

# Russian Forces Perpetrated a Huge Massacre on the Day of Khan Sheikhoun Chemical Attack

32 Civilians Killed, Including  
19 Children in Salqin City

**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



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## I. Introduction

Salqin city follows Harem area in Idlib governorate. Salqin city is Located in Idlib's northwestern suburbs, and it is located 45 kilometers away from Idlib city. Salqin city was taken over by armed opposition factions in October 2012, before the city fell into ISIS's hands (self-proclaimed the Islamic State) in September 2013, and since early-2014, the city has been under the control of armed opposition factions and Fateh al Sham Front (formerly al Nusra Front).

The report documents a bombing by fixed-wing warplanes we believe were Russian on a mosque and a residential building in Salqin city on Tuesday, April 4, 2017, the same day on which [Khan Sheikhoun Chemical Attack](#) was carried out by Syrian regime forces in Khan Sheikhoun city, southern suburbs of Idlib governorate. SNHR team contacted a number of the city residents, eyewitnesses, and survivors, in addition to local media activists. This report contains two accounts. We have explained the purpose of the interviews to the eyewitnesses who gave us permission to use the information they provided in this report, without offering or giving them any incentives. Also, SNHR tried to spate them the agony of remembering the violation as much as possible, and we gave guarantees to congeal the identities of the eyewitnesses who preferred to use an alias.

We have also reviewed the pictures and videos we received and verified their authenticity. These pictures show the great destruction at the mosque and the adjacent residential building in addition to pictures of children. We have copies of all the mentioned pictures and videos in this report in a secret online database and backup copies on hard drives. For more information, please see our general work [methodology](#)



The investigations of this report have proven that the targeted areas were civilian areas, as no military bases or weapon warehouses for armed opposition factions or extremist Islamic groups were found before or during the attack. Also, Russian forces didn't warn the civilians of the attack beforehand as the international humanitarian law requires.

This report only represents the bare minimum of the severity and magnitude of the violation that occurred, and it doesn't cover the social, economic, and psychological ramifications.

## II. Details

On Tuesday, April 4, 2017, around 13:30, fixed-wing warplanes we believe were Russian fired four missiles at al Rawda Mosque and a residential building (formarly al Awqaf building) that is adjacent to the mosque in al Gharbi neighborhood, Salqin city. The bombardment resulted in the killing of 32 civilians, including 19 children and eight women (adult female). Most of the victims were IDPs from Deir Ez-Zour city. Additionally, the nearby shops and residential houses were heavily destroyed, in addition to damages to Mustafa al Sayyed Ahmad School (The Rural School).



Abdul Ghany al Aryan, a resident of Salqin city, told SNHR, via Facebook, that he heard the alarms from the armed opposition observatories which announced that a fixed-wing warplane they said that it was Russian was soaring above his city. He emphasized to us that four missiles targeted the city. Abdul Ghany told us of what he saw after he headed for al Gharbi neighborhood, where the missile landed:

“I thought the bombardment was with poison gases as what happened early on that day in Khan Sheikhoun, but I saw the great destruction at al Rawda Mosque, which is one of the oldest mosques in the city, and the former al Awqaf building which was completely destroyed. This building was a shelter for the family of mosque’s Mouezzin (the person who calls people for prayers) and IDP families from Deir Ez-Zour. I saw the civil defense pulling out the dead bodies from the rubbles. The first dead body they managed to pull was for a four-year-old kid, and then they pulled out his mother.”

Fares Wati is a local media activist who headed for al Gharbi neighborhood after it was targeted. Fares told us, via Facebook, of the great destruction at the targeted building which buried tens of civilians underneath it:

“We hadn’t even begun to recover from the chemical attack against Khan Sheikhoun city by Syrian regime forces that morning, and Russian forces targeted us again in Salqin city. The observatory announced that Russian warplanes are soaring in the sky of Idlib’s northwestern suburbs, and notified the people that any gathering must be dissolved. This happened roughly at 1:30 PM when the airstrikes were carried out, and I heard huge explosions. The target was a residential building that was adjacent to al Rawda Mosque. I saw civil defense teams pull out dead bodies and body parts from the rubbles of the building. I counted more than 10 dead bodies that were mostly for children and women and 30 wounded at least. And I counted more than nine shops that were destroyed completely.”





