

Syrian Regime Forces and its Allies Targeted IDPs as They were Leaving Eastern Aleppo

83 Civilians Killed in Deliberate, Repeated Attacks

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



Contents

- I. Introduction and Historical Context
- II. Attacks that Targeted IDPs Convoys in Eastern Aleppo City
- III. Attachments
- IV. Conclusions and Recommendations

I. Introduction and Historical Context

Eastern Aleppo's neighborhoods -nearly 63 neighborhoods (Salah al Din, al Mash-had, Masaken Hananou, Tareeq al Bab, Karam al Jabal, al Sakhour, Jub al Qubba, al Sha'ar, Qadi Askar...)- have been under the control of armed opposition factions since the end of 2012. These neighborhoods are connected with the western and northern suburbs of Aleppo city through Castello Road.

Neighborhoods of Eastern Aleppo were besieged twice in the second half of 2016

The first siege: started on July 10, 2016, when Syrian regime forces, along with the pro-regime Shiite militias, advanced to Mazarea' al Mallah area that overlooks Castello Road. The besieged population were approximately 300,000. We have also noted that Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) had played a role in the siege by taking over al Sheikh Maqsoud neighborhood, in northeastern Aleppo city, and refusing to facilitate the passage of aids and civilians.

The siege lasted until August 7, 2016, when armed opposition factions managed to take over al Ramousa and al Kulleyat neighborhoods, effectively ending the siege.

The second siege: started in early-September 2016, when Syrian regime forces took over al Ramousa and al Kulleyat neighborhoods in southwestern Aleppo city, and barred any aids convoys from entering the area, or securing a safe exit for the besieged residents and civilians.



In mid-November 2016, Syrian-Russian alliance forces escalated their airstrikes on Eastern Aleppo's neighborhoods. These attacks went hand-in-hand with Syrian regime forces' and pro-regime Shiite militias' advancement on the ground, who firstly had taken over Masaken Hananou and Jabal Bedrou neighborhoods and parts of al Haydariya and al Sakhour neighborhoods. In no more than 20 days, Syrian regime forces managed to take over no less than 95% of Eastern Aleppo's neighborhoods, which forced tens of thousands of civilians to flee the neighborhoods of Aleppo city, as some of them headed for Syrian regime-held areas, while other chose to flee to areas under the control of the Kurdish Democratic Union Party. However, about 50,000 people remained under siege in al Zebdiya, al Sukkari, al Mashhad, and al Ansari neighborhoods - which were still under the control of armed opposition factions at the time until civilian evacuations started.

On December 13, 2016, the Russian regime announced, in coordination with the Turkish regime, a ceasefire inside the neighborhoods of Aleppo city that are still under armed opposition factions. The agreement provided for the evacuation of civilians, wounded, and fighters to begin via al Ramousa corridor, where they were to be transferred to Uqdat al Raqqa area and then to western suburbs of Aleppo. About 50,000 people were evacuated on seven waves, the last of which were on December 22, 2016.

The Commission of Inquiry, which is affiliated with the Human Rights Council, said in [its report](#), released on February 2, 2017, that the evacuation of the residents in the east section of Aleppo city constitute a war crime. Security Council Resolution 2328, adopted on December 19, 2016, called for monitoring the displacement, as the fourth paragraph states: **“Stresses the importance to ensure the voluntary, safe and dignified passage of all civilians from the eastern districts of Aleppo or other areas, under the monitoring of and coordination by the United Nations and other relevant institutions, to a destination of their choice”**. However, the Security Council is fully aware that this wasn't a passage, and it wasn't voluntary. This resolution was a part of a series of Resolutions that have never been implemented, and were merely words on papers, which reflects the negligence of the Syrian case by the Security Council and the international community.



