

# Targeting Christian Places of Worship in Syria

63% have been targeted by government's forces



## Introduction:

Since the early days of the uprising in Syria in March 2011, Assad Government committed all of its resources to portray it as a sectarian conflict by retaliating with extreme military force, and by creating and deepening sectarian divisions within the diverse Syrian society. Eventually, what started as a peaceful uprising transformed into a full-blown armed conflict. Assad Government has always promoted itself as “the protector of minorities” especially Christians. However, and for over 40 years, Assad Government used sectarianism systematically to tighten its grip on the Syrian society. As a result of the Government’s ruthless and sectarian nature, ethnic and sectarian divisions have become deeper and more established which threaten Syria’s national and territorial integrity.

This report, alongside other previous reports issued by the Syrian Network for Human Rights, shows that Assad Government protects itself only and is willing to target anybody who demands democracy and human rights regardless of their religious or ethnic affiliations.

SNHR emphasises the importance of building a democratic and inclusive state with the rule of law. A state that would ensure that all of its citizens would enjoy the rights enshrined in the International Humanitarian Law and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. SNHR vision for Syria is of a country where all citizens work together towards a prosperous, tolerant and vibrant society.

Dr. Wael Aleji, the Spokesperson for SNHR, says:

“Christians and their places of worship have suffered as much as the rest of the Syrian people. Scud missiles, chemical weapons or barrel bombs do not differentiate between Christians and non-Christians. And, after the rise and expansion of terrorist groups, Christians suffered different types of discrimination and violence although they have been living in harmony and tolerance with Muslims for hundreds of years. Christians have become trapped trapped and squeezed between the fire of Assad Government and the hell of the extremist groups”.



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## Methodology:

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This updated report comes in the context of our ongoing efforts to document violations of places of worship, hospitals and schools since 2011. We have issued several reports in the past and we continue to issue a monthly report documenting incidents of targeting infra-structure and public places.

It took us nearly 5 months to update this report. We have encountered many challenges despite benefiting from previous SNHR reports: in light of the continuous daily killing, documenting the destruction of infra-structure becomes less important to the local community especially when no lives are lost. It was difficult sometimes to identify the responsible party especially when the church was close to frontlines.

It is worth mentioning that we might have not been able to document all incidents, due to internet and power interruption and the Government's restrictive measures to block the outflow of information. Government's policies carry a huge risk to the safety of our activists.

We have verified all the video clips included in this report, as well as the photos provided by local people or obtained from social media. We have kept copies of all the material for our archive.

We used information provided by our activists and local people in the opposition-controlled areas; whereas in the Government-controlled areas we depended to a large extent on information obtained from sources loyal to the Government after verifying and cross-checking it with other sources. Most of the targeted churches were located in opposition-controlled areas.

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# Executive Summary:

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## **This report document:**

### **Churches damaged by shelling:**

SNHR documented 63 churches targeted since the beginning of the uprising in March 2011

The breakdown of this account is as follow:

- Government forces: 40
- Extremists groups: 7
- ISIS: 6
- Al-Nusra Front: 1
- Armed opposition factions: 14
- Unidentified groups: 2

### **Churches used as military bases:**

SNHR documented least 11 churches turned into military or administrative bases

- Government forces: 6
- Extremist groups: 3
- ISIS: 2
- Al-Nusra Front: 1
- Armed opposition factions: 2

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## Details:

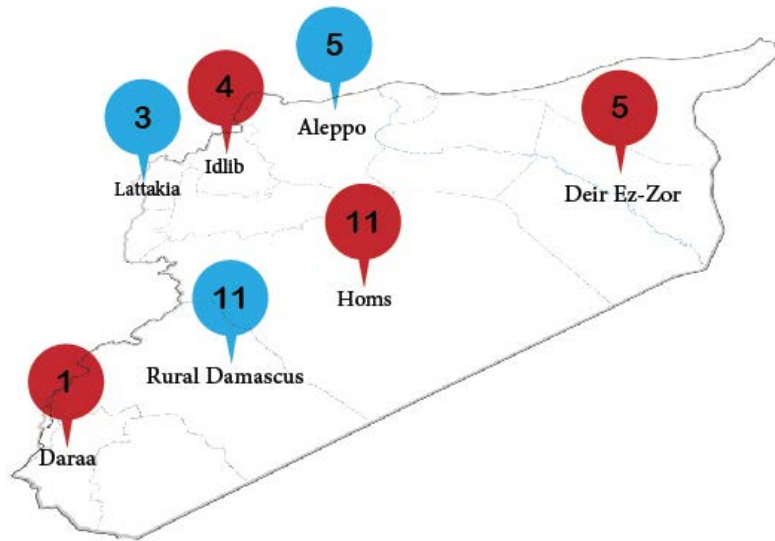
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### **Violations by the Government forces (army, security, local and foreign militias):**

