

13 Medical and Civil Defense Personnel Killed, and 14 Incidents of Attack on their Vital Facilities in August 2017

International Coalition Forces Top
all other Parties in Terms of
Violations

SNHR

SYRIAN NETWORK FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

الشبكة السورية لحقوق الإنسان

Friday, September 8, 2017

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



Contents

- I. Introduction and Methodology
- II. Executive Summary
- III. Details
- IV. Conclusions and Recommendations

I. Introduction and Methodology

The consistent bombing and targeting of medical facilities and civil defense centers by Syrian regime forces since 2011, and the killing and arrest of medics and civil defense personnel at the hands of different conflict parties, especially Syrian regime forces, indicates a systematic policy that only aims to shed more blood and deepen the suffering of the injured – civilians and armed.

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 chaotic, 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.”

The fourth round of negotiations was held in Astana city, Kazakhstan’s capital, on 3 and 4 of May 2017. Russian, Turkish, and Iranian representatives attended as the sponsoring states of Ankara Ceasefire Agreement. The three states agreed on establishing four de-escalation zones, wherein the agreement is to commence on May 6, 2017. The agreement outlined four major de-escalation areas – Idlib governorate and the surrounding areas (parts of Aleppo, Hama, and Latakia governorates), northern Homs governorate, Eastern Ghouta, and parts of Daraa and al Quneitra governorates in the southern parts of Syria. It was provided that an expert committee would accurately assign the borders of said zones at a later date. The agreement provided for a cessation of combat operations, passage of humanitarian aids, and for IDPs to go back to their areas.



Following an extensive round of talks between Russia, USA, and Jordan that commenced in May 2017 in Amman, Jordan's capital, the American and Russian presidents announced, on the sidelines of the 2017 G20 summit in Hamburg, that a ceasefire agreement has been reached in southwestern Syria – Daraa, Quneitra, and Suwayda governorates. The agreement went into force at 12:00 on Sunday July 9, 2017, and provided for the passage of humanitarian aids in addition to a ceasefire between the conflicting parties (Syrian regime forces and their allies on one side, and armed opposition factions on the other side). Also, the agreement specifies that maintaining security in this region is the Russian forces' responsibility in coordination with the Americans and Jordanians. Since the agreement went into effect, the included areas saw a significant and relatively good drop in killings rates in comparison with previous months since March 2011.

In addition, there have been a number of other local agreements in July and August, such as Eastern Ghouta agreement between armed opposition factions, on one side, and officials from the Russian side, while a similar agreement was struck with the opposition in northern suburbs of Homs. However, the [texts of these agreements](#) haven'tt been made public on Russian government's websites, and the same for armed opposition factions who didn't publicize these agreements, except for Failaq al Rahman who published the text of the agreement on their official website. At the end of the agreement, according to the copy on Failaq al Rahman's website, a signature by a Russian sponsor was shown but without an explicit name, which is a great flaw, as apparently all of this helps the sponsoring Russian side to easily dissolve themselves from these agreements with no subsequent political or legal obligations and repercussions.

On Saturday, July 22, 2017, Russian Ministry of Defense announced that a de-escalation agreement has been signed in Eastern Ghouta following a round of talks between Russian military officials, on one side, and Jaish al Islam faction, on the other side, in Egypt's capital Cairo. The agreement was to come into effect at 12:00 of the same day. On Wednesday, August 16, 2017, a Failaq al Rahman representative and a Russian representative have signed an agreement in Geneva city that established Failaq al Rahman's inclusion in the de-escalation zone in Eastern Ghouta. The agreement was to come into effect at 21:00 of Friday, August 18, 2017.

On Monday, July 31, 2017, another de-escalation agreement was signed in Egypt's capital Cairo for northern Homs suburbs and southern Hama suburbs following a round of talks between armed opposition factions in the area and the Syrian regime represented by the Russian government as a sponsoring party, as the agreement was to commence at 12:00 on Thursday, August 3, 2017.



Most notably, the two most recent agreements provided for a full cessation of hostilities between the conflicting parties in the relevant areas -with the exclusion of the areas in which ISIS and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham are present- and for humanitarian aids to enter these areas and for detainees to be released as per the demands of each party as to which detainees are to be released.

