

No less than 21 Attacks on Vital Civilian Facilities in Syria in May 2018

415 Attacks on Vital Civilian
Facilities since the Start of 2018

SNHR

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.

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I. Introduction and Methodology

Article 52 of the Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949 defines Civilian Objects as: **“....all objects which are not military objectives” with Military Objects being: “military objectives are limited to those objects which by their nature, location, purpose or use make an effective contribution to military action and whose total or partial destruction, capture or neutralization, in the circumstances ruling at the time, offers a definite military advantage.”**

Civilian objects include medical facilities, educational facilities, infrastructures, places of worship, and other facilities that are used for civilian purposes.

Since March 2011, Syrian regime forces, and then Syrian-Russian alliance forces, have trumped all parties in targeting vital civilian facilities – especially in the areas under the control of armed opposition, and to a lesser degree in ISIS-held areas. We have recorded repeated attacks on thousands of vital facilities, which proves that these facilities were deliberately destroyed and corrupted. We have also recorded hundreds of massacres that resulted from attacks on such objects.



Certainly, other parties committed similar violations, but to varying degrees, and never to the extent of the crimes by the Syrian-Russian-Iranian forces.

The attacks we have recorded include deliberate bombardments that targeted civilian objects, lootings, and attacks that involve disabling these objects and undermining their purpose in serving civilians despite the lack of any pressing military necessity or these objects being used for combat purposes by a party which would have justified targeting them by the other parties to the conflict.

In light of the prolonged duration of the conflict and these facilities being continually targeted, as well as the ongoing demographic changes, a need rose for alternating the functions of some facilities (for example, many schools have been turned into IDPs shelters). We have also noticed that some facilities moved between multiple buildings and areas more than once in order to evade bombardment, while others were moved to secure sites such as caves.

SNHR has dedicated a periodic monthly report to monitor attacks on vital civilian facilities. In addition, SNHR has released extensive reports and researches on vital facilities that have been destroyed by the parties to the conflict.

Methodology

The report monitors the attacks on vital civilian facilities that we were able to document in May, except for attacks on medical facilities, civil defense facilities, and international humanitarian insignia which are documented in a separate [monthly report](#).

This report draws upon, firstly, the daily, ongoing documentation and monitoring efforts by SNHR team, and, secondly, on accounts from survivors, eyewitnesses, and local media workers that we've talked to via phone or social media. We have also analyzed a large number of the videos and pictures that were posted online or we received from local activists via e-mail, Skype, and social media. Videos posted by local activists have shown wide destruction in vital civilian facilities. We have copies of all the videos and pictures included in this report in a secret online database, as well as backup copies on hard drives. For more information, please see the methodology adopted by SNHR for [classifying vital civilian facilities](#).

This report documents a number of incidents of attack that were the result of bombings. However, we weren't able to identify the groups behind them in light of the considerable difficulty in identifying the responsible party in such bombings.



This report contains two accounts that we've collected through speaking directly to 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 they provided without 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 insurances to conceal the identity of any witness who preferred to use an alias.

Most of the attacks we have documented targeted civilian areas, as our investigations have proven, where no military bases or armories were found during or before the attacks. The attacking forces didn't take into consideration the principle of proportionality. We also didn't record that the attacking forces put out warnings for civilians prior to the attack as the international humanitarian law requires.

The type and number of evidences vary from one case to another. In light of the challenges we mentioned above, many of the incidents' legal description change based on new evidences or clues that surface after we had released the report. We add these evidences and clues to our data archive. On the other hand, many incidents don't constitute a violation to the international humanitarian law, but it involved collateral damages, so we record and archive these incidents to know what happened historically and to preserve it as a national record. However, they don't necessarily qualify as crimes.

This report only represents the bare minimum of the actual severity and magnitude of the violations that occurred. Also, it doesn't cover the social, economic, and mental ramifications.

