

Brief Report

Nearly 370,000 IDPs in Deir Ez-Zour and Raqqa in the wake of the Syrian-Russian Alliance Attacks

Shelters must be Secured for the IDPs

SNHR

SYRIAN NETWORK FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

الشبكة السورية لحقوق الإنسان

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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

It is quite clear that Russian forces are not bothered with, or have taken into consideration, the consequences of their decisions to engage in multiple battles at the same time in populated ISIS-held areas, as the attacking forces' only priority was to carry out their offensive and target the terrorist group ISIS regardless of the exploding dynamics that will undoubtedly result from any battle. The main point of focus is displacement and the hundreds of thousands of residents who fled in fear of bombardment, or the direct killings carried out by Syrian regime land forces and the Shiite pro-regime militias, including the Lebanese group Hezbollah, as we received many reports of this nature from villages and towns they were able to seize. These forces never made any subsequent efforts to remedy the catastrophic consequences that resulted from displacing those residents, and, rather, left them to their uncertain fate to deal with their situation on their own in both Raqqa and Deir Ez-Zour governorate, which mostly consists of desert areas. In this report, SNHR monitors some of the horrifying fallouts of launching battles without taking into consideration the human repercussions. Seeing that it would be pointless to rationalize with ISIS, an enemy of humanity, we hold the member states of the United Nations, most significantly the Syrian and Russian regimes, fully responsible for the resultant situation for tens of thousands of civilians and the incidents of killing that resulted from the indiscriminate and disproportionate bombardment. We have shed light on the responsibility of international coalition forces and the Kurdish-majority Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) in these areas in a report entitled: "[The Yellow Assault](#)"



We noted, in a number of past report, that it is interesting to us, as monitors of airstrikes and violations, that we have never recorded a significant Russian military escalation towards Raqqa and Deir Ez-Zour governorates ever since the Russian military intervention started in September 2015, even though both governorates are major ISIS strongholds, as attacks were mostly concentrated in areas under the control of armed opposition factions. Even the limited number of attacks that Russian forces carried out in ISIS-held areas have targeted, in most of them, civilian areas, as we recorded tens of massacres.

Apparently, following the four de-escalation zones agreement's commencement and the other local agreements that were struck in Eastern Ghouta and South Syria, the Syrian-Russian alliance have instructed its forces to carry out heavy airstrikes in both eastern suburbs of Raqqa and eastern and western suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour, as these forces managed to end the siege on al Joura and al Qosour neighborhoods, in western Deir Ez-Zour city, that had been under a siege imposed by ISIS since March 2015. Subsequently, these forces tried to move to the east bank of Euphrates River and reach the oil and gas fields, where Russian forces constructed a bridge to move military equipment to the east bank of Euphrates River.

This report documents the violations that have been committed by the Syrian-Russian alliance since the start of its offensive in eastern suburbs of Raqqa (mid-July 2017) and the eastern and western suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour (mid-August 2017).

II. Details

- Raqqa governorate

Killing, bombing, and displacing nearly 120,000 people in eastern suburbs of Raqqa

In mid-July 2017, Syrian-Russian alliance forces started escalating their military operations in non-stop, heavy airstrikes in eastern suburbs of Raqqa (Shamiya villages)¹, particularly the cities of al Sabkha and Ma'adan, in conjunction with a land advancement for local militias that came to form the pro-Syrian regime army "Jaish al Ashayer" in order to eliminate ISIS that has been in control since the start of 2014. These forces carried out hundreds of attacks that targeted, in most of them, residential neighborhoods and vital civilian facilities. We have recoded the killing of 48 civilians, including 19 children and eight women, and no less than five massacres, in addition to 11 incidents of attack on vital civilian facilities.

¹ Villages on the right bank of Euphrates River



These attacks have led to the displacement of nearly 120,000 people from Ma'adan and al Sabkha cities in eastern suburbs of Raqqa that manifested on parts. The largest portion displaced to the opposing villages on the banks of Euphrates River (Jazira villages)², while tens of thousands displaced to al Karama Camps (eastern suburbs of Raqqa), Ein Eissa camp (northern suburbs of Raqqa), and al Mabrouka camp (western suburbs of Hasaka) which are camps that were prepared by SDF who also directly oversee these camps, in addition to others who set up primitive tents on the banks of Euphrates River.

