Idlib Governorate One Year after the De-Escalation Agreement Commenced

Syrian-Russian Alliance Forces Have Killed 1,109 Civilians, including 225 Children, and Endless Violations

SYRIAN NETWORK FOR HUMAN RIGHTS
الشبكة السورية لحقوق الإنسان

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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.

Contents
I. Introduction and Historical Context
   • Idlib Governorate is a Destination for the Forcibly Displaced
   • The Impact the De-Escalation Agreement Had on Killing Rates in Idlib Governorate
II. Executive Summary
III. Details
IV. Conclusions and Recommendations

Introduction and Historical Context

Factions from the armed opposition have managed to establish their control over Idlib governorate with al Nussra Front (currently named Hay’at Tahrir al Sham) and end all existence for Syrian regime forces in the governorate. As such, Idlib governorate was effectively out of the Syrian regime control except for al Fou’a and Kafrayya towns which remained within the grasp of Syrian regime forces through pro-regime militias. The two towns fell to a siege enforced by factions from the armed opposition.

A number of regions in Idlib governorate (Idlib city and the towns of Ma’aret Misreen, Binnesh, T’oum, Taftanaz, and Ram Hamdan) saw an agreement that came to be called the Four Cities Agreement. Struck primarily between Ahrar al Sham, an armed opposition faction, and the Syrian regime, the agreement provided for a complete cease of all land and air attacks on these areas in exchange for granting access to food aids into Kafrayya and al Fou’a towns, in addition to other terms on Madaya an al Zabadani in Damascus suburbs. The truce has been violated multiple times, and we’ve recorded numerous Russian and Syrian attacks that targeted vital civilian facilities and populated areas. Even after the agreement was extended on June 11, 2016, breaches by Syrian-Russian alliance forces continued significantly.
In parallel with the Four Cities Agreement, Idlib governorate was also included as one of the areas of the Cessation of Hostilities statement on February 27, 2016, and September 12, 2016, and then Ankara Ceasefire Agreement on December 30, 2016. None of these agreements, however, held for long, as they all failed to establish a permanent, real ceasefire. Some areas in Idlib governorate continued to suffer under heavy waves of vicious bombardment, destruction, and killing. Syrian and Russian warplanes continued to come and go and bomb as they wish.

The de-escalation agreement, which was announced in May 2017, entered into force. Nonetheless, the agreement saw atrocious breaches by Syrian-Russian-Iranian alliance forces in the months following its commencement in Idlib governorate. We have released a report that documents the most notable of these breaches.

Syrian-Russian-Iranian alliance forces carried out heavy airstrikes on eastern suburbs of Hama governorate, followed by raid attempts in which Iranian militias were involved. These offensives expanded to reach eastern and southern suburbs of Idlib. Thanks to the heavy and continued strikes by the Russian regime, Syrian and Iranian regimes forces managed to take over Abu al Thohour Military Airbase, as well as a large number of villages and towns in eastern suburbs of Idlib over the course of four months. In addition, there has been blatant coordination between the Syrian regime and ISIS in the battles of eastern suburbs of Hama and southern and eastern suburbs of Idlib. We’ve also monitored major violations of human rights, including killing, destruction, and forced displacement that were perpetrated by Syrian-Russian-Iranian alliance forces in parallel with the offensive. We’ve highlighted those violations in a detailed report.

Security Council adopted Resolution 2401, which provided for a 30-day ceasefire across Syria. However, Syrian-Russian alliance forces continued to commit unrestrained violations in a blatant breach of the new Security Council Resolution, same as many other Resolutions.
• Idlib Governorate is a Destination for the Forcibly Displaced

Since wide parts of the governorate’s were freed from the Syrian regime’s grip, Idlib governorate has been a haven for tens of thousands of families who were displaced after they were forced to submit and flee in fear of arrest and torture operations that the Syrian regime and its allies might resort to, or having their young men conscripted with their forces, and, consequently, involve them in perpetrating war crimes and crimes against humanity. There are around 2.5 million people living in Idlib governorate according to a figure provided by the Response Coordination Group1 in north Syria as of the end of May 2018, half of which are IDPs from other areas, such as Eastern Aleppo’s neighborhoods, Eastern Ghouta’s towns, northern suburbs of Homs governorate, and al Yarmouk Camp in south Damascus.

