

No less than 69 Massacres in Syria in February 2018

Including 46 Massacres in
Eastern Ghouta by Syrian
Regime Forces

SNHR

SYRIAN NETWORK FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

الشبكة السورية لحقوق الإنسان

Friday, March 9, 2018

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

Since the popular uprising for freedom started in Syria in March 2011, SNHR has taken it upon itself to record a wide range of violations that are being perpetrated daily against the Syrian people, such as killing, enforced-disappearance, arbitrary arrest, destruction, indiscriminate bombardment, and torture as SNHR shed light on the most notable violations it recorded that were committed by the parties to the conflict in Syria in hundreds of reports.

The Syrian regime, and its militias, were the only perpetrator of violations at the start of the popular uprising, and they remain the main perpetrator, as the Syrian regime is responsible for the majority of violations. Subsequently, other parties emerged gradually such as the armed opposition, extremist Islamic groups, Democratic Union Party forces, international coalition forces, and Russian forces.

The first two years of the popular uprising saw the largest portion of ethnic and sectarian cleansing massacres, where the Syrian regime and its militias were responsible for the majority of these massacres. In mid-2013, Syrian regime forces started relying heavily on warplanes and they were also used later by international coalition forces and Russian forces. The wide use of aerial bombardment doubled the numbers of victims and caused huge destruction to the infrastructure, as one or two new massacres at least are recorded almost every day.



The Syrian regime used improvised weapons, such as barrel bombs, to bomb the areas that are out of its control while Russian forces used more deadly weapons, relying more on bunker-buster missiles, incendiary ammunitions, and cluster munitions.

Also, we have recorded in our database tens of massacres that were perpetrated by extremist Islamic groups and factions from the armed opposition. In addition, we've monitored massacres by Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) which are backed by the international coalition forces' air force, where we have recorded a significant rise in the rate of massacres perpetrated by the coalition (international coalition - SDF) since the end of 2016.

Methodology

This report records the massacres perpetrated by the parties to the conflict in Syria in February that SNHR team was able to document. This report also sheds light on the most notable massacres. We have the details of the complete incidents stored in SNHR's database. The term "massacre" refers to any attack that resulted in the killing of five peaceful individuals in the same attack.

This report draws upon the ongoing monitoring of news and development by SNHR team, and on an extensive network of relations with tens of various sources that have been built over the course of our work. When we receive information, or hear some news about a violation via the internet or media outlets, we work on following on this news and try to verify and collect evidences and data. In some cases, the researcher is able to visit the incident location at the soonest. However, this is a rarity in light of the incredibly high security risks, and given the frequency of daily incidents and the limited human and material resources. Therefore, the possibility to access evidences vary from one case to another, and, hence, the degree of its classification. Usually, what we do, at SNHR, in such cases is relying on accounts from survivors who experienced the violation firsthand, where we try to access those directly, and, to a second degree, who saw or filmed the violation.

This report documents one massacre that was the result of bombings that we couldn't identify the groups behind them in light of the difficulties in identifying the responsible party for such bombings.

This report also contains a number of attacks by shell that we couldn't accurately determine who fired them, as we weren't able to visit the site or obtain evidences to assist in properly identifying the source of these shells.



This report contains two accounts that we've collected through speaking directly to eyewitnesses, and not are 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 identify of any witness who preferred to use an alias.

All of the attacks included in this report have targeted civilian areas. We didn't identify any military presence or armories during the attacks or even before it. Additionally, the forces that attacked civilians didn't put out a warning prior to their attacks as the international humanitarian law requires.

SNHR has analyzed videos and pictures that were posted online, or were sent by local activists via e-mail, Skype, or social media. Some of the videos showed victims who were killed in carried out by fixed-wing warplanes, helicopters, and rocket launchers. Most of the victims were children and women. Other pictures showed dead bodies being pulled out from rubble. We have copies of all the pictures and videos included in this report in a secret online database and back up copies on hard drives. We always make sure to store this data with its respective source. Nonetheless, we can't claim that we have document all cases in light of the ban and pursuit by Syrian regime forces as well as other armed groups.

