

The Barbarian Bombardment and Siege on Eastern Ghouta Practically Invalidates the Upcoming Geneva Round

146 Civilians Killed, including
37 Children, in less than Two Weeks

SNHR

SYRIAN NETWORK FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

الشبكة السورية لحقوق الإنسان

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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 and Historical Context

In October 2012, a partial siege was imposed on the Eastern Ghouta region, Damascus suburbs by Syrian regime forces who elevated their siege on November 19, 2013, to enclose the entirety of Eastern Ghouta almost completely. The besieged region has an area of approximately 103 km² with a population of nearly 350,000 people. Merely a handful of humanitarian convoys had access to the region. Consequently, the living conditions in Eastern Ghouta have increasingly deteriorated and diseases ran rampant as a result of the siege. We released a number of reports on the siege of Ghouta and its social and humanitarian ramifications – the most recent of which was: [“Over 350,000 Civilians are still Living under Siege Despite the De-Escalation Agreement with Russia”](#)

On Saturday, July 22, 2017, a de-escalation agreement was struck in Eastern Ghouta between Jaish al Islam, an armed opposition faction, and Russian forces under an Egyptian sponsorship. The agreement provided that relief convoys shall have access to the area, while the evacuation of the wounded was to commence. On Wednesday, August 16, 2017, a similar [agreement](#) was signed with Failaq al Rahman faction that established the inclusion of the faction’s territories as a de-escalation zone, where the agreement was to go into effect at 21:00 of Friday, August 18, 2017. Despite the in-effect de-escalation agreement, Syrian-Russian alliance forces continued to target civilians and vital civilian facilities, as the killing and destruction never stopped as well as the starvation policy. As of this writing, we have documented 14 massacres and 53 incidents of attack on vital civilian facilities, including seven medical facilities, from July 22, 2017 until the time of this writing.



Doctor Majd Dalati, a SNHR researcher who operates in Eastern Ghouta, says: **“This is the first time in seven years that Eastern Ghouta has seen such a heavy and continued shelling with all kinds of weapons, even cluster munitions. Residents have spent days in basements and caves, and hospitals are overcrowded with wounded. We have lost nearly 100 victims. who were mostly women and children. Hundreds wounded. Hundreds of destroyed houses. Thousands of people who have been traumatized. And all of this has happened as the international community stands idly by in utter silence, while the miraculous endurance of the residents of Ghouta continues.”**

We have shed light in a past report, [“The Syrian-Russian Alliance Completely Shatters Astana Agreements in Idlib”](#), on a similar offensive by Syrian-Russian alliance forces against Idlib governorate, which is also a de-escalation zone. This strongly indicates that the Syrian-Russian-Iranian alliance aims to undermine any de-escalation agreement, diligently and avidly work on submitting the Syrian people into surrendering and then accepting the legitimacy of the Syrian regime, paving the way for the Syrian regime to establish his complete rule over Syria.

Methodology

In the course of the ongoing monitoring for incidents and developments by SNHR team through a wide network that include tens of various sources that have been built over an accumulation of extensive relations since the start of our work. When we receive information, or hear some news about a violation via the internet or media outlets, we work on following-up on this news and try to verify and collect evidences and data. In some cases, the researcher is able to visit the incident location at the soonest. However, this is a rarity in light of the incredibly high security risks, and given the frequency of daily incidents and the human and material resources. Therefore, the possibility to access evidences vary from one case to another, and, hence, the degree of its classification. Usually, what we do, at SNHR, in such cases is relying on accounts from survivors who experience the violation firsthand, where we try to access those directly, and, to a second degree, who saw or filmed the violation, in addition to analyzing available materials from open sources such as the internet and media outlets. Thirdly, we try to speak to medical personnel who treated the wounded, assessed the symptoms, and determined the cause of death.

Please see the methodology adopted by SNHR for [documenting victims](#) and [classifying vital civilian facilities](#)



This report contains four accounts that were collected through speaking directly with eyewitnesses, and are not cited from any open sources. We have explained the purpose of these interviews to the eyewitnesses who gave us permission to use the information they provided in this report without offering or giving them any incentives.

