

No less than 27 Massacres in August 2017

International Coalition Forces
Top all other Parties with
17 Massacres

SNHR

SYRIAN NETWORK FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

الشبكة السورية لحقوق الإنسان

Monday, September 11, 2017

The Syrian Network for Human Rights, founded in June 2011, is a non-governmental, non-profit independent organization that is a primary source for the United Nations on all death toll-related statistics in Syria



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I. Introduction and Methodology

The fourth round of negotiations was held in Astana city, Kazakhstan's capital, on 3 and 4 of May 2017. Russian, Turkish, and Iranian representatives attended as the sponsoring states of Ankara Ceasefire Agreement. The three states agreed on establishing four de-escalation zones, wherein the agreement is to commence on May 6, 2017. The agreement outlined four major de-escalation areas – Idlib governorate and the surrounding areas (parts of Aleppo, Hama, and Latakia governorates), northern Homs governorate, Eastern Ghouta, and parts of Daraa and al Quneitra governorates in the southern parts of Syria. It was provided that an expert committee would accurately assign the borders of said zones at a later date. The agreement provided for a cessation of combat operations, passage of humanitarian aids, and for IDPs to go back to their areas.

Following an extensive round of talks between Russia, USA, and Jordan that commenced in May 2017 in Amman, Jordan's capital, the American and Russian presidents announced, on the sidelines of the 2017 G20 summit in Hamburg, that a ceasefire agreement has been reached in southwestern Syria – Daraa, Quneitra, and Suwayda governorates. The agreement went into force at 12:00 on Sunday July 9, 2017, and provided for the passage of humanitarian aids in addition to a ceasefire between the conflicting parties (Syrian regime forces and their allies on one side, and armed opposition factions on the other side). Also, the agreement specifies that maintaining security in this region is the Russian forces' responsibility in coordination with the Americans and Jordanians.

Since these agreements went into effect, the included areas saw a significant and relatively good drop in killing rates compared to the previous months since March 2011.



In addition, a number of other local agreements were struck in July and August 2017, such as Eastern Ghouta agreement between armed opposition factions, on one side, and officials from the Russian side, while a similar agreement was struck with the opposition in northern suburbs of Homs. However, the texts of these agreements haven't been made public on Russian government's websites, and the same for armed opposition factions who didn't publicize these agreements, except for Failaq al Rahman who published the [text of the agreement](#) on their official website. At the end of the agreement, according to the copy on Failaq al Rahman's website, a signature by a Russian sponsor was shown but without an explicit name, which is a great flaw, as apparently all of this helps the sponsoring Russian side to easily dissolve themselves from these agreements with no subsequent political or legal obligations and repercussions.

On Saturday, July 22, 2017, Russian Ministry of Defense announced that a de-escalation agreement has been signed in Eastern Ghouta following a round of talks between Russian military officials, on one side, and Jaish al Islam faction, on the other side, in Egypt's capital Cairo. The agreement was to come into effect at 12:00 of the same day. On Wednesday, August 16, 2017, a Failaq al Rahman representative and a Russian representative have signed an agreement in Geneva city that established Failaq al Rahman's inclusion in the de-escalation zone in Eastern Ghouta. The agreement was to come into effect at 21:00 of Friday, August 18, 2017.

On Monday, July 31, 2017, another de-escalation agreement was signed in Egypt's capital Cairo for northern Homs suburbs and southern Hama suburbs following a round of talks between armed opposition factions in the area and the Syrian regime represented by the Russian government as a sponsoring party, as the agreement was to commence at 12:00 on Thursday, August 3, 2017.

Most notably, the most two recent agreements provided for a full cessation of hostilities between the conflicting parties in the relevant areas -with the exclusion of the areas in which ISIS and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham are present- and for humanitarian aids to enter these areas and for detainees to be released as per the demands of each party as to which detainees are to be released.

The toll of civilian victims killed by Syrian regime forces, as well as its widespread violations, imply a lack of commitment to the most two recent signed agreements on the Syrian regime's part.



Despite Ankara Ceasefire Agreement and the string of de-escalation agreements that followed, breaches haven't stopped, mainly by the Syrian regime, who is seemingly the party that would be most affected should the ceasefire go on, and in particular extrajudicial killing crimes and, more horrendously, deaths due to torture. This strongly asserts that there is a ceasefire of some sort on the table, but the crimes that the international community -especially the sponsoring states- won't see are still going on as nothing had changed.

