

Syrian-Russian Alliance Forces Target 31 Civil Defense Vital Facilities in the Fourth De-Escalation Zone in 11 Weeks

Documenting the Deaths of
229 Syrian Civil Defense Members
Since Its Establishment in March
2013 to Date

SNHR

SYRIAN NETWORK FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

الشبكة السورية لحقوق الإنسان

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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

Throughout the Syrian Network for Human Rights' (SNHR) eight years of documenting violations in Syria to date, we have observed that the targeting of relief activities and their pillars is a recurring pattern of behavior by the Syrian regime and its allies used to inflict the most severe suffering among civilians and force them to capitulate and surrender through targeting those who offer them relief, aid and treatment services.

The distinction between civilians and combatants and the protection of all those not taking part in hostilities constitutes the essence of international humanitarian law applicable in the case of armed conflicts, with many of its articles calling for the protection of medical personnel assisting civilians and the wounded following attacks, and for respecting them as neutral individuals helping the sick and wounded without discrimination. Amongst these articles of legislation is the first Geneva Convention, which states in Article 24: "Medical personnel exclusively engaged in the search for, or the collection, transport or treatment of the wounded or sick, or in the prevention of disease, staff exclusively engaged in the administration of medical units and establishments, as well as chaplains attached to the armed forces, shall be respected and protected in all circumstances.". The first Additional



Protocol, in Chapter VI, also defines the meaning of civil defense and, in Article 62, provides for the protection of civil defense personnel. This Protocol also identified 15 activities within the framework of civil defense functions, all of which are dedicated to protecting the civilian population and ensuring the conditions necessary for their survival, namely, protecting them from the dangers of hostilities and disasters and helping them to recover from their immediate effects. Also, under Rule 109 of customary humanitarian law, each party to the conflict has to take all possible measures to search for, collect and evacuate the wounded, sick and shipwrecked. This includes permitting humanitarian organizations to assist in their search and collection.

We note that since the beginning of the military escalation in the fourth de-escalation zone on April 26, 2019, concerning which the SNHR outlined the most notable violations resulting from it in a recent [report](#), the Russian and Syrian Regime forces inflicted deliberate and intensive targeting of vital facilities, particularly medical facilities, Civil Defense facilities, and schools; we have prepared [a detailed report](#) on the targeting of medical facilities by the Syrian regime and its allies. In this report we detail the targeting of the headquarters and teams of the Syrian Civil Defense organization (known as the White Helmets) between April 26, and July 12, 2019. In May 2016, we issued [an extensive report](#) on the most notable violations against the Civil Defense organization by all the parties to the conflict in Syria, and we also document the most notable violations against the Civil Defense personnel and their vital facilities [on a monthly basis](#).

Fadel Abdul Ghany, Chairman of the Syrian Network for Human Rights, says:

“The tasks carried out by the Syrian Civil Defense teams (White Helmets) are diametrically opposed to the strategy of the Syrian regime and Russia of inflicting as much pain and fear in the community as possible. This is primarily why its equipment, headquarters and personnel have been subjected to deliberate shelling. Its reputation was also distorted by an attempt to link it to extremist organizations. All those who kill and target those who assist and aid civilians must be condemned and exposed. “



II. Background on the Syrian Civil Defense Organization and the Most Notable Challenges It Faces

In light of the Syrian regime's and its allies' relentless aerial bombardment with missiles and barrel bombs of populated neighborhoods and the resulting difficulties in rescuing survivors and recovering bodies from under the rubble, in addition to the severe lack of organization of the initial response immediately after the bombing, and other functions, the Syrian Civil Defense Organization was established in Aleppo governorate in March 2013, two years after the start of the popular uprising for democracy in March 2011. Due to the great failure by any external or international rescue organizations to protect civilians from the bombing by Syrian regime aircraft, as well as the failure to rescue survivors from under the rubble after aerial bombardment and the expansion of this military strategy, the organization and the geographical area it covered expanded and consolidated over time under a central administration following a conference in Turkey held for this purpose on October 25, 2014. According to the Civil Defense Administration's statements, the current number of Civil Defense volunteers stands at nearly 2,393, of whom 201 are female volunteers; the Civil Defense rescue teams work in a total of 129 facilities, which are divided between main centers, sub-centers, women's centers, unexploded ordnance clearance centers, and handling of hazardous substances centers, as well as training centers.

The duties of the Syrian Civil Defense organization aren't limited to operations of ambulance, rescue, recovery, and evacuation of the wounded, but also extend to helping with the evacuation of civilians from areas under bombardment, the provision of housing and shelters for the displaced, and responding to camp requirements. The Civil Defense teams also contribute effectively to the removal of rubble and debris, fire suppression, identifying and marking hazardous areas, removing unexploded ordnance, delivering water and repairing electricity networks damaged as a result of the shelling. In addition to all this, the Civil Defense members, especially women, monitor the situation of the wounded and provide first aid, care for children and pregnant women, and raise awareness, in addition to filming the rescue operations and the remnants of weapons used, and recounting the details of bombing incidents. All these activities contribute to helping us effectively in the process of documenting violations.

Accordingly, it may be considered that attacking the Civil Defense teams constitutes a violation of both the Fourth Geneva Convention, Articles 17, 23, 59; Protocol (I), Article 70; Protocol (II), Article 18-2), and Rule 55 of Customary Humanitarian Law, which states: " The parties to the conflict must allow and facilitate rapid and unimpeded passage of humanitarian relief for civilians in need, which is impartial in character and conducted without any



adverse distinction, subject to their right of control “, as well as Rule 56, which states: “ The parties to the conflict must ensure the freedom of movement of authorized humanitarian relief personnel essential to the exercise of their functions. Only in case of imperative military necessity may their movements be temporarily restricted.”

