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Syria

# Solidarity with Aleppo and popular democratic resistance in Syria

- IV Online magazine - 2016 - IV496 - May 2016 -

Publication date: Wednesday 11 May 2016

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**You may have noticed on Facebook many people changing their profile picture to a solid block of red. It's for a campaign of solidarity with the Syrian city of Aleppo.**

A new wave of violence hit the city of Aleppo from April 22, to May 5 resulting in about 300 deaths in total, mostly civilians in areas controlled by the opposition which is composed of civilian democratic forces, FSA groups and Islamist oriented armed brigades. [Daech (also called (ISIS) and Jabhat al-Nusra and other salafist jihadist forces are excluded.] Some civilians in regime controlled areas were also targeted. It is in this context that groups and individuals launched an international campaign called "Aleppo is Burning" in recent weeks around the world supporting the Syrian revolution to demand the cessation of all bombing and launching of rockets against all civilians in Aleppo and demonstrate solidarity with the wounded city. Popular demonstrations have also taken place in many part of liberated Syria condemning the bombing by Assad and its allies' warplanes and demonstrating their solidarity with the inhabitants of Aleppo.

It is true that the firepower of the regime has no equal on the side of the armed opposition and that the number of civilians killed by the regime and its allies is much higher, but this does not in any case justify the bombing and the killing of civilians and destruction of hospitals by armed opposition groups (a shelling hit a maternity hospital in Aleppo in the regime-held area, the opposition armed groups have been accused, although this still need to be proven). As the demonstrators chanted at the beginning of the revolution "who kills his people is a traitor", today we say the same and add "who kills civilians is a traitor and a criminal". We can't claim to want to present a democratic alternative to the monster Assad by using methods similar to him.

A temporary truce in Aleppo was nevertheless announced Thursday, May 5, which still stands at the time of writing despite a rocket fired by armed opposition groups on Sunday night killing 3 civilians in areas under the control of the regime, after a cessation of hostilities throughout the country between regime forces and its allies on one side and the armed opposition on the other applied since February 27 has been shattered in the city. This has not prevented the dictator Bashar al-Assad to declare just a day after the start of the temporary truce in a telegram to Russian President Vladimir Putin, in which he thanked Moscow for its military support, that the Syrian army would not accept anything less than "attaining final victory" and "crushing the aggression" by rebels in Aleppo. Despite the various truces the Assad regime and its allies have indeed continued military offensives in various parts of the country. This is actually the main reason why the "peace" negotiations are stalled.

Fighting is actually continuing elsewhere in the province of Aleppo and in the governorates of Deir Ezzor (east), Damascus, Homs (center) and Deraa (south) between regime forces and armed opposition groups of the Free Syrian Army (FSA) and jihadist groups not included in the truce agreement such as Jabhat Al-Nusra (branch of al-Qaeda in Syria) and Daech (also known as ISIS). A camp of internal displaced people was also bombed, by the Syrian regime's or Russian warplanes, on Thursday, May 5 in the Idlib province (northwest), which killed 28 people including women and children, according to the Syrian Observatory of Human Rights.

## **Regime wants to destroy all democratic popular alternatives**

The battle of Aleppo is of a significant political and military importance and the recapture of the city by Assad regime forces and its allies of Russia, Iran, Hezbollah and others would be a very big blow to the opposition, while strengthening reactionary Islamic fundamentalist forces. Aerial bombardments by the Assad regime do not simply

have the objective to kill as many civilians as possible but also to prevent any popular democratic alternative on the field to exist such as the liberated territories of Aleppo.

Aleppo represents indeed a powerful symbol of a democratic popular opposition, which first opposed and pushed out the Assad regime, and then drove away Daech and Jabhat al-Nusra, opposing their authoritarian and reactionary practices. There are only Free Syrian Army groups and Islamist oriented armed factions in these neighborhoods. The liberated areas of Aleppo, where 300,000 people still live, are self-organized by the local population through local popular councils that manage all sectors of society in the administration of schools, waste management, provision of food and first necessary products, democratic campaigns, cultural events, psychological assistance to civilians, etc.

The power of the civilian democratic forces was seen once in mid April when medical staff throughout the Aleppo liberated areas demonstrated against the recent torture and killing of a medical worker by an FSA-linked faction, "Turkmen Front" group. The civilian democratic forces continue to protect and uphold the principles of the revolution.