Please see SNHR methodology for [documenting victims](#).

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

II. Summary of February 2018

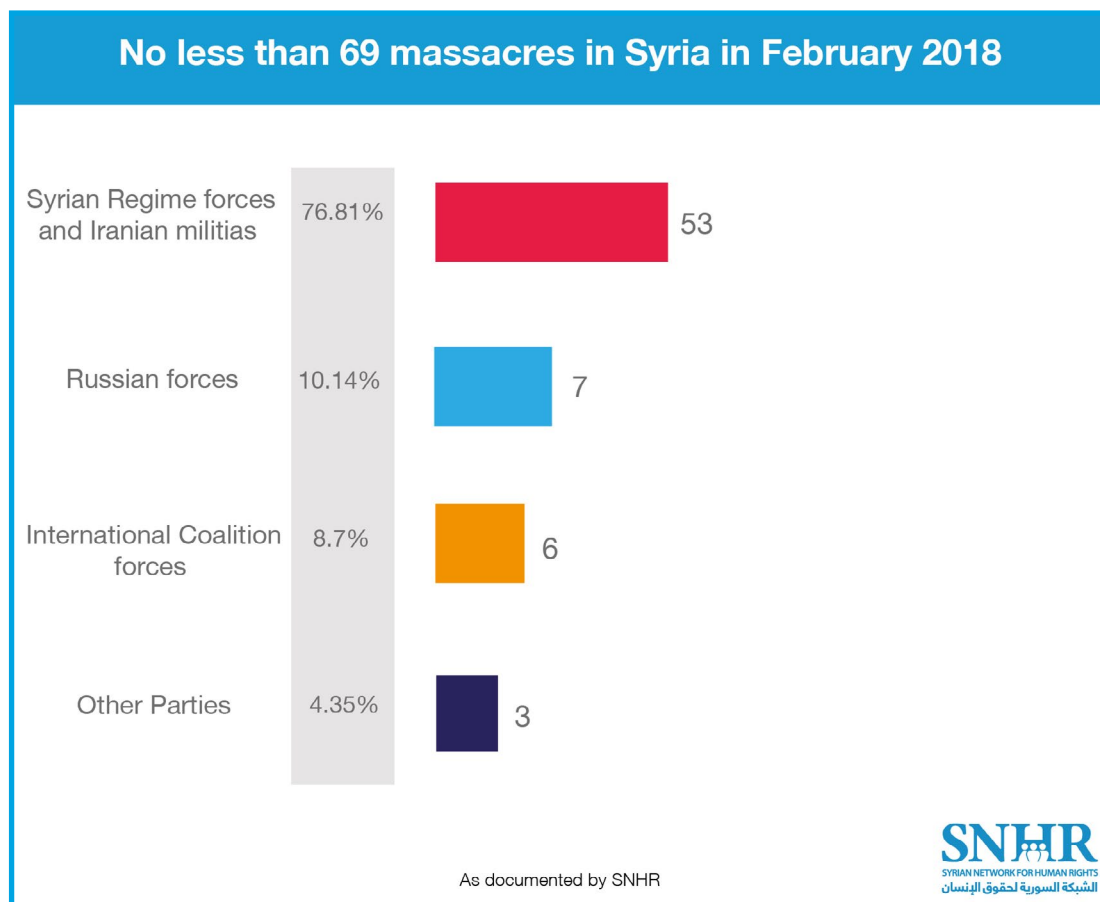
In light of the ruthless offensive by Syrian-Russian alliance forces in de-escalation zones, the number of massacres against civilians by the alliance has increased to more than three times as many massacres recorded by the same forces in January.