II. Attacks that Targeted IDPs Convoys in Eastern Aleppo City

Summary

We have documented hundreds of unjustified, indiscriminate attacks by the Syrian-Russian alliance in which bunker busters, cluster munitions, incendiary weapons, chemical warfare, and barrel bombs were used between mid-November 2016, when the military escalation in Eastern Aleppo's neighborhoods began, and the signing of the evacuation agreement. These attacks have destroyed entire residential neighborhoods almost completely and turned schools, hospitals, and medical centers into piles of rubbles.

Simultaneously, Syrian regime forces, backed by pro-regime local and foreign militias, advanced on the ground, and armed opposition's areas of control gradually diminished as Syrian regime forces extended their territories. In light of these developments, thousands of civilians and wounded were forced to flee the bombardment. While thousands of civilians fled to the Syrian regime-held western neighborhoods, about 50,000 remained trapped in the armed opposition-held areas.

Even though officials from the Syrian regime's [authority announced](#) that humanitarian corridors had been secured for a safe civilian passage into Syrian regime-held areas and to [facilitate civilians' displacement](#), we recorded [a number of repeated](#) attacks by the Syrian-Russian alliance that targeted IDPs convoys, which is the subject matter of this report that sheds light on three attacks by the Syrian-Russian alliance on November 29, 2016, November 30, 2016, and December 1, 2016 that targeted IDPs civilians who fled Eastern Aleppo's neighborhoods towards Syrian regime-held neighborhoods.

SNHR's victim documentation team documented the killing of no less than 83 civilians, including 29 children and 22 women, in these attacks.

Fadel Abdul Ghany, chairman of SNHR, says:

“These incidents assert the Syrian people's conviction that the current ruling regime doesn't have any reliability or credibility, which is why the regime can't be trusted in any agreement, truce, or partnership even when its Russian allies are playing the role of a sponsor and guarantors. These reports, which are only a few of many, firmly establish that any transitional stage will be meaningless as long as the Syrian regime is a part of it.”



Methodology

In the course of the ongoing monitoring for incidents and developments by SNHR team through a wide network that include tens of various sources that have been built over an accumulation of extensive relations since the start of our work. When we receive information, or hear some news about a violation via the internet or media outlets, we work on following-up 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 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 experience the violation firsthand, where we try to access those directly, and, to a second degree, who saw or filmed the violation, in addition to analyzing available materials from open sources such as the internet and media outlets. Thirdly, we try to speak to medical personnel who treated the wounded, assessed the symptoms, and determined the cause of death.

SNHR encountered extreme challenges and difficulties in accessing eyewitnesses and survivors of the incidents that took place in Aleppo battle due to the displacement the residents suffered, and the lack of means of communication with tens of activists. There are still tens of human rights violations and crimes by the Syrian-Russian alliance forces that are still being investigated.

This report contains seven accounts that were collected through speaking directly with eyewitnesses, and are not quoted from any open sources. We have explained the purpose of these interviews to the eyewitnesses who gave us permission to use the information they provided in this report without offering or giving them any incentives. One of the accounts is for a worker at the “central signal” which is a network that works on picking up calls between Syrian regime forces that are operating the artillery, and between air military bases and pilots.

Additionally, SNHR has tried to spare the eyewitnesses the agony of remembering the violation, and gave guarantees to conceal the identity of any witnesses who preferred to use an alias.



Furthermore, the investigations that are included in this report have proved that the targeted areas were civilian areas where no military centers or weapon warehouses for armed opposition factions or extremist Islamic groups were found before or during the attack. Also, Syrian/Russian forces didn't alert the civilians prior to the attack as the international humanitarian law requires.

SNHR has analyzed the videos and pictures that were posted on the internet, and the ones sent to us by local activists via e-mail, Skype, or social media. Some of the videos published by activists show the location of the attacks, the dead bodies, the injured, and the huge destruction in the aftermath of the bombardment.