IDPs in al Karama, Ein Eissa, and al Mabrouka camps suffer from poor living conditions in light of the rising prices of basic food supplies at the camp, and the poor medical care. In addition, the administration of these camps prohibits IDPs from leaving unless they have a sponsor of Kurdish descent, or after blackmailing them into paying sums of money that are approximately 150,000-200,000 Syrian Pounds.

- Deir Ez-Zour governorate

Killing, bombing, and displacing nearly 250,000 people in western and eastern suburbs (Shamiya villages)³

In Mid-August 2017, Syrian-Russian alliance forces started carrying out concentrated attacks on western suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour (Shamiya villages), particularly the villages of Ayyash, al Shmitiya, al Kharita, and Hawayej Thyab Shamiya, as the Syrian regime and its pro-regime militias sought to end the siege on al Joura and al Qosour neighborhoods in western Deir Ez-Zour city. These forces managed to progress on the axis of Damascus-Deir Ez-Zour road and the axis of Jabal al Bishri-(Brigade) 137, and ended the siege on September 6, 2017.

Following the end of siege on Deir Ez-Zour neighborhoods, the pace of the attacks by Syrian-Russian alliance forces and their airstrikes have risen in a Grozny-esque manner to result in total destruction through non-stop, heavy bombardment that expanded to include ISIS-held areas in eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour - particularly the cities of al Mayadeen, al Bokamal, al Qouriya, al Ashara and al Boulayl village. SNHR monitored the use of missiles and barrel bombs, as well as cluster munitions. This heavy bombardment was the main reason behind the displacement in deserts and in tents that lack the most basic living needs.

² Villages on the left bank of Euphrates River

³ Located on the right bank of Euphrates River



Apparently, the objective sought by Syrian-Russian alliance forces in this indiscriminate offensive was to take over Cunico gas field near Khasham town in eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour. However, the Kurdish-majority SDF forces, supported by international coalition forces, came first and managed to take over the field on September 22, 2017. The Syrian-Russian alliance attacks are still being carried out especially near al Mayadeen city in order to take over al Omar field that is located in north of the city.

The huge amount of human and material losses reflects that a considerable number of violations of customary international law rules have been perpetrated, as we recorded the killing of 362 civilians, including 74 children and 64 women, at the hands of Syrian-Russian alliance forces in western and eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour since mid-August 2017 (as of this writing) in addition to 36 massacres and no less than 27 incidents of attack on vital civilian facilities. This bombardment cut-off water and communication services. Furthermore, Syrian regime forces arrested no less than 217 individuals, including 19 children and 22 women, in Marat, Mathloun, al Salhiya, al Kharita, and al Shmitiya villages. All of this led to the displacement of no less than 250,00 people – most of them displaced to areas in the suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour (Jazira villages)⁴. These areas are the ground for ongoing clashes between SDF and ISIS.

Some IDPs told us that they had to live in the open in completely unequipped areas. Some of them had to set up primitive tents on the banks of Euphrates River, but with no food aids, safe-to-drink water, or sanitation supplies, in addition to almost-complete lack of health care in light of a severe shortage of medical personnel, hospitals, and makeshift clinics. All of this put the lives of thousands of people at significant risk.

We recorded no less than 10 attacks by fixed-wing warplanes we believe are Russian on crossings, which are a gathering of boats used by civilians to cross Euphrates River in order to flee to the other bank.