#### **Churches damaged or destroyed by direct shelling:**

SNHR documented 40 churches suffered partial or severe damage after being targeted by the Government; this is double the number of churches documented in our [previous report](#) issued on 24/12/2012 in which we documented the targeting of 19 churches. 12 churches have been shelled by the Government several times, this indicates deliberate targeting: Lady Mary of Peace and Lady of the Holy Belt, both in Homs, have been targeted 6 and 4 times respectively.

The geographical distribution of these 40 churches is as follow:



### Homs Province:

11 churches have been attacked by Government forces:

#### **1. Syriac Orthodox church of Lady of the Holy Belt:**

Located in Hamidiyeh neighborhood and is considered the archdiocese of Homs and Hama for Syriac Orthodox.

The church was shelled 4 times:

- in March 2012, government forces shelled the church damaging its fence

- in June 2012, government forces shelled the church twice destroying [a large part](#) of the church building

- in September 2012, a government helicopter dropped a barrel bomb causing [severe destruction](#) in the church building.

#### **2. Mar Elias Monastery:**

located near Rablah, a village to the south of Al-Qusayer on Homs-Baalbek road that leads to Jusiya on the borders with Lebanon. This monastery was a refuge for hundreds of civilians who fled Baba Amr (Homs) after it was attacked and destroyed by the Government in February 2012. The monastery sustained two attacks by heavy artillery and mortar shells:

- In March 2012, government forces shelled Mar Elias Monastery causing [minor damage in the building](#).

- In September 2012, government forces re-targeted the monastery by mortar shells; the front of the





building was [destroyed partially](#).

### 3. Mar Elias Church:

located in Al-Qusayer and was targeted by government forces 3 times:

-in July 2012, government forces fired mortar shells on the church damaging its building .

-in October 2012, government forces fired mortar shells on the church [damaging the roof](#) of the church and its furniture.

-in November 2013, government forces re-targeted Mar Elias Church by mortar shells damaging the church building; [the statue of Virgin Mary](#) was also destroyed.



### 4. Lady of Peace Church:

this is a Roman Catholic church located in Bustan Al-Diwan , it was attacked 6 times by the Government's mortars and missiles. It was also reported that the Government implanted a landmine inside the church which exploded and killed Mr. Fahd Issa Nemeh and caused damage to the building.

-in July 2012, government forces fired a missile on the church causing destruction to the building.

-in August 2012, government forces fired mortar shells on the church, damaging the building and furniture severely.

-in September 2012, government forces re-targeted [Lady of Peace church](#) twice, damaging the [building severely](#).

-in April 2014, government forces attacked the church with several missiles which caused [severe damage to the building](#).

-On 10/05/ 2014, a landmine exploded inside the church killing Mr. Fahed Issa Nemeh.



Many activists and local people in the ancient part of Homs informed SNHR that the government implanted many landmines inside churches, mosques, homes and public spaces.

## 5. The Evangelical Cathedral:

located in Bustan Al-Diwan neighborhood, government forces shelled this church once in April 2012 [destroying its furniture and partially damaging its roof](#).

## 6. St. George's Church:

located in Hamidiyeh, it was targeted by the government in June 2012 with a mortar shell which caused [severe damage to the building](#).

## 7. The Roman Orthodox cathedral of Al-Arba'een:

located in the main street in Bustan Al-Diwan neighborhood, it was attacked twice by government forces:

-in May 2012, government forces shelled the church causing severe [damages to the building](#)

-in March 2013, government forces re-targeted the church by launching a missile attack which damaged [the church severely](#).

## 8. Syriac Catholic Cathedral:

located in Al-Hamidiyeh neighborhood, it was shelled by government forces twice in September 2012, causing [severe damages to the building](#) and a [fire in one of the rooms](#).

## 9. Mar Elian "Church of Martyr Elian Al-Homsi":

located in Slaibet Al-Assyati, it contains the remains of Saint Elian Al-Homsi, shelled by government forces once on Sunday 09/11/ 2011 damaging the church building partially.