In August, we recorded a drop in the number of massacres by Russian forces for the fourth month in a row following the de-escalation agreement's commencement on May 6, 2017. Also, number of massacres by Syrian regime forces have decreased nearly by half in comparison with last July. However, international coalition forces are still perpetrating massacres at the same rates, and have trumped all other parties in terms of massacre for the fourth month in a row with 17 massacres, including 16 massacres in Raqqa city under the pretext of defeating terrorism.

Methodology

SNHR incorporates high documentation standards that rely on direct accounts from survivors or victims' families and local media activists. This report contains one account. We have explained the purpose of the interviews for the eyewitnesses who gave us permission to use the information they provided without offering or giving them incentives. Also, SNHR tried to spare them the agony of remembering the agony of the violations, and we gave guarantees to conceal the identity of anyone who preferred to use an alias. In addition, we have analyzed the pictures and videos and some medical records we received. We have all the pictures and videos that are mentioned in this report in a secret online database, and backup copies on hard drives. Certainly, we can't claim that we have documented all cases in light of the ban and pursuit by Syrian regime forces and other armed groups.

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 database 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, we don't describe it as massacres.

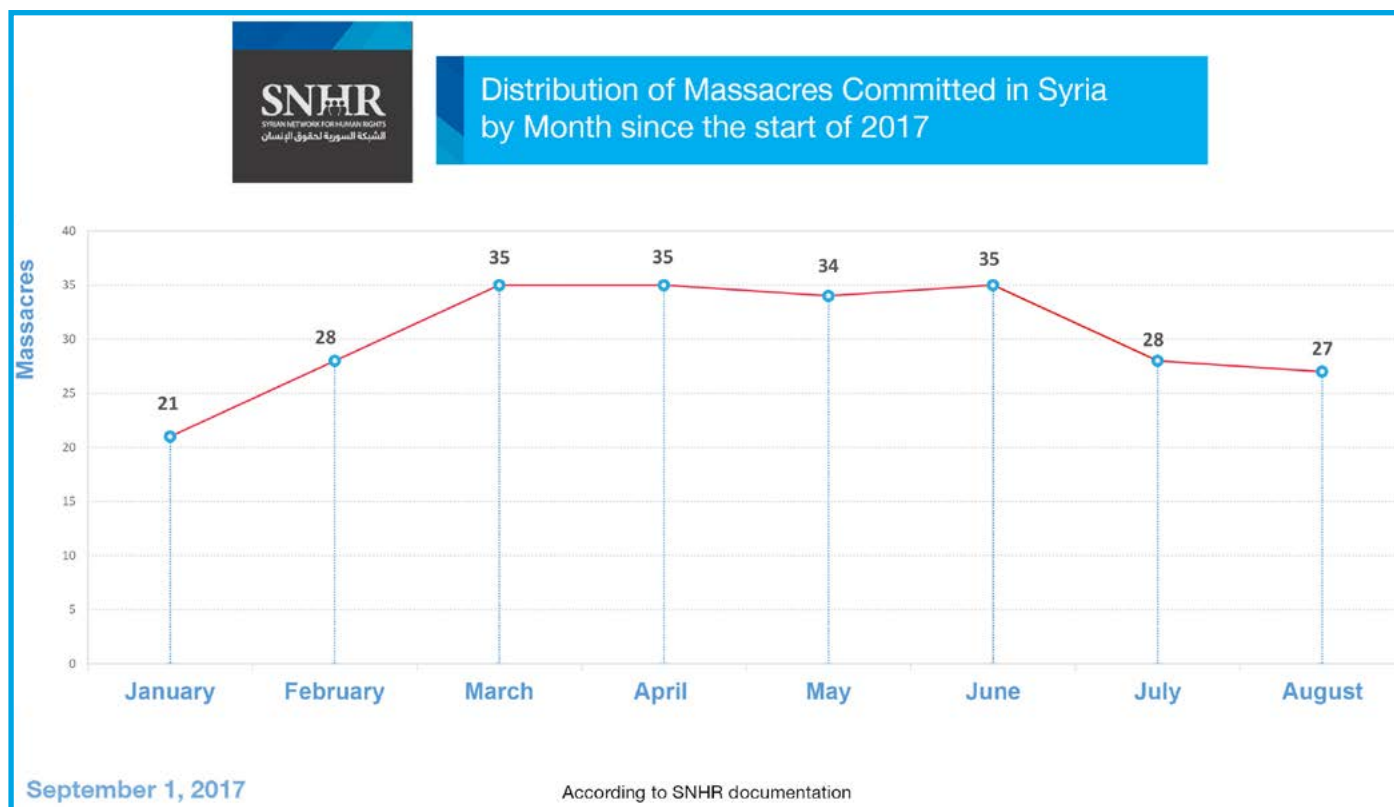


SNHR describes an incident as a massacre if it involves the killing of five peaceful individuals at the same time. For more information about our methodology in [documenting victims](#), please see the Following URL