Exceptional challenges facing the Civil Defense teams in Syria:

The work of the civil defense teams in different countries of the world faces a number of risks because of the nature and difficulty of the tasks included in their activities, but in Syria, these lifesaving rescue workers face additional and exceptional challenges that are difficult for their colleagues in civil defense teams worldwide even to imagine:

A: In addition to the deliberate bombings and attempts by Russian and Syrian intelligence to locate the Civil Defense headquarters buildings in order to bomb them, Russian forces in Syria have devised a brutal new tactic, the ‘double tap strike’, which is based on bombing sites that were bombed a short time before as the ambulances and rescue workers rush to rescue the survivors; this grotesque tactic is deployed calculatingly in order to not only inflict the greatest possible loss of civilian lives, but also to harm the greatest possible number of rescue workers and medics and their equipment.

B. Our team has documented the bombing of roads used by paramedics and civil defense teams in the aftermath of the bombing by the Syrian-Russian alliance forces in order to obstruct their work in rescuing the survivors of bombings.

C: The widespread use of cluster and incendiary munitions constitutes a double burden on civil defense teams; the dumping of a single explosive charge of these munitions causes extensive damage on a very large scale and may ensure the death and injury of as many people as possible in different areas, depending on the spread of such munitions, which gravely threatens the civil defense teams deployed after the bombing.

D: Defamation: The Syrian and Russian regime not only deliberately target the Civil Defense rescue workers with bombs and missiles, but use the media machine to spread disinformation and slander, in parallel with launching numerous media campaigns and false news reports smearing the Syrian Civil Defense organization with ludicrous and offensive accusations, slanderously linking them to al Qaeda on the one hand and with Western governments and intelligence agencies on the other, as well as accusing them of preparing chemical attacks and counterfeiting rescue operations, staging false massacres for photo opportunities, and other vile charges without providing any credible evidence to substantiate these defamatory claims.



The SNHR contacted Mr. Raed al Saleh¹, director of the Syrian Civil Defense Organization, who told us about the most important tasks of the organization:

“The organization provides two types of responses: first, to respond to bombardment and to put out fires caused by bombardment in agricultural land; and secondly to send teams to camps that have received displaced persons to facilitate roads and provide some services to civilians that facilitate their lives in their areas of displacement. The Syrian and Russian regimes have made many attempts to distort our reputation because we’re witnesses to many of the crimes they’ve committed against the Syrian people. “

III. Methodology:

This report includes the record of the most notable violations documented by the Syrian Network for Human Rights against the Civil Defense Organization by the main parties to the conflict in Syria. These violations include the civilian death toll among the Civil Defense personnel, in addition to the attacks on Civil Defense vital facilities (centers and vehicles) from the establishment of the Civil Defense Organization in March 2013 up until July 12, 2019. The report highlights the most notable attacks carried out by the Syrian-Russian alliance forces against the Civil Defense Organization in the fourth and final de-escalation zone (consisting of Idlib governorate and parts of the governorates of Hama, Aleppo and Latakia), which took place during the recent military campaign against the region between April 26, and July 12, 2019.

The record of attacks included in this report include:

First: Bombings that targeted Civil Defense vital facilities (centers and vehicles), with no military headquarters or equipment nearby.

Second: Bombings on Civil Defense vital facilities whose work has been suspended due to fear of being bombed and due to the displacement of the residents of the area.

Third: Civil Defense vital facilities have regularly been subjected to more than one attack, and we document each attack as a separate violation.

Fourth: One military attack may result in damage to more than one Civil Defense vital facility, and we document each facility as a separate attack.

¹ Via WhatsApp on June 17, 2019



Under international humanitarian law, civilian objects are categorized as being protected from military attacks unless they are used for military purposes, with this protection suspended only when these objects are used for military purposes and for the duration of such use; once the civilian object is no longer being used for any military purpose and returns to its former civilian status, military attacks are once again prohibited and the object's protected status is resumed.

In the course of our work on this report, we sometimes had difficulty in documenting incidents because of the location of some Civil Defense facilities and vehicles at the contact lines, and because of the heavy bombardment these areas were subjected to.

This report draws upon the ongoing daily monitoring of news and developments by SNHR's team, and on our extensive network of various credible sources that have 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, although this is a rarity in light of the incredibly high security risks involved, and given the frequency of daily incidents and the scarcity of human and material resources to carry out this work. Therefore, the opportunities available to access evidence vary between one case and another, and consequently the level of certainty in the classification of each incident varies. SNHR's customary policy in such cases is to rely on accounts from survivors who experienced the violation firsthand or those who saw or photographed the violation, 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.

SNHR also analyzes videos and photographs that our team has documented, or 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 the scale and extent of the destruction inflicted on Civil Defense facilities in attacks by Syrian-Russian alliance forces, in addition to photos of the Civil Defense personnel either the fatalities or the injured.

Furthermore, we retain copies of all the videos and photographs outlined in this report in a confidential electronic database, as well as keeping hard disk backup copies. 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. Readers are welcome to find out more about SNHR's [methodology](#).



This report contains seven accounts that we've collected through speaking directly with eyewitnesses or persons concerned with the work of these Civil Defense vital facilities, none of which are cited from any open sources. We explained the purpose of these interviews beforehand to the eyewitnesses, who gave us permission to use the information they provided without us offering or giving them any incentives. Also, SNHR endeavors always to spare the eyewitnesses the agony of remembering the violations as much as possible, and to provide assurances that we will conceal the identity of any witness who prefers to use an alias.

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.

IV. The Responsibility to Protect Civilians in Syria

For eight years, the Syrian regime has committed grave crimes and violations against Syrian civilians. It has also consistently failed to respond to any of the demands of the International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, or to those of the High Commission for Human Rights, or even to Security Council resolutions. The Security Council, which was supposed to take collective measures and action under Article 41 and 42 of the Charter of the United Nations, also failed because of the immunity granted by Russia to the Syrian regime, with Russia routinely using its veto in the case of the Syrian regime, which not only failed to abide by the responsibility for the protection of civilians, but committed the most egregious violations against them, reaching the level of crimes against humanity, and extermination within detention centers through torture.