Mar Elian "Church

## 10. Al-Dwair Church:

located in Dwair village in the North West of Homs, shelled by government forces on Thursday 30/05/ 2013. The Syrian government accused the armed opposition for destroying the church and perpetrating a massacre in the village, but an investigation conducted by SNHR team revealed that there was no massacre and it was indeed the Government forces who destroyed the church.

Here are [links](#) to our investigation into what happened in Al-Dwair village.



Al-Dwair Church

Saraya Church at Al-Hosn village (Crak de Chevalier): this church was shelled by government forces during the second half of 2012 which caused [partial damage to the church building](#).

## **Damascus suburbs:**

11 churches have been targeted by government forces in Damascus suburbs:

### **1. Saint Taqla Church:**

located in Daryya, shelled by government forces 4 times.

-in November 2012, government forces' artillery shelled the church causing considerable damage to its building



-in December 2013, a government helicopter dropped a barrel bomb on the church garden damaging it and the church building.

-in January 2014, government helicopters dropped several barrel bombs on the church destroying the study hall attached to the church .

-in May 2014, government helicopters dropped two barrel bombs on the surroundings of the church causing severe damage.



### **2. Saint Paul's Church:**

located in Darayya: Government helicopters targeted the church in February 2014 dropping several barrel bombs on the church yard causing [considerable damage to the building](#).

### **3. Virgin Mary Church:**

located in Harasta, shelled by government forces 3 times:

-in October 2012, government forces targeted the church with two mortar shells causing damage and injuring many civilians.

-in October 2012, government forces targeted the church building with several artillery shells.

-in February 2013, government soldiers raided the church and caused [damage and destruction to its building and furniture](#).

### **4. The Roman Orthodox Church of Mar Elias the Committed:**

Located in Harasta. It was attacked by government forces mortars in December 2012 causing damage to the church building.



### 5. Saint George's Church:

this church is located in Irbin, it was targeted by government forces on two occasions:

- two mortar shells landed in the church's school yard causing [damage to the building](#).

- in September 2013, government forces targeted the church with artillery causing fire inside the church.



### 6. Constantine and Helen Church:

one of the oldest churches in Syria and located in Yabroud, it was attacked twice by government forces:

- in September 2013, government forces fired several artillery shells on the church, damaging its building.

- in February 2014, government forces used heavy artillery which caused considerable [damage to the church building](#).



### 7. All Saints Cathedral:

located in Yabroud: it was targeted by government artillery in September 2012.

### 8. Al-Zabadani Church:

it was targeted by [the Government's artillery](#) based in Bloudan checkpoint in November 2012.

### 9. Mar Sarkaiss Church in Maaloula:

it was [heavily bombed by government forces](#) after the opposition forces stormed the town in September 2013.

### 10. Mar Taqla Monastery in Maaloula:

it was heavily bombed by government forces after the opposition forces stormed the town in September 2013.

### 11. Mar Michael Church in Qarra:

it was targeted by government helicopters in August 2013; 4 civilians were injured according to SNHR in addition to considerable damage to the church building.

### Aleppo Province:

SNHR documented 5 incidents in which churches were targeted by government forces:

#### **1. Mar Samaan Church and Monastery (Saint Simon) in Darat Azzah in the western Aleppo suburbs:**

this church was shelled by government forces on Monday 21/05/2012.



#### **2. The Armenian Evangelical Church of Jesus the Nazareth in Midan:**

the church was shelled once by government forces on Sunday 23/09/ 2012.

#### **3. The Ancient Church of Saint George in Al-Jedaydeh in old Aleppo:**

this church was a refuge place for many families, [it was attacked by mortar shells](#) on Wednesday 16/12/ 2013.

#### **4. [The Armenian Evangelical Church](#) near Al-Hattab Square in Al-Jedaydeh:**

shelled by government forces on Saturday 16/02/2013.

#### **5. Saint Wartan Monastery:**

Located on the frontline between Midan and Bustan Al-Basha neighborhoods which made it vulnerable to attacks by both sides. On Sunday 08/11/ 2013, government forces targeted the monastery with a mortar shell [damaging its building](#).

### DeirEz-Zor Province:

SNHR documented attacks by Government forces on 5 churches which caused considerable damage:

#### **1. Syriac Orthodox Church of Vergin Mary**

in Al-Rashedia area next to the Headquarter of the eastern Command, it is also called the Church of Unity. The church has a private primary school attached to it called the Private Unit, it was attacked 3 times by the Government:

- in September and December 2012, government forces [shelled the church damaging the building](#).
- in January 2013, government forces targeted the church and caused [serious destruction](#) in the church's front.

