Abdulmonam Eassa was born in Damascus in 1995. Until early 2018 he was based in Hammouria, Eastern Ghouta, in the agricultural countryside near Damascus, 13 km north-east of the capital. When the war broke out in 2011, he was forced to quit his studies. In 2013, the many crimes committed by the Syrian army he witnessed motivated him to start his activity of photojournalist, along with some of his friends, to cover the near-daily airstrikes, the deaths of civilians and the massacres by the Syrian government forces and supported by the Russian air force in their fight “against terrorism”. Their main goal was to share with the world the reality of what happened in Syria that foreign journalist could not cover, as they were not allowed to enter the area under siege by the government forces: the Syrian government had blocked the access for foreign medias since 2011, in order to hide what was happening in the country.

At the end of March 2018, after a period of terror and bombing during which hundreds of innocent civilians were killed, an agreement was reached between rebel fighters and the Syrian government leading to the forced displacements of civilians to the north of Syria. Abdulmonam was forced to leave his hometown. Once he arrived in the north, the situation being unbearable, he decided to cross the Turkish border. After several months of travel, he managed to get to Paris where he was able to apply for asylum.
Photojournalism has become Abdulmonam’s passion. What had started as a self-taught activity has led him to be published in the New York Times, Time, The Guardian and the Washington Post. He has worked for the Agence France Presse (AFP) and has won the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) Prix Visa d’Or Humanitaire 2019 award.

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About Eastern Ghouta

Eastern Ghouta was one of the first regions to participate in the peaceful uprising in Syria in early 2011. The regime lost control of the region in late 2012. Almost two thirds of al-Ghouta were held by the opposition and besieged by the regime for more than five years. Eastern Ghouta is considered to be one of the regions that has witnessed the most horrific attacks by the Syrian regime. Before 2011, the population was 1.2 million. In March 2018, there were only 400,000.

Syrian civilians walked alongside a completely destroyed four-story building following shelling by the Syrian government in the town of Aín-Taram, in the besieged Eastern Ghouta area near Damascus, on 17 July 2017.
Volunteers from the Syrian Civil Defence (known as the White Helmets) dig a girl out of the rubble following an air strike on Hamouria, in the besieged rebel-held Eastern Ghouta area near Damascus, on January 9, 2018.

Two Syrian sisters run across the rubble to embrace after finding each other alive following an air strike on Hamouria, in the besieged rebel-held Eastern Ghouta area near Damascus, on January 9, 2018. Air strikes and artillery fire killed dozens of civilians in the besieged rebel enclave, targeted by near-daily regime bombardments.
A picture taken on February 9, 2018, shows a bandaged Syrian boy sitting in a clinic between two young people. He was injured in reported regime air strikes in the town of Arbin.

A Syrian man grieves over the death of his son following a reported air strike in the rebel-controlled town of Arbin, in the Eastern Ghouta region on the outskirts of the capital Damascus, on December 3, 2017. A wave of Syrian air strikes killed at least 19 civilians and wounded dozens across the besieged rebel enclave of Eastern Ghouta near Damascus, the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said.
Syrian civil defence volunteers pray over the body of a victim who died in a building collapse following a reported regime bombardment in Haza, in the besieged Eastern Ghouta region on the outskirts of the capital Damascus on February 26, 2018.

Volunteers from the Syrian civil defence help a man in Hamouria during Syrian government shelling on rebel-held areas in the Eastern Ghouta region on the outskirts of the capital Damascus on March 6, 2018. Heavy air strikes and clashes shook the rebel enclave, as France and Britain called for an emergency UN Security Council meeting on the escalating violence.
Syrians work inside a workshop producing fuel and gas from plastic waste materials in the town of Hamouria, in the besieged Eastern Ghouta area near Damascus, 15 April 2017.

Syrian civilians and rebel fighters prepare to embark aboard buses during the evacuation from the town of Arbin in the Eastern Ghouta region on the outskirts of the capital Damascus on March 25, 2018.
A Syrian woman and child walk down a destroyed street as civilians and rebels prepare to evacuate one of the few remaining rebel-held pockets in Arbin, in Eastern Ghouta, on the outskirts of the Syrian capital Damascus, on March 24, 2018.

The unhoped-for end to the siege

A city under siege is nothing but a huge prison, trapping you and your loved ones inside without any possibility of leaving.

The only escape is to take refuge in your dreams and memories, but this is only temporary - every time reality comes rushing back and drags you down the hole of everyday horrors and suffering. Sounds of shelling, airstrikes, the threat of death that follows you everywhere you go, starvation, freezing weather, skyrocketing prices and endless losses.

Until March 2018, airstrikes were hitting the villages of Eastern Ghouta on a daily basis, a terrorizing and destructive rate that had not been seen throughout the years of the siege - since 2013.

In under 60 days, the landscape of the cities and villages changed completely with the destruction of mosques, hospitals and schools. The shelling was a form of collective punishment for everyone living under the siege, and a lesson for other rebellious neighbourhoods and cities. During this period, innocent people could not leave the shelters to secure their daily needs because of their deep fear from the constant shelling. Some died in shelters trying to protect themselves.

The little pocket of Eastern Ghouta that was under the control of opposition brigades and some Islamist factions was reason enough for the Syrian regime to mobilise its huge military apparatus - supported by Russian air strikes - to kill thousands of innocent civilians using all kinds of
munitions. In March 2018, a large part of fighters and civilians were evacuated to Northern Syria, after an unfair deal that displaced nearly 70,000 residents from their homes and lands.