

Flash Report: Toxic and Suffocating Agents Used in Marea City, Aleppo Governorate

Violations Documentation Center in Syria - VDC
September 2015

Introduction:

On 21 August 2015, various media outlets and social networks reported that the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant/Daesh (ISIL) had targeted [Marea city](#) in northern Syria, (administratively part of the Azaz District of the Aleppo Governorate), with dozens of mortar and artillery shells generated from the ISIL-held areas, particularly from [Asunbul](#), [Hawar al-Nahr](#) and [Tel Malid](#) villages, after its fighters advanced noticeably towards the eastern countryside of Aleppo, controlling several strategic locations.

[Doctors without Borders](#) posted that “a hospital of the medical humanitarian organization Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF)/Doctors Without Borders in Aleppo Governorate treated four patients exhibiting symptoms of exposure to chemical agents on Friday evening 21st”. They added that “the family came from the town of Marea (North of Aleppo, Azaz district), that was targeted with heavy shelling during the whole Friday.” The article continues “ The patients are a family composed of two parents, a 3-year old girl and a 5-day old newborn baby girl. They arrived to the MSF hospital one hour after the exposure, presenting eye redness, skin erythema, conjunctivitis and respiratory difficulties, followed by the apparition of blisters and worsening of the respiratory conditions around three hours later. Symptomatic treatment and oxygen was provided to all of them until they were evacuated to another facility for specialized treatment.”

[The Syrian American Medical Society \(SAMS\)](#) had earlier announced that its hospital staff had seen mustard gas victims in Marea city, Aleppo. They added that they have received more than 50 civilians “exhibiting symptoms of chemical exposure.” However, [the Violations Documentation Center in Syria](#) (VDC) cannot conclusively say whether this chemical agent is [mustard gas](#) or another chemical, toxic or suffocating substance.



A WOMAN WITH SKIN BLISTERS UNDER HER LEFT EYE AND SWOLLEN EYELIDS. SOURCE: ACTIVISTS OF MAREA CITY

Attacks on Marea City 21 August 2015

The VDC has reviewed dozens of sources that reported the use of mustard gas by ISIL. It has also examined many pictures and [videos](#) posted by activists and [medical personnel](#) in the city and conducted several interviews with paramedics, civil defense members and injured eyewitnesses till 31 August 2015.

Tareq al-Najjar, 29, paramedic and director of [Hurria Field Hospital](#) in Marea city told the VDC that the city had been exposed to a chemical attack on 21 August 2015. He added that the other attacks with missiles were launched on the city by ISIL fighters located at the northern part of the city, the direction from where the missiles were shelled. Casualties from these attacks began to flow to the hospital between 10 and 11:30 am.

“The city has been shelled with more than 50 missiles,” he said. “At the beginning, we received five civilians sustaining average wounds and fractures caused by shelling and shrapnel. No symptoms were recorded except that the casualties reeked of a distinct sharp bad smell. They were transferred to another medical facility.

At about 4 pm, some people exhibiting symptoms of chemical exposure arrived at the hospital. First, we received a family that consists of the parents and their three-year old and six-day newborn daughters. The father, Ahmad Lattouf (Abu Anas) showed symptoms that included suffocation, respiratory difficulties, teary red eyes, a runny nose and skin irritation. The wife additionally showed conjunctivitis. As for the older daughter, she suffered nausea and vomiting while the younger one had respiratory difficulties.

We treated them with antihistamine and hydrocortisone. They showed no other symptoms until the next day when the same symptoms occurred again. Their bodies smelled so badly. Because their situation was worsening, we evacuated them to the hospital of Doctors without Borders in Sajo (near Bab al-Salama Crossing) for specialized treatment. Some sources told us that the symptoms these victims showed were similar to those of exposure to mustard toxic gas.

At midnight on the same day, another person, showing the same symptoms of teary red eyes, arrived at the hospital.

