



# **Douma Massacre August 2015**

## **Shelling Crowded Markets at Rush Hour**

**The Syrian Network for Human Rights** is a independent and non-governmental, non-profit human rights organization that investigates and documents all violations committed by all conflict parties involved in the Syrian conflict since 2011. The network, that does not adopt any ideology, was founded in June 2011 and aims to defend the human rights of the Syrian people. It also includes 27 researchers and human rights activists stationed in Syria and in other neighboring countries.

**SNHR** is committed to all standards and international conventions of Human Rights issued by the United Nations. It aims to ensure that victims' rights are not exploited and perpetrators are held accountable for their crimes.

**SNHR** issues periodic reports concerning the most notable daily violations, eight monthly statistical or specialized reports, annual reports, and reports concerning global human rights events. It also issues significant studies and documentaries on a regular basis in order to contribute to raising awareness in the Syrian community.

**SNHR** is considered to be one of the most distinguished and reliable sources of information and references for all the analytical and statistical studies issued by the United Nations.



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**This report was prepared in cooperation with the Syrian Coalition**

## I. Introduction:

Douma city is the largest district in rebel-held eastern Ghouta, which has been subjected to crippling siege by pro-regime forces since October 2013. Life conditions have drastically deteriorated as regime forces block the entry of civilians, food and medical supplies.

This report documents a regime aerial attack using eight rockets that hit two marketplaces and a residential neighborhood on 19 August 2015.

This report was prepared by SNHR through its field researcher Dr. Majd Dalati, in coordination with the legal office of the National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces.

Following the airstrikes, Dr. Majd Dalati of the Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) conducted several surgeries on the injured and communicated with victims' families. He took photos and videos to document details, including names, of all the victims.

Out of safety concerns, we changed the names of the witnesses and victims Dr. Dalati interviewed; however, we have preserved the original information in our archives. We explained the goal of the interviews to the witnesses and were granted their consent to use the information they provide in this report. We verified the photos and videos we had received, and we kept copies of all the video clips and images used in this report. Through careful examination of the photo and video evidence, we concluded that the airstrikes have targeted purely civilian marketplaces void of any military or weapons depots neither during nor before the attack. The timing of the attacks and the areas targeted clearly show that pro-regime forces sought to cause as many civilian casualties and as much destruction as possible.

The information contained in this report represents the minimum size of the massacres and violations committed by regime forces in Douma. Also, it does not include the social, economic, and psychological impact of these violations.

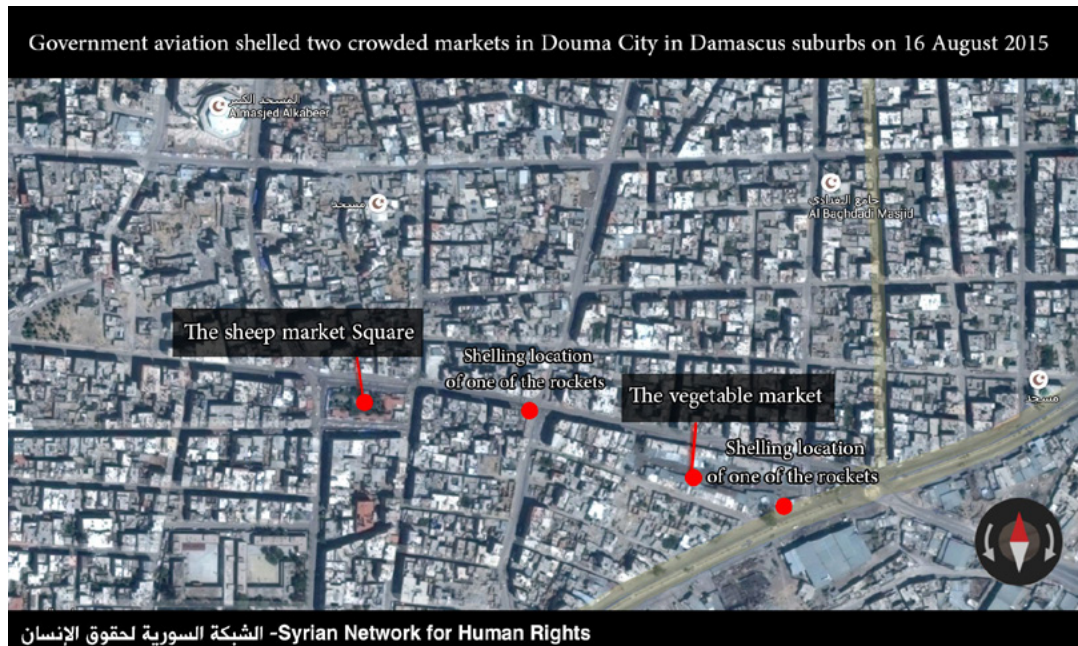
The regime's aerial bombardment, displacement and destruction they cause are apparently aimed at thwarting the establishment of any governance model that may serve as a substitute for the government of the Assad regime.



