

# 416 Civilians, Including Four Medical Personnel and One Member of the Civil Defense Personnel, Documented Killed in Syria in May 2019

SNHR Documented 12 Massacres and 14 Persons Who Died due to Torture

# SNHR

SYRIAN NETWORK FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

الشبكة السورية لحقوق الإنسان

Saturday, June 1, 2019

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

The documentation process to register victims killed in Syria is one of the most important roles performed by the Syrian Network for Human Rights since March 2011. This is all the more crucial since murder is the most prevalent of all the violations perpetrated, and the one which most profoundly affects the Syrian people, with families suffering incalculable and irreparable trauma through the loss of fathers, mothers, brothers, friends, etc.

These violations have become widespread, primarily through Syrian regime forces' and affiliated militias' systematic killing of civilians using every kind of weapon. The regime began by using tanks and artillery, then progressed to also deploying warplanes and helicopter gunships which have dropped or fired barrel bombs, in addition to Scud missiles and chemical weapons.

The entry of several parties into the Syrian conflict has increased the importance and complexity of documenting the victims killed in Syria.

Since 2011, the Syrian Network for Human Rights has created complex electronic programs to archive and categorize the victims' data, which the team collects and verifies, enabling us to catalogue the victims according to their gender and the location where each was killed, the governorate from which each victim originally came, and the party responsible for the killing, and to make comparisons between these parties, and identify the governorates which lost the largest proportion of residents.



Since 2011, we have also deemed it appropriate to highlight the death toll among women and children due to the vulnerability of these groups, their central role in the community, and because they give a strong indication of the targeting of civilians. We later added other groups which have played a key role in the popular movement and later in the armed conflict, such as media, medical, relief and civil defense personnel.

Given the importance and sensitivity surrounding the murder of Syrian citizens, the Syrian Network for Human Rights has never stopped issuing daily death toll of victims for nearly eight years, or publishing monthly reports documenting the death toll of victims Syria lost each month, in addition to issuing an annual report, as well as dozens of other reports documenting massacres committed on Syrian soil. Also, SNHR periodically sends a special form to the United Nations Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial killings.

It should be noted that the United Nations has relied on the Syrian Network for Human Rights for all the statistics it has used in its analysis of victims in the conflict, given SNHR's prominent role as one of the most credible sources. SNHR is also used as a trustworthy source by a large number of Arab and international news agencies and many international human rights organizations.

## **Methodology**

This report records the death toll of victims killed by the main perpetrator parties to the conflict in Syria in May 2019, particularly focusing on those victims killed under torture, and victims amongst media and medical personnel, paying particular attention to those massacres which the SNHR was able to document that were committed by the main perpetrator parties to the conflict over the past month.

We should note that in this context we use the term “massacre” to refer to any attack that resulted in the deaths of five or more peaceful individuals in the same incident.

The report also includes a review of the most prominent incidents during this period. Finally, we maintain the full details of every incident on the SNHR database.

The report catalogues the death toll of victims perpetrated by each of the main perpetrator parties in the Syrian conflict. Accurately ascribing responsibility sometimes requires more time and investigation than usual, especially in the case of joint attacks. On some occasions, when we are unable to definitively assign responsibility for particular attacks to one specific party, as in the case of air strikes by Syrian or Russian warplanes, Syrian-Iranian attacks, or attacks by Syrian Democratic Forces and International Coalition forces, we indicate that responsibility for these attacks is held jointly by the parties in question until we are able to likely establish which one of the parties was responsible, or it's proved that the attack was a joint initiative carried out in coordination between the two parties.



The main perpetrator parties to the conflict in Syria are:

- Syrian Regime forces (army, security, local militias, and Shiite foreign militias)
- Russian forces
- Extremist Islamist groups
- Factions of the Armed Opposition
- Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic forces (the Democratic Union Party)
- International Coalition forces
- Other parties

Through use of SNHR's extensive database, we can catalogue the victims according to the governorate where they were killed, and also by the governorate from which they originally came. This report catalogues the death toll of victims according to the governorate in which they were killed, rather than by the governorate they originally came from.

