

No less than 186 Massacres in Syria in the First Half of 2018

Including 15 Massacres in June

SNHR

SYRIAN NETWORK FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

الشبكة السورية لحقوق الإنسان

Saturday, July 7, 2018

The Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR), founded in June 2011, is a non-governmental, independent group that is considered a primary source for the OHCHR on all death toll-related analyses in Syria.



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I. Introduction and Methodology

Since the popular uprising for freedom started in Syria in March 2011, SNHR has taken it upon itself to record a wide range of violations that are being perpetrated daily against the Syrian people, such as killing, enforced-disappearance, arbitrary arrest, destruction, indiscriminate bombardment, and torture as SNHR shed light on the most notable violations it recorded that were committed by the parties to the conflict in Syria in hundreds of reports. The Syrian regime, and its militias, were the only perpetrator of violations at the start of the popular uprising, and they remain the main perpetrator, as the Syrian regime is responsible for the majority of violations. Subsequently, other parties emerged gradually such as the armed opposition, extremist Islamic groups, Democratic Union Party forces, international coalition forces, and Russian forces.

The first two years of the popular uprising saw the largest portion of ethnic and sectarian cleansing massacres, where the Syrian regime and its militias were responsible for the majority of these massacres. In mid-2013, Syrian regime forces started relying heavily on warplanes and they were also used later by international coalition forces and Russian forces. The wide use of aerial bombardment doubled the numbers of victims and caused huge destruction to the infrastructure, as one or two new massacres at least are recorded almost every day.

The Syrian regime used improvised weapons, such as barrel bombs, to bomb the areas that are out of its control while Russian forces used more deadly weapons, relying more on bunker-buster missiles, incendiary ammunitions, and cluster munitions.



Also, we have recorded in our database tens of massacres that were perpetrated by extremist Islamic groups and factions from the armed opposition. In addition, we've monitored massacres by Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) which are backed by the international coalition forces' air force, where we have recorded a significant rise in the rate of massacres perpetrated by the coalition (international coalition - SDF) since the end of 2016.

Methodology

This report records the massacres perpetrated by the parties to the conflict in Syria in June that SNHR team was able to document. This report also sheds light on the most notable massacres. We have the details of the complete incidents stored in SNHR's database. The term "massacre" refers to any attack that resulted in the killing of five peaceful individuals or more in the same attack.

This report draws upon the ongoing monitoring of news and development by SNHR team, and on an extensive network of relations with tens of various sources that have been built over the course of our work. When we receive information, or hear some news about a violation via the internet or media outlets, we work on following on this news and try to verify and collect evidences and data. In some cases, the researcher is able to visit the incident location at the soonest. However, this is a rarity in light of the incredibly high security risks, and given the frequency of daily incidents and the limited human and material resources. Therefore, the possibility to access evidences vary from one case to another, and, hence, the degree of its classification. Usually, what we do, at SNHR, in such cases is relying on accounts from survivors who experienced the violation firsthand, where we try to access those directly, and, to a second degree, who saw or filmed the violation.

This report contains a number of attacks that were carried out using an air force. However, we haven't been able to accurately assign responsibility in these attacks, Syrian regime forces or Russian forces. Therefore, we've assigned responsibility to Syrian regime/Russian forces in those attacks.

This report also contains a number of massacres that were the result of bombings but we haven't been able to accurately identify the parties responsible for them on account of the considerable difficulties in identifying the responsible groups in such bombings.

This report contains one account that we've collected through speaking directly to eyewitnesses, and are not cited from any open sources. We have explained the purpose of these interviews for the eyewitnesses who gave us permission to use the information they provid-



ed without offering or giving them any incentives. Also, SNHR tried to spare the eyewitnesses the agony of remembering the violation as much as possible, and gave insurances to conceal the identity of any witness who preferred to use an alias.

All of the attacks included in this report have targeted civilian areas. We didn't identify any military presence or armories during the attacks or even before it. Additionally, the forces that attacked civilians didn't put out a warning prior to their attacks as the international humanitarian law requires.