The number of civilians killed by the Syrian regime and its widespread violations imply a lack of commitment to the last two signed agreement on the regime's part.

Despite Ankara Ceasefire Agreement and the string of de-escalation agreements that followed, breaches didn't stop, mainly by the Syrian regime, who is seemingly the party that would be most affected should the ceasefire go on, and in particular extrajudicial killing crimes and, more horrendously, deaths due to torture. This strongly asserts that there is a ceasefire of some sort on the table, but the crimes that the international community -especially the sponsoring states- won't see are still going on as nothing had changed.

In August, SNHR documented a significant drop in rates of violations against medical and civil defense personnel and their respective facilities for the third month in a row following the de-escalation agreement's commencement on May 6, 2017. International coalition forces trumped the Syrian regime and ISIS in terms of killing medical and civil defense personnel. Moreover, this month saw the second massacre against civil defense personnel this year, which was committed by an unidentified armed group in Sarmin city, Idlib governorate. Also, we recorded, in August, that Syrian regime forces attacked committed more violations against medical facilities and civil defense facilities than any other party.

Methodology

SNHR's high-level methodology for documentation relies on survivors and families' direct accounts in addition to the process of verifying and analyzing pictures, videos, and some medical records. However, we can't claim that we have documented all cases in light of the ban and pursuit by Syrian regime forces and some of the other armed groups.

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.



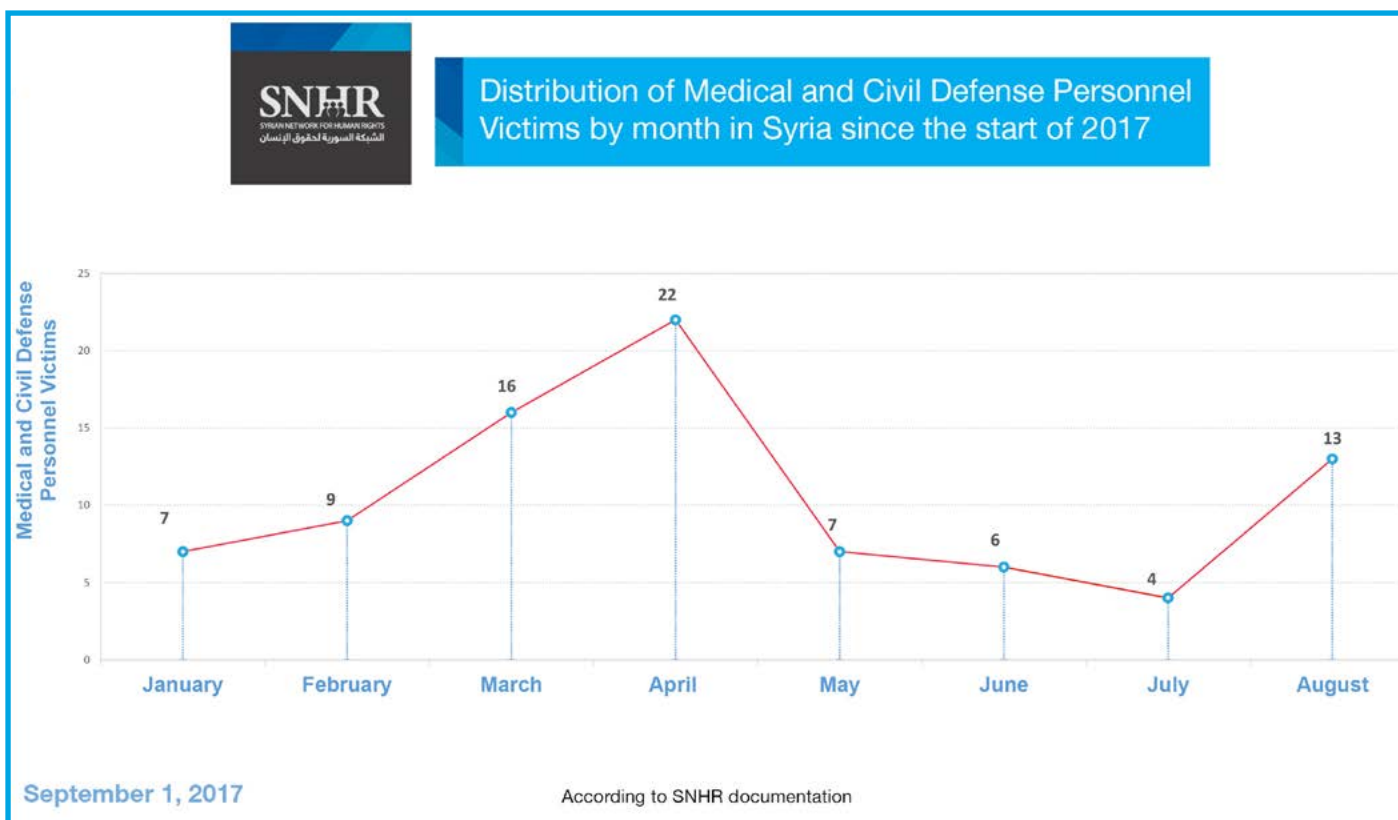
Please see the methodology adopted by SNHR in [victim documentation](#) and [classifying civilian vital facilities](#)

