



Syria: New Chemical Attacks **“UN Security Council Has to Take Immediate Actions”**

Violations Documentation Center in Syria - VDC
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First: Introduction

While the [UN Security Council](#) members are discussing a draft resolution to determine the responsibility for the chemical attacks, specifically the ones that used chlorine gas, in Syria, VDC has documented new attacks during July 2015 in more than one location in different governorates. Those attacks were launched by the Syrian government forces using chlorine and/or toxic substances in Deir Ezzor and Damascus Suburbs (Eastern Gouta) in clear violation of Security Council Resolution 2209 (2015).

The [Security Council](#) adopted [Resolution 2209](#) in its meeting on 6th March 2015, which condemned “in the strongest terms any use of chlorine as a weapon in Syria” and stressed in article 6 that “those individuals responsible for any use of chemicals as weapons, including chlorine or any other toxic chemical, must be held accountable”. It further of the possibility of resorting to measures under [Chapter VII](#) in the event of non-compliance with the relevant resolutions including [resolution 2118](#).

According to the field researchers of the [Violations Documentation Center in Syria \(VDC\)](#), since the issuance of resolution 2209, the Syrian government forces have used the chemical and toxic gases in more than 19 occasions, some of which led to symptoms similar to exposure to chlorine. Although VDC cannot conclusively determine the nature of the substances used in those attacks, those symptoms, recorded in 17 cases, were confirmed. They all indicated that chlorine gas was used as a weapon in most of the attacks in addition to other toxic and/or suffocating substances, whose nature could not be verified by VDC, in other attacks. This statement refers in particular to the following attacks:

On 9 March 2015, the Syrian government forces targeted Muzayrib, which town in the Daraa governorate. The attack led to the [injury](#) of at least one civilian. The symptoms suffered by him were likely to be due to exposure to chlorine gas.

On 15 March 2015, helicopters dropped a barrel loaded, which apparently contained chlorine gas in [Qabr al-Ingilizi](#) area, Aleppo. In the same day, a similar attack targeted [Sarmin city](#) in Idlib causing the death of five members of one family.

Chlorine attacks were also reported against Kafr Hamra in Aleppo, Binnish in Idlib, al-Qadam in Damascus, Darayya in Damascus Suburbs, the city of Idlib and al-Mansoura village in Sahl al-Ghab).

On 27 April 2015, [Kafr Oweid](#) was attacked with barrels loaded with chlorine gas causing more than 90 casualties.

On 2 May 2015, child Mustafa Haj Ali, from Neirab area in Idlib, was killed as a result the use of [chlorine gas](#) in the Syrian government forces attacks.

On 3 May 2015, toxic substances, which are believed to be chlorine gas, were used by the Syrian army during clashes with fighters of Al-Rahman Legion of FSA, specifically on al-Manasher Front [LOCATION?]. Those clashes caused the death of two fighters namely Muhammad Shiekh Bakri and Khaled Shiekh Bakri.

Second: Attack on Shiekh Yasin Neighborhood (Deir Ezzor Governorate)

On the morning of 8 July 2015, local sources informed VDC that the Syrian government forces used toxic gases in the [Shiekh Yasin neighborhood](#) in Deir Ezzor governorate (The City of Deir Ezzor), which is controlled by the Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sham ISIS/Daash. A Syrian group of activists in Deir Ezzor leading a campaign named ([Deir Ezzor Under Siege](#)) have provided VDC with details related to the attack:

“On 8 July 2015, at 6:20 am, the Syrian regime forces targeted Shiekh Yasin neighborhood (controlled by ISIS) with two rockets that fell in a crowded neighborhood, where more than 700 families live. The attack killed a whole family (Zakaria al-Haj Hazaa, his wife Ola Anwar al-Haji, his son Muhammad Zakaria al-Haj Hazaa and his two daughters Shahed and Raghad Zakaria al-Haj Hazaa). Eyewitnesses in the field hospital confirmed that the victims that were hospitalized from the targeted area suffered a rash accompanied with nose heat, and breathing difficulties. Others suffered severe convulsions. The campaign documented 12 suffocation cases due to shelling. The victims were moved to Pharmex field hospital (in Intelaq Street) and the members of the Islamic State did not allow any persons to take photos. Witnesses have also reported seeing a red substance on the ground following the attack, which is thought to be remnants of the forbidden substances loaded in the rockets.”

