

IDPs in Daraa Suburbs Massacred by Syrian Regime Forces

Eight Civilians Killed in an
IDP-Housing School in Tafas city

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

As part of the comprehensive war the Syrian regime waged against anyone who dared to stand and demand a political change to end this one-family rule, the regime never hesitated to perpetrated whatever was in its power to halt the eruption of the popular uprising and terrorize its popular base. We have recorded hundreds of incidents where schools were bombed at times when children and teachers were present. Additionally, schools were bombed outside of school hours in many cases in order to destroy them and displace the children who study there. In late-2012, when the rates of destroyed houses had alarmingly skyrocketed, residents took shelter in out-of-commission schools, and lived there in huge populations. However, this didn't mean they wouldn't be bombed and killed, and, on the contrary, we believe, at this point, that overcrowding was the reason they were targeted and killed in the hopes of submitting the Syrian people.

SNHR has recorded, in a database for documenting targeting of vital civilian facilities, that no less than 1,346 schools have been targeted by the parties to the conflict since the start of the popular uprising at the time of the incident date. The Syrian regime and its Russian ally top all other parties by targeting approximately 87% of all the targeted schools, while the remaining parties (the Kurdish Democratic Union Party, extremist Islamic groups, armed opposition factions, and international coalition forces) were responsible for 13%. All of these attacks were against schools that were not being used for military purposes, and no military activities were recorded in the proximity of these schools. Therefore, all of the recorded incidents we have constitute explicit violations of the international humanitarian law.



These attacks resulted in the killing of 184 children, who were inside or near these schools, and 39 teaching staff members.

Some of the schools in the Syrian regime-held areas have been turned into detention and torture centers, while large numbers of schools in the areas that are not under the Syrian regime control have been used as centers to house tens of thousands of IDPs.

[In the first half of 2017](#) alone, we recorded no less than 95 incidents of attack on educational facilities, including 73 attacks by the Syrian-Russian alliance, which emphasizes the methodology adopted by the Syrian-Russian alliance forces in targeting educational facilities and teaching staffs.

II. Details of Tafas City Attack

Summary

Located 13 kilometers to the northwest of the center of Daraa city, Tafas city administratively follows al Mzayreeb county. Its population reached 80,000 people at least in mid-2017, where most of the population were IDPs from the villages of Ataman, Jilleen, and Masakin Jilleen.

The city has been under the control of armed opposition factions since November 26, 2013, and it is surrounded by military bases for the Syrian regime forces that are stationed in the Artillery Battalion 285 in southern Daraa, and Tal al Kheder which is located four kilometers to the east of Tafas city.

The report documents a bombardment by fixed-wing Syrian regime forces warplanes on an IDP-housing school in Tafas city that resulted in the killing of eight civilians, including one child and one woman. Also, the school fence and some of the classrooms, which housed civilians, were damaged.

Methodology

SNHR team has contacted a number of city residents, eyewitnesses, survivors, and local media activists, where this report contains two accounts. We have explained the purpose of the interviews for the witnesses who gave us permission to use the information they provided in this report without offering or giving them any incentives. Additionally, SNHR has tried to spare them the agony of remembering the violation as much as possible, and guarantees were given to any witnesses who preferred to use an alias.



We have also reviewed the pictures and videos we received and verified their authenticity. These pictures showed the destruction in the aftermath of the bombing on the school, in addition to pictures showing wounded children. We have copies of all the videos and pictures mentioned in this report in a secret online database in addition to backup copies on hard drives. For more information, please read our general work [methodology](#).

The investigations of this report have proven that the targeted areas were civilian areas where no military centers or weapon warehouses for armed opposition factions or extremist Islamic groups were found before or during the attack. We also didn't record that the school building makes any active contributions to any acts of war. Furthermore, Syrian regime forces didn't alarm the civilians before the attack as required by the international humanitarian law.

This report only represents the bare minimum, which we were able to document, of the severity and magnitude of the violation that occurred. Also, this report doesn't cover the social, economic, or psychological ramifications.

