

Statement

4,000 Residents from alSalhabiya al Sharqiya Village in Western Suburbs of Raqqa have been Forcibly Displaced

Syrian Democratic Forces Bar
Residents from Going Back Home

SNHR

SYRIAN NETWORK FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

الشبكة السورية لحقوق الإنسان

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The Syrian Network for Human Rights, founded in June 2011, is a non-governmental, non-profit independent organization that is a primary source for the United Nations on all death toll-related statistics in Syria



On November 6, 2016, the Kurdish-majority Syrian Democratic Forces -SDF- (primarily consisting of the Kurdish Democratic Union Party) initiated the first stage of “Ghadab al Furat” (Euphrates’s Fury) to take over the entirety of Raqqa governorate, one of the most major strongholds for ISIS (self-proclaimed the Islamic State). With the support of the international coalition forces, the battle started in northern suburbs of Raqqa governorate before moving onto western and eastern suburbs of Raqqa. By the end of June 2017, SDF, backed by the air forces of the international coalition, had taken over wide areas of western and northern suburbs of Raqqa -estimated at 80% of the governorate’s land area- and encompassed Raqqa city in preparation to take over the city.

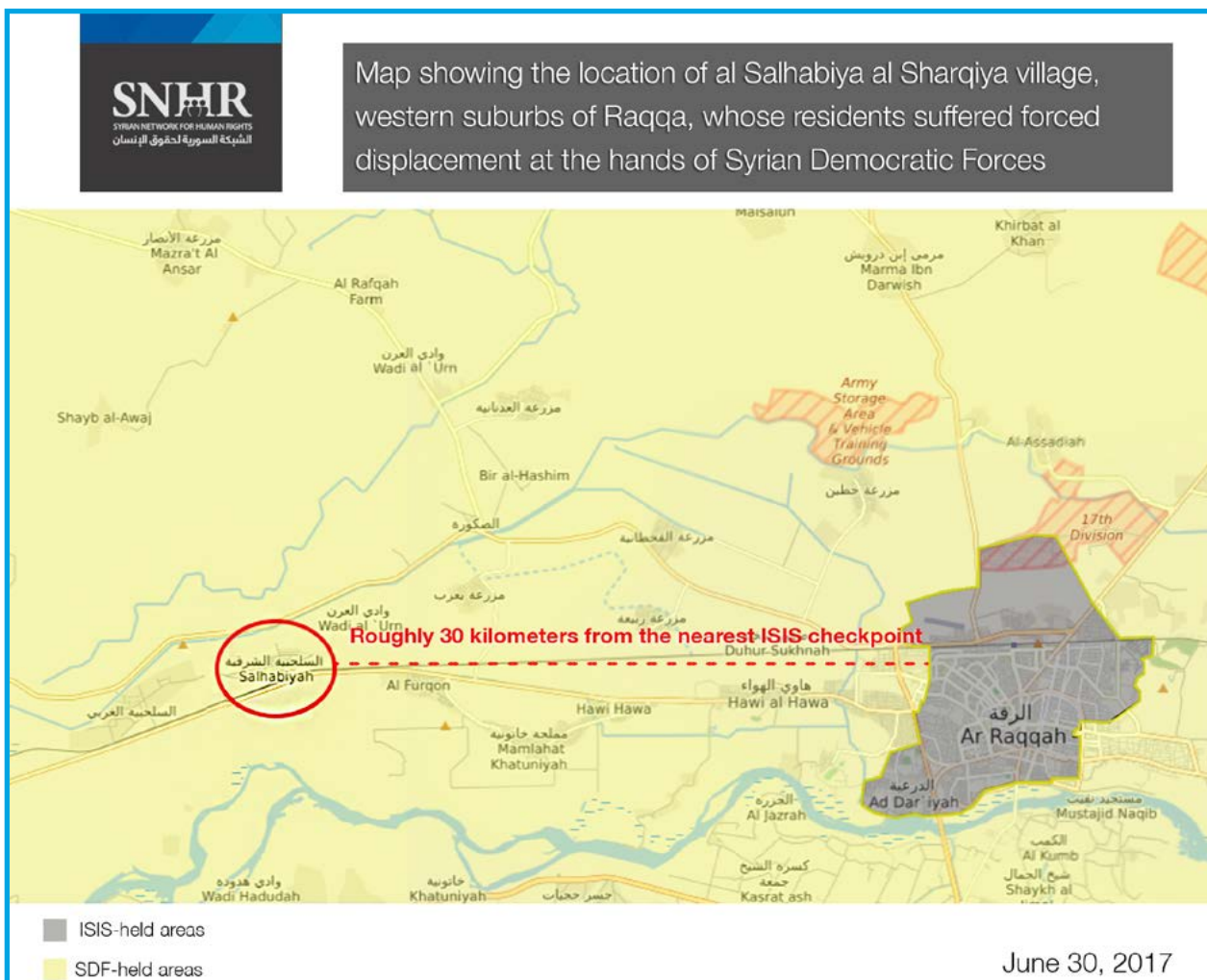
The military operations saw a blatant disregard for the customary international law, which was reflected by the unjustifiable size of human casualties that were killed in that period of time. SNHR recorded that this alliance (SDF-international coalition forces) have killed no less than 895 civilians, including 241 children and 170 women, between November 6, 2016 and June 30, 2017. Also, we recorded approximately 78 incidents of attack on vital civilian facilities in the same period of time. Thirdly, we recorded that 117 individuals, including one child and three women, were arrested at the hands of SDF.