II. May Outline

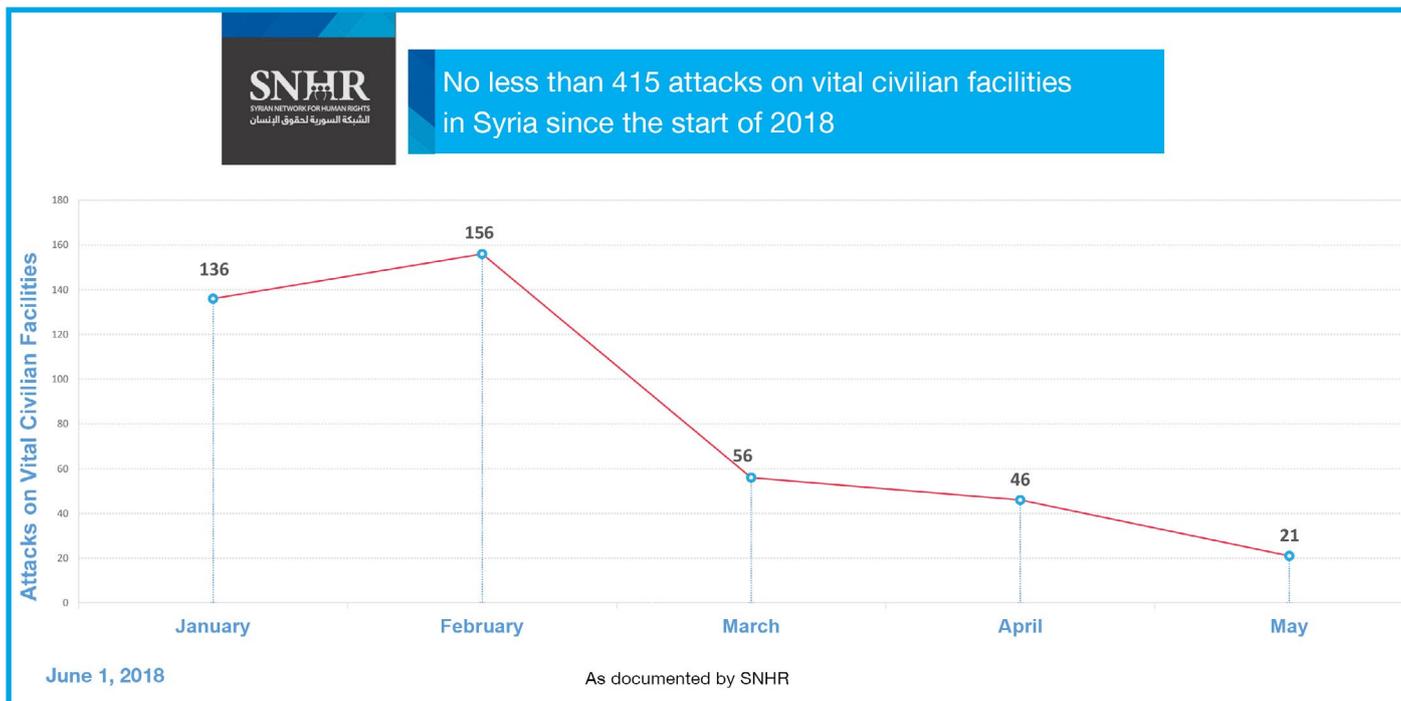
We've recorded a notable drop in attacked vital civilian facilities in May which saw a number of agreements that resulted in Syrian regime forces, backed by Russia, completely seizing control of south Damascus, as well as areas in northern suburbs of Homs governorate. The residents of those areas were forcibly displaced to north Syria. In the wake of those agreements, rates of bombardments by Syrian-Russian alliance forces have notably dropped. We've also noticed a significant increase in numbers of bombings in the areas that aren't under the control of Syrian regime forces. Some of these bombings resulted in damages to vital civilian facilities, as most of those were in Idlib governorate which also saw the majority of May's attacks with a percentage of 81%.