A total of 42 people were treated in the hospital for various injuries , some of them, exhibiting several symptoms, arrived on the fourth and the fifth days after the attack. One death case was recorded due to stomach injury not toxic agents. Another family arrived at the hospital on the fourth day. They had fled to Tel Rifaat city after a missile fell on their house in the attack. The parents showed the aforementioned symptoms while the children developed skin blisters and scalp burns. Moreover, the skin of one of them blackened due to the infection by chemical agents.”



A CHILD WITH SEVERE SKIN IRRITATION, SOURCE: ACTIVISTS OF MAREA CITY



Skin blisters that appeared later on the back of Ahmad Lattouf, Source: Marea News Network



A GIRL FROM MAREA CITY WITH POST-ATTACK SKIN BLISTERS ON HER BODY
SOURCE: MAREA NEWS NETWORK

Attacks on Marea City 21 August 2015

Anmar Najjar, a member and the director of the Syrian Civil Defense branch in Marea, said that when he reached the affected area to rescue the wounded, the situation of some of them was critical. He further stated to the VDC that some of them were ripping their clothes and crying for oxygen.

He continued: “A very bad smell permeated the area when I arrived to one of the targeted houses. The eyes of the injured were clearly red and their eyelids were swollen. The shelling began at about 4 am and lasted for 12 hours. The number of Gvozdika and artillery shells that fell randomly on the city exceeded 70. According to our observers, those shells were generated from [Asunbul](#) and [Hawar Nahr](#) villages. Most of them were not destructive; they only penetrated the walls, turned into shrapnel and produced a yellow substance. One man developed hallucinations. We took 12 injured to Marea hospital and 18 to a field hospital. On the next day, we went to the targeted houses to clean them and remove the smell that stuck to them. Those attacks targeted about 52 civilian houses.”

A resident whose identity has been withheld for security reasons and preferred to be called Louai Saleh, married and has 2 girls, told the VDC that after a missile hit his house, he felt neurological limpness, respiratory difficulties, a runny nose and eye redness. He added:

“On Friday 21 August 2015, I was in my house in the eastern neighborhood of Marea. At about 9:30am, a missile fell directly on my house. Afterwards, I developed strange symptoms. Thus, I rushed to Marea Hospital. Luckily, my family was not at the house during the attack. There were, however about ten people injured in my neighborhood. I suffered those symptoms for three days. I also had a slight skin blister.”



AN EXCLUSIVE PICTURE FOR VDC SHOWING ONE OF THE TARGETED HOUSES THE PICTURE CLEARLY SHOWS A YELLOWISH SUBSTANCE ON THE FLOOR AND A HOLE IN ONE OF THE WALLS, SOURCE: ACTIVIST ANMAR NAJJAR

Conclusion:

The [United Nations Security Council](#), in its 7242nd session on 15 August 2015, adopted Resolution 2170 under Chapter VII by which it “deplores and condemns in the strongest terms the terrorist acts of ISIL and its violent extremist ideology, and its continued gross, systematic and widespread abuses of human rights and violations of international humanitarian law” and recalled, in the third article of the resolution, that “widespread or systematic attacks directed against any civilian populations because of their ethnic or political background, religion or belief may constitute a crime against humanity, emphasizes the need to ensure that ISIL, ANF and all other individuals, groups, undertakings and entities associated with Al-Qaida are held accountable for abuses of human rights and violations of international humanitarian law.

Conclusion:

Some exclusive photos for the VDC by activist Anmar Najjar, Director of the Civil Defense branch in Marea city, 22 August 2015





SHRAPNEL OF A MISSILE AFTER IT WAS EXPLODED. A YELLOWISH SUBSTANCE COMING FROM THE MISSILE



SHRAPNEL OF A MISSILE AFTER IT WAS EXPLODED. A YELLOWISH SUBSTANCE COMING FROM THE MISSILE



SHRAPNEL OF A MISSILE



Some of the missiles that did not explode for unknown reasons



Some of the missiles that did not explode and were emptied (dismantled) by the residents



Violations Documentation Center in Syria

For any questions and comments:

editor@vdc-sy.org

to view our previous reports:

<http://www.vdc-sy.info/index.php/ar/reports>