In relation to victims amongst armed forces, these are divided into two categories:

- Victims from the armed opposition: We face additional difficulties in assessing these casualties as many of these victims are killed on battlefronts rather than in cities or other urban settlements. We are also often unable to obtain information on the victims such as names, photographs and other important personal details due to the reluctance of armed opposition forces to reveal such sensitive information for security concerns among other reasons. Therefore, the actual number of victims is far higher than the number documented.

- Victims from Syrian Regime force, extremist Islamist groups, and Kurdish Democratic Union Party forces: It is almost impossible to access information about this category of victims and the margin of error is considerably higher than usual due to the lack of any applicable methodology in this type of documentation, since these parties don't publish, reveal, or document information about their casualties. From our perspective and given these facts, it is rational to conclude that the statistics published by some groups concerning casualties amongst this category of victims are fabricated rather than being based on any actual data.

In this report, we record only the toll of civilian casualties - with the exception of the death toll among victims who died due to torture, which includes armed combatants as well as civilians - whose deaths we were able to document during the last month. Some of the victims documented may have been killed months or even years ago, as in some cases of death due to torture; in these cases, where the deaths have only recently been confirmed, we include two dates, the date when we were able to document the victim's death, and the date on which we think the death occurred.



The methodology adopted by the Syrian Network for Human Rights in documenting the victims can be seen at this link<sup>1</sup>.

This report draws upon the ongoing daily monitoring of news and developments by SNHR's team, and on information from our extensive network of various sources that has been built up over the course of our work since 2011. When we receive information or learn some news about violations via the internet or media outlets, our team works to follow up these reports and attempts to verify information and collect evidence and data. In some cases, researchers are able to visit the incident location promptly. However, this is a rarity in light of the incredibly high security risks, and given the frequency of daily incidents and the scarcity of human and material resources. Therefore, the opportunities available to access evidence vary between one case and another, and consequently the level of certainty in classification of each incident varies. SNHR's customary policy in such cases is to rely on accounts from survivors who experienced the violation firsthand, in addition to analyzing available materials from open sources such as the Internet and media outlets. We also talk with medical personnel who treated the injured in these incidents, examined the deceased victims' bodies, and identified the cause of death. The Syrian Network for Human Rights also provides [a special form](#) that can be filled with victims' names and personal information so that the Victims Documentation Department can follow up on this information and verify its accuracy and then include it in the database.

SNHR has analyzed videos and photographs that our team documented, which were posted online, or submitted by local activists via e-mail, Skype, or social media platforms. These videos and photos show, amongst other things, the sites of attacks, and bodies of the victims and the injured, whilst other photos may show the bodies of victims killed under torture, and of victims amongst medical and media personnel who died in attacks carried out by parties to the conflict. We also retain copies of all the videos and photographs included in these reports, which are also reviewed in this report, in a confidential electronic database and in hard disk backup copies, and we ensure always that all these data are stored with their original source.

We do not claim, however, that we have documented all cases, given the severe prohibitions, restrictions and persecution by the Syrian Regime forces and some other armed groups.

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<sup>1</sup> "Syrian Network for Human Rights Methodology", Syrian Network for Human Rights, <[http://sn4hr.org/public\\_html/wp-content/pdf/english/SNHR\\_Methodology\\_en.pdf](http://sn4hr.org/public_html/wp-content/pdf/english/SNHR_Methodology_en.pdf)>



Our investigations confirm that all of the attacks included in this report that were carried out by the main perpetrator parties to the conflict in Syria targeted civilian areas where we documented no military presence or armories before or during the attacks, and in which the perpetrators failed to issue any warnings to civilians prior to any of the attacks as required by international humanitarian law.

The type and level of evidence available varies from one case to another. In light of the aforementioned challenges, the legal definition of many of the incidents documented may be subject to change based on any new evidence or information which emerge after this report is released. We shall update our data archive with any such items of evidence and information as soon as they become available. Meanwhile, although many incidents don't technically constitute a violation of international humanitarian law under the terms of such legislation, they involved collateral damage, so we have recorded and archived these incidents to document what happened historically and to preserve these as part of the national record, although we don't qualify these specific incidents as crimes.