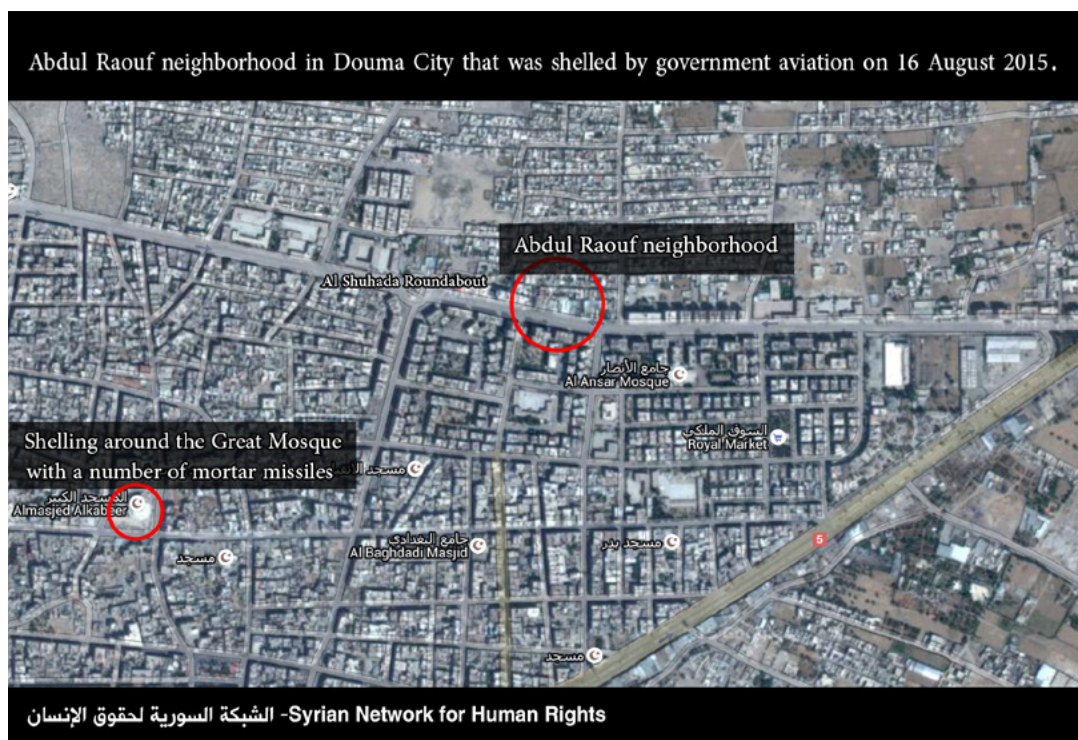
## II. Executive summary:

On Sunday, 16 August 2015, Assad's air force fired eight missiles on two crowded marketplaces and a residential neighborhood. We documented the death of 122 people, including 11 children and two women by their full names and photos, in addition to 485 injuries among civilians.

A photo taken from Google Maps showing the location of the vegetable and sheep market that was targeted by the airstrikes:



A photo taken from Google Maps showing the Abdul-Rauf neighborhood in Douma which was targeted by the airstrikes:



### III. Report Details:

At nearly 1:30 P.M., Assad's air force fired four missiles on two crowded marketplaces in downtown Douma city. The vegetable and sheep markets are nearly 200 meters apart. 115 civilians, including 11 children and two women, were killed in the airstrikes that also caused massive destruction to the shops and civilian property. Approximately two hours later, the regime's jet fighters returned and bombed the Abdul-Rauf neighborhood with four more missiles, killing seven civilians and wounding over 21.

In total, and in just two hours, 122 civilians, including 11 children and two women, were killed and over 485 others injured.

As rescue operations began, regime checkpoints surrounding the district started shelling the same areas with several mortar rounds, targeting paramedics and civil defense teams.

The nearly two year blockade imposed on the town has further exacerbated medical and health conditions, with makeshift hospitals unable to cover the needs of the large number of injured people. Moreover, the severe shortage in the number of medical staff further compounded the suffering of the wounded.

Medical teams however conducted at least 145 surgical operations in around 24 hours. We recorded many cases of amputations because of sheer lack of medical necessities. Dr. Dalati, who works at a field hospital in East Ghouta said:

*"A group of nearly 30 people were rushed to the field hospital, among them were five children. One of the injured people was breathing with great difficulty before he died. I could not offer him anything. Another one died while we were preparing him for surgery. I saw an injured man whose intestines were outside of his body, and another one whose foot was so badly injured that the doctors had to amputate it. There was a child whose face was deformed after it was blown off by shrapnel.*

*Though the field hospital was under-equipped and understaffed all operation rooms were operating beyond the capacity of a large hospital. We had to lay injured people on the floor due to the lack of sufficient beds. While I was walking around amongst the injured, a wounded man who was lying on the floor grabbed me from my feet and implored me to rescue him. It was the most painful moment. The simplest medical needs were no longer available, and we ran out of sterile surgical instruments and sterile gauze bandages.*

*I performed a surgical operation to one of the injured who was suffering from a broken instep. Then we began preparing to conduct another surgical operation to another injured man, but he died before we could do anything to him.*

*Two hours later, aerial bombardment was resumed, leaving a large number of people killed or wounded.*