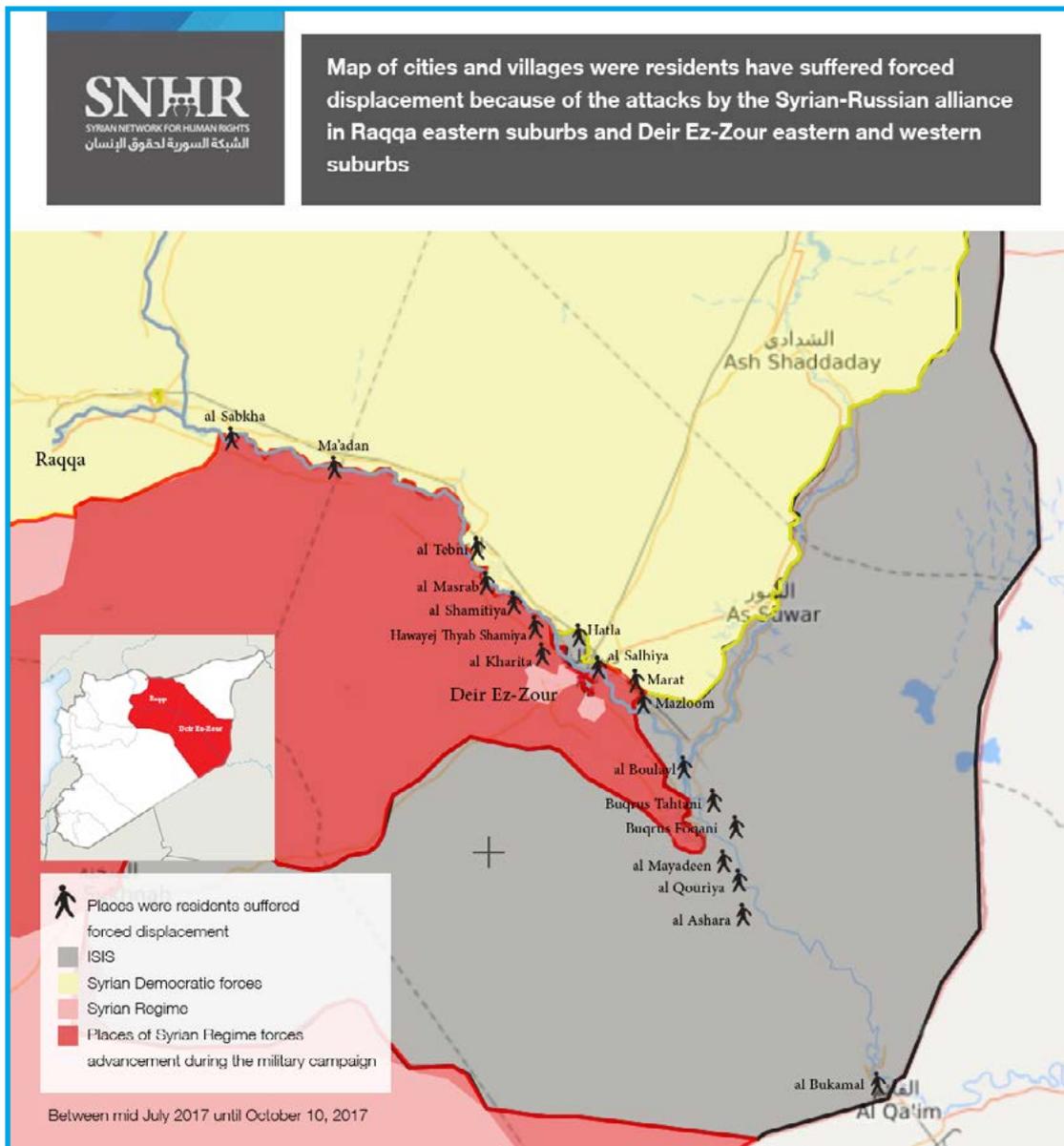
On the 7th and 11th of last September, we recorded that fixed-wing warplanes we believe are Russian targeted al Kharitiya-Hawayej Thyab Shamiya crossing on Euphrates River, and on 9th and 10th of the same month, the same warplanes targeted a river crossing that connects al Boulayl and al Sabha villages.

¹ Villages on the right bank of Euphrates River



IDPs prohibited from returning and their possessions seized

Even though Syrian regime forces managed to take over the entirety of the western suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate by September 23, 2017, these forces prohibited residents from returning to their villages. A number of residents told SNHR about wide lootings by Syrian regime forces and their militias who seized possessions and livestock, where these properties are collected and transferred, before they are sold in markets in al Joura and al Qosour neighborhoods, which is similar to what these forces had blatantly done -as we pointed out in past reports- in Homs and Damascus suburbs governorates, as well as Banyas area.