SNHR has tried to spare the eyewitnesses the agony of remembering the violation, and gave guarantees to conceal the identity of any witnesses who preferred to use an alias.

Furthermore, the investigations included in this report have proved 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. Also, Syrian-Russian forces didn't alert the civilians prior to the attack as the international humanitarian law requires.

SNHR has analyzed the videos and pictures that were posted online, or were sent to us by local activists via e-mail, Skype, or social media. Some of the videos published by activists show the location of the attacks, the dead bodies, the injured, and the huge destruction in the aftermath of the bombardment.

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

II. Executive Summary

The report covers the period of time between November 14, 2017 and November 27, 2017, shedding light on the most notable attacks by the Syrian-Russian alliance against Eastern Ghouta which is under the control of factions from the armed opposition.

A. Massacres and other acts of killing: we have recorded the killing of 146 civilians, including 37 children, 13 women, four civil defense personnel, and two medical personnel. Also, we recorded six massacres that were perpetrated by Syrian-Russian alliance forces.

B. Attacks on vital civilian facilities: We have documented no less than 12 attacks on vital civilian facilities distributed as follows: three mosques, one hospital, two schools, three local markets, and three ambulances belonging to the civil defense.



C. Unlawful attacks: We have recorded three attacks using cluster munitions and one attack using poison gases by Syrian regime forces.

D. Siege: Among the victims we recorded were three civilians, including one child and one woman, who died in light of the siege imposed by Syrian regime forces on the region in the period of time covered by the report.

III. Details

A. Massacres and other acts of killing

Thursday, November 16, 2017, Syrian regime forces artillery fired a number of shells at Beit Sawa town, which resulted in the killing of three children.

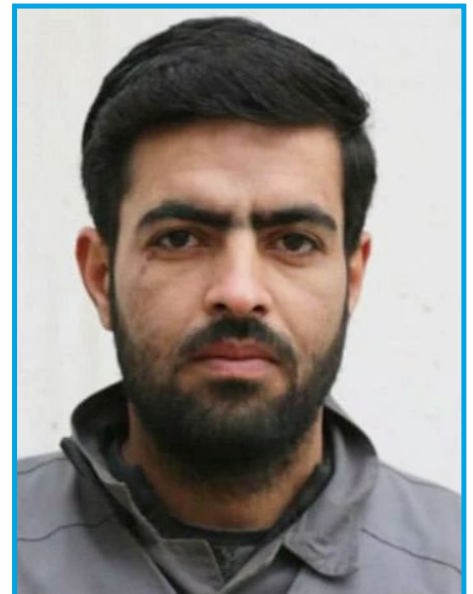
Friday, November 17, 2017, fixed-wing Syrian regime forces warplanes fired a number of missiles in Douma city as the civil defense teams were tending to the wounded from a previous shelling, which resulted in the killing of three civil defense members (Mohammad Ghaleb Haymour, Mohammad Mahmoud Alaya, Ahmad Ibrahim Ka'ka) all of whom are from Douma city.



Ahmad Ka'ka



Mohammad Alaya



Mohammad Haymour



Friday, November 17, 2017, around 12:00, Syrian regime forces [artillery fired](#) a [number of shells](#) at Douma city, which [resulted in](#) the killing of [10 civilians](#), including [six children](#).



A wounded being treated in the aftermath of a Syrian regime forces shelling in Douma city, Damascus suburbs – November 17, 2017

Saturday, November 18, 2017, around 03:30, fixed-wing Syrian regime forces warplanes fired a [number of missiles](#) in Madyara village, which resulted in the killing of [seven civilians](#) at once, including three women, while around 12 others were wounded.

Sunday, November 19, 2017, around 19:00, fixed-wing warplanes of the Syrian-Russian alliance (Investigations are still ongoing to accurately identify the perpetrator party) fired missiles in Madyara village, which resulted in the killing of six civilians (four children and their parents), while no less than 15 others were wounded.

