

1,389 Civilians Killed in Syria in February 2018

67% of all Victims were Killed
by Syrian Regime Forces in
Eastern Ghouta

SNHR

SYRIAN NETWORK FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

الشبكة السورية لحقوق الإنسان

Thursday, March 1, 2018

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 Methodology

Since the popular uprising for freedom started in Syria in March 2011, SNHR has taken it upon itself to record a wide range of violations that are being perpetrated daily against the Syrian people, such as killing, enforced-disappearance, arbitrary arrest, destruction, indiscriminate bombardment, and torture as SNHR shed light on the most notable violations it recorded that were committed by the parties to the conflict in Syria in hundreds of Reports.

SNHR has largely focused, since it was founded, on documenting victims who were killed at the hands of the parties to the conflict, and created a database for the victims' names and their information such as sex, age, occupation, way of killing, the party that killed them, and the type of weapon used.

Most of the victims who were killed in the first months were killed by Syrian regime forces' gunfire who used excessive force against peaceful protesters or due to torture inside government detention centers. In the following years, most of the victims were killed in air attacks carried out by the parties that possess an air force – primarily the Syrian regime, and then Russian forces and international coalition forces. In addition, there have been hundreds of victims who were killed due to shortage of food and medication in light of the siege, and hundreds of victims who were killed in chemical and cluster attacks as well as killed by landmines while other died from cold, or drowning as they were attempting to find a refuge. SNHR's archives, also, contains victims killed in attacks by factions from armed opposition, extremist Islamic groups, and Kurdish Democratic Union Party forces.



Methodology

This report includes only the death toll of civilians that were killed by the main seven influential parties in Syria:

- Syrian regime forces (army, Security, local militias, Shiite foreign militias)
- Russian forces
- Self-management forces (consisting primarily of the Democratic Union Party forces, a branch for the Kurdistan Workers' Party)
- Extremist Islamic groups
- Armed opposition factions
- International coalition forces
- Other parties

As for armed victims, they are divided into two categories:

- Victims from the armed opposition: We face additional difficulties as many of those victims are killed on battlefronts and not inside cities. Also, we aren't able to obtain details such as names, pictures and other important details on account of the armed opposition forces' unwillingness to reveal such information for security concerns among other reasons. Therefore, the actual number of victims is much greater than what is being recorded.

- Victims from Syrian regime force, extremist Islamic groups, and Kurdish Democratic Union Party forces: It is almost impossible to access information about this kind of victims and the margin of error is considerably higher due to the lack of any applicable methodology in this type of documentation. The Syrian government and ISIS don't publish, reveal, or record their victims. From our perspective, the statistics published by some groups on this category of victims are fictitious and are not based on any actual data.

Therefore, we are only going to include civilian victims who were killed by all parties and compare them.

This report draws upon the ongoing monitoring of news and developments by SNHR team, and on an extensive network of relations with various sources that have been built over the course of our work. When we receive information, or learn about 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. Usually, what we do, at SNHR, in such cases is relying on accounts from survivors who experienced the violation firsthand, where we try to access those directly, and, to a second degree, who saw or filmed the violation,



It is also important to note that many of the incidents that result in victims might not be considered as a violation of the international humanitarian law. However, they involved collateral damages, and so we record and archive these incidents in order to preserve historical accuracy and store it as a national record, but we don't describe it as crimes.

Please see SNHR methodology for [documenting victims](#):

II. Summary of February 2018

This month recorded a rise in the rates of killings at the hands of Syrian regime forces and their allies in de-escalation zones. This was concentrated in the besieged region of Eastern Ghouta, Damascus suburbs, in which the Syrian regime killed approximately 67% of all civilian victims. Bombardments never stopped despite Security Council resolution 2401, which was adopted unanimously on February 24, 2018, providing for a cessation of hostilities and allowing for the passage of aids, and the Russian Minister of Defense Sergey Shoygu's personal and nonsensical interpretation of the Security Council resolution in announcing a five-hour truce from 09:00 to 14:00. Also, we haven't recorded that any aids were delivered into the besieged areas.

