



## The Most Notable Violations of Cessation of Hostilities: Shelling and Massacres in “Deir Assafeir” town at the hands of government forces

Conducting an investigation is a must and perpetrators must be held accountable

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### Introduction

SNHR observed the violations of the Agreement on Cessation of Hostilities and issued daily detailed reports until the date of 14 March 2016. We also issued a detailed report on the violations that were committed during the first round of negotiations, from 15th until 25th of March, where the violations of the governmental forces until that date reached 804 breaches between military operations and arrests, in addition to impeding access to humanitarian aid.. The

SNHR team noticed that the various Syrian governorates witnessed a noticeable retreat in military operations and in particular the areas under the control of the armed opposition, which witnessed the return of children to schools, the increase of private business, restoration of its infrastructures, and the high turnout on hospitals and markets, as an active work of local administrations in various aspects of life, which may lead, if continued, to the beginning of new integrated social life.

The Syrian regime is considered as the most affected of the continuation of the cessation of hostilities, because such kind of livelihood systems depends on chaos and terrorism, similar to extremist organizations. The ruling Syrian regime is constantly committing dozens of breaches that would its accomplish its aspirations. In this regard, the governmental forces launched sequential attacks on civilian sites in the town of «Deir Assafeir» on 31 March 2016, which led to the occurrence of the massacres and the destruction of vital centers inside the town





## II. Executive Summary:

The town is under the control of the opposition armed factions and the governmental forces impose (Security, army, both local and foreign pro- militias) a blockade on the town since October 2013 like other regions of eastern «Ghouta»

The importance of the town is its strategic location on the road to the international airport of Damascus; Al Nawla city is located on its west as well, which is the front line with the governmental forces stationed in the town of «Deir Salman». In addition, the town of «Deir Assafier» follows the southern sector of eastern Ghouta, which is considered one of the most important sources of agricultural s that contribute to the alleviation of the blockade imposed on it, and therefore seeks government forces seek to disengage it from the rest of the regions of Ghouta which leads to tightening the siege.

In the present report, we document the perpetration of two massacres by the governmental forces in the town of Deir Assafier, in addition to bombing several centers of vital civil sites in the biggest breach committed by the governmental forces since the entry of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement came into effect.

SNHR communicated with a number of the inhabitants of the town and eyewitnesses, who were rescued and with activists of the local media, we offer in this report two testimonies in addition to photos and videos that we assure its credibility. We also explained to the witnesses the aim of the interviews, and received their consent to the use of the information provided in this report. We reserve the copies of all videos, pictures, mentioned in this report.

Investigations proved in the present report that the targeted areas were civilian areas where there is no military or weapons stores belonging to the armed opposition or extremist Islamic groups during the attack or even before.

The contents in the present report represent the minimum that we have managed to document regarding the size of the seriousness of the violation that happened, and does not include the talk about the social, economical, and psychological.

## III. Details:

On 31 March 2016, government warplanes attacked by at least 14 missiles within 4 hours in separate areas of the town of «Deir Assafier» which led to the killing of 31 civilians, including 12 children under the age of 18, and 9 women.

First incident: at about 9:20 a.m., Government warplanes launched two missiles that targeted the Palestinian Street; what led to the killing of two persons and the injury of about 8 others.





The second incident: at about 9:25 am Government warplanes launched two missiles targeted the town's mosque. The rockets fell on the mosque's garden which led to simple material damages in the windows and doors, in addition to material damages in the building of the municipal council, away from the mosque approximately 50M.

The third incident: at about 9:37 a.m. Government warplanes launched at least 8 missiles that targeted the western district. The bombardment caused the killing of 10 civilians; including 6 from one family were killed in the bombing of their home; in addition to the damage to at least 6 residential buildings.

The fourth incident: at about 9:50 Government warplanes launched a missile that targeted the west side of the building includes medical point of the Center for the defense of civil society; killing 13 civilians, among the victims a paramedic, a teacher and two members of the civil police and an ambulance driver. The bombardment caused irreversible damage equipment field hospital and the Center for the civil defense, in addition to the complete destruction of the ambulance carrying the injured. The shelling also affected the civil police station near the place material damages.

The fifth incident: at about 12:20 p.m. Government warplanes targeted the school of «Deir Assafir»; which led to the injury of 5 civilians, and destruction in the school's building which caused it to go out of service.

We also marked several raids in separate areas in the town caused the death of 6 civilians. SNHR was able to interview Mr. Abu Basheer, a civil defense member who aided the injured people. He gave SNHR his testimony:

*«The civil defense informed us about the violent shelling in Deir Al Assafeir town. The first team went toward town to help the civil defense there. As we arrived we were targeted and the ambulance that belonged to us was damaged which was completely destroyed and its driver died. The greatest massacre was at that day. The building houses a medical point and shelter which used to protect civilian.*

*The second team went to the town. I saw the children and women running and screaming. The street was full of fear and death. It was difficult to move because the streets were closed by collapsed buildings. At the end of day many victims died, about 31 individuals died and 57 were injured. There are not any military headquarters related to ISIL or Al Nusra front to justify the government shelling.*

*The government separated southern Ghouta towns from western Ghouta towns and committed massacres in order to displace people and control it.»*





The press photographer Aamer Al Shami went to the shelling site. SNHR interviewed him and he gave SNHR his testimony:

«I crossed 10 km to the incident place after I was informed about the severe shelling. On my way I saw the ambulances heading to the town to aid victims and injured. The warplanes were soaring close earth.