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 psychological ramifications.

II. Executive Summary

A. Victims among medical personnel and civil defense personnel since the start 2017

SNHR has documented the killing of 84 medical personnel and civil defense personnel at the hands of the parties to the conflict in Syria between the start of 2017 and September of the same year.

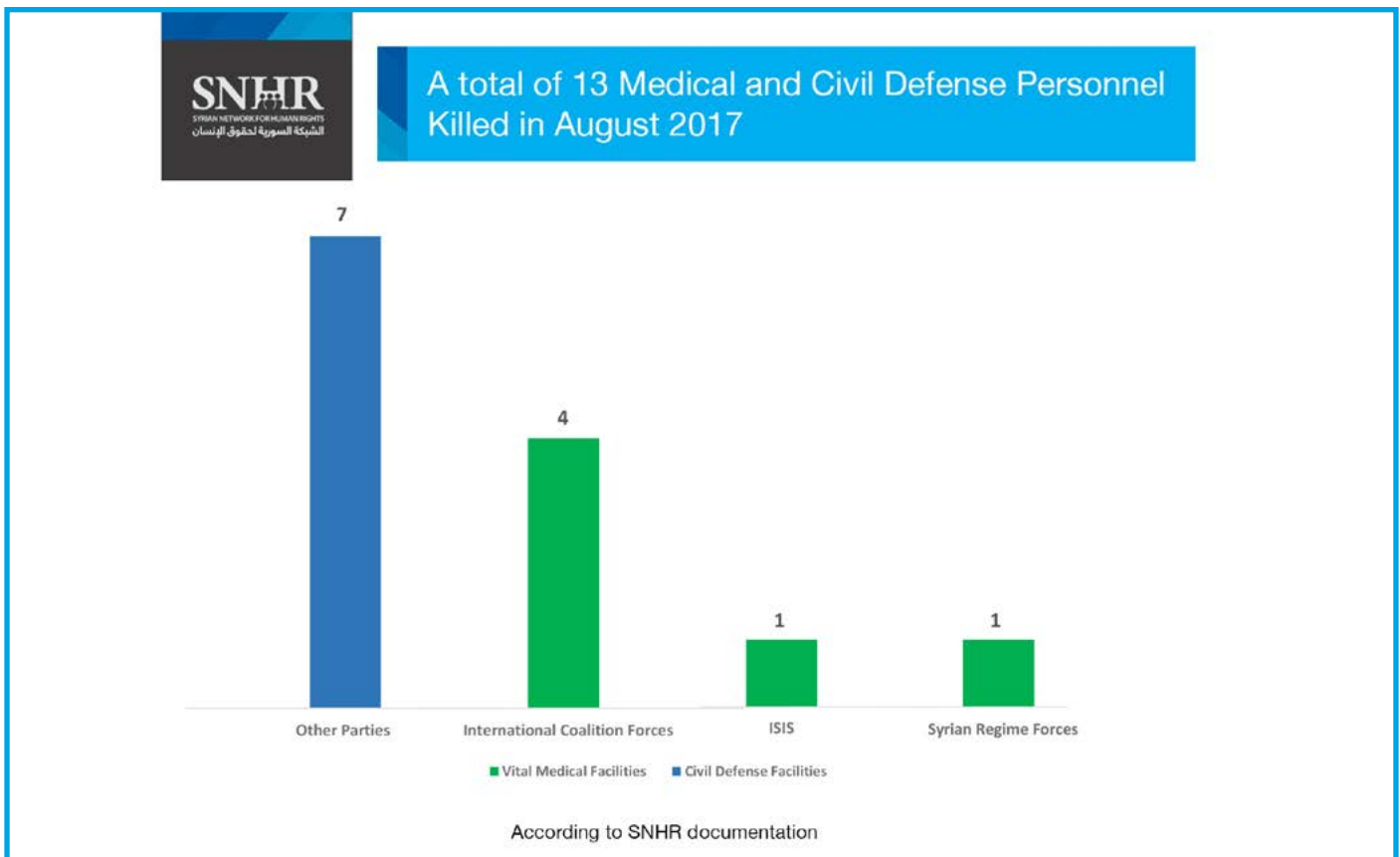


B. Toll of Violations in August 2017

SNHR has documented in the month of August 2017 the following main violations against medical personnel, civil defense personnel, and their respective facilities:

- Acts of killing

We documented the killing of 13 medical and civil defense personnel



As follows:

- Syrian regime forces (army, security, local militias, Shiite foreign militias): killed one medical personnel.
- Extremist Islamic groups
ISIS (self-proclaimed the Islamic State): killed one doctor.
- International coalition forces: killed four doctors.
- Other parties: killed seven civil defense personnel.

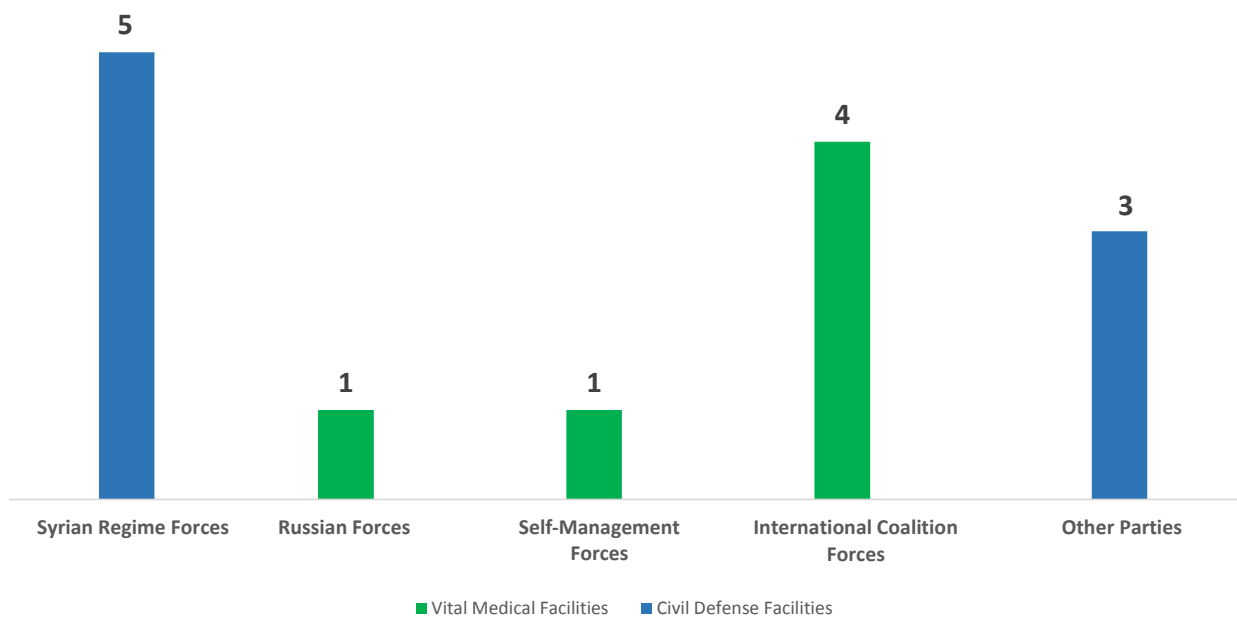


- Targeting vital medical and civil defense facilities

SNHR has documented 14 incidents of attack on vital medical facilities and civil defense facilities, as follows

