



# **Unbiased news** from Syria goes global via WhatsApp

Tuesday, May 29, 2018

**DONATE**

In East Ghouta armed groups engaged in fierce fighting with the army of President Assad. The area was becoming increasingly isolated; international media left and news about the daily reality of the inhabitants was only coming out in dribs and drabs. The Syrian Journalists Association created a WhatsApp group to prevent East Ghouta from becoming completely isolated.

## From 10 to more than 80 members

Sakher Edris, journalist and General Secretary of the [Syrian Journalists Association](#), about what led to setting up the group: "Authorities of Assad and Russia began with heavy shooting on Ghouta and we saw that citizens and hospitals were also targets. When we contacted various international media, we discovered that they in fact no longer had access to news from the region. We started the WhatsApp group in February 2018 with about 10 members, but that soon grew to more than 80." Among the members, there are journalists and activists from Ghouta as well as journalists from CNN, BBC, Al Jazeera, Reuters, France 24 and Der Spiegel.

The WhatsApp group was one of the few ways the inhabitants of East Ghouta could place their story alongside the official reading of those in power. Edris: "International media use the group to verify facts and to interview people in the area. When the Assad authorities denied having bombed civilian hospitals, we added a doctor to the group who had worked at one of those hospitals and could check and prove that it had happened. And when there was chemical weapons attack on April 7, 2018, international journalists received a lot of photos and videos via our WhatsApp group that showed how bad the situation was for the inhabitants of the area, especially for the children."

## Staying impartial under all circumstances

Now that the international media themselves are no longer present in the area, local journalists and activists remain the most important source of information for the rest of the world. It is therefore extremely important that they provide unbiased and factually correct information. That is not always easy when you live in such harsh and volatile circumstances as in East Ghouta.

That is why the Syrian Journalists Association also started a second WhatsApp group, especially for journalists and activists who were in Oost-Ghouta. Edris: "We noticed that some activists found it

## Stay involved

First name \*

Last name \*

E-mail address \*

**Submit**

difficult to report on the events. We now support them with guidelines for the use of impartial and professional terminology during their interviews and reports." The group members were a sounding board for each other and jointly acted as an editorial moderator. In this way they could continue to remind each other of their important task: giving the inhabitants of the area and the outside world access to reliable, impartial and professional information.

Edris: "We bring parties together and translate from Arabic into English if necessary. We are only a bridge between activists and journalists in East Ghouta and international media, we have no authority over the journalists, but they do offer them contact with the outside world. A nice side effect is that some freelance journalists now receive paid assignments from international media."

## A professional sector

Free Press Unlimited has contributed through a partnership, knowledge, money and strategy to the establishment and strengthening of the Syrian Journalists Association in 2013. Even now, Free Press Unlimited is a strategic partner, and we support the Syrian Journalists Association, focused on its capabilities to serve its members well and to maintain professional standards in the sector, for example through forums, debates, network activisms, advocacy and training.

---

**SHARE THIS PAGE:**



## PROJECTS

---

Digital security courses for journalists & activists

Empowering media through collaborative crowdfunded journalism

Together for reliable information in Africa

## NEWS

---

Call for proposals: submission for a documentary

The impact of COVID-19 on the global struggle for freedom

Insiders info: Fact-checking journalist over fake news

## ABOUT US

---

About us

Publications

Vacancies

Disclaimer

Privacy statement

Subscribe to newsletter

Complaints and reports

## CONTACT DETAILS

---

Weesperstraat 3

1018 DN Amsterdam

The Netherlands

T: +31 20 8000400

E: info[at]freepressunlimited.org

IBAN: NL92 INGB 000 000 7676



## PARTNERS

---

greenhost.



## CERTIFICATIONS

---

