The Most Notable Violations of the Russo-Turkish Sochi Agreement in the Fourth and Final De-escalation Zone
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:

After Russia broke the agreement on earlier de-escalation zones, and took control, in alliance with Iranian and Syrian forces, of the Eastern Ghouta, and the region of southern Syria and Homs northern suburbs, only the fourth and final de-escalation zone is left (consisting of Idlib governorate and parts of Hama, Aleppo and Latakia governorates). While the Syrian Regime and Iranian militias’ build-up gathered in preparation to fully end the agreement on a de-escalation zone, the Russian-Turkish agreement, developed as a result of the meeting between the Russian and Turkish presidents in Sochi, halted the military operation. However, the Sochi agreement was previously included in the Astana agreements, which, during the sixth round, included the annexation of Idlib and its environs to the de-escalation zones. All the Russian attacks on de-escalation zones have been carried out on the pretext of dismantling terrorist organizations; while these organizations were virtually non-existent in the previous de-escalation zones, they stand out clearly in the case of the fourth region, represented by Hay’at Tahrir al Sham, as well as smaller extremist organizations, (such as Ansar al Tawheed, Hurrass al Din, Ansar al-Din Front, and Ansar al Islam Front) which announced in a statement that they rejected the agreement. These organizations share with the Iranian militias and the Syrian Regime the desire to break any agreement and continue the cycle of open conflict. The elimination of these organizations and their foreign elements...
is one of the biggest challenges facing the local community in Idlib, and requires integrated efforts by both regional countries and the ‘Friends of Syria’ nations. In this case, we are talking about a very complex and costly operation, with the long duration and neglect of the Syrian disaster having increased the ability of these extremist organizations to infiltrate within communities.

The complex humanitarian situation in the fourth de-escalation zone remains the biggest challenge, given that there are approximately 5 million residents and displaced persons, many of whom are subsisting on aid, in the context of widespread poverty and unemployment; this already intolerable suffering is further exacerbated by the fact that a large number of aid organizations have ceased to work following a break in or cessation of funding; which has left the fate of tens of thousands of families vulnerable to extortion, and to exploitation under the control of extremist organizations. Responsibility for countering these dangers should be borne by countries that claim to combat the spread of the phenomenon of extremist organizations. Finally, it should be noted, in this context, that IDP camps have not been spared from deliberate targeting by the Syrian Regime forces, which threatens the stability of hundreds of thousands of civilians living in these camps and increases the burden of basic humanitarian needs.

**Methodology:**

This report sheds light on the fourth and last de-escalation zone (consisting of Idlib governorate and parts of Hama, Aleppo and Latakia governorates). It records the most notable violations since the de-escalation agreement went into force between May, 2017, and December 23, 2018, focusing particularly on the Russian-Syrian military preparation and escalation prior to the Sochi agreement, which was signed on May 17, 2018, in the Russian city of Sochi, and its devastating impact in the massive displacement of residents. We relied on two of our field researchers in collecting testimonies through speaking directly to survivals, victims’ relatives, relief workers or media activists, as well as on an extensive network of various sources built up over the course of our continuous work over the last seven years.

This report contains nine accounts that we collected through speaking directly with eyewitnesses, none of which are cited 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 without our 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 assurances of concealing the identity of any witness who preferred to use an alias.
The SNHR works to document violations on a daily basis, and considers homicide, along with the targeting of vital civilian facilities, to be the gravest of crimes. SNHR has also analyzed many videos and pictures posted online, or sent by local activists via e-mail, Skype, or social media. Some of the videos posted by activists showed the locations of attacks, as well as victims’ bodies, wounded people and some of the immense destruction caused by attacks.

We have retained copies of all the videos and pictures included in this report in a secret online database, as well as keeping backup copies on hard drives. Nonetheless, we can’t claim to have documented all cases in light of the Syrian regime’s continuing media blackout and persecution of citizens by Syrian regime forces as well as other armed groups. This report only represents the bare minimum documentation of the actual magnitude and severity of the violations that have occurred. It also doesn’t cover the social, economic, and psychological ramifications of these events on the people.

II. The last de-escalation zone is the destination of the arbitrary displaced

The fourth de-escalation zone (consisting of Idlib governorate and parts of Hama, Aleppo and Latakia governorates) is one of four de-escalation zones approved by the de-escalation agreement signed on May, 2017, with its boundaries established during the sixth round of Astana Talks, which were held over a two-day period on May 14-15, 2017.

In the wake of Russia’s violations of all its commitments on the three former de-escalation zones (certain areas in northern Homs governorate, parts of Daraa and Quneitra governorates, and the Eastern Ghouta in Damascus Suburbs governorate), its forces, allied with the Syrian Regime’s forces, seized control of all of these areas. From our viewpoint, therefore, it is apparent that Russia seeks to seize control of the fourth de-escalation zone - as it did with the previous ones - and to revoke the collapsing agreement, but it is still awaiting the right opportunity.

