

# Two Medical Personnel Killed and Seven Attacks on Vital Medical Facilities in Syria in August 2018

52 Medical Personnel Killed  
in 2018

# SNHR

SYRIAN NETWORK FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

الشبكة السورية لحقوق الإنسان

Monday, September 3, 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 Democracy started in March 2011, medical facilities and their personnel have seen blatant violations of the international humanitarian law, which established special protection for medical facilities and their personnel, in addition to the general protection for civilians and civilian facilities.

Nonetheless, hospitals, dispensaries, clinics, and pharmacies have been bombed, and hundreds of medical personnel have been arrested while some of them have been tortured to death. Additionally, medical teams and their vehicles have become a target as saving the wounded is branded now as a dangerous profession that might lead to death.

The Syrian regime has been, and still is, the main and primary perpetrator of crimes against medical personnel and their facilities, as its forces have raided hospitals and abducted some of the wounded, and targeted hospitals and medical points using shells, missiles, and barrel bombs, while civil defense facilities have been bombed repeatedly and civil defense personnel have suffered many casualties. Even international humanitarian insignia weren't safe from the attacks that targeted their facilities and killed their personnel despite the fact they are neutral, impartial entities.

We also recorded the use of the double-strike method<sup>1</sup> by Syrian-Russian alliance forces -in many attacks- and the victims in most cases are paramedics and civil defense members. On the other hand, we have documented similar violations by the rest of the parties to the conflict, but to less extents and at smaller rates. ISIS members raided makeshift hospitals and dispensaries and abducted some of the wounded, doctors, and paramedics. Also, ISIS

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<sup>1</sup> A policy adopted by the Syrian and Russian regimes where they bomb the same site again a few minutes after an initial attack in order to inflict as much losses as possible in the ranks of civil defense personnel, medical teams, and doctors.



barred some doctors from practicing as per their discriminative laws while the Coalition forces (international coalition and SDF) have targeted a number of hospitals and medical points.

Violations against medical and civil defense personnel does not only impact them, but also extends to the lives of the people who are in need of medical care services, treatment, and rescue. Consequently, these violations result in the death of many of the wounded and those who were trapped in rubble.

**Fadel Abdul Ghany, chairman of SNHR, says:**

“Attacks on medical and civil defense centers as well as medical and civil defense personnel are considered a blatant violation of the international humanitarian law and constitute war crimes given the indiscriminate, and in many cases, deliberate, targeting of protected objects. All of this have only deepened the suffering of the wounded and injured and is one of the main reasons behind the displacement of the Syrian people as it sends a very clear message: there is no safe area, or a red line, including hospitals, you either flee or perish.”

**Methodology**

This report outlines the death toll among medical personnel, civil defense personnel, and Red Crescent personnel who were killed by the parties to the conflict in August, and the attacks on their vital facilities, with highlighting the most notable of these incidents.

According to SNHR’s methodology, the term “medical personnel” includes all who are active in medical fields, including doctors, paramedics, pharmacists, medical laboratory scientists, and managing officials, in addition to workers who operate and transport medical equipment. Secondly, the term “vital medical facilities” refers to hospitals, medical points, dispensaries, makeshift hospitals, and ambulances.

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 show wide destruction in vital medical facilities, civil defense facilities, and Red Crescent 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 our methodology for [documenting victims](#) and for [classifying vital civilian facilities](#).



This report documents a number of bombings, where we haven't been able to accurately identify the group responsible for them in light of the difficulties in identifying the perpetrator in such bombings.

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. August Outline

The scale of military operations has diminished notably in the month of August across Syria, which reflected on the numbers of victims in general. On the other hand, August was the third month in a row in which new names of forcibly-disappeared persons at the hands of Syrian regime forces came into light as those names were registered as dead in civil records. We have released a [report](#) recently on this matter. According to our records, two cases, of those that we have documented in August, are for medical personnel.