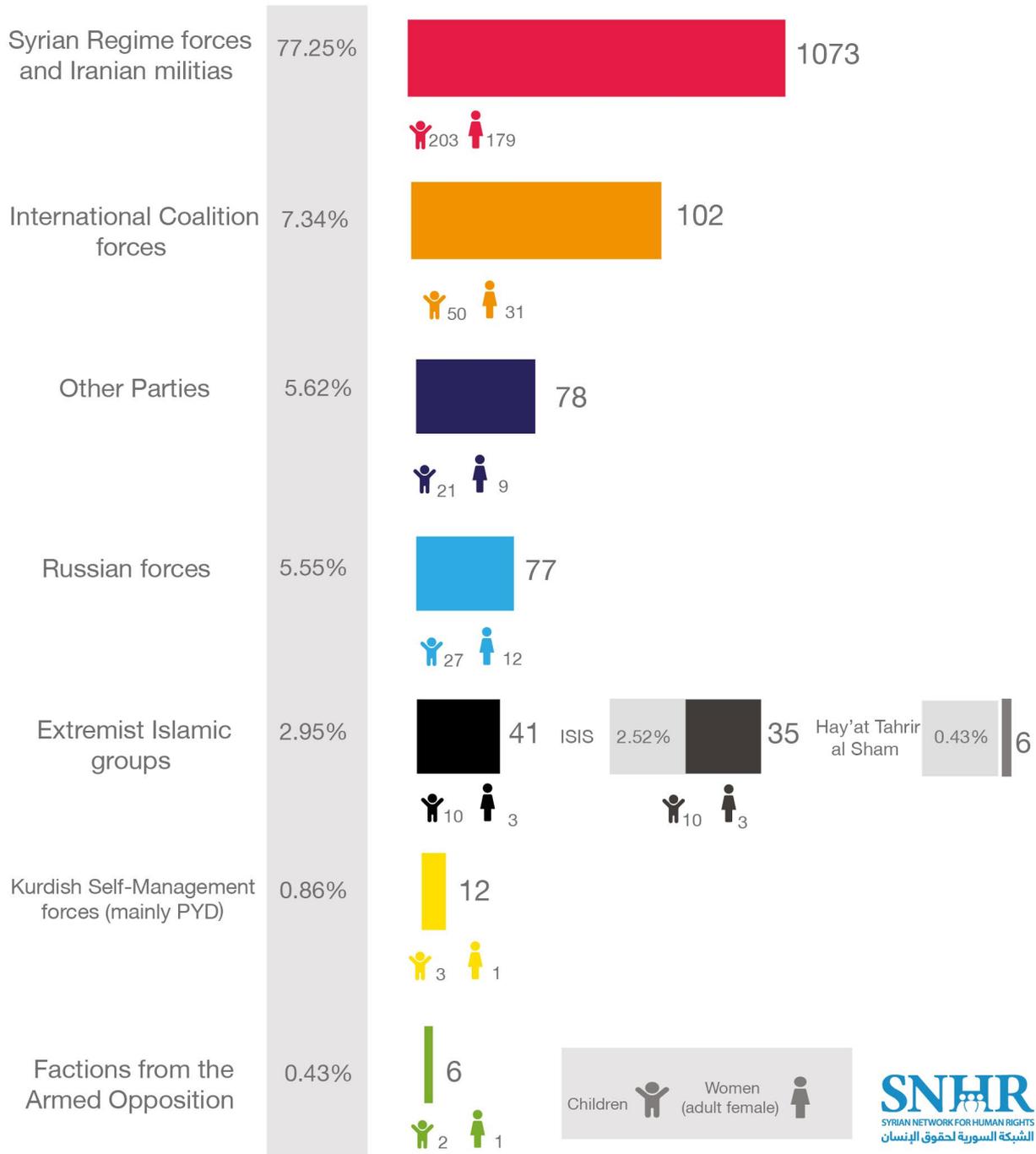
Syrian regime forces used barrel bombs in Eastern Ghouta for the first time in about a year and a half. We have recorded a number of civilian deaths by that weapon – the majority of them were in Damascus suburbs' Eastern Ghouta and Aleppo governorate.

