

# Statement by the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic on the situation of civilians affected by the capture of Aleppo

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GENEVA (14 December 2016) – As the protracted battle for eastern Aleppo drew mostly to an end yesterday after four and a half years of stalemate, the Commission once again reiterates its call for all warring parties to abide by the basic principles of the laws of warfare which continue to bind them. While the situation on the ground remains fluid, numerous reports of violations perpetrated by pro-Government forces continue to emerge, including summary executions, arbitrary arrests, enforced disappearances and forced conscription. Men of fighting age appear to have been particularly vulnerable to abuse.

Alongside a pattern of indiscriminate attacks, the Commission has further received allegations of opposition groups, including the terrorist group Jabhat Fatah al-Sham (formerly Jabhat al-Nusra) and Ahrar al-Sham preventing civilians from leaving as well as opposition fighters embedding themselves within the civilian population, thus heightening the risk to civilians of being killed or injured.

The Syrian Government in concert with allied forces now exercise effective control over eastern Aleppo, and therefore bear the primary responsibility for preventing such violations, including possible acts of reprisals. Commanders within their ranks must ensure discipline of their troops, as well as hold transgressors to account.

The unrelenting bombardment over eastern Aleppo since July, which has devastated all remaining pockets held by armed groups, has been made more dire by a prolonged siege. Health facilities have all but vanished due to airstrikes, often targeted in order to devastate civilian infrastructure. Severe shortages of food and plunging temperatures have additionally contributed to the loss of civilian life, particularly amongst infants.

The Commission underscores as imperative the need for safe passage of civilians from eastern Aleppo. At this critical moment, the illusion that military victory is still possible must be discouraged. All States with influence over the warring parties are aware that a return to political negotiations is critical to prevent further massive loss of innocent lives. The success of any negotiations hinges on their recognition of the violations committed since the beginning of this brutal conflict, and the inclusion of accountability mechanisms to provide justice for victims in any agreement reached.

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