In a report issued in December 2001, the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty stressed that: "The Security Council should take into account in all its deliberations that, if it fails to discharge its responsibility to protect in conscience-shocking situations crying out for action, concerned states may not rule out other means to meet the gravity and urgency of that situation"

Such conscience-shocking situations are exactly what have continued to happen in Syria, not only in the form of one massacre or one violation but in industrial-scale killings and torture, sexual violence, enforced disappearances, the use of chemical weapons and barrel bombs, and besieging civilians. The list of crimes against humanity perpetrated by the Syrian regime and its allies goes on. The Security Council has signally failed to assume its responsibilities in the Syrian case, despite the Syrian Network for Human Rights, international organizations and UN commissions of inquiry crying out for action by the Security



Council many thousands of times. In this context, the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty affirmed in the same report: “it would be impossible to find consensus, in the Commission’s view, around any set of proposals for military intervention which acknowledged the validity of any intervention not authorized by the Security Council or General Assembly. But that may still leave circumstances when the Security Council fails to discharge what this Commission would regard as its responsibility to protect, in a conscience-shocking situation crying out for action. It is a real question in these circumstances where lies the most harm: **in the damage to international order if the Security Council is bypassed or in the damage to that order if human beings are slaughtered while the Security Council stands by.**”

V. The Escalation Challenges Facing the Civil Defense Organization in the Idlib Region

In the course of the military campaign launched by the Syrian-Russian alliance forces on the area since April 26, which targeted medical facilities and caused most of them to stop working, putting them out of service, the process of transporting the injured and wounded has become more difficult and long distances are required to go through to transport the injured and sick to hospitals. The successive movements of displacement in the light of the weakness of international humanitarian responses to increase the burden on the Organization. The fulfillment of these commitments will require considerable efforts if we consider that the 2,393 Civil Defense members have to fulfill those obligations for nearly three million civilians living in this area.

Civil defense members, in light of the complete disregard of the international humanitarian law and the relevant UN Security Council resolutions by the Syrian-Russian alliance forces, and in light of the ongoing military campaign until the moment of issuing this report, lay under constant danger and threat as the Syrian-Russian alliance forces continue to target their headquarters, facilities and vehicles they use to transfer the injured and wounded. The policy of double tap strikes and targeting of ambulance roads continue to be a systematic policy adopted by the Syrian-Russian alliance forces. These attacks will delay the arrival of rescue workers and inflict the greatest harm on their victims, and will cause the delay in the suppression of fires caused by bombardment in the agricultural land. We also recorded injuries resulting from traffic accidents during work, in addition to normal work accidents.



Recently, the Civil Defense teams resorted to establishing concealed centers and setting up unmarked points on agricultural land and divided themselves into smaller teams to prevent gathering in one place, which makes it easier for them to be targeted. Despite these measures, the Syrian-Russian alliance forces deliberately attacked them, with SNHR documenting attacks on them in the locations where they were distributed, such as an attack on a fire vehicle parked in a residential building in al Latamena town in the northern suburbs of Hama on May 23, and another attack on the Civil Defense team from the Balyoun Center on June 2, which was stationed on agricultural land.

Mustafa al Haj Yousef², Director of the Syrian Civil Defense Directorate in Idlib governorate, told the SNHR: **“Our centers in the north of Syria have been subjected to direct targeting repeatedly, but the work of the Civil Defense has not stopped despite the losses that have been incurred, and we have worked to mitigate the impact of these targets by moving to the idea of teams dispersed in the areas being targeted.”**

Mustafa added: **“The use of incendiary weapons by the Syrian and Russian regimes in the bombing of agricultural land caused an increase in the frequency of fires in them, which is an additional burden on our members, and despite our tireless attempts to reduce the impact, we lost thousands of hectares.”**

VI. The Most Notable Violations Against the Civil Defense Organization According to the Syrian Network for Human Rights' Database

A: Since the establishment of the Organization in March 2013 to July 12, 2019:

SNHR documented the deaths of at least 229 Civil Defense personnel in Syria at the hands of the main perpetrator parties to the conflict in Syria between March 2013 and July 12, 2019, distributed as follows:

- Syrian Regime forces: 159

- Russian forces: 38

- Extremist Islamist groups:

ISIS: Three

- Syrian Democratic Forces: One

- Other parties: 28

² Via WhatsApp on June 16, 2019



We also recorded at least 396 attacks on Civil Defense vital facilities in Syria at the hands of the main perpetrator parties to the conflict in Syria, during the same period, distributed as follows:

- **Syrian Regime forces:** 277
- **Russian forces:** 102
- **Extremist Islamist groups:**
- **Factions of the Armed Opposition:** One
- **Other parties:** 16

The record shows that the Syrian-Russian alliance forces resulted in the deaths of 87 percent of the total death toll among the Civil Defense personnel, while they perpetrated 96 percent of the total record of attacks on the Civil Defense vital facilities.

B. Since the beginning of the military campaign on April 26, 2019, to July 12, 2019:

Since the beginning of the military campaign by the Syrian-Russian alliance forces against the fourth and final de-escalation zone on April 26, up until July 12, 2019, SNHR has documented the deaths of four Civil Defense personnel, all at the hands of Russian forces, and the injury of at least 22 others with varying injuries. We also documented attacks by the Syrian-Russian alliance forces on at least 31 Syrian Civil Defense vital facilities (centers and vehicles), during the same period. These attacks were distributed according to the main perpetrator parties as follows:

• **Syrian Regime forces:** 15, distributed as follows:

Facilities: Four

Vehicles: 11

This record was distributed across governorates as follows:

Idlib governorate: Seven

Hama governorate: Six

Aleppo governorate: Two

• **Russian forces:** 16, distributed as follows:

Facilities: Four

Vehicles: 12

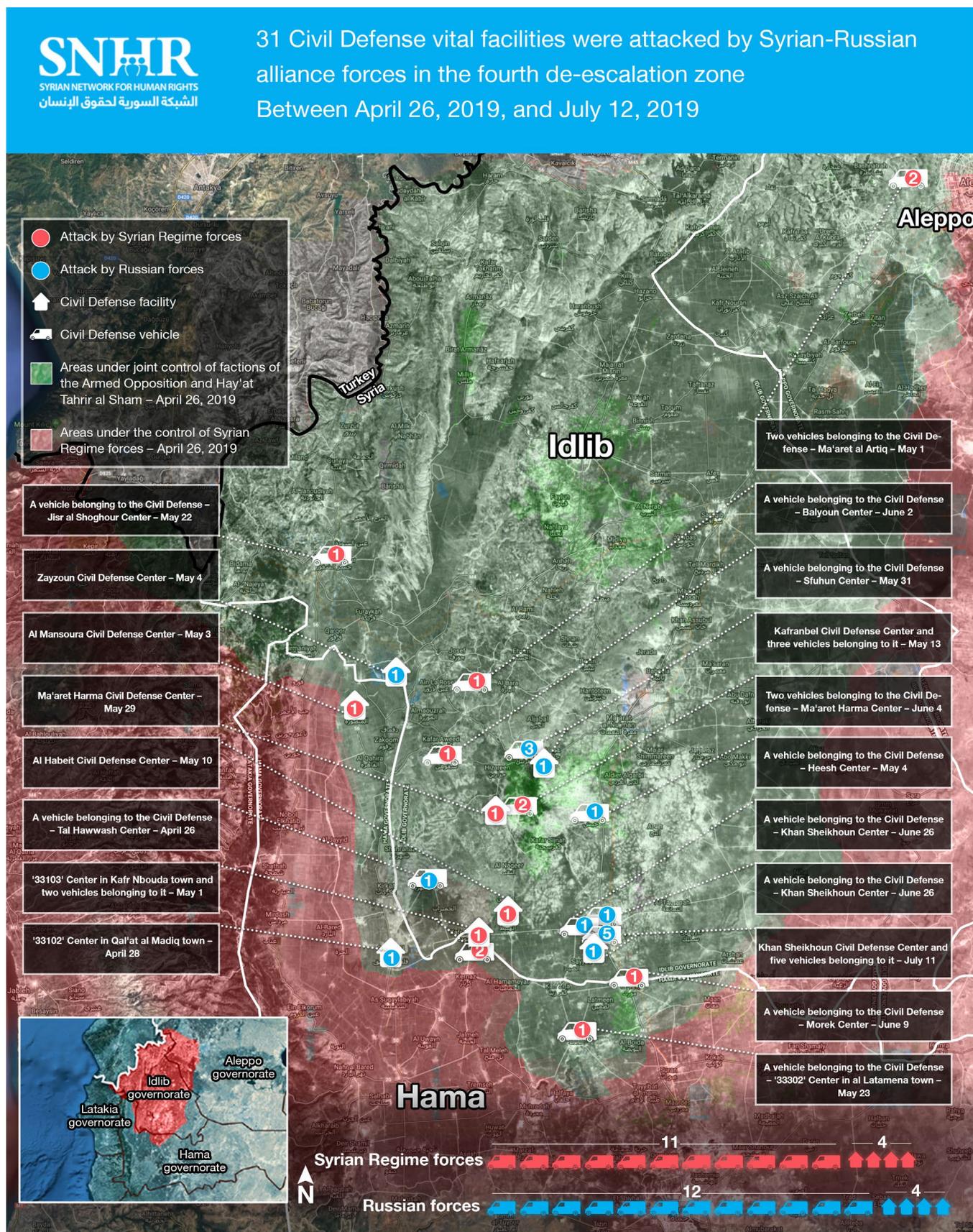
This record was distributed across governorates as follows:

Idlib governorate: 13

Hama governorate: Three



A map showing approximate locations of the Civil Defense vital facilities which we have documented as having been attacked by Syrian-Russian alliance forces:



The map shows that most of the Civil Defense vital facilities attacked by Syrian-Russian alliance forces are located in Idlib governorate, with 20 vital facilities (four centers and 16 vehicles), while nine of these facilities (four centers and five vehicles) were attacked in Hama governorate.

VII. The Most Notable attacks by the Syrian-Russian Alliance Forces on Syrian Civil Defense Vital Facilities in the Fourth De-Escalation Zone During the Recent Military Campaign on the Region

At around dawn on Friday, April 28, 2019, fixed-wing warplanes, which we believe were Russian, fired a number of missiles that landed near the '33101' Civil Defense Center in the center of [Qal'at al Madiq](#) town in the western suburbs of Hama governorate, perpetrating a massacre, as well as inflicting moderate material damage to the center's building and furniture. The town, which was under the joint control of factions of the Armed Opposition and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident, is under the control of Syrian Regime forces at the time of preparing this report.

On Wednesday, May 1, 2019, Syrian Regime forces' artillery fired a shell that landed near the Civil Defense team from the Ma'aret al Artiq Center as the team was passing along the road linking the villages of Ma'aret al Artiq and Kafr Hamra in Aleppo governorate western suburbs to do service work in the latter, causing moderate material damage to two vehicles belonging to the team (a Hyundai H1 [service vehicle](#) and [a bulldozer used to remove debris](#)). The area was under the control of Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.

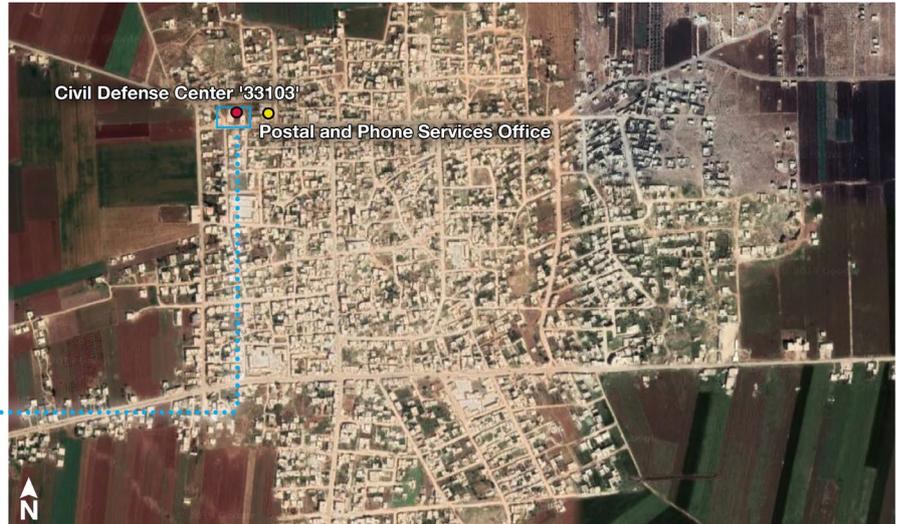
On Wednesday, May 1, 2019, at around 01:30, Syrian Regime forces used a missile launcher to shell the '33103' Civil Defense Center located near the Surgical Unit in Kafr Nbouda town in Hama governorate northern suburbs. The shelling partially destroyed the Civil Defense Center building, and inflicted moderate [material damage](#) to [its equipment](#) and [furniture](#), putting it out of service. We note that the same forces repeated their shelling on this site during an attempt by the Civil Defense teams to reach it, causing moderate material damage to two vehicles belonging to the Civil Defense, Kafr Nbouda Center, ([a service car](#) and an [ambulance](#)). Kafr Nbouda town was under the joint control of factions of the Armed Opposition and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.