#### **2. Forty Martyrs Armenian Church:**

located in the city center near Ziyad Hotel. It was randomly attacked by missiles launched by the Government which caused fire and huge destruction.

### 3.Armenian Catholic Church:

located in the city centre near Cinema Fouad Street. Government forces used missiles and mortars to attack this church; we documented 6 mortar shells at least in January 2013. The shelling caused severe destruction in the church building specially the bells' tower and chapel.



Armenian Catholic Church

### 4. The Armenian Church:

located in DeirEz-Zor city. This is a historical church that goes back more than 300 years. It was attacked with several Government's missiles in September 2012, causing [severe destruction](#) in the church building.

### 5. Latin Church (Capuchin):

located behind the Military Police Headquarter. On Monday 15/04/ 2013, a missile attack led to its complete destruction.

### Idlib Province:

SNHR documented 4 churches damaged due to attacks by government forces:

#### 1.Roman Orthodox Church of Saint George:

located in Al-Ghassaniyye village in Jisr Al-Shoughour, it was shelled by government forces in October 2012 causing [damage to the building](#).

#### 2. Church of John the Baptist in Jedaiydeh village in Jisr Al-Shoughour:

It was shelled by government forces in the end of 2012, causing damage to the church building.



Church of John the Baptist

#### 3. Saint Anna Church in Yacoubiyye village:

it was attacked once in June 2013 by the Government's forces, considerable [damage to the building](#) was reported.

#### 4. The Nunnery in Al Qnayyeh in Jisr Al-Shoughour:

Shelled in October 2013 by government forces. [Partial damage](#) was reported.

### Lattakia Province:

SNHR documented 3 churches damaged due attacks by the Government's forces:

#### **1. Roman Orthodox Church of Mar Elias in Qasab village:**

in September 2012, government forces attacked the church by tanks, partially damaging the church building and injuring 5 individuals.



#### **2. Kasab Churches:**

The Government's forces bombarded the church several times before storming Kasab in June after 3 months of fierce fighting against the armed opposition. According to locals and eye witnesses, Government's troops desecrated the church and burnt it. However, the Government accused the opposition forces for destroying the church.



Kasab churches; pictures distributed by some of the Government's media outlets

#### **3. Al-Samra Village Church:**

During the first quarter of 2014, government forces bombarded the village with mortars in an attempt to control it causing severe damage to the church.

### Daraa Province:

SNHR documented attacks on one church in Daraa by government forces:

#### **1. Saints Lions and Bacchus Cathedral in Busra Al-Sham:**

in March 2013, government forces targeted the cathedral with heavy artillery causing [partial damage to this ancient church](#).

### **Churches turned to military bases by government forces:**

We have documented 6 churches that have been turned into military bases by the Government. The Government used some of these churches to bombard neighboring villages and towns which increased the sectarian tension considerably.

#### **1. The Cherubim Cathedral in Sednayah (Damascus suburbs):**

Government forces used this church in 2012 as a base to launch waves of heavy bombardment on Qalmoun. This caused the armed opposition and Al-Nuosra Front to retaliate.

The following link shows [Government's forces using the church as a base to attack neighboring areas](#).

The following link shows the Government forces taking control of the church and bombarding Qualamoun:

The following link shows [Al-Nousra Front bombarding the Government forces based at the church in February 2014](#).



## **2. Jedaiydeh Church in Jedaiydeh village in Jisr Al-Shoughour (Idlib):**

Government forces used [the church](#) to bombard neighboring villages; this was confirmed by many residents.

## **3. Latin Church (Capuchin Church) in DeirEz-Zor:**

Since the end of 2012, government forces settled in the Latin Church in Al-Rushdiye near the Military Police Headquarter in DeirEz-Zor. This made it a target for Al-Nousra Front which caused severe destruction to the church.

[Church's location](#) on the map:



Images obtained by SNHR show smoke rising from the monastery's grounds indicating missiles being launched from inside the monastery

## **4. Saint George's Monastery in Mharda in the northern countryside of Hama. Government forces settled there late in 2012.**

Benefiting from the church's high location, the Government stationed rocket launchers to attack the neighboring area which made the church vulnerable to retaliatory attacks by opposition forces.

## **5. Om Sharshouh Church in northern countryside of Homs:**

On Tuesday 19/02/2013, Government's forces occupied the church and turned into a military base. In October 2014, Al-Nousra Front attacked Government's forces stationed in the village which caused severe damage to the church after being shelled by the notorious Jouhannam (hell) artillery.