In February, we recorded that Syrian regime forces topped all parties by committing 53 massacres, including 46 massacres in Eastern Ghouta, a de-escalation zone, while Russian forces committed the second-most massacres in February with seven massacres, including five in Idlib governorate.



III. Executive Summary

SNHR has documented no less than 69 massacres in February, distributed as follows:

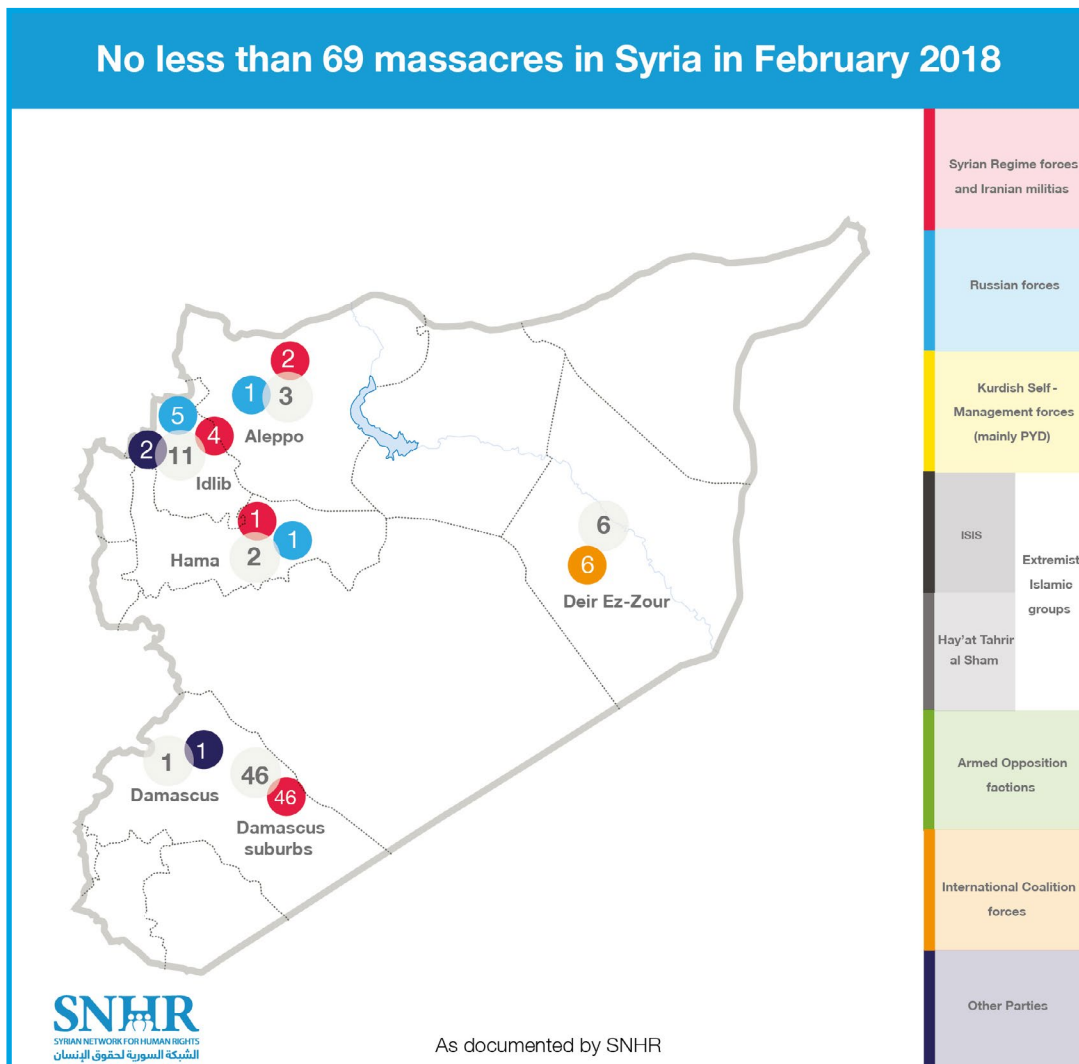


- A. Syrian regime forces (army, security, local militias, Shiite foreign militias): 53
- B. Russian forces: 7
- C. International coalition forces: 6
- D. Other parties: 3