In light of the indiscriminate bombardment and killing, destruction of houses and vital facilities, and arrest operations, tens of thousands of residents to flee. Most of those found themselves forced to live in desert areas that are unequipped for habitation amid a lack of the most basic necessities of life. SNHR estimates the number of civilians who were forcibly displaced at 120,000 people at least from across the governorate. Some of those people managed to go back to their villages after they were taken over by SDF, which meant that international coalition forces’ strikes came to an end in those areas. Nevertheless, thousands of people are still displaced as is the case with al Salhabiya al Sharqiya village, western suburbs of Raqqa governorate. This is what the human rights, humanitarian, and media organizations have to shed light on in order to apply pressure on the international coalition forces so they instruct the forces supported and funded by them (namely, SDF) to let them go back to their houses at once.



In mid-May 2017, SDF advanced towards al Salhabiya al Sharqiya village, which is of an Arabic origin, in western suburbs of Raqqa (21 kilometers from western Raqqa city). Fearing the aerial shelling and arrest campaigns that usually these advancements bring, most, and maybe all, of the village's residents fled. The residents estimate the number of displaced people at 4000 people who are displaced in the agricultural fields that are located in the vicinity of the village, as they set up tents and lived there.

On May 22, 2017, the village fell completely under the control of SDF who forced the residents who were living in tents to flee, so those people found themselves forced to go to a deserted wasteland to the north of the village. After 15 days, the displaced people told us that SDF allowed them to only come back to the agricultural fields in the vicinity of the village following some negotiations between the village's figures and SDF. However, SDF didn't let any people to enter the village, and residents told us that SDF threatened to open fire directly at them, justifying their decisions by a military necessity, even though the reality on the ground, analyzing maps, and the division of areas of control, which corresponded with the residents' account that we acquired, suggest that there are no military justification or any risks on the residents should they come back, as the nearest ISIS checkpoint is roughly 30 kilometers away from al Salhabiya al Sharqiya village according to the following map:



On June 23, 2017, we recorded that seven individuals, including one woman, were injured after SDF assaulted a demonstration by the residents of al Salhabiya al Sharqiya village that condemned the forced displacement they suffered, and demanded that they come home.

[Videos](#) showing a protest by [the residents of al Salhabiya](#) al Sharqiya village that demanded that SDF let them go back to their homes.

At the time of this report's release, there are still 4,000 individuals who are still [trapped](#) in [the fields](#) surrounding [the village](#), lacking the most basic necessities of life and living in rudimentary tents with no food aids, safe-drinking water, or sanitary supplies. In addition, there is an almost complete lack of health care, as SDF didn't let them receive treatment at the medical point they established in the village.

SDF have perpetrated the violation of forced displacement which constitutes a war crime according to Article 8 of Rome Statute. Even in the case that SDF's claims were right and this displacement was justified by military necessities, SDF didn't secure appropriate alternative places of residence. Even more, SDF didn't even let those people go back to their homes after the clashes with ISIS ceased following their complete takeover of the village.

The SDF-supporting states have to apply pressure on SDF to cease all their offenses in all areas and towns under their control, and start founding and supporting local councils composed of members of the local community in order to establish a civil administration in these areas.

International relief organizations have to find ways to deliver water, food, shelter for those displaced people in light of the unbearable heat that reached 45 Celsius.





An IDP camp in the vicinity of al Salhabiya al Sharqiya village, west suburbs of Raqqa – June 2017.

SDF have to let the residents go back to their homes immediately, end the suffering of the residents of al Salhabiya al Sharqiya, and secure immediate and speedy food and medical aids.





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