III. Executive Summary

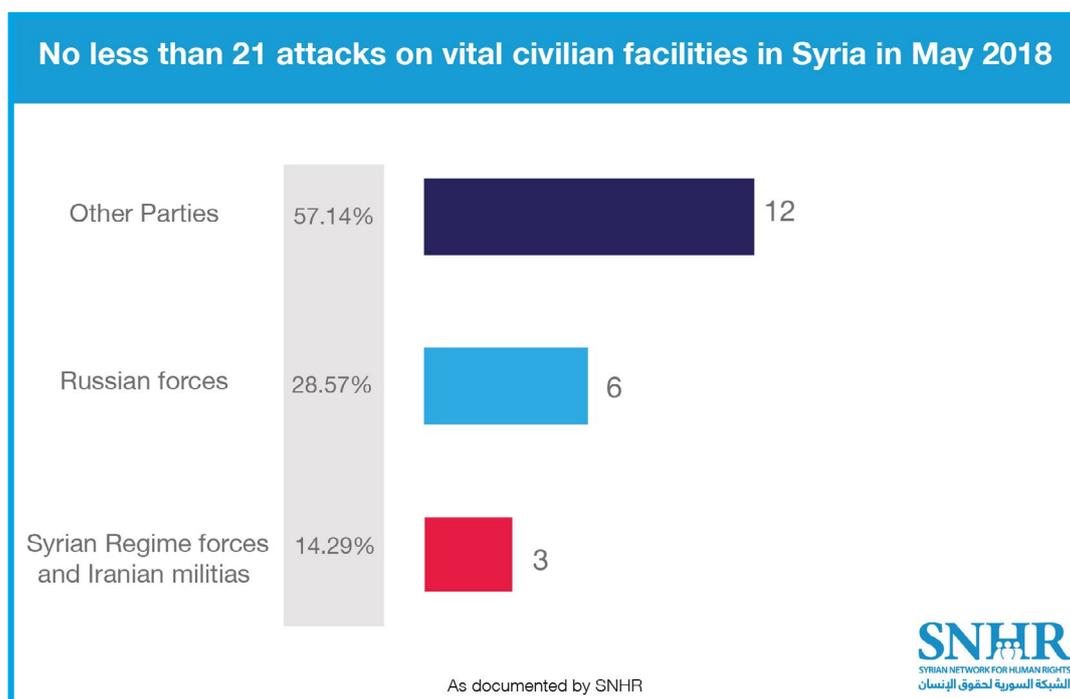
A. Attacks on vital civilian facilities since the start of 2018

SNHR has documented 415 attacks on vital civilian facilities at the hands of the parties to the conflict in Syria between the start of 2018 and June of the same year. Attacks are distributed as follows:



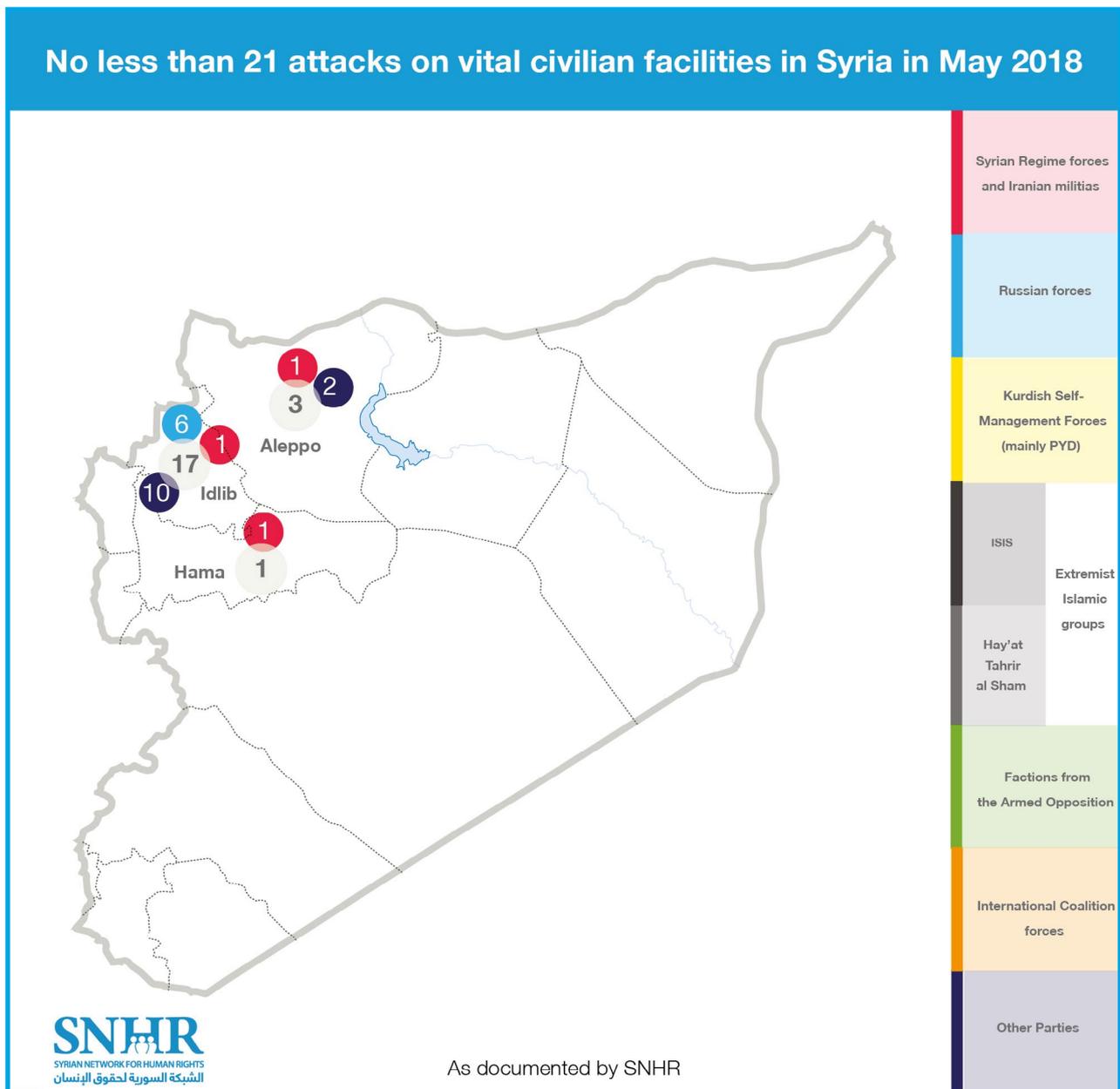
B. Most notable attacks on vital civilian facilities in May