III. Conclusions and Recommendations

Syrian-Russian alliance forces have perpetrated serious violations of the humanitarian international law through indiscriminate bombardments that resulted in the killing of civilians, which constitutes war crimes.

Adding to the crime of extrajudicial killing, the crime of forced-displacement that put nearly 370,000 out of their homes. Most of those people suffer from extremely poor living conditions. Additionally, Syrian regime forces haven't secured shelters or alternative places of residence for IDPs, nor they facilitated the displacement movement or secured safe corridors.

Recommendations

Syrian-Russian alliance forces have to immediately stop carrying out indiscriminate attacks, and use ISIS as a pretext to bomb residential neighborhoods and vital civilian facilities.

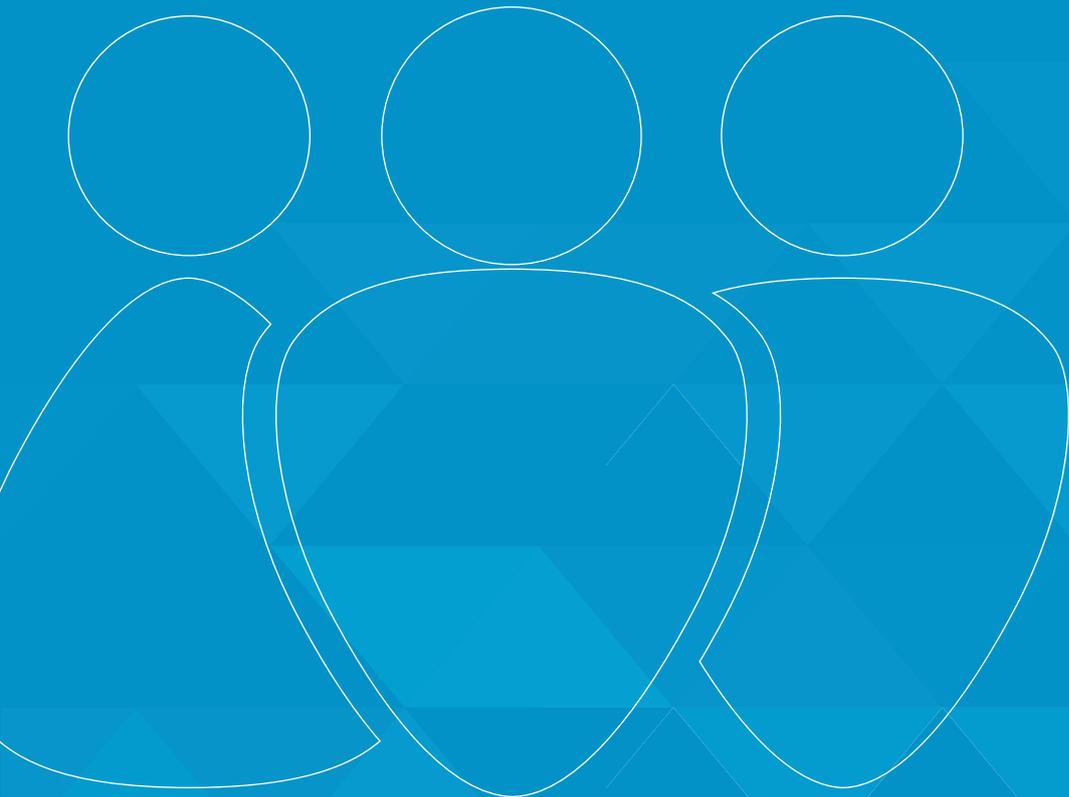
SDF has to improve the living conditions in the camps they are overseeing. Also, SDF should allow IDPs to move freely, and secure food and medical aids. The SDF-supporting states should apply pressure on the group in order to cease all violations of human rights.

International relief organizations should find ways to deliver water, food, and shelter to thousands of displaced people on the banks of Euphrates River and desert areas.

Acknowledgment and Condolences

Our most sincere thanks and gratitude to all the residents and activists who effectively contributed to this report.





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