An eyewitness, a man in his thirties, who refused to reveal his identity for security reasons and fear of the Islamic State fighters who control his area completely, was interviewed by VDC via Skype:

“I was about 20 meters away from the targeted area, where the two rockets fell. I did not hear the helicopters myself. However, some neighbors said they did. The explosion of the rocket was neither as loud nor as destructive as the usual explosions, which are more intensive. Three minutes later, a smell of chlorine prevailed the area (it was a sharp smell). A man and a woman went out of the house safe and sound. They told us there were kids inside. Thus, we entered the house and took out the first kid five minutes later. Although he was still breathing, he was so pale (yellowish) with no traces of burns or injuries at all. Fifteen minutes later, we managed to take out the other two kids who had already died. There were traces of foam coming out of their mouths.

After about 30 minutes, the husband and his wife showed some symptoms including pop eyes and foam started to come of their mouths. They were hospitalized to Pharmex hospital, whose name was changed to al-Farooq Hospital after the Islamic State controlled Deir Ezzor governorate. However, the medical staff could do nothing to help the victims due to the lack of medical materials. Thus, they all died (the father, the mother and the three children).



Muhammad and His tow sisters Shahed and Raghad.
Source of picture: Deir Ezzor under Siege Campaign.

Two days later, on 10 July 2015, a helicopter dropped a rocket near the previously targeted area. Luckily, this one exploded before it hit the ground. When we heard the explosion, we ran to the roofs where we could again recognize a sharp chlorine smell. After the first attack, I suffered burning in my eyes for two days.”



The targeted house.
Source of picture: Deir Ezzor News Center.

The violations Documentation Center in Syria has conducted another interview with a witness, who also refused to reveal his identity for security reasons as he lives in an ISIS-controlled area:

“On Wednesday 8 July 2015, I was in Deir Ezzor when Shiekh Yasin neighborhood was shelled with two rockets that are thought to be shelled by rocket launchers located on the mountain overlooking Deir Ezzor city. That attack led to the death of a whole family consisting of a father, a mother and their three children. Several residents were injured due to inhaling chlorine gas as well and they were transferred to Pharmex hospital, which is the only hospital in Deir Ezzor city. The medical teams noticed red spots on the children’s bodies. Although they seemed physically safe and sound, the doctors said the reason of their death was inhaling a toxic gas that was thought to be chlorine. Some casualties were transferred to Mayadeen city after their lost consciousness while the minor cases were treated in the city using breathing apparatus.”

End of Testimony

Third: The Attack on Harasta City¹(Damascus Suburbs Governorate)

On 21 July 2015, VDC field researcher at the Eastern Ghouta, Thaer Hijazi documented an attack with toxic chemicals that took place in the city of Harasta, Damascus Suburbs. The attack occurred during military clashes on the frontline between the Syrian army on one hand and the brigades of the Free Syrian Army, specifically al-Rahman Legion, on the other hand. Hijazi went to the nearest point of the scene and conducted the following interviews:

Abu Yahya al-Mahmoud, one of al- Rahman Legion fighters who serves as the commander of the southern sector in the city of Harasta, declared:

“I’m from Harasta city, I’m married and I have children, I was there when the attack happened. We were engaged in clashes with regime forces. All of a sudden, one of the tunnels was blown up. So, I went to the targeted location immediately to find out that the regime had apparently detonated mines using toxic materials. Two fighters, Mohammed al-Tallawy from Douma City, lives in Misraba City, and Omar al-Takleh from Msraba City, fell as martyrs in the attack. The smell of gas spread all over the place inside and outside the tunnel. More than thirty fighters were injured. The injuries ranged between severe and minor. We had symptoms like semi numbness in the nerves, headaches, vomiting, pop eyes and trembling. In some cases, there was a feeling of sluggishness followed by fainting.”

The second interview was with the operations commander in the southern sector of the city of Harasta, Abu Rawd:

“When the attack happened, I was near the tunnel. Like many other fighters, I got injured due the toxic substances. We were about 30 casualties, but we couldn’t determine the nature of the mines that were set and blown by the regime. The symptoms were severe breathing difficulties, redness in the eyes, dizziness and, in some cases, fainting.”