## **6. Wartan Monastery in Midan in Aleppo:**

government forces occupied the monastery by the beginning of October 2013 as it is close to frontlines in Bustan Al-Basha neighborhood.

### **Conclusion:**

In some incidents, churches were targeted because both of the Government and extremist groups used it as military bases.

Government forces used the tactics of deliberate and random bombardment in a breach of International Law; these violations mount to the level of war crimes. Occupying, desecrating and using places of worship as military bases violate Common and International Laws; such practices underestimate the religious and cultural significance of places of worship and are prohibited by all laws.



## **Extremist groups:**

### **ISIS:**

#### **Churches targeted by ISIS:**

#### **Raqqa Province:**

SNHR documented 3 churches damaged in Raqqa due to ISIS attacks:

##### **1. Armenian Church of Independence in Tal Abyad in Raqqa countryside:**

it was attacked in October 2013 by members of Al-Hamza Brigade that pledged allegiance to ISIS, they burned the church after stealing its contents and breaking the cross on top of the church.

##### **2. Church of Armenian Martyrs in Raqqa city centre near Al-Rashid Park:**

in September 2013, an armed group from ISIS attacked the church and confiscated all of its contents: desks, crosses, icons, and symbols, they also destroyed the cross on top of the church and raised ISIS flag instead, they also turned the church into a base for ISIS.

The following link [shows the moments of removing the cross](#) and turning the church into an ISIS base.

##### **3. Roman Catholic Church of the Lady of Good News**

near Martyrs Church close to Al-Rashid Park in the city centre: on Thursday 26 September 2013, members of ISIS attacked the Church. They burned the church and its contents such as the statues, crosses and desks. They also removed all signs indicating that it was a church then closed it; it was still closed until the time of preparing this report.

#### **Hasakeh Province:**

SNHR documented 3 churches damaged due attacks by ISIS:

##### **1. Virgin Mary Church in the village of Tal Nasri:**

On Sunday 05 April 2015, ISIS targeted the church with several mortar shells damaging parts of it.

##### **2. Saint Bathio Church in the village of Tal Hurmoz**

near Al-Khabour River in the west countryside of Hasakeh. It was attacked by ISIS on Wednesday 25 February 2015 ISIS, as a result the church was burnt down completely.

##### **3. Quabr Shamyeh or St. George's Church**

near Al-Khabour River in the west countryside of Hasakeh: ISIS fighters attacked the village on Monday 23 February 2015 and burned the church completely.

#### **3. Churches turned into bases by ISIS:**

## 1. Church of Armenian Independence in Raqqa:

Al-Hamza Brigade (ISIS) stormed the church in early 2014 and turned it into a base for ISIS Security Force (an elite force formed from Iraqi recruits).

## 2. Church of Armenian Martyrs in Raqqa:

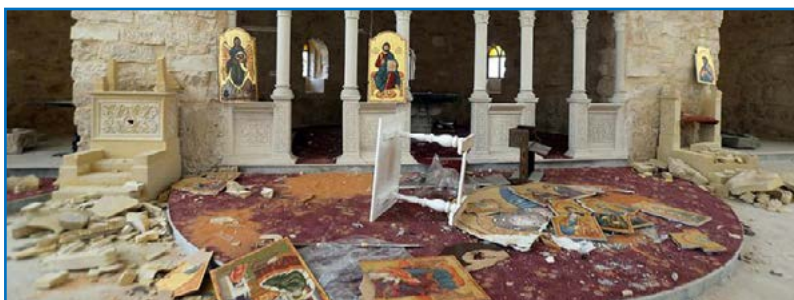
on Monday 02 December 2013, ISIS turned the church into a Court of Justice (Diwan Al-Mathalem); a place where citizens file their complaints to be dealt with directly.

## Al Nusra Front:

According to our information, only one church was deliberately targeted by Al Nusra Front. Other churches were targeted because they were used as military bases by government forces.

## Al-Sayda Roman Catholic Church (Vergin Mary) in Yabroud in Damascus suburbs:

Al Nusra fighters attacked the church in March 2014. They destroyed all the furniture, statues and religious icons as well as the chapel.