[The Syrian Civil Defense](#) organization published a news report on the targeting of the '33103' Center located in Kafr Nbouda on its official 'Twitter' account.



Map showing location of the '33103' Civil Defense Center in Kafr Nbouda town, which was subjected to a ground attack by Syrian Regime forces on May 1, 2019

Location of the '33103' Civil Defense Center in Kafr Nbouda town in the northern suburbs of Hama, which was subjected to a ground attack by Syrian Regime forces on May 1, 2019



SNHR contacted Mr. Abdul Karim Rahmoun³, the Director of the Civil Defense Center in Kafr Nbouda town, who told us that the center was targeted with three high-explosive missiles: **“The missiles directly fell onto the center building, causing significant damage to the building and equipment inside, without inflicting any human casualties among the center personnel. While the Civil Defense teams were inspecting the site, additional missiles fell near the same site, which caused damage to a van used for services and an ambulance, both belonging to the team. “**

On Saturday, May 4, 2019, fixed-wing warplanes, which we believe were Russian, fired missiles that fell near an ambulance of the Civil Defense, Heesh Center, near al Rakaya village in Idlib governorate southern suburbs, while the crew was working to inspect the site of a previous bombing by the same warplanes. The attack killed the ambulance driver Mohammad al Shawwa, in addition to causing significant [material damage](#) to the car, putting it out of service. The village was under the joint control of factions of the Armed Opposition and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.



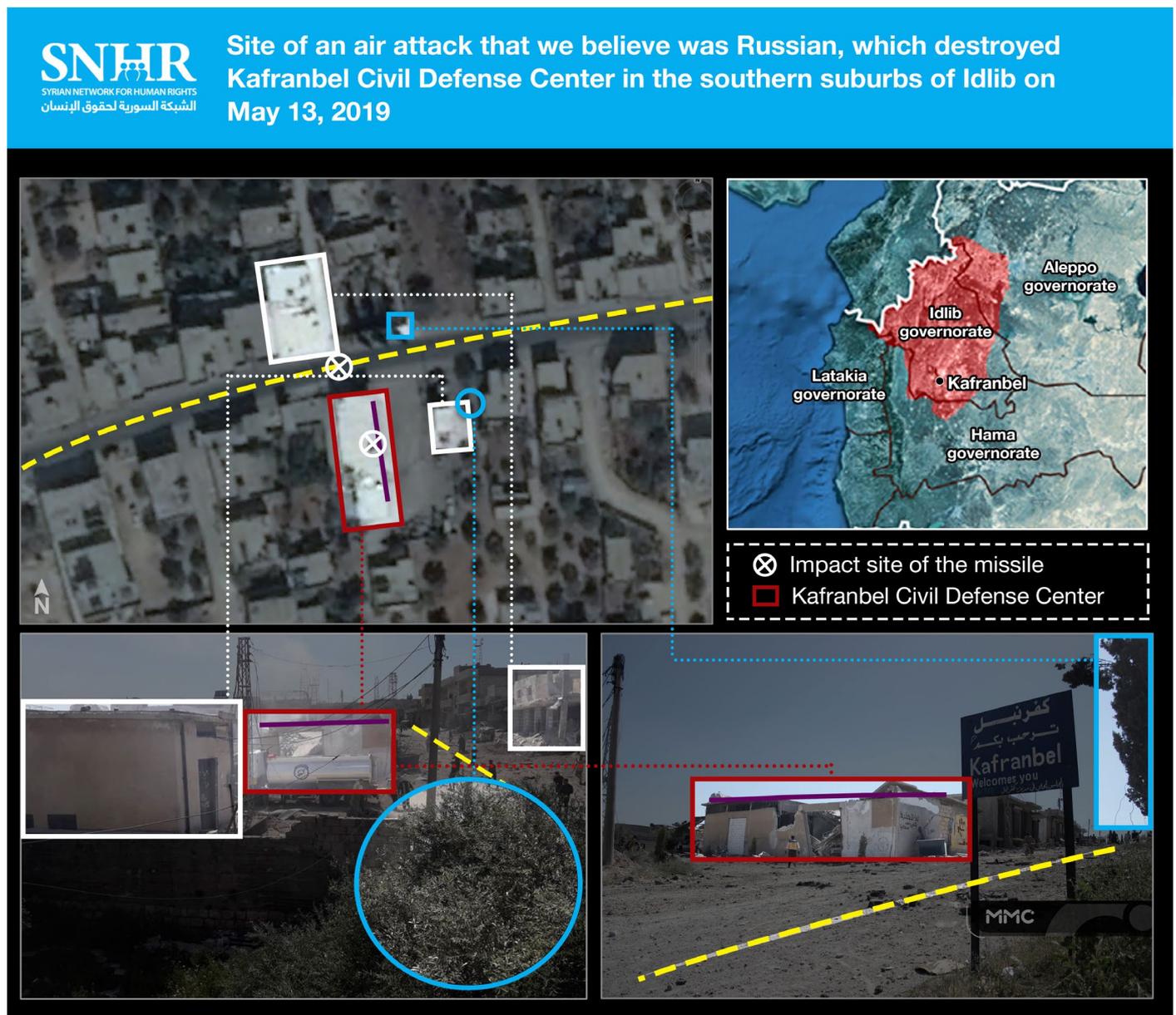
The Civil Defense member, Mohammad al Shawwa, Killed in a Russian Air Attack near al Rakaya village, Idlib, and damage to a Civil Defense ambulance – May 4, 2019

