



## **Flash Report**

### **Over Seventy Cylinder Bombs loaded with incendiary substances Falls on Daraya City**

Violations Documentation Center in Syria - VDC  
**August 2015**

The city of [Daraya](#) in Damascus Suburbs, 8km south Damascus, which is still inhabited by more than 10 thousand civilians, have been witnessing an intensified random shelling by the Syrian government forces following the military operations of Laheeb Daraya (Daraya's Flames), which were carried out by the opposition armed forces on 12 August 2015. During these operations, the opposition forces could control several buildings near [Mazzeah Military Airport](#). In retaliation, the Syrian government forces have dropped hundreds of [barrel bombs](#), known for their random highly-destructive nature, dozens of unguided surface-to-surface missiles (Fil missiles), naval mines and cylinder bombs on the city in addition to launching [dozens of airstrikes by Mig warplanes](#). The cylinders<sup>1</sup>, which were dropped randomly on the inhabited buildings, were loaded with incendiary substances, which led to the destruction of dozens of civilian houses and the outbreak of huge fires, the largest of which was in a wood factory in the city. Some sources informed the Violations Documentation Center in Syria (VDC) that on 13 August 2015, the government forces used toxic substances on a frontline, which led to several casualties among the opposition armed group fighters. All the witnesses interviewed in addition to the official page of [Daraya Council](#) reported an attack on 13 August 2015 with tear-gas-like toxics using small hand grenades. However, these substances caused a temporary memory loss, hallucinations and muscular limpness. As we could not directly contact any eyewitnesses due to the severity of clashes, our center will release an independent statement in case we received any new information in this regard.

**Activist Muhannad Abu al-Zein, 28 years, married and has a child, told the Violations Documentation Center in Syria that the Syrian government forces had been besieging Daraya city completely since 8 November 2012. Although there was a truce, the city had been occasionally shelled occasionally since then. By the beginning of August 2015, however, hundreds of barrel bombs had fallen on the city, especially after the clashes renewed there. He added:**

“As the helicopters that are shelling the city usually come from the south, we believe they took off from Balli Military Airport, which is a helicopters airport. The first use of napalm was on 11 August 2015 around 12:45pm when a helicopter dropped more than 15 cylinders, all of which fall on an earthy square in the city near a wood factory. The second attack, which was two hours after, was fiercer as all the cylinders fall amid the city leading to 7 civilian medium casualties. It also led to the burning of more than 15 houses, the flames of which lasted till the next day. The total number of cylinders dropped that day mounted up to over 60. A similar incident took place on 14 August 2015, when the helicopters shelled the city with napalm-loaded cylinders three times in a row, the first of which was at 12:30 when 5 cylinders fell on already destroyed areas, which led to the burning of old buildings. The second attack was about 4:15 when a helicopter dropped 15 napalm-loaded cylinders amid the city as well. The third was ten minutes later, about thirty meters from the first attacked area (The Middle St). The total number of dropped cylinders on that day reached more than 35.”

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1- Household gas cylinders usually used in cooking in Syria. However, the Syrian government forces, through their military factories, started to modify them for military purposes. They filled the cylinders they dropped on the northern areas with high explosives and shrapnel while the ones they used in Darayya city were loaded with incendiary napalm and some pieces of cloth. They also attached small fans to these cylinders for a vertical fall.

**The testimony of Muhannad corroborated the testimonies of two other activists; the first one is Muhmmad Shahada (Abu Yamen), 37 years old, a member of the Media Office of [Daraya Local Council](#). He said:**

“Helicopters targeted Daraya city on 11th and 14th August 2015 with dozens of cylinder bombs loaded with incendiary napalm. At first, we thought they were barrel bombs of smaller sizes. After a while, we could recognize the household gas cylinders that were filled with incendiaries. The helicopters dropped them gradually. Some of which did not explode, which allowed us to take photos of them, disable them and examine the loading inside them. They were filled with incendiary napalm and cloths. We believe that this attack was in retaliation to “Laheeb Daraya” battles, during which the regime forces lost many of their fighters.”

