

SOURCE A: In November 2016, Syrian forces surrounded the city of Aleppo, held by rebel forces. Under hails of indiscriminate shelling, thousands of civilians left the east part of the city to cross into government-controlled areas. Others, however, fearing reprisals, opted to stay, despite the growing threat of death. One such person, a doctor, is the author of the following anonymous account...

If you're a man and you leave eastern Aleppo, at best you'll be forced to be fight for the Syrian army... at worst, you'll be summarily executed.

- 1 I fled my house on Saturday as the fighting was getting closer. I knew that sooner or later our lives would be in danger. We had no other choice but to leave. We gathered up a few belongings and headed to another neighbourhood in eastern Aleppo. Of course, it hasn't been spared by aerial bombing, but it's still held by rebel forces. As far as I know, very few people
- 5 have tried crossing into government-held territory. Those who leave pay a heavy price. Eastern Aleppo is completely surrounded. There's only one way out – and it's controlled by regime forces. If you're a man, you're forced to undergo a lengthy interrogation and could end up – at best – being forced to fight for the Syrian army. For many, such a scenario would be unthinkable.
- 10 I know that the Syrian regime is looking for me because I'm medical staff. They're waging all-out war against doctors who, out of duty, treat everyone they can, no matter who they are. So they accuse us of supporting the insurgents. I refuse to go into areas controlled by Kurdish YPG forces. Three of my friends found their death there, executed as traitors.
- 15 As a result, we've taken shelter in another part of eastern Aleppo that's still under rebel control. For the last three days I've been living in an apartment abandoned by its owners fortunate enough to afford to flee when the war first broke out. My wife, children and I share it along with two other families. There are 13 of us living in a small three-bedroom apartment, without water or medicine. But that hasn't diminished the solidarity amongst us.
- 20 The local committee – elected by local residents – took the responsibility of housing families in a vacant block. With only one or two hours of electricity per day, it's impossible to warm the apartments, and it is freezing cold in the morning. We have to sleep covered in layers of blankets, of which we have plenty. But what we really lack is medicine, potatoes, vegetables, bread, meat and fuel, all because of the siege.
- 25 I work and earn around 350 dollars per month. A kilogram of meat costs 100 dollars, so every two months I can afford to get myself a kilo. I always share it with those who need it the most. But those moments when we can afford to eat meat are rare. On a normal day we eat rice and pasta - a kilo of rice costs around 3 dollars. It's far more affordable, but we can't go on much longer. The siege is suffocating us and the constant bombardments are terrifying. It's worse for
- 30 the children, who can't get used to it. There aren't enough basements for everyone to hide in, so when we hear planes flying above us, we hold our breath.

I see no way out. There needs to be negotiations between the rebel forces and the Syrian army under the authority of the United Nations, so that we can leave safely. But I doubt that will happen. I fear for my life. I said goodbye to my house when I left it. It's a good thing I left, because residents still living in the area told me that foreign fighters are now occupying it. That was bound to happen. They knew who I was and were looking for me. I hope that those who ran the risk of staying put – especially the elderly – won't fall victim to the violence. I was unable to verify this myself, but I heard that a woman had been raped by a member of this militia, in front of her husband. War is everywhere. It attacks our body and our mind.