

Russian Warplanes Target IDPs in Idlib City

24 Civilians Killed Including 16 Children

SNHR

SYRIAN NETWORK FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

الشبكة السورية لحقوق الإنسان

Tuesday, April 11, 2017

The Syrian Network for Human Rights, founded in June 2011, is a non-governmental, non-profit independent organization that is a primary source for the United Nations on all death toll-related statistics in Syria



Report Contents

- I. Introduction
- II. Details
- III. Attachments
- IV. Conclusions and Recommendations

I. Introduction

Since March 28, 2015, Idlib city has been under the joint control of armed opposition factions and Fateh al Sham Front. The city is populated by no less than 320,000 people including IDPs from Aleppo, Damascus suburbs, and Homs.

On September 24, 2015, the city was the subject of a truce that was struck primarily by Ahrar al Sham, an armed opposition faction and a component of Jaish al Fateh, and the Syrian regime. The agreement provided for a complete cease of military operations and airstrikes in Idlib city and some of the villages that follow it in exchange for some terms such as allowing the passage of food supplies to Al Fou'a and Kafrayya villages which both are of a Syrian regime-supporting majority. The truce was breached a number of times, where we highlighted on of these massacres in a report entitled: [“Russian Forces Breach UN Security Council Resolution 2254 and Kills Idlib Residents”](#).

On June 11, 2016, it was agreed that the truce will be extended for six months. Syrian regime forces, however, breached the truce on the following day, targeting the vegetables market in the city, which resulted in a massacre that we highlighted in the report: [“The Syrian Regime even Betrays the Local Truces it Makes”](#) and then Russian forces targeted the same market, breaching the truce on September 10, 2016. We highlighted that in the report: [“Russian Forces Breach Idlib City Truce”](#).

The city is currently under the control of a number of armed opposition factions and Hay'et Tahrir al Sham (As assembly composed of Fateh al Sham Front, Fasil Ansar al Din, and three armed opposition factions: Lewa' al Haq, Jaish al Sunna, and Kata'eb Nour al Din al Zenki.)



In this report, we will document a massacre in Idlib city by fixed-wing warplanes we believe were Russian. Most of the victims were children. SNHR team contacted number of the city residents, eyewitnesses, survivors, and local media activists. We are including three accounts in this report. We have explained the purpose of interviews for the eyewitnesses who gave us permission to use the information they provided in this report without offering or presenting any incentives. Also, SNHR tried to spare them the agony of remembering the violation as much as possible. We also gave guarantees to conceal the identity of any witnesses who preferred to use aliases.

We reviewed the pictures and videos we received and verified their authenticity. These pictures showed the great destruction that resulted from the bombardment. In addition, other pictures showed the children victims. We have copies of all the videos and pictures included in this report in a secret online database, and backup copies on hard drives. For more information, please see our general work methodology.

The investigations mentioned in this report have proved that the targeted areas were civilian areas, where no military centers or weapon warehouses for armed opposition factions or Extremist Islamic groups were found during or even before the attack.

This report only represents the bare minimum, which we were able to document, of the magnitude and severity of the violation that occurred. Also, this report doesn't cover the social, economic, and psychological ramifications.

II. Details

On Wednesday, March 15, 2017, at approximately 03:25, fixed-wing warplanes we believe were Russian fired two missiles in no less than five minutes that targeted two sites of a close proximity. The first missile targeted a multi-floor residential building in al Qosour neighborhood in the southern parts of Idlib city, which resulted in the killing of 24 civilians including 15 children, one infant, and six women (Adult female). Most of the victims were IDPs from Aleppo suburbs. Additionally, the building was heavily destroyed. The second missile fell nearly 100 meters from the same residential building.



Picture showing the location of the residential building that was targeted by fixed-wing warplanes we believe were Russian in al Qosour neighborhood in Idlib city

Location of the residential building shelled by fixed-wing warplanes we believe are Russian in al Qosour neighborhood in Idlib city on Wednesday, March 15, 2017

SNHR
SYRIAN NETWORK FOR HUMAN RIGHTS
الشبكة السورية لحقوق الإنسان



snhr info@sn4hr.org

www.sn4hr.org



Mahmoud al Sayeh, a doctor from Aleppo suburbs, lost all of his family -seven children and their mother- in the massacre. Mahmoud, whom we contacted via WhatsApp, told us that he woke up to the sound of a warplane soaring. A few minutes later, he heard the missile ripple and his children’s screams for help: “The missile was directed, and it wasn’t a free-fall missile. The rubbles piled up on me, but I was hardly managed to dig a small crack in the rock rubbles to breath. A few minutes later, I heard the sound of civil defense vehicles and ambulances, which was followed by a second missile.”

Mohammad added that he remained under the rubbles for nearly two and half hours until the civil defense pulled him out and took him to the medical center: “I sustained fractures in my ribs and my right leg. I was the only one to survive from my family. Russia has killed them all.”

Ahmad Rahhal, a local media activist, told SNHR, via Facebook, that he was able to distinguish the Russian warplanes from their voice and the high altitude at which they were flying, and also through the observatory that determined that the warplane took off from Hmeimim. Ahmad added that he went to where the two missiles fell in al Qosour neighborhood and saw the targeted residential building that was turned into rubbles: “I arrived in al Qosour neighborhood a few minutes after the first attack. The warplane was soaring above the neighborhood and fired a second missile that fell near the destroyed building. I saw the civil defense pulling out victims’ dead bodies and the injured. There was one among the injured whose hand was amputated. I saw the civil defense save two children from under the rubbles.”