The second witness, Dr. Amjad Abu Jamal, one of the field hospital cadres, told VDC: “Most of the victims we received at the hospital suffered first-degree burns in uncovered parts of the body like the hands. Those burns resulted from an incendiary substance we believe to be napalm. We treated all the cases according to the potentials that were available at the hospital.”

- This was not the first instance when incendiary weapons, specifically the napalm, are used by the Syrian government forces. It was used before in Urem al-Kubra in August 2013 and then in Dael city during the same month. VDC, hence, has [issued a report](#) documenting the death of more than 38 school children in a napalm attack on a school in Urem al-Kubra and an entire family in another attack on Dael city of Daraa in addition to dozens of wounded who suffered severe burns.

[An exclusive video](#) for the [Violations Documentations Center in Syria](#) shot by activist Muhannad Abu al-Zein, who has previously said that the cylinder bombs were household gas cylinders (used in the Syrian houses for cooking) provided with a small fan to ensure a vertical fall. Abu al-Zein informed the center that he shot the video on 12 August 2015 i.e. one day after the attacks after dismantling the fuse at the top of the cylinder and then removing which seemed to be a cap. He also added that he noticed a sharp smell of diesel while disabling the cylinder bomb. He added:

“We then removed the substance the cylinder bombs were filled with. It seemed as gel or silicon that flowed out the cylinder. Moreover, there were no serial numbers or symbols on it to indicate it wasn’t a domestic gas cylinder for cooking.”

[The Video link.](#)

## Legal Assessment

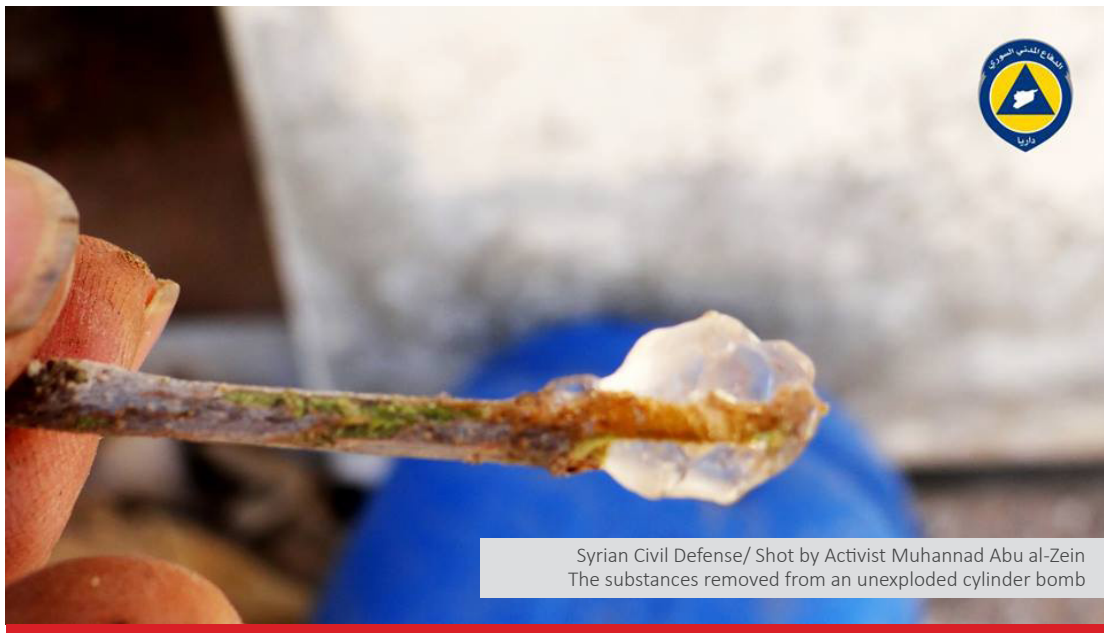
According to a UN Secretary General Report in 1972, incendiary weapons are powerful means of devastation and destruction. In fact, according to the same report, except for “nuclear weapons, and perhaps also certain biological and chemical weapons, no other armament places such destructive power in the hands of military commanders.” (UN, Report of the Secretary General, 1973, *Napalm and Other Incendiary Weapons and All Aspects of their Possible Use* (Document N° A/8803/Rev.1), United Nations, New York, at p. 50 par. 176). The use of these weapons on urban targets has proven since the second world war its savage and cruel consequences for all society.” (Id. par. 176). Its effects are so devastating that they are “adaptable for mass destruction.” Furthermore, incendiary weapons are by their very nature, and irrespective of the circumstances of their use (battle field vs. urban, air raids vs. flame weapons) excessively injurious and result in unnecessary suffering to personnel evidenced in particular, in addition to fatalities, by the irreversible damage they cause to the human body and the environment. (Id. par 189). Another key characteristic associated with the use of these weapons has to do with their indiscriminate effects (Id., par. 187). The Syrian Arab Republic voted in favor of UN General Assembly Resolution 2932 (1972), in which ninety-nine states acknowledged the indiscriminate nature of incendiary weapons, their effects in causing unnecessary sufferings, and deplored their use in all conflicts, international and non-international (UN, General Assembly Resolution 2932 (XXVII). General and Complete Disarmament (A) (November 29 1972)). This is confirmed by Protocol III annexed to the Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons Which May be Deemed to be Excessively Injurious or to Have Indiscriminate Effects (Geneva, October 10 1980, although Syria is not party to it. Yet, the ICRC restatement of the customary rules of international humanitarian law establishes that the prohibition of the use of incendiary weapons, is part of customary international law, and is applicable to non-international armed conflicts, as is the case in Syria. (ICRC 2005, Customary international humanitarian law, Henckaerts, J.-M., Doswald-Beck, L., & Alvermann, C. eds. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, Rules 70, 84, 85 and 156, 177).