This meant that the population in Idlib governorate has increased 1.5 times as it was before, as tens of thousands of IDPs flowed to the governorate, on one hand, while Turkey closed its borders so seeking asylum in European countries was no longer an option. This has resulted in a population explosion and a scarcity in residencies and essential food supplies in light of Hay’at Tahrir al Sham’s (formerly al Nussra Front) control over wide areas of Idlib governorate. On account of the group being added to the list of designated terrorist groups, international aids were cut off. Consequently, most IDPs had to live in camps and shelters that alarmingly lack the most basic services, such as water, restrooms, and medical care, in addition to the increasingly scarce and disoriented aids delivery. Additionally, SNHR team monitored increasing sexual harassment incidents against women who didn’t have sufficient protection, more particularly widows and pregnant women amid the overwhelming and exceptional conditions those women are living in. In light of all of this, hundreds of families decided to set up primitive rudimentary tents in fields and farms on the outskirts of cities and towns. All of this brought back the degrading of human dignity, the very same reason for which the Syrian people rose up against the oppressive security machine in March 2011.

In parallel with the disastrous human situation, civilians in Idlib governorate are living under the constant threat of getting killed by the Syrian-Russian attacks across the governorate’s areas including IDPs camps. despite the dense population, Russia had no reservations against using cluster and incendiary ammunitions in populated areas far away from any military facilities or armories for armed opposition factions.

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1 A voluntary organization that works on counting residents in north Syria and responding to their needs through coordinating organizations’ operations.
The Impact the De-Escalation Agreement Had on Killing Rates in Idlib Governorate

De-escalation agreements haven’t made any tangible difference in terms of putting an end to the various violations that included bombardment, massacres, and indiscriminate or de-liberate attacks by Syrian-Russian alliance forces, even if there was a somewhat notable decrease in rates of deaths in the four first months following the agreement’s commencement. However, Syrian-Russian alliance forces has escalated their attacks steadily since September 2017, as death rates increased sharply. We have recorded that 1,109 civilians were killed, including 255 children and 209 women (adult female), in Idlib governorate in one year since the agreement went into force.

Based on the database possessed by SNHR, we have drawn a comparison between the death toll of the attacks made by Syrian-Russian alliance forces in Idlib governorate in the year prior to the agreement, and the succeeding year’s death toll.

Comparison between civilian victims killed by Syrian-Russian alliance forces in Idlib governorate in the year before the de-escalation agreement and the year after

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>From May 2016 to May 2017</th>
<th>From May 2017 to May 2018</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Civilians</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2175</td>
<td>1109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>613</td>
<td>255</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women (adult female)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>423</td>
<td>209</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Methodology

This report draws upon the ongoing monitoring of incidents and developments by SNHR team, as well as a network of relations including tens of various sources which have been built over the course of our work, in addition to verifying information provided by survivors, eyewitnesses, and central signal operators\(^2\) against each other. This report focuses on the violations by Syrian-Russian alliance forces against civilians in Idlib governorate while excluding violations committed by extremist Islamic groups, Hay’at Tahrir al Sham, which has been outlined in a past report.

This report contains the details of six massacres that were perpetrated by Syrian-Russian forces in the year following the de-escalation agreement in different areas in Idlib governorate. Most of the areas, where the attacks took place, are under the joint control of factions from the armed opposition and Hay’at Tahrir al Sham (Kafr Batikh, Ma’ar Shoreen, Khan Sheikhoun, and Jisr al Shoghour), while Armanaz is under the control of factions from the armed opposition. On the other hand, Harem is under the control of Hay’at Tahrir al Sham. Our investigations, nonetheless, have proved that that the targeted areas, in which the massacres took place, were civilian areas that are devoid of any military bases or armories for factions from the armed opposition or extremist Islamic groups during or even before the attack. Also, Russian and Syrian forces never issued any warnings to civilians prior to the attack as required by the international humanitarian law.

This report contains 15 accounts that we’ve collected by speaking directly to the eyewitnesses and are not cited from any open sources. We have explained the purpose of these interviews for the eyewitnesses who gave us permission to use the information the provided in this report without offering or giving them any incentives. Also, SNHR has tried to spare them the agony of remembering the violation as much as possible, and guarantees were given to conceal the identity of any witness who preferred to use an alias.