II. Executive Summary

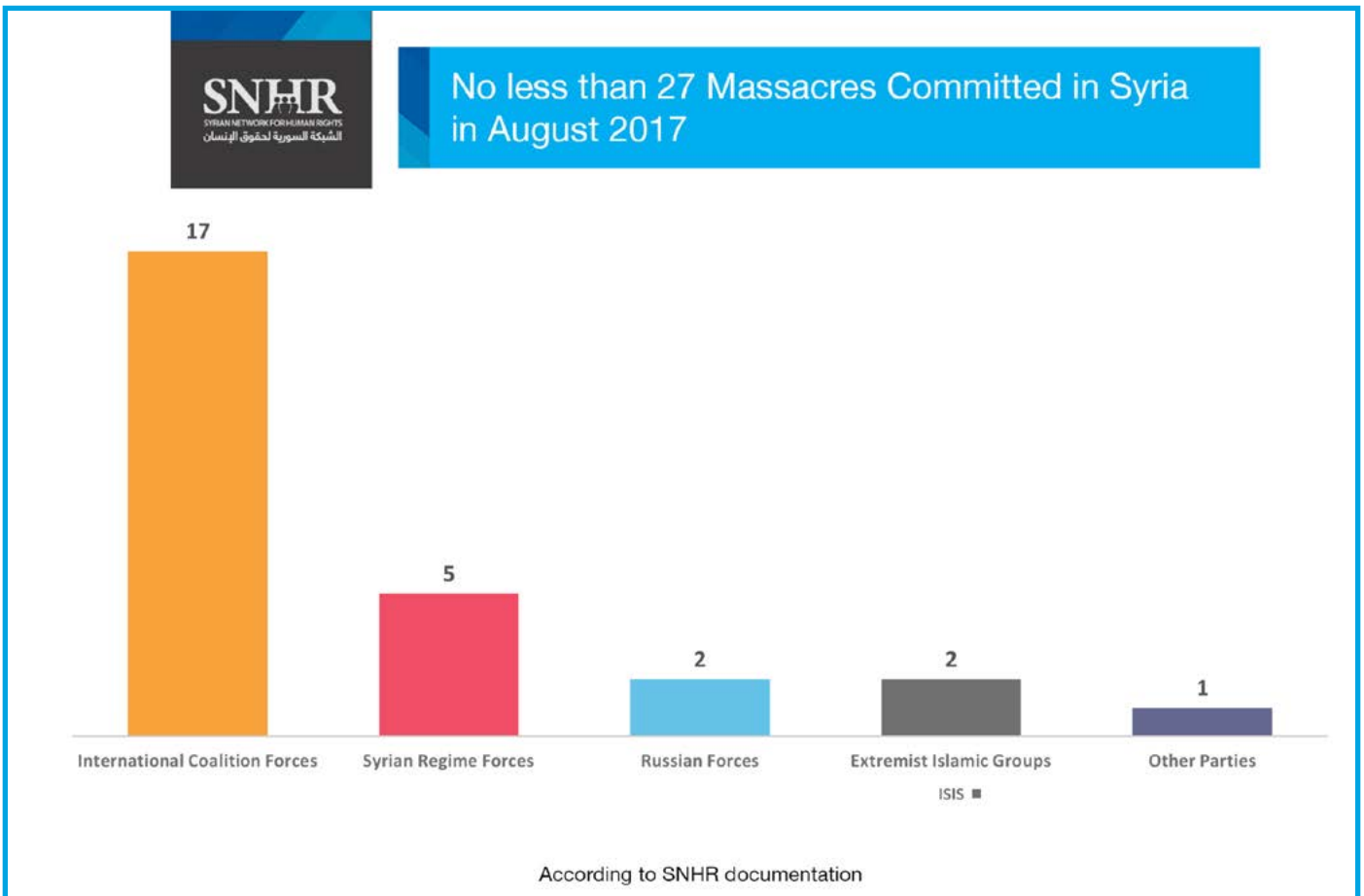
A. Toll of massacres in 2017

SNHR has documented 243 massacres at the hands of the parties to the conflict between the start of 2017 and September of the same year



B. Toll of massacres in August 2017

SNHR has documented no less than 27 massacres in August



As follows:

- A. Syrian regime forces (army, security, local militias, Shiite foreign militias): 5
- B. Russian forces: 2
- C. Extremist Islamic groups:
 - ISIS: 2
- D. International coalition forces: 17
- E. Other parties: 1

The massacres perpetrated by Syrian regime forces were distributed by area of control as follows:

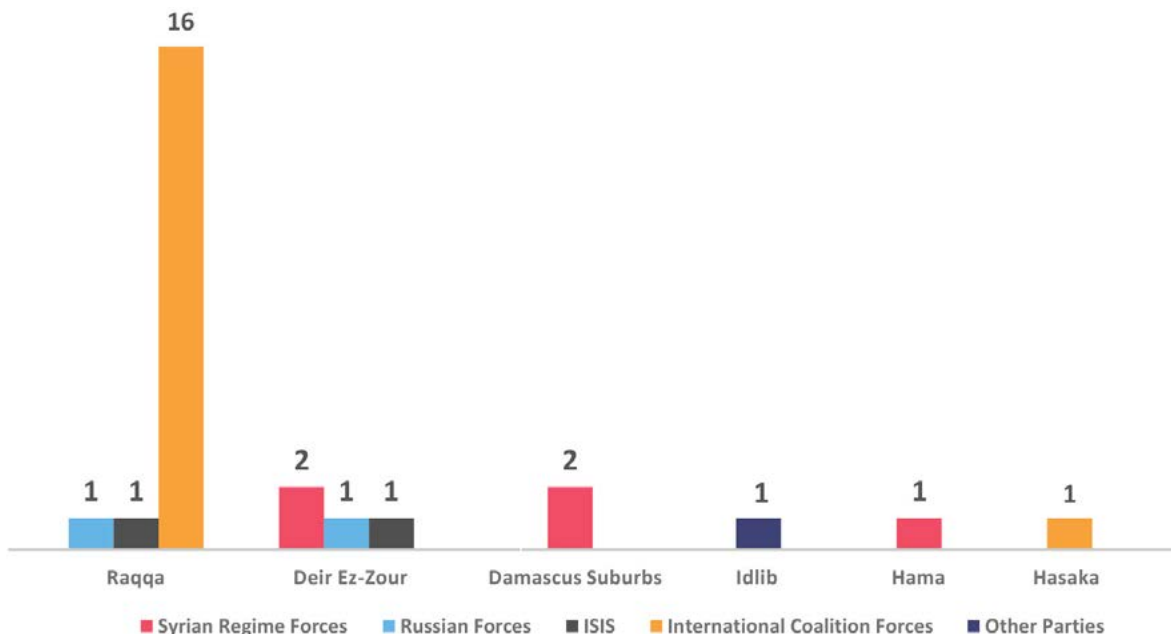
- Two massacres in areas under the control of armed opposition factions.
- Three massacres in areas under the control of ISIS.



The massacres are distributed across governorates as follows:

Raqqa: 18, Deir Ez-Zour: 4, Damascus suburbs: 2, Idlib: 1, Hama: 1, Hasaka: 1

Distribution of Massacres in August 2017 by the Perpetrator Party



According to the victim documentation team at SNHR, 274 individuals were killed in those massacres, including 117 children and 65 women (adult female). This means that 67% of the victims were women and children, which is a considerably high percentage and an indication that civilians were targeted in most of these massacres.

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

Syrian regime forces: 29 individuals, including 11 children and eight women.