SNHR has analyzed videos and pictures that were posted online, or were sent by local activists via e-mail, Skype, or social media. Some of the videos showed victims of attacks in which missiles and barrel bombs were used, while most victims were children and women. Other pictures showed victims that died in bombings we couldn't identify their perpetrators. We have copies of all the pictures and videos included in this report in a secret online database and backup copies on hard drives. We always make sure to store this data with its respective source. Nonetheless, we can't claim that we have documented all cases in light of the ban and pursuit by Syrian regime forces as well as other armed groups.

Please see SNHR methodology for [documenting victims](#).

This report only represents the bare minimum of the actual magnitude and severity of the violation that occurred. It also doesn't cover the social, economic, and mental ramifications.

II. June Outline

Syrian-Russian alliance forces launched a vicious offensive in mid-June in south Syria. These forces established their control over numerous areas while the offensive resulted in a number of massacres against civilians, where we recorded eight massacres in Daraa governorate.

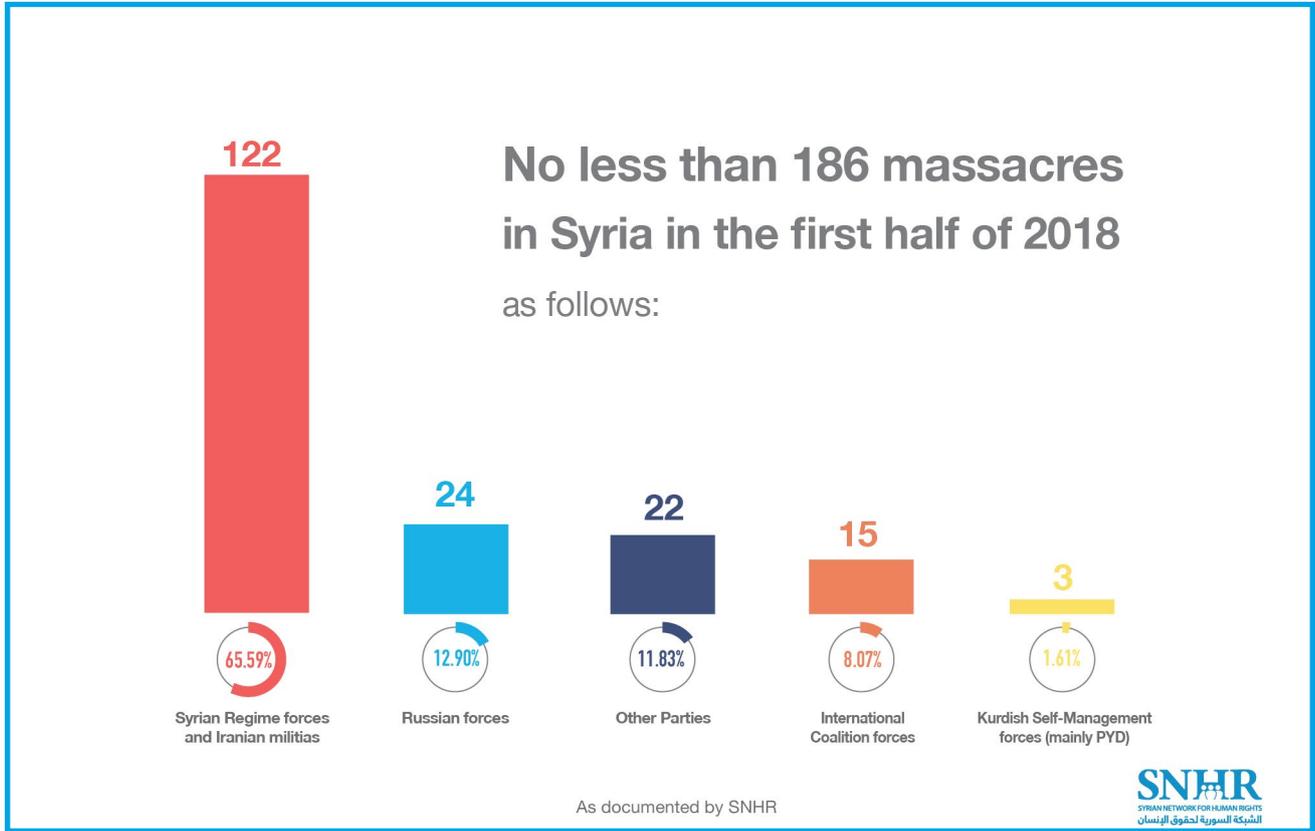
Syrian-Russian alliance forces topped all parties with 10 massacres out of 15 massacres that were recorded in June. In addition, we recorded for a second month in a row massacres by international coalition forces in east Syria, as three massacres were recorded, including two in Hasaka governorate.