Through daily documentation and monitoring, we, at SNHR, have recorded no less than 21 attacks on vital civilian facilities in May 2018, distributed by the perpetrator party as follows:



- A. Syrian regime forces (army, security, local militias, and Shiite foreign militias): 3
- B. Russian forces: 6
- D. Other parties: 12

Attacks on vital civilian facilities in May were distributed across governorates by the perpetrator party as follows:



- Most notable facilities that were attacked in May 2018:

Attacks on vital civilian facilities were distributed as follows

7 infrastructures, 6 places of worship, 1 vital medical facility, 4 vital educational facilities, 2 refugee camps, and 1 international humanitarian insignia.



Distribution of Attacks on Vital Civilian Facilities by the Perpetrator Party in May 2018			
Perpetrator Party	Syrian Regime Forces	Russian Forces	Other Parties
Attacked Facility			
Places of Worship			
Mosques	1	2	3
Vital Educational Facilities			
Schools	1	2	
Universities			1
Vital Medical Facilities			
Medical Facilities			1
International Humanitarian Insignia			
Red Crescent			1
Infrastructures			
Civil Defense Facilities			1
Official Headquarters			4
Industrial Facilities	1		
International Organizations			1
Refugee Camps			
Refugee Camps		2	
Total	3	6	12

IV. Details of Most Notable Incidents in May

This report outlines the most notable attacks on vital civilian facilities. We have the details of the complete incidents stored in SNHR's database.

A. Syrian regime forces (army, security, local militias, and Shiite foreign militias)

Vital educational facilities

- Schools

Friday, May 4, 2018, Syrian regime forces artillery fired a shell at Kafr Hamra [Elementary School](#) in [Kafr Hamra](#) village, northern suburbs of Aleppo governorate. The school building and its furniture were moderately damaged. The village was under the control of armed opposition factions at the time of the incident.



SNHR contacted the media worker Mohammad al Atasi ¹ who was at his house in the center of the village, approximately 500m from the school, when Kafr Hamra school was shelled by Syrian regime artillery with five shells, **“I immediately headed for the school to cover what happened. One shell hit the school directly and created a hole in the roof, as well as damages to the classroom furniture. Also, the school’s glass was shattered.”** Mohammad confirmed that there wasn’t any military presence in the targeted site. However, no injuries were recorded as the school was empty of students because it was a Friday which is a holiday day.

Infrastructures

- Industrial facilities

Wednesday, May 16, 2018, fixed-wing Syrian regime forces warplanes (Su-22) fired a number of [missiles](#) at the industrial district in northeastern Jisr al Shoghour city, western suburbs of Idlib governorate, which [resulted in casualties](#). Additionally, a number of industrial shops were destroyed, while the area facilities were moderately damaged. The city was under the joint control of Hay’at Tahrir al Sham and the Islamic Turkistan Party at the time of the incident.