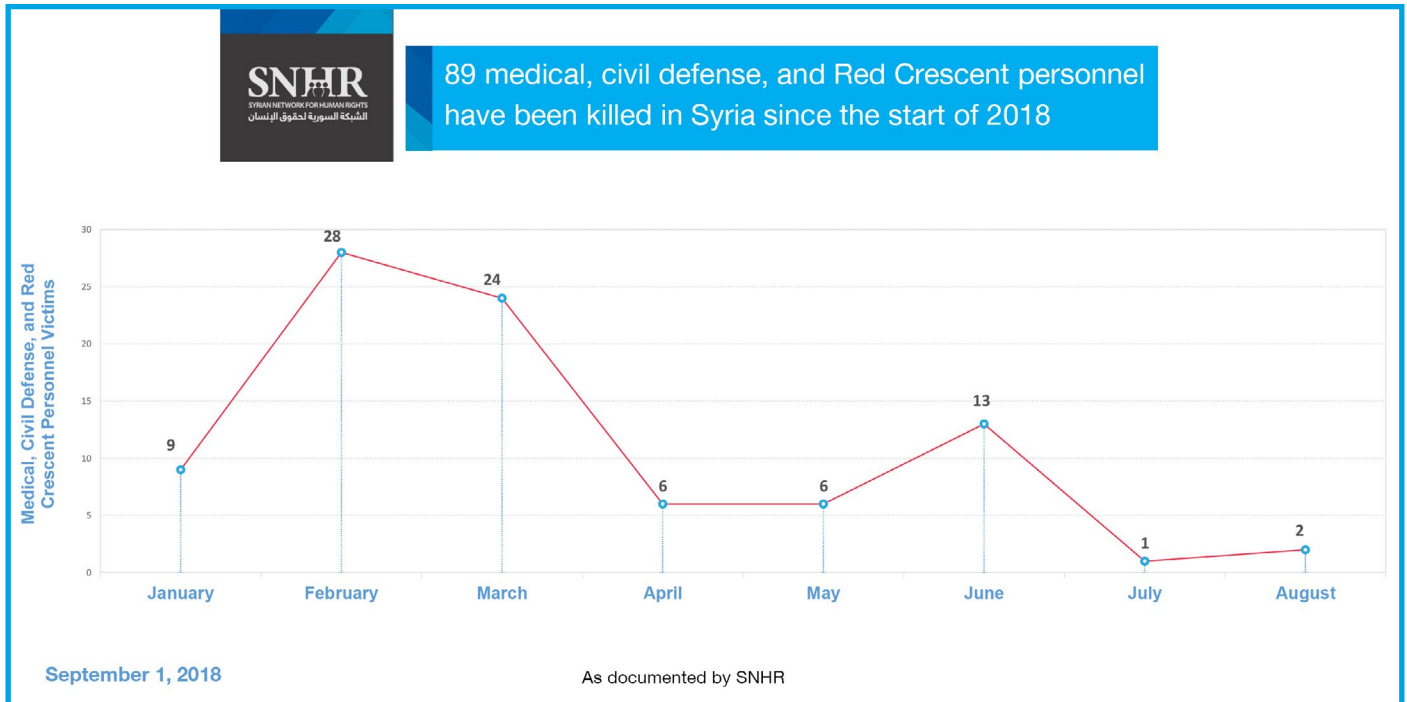
In addition, August saw a significant rise in the number of abductions and arrests that targeted medical personnel in north Syria, which were by Hay'at Tahrir al Sham and other parties we couldn't identify, as we documented four cases. A number of medical facilities have announced that they will be operations partially until they can ensure the safety of their staff as a result of those developments.



### III. Executive Summary

#### A. Medical, civil defense, and Red Crescent victims since the start of 2018

SNHR has documented the killing of 89 medical, civil defense, and Red Crescent personnel at the hands of the parties to the conflict in Syria between the start of 2018 and September of the same year, including 54 killed at the hands of Syrian regime forces. Death toll is distributed by month as follows:



#### B. Most notable violations in August

SNHR has documented the following main violations by the parties to the conflict against medical and civil defense personnel and their respective facilities in August 2018.