Omran Abu Salloum¹, a media activist who was in the village at the time of the attack, told us that the middle section of Eastern Ghouta was targeted in a heavy shelling that involved all kinds of heavy weapons: **“A warplane fired a missile from a high altitude, and the collision sound was harrowing. I rushed with my friend to the place, even though it was too dangerous, where we found civil defense members pulling out the victims and the wounded from the rubbles of a house consisting of two-floor and a basement that was being used as a bunker. The house was destroyed completely.”** Omran added that

¹ We contacted him via Facebook on November 22, 2017



rescue operations lasted for nearly an hour and a half, before it ended because night came, as it was hard to maintain vision, and warplanes were still in the sky: **“The dead bodies of the family that was there were reduced to scattered body parts. A hand here.... And a foot there. I couldn’t post any pictures because they were too gory.”**

Sunday, November 19, 2017, Syrian regime forces artillery fired a number of missiles in Misraba town, which resulted in the killing of four civilians, including a child.

Monday, November 20, 2017, a Syrian regime forces rocket launcher shelled Kafr Batna town, which resulted in the killing of [five civilians](#) (four children and their mother).

Wednesday, November 22, 2017, Syrian regime forces artillery fired a number of shells at Ein Tarma town, which resulted in the killing of the female child Bara’a Faisal Qasem and her child brother Mustafa

Thursday, November 23, 2017, fixed-wing Syrian regime forces warplanes fired a number of missiles in Irbeen city, which resulted in the killing of three civilians, including two female children.

Sunday, November 26, 2017, [fixed-wing](#) Syrian regime forces warplanes fired a [number of missiles](#) in Misraba town, which resulted in the killing of [16 civilians](#) (what we have been able to document as of this writing) including [three children](#) and one woman.