This report only covers the bare minimum, which we have been able to document. IT doesn’t also cover the social, economic, mental, and demographic ramifications.

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\(^2\) A network of observers who work on picking up radar signals from warplanes and tracking phone calls between the pilot and the airbase from which he took off.
II. Executive Summary

This report documents the toll of the most notable violations perpetrated by Syrian-Russian alliance forces in Idlib governorate in the year following the de-escalation agreement’s commencement, namely from May 2017 to May 2018.

A. Massacres and other acts of unlawful killing: we’ve recorded the killing of 1,109 civilians, including 255 children and 209 women (adult female). Also, among the victims were nine medical personnel, including three women. We’ve also recorded no less than 32 massacres.

B. Attacks on vital civilian facilities: we’ve recorded no less than 233 attacks on vital civilian facilities at the hands of Syrian-Russian alliance forces, including 50 attacks on schools, 16 on markets, and 34 on vital medical facilities.

C. Unlawful attacks

- Chemical weapons: 1 attack
- Cluster munitions: 19 attacks
- Incendiary ammunitions: 16 attacks
- Barrel Bombs: 752 barrel bombs
Most notable violations of human rights by Syrian-Russian alliance forces in Idlib governorate a year after the de-escalation agreement went into effect

**Death toll**
- **1109** people
  - Including: **255** men
  - **209** women
  - **9** health workers
  - **32** massacres

**Attacks on vital civilian facilities**
- No less than **233** incidents
  - Including: **16** schools
  - **50** markets
  - **34** water facilities

**Unlawful attacks**
- **1** case of biological attacks
- **19** cases of chemical attacks
- **16** cases of barrel bombs
- **752** cases of other munitions

From May 2017 to May 2018

As documented by SNHR
III. Details
This report highlights six massacres perpetrated by Syrian-Russian alliance forces, all of which took place after the de-escalation agreement came into effect, including two that were committed during the cessation of hostilities month stipulated by Security Council Resolution 2401.

Jisr al Shoghour city - Monday, September 25, 2017
Around 13:30, fixed-wing warplanes we believe were Russian fired four missiles at Karaj Halab area in the middle of Jisr al Shoghour city, western suburbs of Idlib governorate. Karaj Halab is vital area and contains shops and residential houses. The bombing resulted in the killing of 16 civilians, including three women (adult female), while no less than 40 others were injured. Additionally, shops were heavily destroyed.
A few minutes after medical and civil defense teams had arrived, the same warplanes came back and carried out another airstrike that targeted the same site, resulting in damages to an ambulance.

Victims’ names

The witnesses we’ve contacted assured that they heard an alert from central signal operators about fixed-wing Russian warplanes taking off from Hmeimim Airbase and government warplanes taking off from al Tayfour Airbase in Homs suburbs. The operators added that both air forces were involved in the bombing on the city, but the Russian warplanes were the one who carried out the bombing that resulted in casualties.

Abdul Wahhab al Abdo, head of the civil defense in the city, told us that the warplanes never left the city throughout the day, adding that the massacre was a result of Russian air-strikes, “Our team headed for the massacre site and we pulled out dead bodies from the rubble, and worked on aiding the wounded. Some fires broke out because of the bombardment and caused great damages to shops.” Abdul Wahhab confirmed that Karaj Halab area, which is a highly crowded civilian area that contains many shops, was devoid of any military centers or vehicles.
Abdul Wahab noted that another airstrike targeted the same site following civil defense and medical teams’ arrival, as the airstrike caused damages to an ambulance.

**Armanaz town – Friday, September 29, 2017**

Around 20:30 fixed-wing Syrian regime forces warplanes (Su-24) fired no less than six missiles that targeted a residential neighborhood known as Harat Beit al Na'san in south-western Armanaz town, western suburbs of Idlib governorate. Approximately two hours later, as rescue and search operations were underway to save any survivors in the rubble, a same-modeled airstrike targeted the site of the first attack with six missiles. The two attacks resulted in the killing of 31 civilians, including eight children and seven women (adult female) while 85 others were wounded. In addition, around 15 houses were widely destroyed.