- Acts of killing

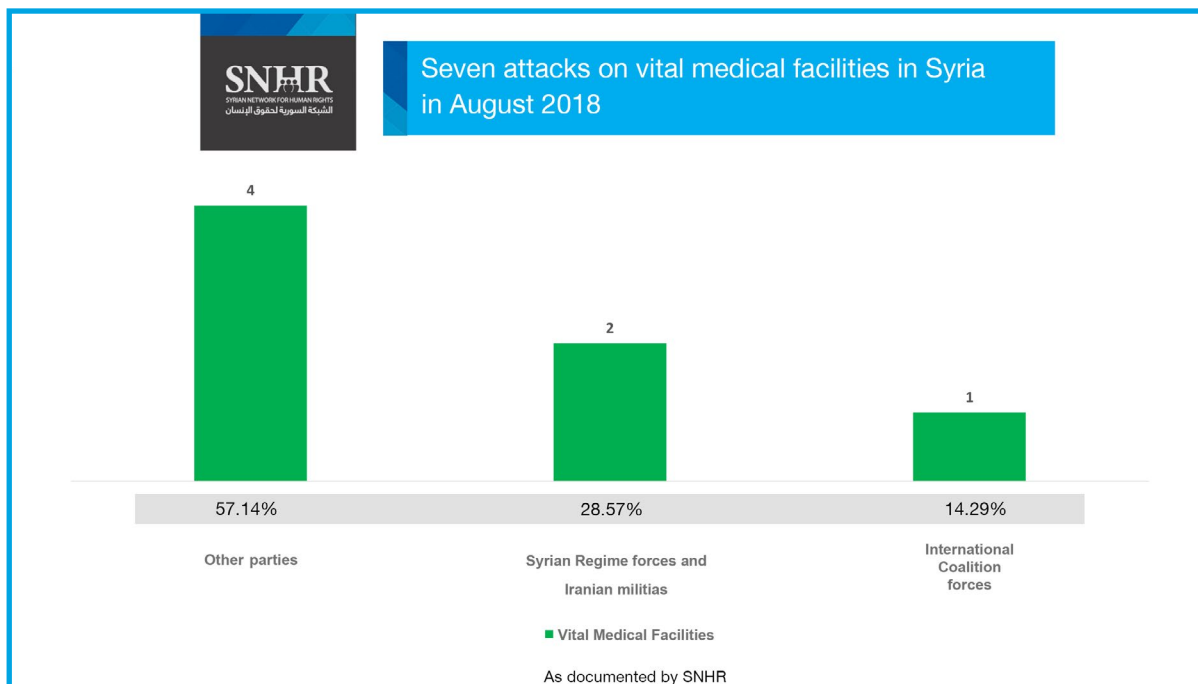
We have documented the killing of 2 medical personnel at the hands of Syrian regime forces, as follows:

- 1 doctor
- 1 nurse

- Attacks on vital medical facilities

SNHR has documented seven attacks on vital medical facilities. Attacks are distributed by the perpetrator party as follows:





- Syrian regime forces (army, security, local militias, and Shiite foreign militias): 2 attacks on medical facilities.
- International coalition forces: 1 attack on a medical facility
- Other parties: 4 attacks, as follows:
  - 3 medical facilities
  - 1 ambulance

## IV. Most Notable incidents in August

### A. Acts of killing

#### - Syrian regime forces

[Abdul Ghafour Ibrahim Khlassi](#), an anesthetist and co-founder of al Zarzour Hospital in Eastern Aleppo's neighborhoods, from Kafr Noran village, western suburbs of Aleppo governorate. He was arrested by Syrian regime forces on Wednesday, November 28, 2012, on Damascus International Highway in eastern Damascus suburbs governorate. On Tuesday, August 7, 2018, we received information that he had died due to torture inside a detention center.

### B. Attacks on vital medical facilities, civil defense facilities, and Red Crescent facilities

#### - Syrian regime forces

##### Vital medical facilities

- Medical facilities (hospitals – dispensaries – medical points – makeshift hospitals)  
 Friday night, August 10, 2018, fixed-wing Syrian regime forces warplanes carried out a machine gun airstrike in which small-sized missiles were used in front of Ma'aret al Nu'man Central Hospital, known as al Watani Hospital (The National Hospital), located on the public road in northeastern [Ma'aret al Nu'man](#) city, southern suburbs of Idlib governorate. A fire broke out in the hospital's garden while no damages were recorded in the hospital building. The city was under the control of armed opposition factions at the time of the incident.



## **- International coalition forces**

### Vital medical facilities

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

Wednesday, August 8, 2018, fixed-wing international coalition forces warplanes fired a number of missiles near al Bwebdran Medical Dispensary in al Susa town, which is administratively a part of al Boukamal city, eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate. The dispensary building was slightly damaged. The town was under the control of ISIS at the time of the incident.

## **- Other parties**

### Vital medical points

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

Saturday, August 14, 2018, an IED, planted inside a car near Sarmin Makeshift Hospital in [Sarmin](#) city, northern suburbs of Idlib governorate, exploded at a Hay'at Tahrir al Sham checkpoint that is about 15m away from the hospital. An ambulance belonging to the hospital was slightly damaged, while the hospital building recorded no damages. As of this writing, we have yet to identify the group behind the bombing in light of considerable difficulties to 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**

- The incidents mentioned in this report are considered, beyond any doubt, violations of Security Council Resolutions 2139 and 2254 which both state that indiscriminate attacks must be ceased. Also, these incidents are violations of Article 7 and 8 of Rome Statute through the act of willful killing which constitutes war crimes.
- The attacks mentioned in this report constitute violations of Security Council resolution 2286 which states that attacks and threats against the wounded and sick, medical personnel and humanitarian personnel exclusively engaged in medical duties, their means of transport and equipment should be ceased, as well as hospitals and other medical facilities.
- We can confirm that most of the incidents included in this report have targeted armless civilians. Therefore, Syrian regime 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. Also, Russian forces, ISIS, armed opposition factions, Self-Management forces, international coalition forces, and other parties have committed acts that amount to war crimes through the crime of extrajudicial killing or targeting vital civilian facilities.