The Commission of Inquiry's report noted a heavy presence for Shiite militias, such as Lewa' Fatimeyoun, Lewa' al Quds, and members of the Iranian military force Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps during Aleppo battle. However, we can't conclusively assign the responsibility for "Jub al Qubba neighborhood" attack, November 30, 2016, to these militias, due to the fact that these forces are on the ground, and it is considerably difficult to determine whether Shiite militias operated the artillery that was used in "Jub al Qubba neighborhood" attack or it was being controlled by fighters from the official Syrian army at the time.

This report only represents the bare minimum, which we were able to document, of the magnitude and severity of the violation that occurred. It also doesn't cover the social, economic, and mental ramifications.

Details

Jub al Qubba neighborhood, Tuesday, November 29, 2016

Around 08:00, fixed-wing warplanes we believe were Russian fired [a missile](#) that targeted a gathering for [displaced civilians](#) from the neighborhoods of [Eastern Aleppo](#), as they were heading for [al Sakhour neighborhood](#). The missile fell in a bystreet between [Bab al Neyrab neighborhood](#) and Jub [al Qubba neighborhood](#) near Hjeij grocery stores, east of Aleppo city. The bombardment resulted in the killing of 17 civilians, including children and women. Additionally, a number of residential houses were heavily destroyed as well as Barsin Mosque, which is located near the attack site.



Abu al Izz, a local media activist who was present at the time of the attack, told us, via WhatsApp, that he was in Jub al Qubba neighborhood to film the displacement wave in the neighborhood, when a missile was dropped from a fixed-wing warplane near him: **“I couldn’t see anything, as the smoke was everywhere. I fell on the ground because of the pressure caused by the explosion. I got up and saw tens of civilians’ dead bodies who were trying to flee Aleppo neighborhoods towards areas under the control of Syrian regime forces.”**

“The sound of the bombing was audible before and after the attack. But the sound of the missile that targeted the area was extremely strong.”

Abu al Izz said that he couldn’t identify the type of warplanes that targeted the area because of the heavy bombing.



Victims killed in the attack on Jub al Qubba neighborhood by fixed-wing warplanes we believe were Russian – November 29, 2016