Destruction in the aftermath of a bombing by Syrian regime forces on the industrial district in northeastern Jisr al Shoghour city, Idlib – May 16, 2018

¹ Via WhatsApp on June 5, 2018



B. Russian forces

Places of worship

- Mosques

Sunday, May 6, 2018, fixed-wing warplanes we believe were Russian fired a number of missiles near [Hamza bin Abdul Muttaleb Mosque](#) in the center of Jisr al Shoghour city, western suburbs of Idlib governorate. [The mosque building](#) and its furniture were moderately damaged. The city was under the joint control of Hay'at Tahrir al Sham and the Islamic Turkistan Party at the time of the incident.



Damages in the aftermath of a bombing by warplanes we believe were Russian who fired missiles at al Hamza Mosque in the center of Jisr al Shoghour city, Idlib – May 6, 2018



Vital educational facilities

- Schools

Sunday, May 6, 2018, fixed-wing warplanes we believe were Russian fired a number of missiles near Rabia al Adawiyya School in the center of [Jisr al Shoghour](#) city, western suburbs of Idlib governorate. The school fence was partially destroyed, while its building and furniture were moderately damaged. The city was under the joint control of Hay'at Tahrir al Sham and the Islamic Turkistan Party at the time of the incident.



Destruction in the aftermath of a bombing by warplanes we believe were Russian who fired missiles near Rabia al Adawiyya School in the center of Jisr al Shoghour city, Idlib – May 6, 2018

Refugee camps

Wednesday, May 9, 2018, fixed-wing warplanes we believe were Russian fired a missile near [al Walid Camp](#) for IDPs in western Ma'ar Zita village, southern suburbs of Idlib governorate. A number of tents were [heavily damaged](#). It should be noted that the camp sustained damages on Friday, May 4, 2018, when it was bombed by the same air force. The village was under the control of armed opposition factions at the time of the incident.

C. Other parties

Places of worship

- Mosques

Saturday, May 12, 2018, a car bomb exploded near Omar ben Abdul Aziz Mosque near the Palace of Justice in the center of Idlib city, which resulted in a massacre. In addition, the mosque building and its furniture were moderately damaged. As of this writing, we have yet to identify the group behind the bombing in light of the considerable difficulty in identifying the perpetrator in such bombings. The city was under the control of Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.



Saturday, May 26, 2018, a car bomb exploded near al Saraya Mosque in the middle of Jisr al Shoghour city, western suburbs of Idlib governorate. The mosque building was partially destroyed and its furniture was heavily damaged. As of this writing, we have yet to identify the group behind the bombing in light of the considerable difficulty in identifying the perpetrator in such bombings. The city was under the joint control of Hay'at Tahrir al Sham and the Islamic Turkistan Party at the time of the incident.

Vital educational facilities

- Universities

Tuesday, May 29, 2018, a car bomb exploded near “Free” Aleppo University in al Dana city, northern suburbs of Idlib governorate. The university building and its cladding materials were moderately damaged. It should be noted that the bombing took place in front of al Sena'a School, which is adjacent to Free Aleppo University. Hay'at Tahrir al Sham occupies the school as a military base. As of this writing, we have yet to identify the group behind the bombing in light of the considerable difficulty in identifying the perpetrator in such bombings. The city was under the control of Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.

SNHR spoke to the media worker Adnan Faisal al Imam² who covered the series of bombings that occurred in al Dana city on that day, **“I’ve heard a strong explosion. An alert went off via communication devices after an IED exploded inside a car in al Shamali neighborhood in front of a base for Hay’at Tahrir al Sham in al Sena’a School. The same site contains Free Aleppo University. Afterwards, another IED exploded inside a military vehicle in the same site, and one of Hay’at Tahrir al Sham fighters was injured.”** Adnan added that he headed back home after he covered the incident at the two sites, **“Ten minutes later after I got to my house, we heard a strong explosion from the side of al Sharqi neighborhood. I learned later that it was next to the cemetery and in the vicinity of al Tawba Mosque. As the civil defense teams and we were putting out the fires, a fourth IED exploded in a close site to the car which civil defense teams were working on extinguishing a fire in. Three civil defense members were moderately wounded.”**

Infrastructures

- Official headquarters

Saturday, May 12, 2018, a car bomb exploded in front of the Palace of Justice, contains the Ministries of Justice and Economic which are affiliated to al Inqath Government, in the

² Via Facebook on June 5, 2018



center of Idlib city. The bombing resulted in a massacre. Additionally, the building was partially destroyed, as it was rendered out of commission. As of this writing, we have yet to identify the group behind the bombing in light of the considerable difficulty in identifying the perpetrator in such bombings. The city was under the control of Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.

