

# No less than 761 Barrel Bombs Dropped by Syrian Regime Air Force in April 2018

The Syrian Regime Uses Barrel Bombs in the Chemical Attack on Douma City in Eastern Ghouta

# SNHR

SYRIAN NETWORK FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

الشبكة السورية لحقوق الإنسان

Tuesday, May 8, 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 and Methodology

In its excessive war on the areas that revolted against its rule, the Syrian regime has used improvised, low-cost, [highly-effective weapons](#) in order to kill as many victims as possible and inflict as much wide destruction as possible. [Barrel bombs](#) have been one of the most-used improvised weapons since March 2011. The first documented barrel bomb attack, according to SNHR archives, was on July 18, 2012 in Dael city, northern Daraa governorate, where five civilians were killed in that attack, including one female child and three women while about eight others were injured.

Nonetheless, it took the Security Council about a year and a half to adopt resolution 2139 on February 22, 2014, which condemned the use of barrel bombs, mentioning it by name: “.... **immediately cease all attacks against civilians, as well as the indiscriminate employment of weapons in populated areas, including shelling and aerial bombardment, such as the use of barrel bombs,**” However, as of this writing, the Syrian regime is still raining down the areas outside of its control with tens of barrel bombs.

On October 31, 2015, about one month after Russia’s intervention started in Syria, Vitaly Churkin, the former Russian representative to the United Nations, said that the Syrian regime will cease dropping barrel bombs following continued calls by Moscow in order to avoid killing civilians. However, what we have documented over the course of the past two years prove that the Syrian regime continues to use this indiscriminate weapon, where we have documented, at the time of this writing, that Syrian regime warplanes dropped 25,364 barrel bombs since the start of the Russian intervention on September 30, 2015, on an average of 28 barrel bombs per day.



Barrel bombs are a Russian-made weapon that is known for its huge destructive power while operating on a simple, rudimentary mechanism and technology. Considering its low cost, the Syrian regime worked on heavily manufacturing this weapon at private factories that are located mostly in military and civilian airbases and defense factories. The concept on which barrel bomb is based revolves around putting explosive materials inside cylinders and large containers, and water tanks in some cases, and adding metal objects so they'd become shrapnel. The mechanism used to trigger the explosion of a barrel bomb is either fuse-based or through applying pressure on a mechanical detonator.

This impact of barrel bombs is not limited to killing civilians, but they also terrorize and displace residents in light of the destruction a barrel bomb creates. Dropping barrel bombs from warplanes, which is based on the principle of free-falling, in this savage and primitive manner amounts to a war crime. Every barrel bomb dropped can be considered a war crime.

We have documented cases where Syrian regime forces used barrel bombs loaded with poison gases, which is a breach of the CWC – an agreement that the Syrian government acceded to in September 2013, and outlaws the use of poison gases and provides for their destruction. This is also a breach of all relevant Security Council resolutions, particularly 2118, 2209, and 2235. In addition, we have recorded the use of incendiary substances we believe were “napalm” inside barrel bombs which caused huge fires in the aftermath of the attack. In the report:” [The Syrian Regime Had Dropped Nearly 70,000 Barrel Bombs on Syria](#)”, we outlined the use of barrel bombs, since its first use in July 2012, and the resultant violations.

## **Methodology**

In this report, we are going to monitor the toll of barrel bombs that were dropped across Syrian governorates in April and the death toll that resulted from these attacks. All of this represents the bare minimum in light of the various difficulties our team encounters.

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. 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 our general work [methodology](#).



All of the attacks included in this report were carried out by the Syrian regime, as we never came across a case where it was proven that any other party (Russian forces, international coalition forces) had used this weapon on Syrian lands even though they possess an air force. In most of the attacks, our investigations have proven that the targeted areas were civilian areas where no military bases or armories were found during the attack or even before it, where the Syrian regime didn't distinguish, in its use of this indiscriminate weapons, between civilians and fighters. It is important to note, however, that some of the incidents in which barrel bombs were used might not constitute violations of the international humanitarian law but involved collateral damages. We include it to preserve the truth historically and store it as a national record, but we don't describe it as having qualified as crimes.