The following map shows the distribution of February's massacres across Syrian governorates by the parties to the conflict



No less than 69 massacres in Syria in February 2018



Syrian regime forces' massacres in February were distributed by area of control, as follows:

- 49 massacres in areas under the control of factions from the armed opposition.
- 4 massacres in areas under the joint control of Hay'at Tahrir al Sham and factions from the armed opposition.

According to the victim documentation team at SNHR, these massacres resulted in the killing of 764 civilians, including 236 children and 165 women (adult female). This means that 54% of all victims were women and children, which is a considerably high percentage, and an indication that civilian residents were targeted in most of these massacres.

Death toll of these massacres is distributed by the perpetrator party as follows:

Syrian regime forces: 563 civilians, including 158 children and 122 women.

Russian forces: 58 civilians, including 20 children and 12 women.

International coalition forces: 101 civilians, including 51 children and 30 women.

Other parties: 24 civilians, including 7 children and 1 woman.



IV. Details of the Most Notable Massacres in February 2018

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

Damascus suburbs governorate

Tuesday, February 6, 2018, around 12:00, fixed-wing Syrian regime forces warplanes fired a number of [missiles](#), in parallel with an artillery shelling, at [the residential neighborhoods](#) in Douma city, Eastern Ghouta, eastern Damascus suburbs governorate, which resulted in the killing of [31 civilians](#), including five children and [10 women](#). The city was under the control of armed opposition factions at the time of the incident.

We contacted¹Baraa Abu Ziad, a resident of Douma city, who told us that he heard the sound of an artillery shelling in the city around 10:00 as he was visiting a relative of his. The shelling was followed by a number of warplanes' airstrikes on the city: **“Around 13:00, we learned that there are people trapped under rubbles, so I headed for the site where I saw civil defense members trying to pull out people who were trapped underneath a destroyed building, which was a four-floor building, I think. I met an acquaintance who told me that his brother’s wife was visiting her family, “Kabrita”, in this building and she is trapped under rubbles.”** Baraa added that rescue operations weren't finished, but they had to stop around 17:00 after the artillery shelling on the city was resumed.

Thursday morning, February 8, 2018, [fixed-wing](#) Syrian regime forces warplanes fired a number of [missiles](#) in Irbeen city, [Eastern Ghouta](#), eastern Damascus suburbs governorate which resulted in [the killing](#) of [30 civilians](#), including [10 children](#) and [four women](#), while about [114 others](#) were wounded, [mostly women](#) and children. The city was under the control of armed opposition factions at the time of the incident.

We contacted Anas al Ta'an², a civil defense volunteer, who told us that observatories announced that a Sukhoi 24 warplanes was headed towards, so civil defense teams were on stand-by in case of any airstrike: **“Around 15:00, the warplane targeted the center of the city, so I headed there and the scene was horrifying. Dead bodies and dead body party were scattered everywhere, and vendors' goods were tossed everywhere. We started working. Due to the large number of dead bodies and wounded people, we had to transfer them five at a time in ambulances. I couldn't count how many martyrs there were as the shelling never stopped.”** Anas added that the wounded were mostly women and children: **“The warplane bombed the market with four missiles. Each missile landed about 30 meters from the another. I can't determine the size of the destruction caused by the missiles, as the shelling didn't stop for days.”**

¹ We contacted him via Facebook on February 13, 2018

² We contacted him via Telegram on February 13, 2018



Monday, February 19, 2018, around 12:30, fixed-wing Syrian regime force warplanes fired a number of [missiles](#) at residential neighborhoods in Hamouriya town, Eastern Ghouta, eastern Damascus suburbs governorate, which resulted in the killing of 19 civilians, including three children and four women, while about 50 others were wounded. The town was under the control of armed opposition factions at the time of the incident.