³ Via WhatsApp on May 1, 2019



On Monday, May 13, 2019, fixed-wing warplanes, which we believe were Russian, fired a number of missiles in two volleys directly at the Civil Defense Center in Kafranbel city in Idlib governorate southern suburbs, [injuring two Civil Defense](#) personnel, namely the center's Director Obeida al Othman and one of the center's personnel Ahmad Salah, in addition to causing severe destruction to the [center's building](#), as well as [inflicting extensive material damage](#) to the furniture, [equipment](#) and three vehicles belonging to the center ([a fire truck](#), [a rescue vehicle](#) and [a bulldozer](#)), putting the center out of service. 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. [The Syrian Civil Defense](#) organization published a news report on the targeting of the Kafranbel Center on its official 'Twitter' account.

Visual guide of the site of an air attack that we believe was Russian, which destroyed Kafranbel Civil Defense Center on May 13, 2019



Obeida al Othman⁴, the Director of the Civil Defense Center in Kafranbel city, who was injured in the attack on the Civil Defense Center in the city, told us that Hazarin town had been attacked with barrel bombs before the attack on Kafranbel. He recalled: **“I stayed with two members in the center while the rest of the team headed to Hazarin town. A few minutes later, our center was targeted directly by a Russian warplane which the observatories informed us had taken off from Hmeimim Airbase. The missile fell about five meters away from the center, then we immediately left the building and moved away from the center. We were afraid that another attack would target the same site, which was what actually happened when the same warplane targeted the same site with a missile that directly hit the center. The center building was greatly damaged, as well as severely damaging the vehicles, putting them completely out of service, while I was injured along with another member by shrapnel from the missiles. “**

On Thursday, May 23, 2019, Syrian regime helicopters dropped a barrel bomb that fell near a fire vehicle belonging to the '33302' Civil Defense Center in al Latamena town in the Hama governorate northwestern suburbs, which was parked inside a residential building some distance from the Civil Defense Center to avoid it being shelled. The bombardment caused holes in the vehicle's chassis, putting it out of service. The town was under the joint control of factions of the Armed Opposition and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.



Damage caused in a fire vehicle belonging to the Civil Defense following a Syrian regime air attack on al Latamena town, Hama - May 23, 2019

⁴ Via WhatsApp on June 16, 2019



On Friday, May 31, 2019, fixed-wing Syrian regime warplanes fired a number of missiles that landed near the Civil Defense team, Sfuhun Center, in Kafr Uweid village in Idlib governorate southern suburbs, injuring two rescue personnel, Mustafa Hasan Meghlaj and Walid Hasan Kbeish, in addition to causing moderate material damage to an ambulance belonging to the team. The village was under the joint control of factions of the Armed Opposition and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident

On Sunday, June 2, 2019, fixed-wing Syrian regime warplanes fired missiles that landed near the Civil Defense team from the Balyoun Center, south of Balyoun village in Idlib governorate southern suburbs, while the team was stationed in agricultural land surrounding the village, causing minor material damage to an ambulance belonging to the team. The village was under the joint control of factions of the Armed Opposition and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.

Tariq Alloush⁵, the Director of the Civil Defense Center in Balyoun, who was injured in the air attack that targeted his center, told the SNHR that the Civil Defense teams had established mobile and hidden stationing points outside their facilities for fear of being attacked: **“On June 2, the observatories circulated that a ‘Sukhoi 22’ Syrian regime warplanes took off from al Shayrat Airbase in Homs. Within a few minutes, the attack occurred, with the warplanes targeting directly with a number of missiles the point where we were stationed, causing me minor injuries, while one vehicle was hit with shrapnel. The same warplanes renewed their strikes on the site, but we had already evacuated the place. “**

On Sunday, June 9, 2019, fixed-wing Syrian regime ‘Sukhoi 24’ warplanes fired a number of missiles that targeted the western part of Morek town in the northern suburbs of Hama, causing moderate material damage to a backhoe loader belonging to the Civil Defense located inside a residential building inside the city. We note that the Civil Defense organization distributes its vehicles in different areas for fear of being targeted for bombardment. The town was under the control of Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.

On Wednesday, June 26, 2019, [Khan Sheikhoun city](#) in the southern suburbs of Idlib was subjected to a number of air raids by the Syrian-Russian alliance air force, from about 12:00 until 12:35, after which Civil Defense teams headed to the sites of shelling one after the other to evacuate the injured.

⁵ Via WhatsApp on June 15, 2019



One of the teams, consisted of three elements, headed to al Beira neighborhood in the north-east of the city having received information about people being injured in a Russian air strike there. On their arrival at around 12:15, Russian warplanes carried out a second raid on the same site, [greatly damaging an ambulance](#), while Ali al Qaddour, a Civil Defense team member, was killed, and Omar al Kayyal, another team member, sustained a fatal injury, while a third team member, Abdul Hamid Hallaq, was also injured.

Following the injury of these team members, a second three-member Civil Defense team went to the site to aid their injured colleagues. When they got to within 10 meters of the scene, the observatories announced the presence of Russian air force aircraft in the area, which carried out another raid near the second team at approximately 12:21, causing [moderate material damage to the ambulance](#) they were driving, and injuring three more of the rescue workers, Khaled Abdul Hamid al Najm, Mohammad al Dyab and Ahmad Qatouf. After the recovery of the victims and injured and on the way back to the hospital, the team was subjected to strafing with machine guns by fixed-wing Syrian regime warplanes. Khan Sheikhoun city was under the joint control of factions of the Armed Opposition and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.