## II. April 2018 Outline

No discernible difference has been recorded between April's barrel bomb toll and March's, as Syrian regime forces continued to drop barrel bomb on the areas that are not under their control in order to push the residents of those areas towards forced displacement, where we recorded in early-April the displacement of Douma city, the last area in the besieged Eastern Ghouta, before the offensive, which was in parallel with dropping barrel bombs, shifted to the areas of northern suburbs of Homs, southern suburbs of Hama, and the areas in southern Damascus city (al Yarmouk Camp and the towns of Yalda, Babbila, and Beit Sahm, as well as the neighborhoods of al Qadam, al Assali, al Hajar al Asswad, and al Tadamun) for the very same purpose.

The Syrian regime used poison gases-loaded barrel bombs in Eastern Ghouta for a second month in a row, as we've documented a massacre using chemical munitions that were loaded in barrel bombs in [Douma city, Damascus suburbs](#) on April 7. The massacres resulted in the killing of 41 civilians who suffocated to death, including 12 children and 15 women.

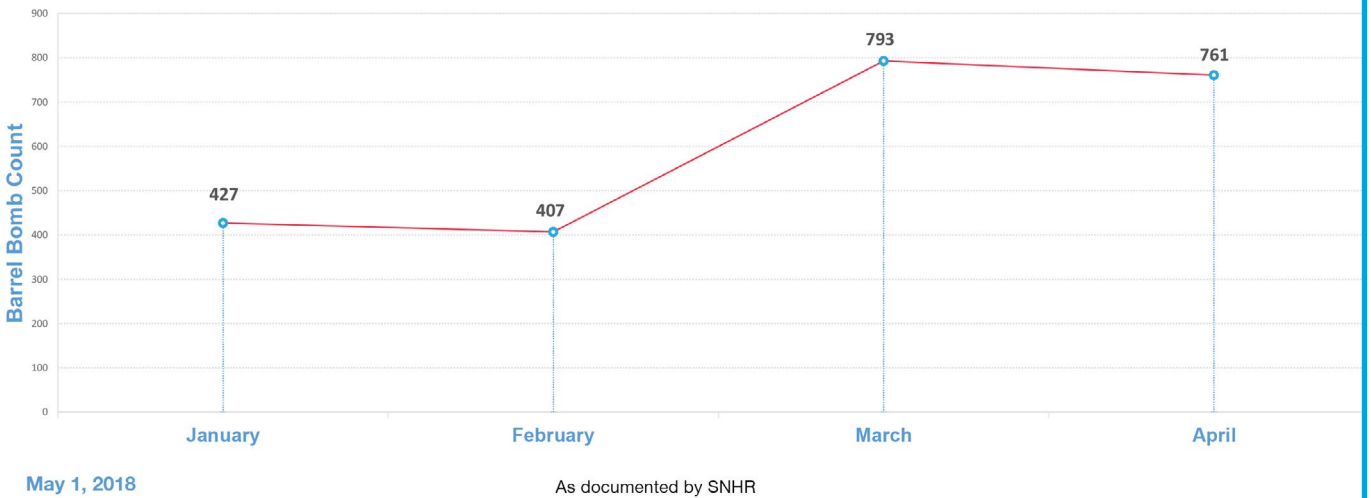
## III. Executive Summary

### **A. Toll of barrel bombs since the start of 2018**

SNHR has documented 2,388 barrel bombs dropped by Syrian regime air force between the start of 2018 and May of the same year. The overall toll of barrel bombs is distributed by month as follows:



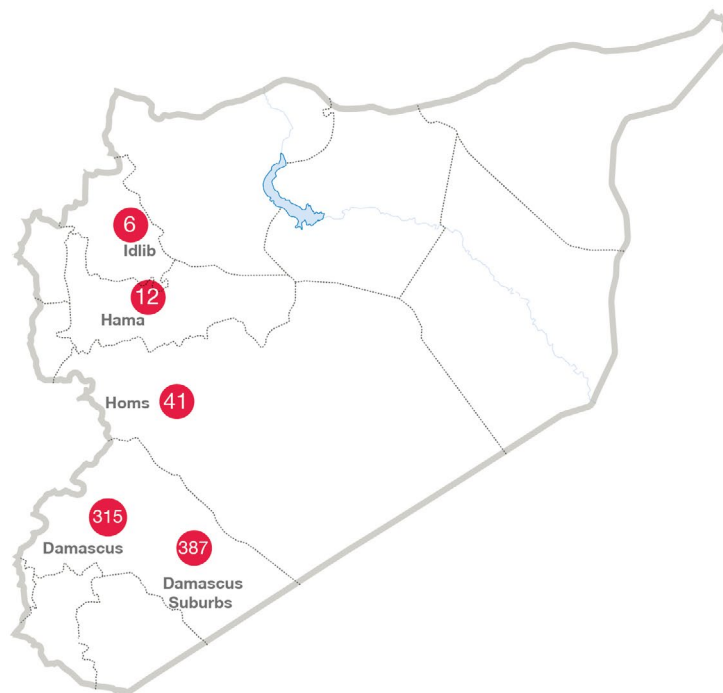
No less than 2388 barrel bombs have been dropped by Syrian regime air force since the start of 2018