III. Executive Summary

A. Massacres in the first half of 2018

SNHR has documented 186 massacres at the hands of the parties to the conflict in the first half of 2018, as follows:



A- Syrian regime forces (army, security, local militias, and Shiite foreign militias): 122

B- Russian forces: 24

C- Self-Management forces (consisting primarily of the Democratic Union Party – a branch for the Kurdistan Workers' Party): 3

D- International coalition forces: 15

E- Other parties: 22

Massacres perpetrated by Syrian regime forces in the first half of 2018 were distributed by area of control as follows:

- 112 massacres in areas under the control of factions from the armed opposition
- 8 massacres in areas under the joint control of armed opposition factions and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham
- 2 massacres in areas under the control of ISIS

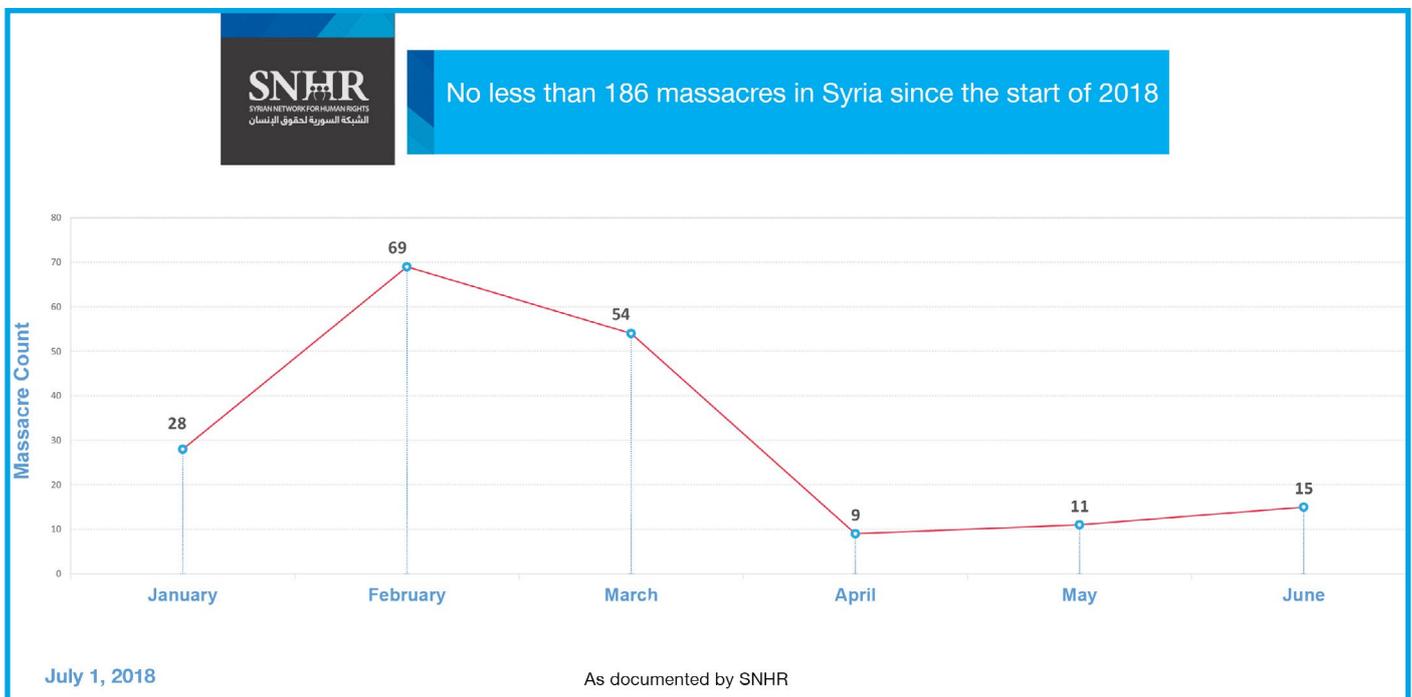