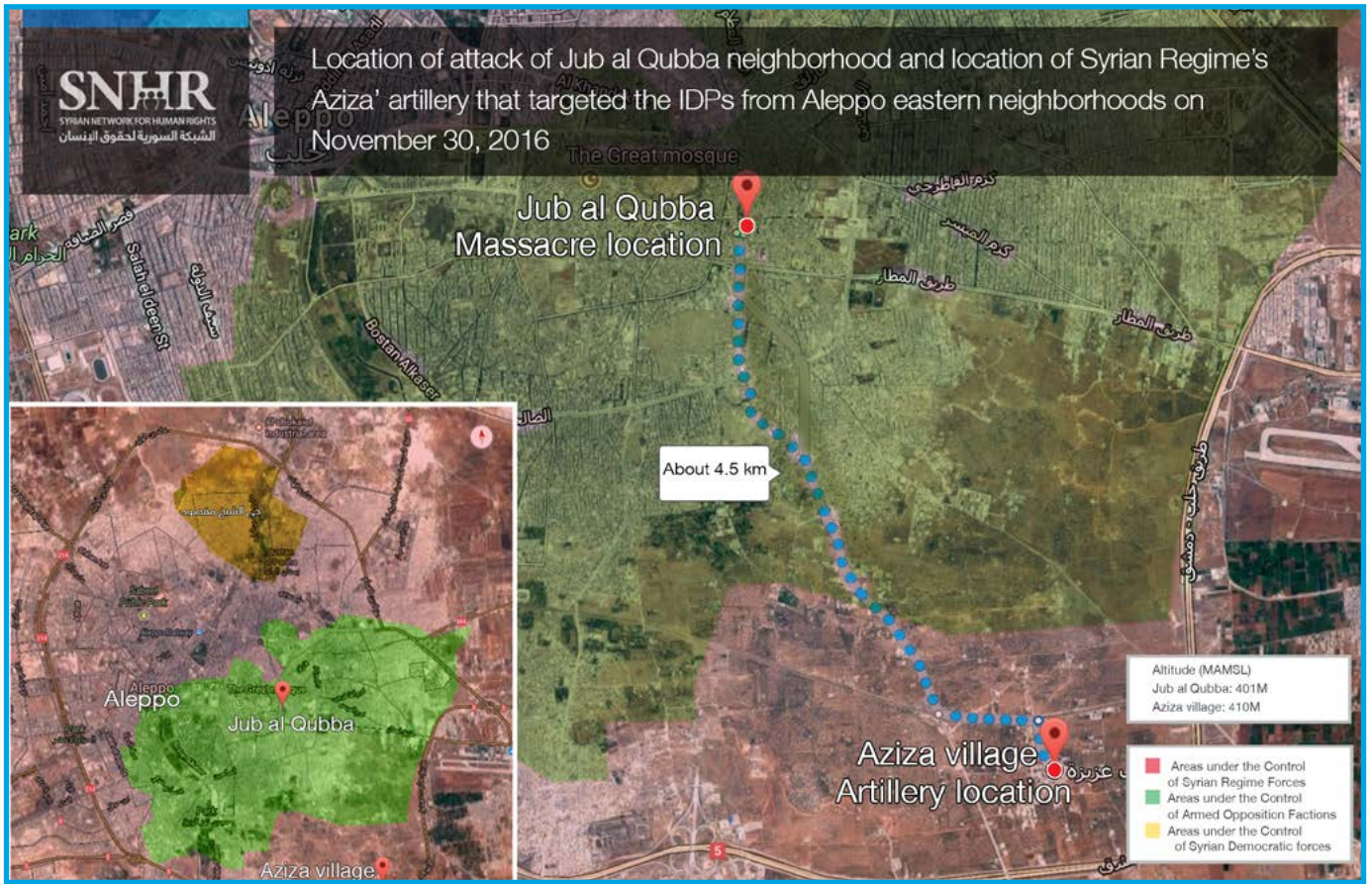
Jub al Qubba neighborhood, Wednesday, November 30, 2016

About 06:15, Syrian regime forces used [a Gvozdika canon](#), which we believe was stationed in [Aziza village](#), southeast of [Aleppo governorate](#), to [fire two shells consecutively](#) that targeted a bystreet between [Bab al Neyrab neighborhood](#) and Jub al Qubba neighborhood, east of Aleppo city, near Hajeij grocery stores. The shelling resulted in the killing of 54 civilians, including 20 children and 18 women, who were heading for the Syrian regime forces-held al Sakhour neighborhood.

Analyzing the pictures and videos of the dead bodies and the wounded and their large numbers corroborate the accounts we acquired about the use of Gvozdika canon, which are highly-fragmentized shells that can hit a large number of people. Also, we did a projection for the attack site and specified the location of the Syrian regime's canon in Aziza village. We also pinpointed the neighborhoods that were still under the control of armed opposition factions at the time of the attack and can be used by armed opposition factions as a base to fire shells from canons. According to the information we obtained, armed opposition factions have no artillery bases, seeing that those can be targeted easily by Syrian regime forces warplanes.

We concluded that Syrian regime forces were responsible for Jub al Qubba attack, as it is unlikely that armed opposition factions would target Jub al Qubba, given the geographic nature of its location and the high buildings that prevents the possibility of targeting the neighborhood with Gvodzdika, while the canon stationed in Aziza village is based on a hill – of an altitude of nearly 410 meters above sea level- that overlooks Jub al Qubba neighborhood, which is nearly 401 meters above sea level. Therefore, Syrian regime forces members can target the neighborhood especially with static artillery bases.