The importance of this area is primarily due to its common border with Turkey, and the existence of the Bab al Hawa border crossing, which is one of the largest crossings in the north, in addition to the presence of two international highways (Hama-Aleppo) and (Aleppo- Latakia) which are considered to be the most important routes for fueling the Syrian economy, since they link central and southern Syria with the north, as well as linking the country’s northern and western regions.

The Idlib region was already a haven for hundreds of thousands of Syrian citizens who had been displaced from their homes in areas across the country, even before the displacement of the people from the three other aforementioned de-escalation zones when these were seized by Russia and the Syrian Regime which now control them.
Before that happened, tens of thousands from Homs and Hama governorates had already been displaced to Idlib governorate, as well as from Darayya city, the Eastern Ghouta and other towns and areas in Damascus Suburbs governorate. When the Russian forces attacked those de-escalation zones, and helped enforce humiliating settlements with the residents, more waves of tens of thousands of displaced people fled to the fourth de-escalation zone. Accordingly, we estimate that the fourth and final de-escalation zone now contains approximately five million Syrian citizens, with nearly three million of this number being residents while the other two million are displaced people from various other Syrian governorates; most of these IDPs refuse to return to areas controlled by the Syrian Regime for well-justified fear of arrests, torture and enforced disappearances, or fear of their children be forcibly conscripted into the ranks of the fighters alongside the Syrian Regime and its local militias.

We at SNHR, have published a number of special reports on several areas subjected to forced displacement, most of whose inhabitants have now been transferred to the fourth de-escalation zone.

The following table manifests the areas whose residents the Syrian - Russian - Iranian alliance’s forces have forcibly displaced towards northern Syria:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Number of the enforced displaced</th>
<th>Date of agreement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Southern Syria</td>
<td>10,000</td>
<td>August, 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Eastern Ghouta</td>
<td>65,000</td>
<td>March, 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al Tal</td>
<td>2,000</td>
<td>December, 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al Qalamoun</td>
<td>6,300</td>
<td>April, 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daraya</td>
<td>2,000</td>
<td>August, 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mua'adamiyet Al Sham</td>
<td>2,900</td>
<td>October, 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wadi Barada villages</td>
<td>2,500</td>
<td>January, 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aleppo eastern neighborhoods</td>
<td>45,000</td>
<td>December, 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Damascus eastern neighborhoods</td>
<td>7,000</td>
<td>May, 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madaya-al Zabadani- Baqqin</td>
<td>3,500</td>
<td>April, 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homs northern suburbs</td>
<td>35,000</td>
<td>May, 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Damascus southern neighborhoods</td>
<td>9,000</td>
<td>May, 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al Wa'er neighborhood</td>
<td>20,000</td>
<td>March, 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qedsaya- al Hama</td>
<td>2,600</td>
<td>October, 2016</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Areas that were subjected to enforced displacement agreements, where approximately 217 thousand Syrian citizens were displaced to the north of Syria accordingly.
III. The military preparation prior to Sochi agreement, and its impact on the last de-escalation zone:

Since the de-escalation agreement went into force on May 2017, and through its establishment in the sixth round of the Astana Talks, which took place on September 14-15, 2017, the SNHR has strived to monitor the violations of this Agreement; this monitoring is crucial given the agreement’s massive impact on the lives of hundreds of thousands of Syrian citizens who live in these areas, as well as providing a historical record and documentation identifying those responsible for violations of the agreement.

We have issued a number of reports in chronological order to fulfil this objective. However, the previous agreements have already practically ended, being blatantly disregarded by Russia, which is the main party responsible for their implementation, with Syrian-Russian alliance forces seizing control of the three de-escalation zones (Eastern Ghouta in Damascus Suburbs, then the area of northern Homs suburbs, and most recently the southern Syria). The fourth de-escalation zone (which includes Idlib governorate and parts of Hama, Aleppo and Latakia governorates) has already seen intensified attacks involving heavy shelling, destruction and killing by the Syrian-Russian forces. According to the SNHR database, the most notable attacks took place during the military campaign launched on September 19, 2017 against villages in southern and eastern Idlib, Hama’s eastern suburbs, and Aleppo’s southern suburbs, which was, accompanied by incursions into these areas involving Iranian militias. These attacks were the result of the Syrian-Russian alliance seizing control of Abu al Duhur military airport and a number of towns and villages in the Idlib region, leading to the displacement of hundreds of thousands of people.

We recorded in a detailed report the toll for the year since the de-escalation agreement commenced.