Details

Wednesday, June 14, 2017, around 13:00, fixed-wing Syrian regime forces warplanes fired a missile in southern Tafas city, western suburbs of Daraa governorate, targeting the Martyr Yousef Kiwan School, which is housed by three IDP families from Ataman town, which resulted in the killing of eight civilians, including one child and one woman. Additionally, seven civilians were wounded, including four children and two women.

Prior to the airstrike, the city saw a series of artillery attacks by Syrian regime forces that targeted a number of locations in the city, and resulted in the killing of the female child "Heba al Hasan" and wounded another civilian. One of the attacks targeted the school as well about an hour before the airstrike. This tactic has been used fairly commonly by the Syrian regime, where an area is targeted with mortar and artillery shells before targeting it using the air arsenal in order to dictate the coordinates of the area that is to be targeted, or to inflict as much human losses as possible by targeting the same area twice.





Abu Raad ¹, a photographer for the Syrian civil defense, said that an artillery shelling targeted the city in the morning and killed the female child “Heba al Hasan” and two other men, before he heard the observatory’s warnings about a Syrian plane flying towards Tafas city: “Five minutes after we heard the warning, the plane was flying in the city sky, and then the warplane carried out the airstrike in south of the city. I went to the targeted location. The target was the Martyr Kiwan School, as the missile fell exactly on the entrance of the school in the same place where the last artillery shell that targeted the city landed.”

¹ We contacted him via Facebook on June 15, 2017



Abu Raad told us that he saw eight dead children and women who were IDPs:

“The sight of the dead bodies with blood all over them was indescribable. One of my colleagues carried a little girl that was covered in blood. The girl was shaking and calling for her mother that was killed in the massacre. The warplanes came back and carried out two more airstrikes, but it targeted a distant area in Tafas city, called al Sa’ada area, and no damages occurred.” Abu Raad confirmed that there was no armed opposition factions gatherings or centers in the school or its vicinity.

Rami Kiwan ², a local media activist, visited the school site in the aftermath of the attack, and described what he saw:

“The dead bodies were piled up. An indescribably cruel sight to see. One of the victims was Ahmad Kiwan whom I was with at noon, and after the attack he was dead. The wounded told me that a missile fired by a Russian warplane was the one that caused the massacre, which was preceded by an artillery shelling that targeted the school. All of the victims were homeless IDPs. The Syrian regime bomb their houses so they are forced to find shelter, and then the regime kills them in their shelters. There is no justifications for this horrendous crime. The Free Army isn’t present in the area nearby the school.”



²We contacted him via Facebook on June 15, 2017





A damaged classroom at the school that was housing IDPs in the aftermath of an aerial attack that targeted Yousef Kiwan School – June 14, 2017

III. Attachments

Victims' names



[Pictures showing](#) the destruction in the aftermath of a bombardment on [the Martyr Yousef Kiwan School](#)

[A video showing](#) the damaged Yousef Kiwan School building and the wounded and victims being pulled out



IV. Conclusions and Recommendations

Legal conclusions

1- The Syrian regime has, beyond any doubt, violated Security Council Resolutions 2139 and 2254 which both state that indiscriminate attacks must be halted. Also, they violated Article 8 of Rome Statute through the act of willful killing which constitutes war crimes.

2- We can confirm that the bombardment mentioned in this report has 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.

3- The attacks mentioned in this report, which were carried out by the Syrian regime, are considered a violation of the customary international law as the shells were fired at a populated area rather than a specific military object.

4- 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

The Security Council

The Security Council has to take additional steps as Resolution 2139 has been adopted and no pledges to cease the indiscriminate bombardment operations have been made. All the parties to the conflict must respect the Resolutions 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 must be held accountable including the Russian regime whose involvement in war crimes has been proven.

Instill security and peace in Syria and implement the norm of the Responsibility to Protect in order to protect the lives, culture, and history of the Syrian people from being destroyed, looted, and ruined.

Expand the sanctions to include the Syrian and Iranian regimes who are directly involved in committing crimes against humanity and war crimes against the Syrian people.