According to the victim documentation team at SNHR, these massacres resulted in the killing of 2,257 civilians, including 660 children and 479 women (adult female). This means that 51% of all victims were women and children, which is a considerably high percentage, and an indication that civilian residents were targeted in most of these massacres.

Death toll is distributed by the perpetrator party as follows:

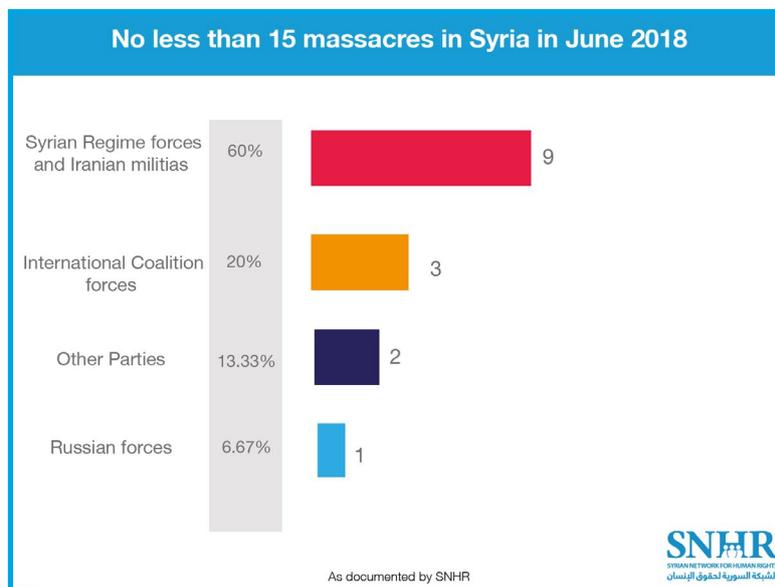
- A- Syrian regime forces: 1,502 civilians, including 385 children and 295 women.
- B- Russian forces: 291 civilians, including 103 children and 68 women.
- C- Self-Management forces: 28 civilians, including 1 child and 12 women.
- D- International coalition forces: 199 civilians, including 101 children and 55 women.
- E- Other parties: 237 civilians, including 70 children and 49 women.

Massacres since the start of 2018 were distributed by month as follows:



B. Massacres in June

SNHR has documented no less than 15 massacres in June, distributed as follows:



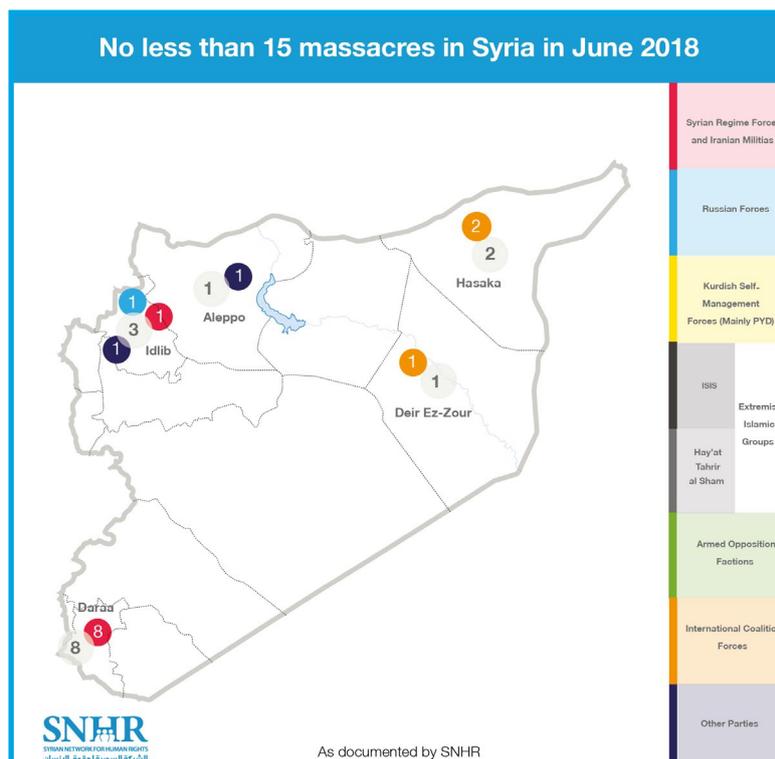
A- Syrian regime forces: 9

B- Russian forces: 1

C- International coalition forces: 3

D- Other parties: 2

The following map shows the distribution of June's massacres across Syrian governorates by the parties to the conflict



The massacres that were carried out by Syrian regime forces in June were distributed by area of control as follows:

- 8 massacres in areas under the control of factions from the armed opposition
- 1 massacres in areas under the joint control of armed opposition factions and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham

According to the victim documentation team at SNHR, the massacres documented this month have resulted in the killing of 206 civilians, including 51 children and 34 women (adult female). This means that 41% of all victims were women and children, which is a considerably high percentage, and an indication that civilian residents were targeted in most of these massacres.

Death toll of these massacres is distributed by the perpetrator party as follows:

- A- Syrian regime forces: 100 civilians, including 18 children and 16 women.
- B- Russian forces: 53 civilians, including 10 children and 9 women.
- C- International coalition forces: 33 civilians, including 20 children and 6 women.
- D- Other parties: 20 civilians, including 3 children and 3 women.

IV. Details of the Most Notable Massacres in June

A- Syrian regime forces (army, security, local militias, and Shiite foreign militias)

Daraa governorate

Wednesday, June 27, 2018, fixed-wing Syrian regime/Russian forces warplanes (the incident is still being investigated to accurately identify the perpetrator party) fired [a number of missiles](#) in [al Tayba](#) village, eastern suburbs of Daraa governorate, which resulted in the killing of [17 civilians](#) who were mostly from the same family (what we have been able to document as of this writing), including [four children](#) and [three women](#). The village was under the control of armed opposition factions at the time of the incident.



A victim being pulled out in the aftermath of a massacre by Syrian regime/Russian forces in al Tayba village, Daraa – June 27, 2018



Thursday, June 28, 2018, fixed-wing Syrian regime/Russian forces warplanes (the incident is still being investigated to accurately identify the perpetrator party) fired a number of missiles at [the foyer](#) of a residential building, used by residents as a bunker, in [al Msaifra](#) town, eastern suburbs of Daraa governorate, which resulted in the killing of [17 civilians](#) (what we have been able to document as of this writing), including [five children](#). The town is under the control of Syrian regime forces at the time of this writing, while it was under the control of armed opposition factions at the time of the incident.



Children victims being pulled out in the aftermath of a massacre by Syrian regime/Russian forces in al Msaifra town, Daraa – June 28, 2018

Saturday, June 30, 2018, Syrian regime forces helicopters dropped a number of barrel bombs on [Ghasam](#) village, eastern suburbs of Daraa governorate, which resulted in the killing of [six civilians](#) at once, including one woman. The village is under the control of Syrian regime forces at the time of this writing, while it was under the control of armed opposition factions at the time of the incident.



Victims being pulled out in the aftermath of a massacre by Syrian regime forces in Ghasam village, Daraa – June 30, 2018

Idlib governorate

Sunday, June 10, 2018, fixed-wing Syrian regime forces warplanes (Su-22) fired a number of missiles in the vicinity of [al Nour Hospital](#) for Children in western [Taftanaz](#) town, western suburbs of Idlib governorate, which resulted in the killing of [12 civilians](#), including four [children](#) and [two women](#). The town was under the joint control of armed opposition factions and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.