Russian forces: 22 civilians, including 10 children and nine women

ISIS: 13 civilians, including one child

International coalition forces: 203 civilians, including 95 children and 48 women

Other parties: seven civilians



II. Details of August's Incidents

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

Damascus suburbs governorate

Tuesday, August 1, 2017, Syrian regime forces [fired a number](#) of “Pheel” rockets at [Ein Tarma town](#), Eastern Ghouta, east of Damascus suburbs governorate, which resulted in the killing of [five individuals](#) at once, including one child and three women. Additionally, about 15 others were wounded. The town was under the control of armed opposition factions at the time of the incident.

Wednesday, August 9, 2017, around 15:05, Syrian regime forces artillery fired [a number of shells](#) that landed in the [public square](#) in [Kafr Batnta town](#), Eastern Ghouta, east of Damascus suburbs governorate, which resulted in the killing of [six individuals](#). [Additionally](#), about 10 others [were wounded](#). The town was under the control of armed opposition factions at the time of the incident.

SNHR contacted the media activist Anas Abu Ayman, a member of Ghouta Media Center, via Facebook a few hours after the massacre took place. Abu Ayman told us:

“On Wednesday, August 9, around 3:15 PM, the Syrian regime artillery that’s located in the Vehicle Administration in al Mleiha town started shelling the public square in the town with a number of consecutive shells, as 5-8 shells landed in the square. I don’t remember the number exactly. One of the shells landed on a fuel selling point, which resulted in fires in the area. The shelling resulted in the killing of five individuals, while 20 others were wounded, to varying degrees, including one child and one woman. After the third shell landed, I headed from my home to the makeshift hospital in Kafr Batna. The hospital was crowded with wounded people. One of them was looking for his brother between the piles of dead bodies and recognized him from his head who remained intact, whereas the rest of his body became merely scattered body parts. He held the head and started weeping. It was a painful image. The most these people can wish for that their beloved ones’ dead bodies stay whole.”

“The area in which the massacre took place doesn’t include any military aspects or centers, and also there is no presence for al Nusra Front in the area due to a campaign carried out by Failaq al Rahman against the group a few days earlier. The nearest military point is “Kafr Batna” battlefield which is about 1.5 kilometers away from the massacres site.”





Some of the dead bodies victims who were killed in the massacres perpetrated by Syrian regime forces in Kafr Batna town, Damascus suburbs – August 9, 2017

Deir Ez-Zour governorate

Wednesday dawn, August 23, 2017, fixed-wing Syrian regime forces warplanes fired a number of missiles in [al Mayadeen city](#), eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate, which resulted in the killing of five civilians from the same family, including two children and two women. Additionally, about 15 others were wounded. The city was under the control of ISIS at the time of the incident.

Wednesday, August 30, 2017, fixed-wing Syrian regime forces warplanes fired a number of missiles in Hawayej Thyab Shamiya, western suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate, which resulted in the killing of five civilians from the same family - three children and two women. The village was under the control of ISIS at the time of the incident.



Hama governorate

Tuesday, August 22, 2017, fixed-wing warplanes of the Syrian-Russian alliance (investigations are still ongoing to accurately determine the perpetrator party) fired a number of missiles at an IDPs gathering in al Rwyada village, which administratively follows Aqerbat county in eastern suburbs of Hama governorate, killing eight individuals (as what we have been able to document as of this writing), who were mostly from the same family, including five children and one woman. The village was under the control of ISIS at the time of the incident.

B. Russian forces

Deir Ez-Zour governorate

Wednesday night, August 2, 2017, fixed-wing warplanes we believe were Russian, fired a number of missiles at a house in [al Tabni town](#), western suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate, which resulted in the killing of 15 civilians, including seven children and six women. Additionally, about 19 others were wounded. The town was under the control of ISIS at the time of the incident.

Raqqa governorate

Saturday, August 19, 2017, fixed-wing warplanes we believe were Russian fired a number of missiles at a car transporting civilians in Abu Shahri village, eastern suburbs of Raqqa governorate, which resulted in the killing of seven civilians from the same family, including three children and three women. The village was under the control of ISIS at the time of the incident.