This incident clearly shows deliberate and intentional targeting of Civil Defense teams. Following the targeting of the second team, a Civil Defense team at Heesh Center drove an ambulance to Khan Sheikhoun to support the Civil Defense teams there, using a secondary road due to the main roads being bombed. As the ambulance approached Khan Sheikhoun city and as a result of the speed and confusion of the driver due to a reconnaissance aircraft flying overhead, the team was involved in a traffic accident that injured four team members in the vehicle, in addition to causing [minor material damage to the ambulance itself](#).

[The Syrian Civil Defense](#) organization published two [statements](#) on the incident on its official 'Twitter' account.



Ali al Qaddour, a Civil Defense team member, was killed in a Russian air attack on the Civil Defense team in Khan Sheikhoun city, Idlib - June 26, 2019





Omar al Kayyal, a member of the Civil Defense team, was killed by a Russian air attack on the Civil Defense team in Khan Sheikhoun city, Idlib - June 26, 2019

Map showing approximate locations of air attacks carried out by Syrian-Russian alliance forces on the two Civil Defense teams in Khan Sheikhoun city on June 26, 2019



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Map showing approximate locations of air attacks by Syrian-Russian alliance forces on the Civil Defense teams in Khan Sheikhoun city in the southern suburbs of Idlib on June 26, 2019






- Location of the Russian air attack on the first Civil Defense team
- Location of the Russian air attack on the second Civil Defense team
- Location of the Syrian air attack on the ambulance during the evacuation
- / The ambulance route



The SNHR spoke with Khaled Abdul Latif al Najm⁶, the commander of a team in the Civil Defense Center in Khan Sheikhoun, who was injured in the incident: “ **Khan Sheikhoun city suffered a heavy bombing campaign that day, and several Civil Defense teams headed to the sites of bombing. After a Russian air raid, we lost contact with one of the teams, and civilians told us that the team was injured. I immediately headed with two members to the site, and while we were trying to approach the place, we learned from the observatories that there were Russian warplanes in the air that would carry out a raid for the second time on the same site. We took cover immediately, and within a minute, the warplane carried out the attack with two missiles on a site near us. The three of us were injured with varying injuries, but we got up and approached the place where we saw the ambulance damaged as a result of the bombing, and we also found the body of the martyr Ali, and recovered the injured, one of whom was the martyr Omar who died after we took him to the hospital. “**

Khaled added that the Russian reconnaissance aircraft returned to monitor the site and the Russian warplanes bombed the same place for a third time, though this was just after they had left. He added: “**On the way to the hospital, we were followed by Syrian warplanes, which carried out a machine-gun raid on us, but we were not hurt, thank God. “**

We also spoke with Sharif al Ismail⁷ from the Civil Defense Center in Heesh, who told us: “**After the two Civil Defense teams in Khan Sheikhoun city were hit, we took an ambulance to the city to support them. During our drive along the Aleppo - Damascus international road to the north of Khan Sheikhoun city, the road was subjected to a number of air raids by warplanes, so we drove along a secondary road, Tal Ja’far Road east of Khan Sheikhoun city. As we approached the city, we had a traffic accident due to speed and fear of being shelled since the area was monitored by a reconnaissance plane, as the observatories informed us. Immediately, we informed the center of the accident that caused minor injuries to me and to three members of the center, then we were evacuated by ambulance to the center. “**

⁶ Via WhatsApp on June 26, 2019

⁷ Via WhatsApp on June 27, 2019



On Thursday morning, July 11, 2019, fixed-wing SU-24 warplanes, which we believe was Russian, launched 14 consecutive missile attacks. These started at around 07:30 and continued until 11:30. The attacks targeted the Civil Defense Center, which was located inside a fortified cave, on the northern outskirts of Khan Sheikhoun city in Idlib governorate southern suburbs, resulting in significant destruction in the center, and causing severe [material damage](#) to its equipment, in addition to inflicting severe destruction to five vehicles of the center (an ambulance, fire engine, two service vehicles, and a Bobcat used to remove debris), putting the center out of service. Khan Sheikhoun city was under the joint control of factions of the Armed Opposition and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.



VIII. Conclusions and Recommendations

- The deliberate attacks against medical units, medical personnel, clearly identified individuals and facilities marked by emblems protected by the Geneva Conventions, and those working in the humanitarian field or with peacekeeping groups, are war crimes, and it is part of the International Criminal Court's duties to hold the perpetrators accountable, according to Article 8 of the court's charter, as well as constituting a breach of the Rules 31, 32, 45, 55, 56 of the International Customary Humanitarian Law.
- Incidents included in this report are unquestionably examples of breaches of UN Security Council resolutions 2139 and 2254 calling for the end of indiscriminate attacks, and breaches of Article 7 and Article 8 of the Rome Statute by committing intentional homicide, all of which constitute war crimes.



- The attacks including in this report are a breach of UN Security Council Resolution number 2286 calling for an end of violations and transgressions committed in armed conflicts against humanitarian workers, and against their transportation vehicles as well as their equipment.
- We confirm that most of the attacks included in the report targeted unarmed civilians, and therefore, the perpetrators have violated International Human Rights Law, which protects the right to life. In addition, these crimes were committed in a non-international armed conflict, meaning that these attacks constitute war crimes, as they fulfill all the criteria for this categorization.
- The attacks included in the report are considered a violation of International Customary Humanitarian Law, as the shells were fired at facilities and vehicles used for humanitarian purposes and the shells did not target a specific military object.
- The bombings have caused losses of civilian lives, injuries, and severe damage to civilian objects, and there are strong indications that lead us to believe the damage was disproportionately extreme compared to any military objectives for the attacks.