This report only represents the bare minimum of the actual severity and magnitude of the violations that occurred. Also, it doesn't include any analysis of the profound social, economic, and psychological ramifications.

## **II. Death Toll of Civilian Victims Documented in May**

SNHR documented in May 2019 the deaths of 416 civilians, including 107 children and 62 women (adult female), bringing the death toll of civilian victims killed at the hands of the main perpetrator parties in Syria since the beginning of 2019 up to June 2019 to 1,517.

The death toll of civilian victims killed at the hands of the main perpetrator parties to the conflict in Syria since the beginning of 2019 was distributed as follows:



1517 civilians were killed in Syria since the beginning of 2019

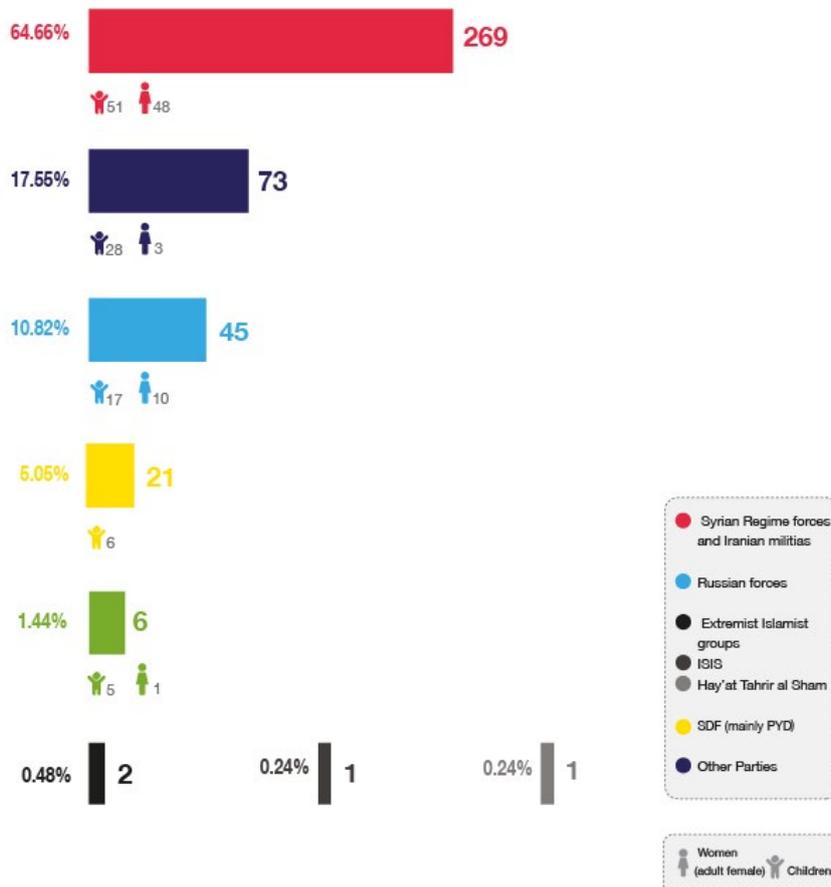


June 1, 2019

As documented by SNHR

The death toll we documented in May was distributed by the main perpetrator parties as follows:

416 civilians were killed in Syria in May 2019



As documented by SNHR



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

We documented the deaths of 269 civilians at the hands of Syrian Regime forces, including 51 children and 48 women.

**- Russian forces:**

We documented the deaths of 45 civilians, including 17 children and 10 women, as a result of bombardment which we believe was by Russian forces.

**- Extremist Islamist groups: killed two civilians. These groups are divided between:**

- ISIS (the self-proclaimed 'Islamic State'): killed one civilian.
- Hay'at Tahrir al Sham (an alliance composed of Fateh al Sham Front and a number of factions of the Armed Opposition): killed one civilian.