The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

The Office must submit a report to the Human Rights Council and other organs of the United Nations on this massacre specifically considering that it is a glaring sign in a string of daily, sporadic and less significant massacres. The OHCHR also should work on implementing the recommendations included in this report.

The European Union and the United States of America

Support the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism that was established in accordance with General Assembly Resolution 248/71 that was adopted on December 21, 2016. And establish local tribunals that enjoy a universal jurisdiction, and work on the war crimes that were perpetrated in Syria.

The International Community

In light of the split of the Security Council and its utter inability, Steps must 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 enhance the support for the relief efforts. Additionally, the principle of universal jurisdiction must 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 were drought out. Therefore, steps under Article 7 of the Rome Statute must be taken and the norm of the Responsibility to Protect, which was established by the United Nations General Assembly, must be implemented. The Security Council is still hindering the protection of civilians in Syria.

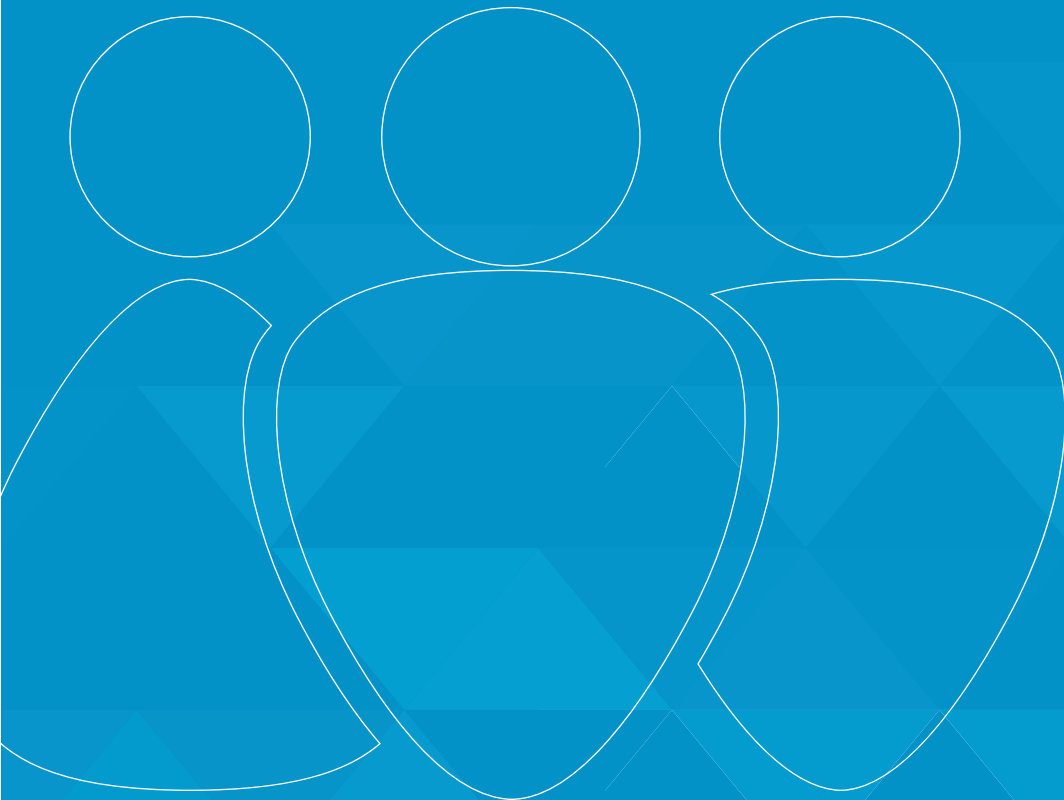
Renew the pressure on the Security Council to refer the case in Syria to the International Criminal Court

Work on fulfilling justice and achieving accountability in Syria through the United Nations General Assembly and the Human Rights Council and work on activating the principle of the universal jurisdiction.

Acknowledgment and Condolences

We would like to thank and extend our most heartfelt condolences to all the families and local activists in Tafas city who effectively contributed to this report.





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