C. Extremist Islamic groups

- ISIS (self-proclaimed the Islamic State)

Raqqa governorate

Thursday, August 24, 2017, ISIS executed five civilians by shooting them to death in al Ekirshi village, eastern suburbs of Raqqa governorate, on accusations of apostasy and dealing with the Jaish al Asha'yer, a group fighting with the Syrian regime forces. The village was under the control of ISIS at the time of the incident.

Deir Ez-Zour governorate

Wednesday, August 30, 2017, a landmine planted by ISIS blew near "Abu Khashab village" intersection, northern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate, as a number of civilians were trying to flee Deir Ez-Zour governorate towards Hasaka governorate, which resulted in the killing of eight civilians at once, including one child. Additionally, about 20 others were wounded. The village was under the control of the Kurdish-majority Syrian Democratic Forces at the time of the incident.



D. International coalition forces

Raqqa governorate

Tuesday, August 1, 2017, fixed-wing international coalition forces warplanes fired four missiles at [two residential buildings](#) in al Wadi Street in the middle of Raqqa city, which resulted in the killing of 11 civilians (as what we have been able to document as of this writing), including one female child and six women. The area was under the control of ISIS at the time of the incident.

Wednesday, August 2, 2017, fixed-wing international coalition forces warplanes fired a number of missiles at a residential building in al Sfarna area, east of Raqqa city, which resulted in the killing of five civilians from the same family, including two children and one woman. The area was under the control of ISIS at the time of the incident.

Wednesday, August 2, 2017, fixed-wing international coalition forces warplanes fired a number of missiles in the middle of Raqqa city, which resulted in the killing of 11 civilians from the same family, including six children and two women. The area was under the control of ISIS at the time of the incident.

Wednesday, August 2, 2017, fixed-wing international coalition forces warplanes fired a number of missiles at a residential building – known as Anas Abu Hif building- that is adjacent to al Saltna restaurant in al Thakna neighborhood in the middle of Raqqa city, which resulted in the killing of 17 civilians -IDPs from al Bab city in eastern suburbs of Aleppo governorate- including seven children and five women. The neighborhood was under the control of ISIS at the time of the incident.

Tuesday, August 8, 2017, fixed-wing international coalition forces warplanes fired a number of missiles at a residential building in al Thakna neighborhood in the middle of Raqqa city, which resulted in the killing of 22 civilians from the same family -IDPs from Tadmur city in eastern suburbs of Homs governorate- including 15 children and seven women. The neighborhood was under the control of ISIS at the time of the incident.

Friday, August 11, 2017, fixed-wing international coalition forces warplanes fired a number of missiles at a car transporting civilians near al Jazra intersection, west of Raqqa city, as they were trying to flee Raqqa city. The bombing resulted in the killing of seven civilians (five children and their parents). The area was under the control of ISIS at the time of the incident.



Tuesday, August 15, 2017, fixed-wing international coalition forces warplanes fired a number of missiles [al Moutaz Street](#) in the middle of Raqqa city, which resulted in the killing of 12 civilians (as what we have been able to document as of this writing) including three children and four women. The area was under the control of ISIS at the time of the incident.

Wednesday, August 16, 2017, fixed-wing international coalition forces warplanes fired a number of missiles at a residential building near Mu'aweya ben Sufyean in al Tawse'eya neighborhood, northwest of Raqqa city, which resulted in the killing of eight civilians from the same family, including five children and three women. The neighborhood was under the control of ISIS at the time of the incident.

Friday, August 18, 2017, fixed-wing international coalition forces warplanes fired a number of missiles in the middle of Raqqa city, which resulted in the killing of six civilians from the same family, including five children. The area was under the control of ISIS at the time of the incident.

Friday, August 18, 2017, fixed-wing international coalition forces warplanes fired a number of missiles at Nazlat al Shahhada area, south of Raqqa city, which resulted in the killing of seven civilians at once, including three children. The area was under the control of ISIS at the time of the incident.

Saturday, August 19, 2017, fixed-wing international coalition forces warplanes fired a number of missiles at a residential building near al Safa mosque in al Dar'iya neighborhood, northwest of Raqqa city, which resulted in the killing of 21 civilians from the same family, including 12 children and three women. Additionally, about 10 others were wounded. The neighborhood was under the control of ISIS at the time of the incident.

