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Syrian Association for Citizens' Dignity warns of the catastrophic consequences of the continuing attacks by Assad and Russian forces on civilians in Idlib, which are causing new waves of displacement and destruction. The latest attacks which intensified on the 19th of December with a ground offensive, in which some 200 people were killed and more than 150 000 were displaced, have put Idlib on the brink of a major humanitarian catastrophe due to absence of humanitarian aid and adequate infrastructure to receive more displaced people. The consequences of such collapse are bound to be felt in Turkey and beyond, including Europe.

Over the last week, Syrian regime forces with the support of Russia have been conducting a new phase of the military campaign that they launched against the province of Idlib back in February 2019. Between February and the end of November, this campaign, with relentless and indiscriminate bombardment of civilian areas and ground attacks, has caused the displacement of over 700 000 new internally displaced people (IDPs) in an area that is already populated with displaced civilians from all over Syria.

The latest ground offensive that started on the 19th of December, which was preceded by weeks of systematic bombing of civilian targets, has already caused more than 150 000 people to flee, most of whom have already been displaced from elsewhere in Syria. The bombardment has initially targeted areas around the T4 and T5 highways, but extended to other areas in the eastern part of Idlib province to include more than 30 towns and villages.

The city of Ma'arat Al-Nouman is particularly targeted, with approximately 70,000 civilians besieged under heavy shelling and civilian vehicles fleeing the city targeted by Russian and regime forces airstrikes. These attacks have caused the death of more than 200 civilians, including women and approximately 70 children, and left hundreds of injured, with thousands of civilians homeless. Approximately 12,000 civilians fled Ma'arat Al-Nouman in the last few days.

"How can the displaced Syrians engage in any process in good faith if everyone we are talking to today, discussing solutions, and laws, and rights, are allowing the regime to annihilate us?" asks Fadi Nzhat, a SACD trustee from Damascus, who is currently displaced in Idlib. "Who benefits from this, other than those intent on destruction and nihilism of Syrian people? What faith can children of Idlib ever have in any future solutions for Syria if brutal attacks against them are not stopped now?"

The Syrian Association for Citizens' Dignity (SACD) has consistently warned of the devastating consequences of international inaction regarding the Russia and regime's indiscriminate yet systematic targeting of civilians, which are causing new waves of displaced people, exacerbating the already complex problem of the displaced Syrians, who now make up more than half of the country's population.



We estimate that approximately 500 thousand people will flee the eastern part of Idlib if the offensive continues. This will make the pressure at the border with Turkey unsustainable. At the same time, with the lack of humanitarian aid and infrastructure to receive more displaced people in other areas of Idlib, we are facing a major humanitarian catastrophe.

Ultimately, three and half million people in the province of Idlib face the threat of dying under bombardment or fleeing into the unknown. For perspective, this is the population of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The echoes of policies implemented there by Serbian forces, which culminated in Srebrenica, are clearly recognized in what is happening in Idlib today.

Russian policies in Syria manifested in the indiscriminate attacks against civilians like those we are witnessing in Idlib will lead to the complete destruction of any realistic possibility of a comprehensive and sustainable political solution in Syria.

This will cause the refugees and IDPs problem to affect further countries in the region and Europe in a more severe manner, and will make the main countries pushing for the political solution lose any credibility in the eyes of the Syrian people.

“Attacks on civilians in Idlib are turning any discussion about the constitution or the safe environment into a futile and fruitless discussion in the eyes of displaced Syrians,” says Fadi Nzhat. “How can we be talking about the return of refugees and IDPs while Russia and the regime are causing more displacement and destruction?”

The Syrian Association for Citizens’ Dignity calls for immediate steps to be taken to prevent the catastrophic scenario driven by the latest offensive on Idlib:

- Immediate ceasefire and cessation of attacks on civilians must be facilitated by the United Nations Special Envoy for Syria Geir Pedersen;
- Immediate access to be allowed and secured for the Red Crescent and United Nations to deliver aid to the areas under attack;
- Immediate cessation of any political negotiations with Assad’s regime until attacks on civilians in Idlib are stopped;
- Increased humanitarian aid to civilians in Idlib, including urgent and increased assistance to the people displaced since February by the Russian/regime offensive;
- Concrete steps to be taken by the European Union, United States and Turkey on the diplomatic front to prevent use of indiscriminate force against civilians by Russia and the Assad regime, including the threat of further economic sanctions and other necessary measures.

We call specifically on the US, the EU, Germany and France to take immediate action in securing the implementation of these recommendations, and to put in place the necessary mechanisms to alleviate the suffering of the displaced Syrians and prevent further waves of displacement.