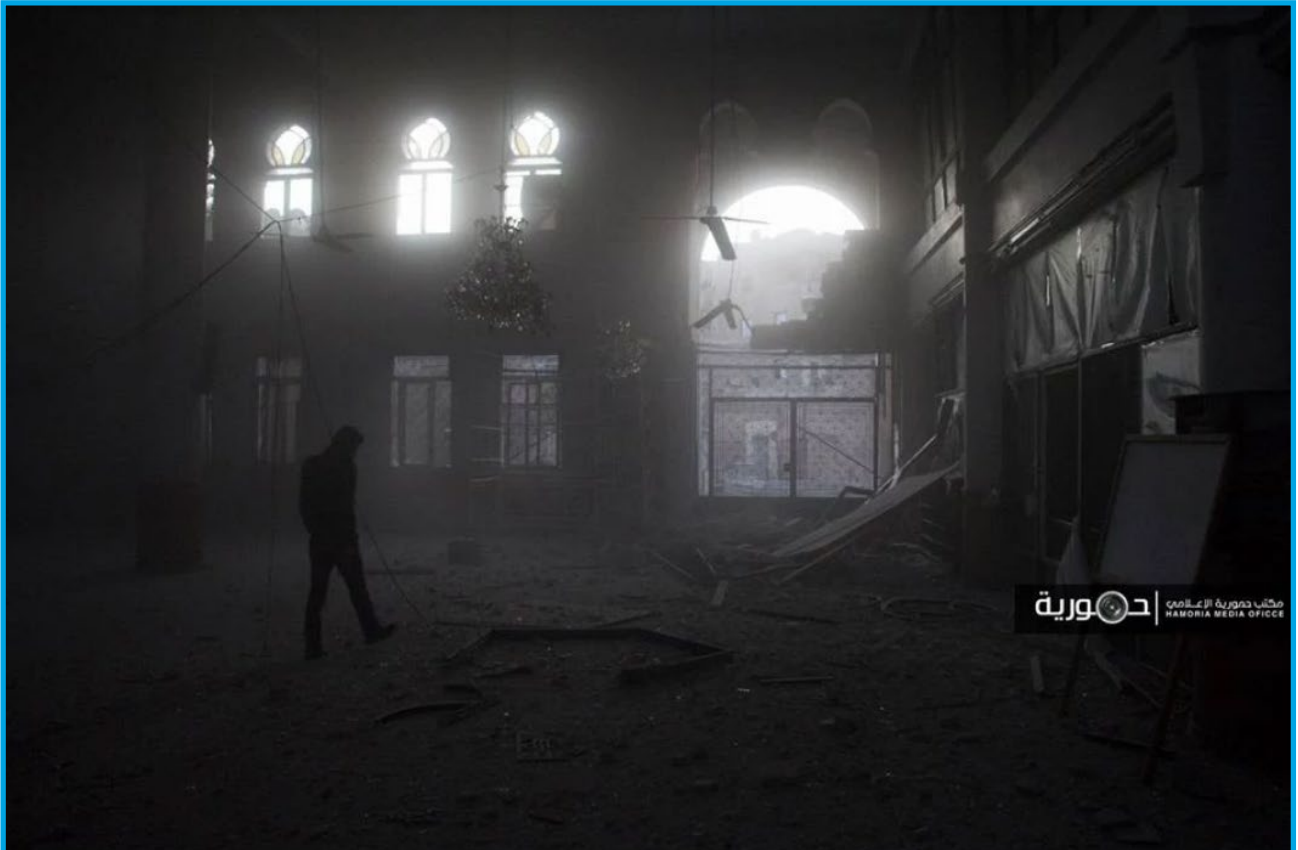


Victims in the aftermath of a massacre by Syrian regime forces, Misraba, Damascus suburbs – November 26, 2017



B. Attacks on vital civilian facilities

Tuesday, November 14, 2017, around 16:30, Syrian regime forces [artillery fired](#) a number of shells at [al Khoulani Mosque](#) in Hamouriya town. The mosque building was partially destroyed and its furniture was heavily damaged.



Destruction in the aftermath of a bombing by Syrian regime forces on al Khoulani Mosque in Hamouriya, Damascus suburbs – November 14, 2017

Wednesday, November 15, 2017, around 05:30, Syrian regime forces artillery fired rockets at the Old Mosque in Hamouriya town. The mosque was partially destroyed.

Friday, November 17, 2017, fixed-wing Syrian regime forces warplanes fired a number of missiles at [al Mustqabal School](#) in Irbeen city. The school building was [partially destroyed](#), and its furniture was heavily damaged, as the school was rendered out of commission.





Destruction in the aftermath of a bombing by Syrian regime forces on al Mustqabal School in Irbeen, Damascus suburbs – November 17, 2017

Sunday, November 19, 2017, around 17:00, Syrian regime forces rocket launchers [fired rockets](#) that landed near an ambulance belonging to the civil defense in Hamouriya town, which resulted in the killing of one civil defense member. Additionally, the ambulance was moderately damaged, as it was temporarily rendered out of commission.

Monday, November 20, 2017, around 15:00, Syrian regime forces rocket launchers fired no less than [nine surface-to-surface](#) rockets that targeted the middle section of Kafr Batna town. Most of the rockets landed near al Kahf Hospital, the only hospital in the town, which resulted in the killing of an entire family of five people -a mother and her four children- while more than five civilians were injured, including one medical personnel. In addition, the hospital building was partially destroyed and heavily damaged, as the hospital was rendered out of commission.

Amer al Ghoutani ², a paramedic at the hospital who was there when it was targeted, confirmed to SNHR that 11 Pheel rockets were used by the Syrian regime to target the hospital and its vicinity around 15:00: **“The first rocket landed near the hospital and didn’t cause any injuries, but about five minutes later nearly nine rockets were dropped. Some of the rockets hit the hospital, while the remaining landed in the vicinity of the hospital and on the nearby houses. A medical staffer was injured.”** Amer added that the destruction to the hospital gates meant that the patients and the medical personnel were trapped

² We contacted him via Facebook on November 22, 2017



inside, while the wounded couldn't get to the hospital: **“The shelling resulted in the killing of a family of a mother and her four children who live near the hospital. Also, the hospital roof and some of its sections were destroyed, and some of its equipment were ruined. The hospital is out of commission as of this day.”**

Sunday, November 25, 2017, Syrian regime forces artillery fired a number of shells that landed near [an evacuation vehicle](#) belonging to the [civil defense's](#) center 103 in Ein Tarma town. The vehicle was [moderately damaged](#).