This is why the Assad regime and/or Russian warplanes target mainly civilian infrastructure in these liberated areas such as a-Quds hospital destroyed by an air raid on April 27, killing at least 55 people, including one of the last pediatricians in the city of Aleppo. The al-Quds Hospital, with had 34 beds, was "the main reference center for pediatrics" in the region said Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), which has supported the hospital since 2012. It is in this same logic we should understand the bombings that hit the only civil defense station in the city of Atareb, periphery of Aleppo, in late April, killing five of its members, in the latest of a series of attacks against civilian and opposition infrastructures in the Northern province. A few days before, it was the city hospital that was bombed.

In the past, bakeries, schools, hospitals, care centers and other infrastructures were also the target of the regime throughout the liberated areas of Syria. Physicians for Human Rights has reported that, since the conflict began, at least 346 attacks on medical facilities have been carried out by parties to the conflict, with 705 health workers killed. Syrian government forces and their allies have been responsible for the overwhelming majority of these. Amnesty International in a recent report denounced attacks on hospitals and health centers by the Assad regime and its allies and characterized these actions as a deliberate war strategy.

The regime wants to empty the liberated territories of their population and prevent the existence of any popular democratic alternative, which are its greatest threat and not the Islamic fundamentalist forces that are its best enemies.

## Popular resistance continues

Demonstrations also took place in the city of Sweida, composed in its vast majority of the Druze minority, in recent weeks following the arrest of activists in the province. The demonstrators marched through the streets of the city chanting slogans such as "the Syrian people are one and united", "Syria is for us and not to the Assad family" and "Religion for God and homeland for all" (the last slogan is a famous slogan during the struggle against the French occupier during the French Mandate 1920-1946). The demonstration ended in the main square of the city, on which the protests have removed the statue of Hafez al-Assad and renamed it "the place of dignity" instead of "the place of the President", with the flag of the Syrian revolution. Solidarity messages were sent from other parts of liberated Syria with the protesters of Sweida.

Local populations of the Eastern Ghouta on their side have organized mass demonstrations against the internal fighting between the Army of Islam, which dominates the region, and forces led by the rival faction Failaq a-Rahman, which saw its influence increased in recent months after its creation in February 2016, and demanded them to unite

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their rifles against the Assad regime. These military confrontations are the result of the will of the two armed groups to control these territories and increase their military influence, all to the detriment of local populations.

An insurrection also began in early May in the Hama prison and prisoners took control of the prison. The revolt began after an attempt by the police to transfer five prisoners sentenced to death by an extra-judiciary military court from Hama's prison to Sadnaya's prison, which is known for its extreme violence against detainees. The prisoners in the "terrorism" wing refused to hand the five detainees, and took hostage nine police officers who had come to take them. The revolt started from there. The rest of the prison joined the insurrection and the prisoners removed the doors of the quarters and opened them for each other, taking control of the whole prison. The prison has about 1,200 prisoners, including 850 political prisoners arrested for their opposition to the regime. The regime tried to storm the prison on Friday, May 6, using tear gas and rubber bullets to try to end the rebellion, but without success. Negotiations then resumed with the prisoners who are demanding the release of political prisoners. Thirty have already been released by the regime last week. The latest news (Monday May 9), is that a tentative deal has been reached to end the strike in the Hama that would eventually lead to the pardon and release of those held without charges, in other words the political prisoners.

Meanwhile, the town of Maaret al-Numaan continues its popular protests, which has been ongoing for more than 50 days, against the reactionary organization Jabhat al-Nusra, which continues to intimidate local activists and protesters. During the last big demonstration on Friday, May 6, militias of Jabhat Al-Nusra tried to break mobilization by violently attacking the demonstrators, but without success.

The establishment of a transition without Assad and his partners in power at the head of the state towards a democratic and free Syria is a necessity to hope for a real change in the country. And as stated by the Human Rights activist Mazen Darwish, recently released from Assad's prison after several years, any transition should include "accountability for all is the only way to protect the Syrian community from the spiral of revenge" in a period transition and that means all the leaders of the regime and its allies, fundamentalist Islamic groups and others should be held accountable for their crimes against civilians and others.

Solidarity with the Syrian people struggling against all forms of counter-revolution trying to crush it.

As written by the revolutionaries of Maarre Al-Numaan "The Revolution is for all Syrians," "We want a Syria for all"

*May 9 2016*

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