Sunday, August 20, 2017, fixed-wing international coalition forces warplanes fired a number of missiles in al Sakhani area, north of Raqqa city, which resulted in the killing of 27 civilians from the same family, including 14 children and eight women. Additionally, about 15 others were wounded. The area was under the control of ISIS at the time of the incident.

Sunday, August 20, 2017, fixed-wing international coalition forces warplanes fired a number of missiles at a residential building near Adnan al Malki School in al Sakhani area, east of Raqqa city, which resulted in the killing of five civilians from the same family, including one child and three women. The area was under the control of ISIS at the time of the incident.



Monday, August 21, 2017, fixed-wing international coalition forces warplanes fired a number of missiles in the middle of Raqqa city, which resulted in the killing of eight civilians from the same family -IDPs from Tadmur city, eastern suburbs of Homs governorate- including five children and one woman. The area was under the control of ISIS at the time of the incident.

Tuesday, August 22, 2017, fixed-wing international coalition forces warplanes fired a number of missiles at al Hadiqa al Baydaa area, north of Raqqa city, which resulted in the killing of six civilians from the same family, including three children and two women. The area was under the control of ISIS at the time of the incident.

Sunday, August 27, 2017, fixed-wing international coalition forces warplanes fired a number of missiles in the middle of Raqqa city, which resulted in the killing of 10 civilians from the same family -IDPs from Tadmur city in eastern suburbs of Homs governorate- including four children and two women. The area was under the control of ISIS at the time of the incident.

Hasaka governorate

Saturday, August 19, 2017, around 16:00, fixed-wing international coalition forces warplanes fired a number of missiles at a mosque in al Jazza' village, which administratively follows al Shaddadi city, northern suburbs of Hasaka governorate, which resulted in the killing of 19 civilians from the same family, including four children. Additionally, about 15 others were wounded. The village was under the control of ISIS at the time of the incident.

D. Other parties

Idlib governorate

Saturday dawn, August 12, 2017, armed men [attacked the civil defense](#) in al Sharqi neighborhood in [Sarmin city](#), eastern suburbs of [Idlib governorate](#), and opened [fire inside](#) the center, [killing seven civil defense members](#) at once. As of this writing, we [haven't been](#) able to identify the party that was responsible for the assault. The city was under the joint control of armed opposition factions and Fateh al Sham Front at the time of the incident.





Some of the dead bodies of the victims that were killed in a massacre perpetrated by armed unknowns against civil defense members in Sarmin city, Idlib – August 12, 2017

III. Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

Syrian regime forces and Russian forces

1. SNHR can confirm the bombing cases, deliberate or indiscriminate, targeted armless civilians, thus, the Syrian-Russian alliance forces have violated the rules of the international human rights law which guarantee the right to life. Furthermore, these violations were perpetrated during a non-international armed conflict which amounts to war crimes as all elements of a war crime have been fulfilled.
2. SNHR believes that the acts of killing that took place during these massacres can be classified as crimes against humanity.



3. These attacks, especially bombardment, have resulted in collateral damages that involved casualties, injuries, and damages to civil facilities. There are strong indicators that compel to believe that the damage was deeply severe compared to the anticipated military benefit. In all of the cases, we couldn't confirm that there were any military targets before or during these attacks.

4. The magnitude of the massacres, its frequent pattern, the exaggerated use of strength, its military nature, the indiscriminate manner of the bombing, and the coordinated approach of these attacks must be based on high orders, and a state policy.

Other forces

According to this report, ISIS, international coalition forces and other parties (includes groups that we weren't able to identify in addition to Turkish, Lebanese, and Jordanian forces) have committed massacres that constitute war crimes. However, these crimes are not crimes against humanity as with the case of Syrian regime forces and their pro-regime forces that are committing massacres in a widespread and systematic manner.

Recommendations

The United Nations and the Security Council

1. Refer the case in Syria to the International Criminal Court and stop the disrupting of the decisions that must be adopted by the Security Council against the Syrian government. This disruption is a wrong message to all dictatorships around the world and supports the culture of crime.
2. Impose urgent punishments on those who are involved in widespread violations of human rights in Syria.
3. Bind the Syrian government to allow all relief and human rights organizations to enter Syria as well as the International Intendent Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic and journalists and let them work without any obstructions.
4. Insure that all weapon imports to the Syrian government, who is using weapons in widespread attacks against civilians, are halted.
5. the Security Council must shoulder its responsibility in preserving security and civil peace in Syria considering that the violations of the Syrian government entail a gross threat to the international peace and security.
6. List the militias that are fighting with the Syrian government and have committed widespread massacres, like Iranian militias, the Lebanese group Hezbollah, other Shiite brigades, National defense Army and "Shabiha" militias, on the international list of terrorist organizations.