**- Factions of the Armed Opposition:** Six civilians, including five children and one woman.

**- Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (the Democratic Union Party):**

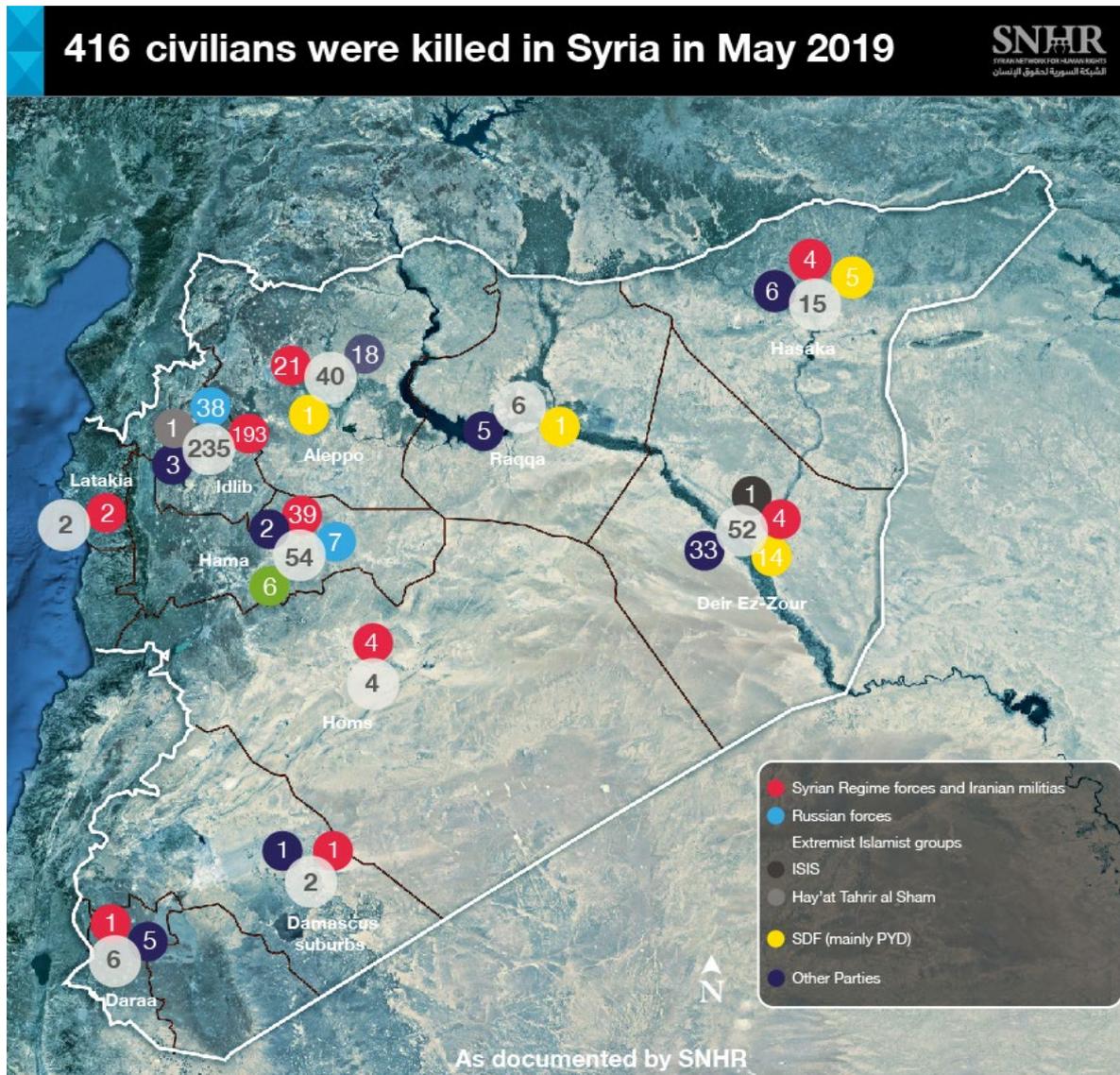
SNHR documented the deaths of 21 civilians, including six children.