When I arrived, the town lived in fear and panic. After 8 hours, 30 individuals died, half of them were children. The targeted town free of any military presence.»

## Attachments:

### Victim's names



- A photo that depicts the shelling aftermath which was caused by government warplane shelling on Deir Al Assafir town in Damascus suburbs on 31 March 2016



Shelling aftermath which was caused by government warplanes shelling fired medical point on Deir Al Assafir town in Damascus suburbs on 31 March 2016 2016.





- A [video](#) that depicts rubble from a shelled ambulance due to government warplane shelling on a medical point in Deir Al Assafeir town in Damascus suburbs on 31 March 2016 2016.

- The shelling aftermath that caused by government warplane shelling fired on Deir Al Assafeir civil defense in Deir Al Assafeir town in Damascus suburbs on 31 March 2016



The shelling aftermath that was caused by government warplane shelling on Deir Al Assafeir school in Deir Al Assafeir town in Damascus suburbs on 31 March 2016



A [video](#) that depicts the shelling aftermath which was caused by government warplanes shelling fired medical point on Deir Al Assafeir town in Damascus suburbs on 31 of March 2016.

[Videos](#) that depict the victims from the government warplanes [shelling fired on Deir Al Assafeir town](#) in Damascus suburbs on 31 March 2016

A [video](#) that depicts the victims and injured people in a makeshift hospital that resulted from government warplane shelling fired on Deir Al Assafeir town in Damascus suburbs on 31 March 2016





### III. Legal Conclusions and Recommendations:

#### - Legal Conclusions

1. The Assad regime flagrantly violated UN Security Council Resolutions 2139 and 2254, which call for stopping of indiscriminate attacks that amount to a crime against humanity under Article VII of the Rome Statute.
2. We emphasize that these aerial attacks have targeted unarmed civilians, which constitutes a violation of the international human rights laws and a war crime under international laws and treaties
3. The aerial attacks contained in the report carried out by the Assad regime is considered as a violation of international humanitarian law as they deliberately targeted populated areas.
- 4-5- The scale of the systematic rocket frequent attacks, and the level of excessive force used in it confirms that they were issued with the consent of Assad, who bears full responsibility for these attacks.
6. The Assad regime is involved in crimes against humanity and war crimes against the Syrian people, as with whoever provides him with financial, political and military aid such as Russian, Iran, the Lebanese Hezbollah and the arms companies that supply it with weapons and ammunition. All these parties must be liable to criminal prosecution.
- 7- The Assad regime has laid a crippling siege on the people of Al Wa'er neighborhood, preventing the entry of humanitarian aid and medical supplies to the people in need. It also used starvation as a weapon of war, which constitutes a war crime under Article VIII of the Rome Statute.

#### Recommandations:

- To Both Conflict Parties :
- We ask the joint American and Russian committee to investigate these incidents, announce its results to the Syrian people and prevent it from happening again.
- We demand the international community to correlate the ceasefire with political efforts that would pave the way towards a transitional stage that would result in a democratic regime, which will end the suffering of the Syrian people.
- If breaches are still being committed, then this fragile ceasefire may fail at any moment. Since USA is a major advocate for this agreement, then it should persuade the Russian government to cease its airstrikes and pressure its ally the Syrian government to do so.
- To the UN Security Council:
  - The UN Security Council must take further action as a year has passed since the adoption of resolutions No. 2139 and 2254 without the Assad regime showing the least commitment to halting indiscriminate shelling, which has caused destruction and daily killings.





- It must put pressure on the Assad regime and its allies to stop supplying it with arms and military experts after its proven involvement in crimes against humanity and war crimes. It also must pass a resolution to condemn the sides that supply it with weapons.
- The Syrian file must be referred to the International Criminal Court and all those involved in war crimes and violations must be held accountable.
- The UN Security Council must establish peace and security and protect Syrian civilians and their heritage from looting, destruction and vandalism.
- It must expand the sanctions to include all pillars of the Assad and the Iranian regimes as they are directly involved war crimes and crimes against humanity.

**- To the High Commissioner for Human Rights:**

We call upon the High Commissioner for Human Rights to submit a report to the Human Rights Council Rights and other United Nations bodies about this massacre in particular and the massacres that followed.

The High Commissioner for Human Rights must demand the implementation of the recommendations contained in this report.

**- To the international community:**

- Given the divisions at the UN Security Council, measures must be made at the national and regional level to build coalitions to aid the Syrian people through protecting it from the daily killings, lifting the siege, and stepping up the relief aid.
- SNHR demands that the United Nations and the Security Council to implement the principle of “protecting civilians” (ICRtoP) / (R2P), adopted by the General Assembly in 2005. Syrian people should be protected from all perpetrators.
- Pressure must be put on the UN Security Council to refer the Syria file to the International Criminal Court.
- It must seek to achieve justice and accountability in Syria through the UN General Assembly and the Human Rights Council and the use of the principle of universal jurisdiction.

## Acknowledgment

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