Victims killed in a massacre by Syrian regime forces in Taftanaz town, Idlib – June 10, 2018

B- Russian forces **Idlib governorate**

Thursday, June 7, 2018, around 21:00, fixed-wing warplanes we believe were Russian fired a number of [missiles](#) in a residential neighborhood near [Saed ben Mu'ath Mosque](#) in south-western [Zardana](#) village, northeastern suburbs of Idlib governorate. As residents and [civil defense teams](#) were gathering to pull out victims and aid the wounded, the same warplanes came back and bombed the same site with missiles around 21:50. The two airstrikes resulted in the killing of [53 civilians](#), including [10 children](#) and [nine women](#), while about 80 others were wounded. The village was under the joint control of armed opposition factions and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.

SNHR contacted activist Mohammad Hamroush¹, who is from Zardana town and works as a news editor with the civil defense in Idlib governorate. Mohammad was at the outskirts of the town and as he was coming home he saw a missile fired by the Russian air force landing on al Janoubi neighborhood to cause a big flash when it hit the ground, **“I headed immediately there and I saw dead bodies scattered everywhere. The bombing destroyed numerous multi-story buildings and created a large hole of a diameter of 10 meters.”** Mohammad added that the residents and civil defense teams gathered to rescue the people who were trapped in rubble, **“One of the civil defense members shouted as warplanes soared above the area. People rushed to clear the site in fear of a second airstrike, which exactly what happened. The site was bombed again with missiles and more victims were killed, and there were three new holes. More than 40 people were killed, while about 80 others were wounded.”**

¹ Via Facebook on June 8, 2018



C- International coalition forces

Hasaka governorate

Monday, June 4, 2018, around 06:00, fixed-wing international coalition forces warplanes fired a number of missiles in al Jazza' village, which is administratively a part of al Shaddadi city, southern suburbs of Hasaka governorate. The bombing resulted in the killing of 13 civilians, including 10 children and two women, while about 10 others were wounded. The village was under the control of ISIS at the time of the incident.

Deir Ez-Zour governorate

Thursday, June 21, 2018, fixed-wing international coalition forces warplanes fired a number of missiles in [al Sh'afa](#) city, which is administratively a part of al Boukamal city, eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate. The bombing resulted in the killing of eight civilians at once, who were IDPs from al Mosul city, Iraq, including four children and two women. The city was under the control of ISIS at the time of the incident.

D- Other parties

Idlib governorate

Thursday, June 21, 2018, a motorbike exploded in front of a house, which is used by Hay'at Tahrir al Sham as a base, located behind the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, formerly Carlton Hotel, in southern Idlib city. The bombing was followed by another car bombing about five minutes later. The two bombings resulted in the killing of [10 civilians](#), including [three children](#) and [one woman](#), while about 35 others were wounded. As of this writing, we have yet to identify the group responsible for the two bombings on account of the considerable difficulties in identifying the perpetrator in such bombings. Idlib city was under the control of Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.





Victims being pulled out in the aftermath of two bombings by unknowns in southern Idlib city – June 21, 2018. By: Ahmad al Rahhal

V. Conclusions and Recommendations

Syrian regime and Russian forces

- The Syrian-Russian alliance has, beyond any doubt, violated Security Council resolutions 2139 and 2254 which both state that indiscriminate attacks must be ceased. Also, The Syrian and Russian regime have violated Article 7 and 8 of Rome Statute through the act of willful killing which constitutes war crimes.
- We can confirm that the bombardment mentioned in this report has targeted defenseless civilians. Therefore, Syrian and Russian forces have violated the rules of the international human rights law which guarantee the right to life. Additionally, these violations were perpetrated in a non-international armed conflict which amount to a war crime where all elements were fulfilled.
- The attacks mentioned in this report that were carried out by The Syrian and Russian regimes, are considered a violation of the customary international law as the shells were fired at a populated area rather than a specific military object.
- Aerial bombardment has caused collateral damages that involved loss of lives, injuries, or significant damages to civil facilities. There are strong indicators suggesting that the damage was too excessive compared to the anticipated military benefit.
- The magnitude of the massacres, their frequent nature, the exaggerated use of power, the indiscriminate manner of the bombing, and the coordinated approach of these attacks must be based on high orders, and a state policy.



