

Syria: Death toll rises as bombardment of civilian areas escalates in Homs

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At least 377 civilians have been killed in Homs in recent days as Syrian security forces escalated their shelling of civilian neighbourhoods in the besieged city, according to information received by Amnesty International. On Wednesday, reports also emerged of a military build-up in the city of Hama, 50 km to the north.

The latest surge in casualties chimes with remarks by UN High Commissioner for Human Rights that the international community's failure to act had "emboldened" the Syrian military assault.

"The international community must not stand idly by while Homs and other Syrian cities come under fire and civilians are dying in droves," said Ann Harrison, interim Deputy Director of the Middle East and North Africa Programme at Amnesty International.

"As the debate over how the UN should react to Syria's brutal crackdown has moved from the Security Council – where Russia and China continue to shield the Syrian government – to the General Assembly, the security forces have only stepped up their attacks."

Since 3 February, Syrian security forces have been shelling areas in and around Homs in what they claim is an effort to root out armed resistance groups based there. (...)

(...) As in other cities around Syria, Amnesty International has been told that the authorities have restricted fuel supplies, possibly as a punitive measure.

Military defectors have increasingly been joining the Free Syrian Army and other armed opposition groups, who are said to have greater control in al-Rastan and other areas. Sporadic clashes have broken out between these forces and the Syrian troops surrounding Homs. (...)

(...) The humanitarian situation in the city's opposition strongholds – including Bab Amr and al-Khaldieh– is said to be dire. As well as food and energy shortages, doctors have told Amnesty International that medical supplies are dwindling and ambulances are being blocked from opposition areas in Homs. (...)

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