Despite Security Council resolution 2401 of February 24, 2018, which provides for a 30-day cessation of hostilities throughout Syria, the Syrian-Russian alliance has continued to commit unlimited violations in flagrant violation of the Security Council resolution, and carried out several attacks in the region of northern Syria, the most prominent of which was an attack on Kafr Batikh village in the eastern suburbs of Idlib on March 21, 2018, and another on Harem city in the northwest of Idlib on March 22, 2018.

At the beginning of August 2018, after seizing control of the three aforementioned former de-escalation zones, the SNHR documented the Syrian Regime bringing military enforcements to its air bases in Hama suburbs, and transferring some of its ground forces who had earlier participated in the battles for control of southern Syria and the Eastern Ghouta to the northwestern Hama suburbs and Latakia suburbs. This was a clear indication of the intention of the Syrian and Iranian regimes to launch a large-scale battle for control of the Idlib region.
We also noted several news reports issued by pro-Syrian Regime media talking about a military build-up, and the regime’s wish to launch a military campaign ending in its controlling the entire Syrian territory. On August 25, 2018, the Russian News Agency ‘Tass’ quoted a statement from General Igor Konashenkov in which he claimed that al Nusra Front organization was planning to launch a chemical weapons attack against civilians, which he said the group would then try to blame on the Syrian government. This is a common strategy used by the Russian government before it launches any such attack, with Russia also issuing similar statements previously, as we documented, just before its attacks on the Eastern Ghouta region and Daraa governorate.

On August 10, 2018, the Syrian Regime launched air raids on the towns of al Tamana’a and Khan Shiekhouk in Idlib’s southern suburbs, accompanied by artillery and missile bombardment originating from Syrian Regime forces stationed in the villages of al Masasna, Helfaya, Abu Dali and Abu Omar,. Meanwhile, the regime also launched ground assaults against cities and villages in the northern Hama suburbs (Latamena, Kafr Zita and Morek) and the eastern villages of Hama suburbs (Qastoun, Zayzoun, and Zeyara)

The SNHR contacted Ahmad¹, a central signal worker in Idlib suburbs, who told us that he had monitored about 47 sorties carried out by the Syrian Regime’s helicopters from al Mujanzarat School in Hama suburbs on the first day of the military campaign, with three helicopters taking part in the raids that day: “The first day of the military campaign saw a major escalation of the bombing operations. Helicopters did not leave the sky over the area, in addition to intensive shelling carried out by the Syrian Regime missile launchers in east of Hama.” On the same day, Ahmad said that he monitored seven Su-24 fighter jets taking off from the T4², Shayrat and al Seen airbases, as well as seven Su-22 fighter jets taking off from the T4 and Shayrat Airbases, and two Mig-23s and one Mig-21 aircraft all taking off from Hama airbase: “The first day was the most intensive in terms of escalation, while the following days saw a clear decline in the use of fixed-wing aircraft for the account of helicopters, which continued to carry out their flights and to drop explosive barrels; three helicopters rotated the bombing on Idlib, using the codes 403, 230 and 233.”

¹ Via WhatsApp on August 15, 2018
² The military al Tias airport, known as T4 military airbase
We have documented some attacks by factions from the Armed Opposition on areas under the control of Syrian Regime forces in Hama suburbs. These attacks occurred following the Syrian-Russian military escalation; although most targeted Syrian Regime military facilities, a few of the attacks killed civilians, which constitutes a violation of international humanitarian law.

**A map showing the sites attacked between August 10, 2018, and May 17, 2018**

Military operations and continuous air raids by the Syrian-Russian forces between August 10, 2018, and the Sochi Agreement’s entry into force on September 17, 2018, have been accompanied by serious human rights violations. We have recorded several attacks on vital civilian facilities and on major highways, especially the Aleppo – Damascus international highway, which have obstructed passage for those fleeing, as well as hindering missions by rescue personnel to treat civilians who were injured following shelling. Our records have documented:
• The death of 110 civilians, including 35 children and 14 women (adult female), distributed as follows:
  Idlib governorate: 44 civilians, including nine children and six women.
  Aleppo governorate: 43 civilians, including 21 children and seven women.
  Hama governorate: 23 civilians, including five children and one woman.
• Two massacres.
• 16 assault incidents against vital civilian centers.
• Syrian Regime forced dropped no fewer than 155 explosive barrels.