Recommendations:

UN Security Council:

- The Security Council must reevaluate the level of risk of violations of human rights and its threat levels to international and regional peace and security, and revert to Article Seven to protect humanitarian workers and facilities in Syria.
- The Security Council must take extra steps after issuing Resolutions number 2139 and 2254, as there appears to be no commitment to stopping the indiscriminate bombing, and all parties to the conflict must comply with this, in addition to complying with the International Humanitarian Law.
- The Syrian crisis should be referred to the International Criminal Court and all those responsible for related crimes should be held accountable including the Russian regime whose involvement in war crimes has been repeatedly proven.
- The current sanctions should be expanded to include the Syrian, Iranian, and Russian regimes as all are directly involved in war crimes and crimes against humanity against the Syrian People.
- The militias fighting alongside the Syrian government, which are responsible for committing mass slaughter and multiple crimes against humanity, such as the Iranian militias, the Lebanese Hezbollah, other Shiite militias, National Defense army, and Shabiha, should be placed on the international terrorists list.



- The Syrian government should no longer be classified as a legitimate official party in regard to any relief efforts, given its responsibility for multiple crimes against humanity, and should no longer be supplied with large amounts of financial or any other relief, which mostly fails to reach those who desperately need and deserve this aid, instead being distributed to Syrian government supporters who have no need of it.

The International Community:

- In light of the split within the Security Council and its utter inability to take any effective action, action should be taken on the national and regional levels to form alliances to support the Syrian people through protecting them from daily killing and lifting the sieges imposed on them, as well as 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 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, from the Arab League's plan to 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. The Security Council is still actively obstructing the protection of civilians in Syria.
- Work on fulfilling justice and achieving accountability in Syria through the United Nations General Assembly and the Human Rights Council and 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 and the incidents that preceded it as a stark mark in light of smaller daily sporadic violations and to try to implement the recommendations included in this report.

Independent International Commission of Inquiry (COI)

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



International, Impartial, and Independent Mechanism (IIIM)

- Study the incidents included in this report and previous reports, and the SNHR is fully ready to cooperate and to work on supplying more evidence and details.

The European Union and United States of America

- Support the International, Impartial, and Independent Mechanism (IIIM) established in accordance with the UN General Assembly Resolution 248/71 issued on December 21, 2016, and open local state courts that operate according to the principle of international justice in order to pursue justice for the victims of war crimes perpetrated in Syria.

The Syrian regime

- Stop treating the Syrian state as a personal family possession.
- End the terrorizing of the Syrian community through killing workers who provide it with medical, rescue, and relief services.
- Stop the bombing of the protected objects, as well as civilian areas, and respect Customary Humanitarian Law.
- Accept full accountability for the legal and financial costs of its actions, and compensate the victims and their families via the state's assets.

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 those responsible accountable.
- Compensate all the damaged centers and facilities, rebuild and rehabilitate them, and compensate all the families of victims who were killed by the current Russian regime, as well as all the wounded.
- Completely cease the bombing of the protected objects, and civilian areas, and respect International Customary Humanitarian law.

Humanitarian organizations around the world:

- Humanitarian organizations working in Syria must make no distinction between help and protection, and must report all violations they suffer during their work.
- The humanitarian organizations working in Syria should threat of using condemnation and denunciation in case violations are repeated.

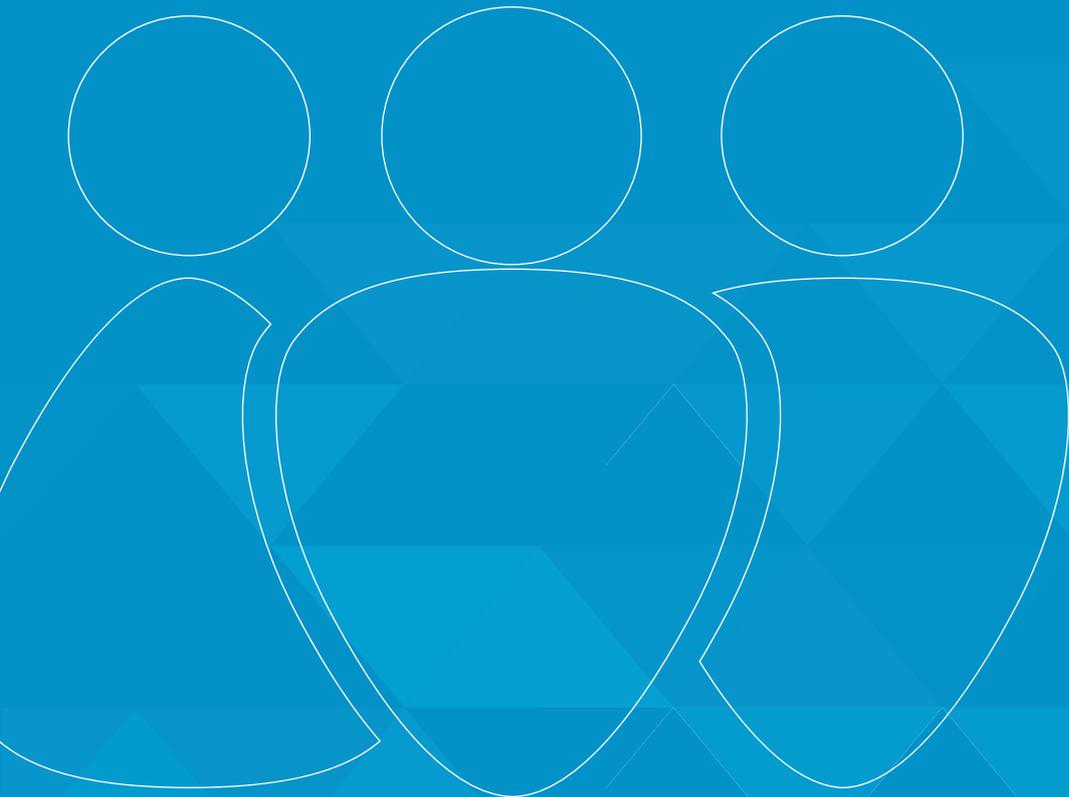


- There is an intense need for all kinds of humanitarian support in Syria, particularly in light of the increasing numbers of IDPs who are struggling financially; the support operations that are needed for the humanitarian facilities, such as hospitals shouldn't stop, and there is a need for continuing the delivery of aid. International organizations must also send volunteers to the non-dangerous areas to help medical staff to treat the wounded and ill being brought to them.

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