**- Other parties:**

We documented 73 civilians, including 28 children and three women, killed by other parties. Victims in this category include those who were killed in bombings whose perpetrators have not yet been identified, victims who died in fires of unknown source, victims killed by landmines of unknown origin, and victims who drowned, in addition to victims who died in fires, victims who were killed in indiscriminate shelling by Turkish aerial and land forces, and victims who were killed by Jordanian or Lebanese forces.



The death toll of civilian victims killed at the hands of the main perpetrator parties documented in May 2019 was distributed across Syrian governorates as follows:



The most notable cases are:

Adnan Haswa, from Manbej city in northeastern Aleppo governorate, was aged 64 when he was arrested on Thursday, May 16, 2019, by gunmen affiliated with Syrian Democratic Forces in Manbej city, and taken to one of their detention centers in the city. Adnan was subsequently tortured to death in their custody, before his body was returned to his family on Wednesday, May 22, 2019, bearing signs of torture.

## **B. Death toll of medical personnel**

### **SNHR documented in May the death of four medical personnel, all at the hands of Syrian Regime forces**

The most notable cases are:

Mrs. Ula Nader Melhem, a married medical worker from Ihsem town in the western suburbs of Idlib governorate western suburbs, worked as the director of the community health team at the Ihsem Dispensary. She was killed and her husband was injured in an air raid by Syrian regime fixed-wing 'SU-22' warplanes when the regime planes fired a missile at Deir Senbul village in Idlib governorate southern suburbs on Sunday, May 5, 2019.

[Hussein al Deiri](#), a paramedic from Arnaba village in Jabal al Zaweya in Idlib governorate southern suburbs, who worked for Kafranbel Emergency System, was married with three children. He [was killed](#) on Sunday, May 5, 2019, when fixed-wing Syrian Regime forces' warplanes fired missiles at an area near the Kafranbel Emergency System's building, located to the west of Kafranbel city in Idlib governorate southern suburbs, while he was near the building.

## **C. Death toll of media workers**

**SNHR didn't document any death incident among media workers in May 2019.**

## **D. Death toll of Civil Defense personnel**

### **SNHR documented in May 2019 the death of one member of the Civil Defense personnel at the hands of Russian forces**

Mohammad Shawwa, an ambulance driver with the Civil Defense organization's Heesh Center, from the Mazra'et Kafr Mazza area around Heesh village in Idlib governorate southern suburbs. Mohammad, who was married with three children, was killed on Saturday, May 4, 2019, [when fixed-wing](#) warplanes, which [we believe were Russian](#), fired missiles near an ambulance he was driving near al Rakaya village in Idlib governorate southern suburbs, while he was inspecting a site which had been bombed earlier by the same warplanes.



[The Syrian Civil Defense](#) published an obituary mourning Mohammad on its official 'Twitter' account.

#### IV. Record of Most Notable Massacres Documented by SNHR in May

**SNHR documented at least 47 massacres since the beginning of 2019, including 12 massacres in May, distributed by the main perpetrator parties as follows:**

- **Syrian Regime forces:** Nine
- **Russian forces:** Two
- **Syrian Democratic Forces:** One

The massacres perpetrated by Syrian Regime forces in May were distributed according to areas of control as follows:

- Seven massacres in areas under the joint control of factions of the Armed Opposition and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham.
- One massacre in an area under the control of Hay'at Tahrir al Sham.
- One massacre in an area under the joint control of Hay'at Tahrir al Sham and the Turkistan Islamic Party.

According to the SNHR's Victim Documentation team, the massacres documented this month resulted in the deaths of 88 civilians, including 29 children (16 males ,12 females and one unborn baby) and 19 women (adult female). This means that 55 percent of all the victims were women and children, a noticeably higher proportion than usual, and a clear indication that civilian residents were specifically targeted in most of these massacres.

The death toll of these massacres was distributed by the perpetrator parties as follows:

- **Syrian Regime forces:** 64 civilians, including 20 children (11 male and nine females) and 16 women.
- **Russian forces:** 16 civilians, including seven children (three males, three females and one unborn baby) and three women.
- **Syrian Democratic Forces:** Eight civilians, including two male children.