### **B. Toll of barrel bombs in April 2018**

Through daily monitoring and documentation, SNHR team was able to record that 761 barrel bombs were dropped by Syrian regime air force in April 2018, distributed across governorates as follows:

No less than 761 barrel bombs dropped by Syrian regime forces air force in April 2018



These barrel bombs resulted in the killing of 59 civilians, including 16 children and 22 women (adult female) according to SNHR documentation team. Death toll is distributed by governorate as follows:

Damascus suburbs: 45 civilians, including 13 children and 16 women.

Homs: 10 civilians, including 2 children and 5 women.

Idlib: 4 civilians, including 1 child and 1 woman.

2- Attacks on vital civilian facilities that involved the use of barrel bombs

Due to the widespread use of barrel bombs, it is impossible to record all forms of destruction caused by barrel bombs. Therefore, we are going to focus on protected objects and vital facilities such as markets, hospitals, schools and places of worship....

The barrel bombs dropped by Syrian regime helicopters in April have resulted in damages to no less than 2 vital civilian facilities, as follows:

Places of worship

- Mosques: 1

Vital medical facilities

- Medical facilities: 1

## IV. Details

### **A. Most notable deaths caused by barrel bombs**

#### **Damascus suburbs governorate**

Saturday, April 7, 2018, around 21:00, Syrian regime forces helicopters dropped a number of [barrel bombs](#) loaded with [poison gases](#) near [al Shuhada](#) Square in Nu'man area, Douma city, Eastern Ghouta, eastern Damascus suburbs governorate, which resulted in the killing of [41 civilians](#), who [suffocated to death](#), including [12 children](#) and [15 women](#), while about 550 others suffered from asphyxia. The city is under the control of Syrian regime forces at the time of this writing, while it was under the control of armed opposition factions at the time of the incident. SNHR has released a statement on the [incident](#).





Victims killed in a massacre carried out by Syrian regime forces who carried out a chemical air attack on Douma city, Eastern Ghouta – April 7, 2018

### **Homs governorate**

Monday, April 30, 2018, Syrian regime forces helicopters dropped a number of barrel bombs on al Rastan city, northern suburbs of Homs governorate, which resulted in the killing of six civilians, including one child and four women. The city was under the control of armed opposition factions at the time of the incident.

### **Idlib governorate**

Tuesday, April 24, 2018, Syrian regime forces helicopters dropped a number of barrel bombs on the houses in the center of Ma'aret Harma village, southern suburbs of Idlib governorate, which resulted in the killing of four civilians, including one child and one woman. The village was under the control of armed opposition factions at the time of the incident.

## **B. Most notable attacks on vital civilian facilities using barrel bombs**

### Vital medical facilities

- Medical facilities (hospitals – dispensaries – medical points – makeshift hospitals)

Wednesday, April 25, 2018, Syrian regime forces helicopters dropped [a barrel bomb](#) near the health center in [Kafr Sajna](#) village, southern suburbs of Idlib governorate. The center building was partially destroyed, and its equipment, furniture, and the dental clinic were heavily damaged. The center was rendered out of commission. The village was under the control of armed opposition factions at the time of the incident.