**Victims’ names**

Mahmoud al Hasna, a central signal operator, confirmed to SNHR in a phone call that he tracked a Su-24 fixed-wing warplane, with the code name “Khabour”, taking off from al Tayfour Airbase in Homs suburbs. Mahmoud also provided the name of the pilot who carried out the attack which was colonel Nedal Eisa, “the warplane headed directly to north-western suburbs of Idlib and fired its missiles load on Armanaz town and returned to the airbase. Less than two hours later, the same warplane came back after re-supplying to target the same site with a number of missiles.”

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3 Via a phone call
Mohammad Jabas⁴, a local media worker in Kafr Takharim city, headed for the attack site immediately after it happened, “All I saw in the massacre site was scattered body parts for children and women and their dead bodies buried in the rubble. The airstrikes have reduced Harat Beit Na’san to mere rubble. I was hearing the shouts of women and children and men screaming for help.” Mohammad added that the second attack, which took place two hours after the first one, resulted in the killing of some of the people who were injured in the first attack while they were being pulled out from the rubbles, “Six missiles were dropped on the same site. Some of the missiles landed on the same destroyed building. Those missiles killed two individuals at least.”
Mohammad headed for the hospital to aid an infant who was injured in the attack, “The baby drew his last breath in my hands, and I couldn’t do anything. He wasn’t the only child in the hospital. I found about 10 children who were either dead or injured. Some of them had their limps amputated, while others were injured in the head.”

Ahmad Ibrahim Jabas⁵, a civil defense member, was involved in aiding the wounded, “We lift the rubbles and extracted civilians who were alive. The team kept working for over 24 hours, and were able to pull out over 30 victims and tens of injury cases. We suffered more airstrikes from a warplane a few hours after the first massacre. The missiles were dropped in the same site and killed more victims.”

⁴ We contacted him via Facebook
⁵ We contacted him via Facebook
Khan Sheikoun city – Sunday, December 17, 2017

Around 14:50, fixed-wing warplanes we believe were Russian carried out 11 airstrikes on Khan Sheikoun city, southern suburbs of Idlib governorate. Missiles loaded with incendiary ammunitions were used in one of the airstrikes which targeted a residential house in al Janoubi al Sharqi neighborhood in the city. Afterwards, the same house was targeted by a missile that fell through the sliding stairs. The bombardment resulted in the killing of the entire family of Ryad al Sarmani, which consists of 10 civilians (four children and six women). In addition, four others were wounded.

The missiles didn’t cause extensive destruction, but caused fires in the targeted house.

Victims’ names

The tail of an ammunition container believed to be incendiary that was found in Khan Sheikoun city in the aftermath of an air attack by Russian forces – December 17, 2017
All of the witnesses we’ve contacted confirmed that the area is devoid of any armories or military facilities belonging to the forces who are in control of the city, namely armed opposition factions and Hay’at Tahrir al Sham

Hamid Qutaini, a media worker with the civil defense center in the city, said that he heard an alert issued by central signal operators about a squadron of Russian warplanes taking off from Hmeimim Airbase, “The squadron reached our city and carried out over 12 airstrikes. The massacre occurred when the warplanes targeted al Janoubi al Sharqi neighborhood in the city. The targeting was with a missile that landed on a residential house which broke through the roof and landed in the middle of the house. The missile caused a fire without creating wide destruction in the area. The same warplanes came back and targeted the same house with another missile, which was when the catastrophe occurred. 10 individuals were killed, all women and children.”

The casing of a container suspected to have carried incendiary ammunition that was found in the aftermath of an air attack by Russian forces on Khan Sheikhoun city – December 17, 2017
Ma’ar Shoreen village – the night of December 20, 2017

Two fixed-wing warplanes we believe were Russian targeted a residential neighborhood in western Ma’ar Shoreen village, Ma’aret al Nu’man suburbs, eastern suburbs of Idlib. The attack started a few minutes before midnight, where the first warplane fired four missiles, before the second warplanes resumed the attack after midnight with another four missiles. The missiles landed in a radius of approximately 300m. The bombardment resulted in the killing of 19 civilians, including seven children and six women (adult female), while 15 others at least were injured. In addition, five residential buildings were widely destroyed.