The Coalition (international coalition and SDF)

The attacks by Coalition forces have caused collateral damages that involved loss of lives, injuries, or significant damages to civilian facilities. There are strong indicators suggesting that the damage was too excessive compared to the anticipated military benefit.

Other forces

International coalition forces and other parties have perpetrated massacres, according to this report, that constitute war crimes. However, we don't believe that these massacres qualify as crimes against humanity, as with the Syrian regime and pro-regime forces who perpetrate massacres in a systematic and widespread manner.

Conclusions

Security Council

- The Security Council has to take additional steps after resolution 2139 and 2254 were adopted, and no pledges to cease the indiscriminate bombing have been made. All parties to the conflict should respect these steps, and adhere to the rules of the international humanitarian law.
- The Syrian case should be referred to the International Criminal Court and all those who are responsible should be held accountable including the Russian regime whose involvement in war crimes has been proven.
- Expand sanctions to include the Syrian and Iranian regimes who are directly involved in crimes against humanity and war crimes against the Syrian people.
- List the militias who are fighting on the side of the Syrian government and had committed wide massacres - such as Iranian militias, the Lebanese group Hezbollah, other Shiite groups, the National Defense Army, and Shabiha, on the international list of terrorist groups.
- Abstain from considering the Syrian government an official side after it perpetrated crimes against humanity with regard to the relief aspect, and stop giving it the largest portion of financial and other aids as they are being delivered to the people who support the Syrian government instead of people who are truly in-need.

International community

- In light of the split of the Security Council and its utter inability, action should be taken on the national and regional levels to form alliances to support the Syrian people that would protect them from the daily killing and siege and raise the support for the relief efforts. Additionally, the principle of universal jurisdiction should be activated in local courts regarding these crimes in order to conduct fair trials for all those who were involved.



- SNHR has repeatedly called for the implementation of the “Responsibility to Protect” in tens of studies and reports and as a member of the International Coalition for the Responsibility to Protect (ICRtoP) after all political channels through the Arab League’s plan and then Mr. Kofi Annan’s plan have been brought out as well as the Cessation of Hostilities statements and Astana agreements that followed. Therefore, steps under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations should be taken and the norm of the “Responsibility to Protect”, which was established by the United Nations General Assembly, should be implemented. The Security Council is still hindering the protection of civilians in Syria.
- Renew the pressure on the Security Council to refer the case in Syria to the International Criminal Court
- Work on fulfilling justice and achieving accountability in Syria through the United Nations General Assembly and the Human Rights Council and work on activating the principle of the universal jurisdiction.

OHCHR

The OHCHR should submit a report to the Human Rights Council and other organs of the United Nations on the incidents included in this report and the massacres that preceded, given that they are a glaring mark in a string of daily sporadic massacres of a smaller scope. Also, the OHCHR should work on implementing the recommendations in this report.

Commission of Inquiry (COI)

Launch investigations on the cases included in this report and past reports. SNHR is willing to cooperate and provide more evidences and data.

International, Impartial, and Independent Mechanism (IIIM)

Address the cases mentioned in this report and past reports. SNHR is willing to cooperate and provide more evidences and data.

European Union and United States of America

Support the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism that was established in accordance with General Assembly Resolution 71/248, adopted on December 21, 2016. And establish local tribunals that enjoy a universal jurisdiction, and address the war crimes that were perpetrated in Syria.



Russian regime

- Launch investigations regarding the incidents that resulted in civilian casualties, make the findings of these investigations public for the Syrian people, and hold the people involved accountable.
- Compensate all affected facilities and centers, and reconstruct and rehabilitate them. Also, compensate all the victims' families, who were killed by the current Russian regime, as well as the all the wounded.
- Immediately cease bombing hospitals, protected objects, and civilian areas, and respect the customary international humanitarian law.