Between August 10, 2018, and September 17, 2018, at least 48,000 people have been displaced from Al Tamana’a town, and from the villages of al Tah, Tahtaya, al Khuain and Om al Khalakhel as a result of shelling, killing and destruction. Most of the displaced people have moved to villages and towns in the area of Ma’aret An-Nu’man in rural eastern Idlib, as well as to al Sarman in Idlib eastern suburbs, while thousands of displaced people were forced to stay in schools and in random encampments set up hastily on agricultural land and in fields.
Approximately 500 people were forced to flee from areas in Aleppo’s southern suburbs by recent attacks on Jazraya village, with most of them going to Sarmada city in Idlib’s northern suburbs. Most of the displaced are now living in camps and shelters which suffer from an alarming lack of basic services such as water, baths and medical services, with their suffering further exacerbated by the woefully inadequate amount of aid available which reaches the camps irregularly.

Hammoud al Sultan³, displaced from al Tah village in Idlib suburbs, told the SNHR, “We had started to return to our village several months ago after the air raids had stopped; we repaired our homes and shops so we could bring the village back to life, but this was not completed. In one day, dozens of missiles, rockets and explosive barrels were dropped on our village, so we were unable to withstand it, and we began to flee from possible imminent intrusions. We fled to the farms and orchards surrounding the village at the beginning, but the intensity of the shelling forced us to evacuate the whole area and move again. “ Hammoud said that around 12,000 civilians had fled from

³ We contacted him via WhatsApp on August 14, 2018
his village towards the area of al Sarman and Ma’aret An-Nu’man eastern suburbs, while others had gone to the Turkish borders. He described the poor living conditions of the displaced people: "We fled from shelling and death and carried little water and food, with thousands of families finding themselves stranded, and no one providing us with any assistance such as food, medicine or healthy water for drinking."

The SNHR contacted Mr. Jaber al Bakri⁴, a local media activist in the town of al Taman’a: “Some families have returned to the town only some months ago, but the Syrian Regime forces resumed targeting us. Dozens of rockets fell on the town, and within hours, the shelling reached the towns of al Tah, Tahtaya and Khan Sheikhoun. It was not safe to stay. I fled with my family and hundreds of other families towards Ma’aret An-Nu’man eastern suburbs, while other families fled to al Sarman region. Some of them went to the northern suburbs of Idlib. Most of us stayed in tents that don’t protect us from the hot sun.” Jaber added that the Syrian Regime’s helicopters were alternating between dropping barrels and other explosive containers on the towns and villages: “The bombing was indescribable. The explosions caused by the barrels were enormous and caused great destruction.”

Rayan al Ahmad⁵, a relief worker in eastern Idlib suburbs, described to the SNHR the plight of aid workers attempting to meet the needs of tens of thousands of displaced people, “They lack the minimum requirements of life - no shelter, no food, and no potable water. Dozens of families have lived in schools, others have shared small tents on agricultural land, we now urgently need substantial support to secure bread and drinking water at a minimum."

On September 17, 2018, the Sochi agreement came into force to provide an agreement in the fourth de-escalation zone, with the policy of establishing such zones having already proven to be fragile and ineffective in the face of monstrous international silence. This region has lost approximately 45 percent of its territory to the Syrian regime in the aftermath of consecutive military campaigns by the Syrian-Russian alliance forces.

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⁴ We contacted him via WhatsApp on August 15, 2018
⁵ We contacted him via WhatsApp on August 14, 2018
According to the SNHR database, we recorded a large number of violations at the hands of the Syrian-Russian alliance forces in the Idlib area, between May 6, 2017, the date of the de-escalation agreement entering into force, and September 17 2018, the date of the Sochi Agreement. These were mainly manifested as follows:

- The death of no fewer than 1856 civilians, including 476 children and 313 women (adult female), distributed as follows:
  - Idlib governorate: 1,123 civilians, including 306 children and 203 women.
  - Aleppo governorate: 350 civilians, including 98 children and 54 women.
  - Hama governorate: 383 civilians, including 72 children and 56 women.
- 53 massacres.
- 346 incidents of assault against vital civilian centers, including 77 attacks on schools and 57 on medical facilities.
- Syrian Regime forces dropped no fewer than 1,167 explosive barrels.
IV. The fourth de-escalation zone after the Sochi agreement:

On Monday, September 17, 2018, a meeting between the Turkish and Russian presidents took place in the Russian city of Sochi with the objective of reaching an agreement to maintain calm in the Idlib region. This meeting was preceded by several rounds of talks, during which a tripartite summit was held for the heads of state of Turkey, Russia and Iran in Tehran, followed by two meetings of the Security Council on September 7 and 11 to discuss possible military attacks on and around the Idlib area.

The most prominent points agreed upon in the city of Sochi were as follows:
1. Establishment of a demilitarized zone at a depth of 15-20 km within the de-escalation zone.
2. Withdrawal of all heavy weapons from this area by October 10, 2018.
3. Removal of all “terrorist” groups from the area by October 15, 2018.
4. Allow traffic through the M4 (Aleppo - Latakia) and M5 (Aleppo - Hama) by the end of 2018.