A child who was killed in Salqin city attack by warplanes we believe were Russian – April 4, 2017

### III. Attachments

Victims' names



[Pictures of the victims](#) who were killed in [the bombing](#) on [al Gharbi neighborhood](#), Salqin city by forces we believe were Russian – April 4, 2017

[Pictures](#) showing [the great destruction](#) in [a residential building](#) (formerly [al Awqaf building](#)) in [the aftermath](#) of airstrikes we believe were Russian



## IV. Conclusions and Recommendations

### Legal conclusions

1- Russian forces have, beyond any doubt, violated Security Council Resolutions 2139 and 2254 which both state that indiscriminate attacks must be halted. Also, they 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, 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.

3- The attacks mentioned in this report, which were carried out by Russian warplanes, 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

- 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 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 must submit a report to the Human Rights Council and other organs of the United Nations on this massacre specifically considering that it is a glaring sign in a string of daily, sporadic and less significant massacres. The OHCHR also should work on implementing the recommendations included in this report.

## **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 were brought 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.

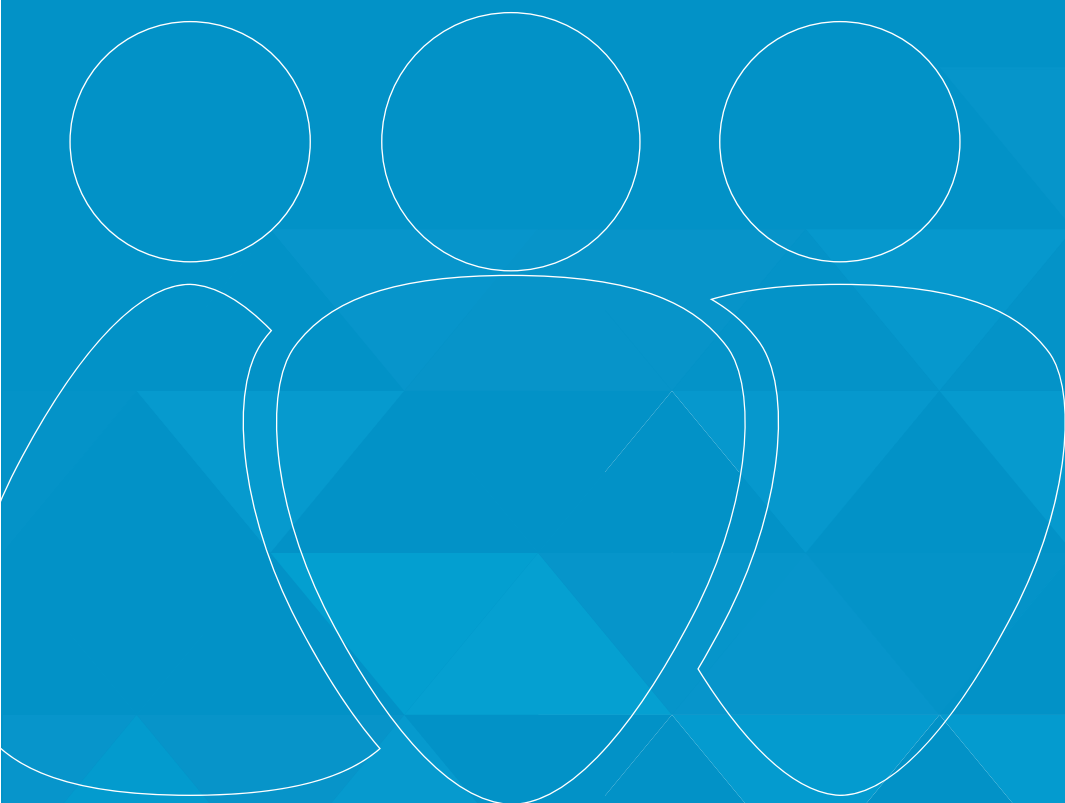
## **The European Union and the United States of America**

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.

## **Acknowledgment and Condolences**

We would like to thank and extend out most heartfelt condolences to all the residents and local activists and especially civil defense members who effectively contributed to this report.





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