- Syrian regime forces (army, security, local militias, Shiite foreign militias): five incidents of attack on civil defense facilities.
- Russian forces: one incident of attack on a medical facility.
- Self-Management forces (primarily consisting of the Democratic Union Party – a branch for the Kurdistan Workers’ Party): one incident of attack on a medical facility
- International coalition forces: four incidents of attack on medical facilities
- Other parties: three incidents of attack on civil defense facilities

Distribution of Incidents of Attack on Vital Medical and Civil Defense Facilities by the Parties to the Conflict in August 2017



III. Details

First: Acts of killing

- Syrian Regime forces (army, security, local militias, Shiite foreign militias)

Ahmad Barhoum Sweis, works at Talbisa Central Hospital, from Talbisa city, northern suburbs of Homs governorate, born in 1983, works as an electric technician at the hospital, has an [intermediate education certificate](#), married and a father of five. He was killed on Sunday, August 20, 2017, in an artillery shelling by Syrian regime forces that fired a number of shells at Talblisa city.



Ahmad Sweis

- Extremist Islamic groups

ISIS (self-proclaimed the Islamic State)

Ibrahim Khalil al Shawwakh, a dentist. He was killed on Wednesday, August 2, 2017, by a landmine planted by ISIS near al Jesr al Qadim area, southern Raqqa city, as he was trying to flee the ISIS-held areas of Raqqa city.



Ibrahim al Shawwakh



- International coalition forces

Qais Farid al Sayed Ahmad, gynecologist, from Raqqa city, born in 1951, works at the National Hospital in Raqqa city, married and has kids. He was killed on Sunday, August 6, 2017, in a bombing by fixed-wing international coalition forces warplanes that fired missiles at his house in Jam'iyet al Attiba' area near the curriculum directorate in Raqqa city.



Qais al Sayed Ahmad

Fouad Bashir al Ijili, dentist, from Raqqa city, born in 1955, married and has kids. He was killed on Sunday, August 6, 2017, in a bombing by fixed-wing international coalition forces warplanes that fired missiles at Dr. Qais Farid al Sayed Ahmad's house -where Dr. Foad was located at the time of the bombing- in Jam'iyet al Attiba' area near the curriculum directorate in Raqqa city.



Fouad al Ijili

Abdul Rahman Samer Mustafa al Akel, a third-year [medical student](#) at ISIS's Caliphate University in Raqqa city, he works as a doctor at the National Hospital in Raqqa city, from al Hwyaqa neighborhood, Deir Ez-Zour city, born in 1996. He was killed on Friday, August 18, 2017, in a bombing by fixed-wing international coalition forces warplanes that fired missiles at the National Hospital in the middle of Raqqa city.

Mustafa Mahmoud al Sheikh, [orthopedist](#), from al Bab city, eastern suburbs of Aleppo governorate, and IDP who fled to Raqqa city, born in 1968. He was killed on Saturday, August 26, 2017, in a bombing by fixed-wing international coalition forces warplanes that fired missiles in Raqqa city.



- Other parties

Basel Mustafa Qassas, [an ambulance driver](#) and the technical officer in charge of the equipment at the civil defense center in Sarmin city, eastern suburbs of Idlib governorate, born in Sarmin city on May 5, 1986, has a degree in Arabic from Aleppo University, married and a father of two. He was shot and killed on Saturday, August 12, 2017, by armed men who attacked the civil defense center in Sarmin city. As of this writing, we haven't been able to identify the party that was responsible for the attack.



Basel Qassas

Mohammad Dib al Her, [a firefighter](#) at the [civil defense center](#) (team 2) in Sarmin city, eastern suburbs of Idlib governorate, from Sarmin city, 25-year-old. He was shot and killed on Saturday, August 12, 2017, by armed men who attacked the civil defense center in Sarmin city. As of this writing, we haven't been able to identify the party that was responsible for the attack.



