

Dr. Abu Rajab Opening Statement

Senate Foreign Relations Committee

March 15, 2017

Good morning. My name is Mohamed Abu Rajab. I was the director of M10 hospital in Aleppo, the largest trauma hospital in the eastern part of the city. The hospital was established by the Syrian American Medical Society, SAMS, in February of 2013. It had four operating rooms, which made it the largest surgical center in eastern Aleppo. Because of the many attacks on the the hospital, SAMS moved it to an underground, fortified structure to protect its patients and medical workers in 2014. In March of 2015 we added a CAT scanner, the only one in eastern Aleppo.

From the opening of the hospital in 2013 until it was bombed out of service on October 14, 2016, M10 was hit by airstrikes 22 times. In October 2016, the hospital was targeted five times in one week, removing it from service. I myself was injured by shrapnel in one of the attacks. Some of the shrapnel remains in my body to this day. Yet I was one of the lucky ones- I survived; many others did not. Do you remember the young boy, Omran, whose photo became a symbol of the plight of the children of Aleppo? We treated him at M10. Thankfully, he survived his injuries. Sadly, his brother, Ali who was 11, died from his injuries a week later. Most of our patients at M10 were children. So much death and suffering- and for what? The people of Syria simply want to live in peace and to be free.

We built the hospital underground in order to protect the doctors and patients from the airstrikes. However, the use of bunker busters made this ineffective. It wasn't until the entrance of Russia into the conflict that we started to see these advanced weapons: bunker buster bombs, parachute bombs, and more. We moved from one hospital to another, as each was targeted and taken out of service. We struggled to eat, to sleep, and to protect our families. We were convinced that we were going to die. We lost many of our friends, colleagues, and family members.

When the final evacuations began, we were scared of what would happen to us. The Iranian militias were looting houses and killing anyone who resisted. We went to a checkpoint and boarded the infamous green buses. Many people were locked in the buses for up to 20 hours without food, water, or bathrooms. Some of the militias forced people to remove all their clothes and wait in the buses in nothing more than their underwear. We ultimately made our way north to Idlib. We would have been arrested if we had entered a government-controlled area. This kind of forced displacement cannot be allowed to continue. I love Aleppo. It is my home. It is a part of me. I dream of one day returning to my home with my family and living in peace. But I need your help. I call on you to protect hospitals and health workers. This is a simple request. In addition, we must allow civilians to remain in their homes, and not be forced to evacuate. When you live in freedom, you must help others to be free. Who among us does not like peace? The United States government must be a voice for the innocent people of Syria, and must be a moral compass for the parties involved. Thank you.