The Coalition (international coalition forces and Syrian Democratic Forces)

- The states of the coalition have to unequivocally and truly acknowledge that some of the bombardment operations have resulted in the killing of innocent civilians. Instead of denying, these states should take speedy steps to launch serious investigations, and immediately compensate and apologize to the victims and those who were affected.
- The SDF-supporting states should apply pressure on these forces in order to compel them to cease all of their violations in all the areas and towns that are under their control.
- All forms of support, weapons and otherwise, should be ceased until SDF commit to the previous recommendations. This is primarily the supporting states' responsibility. Providing SDF with weapons and support while knowing that they can be used in war crimes or crimes against humanity can be seen as a contribution to these crimes.

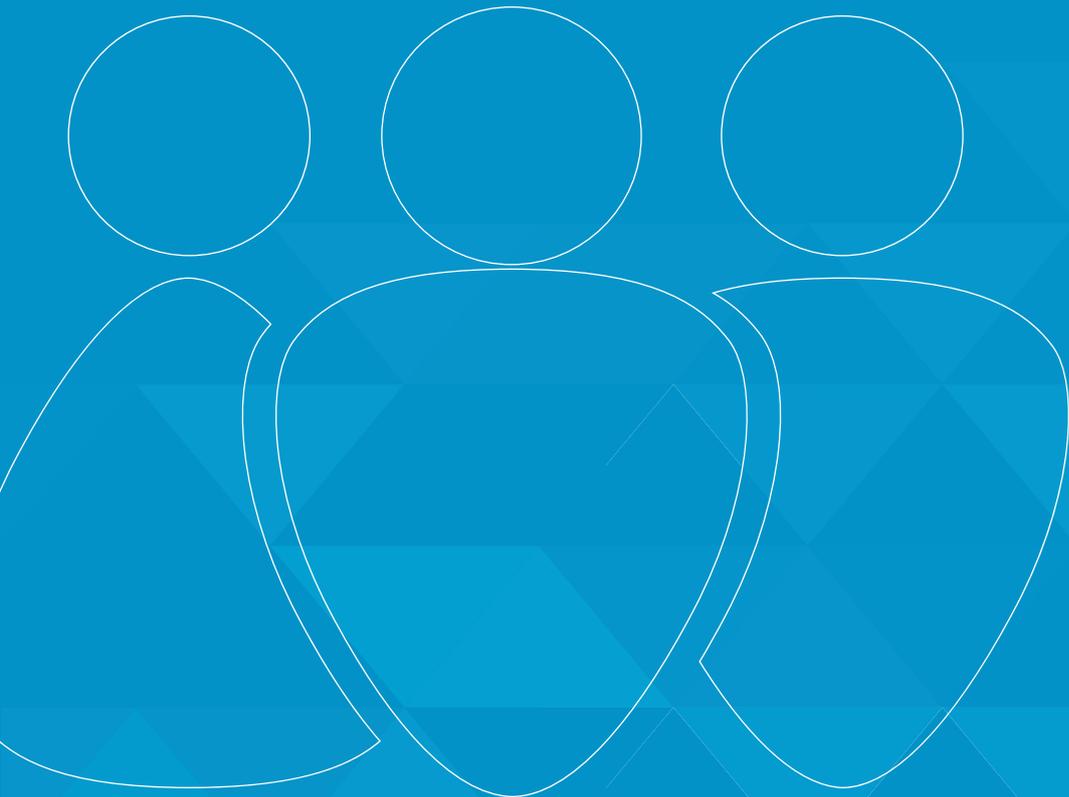
Armed opposition factions

Ensure the protection of civilians in all of their areas of control. Also, armed opposition factions should distinguish between civilians and military targets, and cease any indiscriminate attacks.

Acknowledgment and Condolences

Our thanks to the residents, victims' families, eyewitnesses, and local community activists who contributed effectively to this report. Also, our most heartfelt condolences to the victims' families and friends.





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