

No less than 54 Massacres in Syria in March 2018

Including 39 Massacres in
Eastern Ghouta at the hands
of Syrian Regime forces
and their Allies

SNHR

SYRIAN NETWORK FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

الشبكة السورية لحقوق الإنسان

Tuesday, April 10, 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.



Contents

- I. Introduction and Methodology
- II. March 2018 Outline
- III. Executive Summary
- I. Details of the Most Notable Massacres in March
- V. Conclusions and Recommendations

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.

The Syrian regime, and its militias, were the only perpetrator of violations at the start of the popular uprising, and they remain the main perpetrator, as the Syrian regime is responsible for the majority of violations. Subsequently, other parties emerged gradually such as the armed opposition, extremist Islamic groups, Democratic Union Party forces, international coalition forces, and Russian forces.

The first two years of the popular uprising saw the largest portion of ethnic and sectarian cleansing massacres, where the Syrian regime and its militias were responsible for the majority of these massacres. In mid-2013, Syrian regime forces started relying heavily on warplanes and they were also used later by international coalition forces and Russian forces. The wide use of aerial bombardment doubled the numbers of victims and caused huge destruction to the infrastructure, as one or two new massacres at least are recorded almost every day.

The Syrian regime used improvised weapons, such as barrel bombs, to bomb the areas that are out of its control while Russian forces used more deadly weapons, relying more on bunker-buster missiles, incendiary ammunitions, and cluster munitions.



Also, we have recorded in our database tens of massacres that were perpetrated by extremist Islamic groups and factions from the armed opposition. In addition, we've monitored massacres by Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) which are backed by the international coalition forces' air force, where we have recorded a significant rise in the rate of massacres perpetrated by the coalition (international coalition - SDF) since the end of 2016.

Methodology

This report records the massacres perpetrated by the parties to the conflict in Syria in March that SNHR team was able to document in March. This report also sheds light on the most notable massacres. We have the details of the complete incidents stored in SNHR's database. The term "massacre" refers to any attack that resulted in the killing of five peaceful individuals in the same attack.

This report draws upon the ongoing monitoring of news and development by SNHR team, and on an extensive network of relations with tens of various sources that have been built over the course of our work. When we receive information, or hear some news about a violation via the internet or media outlets, we work on following 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 limited human and material resources. Therefore, the possibility to access evidences vary from one case to another, and, hence, the degree of its classification. 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.

This report contains a number of attacks that were carried out using an air force. However, we haven't been able to accurately assign responsibility in these attacks, Syrian regime forces or Russian forces. Therefore, we've assigned responsibility to Syrian regime/Russian forces.

This report also contains a number of massacres that were the result of bombings and landmine explosions, but we haven't been able to accurately identify the parties responsible for them on account of the considerable difficulties in identifying the responsible groups in such bombings. In addition, this report contains one massacre that was the result of an attack which was carried out by a weapon we couldn't identify, or identify its source, as we haven't been able to visit the site or collect evidences that would help us properly identify the source.



This report contains two accounts that we've collected through speaking directly to eyewitnesses, and not are cited from any open sources. We have explained the purpose of these interviews for the eyewitnesses who gave us permission to use the information they provided without offering or giving them any incentives. Also, SNHR tried to spare the eyewitnesses the agony of remembering the violation as much as possible, and gave insurances to conceal the identify of any witness who preferred to use an alias.

All of the attacks included in this report have targeted civilian areas. We didn't identify any military presence or armories during the attacks or even before it. Additionally, the forces that attacked civilians didn't put out a warning prior to their attacks as the international humanitarian law requires.

SNHR has analyzed videos and pictures that were posted online, or were sent by local activists via e-mail, Skype, or social media. Some of the videos showed attacks carried out by fixed-wing warplanes, helicopters, rocket launchers, while most victims were children and women. Other pictures showed victims who were killed in bombings where we haven't been able to identify the groups responsible for them. We have copies of all the pictures and videos included in this report in a secret online database and back up copies on hard drives. We always make sure to store this data with its respective source. Nonetheless, we can't claim that we have document all cases in light of the ban and pursuit by Syrian regime forces as well as other armed groups.