The testimonies reported clearly indicate that the Syrian regime, through its war plans which are the only capable of flying the area, has targeted civilian buildings, and civilian persons in various locations of Darya, by use of what appears to be metal cooking gas tanks converted into bombs and filled with incendiary substances. The testimonies that the VDC was able to gather clearly indicate that the fatalities were particularly affected by various degrees of burns.

The execution of indiscriminate attacks on civilians, and using incendiary weapons capable by design to cause superfluous injuries and unnecessary suffering constitute each on its own a serious violation of international humanitarian law. They accordingly constitute war crimes.

Furthermore, those attacks are part of a pattern in which regime forces have deliberately and systematically targeted civilians, engaged in indiscriminate attacks, against many Eastern and Western Ghouta localities, including Darya, which is under siege by the regime for more than two years. The regime's use of incendiary weapons, which are designed to cause unnecessary suffering, makes these attacks elements in a crime against humanity as defined in Article 7 of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, and in customary international humanitarian law.

On August 7, 2015, the United Nations Security Council voted Resolution 2235, purporting to establish an OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism to identify perpetrators, organisers, and sponsors involved in the use of chemicals as weapons, including chlorine in Syria. In a clear message of defiance, the Syrian regime continues unabated to deliberately target civilians by use of a large variety of prohibited weapons, including incendiary weapons, as documented in Darya on August 11, 2015. The regime does so, because of a deep sense that despite this modest action of the international community, it will nevertheless get away with total impunity. This impunity must stop. The international community must send a clear message by creating effective and credible accountability mechanisms to judge and punish all perpetrators of war crimes and crimes against humanity in Syria.





Syrian Civil Defense/ Shot by Activist Muhannad Abu al-Zein  
An unexploded cylinder bomb



Syrian Civil Defense  
Daraya City Following the Attacks with incendiary substances



Syrian Civil Defense  
Daraya City Following the Attacks with incendiary substances



## Violations Documentation Center in Syria

For any questions and comments:  
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