Victims’ names

The Russian Ministry of Defense denied having targeted Ma’ar Shoreen. According to the Ministry of Defense, Russian air force never carried out any attacks on the residential neighborhood in the village. Nonetheless, Mahmoud al Hasna, a central signal operator who is charge of tracking warplanes’ movements in Idlib suburbs, said that he tracked that two Su-24 warplanes, a model used by both Syrian and Russian forces, took off before midnight from Hmeimim Airbase in Latakia suburbs which is a military airbase held by Russian forces, “The two warplanes headed east until they reached eastern suburbs of Idlib. They arrived at Abu al Thohour area, before heading west to the eastern suburbs of Ma’aret al Nu’man. The warplanes were making a very strong noise, heard throughout the eastern suburbs. It seems the warplanes were soaring at a low altitude.”
Anas al M’arawi⁶, a local media worker from eastern suburbs of Idlib, said that a scout plane soared over the eastern suburbs of Idlib about three hours before the attack. Afterwards, Anas added, he heard an alert issued by the observatory network that monitors planes’ movement. The alert was about two Russian warplanes that took off from Hmeimim Airbase. Anas added that the attack was on two waves, each warplane struck separately. The second wave of missiles caused large explosions, “The missiles dropped by the second warplane made us feel that the morning came too soon. We could see them from outside the village. As I was heading for the site, I saw an indescribable destruction. I counted destroyed houses in addition to the destruction at the rug factory.”

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⁶ We contacted him via Facebook
SNHR contacted Mr. Hafez Tarman⁷, who lives in Ma’ar Shoreen 1km from the attack site, “The bombing caused strong explosions. I felt that an earthquake has struck the area, and a flash just like thunder lit in the sky. That was at midnight. I headed for the site and helped with evacuating the wounded. They were civilians, including children between the ages of 8-14. Among the wounded were some relatives of mine whom I transferred to a nearby hospital. I saw three houses that were destroyed completely. I saw civil defense teams pulling out three dead bodies that were buried under the rubble of their houses.”

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⁷ We contacted him via Facebook
Kafr Batikh village – Wednesday, March 21, 2018

Wednesday, March 21, 2018, around 09:50, fixed-wing warplanes we believe were Russian fired two missiles that landed on the outskirts of Kafr Batikh village, 27km to the east of Idlib city. In the aftermath of the attack, some students from Kafr Batikh School, located in the middle of village, took shelter in a nearby cave which is purposed as a bunker. The cave was about 200m from the school. A few minutes later, the cave was targeted by the same warplanes with two missiles, as the cave was destroyed completely. 20 civilians, including 16 children and three women, were killed.

Victims’ names

All of the witnesses whom SNHR spoke to confirmed that the targeted area was devoid of any military targets or any presence by armed opposition factions.
Laith al Abdullah took part in pulling out the rubbles after the massacre. He told us that the cave’s roof collapsed completely over the heads of everyone inside, which made the mission of pulling out the victims complicated and lasted for over four hours, “Seeing the victims was too painful. The dead bodies were piled over each other. Every time we pull out a child’s dead body we find another one beneath it. My heart was devastated when I saw a mother’s dead body who laid over her two children to protect them, but they all died.” Laith said that some children suffocated to death in the rubble, and he suspected that the bombardment was using a bunker-buster missile.

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8 We contacted him via Facebook on March 26, 2018
Saud Sayyah⁹, an activist in Khan al Subul village, 9km to the east of Kafr Batikh who tracks warplanes and document their airstrikes, said that he heard the sound of a fixed-wing warplane before the attack. He added that it was a Su-24 as he was able to identify its design and colors, “Around 09:41, I tracked a warplane taking off. Exactly eight minutes later, I heard a large explosion coming from the nearby Kafr Batikh village. In less than ten minutes, the explosions were coming one after another. I also saw a scout plane in the area, which means that the children who hid in the cave were specifically targeted in the massacre, as they were scouted by the scout plane which send their location to the warplane that targeted them.”

We contacted Mr. Mahmoud al Yasin¹⁰, principle of Kafr Batikh School for Elementary Education, “We were fearing that the school might be targeted after the airstrike that were carried out by the warplanes on the outskirts of the village. We’ve waited a few minutes after the first bombardment, and evacuated the female students with the teachers. Some of the students headed to a cave which was close to the school in fear of the bombardment coming back. However, the warplanes targeted them directly. They were all killed in the rubble.”