Massacre victims killed in an attack by fixed-wing Syrian regime warplanes on Hamouriya town, Damascus suburbs – February 19, 2018

Monday, February 19, 2018, [fixed-wing](#) Syrian regime/Russian forces warplanes (the incident is [still being](#) investigated to [identify the perpetrator](#) party accurately) fired an underground shelter where [civilians](#) were hiding in Beit Sawa town, Eastern Ghouta, eastern Damascus suburbs governorate, which resulted in [the killing of 43 civilians](#), as we have documented at the time of this writing, including [26 children](#) and [16 women](#). The town was under the control of armed opposition factions at the time of the incident.





Massacre victims killed in a Syrian/Russian air attack that targeted a shelter where civilians were hiding in Beit Saw town, Damascus suburbs – February 19, 2018

Wednesday, February 21, 2018, fixed-wing Syrian regime/ Russian forces warplanes (the incident is still being investigated to identify the perpetrator party accurately) fired a number of missiles in Saqba city, Eastern Ghouta, eastern Damascus suburbs governorate in parallel with a barrel bomb attack by Syrian regime forces helicopters who dropped a number of barrel bombs. The attack resulted in the killing of 15 civilians, including three children and three women. The city was under the control of armed opposition factions at the time of the incident.

Thursday, February 22, 2018, a Syrian regime rocket launcher fired a number of rockets at Douma city, Eastern Ghouta, eastern Damascus suburbs governorate, which resulted in the killing of 13 civilians, including one female child and three women, while about 20 others were wounded. It is worth noting that fixed-wing Syrian regime / Russian forces warplanes (the incident is still being investigated to identify the perpetrator party accurately) caused another massacre on the same day at another time when they fired a number of missiles at the city to kill 31 civilians, including six children and six women, while about 50 others were wounded. The city was under the control of armed opposition factions at the time of the incident.



Monday evening, February 26, 2018, fixed-wing Syrian regime /Russian forces warplanes (the incident is still being investigated to identify the perpetrator party accurately) fired a [number of missiles](#) at the area between Misraba town and Beit Sawa in Eastern Ghouta, eastern Damascus suburbs governorate, which resulted in the killing of five civilians from the same family, including two children and two women, while about 10 others were wounded. The area was under the control of armed opposition factions at the time of the incident.

Idlib governorate

Saturday, February 3, 2018, Syrian regime forces helicopters dropped a number of [barrel bombs](#) on al Shamali neighborhood, [Ma'saran](#) village, eastern suburbs of Idlib governorate, which resulted in [the killing](#) of [seven civilians](#) from the same family (five children and their parents) as they were trying to leave their house to a safer place in fear of the bombing on the village. The village was under the joint control of armed opposition factions and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.

Aleppo governorate

Friday, February 2, 2018, around 13:30m fixed-wing Syrian regime forces warplanes carried out a strike with [machine guns](#) near cars that were transporting IDPs on the international highway Aleppo-Damascus at the entrance of [Tal Hadya](#) village, southern suburbs of Aleppo governorate. [Seven civilians](#) were killed at once, including one child and two women. The area was under the control of armed opposition factions at the time of the incident.

Hama governorate

Saturday, February 24, 2018, a Syrian regime forces rocket launcher shelled Kafr Zita city, northern suburbs of Hama governorate, which resulted in the killing of five civilians at once, including two children and two women. The city was under the joint control of armed opposition factions and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.

B. Russian forces

Sunday, February 4, 2018, fixed-wing warplanes we believe were Russian fired a number of missiles at the center of [Kafranbel](#) city, southern suburbs of Idlib governorate, which resulted in the killing of eight civilians at once, including [two children](#) and [one woman](#), while about [15 others](#) were wounded. The city was under the joint control of armed opposition factions and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.