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

This report only represents the bare minimum of the actual magnitude and severity of the violation that occurred. It also doesn't cover the social, economic, and mental ramifications.

II. March 2018 Outline

We've recorded a rise in the number of massacres perpetrated by Syrian regime forces in March for the second month in a row as the Syrian regime's vicious offensive against Eastern Ghouta, which is a de-escalation zone, continues. The offensive has resulted, so far, in the Syrian regime seizing control of 80% of Eastern Ghouta and forcibly displacing most of the region's residents.

Syrian regime forces topped all parties this month with 40 massacres, including 39 in Eastern Ghouta, while Russian forces were responsible for four massacres, all took place in Idlib governorate.



III. Executive Summary

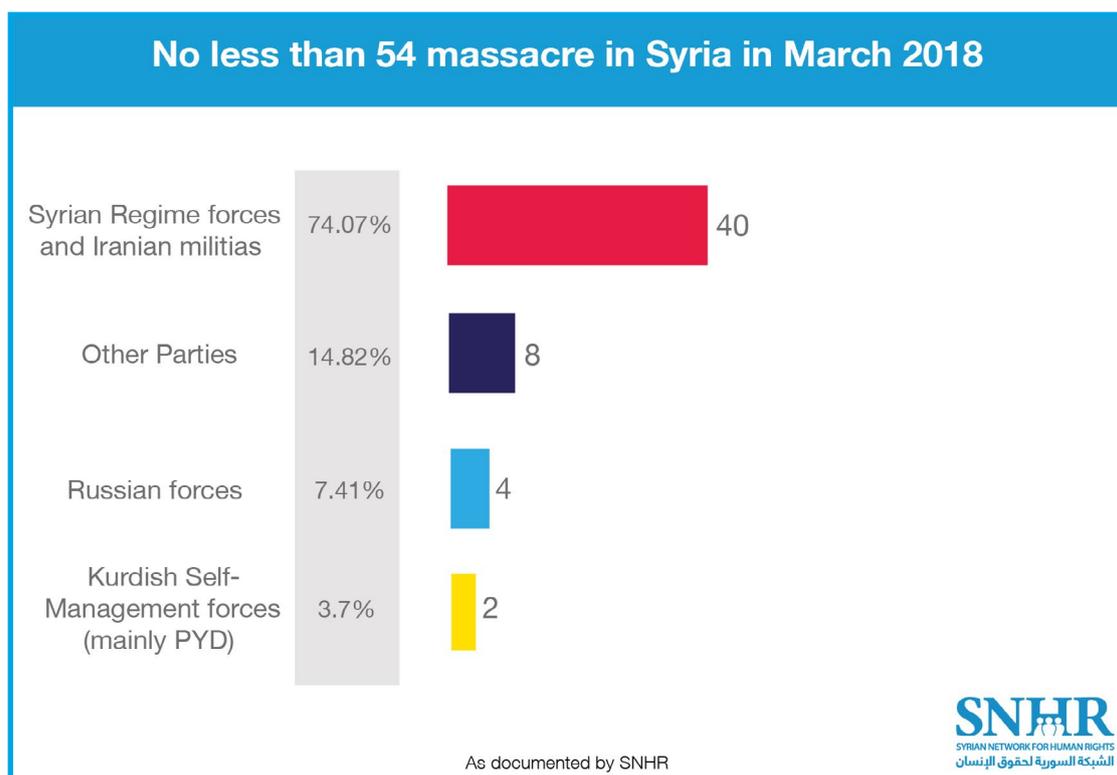
A. Toll of massacres since the start of 2018

SNHR has documented 151 massacres at the hands of the parties to the conflict in Syria between the start of 2018 and April of the same year. Massacres are distributed by month as follows:



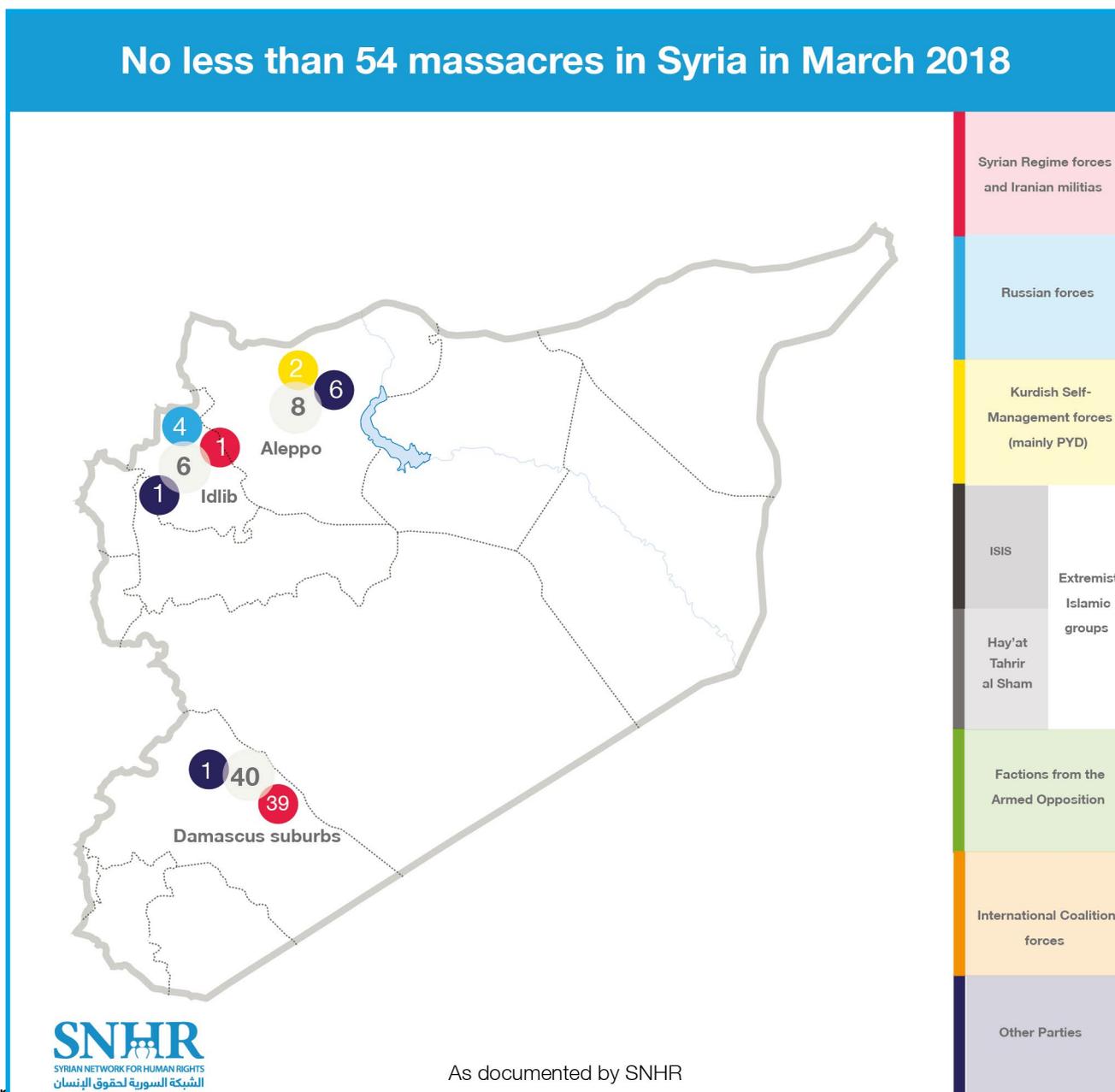
B. Massacres in March

SNHR has documented no less than 54 massacres in March, distributed as follows:



- A. Syrian regime forces (army, security, local militias, Shiite foreign militias): 40
- B. Russian forces: 4
- C. Self-Management forces (consisting primarily of the Democratic Union Party – a branch for the Kurdistan Workers’ Party): 2
- D. Other parties: 8

The following map shows the distribution of March’s massacres across Syrian governorates by the parties to the conflict



Syrian regime forces carried out 40 massacres in March. 71% of these massacres took place in areas under the control of factions from the armed opposition.