V. Conclusions and Recommendations

Syrian regime and Russian forces

- Syrian-Russian-Iranian alliance has, beyond any doubt, violated Security Council resolutions 2139 and 2254 which both state that indiscriminate attacks must be ceased.
- We can confirm that the bombardment mentioned in this report has targeted civilian objects. Therefore, Syrian-Russian-Iranian alliance forces have violated Articles 52,53,54,55, and 56 of the Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949.
- The attacks mentioned in this report that were carried out by the Syrian-Russian-Iranian alliance forces, are considered a violation of the rules of the customary international humanitarian law (rules 7 through 10).
- Aerial bombardment has caused collateral damages that involved loss of lives, injuries, or significant damages to civil facilities. There are strong indicators suggesting that the damage was too excessive compared to the anticipated military benefit.
- The indiscriminate manner of the bombing, and the coordinated approach of these attacks, as well as the repeated targeting, must be based on high orders, and a state policy.

The Coalition (international coalition and SDF)

The attacks by Coalition forces have caused significant damages to civilian facilities. In most cases, these attacks have also resulted in losses that involved casualties or injuries. There are strong indicators suggesting that the damage was too excessive compared to the anticipated military benefit.

Other forces

Other parties have carried out attacks that targeted civilian objects, which also resulted, in some cases, in loss of lives. These violations might qualify as war crimes. However, these violations don't qualify as crimes against humanity, as with the Syrian regime and pro-regime forces who carry out unlawful attacks in a systematic and widespread manner.



Recommendations

Security Council

- The Security Council has to take additional steps after resolution 2139 and 2254 have been adopted, and no pledges to cease the indiscriminate bombing have been made. All parties to the conflict should respect these steps, and adhere to the rules of the international humanitarian law.
- The Syrian case should be referred to the International Criminal Court and all those who are responsible should be held accountable including the Russian regime whose involvement in war crimes has been proven.
- Expand sanctions to include the Syrian, Russian, and Iranian regimes who were directly involved in crimes against humanity and war crimes against the Syrian people.
- List the militias who are fighting on the side of the Syrian government and had committed wide massacres - such as Iranian militias, the Lebanese group Hezbollah, other Shiite groups, the National Defense Army, and Shabiha, on the international list of terrorist groups.
- Abstain from considering the Syrian government an official side after it perpetrated crimes against humanity with regard to the relief aspect, and stop giving it the largest portion of financial and other aids as they are being delivered to the people who support the Syrian government instead of people who are truly in-need.

International community

- In light of the split of the Security Council and its utter inability, action should 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 raise the support for the relief efforts. Additionally, the principle of universal jurisdiction should be activated in local courts regarding these crimes in order to conduct fair trials for all those who were involved.
- SNHR has repeatedly called for the implementation of the “Responsibility to Protect” in tens of studies and reports and as a member of the International Coalition for the Responsibility to Protect (ICRtoP) after all political channels through the Arab League’s plan and then Mr. Kofi Annan’s plan have been drought out as well as the Cessation of Hostilities statements and Astana agreements that followed. Therefore, steps under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations should be taken 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 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.

OHCHR

The OHCHR should submit a report to the Human Rights Council and other organs of the United Nations on the incidents included in this report and the incidents that preceded, given that they are a glaring mark in a string of daily sporadic violations of a smaller scope. Also, the OHCHR should work on implementing the recommendations in this report.

Commission of Inquiry (COI)

Launch investigations on the cases included in this report and past reports. SNHR is willing to cooperate and provide more evidences and data.

International, Impartial, and Independent Mechanism (IIIM)

Address the cases mentioned in this report and past reports. SNHR is willing to cooperate and provide more evidences and data.