It was also agreed to install 29 observation posts (10 of them Russian, 12 Turkish and 7 Iranian) observing the cease-fire at the demilitarized zone boundaries in Idlib.

From a humanitarian viewpoint the agreement succeeded, at least during this phase, in halting the flight of military aircraft, and thus stopping aerial bombardment and the killing of Syrian citizens in airstrikes. However, it did not succeed in stopping the artillery bombardment. Syrian Regime forces have continued almost daily to bomb villages and towns adjacent to the line of contact, in particular the towns and villages of Hama’s northern suburbs and Idlib’s southern suburbs (such as al Latamena, Kafr Zita, al Lahaya and Morek in Hama’s northern suburbs, and al Taman’a, al Khuain, Jarjanaz and Khan Sheikhoun in Idlib’s southern suburbs).

Syrian Regime forces apparently felt that simply carrying out artillery shelling was insufficient for their purposes; on November 9, we recorded an operation by the Syrian Regime forces in which they launched an intrusion into an area under the control of factions from the Armed Opposition at al Zallaqiyat axis. We managed to verify the death of 19 fighters of al Izza army in this attack, which lasted for two hours before the Syrian Regime forces returned to their positions. Attempts by the Syrian regime’s forces to break into the area of the fourth de-escalation zone have continued, with the SNHR documenting 10 such attempts in the period covered by this report.
On November 25, there was a serious development. For the first time in this de-escalation zone, we documented a bombing incident by fixed-wing warplanes, which we believe were Russian, targeting al Rashidin neighborhood in Aleppo.

We also recorded violations by factions from the Armed Opposition and the Hay’at Tahrir al Sham, in which they bombed some areas controlled by Syrian Regime forces.

SNHR has documented no fewer than 369 violations of the agreement by Syrian Regime forces, most of which were in the demilitarized zone, between the signing of the Sochi agreement on May 17, 2018, and December 23, 2018.

Idlib governorate: 145 violations
Aleppo governorate: 22 violation
Hama governorate: 202 violations

There violations resulted in the death of 45 civilians, including 22 children and six women (adult female), distributed as follows:

Idlib governorate: 35 civilians, including 20 children and five women.
Aleppo governorate: nine civilians, including two children.
Hama governorate: one civilian, including a woman.

In addition, although the agreement went into force, most of the inhabitants of the demilitarized zone haven’t been able to return to their houses, because of the artillery shelling in the area.
A map showing the Idlib area, demilitarized zone, observation posts and violations:

Areas where Syrian regime forces violated the Sochi agreement in Idlib de-escalation zone
V. Hay’at Tahrir al Sham exploits the agreement in favor of expanding and strengthening its power:

Since the beginning of September, 2018, we monitored a significant increase in the number of violations committed by Hay’at Tahrir al Sham in the Idlib region, in which the terror group’s members have stormed several villages, and arrested dozens of people, including local activists, aid workers and mosque preachers. It seems apparent to us that all of that was advance of the Turkish-Russian agreement with the goal of achieving the largest possible gains on the ground beforehand; on September 17, when the Turkish-Russian agreement went into force, the people should have benefited from the low rates of bombing and killing to help restore stability and, especially, to secure certain basic needs. Instead, Hay’at Tahrir al Sham exploited this period of calm to perpetrate violations that undermined the fragile security and stability that the community there desperately needed, generating a state of panic in a number of villages and districts in the region.

We documented the exploitation by Hay’at Tahrir al Sham of the calm brought by the agreement, to escalate its violations in the Idlib area in a previously published report.

VI. Types of most notable violations of the Sochi Agreement:

On Tuesday, September 25, 2018, Syrian regime artillery forces, stationed at al Masasna village, fired a number of shells at Latamena city, in the north of Hama governorate, injuring two civilians. The city was under the control of factions from the Armed Opposition at the time of the incident.

On Wednesday, October 24, 2018, a five-year-old girl, Jana Khaled Tet, died of an injury caused by regime forces’ artillery shelling of the village of Kafr Hamra in the western suburbs of Aleppo governorate. The village was under the control of factions from the Armed Opposition at the time of the incident.

On the morning of Sunday, November 25, 2018, Syrian regime artillery forces fired eight shells at the city of Kafr Zita in the northern suburbs of Hama governorate, injuring one civilian. The city was under the control of factions from the Armed Opposition at the time of the incident.

The child Jana Khaled Tet died in a Syrian Regime artillery shelling on Kafr Hamra village on 24/10/2018
Friday, October 26, 2018, Syrian Regime artillery forces, stationed in the southeast of Idlib governorate, targeted civilian houses in al Ruffa village in Idlib governorate eastern suburbs with a number of shells, resulting in the deaths of six civilians.