III. Details

SNHR has documented the killing of 1,389 civilians at the hands of the parties to the conflict in February 2018, as follows:



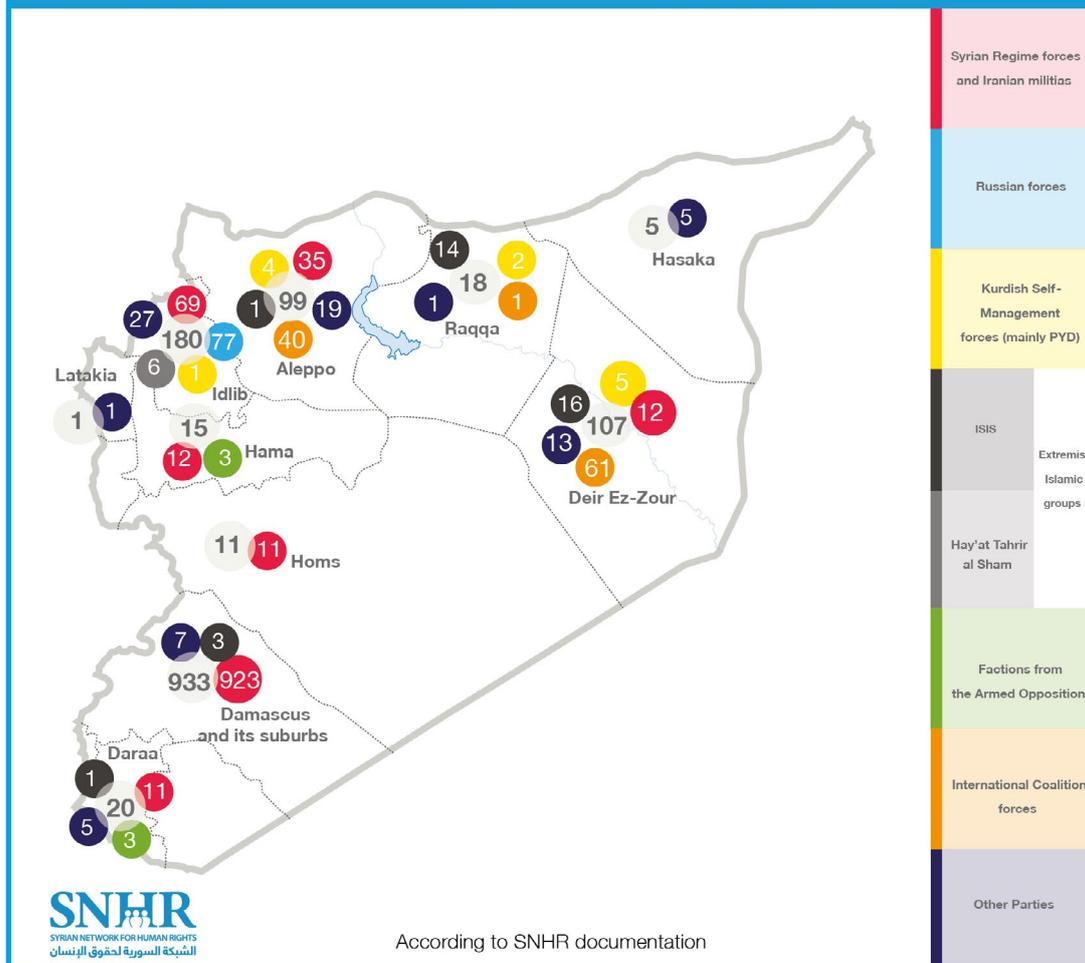
1389 civilians were killed in Syria in February 2018



According to SNHR documentation



1389 Civilians killed in Syria in February 2018



Death toll is distributed by the parties to the conflict as follows

A. Syrian regime forces (army, security, local militias, and Shiite foreign militias)

We have documented the killing of 1,073 civilians by Syrian regime forces, including 203 children (on an average of eight children per day), and 179 women (adult female). Also, among the victims were seven who died due to torture.

B. Russian forces

We have recorded the killing of 77 civilians, including 27 children and 12 women, in air attacks we believe were by Russian forces.

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

SNHR has recorded the killing of 12 civilians, including three children and one woman.



D. Extremist Islamic groups: killed 41 civilians, including 10 children and three women, divided into:

- ISIS (self-proclaimed the Islamic State): killed 35 civilians, including 10 children and three women.
- Hay'at Tahrir al Sham (an alliance composed of Fateh al Sham Front and a number of factions from the armed opposition): killed six civilians.

E. Factions from the armed opposition

SNHR has documented the killing of six civilians, including two children and one woman.