European Union and United States of America

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

Russian regime

- Launch investigations regarding the incidents that resulted in civilian casualties, make the findings of these investigations public for the Syrian people, and hold the people involved accountable.
- Compensate all affected facilities and centers, and reconstruct and rehabilitate them. Also, compensate all the victims' families, who were killed by the current Russian regime, as well as the all the wounded.
- Immediately cease bombing hospitals, protected objects, and civilian areas, and respect the customary international law.



The Coalition (international coalition forces and Syrian Democratic Forces)

- The states of the coalition have to unequivocally and truly acknowledge that some of the bombardment operations have targeted civilian objects, while some attacks resulted in the killing of innocent civilians. Instead of denying, these states should take speedy steps to launch serious investigations, and immediately compensate and apologize to the victims and those who were affected.
- The SDF-supporting states should apply pressure on these forces in order to compel them to cease all of their violations in all the areas and towns that are under their control.
- All forms of support, weapons and otherwise, should be ceased until SDF commit to the previous recommendations. This is primarily the supporting states' responsibility. Providing SDF with weapons and support while knowing that they can be used in war crimes or crimes against humanity can be seen as a contribution to these crimes.

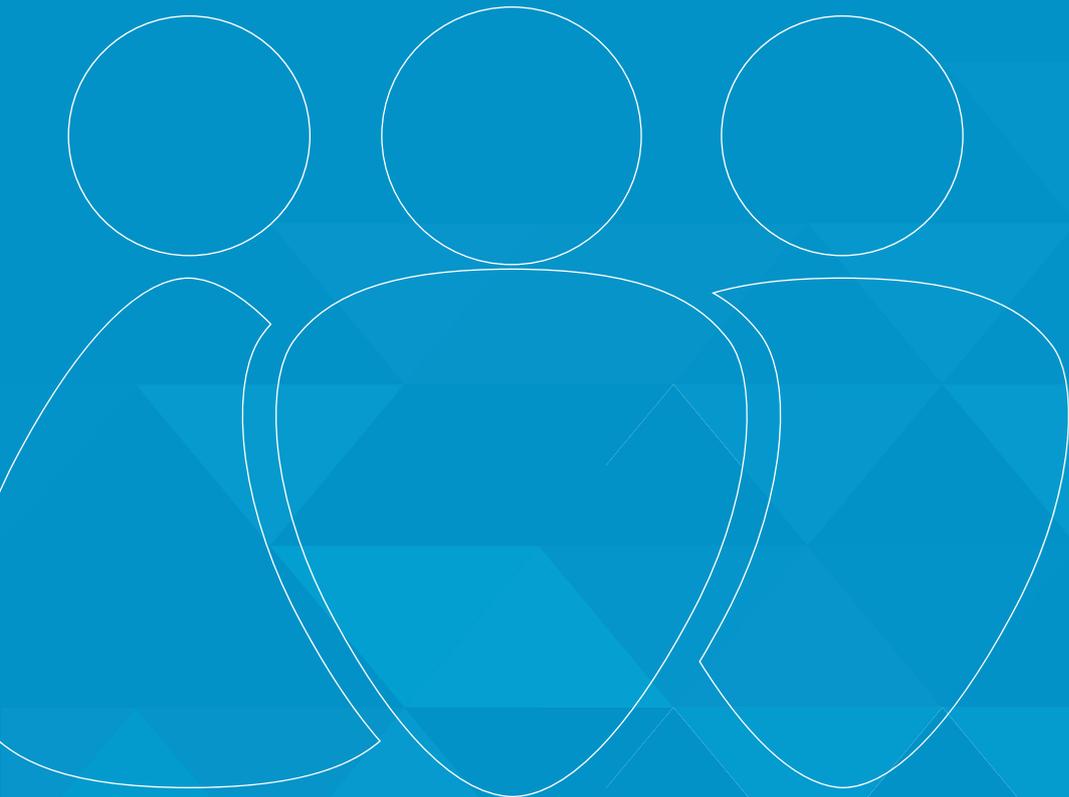
Armed opposition factions

Ensure the protection of civilians and civilian objects in all of their areas of control. Also, armed opposition factions should launch investigations on the incidents included in this report.

Acknowledgment and Condolences

We would like to thank and extend our most heartfelt condolences to all the residents and local activists who contributed effectively to this report.





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