According to the victim documentation team at SNHR, these massacres resulted in the kill-



ing of 783 civilians, including 198 children and 138 women (adult female). This means that 43% of all victims were women and children, which is a considerably high percentage, and an indication that civilian residents were targeted in most of these massacres.

Death toll of these massacres is distributed by the perpetrator party as follows:

- A. Syrian regime forces: 620 civilians, including 142 children and 105 women.
- B. Russian forces: 78 civilians, including 41 children and 14 women.
- C. Self-Management forces: 17 individuals, including five women.
- D. Other parties: 68 civilians, including 15 children and 14 women.

IV. Details of the Most Notable Massacres in March 2018

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

Damascus suburbs governorate

Sunday, March 4, 2018, fixed-wing Syrian regime/Russian forces warplanes (the incident is still being investigated to accurately identify the perpetrator party) fired a number of missiles in parallel with a shelling by Syrian regime forces artillery and rocket launchers on Douma city, Eastern Ghouta, eastern Damascus suburbs governorate. This resulted in the killing of [31 civilians](#), including [11 children](#) and two women. The city was under the control of armed opposition factions at the time of the incident.

Wednesday, March 7, 2018, fixed-wing Syrian regime/Russian forces warplanes (the incident is still being investigated to accurately identify the perpetrator party) fired a number of [missiles](#) at the residential neighborhoods in [Hamouriya](#) town, Eastern Ghouta, eastern Damascus suburbs governorate, which resulted in the killing of [27 civilians](#), including [seven women](#). The city is under the control of Syrian regime forces at the time of this writing, while it was under the control of armed opposition factions at the time of the incident.

Thursday, March 8, 2018, fixed-wing Syrian regime/Russian forces warplanes (the incident



Victims killed in a massacre by Syrian regime/Russian forces in Hamouriya town, Damascus suburbs – March 7, 2018



is still being investigated to accurately identify the perpetrator party) fired a number of missiles at Saqba town, Eastern Ghouta, eastern Damascus suburbs governorate, which resulted in the killing of 13 civilians, including eight children and two women. The city is under the control of Syrian regime forces at the time of this writing, while it was under the control of armed opposition factions at the time of the incident.

Sunday, March 11, 2018, fixed-wing Syrian regime forces helicopters dropped a number of barrel bombs on Douma city, Eastern Ghouta, eastern Damascus suburbs governorate, which resulted in the killing of 28 civilians, including 11 children and seven women. The city was under the control of armed opposition factions at the time of the incident.

Sunday, March 11, 2018, fixed-wing Syrian regime/Russian forces warplanes (the incident is still being investigated to accurately identify the perpetrator party) fired a number of missiles in parallel with a barrel bomb attack by Syrian regime forces helicopters in Irbeen city, Eastern Ghouta, eastern Damascus suburbs governorate. This resulted in the killing of 16 civilians, including one child and one woman. The city is under the control of Syrian regime forces at the time of this writing, while it was under the control of armed opposition factions at the time of the incident.

Wednesday, March 14, 2018, fixed-wing Syrian regime/Russian forces warplanes (the incident is still being investigated to accurately identify the perpetrator party) fired a number of missiles in Hamouriya town, Eastern Ghouta, eastern Damascus suburbs governorate, which resulted in the killing of 15 civilians, including four children and three women. The town is under the control of Syrian regime forces at the time of this writing, while it was under the control of armed opposition factions at the time of the incident.