C. Unlawful attacks:

Attacks using Cluster Munitions:

Wednesday, November 15, 2017, Syrian regime forces rocket launchers fired [two rockets](#) loaded with O-10 [cluster submunitions](#) that targeted the [residential neighborhoods](#) in the middle of Saqba city. Two individuals at least were wounded.

Moayed al Hafi ³, a media activist who works for al Ghouta Media Center as a photographer, told us that he heard a big explosion that was followed by smaller explosions around 07:00, adding that he counted six rockets of the same type that targeted the middle of the city: **“The rocket remnants would explode once they touch the ground, and people's screams go higher with these explosions. It was really horrifying. Our city was never targeted with cluster weapons this heavily before, but on that day, we'd see a cluster rocket approximately every half hour.”**



Remnants of O-10 cluster submunitions that were found in Saqba city, Damascus suburbs in the aftermath of an attack by Syrian regime – November 15, 2017

³ We contacted him via Facebook on November 17, 2017



Wednesday, November 15, 2017, Syrian regime rocket launchers stationing in Dahiyat al Assad area, northern Kafr Batna city, fired two [rockets loaded](#) with O-10 cluster submunition, targeting the northeastern neighborhoods in Kafr Batna city. No less than [five civilians](#) were injured.

Anas Abu Ayman ⁴, a photographer who works for al Ghouta Media Center, told us that the shelling happened around 08:00, adding that he saw a rocket exploding in the sky, and small bombs exploding in the air: **“Mini-bombs scattered over 50-100 meters, and one of the explosion was close to me, but I didn’t get hurt. The bombs were horizontal and carried by parachutes. Among the injured were a 10-year-old child and a woman was found injured in her house. These mini-bombs caused severe injuries, and can heavily fragmentize. The attack lasted for hours, and I counted more than six bomb-carrying rockets of the same type.”**

Attacks using poison gases:

Saturday, November 18, 2017, Syrian regime forces used grenades loaded with a poison gas to target fighters from the armed opposition who were stationed at a clash line near the Vehicle Administration building in Harasta city. No less than [10 fighters suffered](#) from suffocation and blurry vision as a result of the attack, while some of them suffered from miosis.

IV. Conclusions and Recommendations

Legal conclusions

1- The Syrian-Russian alliance has, beyond any doubt, violated Security Council Resolutions 2139 and 2254 which both state that indiscriminate attacks must be halted. Also, The Syrian and Russian regime have 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 defenseless civilians. Therefore, Syrian and Russian 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 and Russian regimes, 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.

⁴ We contacted him via Facebook on November 18, 2017



Recommendations

The Russian regime

- Launch investigations regarding the incidents included in this report, make the findings of these investigations public for the Syrian people, and hold the people involved accountable.
- Compensate all the damaged centers and facilities, rebuild and rehabilitate them, and compensate all the victims' families and the wounded who were killed by the current Russian regime.
- Completely cease the bombing of hospitals, protected objects, and civilian areas, and respect the customary international law.

The Security Council

- The Security Council has to take additional steps after Resolution 2254 was adopted, which states: **“Demands that all parties immediately cease any attacks against civilians and civilian objects as such, including attacks against medical facilities and personnel, and any indiscriminate use of weapons, including through shelling and aerial bombardment.”**
- 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 Russian and Iranian regimes who are directly involved in committing crimes against humanity and war crimes against the Syrian people.

The OHCHR

The Office should submit a report to the Human Rights Council and other organs of the United Nations on the incidents mentioned in this report, as these incidents have been perpetrated by forces we believe are Russian in coordination with government forces.



The United Nations special envoy to Syria

- Expand Security Council briefings rather than only limiting them to the violations of al Nusra Front and ISIS
- Condemn the perpetrators of the crimes, the massacres, and those who were primarily responsible for shattering the de-escalation agreements.

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 have been 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

Our most heartfelt gratitude and condolences to all the residents and local activists who contributed effectively to this report.





@snhr



Info@sn4hr.org

www.sn4hr.org