Mohammad Dib al Her

Ziad Hasan Qadhanoun, director of team 2 at the civil defense center in Sarmin city, eastern suburbs of Idlib governorate, from Sarmin city, 40-year-old, married and a father of five (four daughters and one son). He was shot and killed on Saturday, August 12, 2017, by armed men who attacked the civil defense center in Sarmin city. As of this writing, we haven't been able to identify the party that was responsible for the attack.



Ziad Qadhanoun



Mohammad Omar Shabib, [a fire truck driver](#) at the civil defense center (team 2) in Sarmin city, eastern suburbs of Idlib governorate, from Sarmin city, born on April 1, 1980, married and a father of four. He was shot and killed on Saturday, August 12, 2017, by armed men who attacked the civil defense center in Sarmin city. As of this writing, we haven't been able to identify the party that was responsible for the attack.



Mohammad Shabib

Hamza Krouma, a member of the rescue team at the civil defense center (team 2) in Sarmin city, eastern suburbs of Idlib governorate, from al Khaldiya neighborhood in the middle of Homs city, 24-year-old, married and his wife was pregnant. He was shot and killed on Saturday, August 12, 2017, by armed men who attacked the civil defense center in Sarmin city. As of this writing, we haven't been able to identify the party that was responsible for the attack.



Hamza Krouma

Obayda al Redwan, a member of the rescue team at the civil defense center (team 2) in Sarmin city, eastern suburbs of Idlib governorate, from al Khaldiya neighborhood in the middle of Homs city, 20-year-old, married. He was shot and killed on Saturday, August 12, 2017, by armed men who attacked the civil defense center in Sarmin city. As of this writing, we haven't been able to identify the party that was responsible for the attack.



Obayda al Redwan



Abdul Razzaq Hasan Haj Khalil, [a member of the rescue team](#) at the civil defense center in Sarmin city, eastern suburbs of Idlib governorate, from Sarmin city, 24-year-old, married and a father of two (a son and a daughter). He was shot and killed on Saturday, August 12, 2017, by armed men who attacked the civil defense center in Sarmin city. As of this writing, we haven't been able to identify the party that was responsible for the attack.



B. Targeting medical facilities and civil defense facilities

- Syrian regime forces (army security, local militias, Shiite foreign militias)

Civil defense centers

Monday morning, August 7, 2017, Syrian regime forces fired a number of “Pheel” rockets that landed near the civil defense center in [Ein Tarma town](#), Eastern Ghouta, east of Damascus suburbs governorate. A civil defense member was wounded. Additionally, the center building was slightly damaged as well as its equipment. The town was under the control of armed opposition factions at the time of the incident.

Tuesday afternoon, August 8, 2017, Syrian regime forces artillery fired a number of shells at a first-response medical point for the civil defense in al Ash’ari town, al Marj area, Eastern Ghouta, east of Damascus suburbs governorate. The point building and its equipment were [moderately damaged](#). The town was under the control of armed opposition factions at the time of the incident.

Wednesday, August 9, 2017, Syrian regime forces artillery fired a number of shells that landed near an ambulance belonging to the civil defense’s center 215 in [Kafr Batna town](#), Eastern Ghouta, east of Damascus suburbs governorate. The front structure of the ambulance was [moderately damaged](#). The town was under the control of ISIS at the time of the incident.





Damages resulting from a shelling by Syrian regime forces on an ambulance belonging to the civil defense in Kafr Batna town, Damascus suburbs – Wednesday, August 9, 2017

Wednesday, August 9, 2017, Syrian regime forces artillery fired a number of shells that landed near an ambulance belonging to the civil defense's center 103 in Ein Tarma town, Eastern Ghouta, east of Damascus suburbs governorate. The ambulance structure was moderately damaged. The town was under the control of ISIS at the time of the incident.

Sunday, August 13, 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](#), Eastern Ghouta, east of Damascus suburbs governorate. The vehicle was slightly damaged. The town was under the control of ISIS at the time of the incident.