Fourth: The Attacks of Monday 27 July 2015 (Eastern Gouta)

On 27 July 2015, further attacks with probable use of Chlorine, were reported in Easter Ghouta. Our field researcher (Thaer Hijazi) conducted several interviews regarding the attacks, and visited several medical units there, few hours after the attacks:

Paramedic (Q, Kh), who refused to reveal his full name for security reasons, works in Arbin Surgery Hospital, said to VDC:

“On 27 May 2015, at 5 am, we heard the sounds of shelling and the explosions of rockets near [Arbin city](#), Damascus Suburbs. We thought that [Jobar neighborhood](#) or [Ein Tarma city](#) were being shelled. At 6 am, casualties started to arrive to the hospital; some were injured by explosive materials, others had inhaled chemical substances. Chlorine gas smell was so obvious, especially on the clothes of the casualties, which drove some paramedics to exit the medical point for fear of getting infected especially when some symptoms appeared on some victims. Those symptoms included redness in the eyes, running noses, trachea spasms and whizzing breathing².

1- The Violations Documentation Center in Syria could not contact other eyewitnesses due to the ferocity of clashes on the frontlines. It could not conduct all the needed field investigations, especially in regard of the nature of the gases used in the attacks and whether they were chemical or natural substances that are used in mines manufacturing. However, our research team found that it is important to include the two testimonies in the report without confirming nor denying them taking into consideration all the standards followed in conducting interviews

2- Respiratory Sound

Among the victims were five women, three children (between 7 and 10 years old) and two youths in their twenties. They were all treated immediately by injecting them with one shot of Hydrocortisone. In some critical cases, we had to give them more than one shot in addition to giving them oxygen and sodium carbonate spray. Luckily, we did not have to put any case in the intensive care unit. We supervised them for two hours after that. The victims who were brought to our hospital were from Ein Tarma city. As I contacted other hospitals and medical points, doctors in Dar al-Shifaa Hospital in [Hamorya](#), told me that they had received several cases affected with chlorine gas. We also heard that the regime forces have used surface-to-surface missiles loaded with chlorine gas. However, I cannot confirm nor deny how chlorine gas was carried but we heard sounds of big explosions different from those of mortar shells or regular rockets.”

Maher Abu al-Khair, communication and media official in the medical point of Jobar neighborhood, informed VDC that in the early hours of 27 July 2015, Syrian government forces launched several air strikes on the neighborhood of Jobar and the surroundings of Ein Tarma city. I was only 300 meters from the targeted area. Two of the rockets were loaded with toxic substances as some of Ein Tarma residents were affected by them immediately. No one was killed during those attacks, however, the injured suffered symptoms including: dyspnea, vomiting, coughing and tearing eyes.”

The testimony of Jihad, an activist in Zamalka Coordination Committee, corresponded with the other testimonies that VDC gathered as he confirmed the chemical attacks on that day. He added:

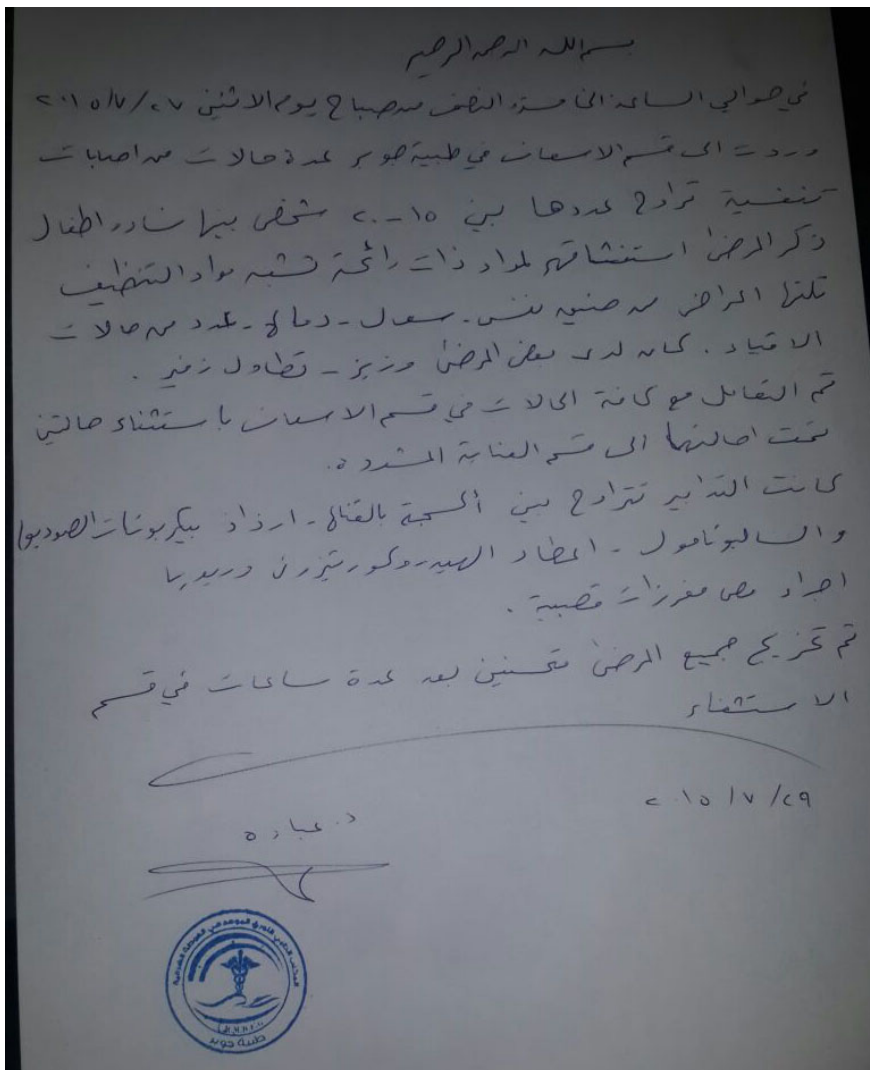
“The shelling began at about 5 am. We haven’t been exposed to such kind of shelling before as two rockets fell near Jobar neighborhood. Later on, we discovered that those rockets were loaded with a toxic gas on first examination of the victim’s symptoms after the attack, several casualties arrived to different medical points in the area. We have documented more than 25 cases, some of which were injured in Jobar, Ein Tarma and Zamalka area. Those distributed on many medical points (Some of them were FSA fighters). The gas used in the attack was colorless, however, it has a distinctive smell like the house-cleaning-substances (chlorine). Some of the symptoms the infected showed were nausea and blurred vision.