Massacre victims being pulled out in the aftermath of a Russian air attack on Kafranbel city, Idlib – February 4, 2018

Sunday, February 4, 2018, fixed-wing warplanes we believe were Russian fired a number of missiles at a six-floor residential building in [Wadi al Nasim](#) area in southern Idlib city, which resulted in the killing of [12 civilians](#), including [six children](#) and [four women](#). The city was under the control of Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.



Image shows some of victims of a massacre in Wadi al Nasim area south of Idlib city as suspected Russian warplanes fired missiles on a residential building in the area, on February 4, 2018.

By: Ahmad Rahhal ©SNHR

Massacre victims killed in a Russian air attack on Wadi al Nasim area, Idlib – February 4, 2018



Aleppo governorate

Thursday, February 1, 2018, around 15:45, fixed-wing warplanes we believe were Russian fired a missile at [Abad](#) village, southern suburbs of Aleppo governorate, which resulted in the killing of 11 civilians, including four children and three women. The village was under the control of armed opposition factions at the time of the incident.

Hama governorate

Thursday, February 1, 2018, fixed-wing warplanes we believe were Russian fired two missiles at the northern area in [Kafr Nbouda](#) town, northwestern suburbs of Hama governorate, which resulted in the killing of [eight civilians](#) at once, including [two children](#) and one woman. The town was under the control of armed opposition factions at the time of the incident.



One of the victims killed in a massacre in the aftermath of a Russian air attack on Kafr Nbouda town, Hama – February 2, 2018

C. International coalition forces

Deir Ez-Zour governorate

Sunday, February 4, 2018, around 01:30, [fixed-wing](#) international coalition warplanes fired a [number of missiles](#) at al Bahra village, eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate, which resulted in the killing of [40 civilians](#), IDPs from al Sfeira city, eastern suburbs of Idlib governorate, including [21 children](#) and [13 women](#). The village was under the control of ISIS at the time of the incident.





A child killed in a massacre by international coalition forces warplanes in al Bahra village, Deir Ez-Zour – February 4, 2018

Sunday, February 25, 2018, fixed-wing international coalition forces warplanes fired a number of missiles at a civilian car transporting IDPs in the badiya of al Sha'fa city, which is administratively a part of al Boukamal city, eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate. The bombing took place as the car was heading towards al Alwani camp in the badiya of al Sousa town, which is administratively a part of al Boukamal city, and resulted in the killing of 16 civilians from the same family, IDPs from al Baghouz village which is administratively a part of al Boukamal city, including 10 children and four women. The area was under the control of ISIS at the time of the incident.

D. Other parties

Damascus governorate

Thursday, February 1, 2018, around 17:00, a number of rocket shells landed on [Ush al Warwar](#) area, northern Damascus city, which resulted in the killing of nine civilians, including seven children while about 12 others were wounded. we have yet, as of this writing, to identify the party that carried out the shelling. The area was under the control of Syrian regime forces at the time of the incident.



Idlib governorate

Saturday, February 10, 2018, an IED planted under al Sa'a building in the market of al Sa'a square (The Watch Square) in the center of Idlib city exploded, where [seven civilians](#) were killed at once in [the bombing](#), including one woman, while about 30 others were wounded. We have yet, as of this writing, to identify the group behind as of this writing due to the difficulty in identifying the perpetrators of bombing of this type. 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

- The Syrian-Russian alliance has, beyond any doubt, violated Security Council resolutions 2139 and 2254 which both state that indiscriminate attacks must be ceased. Also, The Syrian and Russian regime have violated Article 7 and 8 of Rome Statute through the act of willful killing which constitutes war crimes.
- We can confirm that the bombardment mentioned in this report has targeted defenseless civilians. Therefore, Syrian and 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.
- The attacks mentioned in this report that were carried out by The Syrian and Russian regimes, are considered a violation of the customary international law as the shells were fired at a populated area rather than a specific military object.
- 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 magnitude of the massacres, their frequent nature, the exaggerated use of power, the indiscriminate manner of the bombing, and the coordinated approach of these attacks must be based on high orders, and a state policy.