F. International coalition forces

We have recorded the killing of 102 civilians, including 50 children and 31 women, in air attacks by international coalition forces warplanes.

G. Other parties

We have recorded the killing of 78 civilians, including 21 children and nine women, by other parties. This category includes victims who were killed in bombings that we couldn't identify their perpetrators, gunfire of unknown source, landmines of unknown source, in addition victims who died in fires and indiscriminate shelling incidents by the Turkish land and air forces, as well as victims who were killed by Jordanian and Lebanese forces.

We would like to note that this is what we were able to document and verify with full names, place, and time through our members who are spread across Syria. It also should be noted that there are many cases that we couldn't access and document especially in the event of massacres where towns and villages are enclosed and communication is cut off. This suggests that the actual number of civilian deaths is greater. All of this is because the Syrian government bans any human rights organization from working on its grounds.

IV. Conclusions and Recommendations

- SNHR stresses that the Syrian-Russian alliance forces have violated the rules of international human rights law which guarantee the right to life.
- Evidences and proofs, according to hundreds of eyewitnesses' testimonies, indicate that 90% at least of the widespread and single attacks were directed against civilians and civilian facilities.
- All of this discredits the Syrian government's and the Russian government's claims that they are fighting "Al-Qaeda and terrorists"
- SNHR notes that these incidents of killing constitute crimes against humanity where the element of widespread or systematic attack against a group of civilian residents was fulfilled in most of the killing cases.



- Kurdish Self-management forces have carried out extrajudicial killings that constitute war crimes.
- Extremist Islamic groups have carried out extrajudicial killings that constitute war crimes.
- Some of the armed opposition factions have carried out extrajudicial killings that constitute war crimes.
- International coalition forces have carried out extrajudicial killings that constitute war crimes.

Condemnation and liability

Every internationally unlawful act committed by the state will entail a legal responsibility on that state. Equally, the customary international law states that the state is responsible for all the acts committed by the members of its security and military forces. Consequently, the state is responsible for the unlawful acts, including crimes against humanity, that have been perpetrated by the members of its military and security forces.

Additionally, the Russian regime and all Shiite militias as well as ISIS are all foreign parties who were effectively involved in acts of killings and are all responsible legally and judicially in addition to the funders and supporters of the Syrian regime that is perpetrating massacres systemically and ceaselessly on a daily basis.

Recommendations

Security Council

- The Security Council has to take new steps after resolution 2139 has been adopted and no pledges to stop the indiscriminate bombing have been made. All parties to the conflict should adhere to these steps as well as the rules of the international humanitarian law.
- The Syrian case should be referred to the International Criminal Court and all those who are responsible should be held accountable including the Russian regime whose involvement in war crimes has been proven.
- Expand sanctions to include the Syrian, Russian, and Iranian regimes who were directly involved in crimes against humanity and war crimes against the Syrian people.
- List the militias who are fighting on the side of the Syrian government and had committed wide massacres - such as Iranian militias, the Lebanese group Hezbollah, other Shiite groups, the National Defense Army, and Shabihas, on the international list of terrorist groups.
- Abstain from considering the Syrian government an official side after it perpetrated crimes against humanity with regard to the relief aspect, and stop giving it the largest portion of financial and other aids as they are being delivered to the people who support the Syrian government instead of people who are truly in-need.



International Community

- In light of the split of the Security Council and its utter inability, action should 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 raise the support for the relief efforts. Additionally, the principle of universal jurisdiction should be activated in local tribunals 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 consumed as well as the Cessation of Hostilities statements and Astana agreements that followed. Therefore, steps under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations should be taken and the norm of the “Responsibility to Protect”, which was established by the United Nations General Assembly, should 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.

OHCHR

The OHCHR should submit a report to the Human Rights Council and other organs of the United Nations on the death toll mentioned in this report and the incidents of killing that preceded, considering that they are a glaring sign in a string of less-frequent massacres of smaller scope. The OHCHR should also work on acting upon the recommendations included in this report.

Commission of Inquiry (COI)

Launch investigations on the cases included in this report and past reports. SNHR is willing to cooperate and provide more evidences and data.

International, Impartial, and Independent Mechanism (IIIM)

Address the cases mentioned in this report and past reports. SNHR is willing to cooperate and provide more evidences and data.