Al-Sayda Roman Catholic Church (Vergin Mary) - images of the damage

## Churches turned to bases for the front

### Saint Samaan Monastery (St. Simon) near Dara Azzah, Aleppo suburbs:

This is a historical place that is located inside St. Simon Castle. In early May 2012, Al Nusra and Ahrar Al Sham stormed the place and turned it into a military base and used it to bombard government forces stationed in Sheikh Barakat hill opposite to the castle (4 km from the castle). Government forces retaliated with heavy artillery which caused considerable damage to the monastery. We also documented incidents of excavation work in this archeological place by Al Nusra which caused further damage.

## Conclusion:

extremist groups have carried out random, and sometimes deliberate, attacks on places of worship. Such acts breach the International Law and mount to the level of war crimes. Using churches as military bases compromises its cultural and religious value and is prohibited by Common and Humanitarian Laws.

## Churches targeted by other Armed Opposition Groupss:

## Aleppo Province:

SNHR documented 12 churches damaged due to attacks by different armed opposition groups:

### **1. The Maronite Cathedral of Mar Elias in Farhat Square in Jedaiydeh:**

one of the most beautiful churches in Aleppo, it was attacked twice by mortar shells:

On Wednesday 22 August 2012, a mortar shell hit the church damaging its front yard and the front of the building.

Image of [the destruction, 22 August 2012](#).



Image of the destruction, 22 August 2012

On Saturday 29 November 2014, several mortar shells were fired on the church causing [severe damage to the dome of the church](#) (4 holes) and leaving many windows broken.

### **2. Roman Catholic Archbishopric near the Maronite Cathedral in Farhat Square:**

the church was attacked on two occasions:

-Wednesday 10 October 2012, two mortar shells landed on the church injuring Father Imad Al-Daher (multiple fractures) and another person who was working in the grounds. This attack caused huge destruction to the building, furniture and offices.

- On Wednesday 8 April 2015, the armed opposition attacked Al-Telal and Azaiziyah neighborhoods with 11 mortar shells and gas canisters. This caused huge damage to the church walls, houses and Al-Telal school:



Roman Catholic Archbishopric

### **3. The New Syriac Orthodox Archbishopric in Sulimaniyah:**

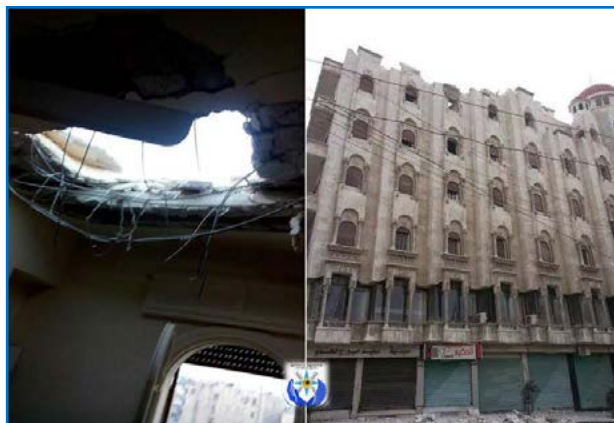
Was targeted 3 times by the armed opposition:

Tuesday 7 May 2013, a mortar shell fell on the church's roof [damaging the sixth floor](#); more shells landed [around the church](#).

On Monday 7 April 2014, the church was attacked

by two mortar shells fired by opposition forces according to local residents. This caused [broken windows and moderate damage to the building](#).

On Tuesday 30 December 2014, an attack with several mortar shells caused [considerable damage](#) to the top floors of the building.



Currently, the damaged part of the church is used by local residents as a temporary refuge for elderly people, no injuries have been reported.

#### **4. Armenian Orthodox Church of Saint Georgiou Al-Monawar in Midan in Aleppo:**

On Sunday 01 June 2014, a mortar shell fell near the church in. An eyewitness confirmed that the shell was fired by opposition forces. The attack caused broken windows and damage to [the gate and external walls of the church](#).

#### **5. Syriac Catholic Church of the Lady of Transition in Al-Azizya:**

The church suffered two attacks by mortars and gas canisters twice in three days. This is a link to the [church's location](#).

On Friday 11 July 2014, a gas canister attached to a mortar shell hit the church at 6:00pm during prayers; the church's choir was also preparing for Sunday service. A priest and 4 worshippers were injured. The attack caused [considerable damage inside and outside the church](#).



Syriac Catholic Church of the Lady of Transition in Al-Azizya

On Monday 14 July 2014, another gas canister attached to a mortar shell hit the church after midnight. The attack caused [huge damage](#) to the 1st and 2nd floors, and to lounge, dining room, the kitchen and the church's museum.