Omar al Mkahhal, a member of the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, told SNHR that civil defense and Red Crescent teams pulled out more than 20 dead bodies from the rubbles including two doctors from al Bab city in Aleppo suburbs who fled to Idlib city recently: “The Russian warplanes were who carried out the airstrikes at dawn. The sound of the explosion was too high although the bombardment was with only one missile.”

III. Attachments

Victims’ names



A video published by [Baladi News Media Network](#) showed victims being pulled out from the rubbles after airstrikes we believe were Russian in al Qosour neighborhood in Idlib city

Another video published by [al Ma'ara Media Center](#) showed the great destruction that resulted from the bombardment. The video also has a member of the civil defense saying that a great number of wounded were pulled out from under the rubbles, and that most of them were children and women

The doctor Mahmoud al Sayeh's [children](#) who were killed in the massacre

IV. Conclusions and Recommendations

Legal conclusions

1- The Russian regime has, beyond any doubt, violated Security Council Resolutions 2139 and 2254 which both state that indiscriminate attacks must be halted. Also, they violated Article 8 of Rome Statute through the act of willful killing which constitutes war crimes.

2- We can confirm that the bombardment mentioned in this report has targeted armless civilians. Therefore, 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.

3- The attacks mentioned in this report, which were carried out by the Russian regime, are considered a violation of the customary international law as the shells were fired at a populated area rather than a specific military object.

4- Aerial bombardment has caused collateral damages that involved loss of lives, injuries, and significant damages to civil facilities. There are strong indicators suggesting that the damage was too excessive compared to the anticipated military benefit.

Recommendations

The Security Council

- The Security Council has to take additional steps as Resolution 2254 has been adopted and no pledges to cease the indiscriminate bombardment operations have been made. All the parties to the conflict must respect the Resolutions and adhere to the rules of the international humanitarian law.
- The Syrian case must be referred to the International Criminal Court and all those who are responsible must be held accountable including the Russian regime whose involvement in war crimes has been proven.



- Instill security and peace in Syria and implement the norm of the Responsibility to Protect in order to protect the lives, culture, and history of the Syrian people from being destroyed, looted, and ruined.
- Expand the sanctions to include the Russian and Iranian regimes who are directly involved in committing crimes against humanity and war crimes against the Syrian people.

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

The Office must submit a report to the Human Rights Council and other organs of the United Nations on this massacre specifically considering that it was perpetrated by forces which we believe were Russian.

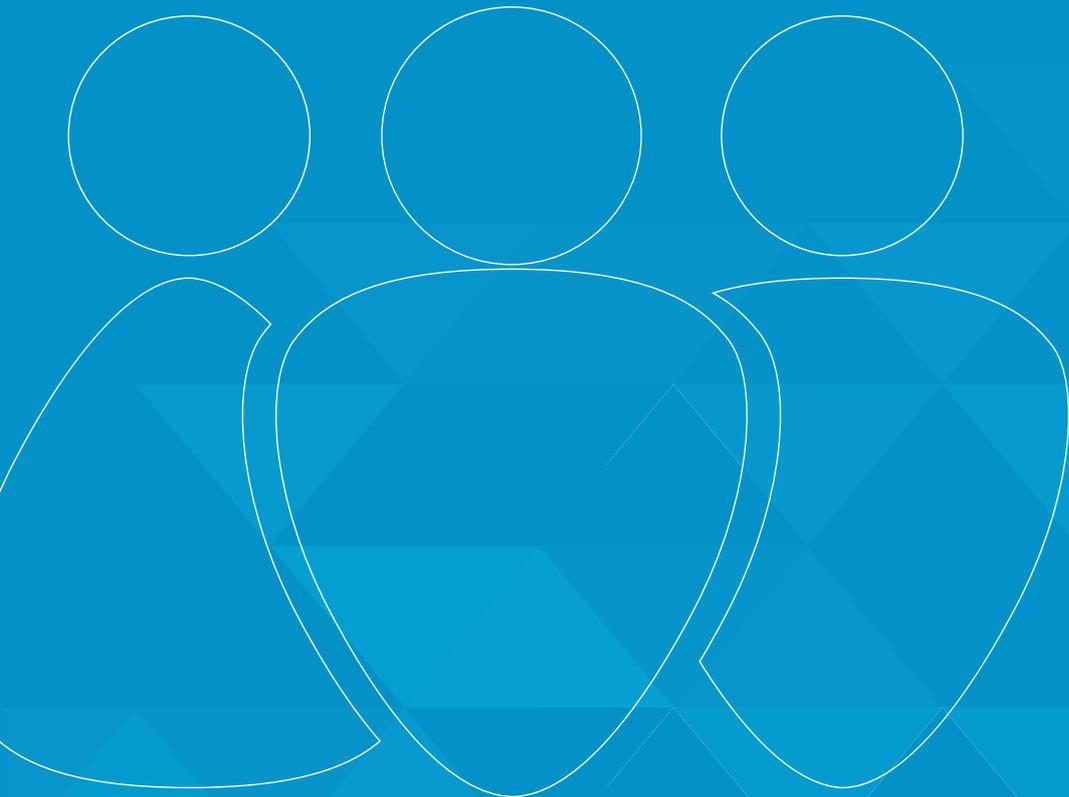
The International Community

- In light of the split of the Security Council and its utter inability, Steps must 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 enhance the support for the relief efforts. Additionally, the principle of universal jurisdiction must 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 were drought out. Therefore, steps under Article 7 of the Rome Statute must be taken and the norm of the Responsibility to Protect, which was established by the United Nations General Assembly, must 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.
- To 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.

Acknowledgment

Our thanks and condolences for the families and local activists who contributed majorly to this report.





@snhr



Info@sn4hr.org

www.sn4hr.org