SNHR contacted activist Mohammad Bal’as⁶, who is from the Senjar area in the eastern suburbs of Idlib. He told us, “On Friday evening, October 26, the artillery, stationed in towns and villages in Idlib southeast suburbs like Abu Omar, Abu Dali and al Zarzour, began to randomly attack al Ruffa village with heavy shelling. One of the shells hit a civilian’s house, resulting in the death of four civilians.” Mohammad added that the village is located near the line of contact with Syrian Regime forces: “Following the Sochi agreement, some of the village people, who had fled, returned two weeks ago, but the resumption of shelling yesterday forced the majority of people to leave the village, wandering in the wilderness.” Mohammad said he headed to the village as soon as he discovered that the shelling had resulted in victims, “I headed to the said house where I knew that the victims were from one family. The village has been free from any military presence as agreed in the Sochi agreement. Yet, the Regime keeps on violating it, and attacks the village.”

On Saturday afternoon, October 27, 2018, Syrian regime forces, stationed in M’an village in east Hama governorate, targeted the eastern parts of al Taman’a town in Idlib southern suburbs with a number of artillery shells. No casualties were recorded.

Mohammad al Bakri⁷, from al Taman’a town, told the SNHR, “As soon as the displaced people returned to the town, Syrian regime forces resumed shelling it with artillery many times intermittently on October 26 and 27. The shelling concentrated on the residential houses on the outskirts of the village, where no casualties recorded, thank God, because the town is almost deserted following the previous military campaigns launched by Syrian and Russian forces.”

On Monday, October 29, 2018, Syrian Regime artillery forces stationed in the village of Retyan in Aleppo northern suburbs, fired a number of shells at Hayyan town in Aleppo northern suburbs, which resulted in the death of a fighter of Hay’at Tahrir al Sham and wounded others.

⁶ We contacted him via WhatsApp on October 25, 2018
⁷ We contacted him via his FB personal account on October 27, 2018
On Friday, November 2, 2018, Syrian Regime artillery forces fired a number of shells at al Sarman camp in al Sarman village in Idlib governorate’s eastern suburbs, resulting in moderate material damages in a number of tents. The village was under the joint control of factions from the Armed Opposition and Hay’at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.

On Friday, November 2, 2018, Syrian Regime artillery forces stationed in Idlib’s eastern suburbs, fired a number of shells at al Tah town in Idlib governorate’s southern suburbs. The town was under the joint control of factions from the Armed Opposition and Hay’at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.

Hammoud Sultan⁸, from al Tah town, told the SNHR that Syrian Regime forces, stationed at M’an town, in Hama eastern suburbs, and Tal Marq, in Idlib eastern suburbs, have continued with operations that violate the Idlib agreement: “On an almost daily basis, those forces shell an area along the line of the demilitarized region. Today, Friday, al Tah town was attacked with a number of shells that targeted its eastern farms, where it was busy with people who were working on harvesting the olive crop, but, thank God, the shelling didn’t cause any injuries among them.”

On Friday, November 2, 2018, Syrian Regime forces artillery, stationed at E’jaz town, Abu Omar town and Abu Dali town in the Idlib eastern suburbs, fired a number of shells - around 16 shells in total - that landed intermittently on the main street in the center of Jarjanaz town in Idlib governorate eastern suburbs, resulting in the deaths of eight civilians, including two children, and injured 13 others, with the victims being struck in many locations. The town, which was under the joint control of factions from the Armed Opposition and Hay’at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident, is located eight kilometers away from the line of contact with the Syrian Regime in Idlib eastern suburbs.

We contacted Mohammad al Dghaim⁹, an activist from Jarjanaz town in Idlib governorate eastern suburbs. He told us, “On Friday, October 2, the Syrian Regime’s artillery shelled the main street and its environs in Jarjanaz town, in a radius of about 500 meters. The shelling resulted in the death of eight civilians, including people who were passing through the town in their cars from Souran, in addition to a worker in a pharmacy and two children.”

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⁸ We contacted him via WhatsApp on November 2, 2018
⁹ We contacted him via WhatsApp on November 2, 2018
He added, “The village is overcrowded because of its distance from the contact lines, however, the sudden bombing caused panic among people, and many of them went to the farms.”

On Saturday, November 15, 2018, Syrian Regime artillery forces fired a number of shells at al-Zeyara town in Hama western suburbs, resulting in the injury of a civilian. The town was under the control of factions from the Armed Opposition at the time of the incident.

On Friday, November 16, 2018, Syrian Regime artillery forces fired a number of shells at al-Taman’a town in Idlib governorate’s southern suburbs. The town was under the joint control of factions from the Armed Opposition and Hay’at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.

