

Victims of Cluster Munitions in Syria

Government Forces Show No Respect to International Law and Continue to Use Cluster Munitions

A Report Prepared by: SNHR on February, 2, 2014.

The report presents a comprehensive statistic of the victims of cluster munitions and documents the last incident for the use of these munitions in Keferzita, in the countryside of Hama.

Introduction

Despite of the fact that more than 112 of the world countries condemned, through a decision taken by the UN general Assembly, the Syrian government for using cluster munitions against its people, this government continued disdaining the international community by hitting dozens of new places with these munitions. More than 70 percent of the sites targeted are civilian areas and most of the victims are children, according to statistics gathered by SNHR. These statistics show that 97 percent of the victims are civilians.

Government forces have used cluster munitions in dozens of areas along 9 governorates, the last of which was during the attacks on Keferzita in the countryside of Hama. These attacks caused the killing of 120 civilians, among them 58 children (48%) and 14 women (12%). This means that a total of 60% of the victims are women and children. Other victims include 48 men and only 3 rebels which constitutes only 2.5 % of the total victims of the attacks.

Three more children were killed in Keferzita recently in a new cluster munitions attack by the government forces.

Despite the great difficulty in even getting an approximate number of people injured by the use of cluster munitions by the government forces, the estimates of the team of SNHR refer to more than 1470 people injured. And it worth noticing that this number might be underestimated since the cluster munitions sometimes spread over an area more than 30000 square meters. Consequently, the exact number of victims can't be decided accurately since the cluster munitions remain for decades unless they are cleared by specialized teams.

The next link contains the names and photos of all the victims of cluster munitions attacks distributed according to the different Syrian governorates. In addition, the percentage of women and children victims is mentioned.

Details:

The methodology of this report is based on interviews conducted by the team of the SNHR with activists and eyewitnesses. The report includes recorded accounts of two eyewitnesses, in addition to pieces of news and pictures that the SNHR could obtain from Keferzita activists who cooperated with our team.

Keferzita is 35 KM to the northwest of Hama. The city is under the control of the armed opposition since the beginning of 2013. Here is a link that shows the location of the city:

The Syrian government forces bombed the city on Wednesday and Thursday with rockets that contain cluster munitions. Number of military experts assured us that this is the first time they see such kind of rockets.

The investigations conducted by the team of SNHR showed that the areas targeted are civilian areas that are crowded with people. No evidence was found to prove that there were opposition fighters in those areas.

After the 2008 Convention on Cluster Munitions most countries banned the use of cluster munitions. Syria has not joined that convention and was not part in the 2007-2008 talks that established for the convention.

Our dear colleagues in Human Rights Watch issued a number of reports that document many cases of the use of cluster munitions by the Syrian government forces in, including this last incident in Keferzita. Great efforts were put in those reports in which it was shown that seven kinds of cluster munitions were used by the Syrian government forces; with documents from many different Syrian governorates.

Abu Hamza, a resident of Keferzita told SNHR:

“At about 1:30 PM, I was on the outskirts of the city when the opposition fighters used their radio connections to warn civilians that there was a new wave of rockets launched towards the city from Hama military airport. Rebels requested that civilians go down to the shelters. After that, I heard sounds of explosions that took place in the city centre, about one KM from where I was. The rockets used were 10 inches wide and 6 meters long. They were supplied with cluster munitions. The remnants of one rocket are still in a square in front of my house. Ambulance arrived soon after that. More than 15 civilians were injured, among them a child who died just later. The same timing next day, the city received another rocket of the same kind. Many civilians were injured as well. The reason that the number of the killed and the injured is not huge is that people used to hide in shelters. If it were not for these shelters, a horrible massacre could have happened.”

Fadel Abdul Ghani, the founder and head of SNHR said:

“the real threat of cluster munitions continues to exist even after the attacks as hundreds of submunitions may fail to explode upon impact and might explode in the future when people close them unknowing of their existence, causing them to be killed or injured.”

SNHR documented dozens of cases for people killed or injured in different Syrian governorates because of explosions caused by unexploded cluster submunitions that spread now in suburbs, schools and fields.

SNHR contacted Mr. Hasan, an eyewitness from Keferzita. He said:

“On Wednesday afternoon, at about quarter to two PM, after we heard the warnings from the radio of the opposition fighters, we entered the shelters, and then we heard sounds of explosions similar to the sounds of rockets. The whole city rocked. The rockets were launched from Hama airport. They were two rockets supplied with more than 80 cluster submunitions. The next day, the city was targeted again with another rocket that was launched from Hama airport and hit the northern the area of the city that was targeted the day before. In all cases the areas that were targeted civilian and residential areas.”

Different Sources asserted that the rockets used in the attack were launched from a military airport based to the west of Hama. As known, cluster munitions can be launched by rockets, mortar shells, or they can be bombed by the means of military jets. The armed opposition doesn't possess launchers for bombing such kinds of missiles.

Those attacks caused the death of three civilians from the city:

Mahmud Talal Addalati, 25 years old.

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/0BwxbVgIZXLmAYWtDb09UNXp3Vnc/edit?usp=sharing>

Abdulrahman Rami Al Rahil Al Mahmud, 6 years old.

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/0BwxbVgIZXLmAYWtDb09UNXp3Vnc/edit?usp=sharing>

Mahud Al Qabalan, 70 years old.

12 people were injured in the attacks, among them women and children:

1. Muhamed Al Husien, Keferzita, 39 years old.
2. Maysa Adnan Al Rajo, Keferzita, 24 years old.
3. Saleh Al Bakkour, Keferzita, 64 years old.
4. Ukba Al Othman, Keferzita 28 years old.
5. Maya Al Shawrdi, Morek, 25 years old.
6. The child Maysa Al Shawrdi, Morek, 4 years old.
7. Khaked Al Rijo, Keferzita, 24 years old.
8. Tarek Kabalan, Keferzita, 26 years old.
9. Abdulatif Al Hebio, Keferzita, 55 years old.
10. Abdulaziz Naif, Keferzita, 36 years old.
11. Muhamed Husien Hindawi, Keferzita, 66 years old.
12. Sami Hamdu Al Ubaidan, Keferzita, 45 years old.

Appendixes and attachments:

Pictures of the cluster munitions hit on Keferzita:

Remnants of cluster munitions that were hit on the city:

A video showing the sounds of explosions caused by the shelling:

A video that shows the fall of the rocket on February, 13, 2014.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=irrDKCIXUUU&feature=youtu.be>

A video that shows the fall of rockets on February, 13, 2014.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yrQwQubXpQ4&feature=youtu.be>

Conclusions and Recommendations

The use of cluster munitions by the Syrian government forces is considered a violation of the principles of non-discrimination and equality in the International Human Rights Law and is considered a war crime.

Russian government and other governments must stop supplying the Syrian government with weapons because it is proved now that the Syrian government forces have used these weapons in making crimes against humanity and war crimes that targeted civilian citizens. On the other hand, the friends of the Syrian people must practice real pressure, economically and politically, on the Russian government for this purpose.

The European Union must put more pressure on the Security Council in order that the Syrian issue is turned into the International Criminal Court.

The United Nations must, from now on, prepare a comprehensive study on the areas hit by the Syrian government with cluster munitions in order to give warnings to the civilians living in these areas. The United Nations must also work quickly on illuminating the unexploded submunitions.

The use, transport and production of inaccurate and unreliable cluster munitions must be banned. Existing depots must be destroyed.

Acknowledgments

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