7. Implement the “Responsibility to Protect” norm, which was established by the United Nations General Assembly in 2005, in Syria as it is direly needed there.

8. With the crimes against humanity committed by the Syrian government, the international community should stop dealing with this government as an “official side” concerning the relief issues, and stop supplying the Syrian government with most of the financial and humanitarian aids that, in most cases, are not being delivered to those who are in need and go instead to the people and parties that support the Syrian government.

The sponsoring Russian side

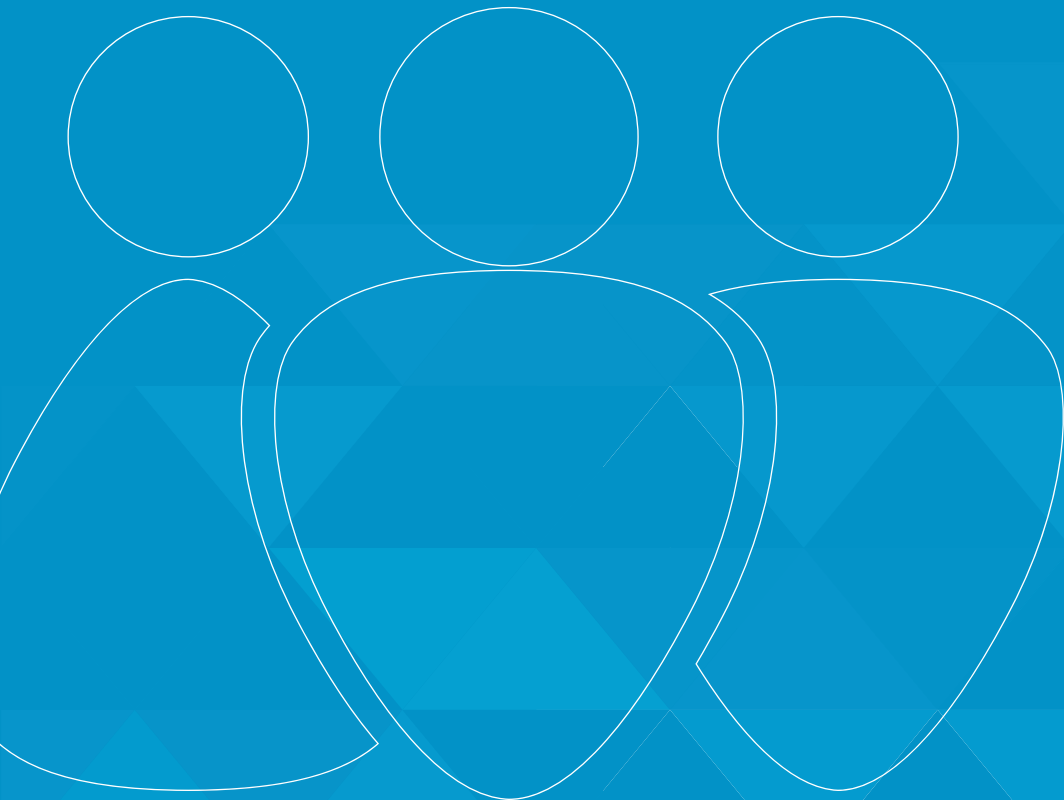
1. The Syrian regime has to be stopped from dooming the de-escalation agreements. Otherwise, it will only be seen as an exchange of roles between the Russian regime, on one side, and the Syrian/Iranian alliance alliance on the other side.

2. Start making progress in the detainees issue by revealing the fates of 76,000 forcibly-disappeared persons at the hands of the Syrian regime.

Acknowledgment and Condolences

Our thanks and appreciations go to the victims’ families, eyewitnesses, and local activists whose accounts contributed majorly to this report. Our most profound consolations go out to the victims’ families and friends.





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