Friday, March 16, 2018, [fixed-wing](#) Syrian regime/Russian forces warplanes (the incident is still being investigated to accurately identify the perpetrator party) fired [a number of missiles](#) at a gathering of civilians inside [a local market](#) in [Kafr Batna](#) town, Eastern Ghouta, eastern Damascus suburbs governorate, which resulted in the killing of [51 civilians](#), as we have been able to document as of [this writing](#). The town is under the control of Syrian regime forces at the time of this writing, while it was under the control of armed opposition factions at the time of the incident.





Victims killed in a massacre by Syrian regime/Russian forces in Kafr Batna town, Damascus suburbs – March 16, 2018

Monday, March 19, 2018, fixed-wing Syrian regime/Russian forces warplanes (the incident is still being investigated to accurately identify the perpetrator party) fired a missile at a shelter that houses civilians in Irbeen city, Eastern Ghouta, eastern Damascus suburbs governorate, which resulted in the killing of 20 civilians (16 children and four women). It should be noted that the shelter was a school that was recently rehabilitated but was turned into a shelter in light of the vicious offensive in Eastern Ghouta. The city is under the control of Syrian regime forces at the time of this writing, while it was under the control of armed opposition factions at the time of the incident.

Tuesday, March 20, 2018, fixed-wing Syrian regime/Russian forces warplanes (the incident is still being investigated to accurately identify the perpetrator party) fired a [number of missiles](#) in parallel with a barrel bomb attack, as well as a rocket and artillery shelling by Syrian regime forces artillery and [rocket launchers](#) in [Douma](#) city, Eastern Ghouta, eastern Damascus suburbs governorate. This resulted in the killing of [58 civilians](#), including 15 children and [five women](#). The city was under the control of armed opposition factions at the time of the incident.





Victims killed in a massacre by Syrian regime/Russian forces in Douma city, Damascus suburbs – March 20, 2018

Thursday night, March 22, 2018, [fixed-wing](#) Syrian regime/Russian forces warplanes (the incident is still being investigated to accurately identify the perpetrator party) fired a [number of missiles](#) at a shelter in [Irbeen](#) city, which resulted in the killing of [48 civilians](#), including [20 children](#) and [16 women](#). The city is under the control of Syrian regime forces at the time of this writing, while it was under the control of armed opposition factions at the time of the incident.

Idlib governorate

Saturday, March 10, 2018, fixed-wing Syrian regime forces warplanes fired a number of missiles at the residential buildings that are located near Ajyal al Mustqabal Kindergarten for Children in eastern [Kafr Sajna](#) village, southern suburbs of Idlib governorate, which resulted in the killing of eight civilian from the same family, including [two children](#) and [four women](#). The village was under the control of armed opposition factions at the time of the incident.

B. Russian forces

Idlib governorate

Wednesday, March 21, 2018, around 09:50, [fixed-wing](#) warplanes we believe were Russian fired [two missiles](#) at a shelter (cave) where residents [were hiding](#) near Kafr Battikh village in the middle of Kafr Battikh village, northern suburbs of Idlib governorate. This resulted in the killing of [20 civilians](#), including [16 children](#), who were [mostly school students](#), and [three women](#). The village was under the joint control of armed opposition factions and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.





Victims killed in a massacre by Russian forces in Kafr Battikh village, Idlib –
March 21, 2018

We contacted the media activist Hasan al Mukhtar¹ who learned via wireless communication devices that Russian warplanes had carried out a number of airstrikes on Kafr Battikh town where he headed to cover the incident: **“When I arrived, civil defense members were working on lifting a cave rubble, as residents told us that there are women and children inside. I stayed at the site for hours, during which civil defense members were able to pull put 20 dead bodies who were mostly children and women.”** Hasan added that the site was very close to Kafr Battikh School for Elementary Education: **“Residents told us that students left the school after the first airstrikes in fear of the school being targeted. Some of them hid in a cave for their relatives near the school, but Russian warplanes bombed the cave and killed them.”**

Thursday, March 22, 2018, around 16:10, [fixed-wing](#) warplanes we believe were Russian (Su-34) carried out two consecutive airstrikes with [four missiles](#), targeting the [old local market](#) and its [vicinity](#) in southern [Harem](#) city, northern suburbs of Idlib governorate. The two airstrikes were approximately [10 minutes apart](#). This resulted in the killing of [44 civilians](#), including [17 children](#) and [four women](#), while about [50 others](#) were wounded. The city was under the control of Hay’at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.