The Coalition (international coalition and SDF)

The attacks by Coalition forces have caused collateral damages that involved loss of lives, injuries, or significant damages to civilian facilities. There are strong indicators suggesting that the damage was too excessive compared to the anticipated military benefit.

Other forces

International coalition forces and other forces have perpetrated massacres, according to this report, that constitute war crimes. However, we don't believe that these massacres qualify as crimes against humanity, as with the Syrian regime and pro-regime forces who perpetrate massacres in a systematic and widespread manner.



Conclusions

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 brought 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 massacres that preceded, given that they are a glaring mark in a string of daily sporadic massacres 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.

The 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 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.

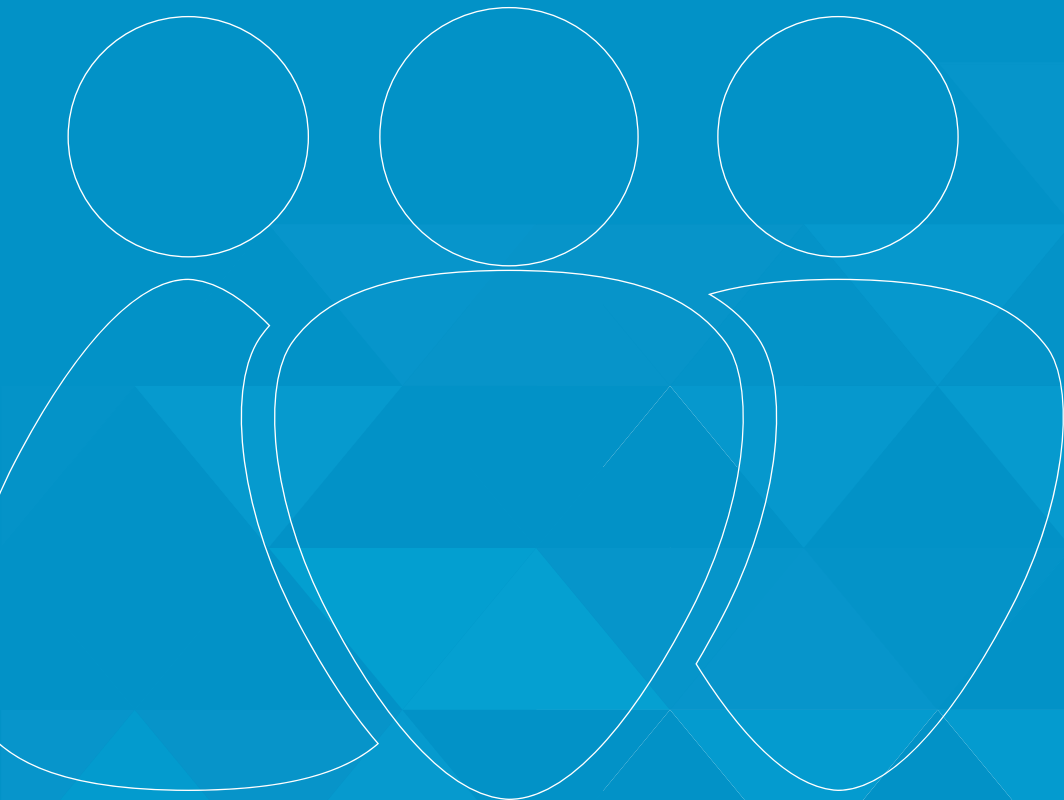
Armed opposition factions

Ensure the protection of civilians in all of their areas of control. Also, armed opposition factions should distinguish between civilians and military targets, and cease any indiscriminate attacks.

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.





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