Ibrahim Abu al Laith, director of the media office at the Syria civil defense, told us, via Facebook, that he was present in Jub al Qubba neighborhood at the time of the attack, as he was documenting the displacements from the neighborhood: **“I heard an explosion, and I hid in a nearby building. Two minutes later, I got out and found the piles of dead bodies and wounded. The street was crowded with displaced people, and everyone is dead. All of them were civilians, children and women. Why did they target them?”**

Ibrahim confirmed that he heard two artillery shells, but he couldn't conclusively specify the location of the artillery that targeted the area: **“There is al Qal'a artillery and another one in al ltha'a neighborhood, and one in al Masharqa neighborhood. There is also one in Aziza village. I couldn't determine the source. At the time, my priority was aiding the wounded who died of their wounds before they were transferred to al Quds Hospital – the only hospital in the city.”**

The media activist and Anadolu Agency reporter Jawad al Refa'i was in street close to the massacre site when the attack took place. Jawad told us, via WhatsApp, that he heard two consecutive explosions before he headed to the area: **“The dead bodies and their body parts and the wounded were everywhere. They were all trying to flee death, heading for al Sakhour neighborhood which was under the control of Syrian regime forces. They were families, and many of them were children and women. They had nowhere to escape.”**

SNHR contacted Omar Ataqi, via WhatsApp, who works at the “central signal” in Aleppo. On the day of the massacre, Omar tells us, they picked up a call between Syrian regime forces who were stationed in Aziza village, located to the southeast of Jub al Qubba neighborhood: **“They said, in the call, that a gathering was tracked in Jub al Qubba, and then they declared that they are ready and finalized the preparations for the shelling. That was before the massacre. I notified the rebels that “Aziza village” artillery might target Old Aleppo's neighborhood, especially Jub al Qubba, al Salhin, al Ferdous, and al Marja.”**

Omar added that the attack area was within the range of a number of artillery and surface-to-surface rocket launchers: **“but the open field between the artillery of the vicinity of Aziza village and the massacre site and the close proximity -approximately 4.5 kilometers- makes the possibility of the targeting being from there higher compared to the artilleries of Aleppo Airport, al Sheikh Yousef hill, Handarat, and other artilleries.”**





Dead bodies for victims killed in Jub al Qubba neighborhood attack by Syrian regime forces using Gvozdika shells – November 30, 2016



Victims and huge destruction in the aftermath of an attack by Syrian regime forces using Gvozdika shells that targeted displacing civilians – November 30, 2016



Al Sha'ar neighborhood, Thursday, December 1, 2016

About 10:30, Syrian regime forces helicopters dropped two barrel bombs on al Jisr Street in al Sha'ar neighborhood, east of Aleppo city, as displaced civilians from Eastern Aleppo's neighborhoods were crossing the street towards al Sakhour neighborhood, which is under the control of Syrian regime forces. The shelling resulted in the killing of 21 civilians, including nine children and four women.

Diyaa Bdour, director of the civil defense's "Hnanou neighborhood", told SNHR via WhatsApp: **"I arrived in al Sha'ar neighborhood, where the massacre took place, and I found tens of victims lying on the ground. Most of them had already died. They were heading for al Sakhour neighborhood after Syrian regime forces besieged the eastern neighborhoods. They had no choice. I saw the barrel bombs remnants and the hole created by the barrel bombs. While we were aiding the wounded and trying to pull out the dead bodies, Syrian regime forces' artillery shells were targeting us consistently. There were no armed people or weapon centers for the rebels. Just civilians running for their lives."**

Ahmad Masri, a civil defense volunteer who headed for the attack site, added via WhatsApp: **"I saw the remnants of two barrel bombs and identified the two holes they created. The helicopter bombing killed tens of people who were more than 20 martyrs. All of them were heading for al Sakhour neighborhood. They were escaping death, but death found its way to them."**

Ahmad said that the artillery shelling by government forces targeted the same area as they were aiding the wounded, which impeded the efforts to pull out the victims transfer them to makeshift hospitals.