- Russian forces

Vital medical facilities

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

Wednesday, August 9, 2017, fixed-wing warplanes we believe were Russian fired a number of missiles at the dispensary in [al Tabni town](#), western suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate. The dispensary building was heavily damaged, and was rendered out of commission. The town was under the control of ISIS at the time of the incident.



- Self-Management forces (primarily consisting of the Democratic Union Party – a branch for the Kurdistan Workers’ Party)

Vital medical facilities

Thursday, August 24, 2017, an artillery for the Kurdish-majority Syrian Democratic Forces fired a number of shells at the National Hospital in 23 February Street in the middle of Raqqa city. The hospital building was heavily damaged, and parts of it were rendered out of commission. It should be noted that the same hospital was heavily damaged due to a missile bombing by fixed-wing international coalition forces warplanes on Saturday, August 5, 2017. The area, located in the middle of Raqqa city, was under the control of ISIS at the time of the incident.

- International coalition forces

Vital medical facilities

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

Saturday, August 5, 2017, fixed-wing international coalition forces warplanes fired a number of missiles at the [National Hospital](#) in 23 February Street in the middle of Raqqa city. The hospital building was heavily damaged, and parts of were rendered out of commission. The area was under the control of ISIS at the time of the incident.

Tuesday, August 8, 2017, fixed-wing international coalition forces warplanes fired a number of missiles at [al Salam Hospital](#) in 23 February Street in the middle of Raqqa city. The hospital building was heavily damaged and was rendered out of commission. The area was under the control of ISIS at the time of the incident.

Sunday, August 20, 2017, fixed-wing international coalition forces warplanes fired a number of missiles at al Teb al Hadith Hospital in west of al Nour Street (formerly Bassel Street), west of the ISIS-held Raqqa city. The hospital building was completely destroyed, and was rendered out of commission.

Tuesday, August 29, 2017, fixed-wing international coalition forces warplanes fired a number of missiles at [al Mwasa Hospital](#) in the middle of Raqqa city. The hospital building was heavily destroyed, and was rendered out of commission. The city was under the control of ISIS at the time of the incident.



- Other parties

Civil defense centers

Saturday, August 12, 2017, armed men attacked the civil defense center in the al Sharqi neighborhood, [Sarmin city](#), eastern suburbs of [Idlib governorate](#), and opened fire inside the center, [killing seven civil defense personnel](#), and puncturing the center walls. Also, the armed men looted the center equipment and seized a service vehicle and ambulance - the latter was found completely burned. As of this writing, we haven't been able to identify the party that was responsible for the attack. The city was under the joint control of armed opposition factions and Fateh al Sham Front at the time of the incident.

IV. Conclusions and Recommendation

Legal conclusions

1- 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 halted. Also, these incidents are violations of Article 8 of Rome Statute through the act of willful killing which constitutes war crimes.

2- 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, Self-Management forces, international coalition forces, and other parties (which includes parties that we weren't able to identify as well as Turkish, Lebanese, and Jordanian forces) have committed acts that amount to war crimes through the crime of extrajudicial killing or targeting vital civilian facilities.

3- The attacks mentioned in this report are considered a violation of the customary international law as the shells were fired at populated areas 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 it has been more than two years since Resolution 2139 was adopted and no pledges to cease the indiscriminate bombardment operations have been made. All the conflict parties must 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 must be held accountable including the Russian regime whose involvement in committing war crimes have 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, stolen, and ruined.
- Expand the sanctions to include the Syrian and Iranian regimes and all of their pillars who are directly involved in committing crimes against humanity and war crimes against the Syrian people.

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 killings 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 utilizing the principle of the universal jurisdiction.



The sponsoring Russian side

- The Syrian regime has to be stopped from dooming the de-escalation agreements. Otherwise, it will only be seen as an exchange of roles between the Russian regime, on one side, and the Syrian/Russian alliance on the other side.
- Start making progress in the detainees issue by revealing the fates of 76,000 forcibly-disappeared persons at the hands of the Syrian regime.

Medical organizations around the world

There is a severe shortage in medical manpower in Syria because of the ceaseless killing of medical personnel. 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 go to the victims' families and friends and to the local activists who contributed majorly to this report.





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