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⁹ We contacted him via WhatsApp on March 26, 2018
¹⁰ We contacted him via WhatsApp on March 21, 2018
Harem city – Thursday, March 22, 2018

Around 16:00, fixed-wing Su-34 warplanes we believe were Russian carried out two air-strikes on southern Harem city, northwestern suburbs of Idlib governorate.

The first airstrike involved two missiles that targeted the entrance to the ancient castle. Less than 10 minutes later, the same warplanes carried out a second airstrike, where they targeted a residential area about 100-150m away from the site of the first attack. The area contains old houses that were built mostly from clay and wood, which is why many collapsed heavily. The area contains shops that see large civilian gatherings usually.

The two attacks resulted in the killing of no less than 42 civilians, including 17 children and six women (adult female), while 50 others were wounded. In addition, residential houses and the market area were both heavily destroyed.

Victims’ names

A building heavily collapsed in Harem city in the aftermath of an air attack by Russian forces – March 22, 2018
Mohammad Ahmad Rahhal\textsuperscript{11}, a resident from Harem city who works as a media activist with the Syrian civil defense, said he didn’t hear the sound of the warplane in the first air-strike. He wasn’t aware until he heard the huge explosions that came from the old residential neighborhood, but he saw the warplane clearly in the second airstrike and identified the two missiles that targeted the market.

Mohammad adds, “\textbf{Civil defense teams pulled out 43 victims and 50 injured, some of whom were in critical conditions.}”

Abdul Ghani al Aryan\textsuperscript{12}, a media activist in Salqin city which is next to Harem city, headed for the attack site after he heard an alert from the central signal operators who warned residents from an incoming Russian warplane headed towards the northwestern suburbs of Idlib governorate. He heard another alert about the same warplane carrying out two airstrikes on Harem city, “I arrived at the attack site. Death and destruction were everywhere. One of the airstrikes targeted an old residential neighborhood. The second one targeted a vegetables market. I saw tens of victims, including children and women. They were piling on the sidewalks, tens others were buried in the rubble.” Abdul Ghani added that pulling out victims took hours because of the huge destruction that hit the area, “The civil defense was able to pull out a little girl from the rubble about 18 hours after the attack.”

\textsuperscript{11} We contacted him via Facebook on March 23, 2018
\textsuperscript{12} We contacted him via Facebook on March 23, 2018
Mohammad Jabas\textsuperscript{13}, a local media worker from Kafr Takharim city which is next to Harem city, told us that he headed for the attack site hours after the observatories alerted about Russian airstrikes in Harem city. Mohammad added that the missiles targeted a highly crowded civilian area. He added that the bombing caused huge fires and destruction, noting that some missiles loaded with incendiary ammunitions might have used to target the market area, “\textit{All the victims were civilians who were either at home or shopping at the market. Entire families were buried in the rubble. Entire houses were leveled. There aren’t any military targets here. Russian warplanes always deliberately aim to kill civilians and destroy their villages and houses.}”

Mohammad gave us an audio recording for Abu Ahmad Jabal, a central signal operator, who is in charge of tracking planes’ movement in the northwestern suburbs of Idlib. In the audio recording, Abu Ahmad noted that he tracked an Su-34 warplane taking off from Hmeimim Airbase in Latakia about 16:30. He tracked the plane until it entered the atmosphere of Sahl al Ghab area, then Jabal al Zawiya, then it headed north where it carried out its first airstrike on Harem city around 16:10. Abu Ahmad added that the same warplane came back to carry out a second airstrike a few minutes later in the market area in Harem city.

\begin{center}
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{victim_burned.jpg}
\end{center}

\textbf{Picture showing a victim severely burned in the aftermath of an air attack by Russian forces on Harem city – March 22, 2018}

\textsuperscript{13} We contacted him via Facebook on March 23, 2018
IV. Conclusions and Recommendations

