

## A brief report on the recent developments in the town of Kanaker in the western countryside of Damascus. October 2020

The Syrian government siege on the town of Kanaker in the western countryside of Damascus which started on Monday, 21 September 2020 continues until the moment. It aims to pressure the people of the town to hand over the wanted ones to the government following protests in the town.

The center for documentation of violations have received urgent emergency appeals from inside the town to act in order to save the lives of the remaining civilians under siege as the humanitarian situation had reached a dangerous level of deterioration, and a serious human catastrophe is threatening the lives of thousands of civilians who are now facing the risk of getting arrested by the Syrian government forces in case of invasion, alongside the absence of medical and relief materials as a result of the intensification of the siege and the complete general shut down in times when some areas of Damascus suburbs, including Kanaker, are witnessing a widespread of COVID-19 and many deceases were registered.

Kanaker has been under the control of the Syrian government forces since 2018 after the signing of a reconciliation and settlement agreement by several armed opposition groups, that stipulated the displacement of those opposed to the agreement towards northern Syria.

- On 20 September 2020: A temporary air force intelligence checkpoint on Taybeh bridge in Damascus countryside between Kesweh and Dannoun regions, arrested three women and a young girl from Kanaker (Sou'ad Sheikh Sulaiman, wife of the detainee Issa Khamees who is detained since 2011, Eman Ahmad Khamees, 20 years old, Esraa Issa Khamees, 20 years old, with her child Hatoun Ajaj, 3 years old) they were returning from a checkup after a surgery in Damascus. They were released later on Wednesday, 07 October.

- On 21 September 2020: Protests and security tensions erupted in the town over the arrests of the previous day, in response, the Syrian government forces' points near the town fired rounds of bullets towards civilian homes throughout the whole night.

- On 22 September 2020: Two young men were arrested, one of them is Nidal Khamees, a relative of one of the detained women, and the other is from the Qastalawi family. As a result of the arrest campaigns, gunshots were fired by unknown gunmen due to the Syrian security forces' attempt to arrest others at the Al-Qaws checkpoint at the northern entrance of the town, leading to the death of the recruited Muhammad Issa, and the injury of: Ali Saleh (Brigadier General), and Faris Barbour (reconciliation officer from Kanaker). In response, the security forces fired at civilian homes using "Shilka" weapons, from the Brigade 121, northern of Kanaker, at the time students returned from schools. different checkpoints in the countryside of Damascus have witnessed arrests including arrests of children from Kanaker, of whom is known Muhammad al-Atrash (a settlement agent who joined the Saa'sa branch), Osama Hafez (a civilian), and the child Omran al-Rifai (13 years).

- On 3 October 2020: Syrian forces broke in in large numbers consisting of eight groups. Tens of homes were raided simultaneously with government forces preparing to conduct new settlements for a number of townspeople noting that the agreement did not mention the detained women nor other detainees from the town, and no information was provided regarding their current conditions.

The detention of the three women and child by the government forces is a violation of the general humanitarian principles, and international human rights law including the special rules concerning the protection of women, and relevant United Nations declarations, one of which is Vienna Declaration and Program of Action, 1993 "Violations of the human rights of women in situations of armed conflict are violations of the fundamental principles of international human rights and humanitarian law. All violations of this kind require a particularly effective response." Additionally, this detention is a violation of the rules of international humanitarian law, the Fourth Geneva Conventions and Articles 88 of the Additional Protocol (I) to the Geneva Conventions in its first paragraph and Article 4 of the second paragraph of the Second Protocol.

The siege of Kanaker and the recurring threats of breaking in violate the basic principles of international humanitarian law, which prohibit attacks on civilians and prohibit attacking, destroying, moving or disrupting objects and materials that are indispensable to the survival of the civilian population, whatever the motive, whether it is intended to starve civilians, to force them to displace or for any other incentive according to Article 54(2) of Additional Protocol (I), and Rule 54 of customary international humanitarian law.

The siege violates the rule prohibiting intimidation of the civilian population - Article 51(2) of Additional Protocol (I), Article 13(2) of the Additional Protocol (II), Rule 2 of the rules of customary international humanitarian law, and the rule prohibiting collective punishment of Article 75 of Additional Protocol (I), Article 4 of Additional Protocol (II), And rule 103 of customary international humanitarian law. The prohibition of starving civilians - intentionally or accidentally - in accordance with Article 54(1) of Additional Protocol (I), Article 14 of Additional Protocol (II).

The Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression affirms:

- The failure of the Syrian government to abide by the provisions that must be implemented according to the settlement agreements, by introducing the state's service institutions to secure the needs of citizens, and to alleviate the humanitarian crisis in which they live as a result of the destruction of the infrastructure, to return employees to their jobs, to return professionals to their unions, to release detainees, in particular those who were arrested after the settlements, in return for focusing on the security side and the deployment of security checkpoints, and the continuing arbitrary arrest campaigns launched by its forces, is the direct cause of the growth of popular anger and the outbreak of protests throughout the governorate.
- The necessity for the Russian side to fulfill its duties and obligations as a guarantor for the settlement agreements concluded in mid-2018 and force the government to implement all of its provisions and to intervene in a serious and intense manner to prevent any future incidents or tensions, and to commit to patrolling the Russian military police to monitor the implementation of the agreements throughout Daraa Governorate.
- The Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression demands all international organizations and bodies, most importantly the Office of the Special Envoy for Syria, the Secretary-General of the United Nations and the High Commissioner for Human Rights to start immediate practical measures to prevent a humanitarian catastrophe in Kanaker, and to press all available means to force the Syrian forces to lift the siege immediately, and to immediately release the three detainees and the child, and to investigate the arrest incident, which includes the deliberate provocation of civilians, holding the ones responsible for it and for the general deteriorating security conditions in the governorate accountable.