Destruction at the health center in Kafr Sajna, Idlib in the aftermath of an air attack by Syrian regime forces using barrel bombs – April 25, 2018

## V. Appendixes and Attachments

[A video showing](#) Syrian regime forces helicopters dropped three barrel bombs on the outskirts of Yalda town, southern Damascus suburbs governorate – Saturday, April 21, 2018

A video showing Syrian regime forces helicopters dropping [a barrel bomb](#) on Ma'aret Harma village, southern suburbs of Idlib governorate – Tuesday, April 24, 2018

A video showing Syrian regime forces helicopters dropping [a barrel bomb](#) on Deir Foul village, northeastern suburbs of Homs governorate – Sunday, April 29, 2018

[A picture showing](#) a cylinder believed to be loaded with a poison gas that was dropped by Syrian regime forces helicopters on Douma city, Eastern Ghouta, eastern Damascus suburbs governorate – Saturday, April 7, 2018

[A picture showing](#) Syrian regime forces helicopters dropping four barrel bombs on al Hajar al Aswad neighborhood and al Yarmouk Camp for Palestinian Refugees, Damascus city – Saturday, April 21, 2018

A picture showing the destruction [in the aftermath](#) of a barrel bomb attack by Syrian regime forces helicopters on the houses in Ma'aret Harma village, southern suburbs of Idlib governorate – Tuesday, April 24, 2018





## VI. Conclusions and Recommendations

- The Syrian government has, beyond any doubt, violated Security Council Resolutions 2139 and 2254, and used barrel bombs in a systematic, widespread manner. Also, the Syrian government, through the crime of willful killing, has violated Article 7 and Article 8 of Rome Statute in a systematic and widespread manner which constitutes crimes against humanity.
- SNHR can confirm that barrel bomb attacks are an indiscriminate bombing that targeted defenseless civilians and caused collateral damages that involved deaths, injuries, or significant damages to civilian objects. There are strong indicators suggesting that the damage was too excessive compared to the anticipated military benefit.
- Syrian regime forces have violated the rules of the international human rights law that guarantee the right to life. In addition, these violations were committed during a non-international armed conflict, which constitutes war crimes, as all elements were fulfilled.
- Through the use of poison gases-loaded barrel bombs, the Syrian regime has violated the rules of the customary international humanitarian law which prohibits the use of chemical weapons regardless of the circumstances. Secondly, the Syrian regime has, beyond any doubt, violated the CWC treaty which the Syrian government acceded to in September 2013 as the treaty provides for the prohibition and destruction of poison gases. Thirdly, the Syrian regime has violated all relevant Security Council Resolutions – particularly 2118, 2209, and 2235. In addition, the use of chemical weapons constitutes a war crime according to ICC's Rome Statute.
- Syrian regime forces have used barrel bombs loaded with incendiary ammunitions against populated residential neighborhoods without taking any measures to reduce the damages to civilians and civilian buildings and facilities. On the contrary, Syrian regime used these weapons with no military justification from our point of view as the use of these weapons wasn't followed by any progression on the ground, nor did these attacks destroy or sabotage any trenches or military facilities.
- The systematic, continued, repeated bombing, the excessive level of force, the indiscriminate nature of the bombing and the coordinated approach of the attacks. All of this can't be without high orders and a part of state policy.
- Syrian regime forces, including all of their commands and forms, are involved in committing crimes against humanity and war crimes against the Syrian people. All those who provide financial, political, and military support, such as the Russian and Iranian government and the Lebanese group Hezbollah among others, as well as weapon import companies are partners to these crimes and prone to criminal prosecution.



## **Recommendations**

### **The Security Council**

- The Security Council should insure the serious implementation of its resolutions. These resolutions have become merely words and, thus, the Security Council has lost all of its credibility and purpose.
- The four permanent state members should apply pressure on the Russian government to cease its support for the Syrian regime who is using chemical weapons and barrel bombs as its involvement in his regard has been proven.
- An arms embargo should be imposed on the Syrian government Also, all those who supply it with weapons and funding must be prosecuted considering the risk that these weapons might be used to commit crimes and serious violations of human rights.
- In the Syrian case, The Security Council is the one who is authorized to refer the case to the International Criminal Court. However, the Security Council has been obstructing this procedure for five years instead of facilitating it and working on instilling peace and security in Syria. The prosecution of everyone involved in crimes against humanity and war crimes should commence immediately.

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

Support the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism (IIIM) 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.

### **OHCHR**

The OHCHR should submit a report to the Human Rights Council and other organs of the United Nations on the incidents include in this reports and other documented incidents from our past reports. Also, the OHCHR should work on implementing the recommendations mentioned 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.



## 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.
- Apply pressure on the Syrian government in order to ratify Protocol III of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons, and pressure the Syrian government to comply with the Protocol's restrictions.
- 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.

## Acknowledgment and Consolation

We would like to thank the victims' families, relatives, and friends, as well as local activists and media workers who contributed effectively to this report.





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