On Saturday, November 17, 2018, Syrian Regime forces used a missile launcher to target the Qatra camp, a camp for IDPs, on the western outskirts of Qatra village in Idlib governorate’s eastern suburbs, with a number of missiles, forcing the camp inhabitants to flee to the farms. One of the missiles hit a family near the camp while they were fleeing, resulting in the death of one woman and her child and injuring two other individuals from the same family. The village was under the joint control of factions from the Armed Opposition and Hay’at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.

On Saturday, November 24, 2018, Syrian Regime forces stationed at Abu Dali village in Idlib governorate’s southeast suburbs used a missile launcher to shell the area near a pick-up-style rescue vehicle belonging to the local Civil Defense-Talmennes center, in the southern neighborhood of Jarjanaz town in Idlib governorate eastern suburbs, while the Civil Defence personnel were helping people wounded in earlier shelling. One member of the Civil Defence team was injured in the shelling, which also caused shrapnel damage to the body of the vehicle. The town was under the joint control of factions from the Armed Opposition and Hay’at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.

On Saturday, November 24, 2018, Syrian Regime forces, most likely stationed at Abu Dali village, used a missile launcher to fire three medium-range missiles targeting the southern outskirts of Jarjanaz town in Idlib governorate eastern suburbs, hitting the area around al-Khansaa School and the Teacher Training Institute adjacent to the school, which are both surrounded by the same wall. The shelling resulted in the deaths of ten civilians, including
eight children - seven of whom were school students on their way home from school, with the other being a fetus - and two women – in addition to injuring several other civilians. Syrian Regime forces repeated shelling of the same area after Civil Defense members arrived to treat the wounded, with one of the Civil Defense personnel sustaining a minor injury. The town was under the joint control of factions from the Armed Opposition and Hay’at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.

SNHR contacted Mustafa Hamdo al Dghaim\(^{10}\), a teacher at the Teacher Training Institute in the town of Jarjanaz, who told us that a rocket landed with a very loud explosion in the residential neighborhood about 800 meters away from the institute, while Mustafa was lecturing in one of the halls adjacent to al Khansaa School: “We sent all the students of the Institute, the majority of whom are residents of the surrounding villages in the region, down to the ground floor, then a second strike followed. The sound of the explosion was stronger and closer to the institute. At this point, several cars arrived to inspect the bombing site when a third explosion was heard in the same area. After the shelling stopped, I left the institute, and I saw wounded people about 30 meters from the institute. I was told that the medical teams moved the bodies of three women and three students, who were killed by the shelling after they left the school after the first missile fell.”

\(^{10}\) We contacted him via WhatsApp on November 24, 2018
Mustafa added that the main damage was caused by the second and third missiles at a location near the school: “I have not witnessed such missiles before. The explosion was stronger than the artillery strikes, and their effects were too large and unfamiliar,” he said.

At sunrise on Sunday, November 25, 2018, Syrian Regime artillery forces fired a number of shells on Jarjanaz town in Idlib governorate eastern suburbs, which resulted in the death of one child and the injury of many other civilians. The town was under the joint control of factions from the Armed Opposition and Hay’at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.

On Thursday, November 29, 2018, Syrian Regime forces stationed in Abu Dali village used a missile launcher to fire a number of missiles targeting Jarjanaz town in Idlib governorate eastern suburbs, which resulted in the death of one civilian and the injury of others. The town was under the joint control of factions from the Armed Opposition and Hay’at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.

On Saturday, December 1, 2018, Syrian Regime forces stationed in Abu Dali village used a missile launcher to fire a number of missiles at the Amal al Ghad Kindergarten in al Tah village in Idlib governorate southern suburbs, which inflicted moderate destruction of the kindergarten building, and serious material damages to its furniture and equipment, putting the kindergarten out of service. The area was under the joint control of factions from the Armed Opposition and Hay’at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.
On Tuesday, December 18, 2018, Syrian Regime missile launcher fired a missile on Hitteen School in Jarjanaz town in Idlib governorate eastern suburbs, which caused partially damages to the school building. The town was under a joint control of Hay’at Tahrir al Sham and factions from the Armed Opposition.