¹ We contacted him via Facebook on March 21, 2018





Mohammad Ahmad Rahhal², hails from Harem city and head of the civil defense media in the city, told us that observatories told them around 16:10 that a Russian warplane was soaring above Harem city: **“The warplanes carried out an airstrike with two missiles on the city that resulted in huge explosions. Warplanes returned and carried out another airstrike with another two missiles on the local market and the buildings in its vicinity.”** Ahmad added that civil defense teams rushed to the site: **“They’ve kept working until the next day. They’ve pulled out 43 dead bodies and aided 50 wounded people. We couldn’t hear the sound of the first warplane, but the sound of the second one was clear.”**

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

Aleppo governorate

Sunday, March 18, 2018, around 22:30, two landmines (which were planted by Self-Management forces (primarily consisting of the Democratic Union Party – a branch for the Kurdistan Workers’ Party) inside a residential building in the center of Afrin city, northern suburbs of Aleppo governorate before retreating from the city) exploded, killing 10 individuals at once (seven civilians and three fighters from armed opposition factions). The city was under the control of the Turkish forces-backed Olive Branch at the time of the incident.

D. Other parties

² We contacted him via Facebook on March 23, 2018



Aleppo governorate

Wednesday, March 7, 2018, an IED that was [inside a car](#) near the “Free” Police Station at the southern entrance to [Jarablos](#) city, eastern suburbs of Aleppo governorate, which resulted in the killing of [eight civilians](#) at once, including [one woman](#), and a member of the “Free” Police. We have yet to identify the group behind the bombing, at the time of this writing, on account of the considerable difficulty in identifying the groups responsible in such bombings.

Damascus suburbs governorate

Tuesday, March 20, 2018, 22 civilians, including seven children and [10 women](#), were killed in [a bombing](#), which we couldn't identify its source or the weapon used in it at the time of this writing. The bombing occurred in [Jaramana](#) city, southeastern Damascus suburbs governorate. Jaramana city was under the control of Syrian regime forces at the time of the incident.

Idlib governorate

Saturday, March 24, 2018, a car bomb that was near the internal specialized clinical wing, which are affiliated to Idlib Central Hospital, exploded in the center of Idlib city. The bombing resulted in the killing of six civilians at once, while about 25 others were wounded. As of this writing, we have yet to identify the group that was responsible for the bombing on account of the considerable difficulty in identifying the perpetrators in such bombings. It is worth noting that the car was parked in front of a military center for Hay'at Tahrir al Sham. The city was under the control of Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.

V. Conclusions and Recommendations

Syrian regime and Russian forces

- The Syrian-Russian alliance has, beyond any doubt, violated Security Council resolutions 2139 and 2254 which both state that indiscriminate attacks must be ceased. Also, The Syrian and Russian regime have violated Article 7 and 8 of Rome Statute through the act of willful killing which constitutes war crimes.
- We can confirm that the bombardment mentioned in this report has targeted defenseless civilians. Therefore, Syrian and Russian 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.
- The attacks mentioned in this report that were carried out by The Syrian and Russian regimes, are considered a violation of the customary international law as the shells were fired at a populated area rather than a specific military object.
- Aerial bombardment has caused collateral damages that involved loss of lives, injuries,



or significant damages to civil facilities. There are strong indicators suggesting that the damage was too excessive compared to the anticipated military benefit.

- The magnitude of the massacres, their frequent nature, the exaggerated use of power, the indiscriminate manner of the bombing, and the coordinated approach of these attacks must be based on high orders, and a state policy.