#### **6. Armenian Catholic Church of the Lady of Joy (known also as Holy Trinity)**



in Midan in Aleppo. This church was attacked in two occasions:

On Thursday 14 August 2014, an armed opposition group fired a rocket on the church causing [partial damage and destruction](#) inside the building.

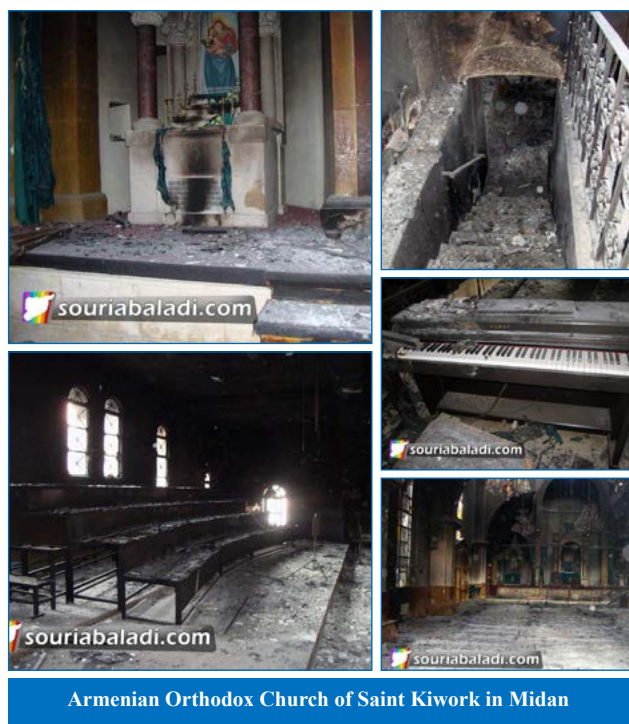
Wednesday 30 July 2014, a mortar shell fell [near the church](#) breaking some of the church's windows and killing 5 civilians including 2 women. 11 civilians were also injured according to SNHR sources:

Link to [the names and details of the victims of the attack](#)

### 7. Armenian Orthodox Church of Saint Kiwork in Midan:

On 31/10/ 2012, an armed opposition group initiated a random attack of the church. Several shells (assumed to be mortar shells) were fired. The attack caused holes in the church's walls, roof, and entrance. It also caused fire inside the church which damaged the church hall and furniture. Bethlehem Nursery (belongs to the church) was also destroyed.

A video from the government media, shows [the destruction and fire inside the church](#).



### 8. Mar Elias Church in Sulimaniyeh:

On Thursday 11 April 2013, a mortar shell landed on the church [damaging its building and dome](#).

### 9. Wartan Monastery:

It is located on the frontlines between Midan and Bustan Al-Basha neighborhoods which made it vulnerable to attacks by both sides.

On Friday 25 October 2013, Sultan Murad Brigade attacked the monastery with several mortar shells:

Video of [fighters from Sultan Murad Brigade firing mortars on Wartan Monastery](#).

### 10. Latin Church of Franciscan Fathers in Azziziyah:

On Saturday 2 November 2013, two rockets were fired by opposition forces. one of them hit the church's dome and the other hit the church's yard as worshippers were leaving the church. [Broken windows and considerable damage](#) were reported.

### 11. Saint Demetrious Church in Telephone Hawaei



### **neighborhood:**

On Wednesday 23 July 2014, a rocket fired by the armed opposition fell in front of the church [damaging the church's windows, fence and gate](#). The shell also caused a huge hole in front of the church. 8 civilians, including 3 children and 3 women from one family, were killed and 7 others were injured according to SNHR sources.

### **12. Maronite Archbishopric in Farhat Square in Sulimaniyah in Aleppo:**

it was attacked by opposition forces by mortar shells on Friday 10 April 2014. A mortar shell fell inside the basement causing [considerable damage to the furniture](#).



Maronite Archbishopric in Farhat Square in Sulimaniyah in Aleppo

### **Damascus Province:**

SNHR documented attacks on two churches by opposition forces:

#### **1. Roman Orthodox Church of the Holy Cross**

in Qass'a neighborhood in Damascus near the French Hospital: this is one of the biggest churches in Syria; it was built around 1930. 3 attacks at different times were reported:

On Friday 09 August 2013, a mortar shell fell in the church yard [causing material damage](#).