- The attacks mentioned in this report are considered a violation of the customary international humanitarian law as the shells were fired at populated areas rather than a specific military object.
- Aerial bombardment has caused collateral damages that involved loss of lives, injuries, and significant damages to civil facilities. There are strong indicators suggesting that the damage was too excessive compared to the anticipated military benefit.

## **Recommendations**

### **Security Council**

- The Security Council has to take additional steps after resolutions 2139 and 2254 have been adopted and no pledges to stop 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 must 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 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 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.

## **Syrian regime**

- Stop treating the Syrian state as a private family property.
- Cease the terrorization of the Syrian people through killing the teams that provide medical, aid, and rescue services.
- Cease the bombing on hospitals and protected objects, as well as civilian areas, and respect the customary humanitarian law.
- Shoulder all the legal and material repercussions, and compensate victims and their families from the Syrian state’s resources.



## **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 humanitarian 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. Denying so won't do any good for these governments, as documented human rights reports and residents' accounts explicitly expose this fact. 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 vital medical facilities and civil defense facilities and their respective personnel in all areas, and launch investigations on the incidents included in this report.

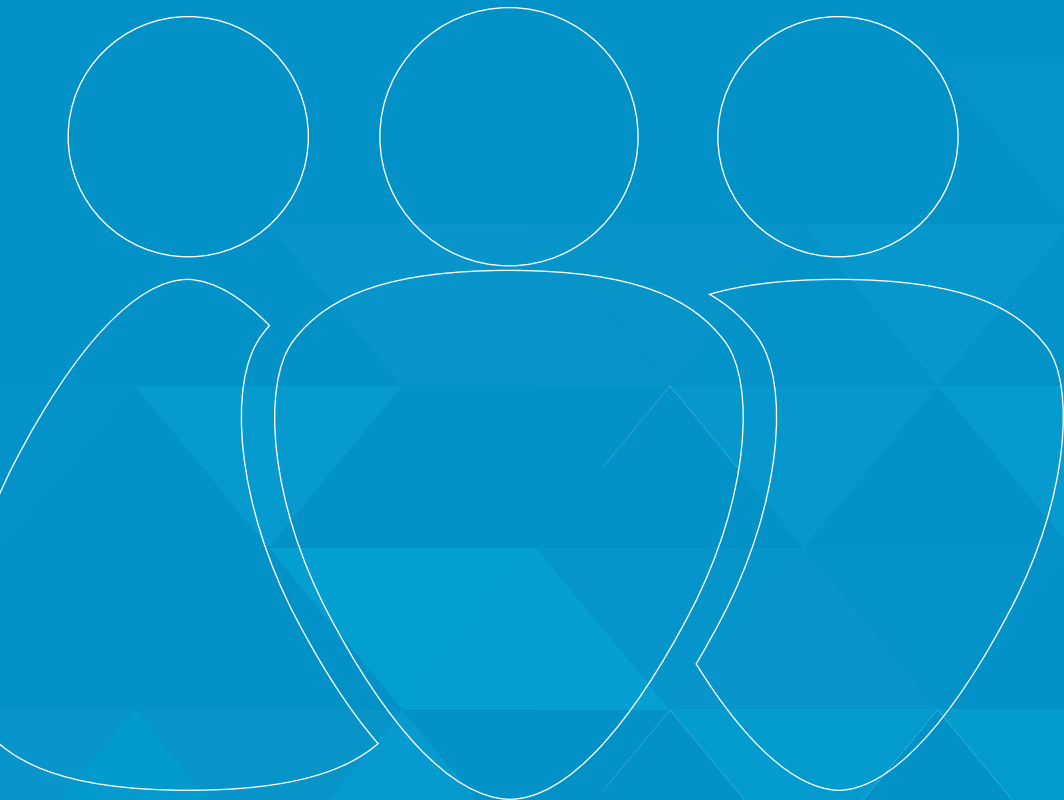
## **Medical organizations around the world**

There is a severe shortage in medical manpower in Syria in light of the ceaseless killing. Firstly, Syrian doctors must come back to Syria to compensate for the severe shortage in medical personnel. Also, international organizations can send volunteers to safe areas where wounded are sent for treatment. We have recorded many cases where wounded died due to lack of medical resources.

## **Acknowledgment and Condolences**

Our most sincere thanks and condolences to the residents and local activists who effectively contributed to this report.





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