*Hours of continuous work in a field hospital that lacks the minimum medical needs, with many dead or injured. We felt helpless in front of the death around us."*



Abu Basil, a doctor who also works in a field hospital in Douma, recounts:

*"I arrived at the field hospital moments after the first air raid. It was an awful scene; the hospital was drowning in blood, too many injuries, most of them lying on the ground due to the lack of enough beds. We were completely unable to provide necessary medical assistance to all the injured, especially with the large number of injuries and the insufficient medical equipment. We ran out of blood bags, sterile surgical instruments, and serum bags, but the injured were still rushed into the hospital."*

Firas Al-Abdullah, a local activist in Douma, testified about the incident:

*"I was at the Media Office near the vegetable market when the airstrikes hit. It was around 1:30 PM, a time when the marketplace is the busiest. Four missiles hit the vegetable and the sheep markets. I rushed to the targeted area, and we began to identify the victims. There were about 55 people dead, and then the number rose to 85 after dozens of victims were pulled from under the rubble. Ambulances worked continuously for several hours. Civil defense teams were not spared the shelling by mortar shells, which continued to fall on the area after the jet fighters had left."*

We contacted a local activist in Douma, a cameraman nicknamed Hamza al-Dimashqi, who told us his eyewitness account of the incident:

*"Sounds of the explosions were so powerful that they shook the walls of my house though it is not very close to the site of the attack. I went to the makeshift hospital, what I saw was appalling; large numbers of dead and injured people who were lying on the sidewalk facing the makeshift hospital. They outnumbered those who were inside the hospital. Blood covered the place which resonated with the groans of the wounded. Around an hour and a half later, jet fighters pounded the Abdul-Rauf neighborhood, leaving more people dead or injured."*

## IV. Attachments

The Syrian Network for Human Rights documented 122 people killed, including 11 children in the regime's aerial attacks on the district of Douma in Rural Damascus on August 16, 2015.

A [link](#) that contains the names, pictures and details about the victims who died due to the shelling on Douma City

Videos showing the victims and the massive destruction caused by the aerial attacks:



A group of images that depicts a number of victims including children:



Image of victims of the massacre caused by government warplanes missiles fired on two local markets in Duma in Rif Dimashq, in August 16, 2015

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A [group](#) of images that depicts injured civilians due to the shelling:

## IV. Legal Conclusions

1. The Assad regime flagrantly violated UN Security Council Resolution 2139, which calls for stopping of indiscriminate attacks that amount to a crime against humanity under Article VII of the Rome Statute.
2. We emphasize that these aerial attacks have targeted unarmed civilians, which constitutes a violation of the international human rights laws and a war crime under international laws and treaties
3. The aerial attacks contained in the report carried out by the Assad regime is considered as a violation of international humanitarian law as they deliberately targeted populated areas.
4. The scale of the systematic rocket frequent attacks, and the level of excessive force used in it confirms that they were issued with the consent of Assad, who bears full responsibility for these attacks.
5. The Assad regime is involved in crimes against humanity and war crimes against the Syrian people, as with whoever provide him with financial, political and military aid such as Russian, Iran, the Lebanese Hezbollah and the arms companies that supply it with weapons and ammunition. All these parties must be liable to criminal prosecution.
6. The Assad regime has laid a crippling siege on the people of eastern Ghouta, preventing the entry of humanitarian aid and medical supplies to the people in need. It also used starvation as a weapon of war, which constitutes a war crime under Article VIII of the Rome Statute.

## Recommendations:

### To the UN Security Council:

- The UN Security Council must take further action as a year has passed since the adoption of resolution No. 2139 without the Assad regime showing the least commitment to halting indiscriminate shelling, which has caused destruction and daily killings.
- It must put pressure on the Assad regime and its allies to stop supplying it with arms and military experts after its proven involvement in crimes against humanity and war crimes. It also must pass a resolution to condemn the sides that supply it with weapons.
- The Syrian file must be referred to the International Criminal Court and all those involved in war crimes and violations must be held accountable.
- The UN Security Council must establish peace and security and protect Syrian civilians and their heritage from looting, destruction and vandalism.
- It must expand the sanctions to include all pillars of the Assad and the Iranian regimes as they are directly involved war crimes and crimes against humanity.

### To the High Commissioner for Human Rights:

We call upon the High Commissioner for Human Rights to submit a report to the Human Rights Council Rights and other United Nations bodies about this massacre in particular and the massacres that followed.

The High Commissioner for Human Rights must demand the implementation of the recommendations contained in this report.

### To the international community:

- Given the divisions at the UN Security Council, measures must be made at the national and regional level to build coalitions to aid the Syrian people through protecting it from the daily killings, lifting the siege, and stepping up the relief aid.

We call upon the international community to exercise the universal jurisdiction over these crimes before national courts and in trials for all those involved.

- Pressure must be put on the UN Security Council to refer the Syria file to the International Criminal Court.
- It must seek to achieve justice and accountability in Syria through the UN General Assembly and the Human Rights Council and the use of the principle of universal jurisdiction.

## Acknowledgment

Our sincere thanks go to the local activists and citizens who contributed to this report.