The most notable cases are:

On Tuesday evening, May 14, 2019, fixed-wing Syrian regime warplanes fired a number of missiles at the main market, known as al Samak Market, in the middle of [Jisr al Shoghour](#) city in Idlib governorate western suburbs, which resulted in the immediate [deaths of seven civilians](#), including one female child, and injured nearly 10 others. The city was under the joint control of Hay'at Tahrir al Sham and the Turkistan Islamic Party at the time of the incident.



On Sunday night, May 19, 2019, fixed-wing warplanes, which we believe were Russian, carried out consecutive raids using missiles on a residential neighborhood in the west of Kafranbel city in Idlib governorate southern suburbs, which resulted in [the deaths of 11 civilians](#), [mostly from one family](#), including seven children (three males, three females and one unborn baby) and two women. The city was under the joint control of factions of the Armed Opposition and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.

On Wednesday, May 22, 2019, fixed-wing Syrian regime warplanes fired two missiles at the local market in the main square known as [al Masjed al Kabir square](#) in the center of Ma'aret al Numan city in Idlib governorate southern suburbs, [resulting in the immediate deaths of nine civilians](#), including [one child](#), and injuring around 20 others. The city was under the joint control of factions of the Armed Opposition and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.



Civilian victims killed in a massacre inflicted in an air raid by Syrian regime warplanes on al Masjed al Kabir square in the center of Ma'aret al Numan city, Idlib – May 22, 2019

On Tuesday, May 28, 2019, fixed-wing Syrian regime warplanes fired a number of missiles at a public street in the middle of [Kafr Halab](#) village in Aleppo governorate western suburbs, resulting in the [deaths of 10 civilians](#) so far as is [documented up to the time](#) of publication; [the victims](#) include [four children](#) (three males and one female), and one woman. The city was under the joint control of factions of the Armed Opposition and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.





Civilian victims killed in a massacre perpetrated by an air raid by Syrian regime warplanes on Kafr Halab village, Aleppo  
– May 28, 2019

## V. Conclusions and Recommendations

### **Conclusions:**

- The evidence we collected indicates that attacks were directed against civilians and civilian objects. The Syrian-Russian alliance forces have committed various crimes of extrajudicial killings. There are reasonable grounds to believe that the war crime of attacking civilians has been committed in many cases.
- The Syrian government has not only violated international humanitarian law and customary law, but has also breached a number of UN Security Council resolutions, particularly resolution 2139 and resolution 2042 on the release of detainees, as well as resolution 2254, all without any accountability.
- Extremist Islamist groups have violated international humanitarian law, causing the deaths of many civilians.
- The indiscriminate and disproportionate bombardment carried out by the alliance of International Coalition forces and the Syrian Democratic Forces is considered a violation of customary international humanitarian law, inadvertently causing loss of civilian lives or injuries to civilians.
- The use of explosive arms to target densely populated areas reflects a criminal and wholly deliberate mentality intended to inflict the greatest possible number of deaths, which is a clear contravention of international human rights law and a flagrant violation of the four Geneva Convention (articles 27, 31, 32).



- We could find no record of any warnings being issued by the Syrian Regime, or by Russian or International Coalition forces prior to any attack in accordance with the requirements of international humanitarian law. This has been the case since the beginning of the popular uprising, providing another blatant demonstration of these forces' total disregard for the lives of civilians in Syria.
- These attacks, particularly bombings, caused massive collateral damage that involved loss of lives, injuries, or significant damage to civilian objects. There are strong indicators suggesting that this damage was excessive compared to the anticipated military benefit.
- The magnitude and frequency of the violations, the disproportionate use of military force, the indiscriminate manner of the bombing, and the coordinated approach of these attacks leads to the inescapable conclusion that these acts are wholly deliberate and based on high-level orders, and as such constitute a part of state policy.