Mohammad al Ali, a civil defense volunteer, told SNHR, via WhatsApp, that he alone pulled out more than six civilians -dead and wounded- including two children. He added that he saw tens of victims: **"The place was soaking with blood. The artillery shells kept haunting us even after the massacre. Civilians were in hysterical panic. Some of them were running over the dead bodies to escape."**



III. Attachments

[Government Forces and the Fighting Shiite Militias Breach Aleppo Agreement Multiple Times](#)

[No less than 100 thousand civilians' fate is unknown after the regime seized control over 95% of eastern Aleppo neighborhoods](#)

[UN has to Ensure the Safety and Fate of IDPs from Aleppo's Eastern Neighborhoods](#)

[Detailed Account of One Month of Syrian-Russian Attacks on the Neighborhoods of Eastern Aleppo](#)

[Detailed Account of the Russian-Syrian Attacks on the Neighborhoods of Eastern Aleppo after 25 Days of the Second Cessation of Hostilities Statement](#)

[Aleppo's Eastern Neighborhoods are being Torn Apart by the Shells of the Russian and Syrian Forces, A Detailed Account of the Violations One Week after the Second Cessation of Hostilities Statement](#)

[Multiple Evidences Indicating that Russian and Syrian Forces Deliberately Targeted the U.N. Aid Convoy in Aleppo](#)

[The Alleged Passages Announced by Government Forces are for Killing and Disappearance](#)

[Eastern Neighborhoods of Aleppo are being Bombed and Besieged](#)



IV. Conclusions and Recommendations

Legal conclusions

1- The Syrian-Russian alliance has, beyond any doubt, violated Security Council Resolutions 2139 and 2254 which both state that indiscriminate attacks must be halted. Also, The Syrian regime has violated Article 8 of Rome Statute through the act of willful killing which constitutes war crimes.

2- We can confirm that the bombardment mentioned in this report has targeted armless civilians. Therefore, the Syrian-Russian alliance 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.

3- The attacks mentioned in this report, which were carried out by The Syrian-Russian alliance, are considered a violation of the customary international law as the shells were fired at a populated area rather than a specific military object.

4- Aerial bombardment has caused collateral damages that involved loss of lives, injuries, and significant damages to civil facilities. There are strong indicators suggesting that the damage was too excessive compared to the anticipated military benefit.

Recommendations

The Security Council

Apologize to the residents of Aleppo governorate for the Resolution 2328 that was a grave injustice to them and their history, and adopt a new Resolution that insure that Security Council will maintain that the forcibly-displaced people will go back to their homes.

The Security Council has to take additional steps as Resolution 2139 has been adopted and no pledges to cease the indiscriminate bombardment operations have been made. All the parties to the conflict must respect the Resolutions and adhere to the rules of the international humanitarian law.

The Syrian case must be referred to the International Criminal Court and all those who are responsible must be held accountable including the Russian regime whose involvement in war crimes has been proven.

Instill security and peace in Syria and implement the norm of the Responsibility to Protect in order to protect the lives, culture, and history of the Syrian people from being destroyed, looted, and ruined.

Expand the sanctions to include the Syrian, Russian, and Iranian regimes who are directly involved in committing crimes against humanity and war crimes against the Syrian people.



The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

The Office should submit a report to the Human Rights Council and other organs of the United Nations on the incidents mentioned in this report, and the massacres that preceded them, as they are a glaring point in a string of daily, sporadic and less significant massacres. The OHCHR also should work on implementing the recommendations included in this report.

The European Union and the United States of America

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

The International Community

In light of the split of the Security Council and its utter inability, Steps must 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 enhance the support for the relief efforts. Additionally, the principle of universal jurisdiction must 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 drought out. Therefore, steps under Article 7 of the Rome Statute must be taken and the norm of the Responsibility to Protect, which was established by the United Nations General Assembly, must 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.

Acknowledgment and Condolences

Our most heartfelt gratitude and condolences to all the residents and local activists of Aleppo city who contributed effectively to this report.





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