On Wednesday, December 19, 2018, Syrian Regime artillery forces, stationed in the south of Helfaya city in Hama governorate west-north suburbs, fired two shells in front of the Civil Defense center in al Latamena town in Hama governorate northern suburbs, which caused disproportionate damages to three of their vehicles (an ambulance, a rescue vehicle and a Trucks vehicle). The town was under the control of factions from the Armed Opposition at the time of the incident.
VII. Legal qualification and Recommendations

• The Syrian-Russian alliance forces violated the agreement of de-escalation zone in all areas, and in the Idlib area, repeatedly violating the Sochi Agreement signed in September 2018.
• Syrian Regime forces unambiguously violated the Sochi Agreement by carrying out artillery bombardment on a number of villages and towns in the fourth de-escalation zone, most of which were in the demilitarized zone, in Hama’s eastern suburbs and Idlib’s southeast suburbs, which caused civilian casualties.
• Syrian Regime forces and affiliated Shiite militias violated the Sochi agreement by attacking factions from the Armed Opposition and killing a number of their members.
• Islamist factions violated the Sochi Agreement by shelling areas under the control of the Syrian Regime. They also exploited the cessation of fighting to extend their control over additional areas at the expense of factions from the Armed Opposition.
• Some Armed Opposition factions violated the Sochi Agreement by shelling areas under the control of Syrian Regime forces.
• The Syrian Regime has practiced the crime of displacement in a systematic, widespread and organized manner against the civilian population. This constitutes a flagrant violation of the Geneva Conventions and amounts to a crime against humanity under Article VII of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. And we have not recorded any measures to provide shelter, health care or food to displaced civilians.

Recommendations:

International Security Council:

• The Security Council must pass a resolution to stabilize the ceasefire in Idlib and include punitive measures for all violators of the cease-fire.
• Genuine support for serious implementation of the peace process in Syria and for achieving a just political transition that guarantees security and stability
• The Syrian issue must be referred to the International Criminal Court and all those involved, including the Russian regime, must be held accountable for having been implicated in committing war crimes.
• The establishment of peace and security and the application of the principle of responsibility for the protection of civilians and to save Syrians’ lives, heritage and cultural artefacts from destruction, pillage and vandalism.
• The UN Security Council must pass a resolution on some 7 million internally displaced persons in Syria that addresses forced displacement, to ensure that this does not become a long-term crisis, and put pressure on the Syrian regime to end displacements, and enact laws aimed at preventing the plunder of displaced persons’ properties and possessions.
International Community:
• In light of the split within the Security Council and its utter inability, action should be taken at the national and regional levels to form alliances to support the Syrian people that can protect them from the daily killings and siege and increase support for relief efforts. Additionally, the principle of universal jurisdiction should be applied 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” principle in dozens of studies and reports and as a member of the International Coalition for the Responsibility to Protect (ICRtoP) after exhausting all political channels from the Arab League’s plan, then Mr. Kofi Annan’s plan proved fruitless, as did the Cessation of Hostilities statements and Astana agreements that followed. Therefore, the steps recommended under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations should be adopted 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 pressure on the Security Council to refer the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court
• Work to fulfill justice and achieve accountability in Syria through the United Nations General Assembly and the Human Rights Council and on implementing the principle of the universal jurisdiction.
• The countries that support the parties to the conflict in Syria, especially Russia, must put pressure on their allies on the ground to ensure the neutrality of the Idlib area of combat operations, and protect the lives of at least 4.7 million people living there.

UN General Assembly
• The Syrian regime has full responsibility for the displacement of one-third of the Syrian people, including legal and material responsibility, and must ensure that victims receive full compensation for the heavy losses they have suffered, including the return of looted properties to their owners.

OHCHR
• The OHCHR should submit a report to the Human Rights Council and other organs of the United Nations concerning the violations committed by the Syrian-Russian alliance forces.
UN Envoy to Syria
• Condemn the perpetrators of the crimes and massacres and the main culprits in the collapse of agreements on de-escalation zones, and thus declare the collapse and the end of the political process in full, as well as holding the Syrian-Russian alliance to account for its actions.
• Disclose to the Syrian people Russia’s pursuit of full control of Syrian territory by force, and its public desire to rehabilitate the current regime, which means the creation of a political solution which satisfies only its own interests.

Donor countries and UNOCHR
• The international community and donor countries must ensure basic living conditions, pay attention to the needs of and help provide care for thousands of displaced Syrians who are displaced in the north-western Idlib suburbs, with the most pressing basic needs being primarily water, food, housing, clothing and medical care.

Russian forces
• Stop committing all types of war crimes in Syria.
• Reconstruct what was destroyed by the Russian war machine.
• Compensate victims financially and morally and apologize publicly.
• Commit to the outcome of the Sochi Summit and not to repeat the scenario of violations we have seen in the agreements of de-escalation zone.
• Stop supporting the war crimes and crimes against humanity which the Syrian regime has been committing for eight years, with the current support being considered as direct involvement in these crimes.
• Contribute to the assistance of displaced persons who were displaced by the Russian war machine from the Eastern Ghouta in the Damascus Suburbs governorate and the governorates of Homs and Daraa, and protect the residents of those areas who remained from the arrests, persecution, kidnappings and enforced disappearances being perpetrated by the Syrian Regime and the Iranian militias.

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.