European Union and United States of America

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



The Russian regime

- Launch investigations regarding the incidents that resulted in civilian casualties, make the findings of these investigations public for the Syrian people, and hold the people involved accountable.
- Compensate all affected facilities and centers, and reconstruct and rehabilitate them. Also, compensate all the victims' families, who were killed by the current Russian regime, as well as the all the wounded.
- Immediately cease bombing hospitals, protected objects, and civilian areas, and respect the customary international law.

The Coalition (international coalition forces and Syrian Democratic Forces)

- The states of the coalition have to unequivocally and truly acknowledge that some of the bombardment operations have resulted in the killing of innocent civilians. Instead of denying, these states should take speedy steps to launch serious investigations, and immediately compensate and apologize to the victims and those who were affected.
- The SDF-supporting states should apply pressure on these forces in order to compel them to cease all of their violations in all the areas and towns that are under their control.
- All forms of support, weapons and otherwise, should be ceased until SDF commit to the previous recommendations. This is primarily the supporting states' responsibility. Providing SDF with weapons and support while knowing that they can be used in war crimes or crimes against humanity can be seen as a contribution to these crimes.

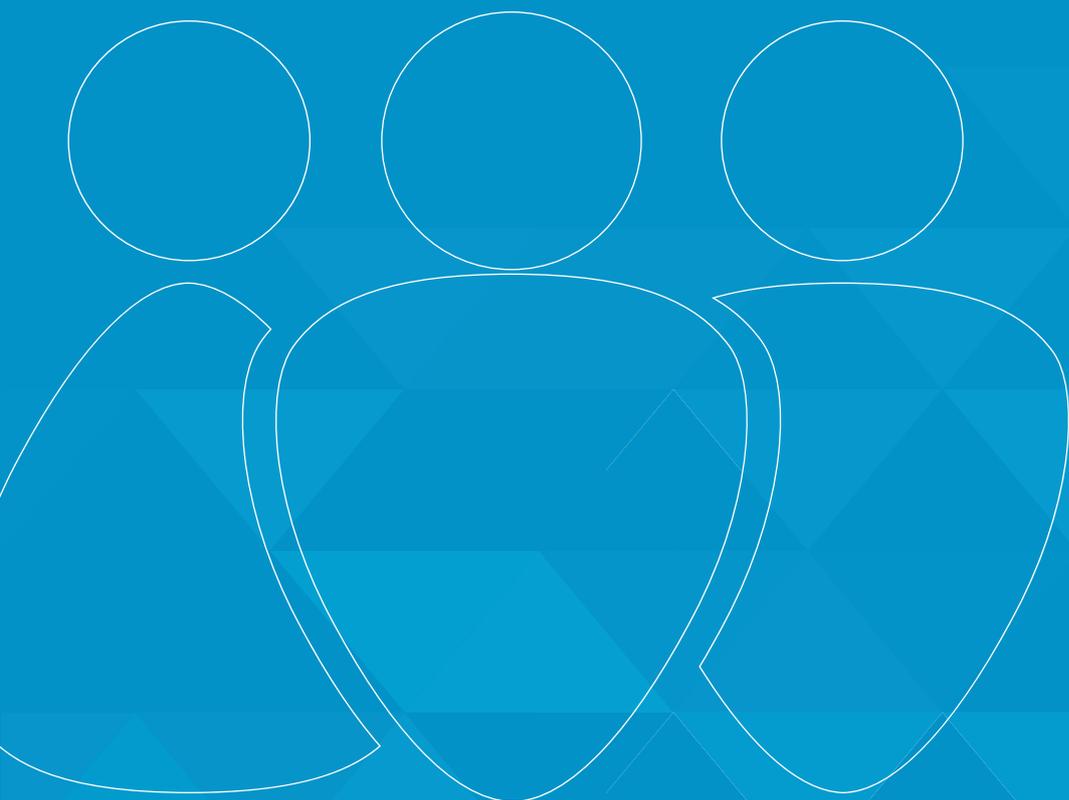
Armed opposition factions

Ensure the protection of civilians in all of their areas of control. Also, armed opposition factions should distinguish between civilians and military targets, and cease any indiscriminate attacks.

Acknowledgment and Condolences

Our thanks to the residents, victims' families, eyewitnesses, and local community activists who contributed effectively to this report. Also, our most heartfelt condolences to the victims' families and friends.





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