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Besieged by silence: a letter to the world

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Jaffa of Syria



Dear World,

This is a letter from those who are besieged—over one million civilians in Syria—who are being starved to death right now. The siege is not new; it has been going on for years. The world keeps watching silently as children die from starvation; it has become another everyday event that is not worth care or action. Just an ordinary modern siege, in an ordinary modern war that has claimed the lives of half a million people. This letter is not to seek your sympathy. It is a declaration of your responsibility; to you in the world

outside the siege, and your lack of effort to break the siege.

To be besieged means to be stripped of your ability to survive; of your ability to care for those who you love. To be besieged means to be imprisoned in your own city, in your own neighbourhood. That place you call home becomes the scene of your torture, the place where you are made to witness your child starving to death. This mass hunger is the weapon of a dictator who is punishing the people, to make them kneel to his will. You are forced to eat grass, the leaves of trees and even your own pets. Your children hear stories of abundant food and even chocolate as if they were fairy tales, things they can only dream of but will never be true. To be besieged is not just to be deprived from food; it also means to be denied medication, resources, services, education, and choice. You don't even have the choice to leave, to be a refugee. You are locked in a situation that you can't do anything about. To be besieged is to be abandoned in a dangerous, deadly, and hopeless state. Areas that are besieged are heavily targeted by barrel bombs that are deliberately dropped on civilians. So, you are not only trapped, hungry, weak, defenseless, and abandoned; the sky over you is raining hell and there is nowhere to hide. Finally, the siege means the lack of prospects; you don't have luxury to think of a future, to hope, to dream. The only thing that you can afford is to think about is survival and how to get through to the next day.

Dear world, it's important to tell you what it means to be besieged, because we don't think you understand. One shipment of aid to one besieged area will not solve anything. You must know that there are more than fifteen areas where people are starving to death in Syria. You must

know that the supplies of that single shipment will last that one area less than a month and the circle of hunger will start again. You must know that this shipment of aid had to go through the Assad regime barricades; stripping it of lifesaving medical supplies. So why keep doing something that is clearly not working? Do you think we are stupid? Or do you think that we are not going to be a problem for much longer? As the chances of our survival become slimmer and slimmer, perhaps that single aid shipment is just to calm the temporary media storm and is not really about aiding the besieged Syrian people at all.

On a different note, while you are failing to help at least don't be callous about it. When we film our children as they are on brink of dying, looking like skeletons, barely breathing, we are not doing that to get a news scoop or to be watched. We just don't have a choice; this is our last resort to get some help, any help. So, when we see international aid organizations using the footage of our dying children to promote their timid efforts in breaking the siege, while at the same time they are in bed with the Syrian regime and falsifying reports from Damascus to fit the Assad narrative, we call that starvation porn, shameless starvation porn.

We are not just being abandoned in a state of ongoing siege; our narrative is being manipulated. Our voice is being stolen and deformed. Skillful political spin doctors are making our starving children a political pawn they can play with. They make the issue of siege something to be argued, bargained with, and trapped in an endless international imperial power game. But the issue is clear and simple: No man-made famine should be allowed to kill a single child, let alone to harm millions of people.

This is a world system that is forcing millions of people to participate in negotiations with their oppressors, and without providing any protection in return. Let's be clear, a mother whose child is dying from hunger will not participate in any peace talks. A population that is besieged, targeted by barrel bombs, and with its youth dying in detention centres, will not willingly participate. Hiding behind negotiations without protecting civilians gives the aggressors more time to kill, to besiege, to detain and persecute the Syrian people, while maintaining the illusion of working for peace.

Dear World, we call upon you to be our voice. Don't besiege us further with your silence. We believe that the human bond can carry us through. Mothers around the world can hear the sound of our weeping mothers. Break starvation as a weapon of war, be our champion, protect civilians, act now to break the sieges in Syria.

The Syria Campaign runs a campaign site [Break the Sieges](#) carrying reports and information from within besieged areas.

Siege Watch produces reports and maintains an interactive map about besieged areas in Syria. [Read their first report on besieged areas from February 2016](#)