

## Civilians in the South of Damascus

### The Continuous Downfall of Human Rights

Once more, civilians in Syria are being used as bargaining chips in tug of war between belligerent parties. Dozens of families are hiding in underground cellars to survive the intensive shelling that has not subsided since the failure of the negotiation agreement to remove any ISIS presence in the southern areas; namely from Yarmouk camp and al-Hajar al-Aswad.

As negotiations fails, the renewed shelling of the southern area on April 19, 2018 was heavier than before, during which all kinds of heavy weapons were being used such as aircrafts and helicopters. More than 60 raids have taken place till Friday, April 20.

The attacks on the Yarmouk camp has focused on the al-Maghrabi and al-Orouba Streets, which contain high density of civilians remaining in the camp. The shelling resulted in many civilian casualties as well as dozens of injuries. In addition, the paramedic "Samih Hameed" was killed as a result of targeting the the Palestine Hospital, as many parts of it have been destroyed and therefore put out of service. The shelling was accompanied by attempts to storm the camp by Syrian government forces and militias, from al- Tadamon neighborhood. The military campaign was also accompanied with launching of several missiles on the Syrian government-held areas, especially the al- Tadamon neighborhood, which led to many casualties and injuries, forcing many families to leave the neighborhood.

The current situation in the southern area threatens the lives of thousands. In the Yarmouk camp alone, with size estimated at 2 square kilometer, there are roughly 12,000 civilians, half of whom are Palestinian refugees, and underground cellars are not equipped and cannot be used as shelters. In addition, the buildings in general are severely affected by previous attacks that have taken place since the outset of the popular movement, making it very dangerous to the civilians.

The military offensive in the war-battered Yarmouk camp may constitute a war crime, according to Article 8 of Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (1998), intentionally directing attacks against civilian population or sites as well as facilities and personnel involved in humanitarian which are not military objectives constitute war crimes.

The Syrian Civic Platform (SCP) strongly condemns the military offensive in the southern area, and express its concern that the military campaign against Eastern Ghouta will be repeated in the southern area. Furthermore, SCP calls for urgent action necessary to protect and neutralize civilians from shelling and that civilians shall not be used as bargaining chips between belligerent parties.

**SCP calls for opening humanitarian crossings; allowing urgent evacuation of critical medical cases for treatment; the entrance of medical teams. In addition, it urges that no pressure to be exerted on the camp's residents to force them to leave their homes, as happened in other areas.**