## **Recommendations:**

### **Security Council**

- The Security Council must take additional steps following its adoption of Resolution 2254, which clearly states that “ all parties immediately cease any attacks against civilians and civilian objects as such.”
- 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 repeatedly proven.
- Ensure peace and security and implement the principle of responsibility to protect civilians' lives and to save the Syrian people's heritage and historical artefacts from destruction, looting and vandalism.
- The Security Council should adopt a resolution banning the use of cluster munitions in Syria, similar to the prohibition on the use of chemical weapons, and include advice on how to safely remove the remnants of such dangerous weapons.
- The four other permanent member states should put pressure on the Russian government to end its support for the Syrian regime, which uses chemical weapons, and expose its involvement in this regard.
- We request that all relevant United Nations agencies make greater efforts to provide food, medical and humanitarian assistance in areas where fighting has ceased, and in internally displaced persons camps, and follow-up with those States that have pledged voluntary contributions.



## **International Community**

- In light of the split within the Security Council and its utter inability to take any effective action, action should be taken at the national and regional levels to form alliances to support the Syrian people by protecting them from daily killing, and by lifting sieges, as well as through increasing support for relief efforts. Additionally, the principle of universal jurisdiction should be enacted 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' doctrine in dozens 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 proved fruitless, along with the Cessation of Hostilities statements and Astana agreements that followed. Therefore, steps should be taken under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations, while the norm of the 'Responsibility to Protect', which was established by the United Nations General Assembly, should be implemented. By failing to do so, the Security Council is still hindering the protection of civilians in Syria.
- Renew 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 to activate the principle of universal jurisdiction.

## **OHCHR**

- The OHCHR should submit a report to the Human Rights Council and other organs of the United Nations on the incidents mentioned in this report since these attacks were perpetrated by the parties to the conflict.
- Train Syrian organizations to undertake clearance of mines and other unexploded ordnance, and raise local awareness of the dangers of such ordnance.
- Establish a platform that brings together a number of Syrian organizations active in documenting violations and providing humanitarian assistance, in order to facilitate an exchange of skills and experiences within Syrian society.

## **Independent International Commission of Inquiry (COI)**

- Launch investigations into the cases included in this report and previous reports. SNHR is willing to cooperate and provide further evidence and data.

## **International, Impartial, and Independent Mechanism (IIIM)**

- Collect further evidence about the crimes documented in this report.



## **The United Nations special envoy to Syria**

- Condemn the perpetrators of crimes and massacres, and those who were primarily responsible for dooming the de-escalation agreements.
- Revive the peace process so that it can resume its natural course despite Russia's attempts to divert and distort it, and empower the Constitutional Commission prior to the establishment of a transitional government.

## **The Syrian regime**

- Stop indiscriminate shelling and targeting residential areas, hospitals, schools and markets, and using prohibited weapons and barrel bombs.
- End the acts of torture that have caused the deaths of thousands of Syrian citizens in detention centers.
- Reveal the fate of some 82,000 Syrian citizens arrested by the security services whose fate has been concealed to date.
- Ensure compliance with UN Security Council resolutions and customary humanitarian law.

## **The Russian regime**

- Launch investigations into 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, who were killed by the current Russian regime, as well as all the wounded.
- Completely cease the bombing of hospitals, protected objects, and civilian areas, and respect customary international law.
- As a guarantor party in the Astana talks, the Russian regime must stop thwarting de-escalation agreements, and apply pressure on the Syrian regime in order to end all indiscriminate attacks and allow the unconditional passage of humanitarian aid to besieged areas.
- Stop using incendiary weapons in populated areas, compensate the victims and their families for all human and material damage caused by the use of these weapons, and provide treatment for dozens of civilian casualties.
- Provide detailed maps of sites where Russian forces have launched cluster munition attacks, issue these to the United Nations and inform the Syrian public about them, thus facilitating the disposal of unexploded ordnance.
- Begin to achieve a breakthrough in the issue of detainees by revealing the fate of 82,000 people disappeared by the Syrian regime.