The Coalition (international coalition and SDF)

The attacks by Coalition forces have caused collateral damages that involved loss of lives, injuries, or significant damages to civilian facilities. There are strong indicators suggesting that the damage was too excessive compared to the anticipated military benefit.

Other forces

Self-Management forces and other parties have perpetrated massacres, according to this report, that constitute war crimes. However, we don't believe that these massacres qualify as crimes against humanity, as with the Syrian regime and pro-regime forces who perpetrate massacres in a systematic and widespread manner.

Conclusions

Security Council

- The Security Council has to take additional steps after resolution 2139 and 2254 were adopted, and no pledges to cease the indiscriminate bombing have been made. All parties to the conflict should respect these steps, and adhere to 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 Shabiha, 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 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 have been drought out 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 the Human Rights Council and other organs of the United Nations on the incidents included in this report and the massacres that preceded, given that they are a glaring mark in a string of daily sporadic massacres of a smaller scope. Also, the OHCHR should work on implementing the recommendations 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.

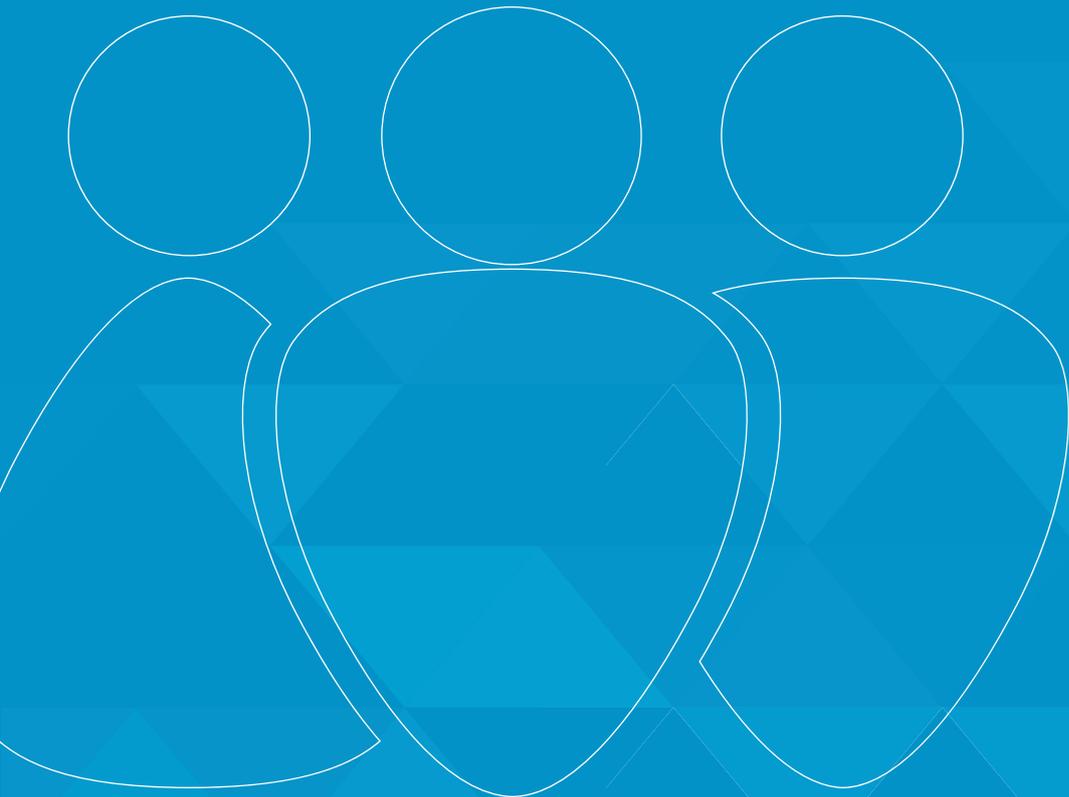
Armed opposition factions

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.





@snhr



Info@sn4hr.org

www.sn4hr.org