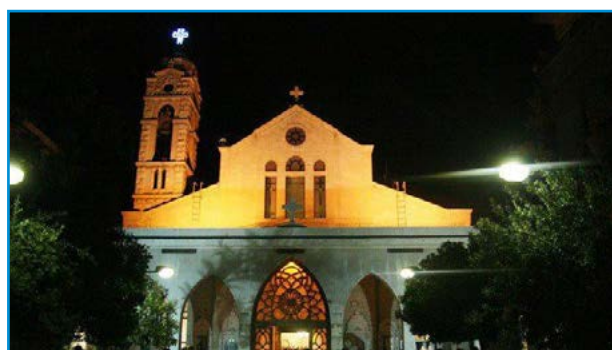
On Sunday 06 October 2013, opposition forces fired three mortar shells injuring 3 individuals and damaging the church building. One of the shells penetrated the church's wall and destroyed the church icons and other valuables, the other two shells caused considerable [damage to the back walls of the church](#).

On Monday 11 November 2013, a mortar shell caused [minor damages to the church's yard and roof](#).

#### **2. Kirillos Church opposite to the French Hospital in Qass'a in Damascus**

and within a walking distance from Baghdad St. this is an important church for the Christian community in Damascus because of its excellent location between old and modern Damascus. This Roman Catholic church was built in 1927:

On Friday 11 October 2013, a mortar shell fell on the church causing considerable damage, it was assumed that the shell was fired by opposition forces.



Kirillos Church

### **Churches turned into military bases by opposition forces:**

### **1. Oum Sharshouh Church in Homs:**

Fighters from the Aman Biallah Brigade took refuge inside the church in March 2013 after being forced out of their positions by government forces. As a result, the church suffered artillery attacks by government forces.

### **2. Saint Samaan Monastery (St. Simon) near Dara Azzah in Aleppo:**

Fighters from Ahrar Al-Sham Islamic Movement stationed themselves at the monastery in early 2014.

#### **Conclusion:**

Some Armed Opposition Groups have carried out random, and sometimes deliberate, attacks on places of worship. Such acts breach the International Law and mount to the level of war crimes. Using churches as military bases compromises its cultural and religious value and is prohibited by Common and Humanitarian Laws.

### **4- Attacks by unidentified groups:**

#### **1-The Arabic Evangelic Church in Jadet Al-Khandaq near Sab'a Bahrat, Aleppo:**

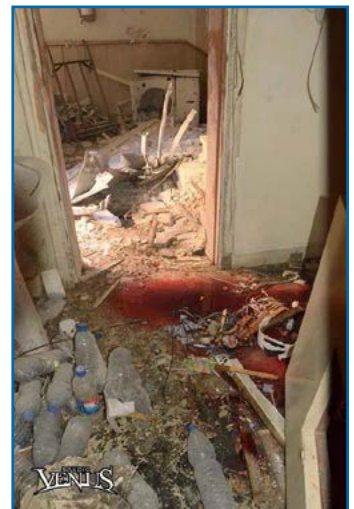
On 06 November 2012, an unidentified armed group planted bombs and destroyed the church. SNHR has not been able to identify the perpetrator until this moment.

In a first attempt, armed men detonated bombs in the back of the church which destroyed large parts of the building and offices. In a second attempt, bombs targeted the main church hall which was [destroyed almost completely](#).

#### **2.Armenian Orthodox Archbishopric in Jedaiydeh in ancient Aleppo:**

On Saturday 08 November 2014, a missile, assumed to be a Grad missile, fell on the church destroying two rooms and killing Mr. Nazat Mlaijan, a live-in church guard (born in Aleppo 1965).

SNHR was unable to identify the party responsible for the attack.



## Recommendations:

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- It has been over a year since resolution 2139 was issued. The UN Security Council should take further actions to ensure the safety of civilians.
- The UN Security Council should increase the pressure on countries supporting the government forces such as Russia, Iran, Iraq and China to stop sending weapons, fighters and military advisors. There is enough evidence to suggest that government forces have committed war crimes and crimes against humanity.
- The UN Security Council should also increase the pressure on countries supporting the Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD) and certain armed opposition factions and extremist individuals and groups.
- The Syrian issue must be referred to the ICC and all those who have committed crimes against humanity should be held accountable.
- Enforcing the principle of the Responsibility to Protect Civilians, and facilitating a political solution. A solution that would bring peace and justice, and would save the lives of the Syrian people and their heritage.

The SNHR would like to thank all the activists and local people who helped with gathering information for the purpose of this report; their contributions are invaluable and hugely appreciated.