## **The Coalition (International Coalition forces and Syrian Democratic Forces)**

- The states of the coalition must unequivocally and sincerely acknowledge that some of their bombing operations have resulted in the deaths of innocent civilians. Rather than attempting denial, these states should take speedy steps to launch serious investigations, and immediately compensate and apologize to the victims and all those affected.
- The states supporting the SDF (which is mainly PYD) should apply pressure on these forces in order to compel them to cease all of their violations in all the areas and towns under their control.
- All forms of support, military and all others, should be ceased until the SDF commits itself to complying with the previous recommendations. This is primarily the responsibility of the supporting states. Providing the SDF with weapons and support while knowing that these can be used in perpetrating war crimes or crimes against humanity can be seen as a contribution to these crimes.

## **Armed Opposition factions**

- Armed Opposition factions must ensure the protection of civilians in all areas under their control. These forces should also take care to distinguish between civilians and military targets and cease any indiscriminate attacks.
- Pledge to cease any arbitrary arrests and investigate incidents that have resulted in violations of international humanitarian law.
- Take punitive action against those who commit violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law.

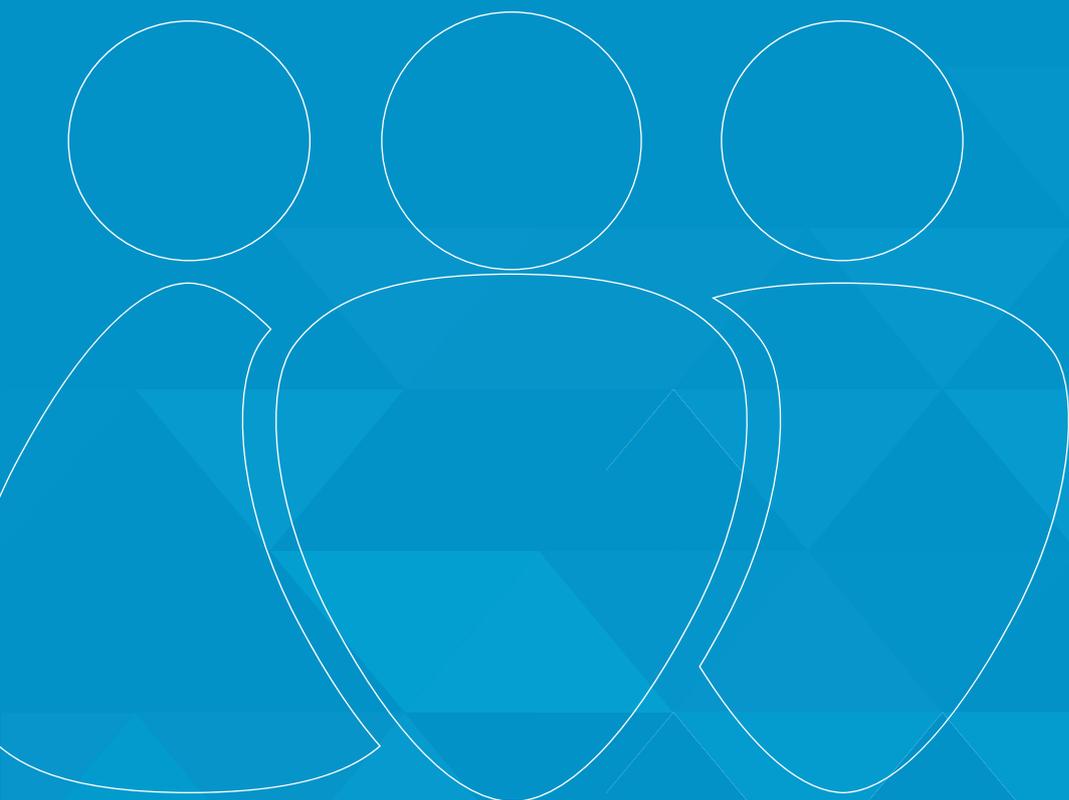
Humanitarian organizations:

Develop urgent operational plans to secure decent shelter for internally displaced persons.

## **Acknowledgments**

We thank all family members, relatives and friends of the victims, along with the eyewitnesses and local activists, whose contributions have enriched this report.





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