Mr. Abu Mahmoud, an Arabic teacher and a resident of Zamalka city in the Eastern Gouta, said in his testimony:

“At about 5 in the morning, we heard the sound of warplanes then a rocket fell near my city Zamalka. It caused a very loud sound. We thought it fell on Jobar neighborhood or on the front-lines. Weirdly, it did not explode. Five minutes later, another rocket with similar speed and sound, fell without exploding. A man carrying an injured on his motorcycle arrived a couple of minutes later and told us that that was a chemical attack. Immediately, I woke up all the neighbors fear of an attack similar to [the chemical massacre](#) of 2013. Then, we started to smell chlorine gas, which caused us some nausea. Later on, we knew that several civilians in the nearby areas were affected by these substances the area was targeted with.”

Dr. Obada (The head of Jobar medical unit) sent VDC a written testimony, with the of Jobar Medical Unit saying:

“At about 5:30 in the morning of Monday 27 July 2015, about 15 to 20 respiratory injuries arrived to Jobar Medical Unit, including women and children. The infected said they had inhaled substances that smell like the house-cleaning materials then they began to suffer symptoms like breathing difficulties, coughing, and vomiting in many cases. other infected had a whizzing breathing-prolonged exhalation. All the cases were treated in the emergency section except for two that were transferred to the intensive care unit. The measures we followed varied between using the oxygen masks and sodium carbonate sprays, injecting the infected with hydrocortisone and suction of tracheal discharges. All the injured were checked out after a few hours.”



A Copy of the letter sent by Dr. Obada.



An Image of a rocket loaded with chemical substances that were dropped on the surrounding of Ein Tarma city.

Fifth: Conclusion

The violations Documentation Center in Syria could not determine the nature of the gases used in some of the attacks on Harasta, Damascus Suburbs. However, the symptoms suffered by the casualties, according to the testimonies which VDC was able to gather (on the attacks of 27 July 2015) confirmed that the Syrian government forces have used toxic substances in those attacks, which led to the fall of several civilian victims near the targeted area. In the Deir Ezzor attacks, the substances used may have been chlorine, according to the sources and the interviews conducted by VDC. Although the center could not conclusively determine the nature of the substances used there, the symptoms the victims showed corresponded to exposure to toxic and/or chemical gases, which mostly experienced and suffered when victims are exposed to chlorine gas.

In all events, it was evident, that the use of such toxic and chemical substances, have specifically targeted civilians in the majority of the cases reported.



Violations Documentation
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For any questions and comments:
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<http://www.vdc-sy.info/index.php/ar/reports>

Source: The Media Office in Jobar Neighborhood in Damascus Casualties.