Legal Conclusions
1. Russian-Syrian alliance forces have, beyond any doubt, violated Security Council Resolutions 2139 and 2254 which both state that indiscriminate attacks must be ceased. Also, they violated Article 7 and Article 8 of Rome Statue through the act of unlawful killing, which constitutes war crimes and crimes against humanity.
2. Russian-Syrian alliance forces have violated Security Council Resolution 2401, adopted on February 24, 2018, which provided for a 30-day ceasefire.
3. Russian-Syrian alliance forces violated the rules of the customary international humanitarian law and the international human rights law which guarantees the right to life. In addition, these indiscriminate attacks constitute a war crime, considering that they were perpetrated in a non-international armed conflict, as all elements have been fulfilled.
4. The bombardments by Russian-Syrian alliance forces have resulted in collateral damages that involved the casualties, injuries, or significant damages to civilian objects. There are strong indicators suggesting that the damage was too excessive compared to the anticipated military benefit.
5. Russian forces have used incendiary weapons against populated civilian neighborhoods. These forces never took any measures to reduce the resultant damages to civilians, facilities, and buildings.

Recommendations
The Security Council
• Security Council should take additional steps after Resolution 2254 was adopted. The resolution states, “Demands that all parties immediately cease any attacks against civilians and civilian objects as such, including attacks against medical facilities and personnel, and any indiscriminate use of weapons, including through shelling and aerial bombardment”
• The Syrian case should be referred to the International Criminal Court and all those who were implicated should be held accountable, including the Russian regime whose involvement in war crimes have been proven.
• Instill peace and security in Syria and implement the ‘Responsibility to Protect (R2P)’ norm, in order to save the Syrian people’s lives, heritage, and arts from being destroyed, looted, and ruined.
• Expand sanctions to include the Russian, Syrian, and Iranian regimes who are directly involved in perpetrating crimes against humanity and war crimes against the Syrian people.
International community

• In light of the Security Council’s division and utter inability, action should be taken on the national and regional levels to form alliances to support the Syrian people. This would manifest in protecting the Syrian people from the daily killing and lifting the siege, as well as raising the support with respect to relief efforts. Additionally, steps should be taken in order to exercise universal jurisdiction on these crimes before national tribunals as part of fair trials for all those who were involved.

• SNHR has repeatedly called, as a member of the International Coalition for the Responsibility to Protect (ICRtoP), for the implementation of the ‘Responsibility to Protect (R2P)’ norm in tens of studies and reports after all political initiatives, through the Arab League agreement and then Mr. Kofi Annan’s plan and the Cessation of Hostilities and Astana agreements that followed, have been to no avail. Therefore, after all of this, action should be taken under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations and the ‘Responsibility to Protect’ norm, which was established by the UN General Assembly, should be implemented. The Security Council is still hindering the protection of civilians in Syria.

• Renew the pressure on the Security Council to refer the case in Syria to the International Criminal Court.

• Works towards achieving justice and accountability in Syria through the UN General Assembly and the Human Rights Council, and use the principle of universal jurisdiction.

• The states supporting the parties to the conflict in Syria, particularly Russia, should apply pressure on their allies on the ground to abstain from targeting Idlib governorate in offensives, and protect no less than 2.5 million people living in the governorate.

OHCHR

Submit a report to the Human Rights Council and other organs of the United Nations on the violations committed by Russian forces.

UN special envoy to Syria

• Expand Security Council briefings rather than only limiting them to the violations of al Nussra Front and ISIS.

• Condemn the perpetrators of the crimes, the massacres, and those who were primarily responsible for doomng Security Council resolutions.
Russian regime

• The immediate compensation to the families of the victims killed at the hands of Russian forces, and to all those whose houses, shops, and possessions were destroyed by Russian bombing
• Abide by the rules of the international humanitarian law and start conducting a wide, impartial investigations into the atrocious violations it perpetrated in Syria.
• Stop using veto to shield the Syrian regime who is involved in perpetrating crimes against humanity and war crimes and using chemical weapons.
• Raise humanitarian aids to hundreds of thousands of displaced people who were displaced and humiliated as a result of the actions of their forces, as well as Syrian regime forces’ and Iranian militias’

International relief groups
Find adequate means to deliver water, food, and shelter to thousands of displaced in the areas of northern and western suburbs of Idlib.

Acknowledgment and Condolences
Our most heartfelt gratitude and condolences go out to all the residents and local activists who effectively contributed to this report.