



Documentation of a Massacre: 48 Civilians Killed due to Russian Shelling on a Residential Building in Al Ghanto Town

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I. Introduction:

Al Ghanto town is located near Talbisa city in northern Homs Suburbs and the number of its inhabitants is almost 15 thousand individuals. The town, which is under the control of armed opposition, also shelters a great numbers of displaced residents from Homs's neighborhoods.

In this report we document the alleged Russian shelling on a residential building where Al Assaf family was sheltering in.

Our team conducted interviews and investigations with residents, local activists and eyewitnesses; in addition we included two of the interviews in this report. We analyzed footages and images we received and crossed referenced these outcomes with information about the air strikes from pro-Russian media outlets. All eyewitnesses spoke in Arabic as we also explained the aim behind conducting these interviews where some of them preferred their real names to be kept confidential, as we also kept a record for all the contact details to all eyewitnesses.

Our investigations proved that the targeted building was a shelter for displaced residents who were related to a member of an armed opposition group. However, he was not present in the building during the shelling; as the region is also free of any military presence for any armed opposition group during the attack or before it.

What is documented below constitutes the bare minimum of what we were able to record, as it also does not tackle the social, economical





and psychological dimensions of this crisis.

Russian authorities deny all these accusations and state that all its targets were on military locations that belonged for ISIL or terrorist groups. Therefore, SNHR demands the Russian authorities to investigate this shelling incident and the prior ones and we are ready to present all required evidence and information.

II. Details:

On 19 October 2015, alleged Russian warplanes launched a rocket on a residential building that sheltered Al Assaf family. The building is located in the northern of Al Ghanto town and 600 meters away from its center. The shelling killed 48 civilians, including 33 children and 13 women.

Mr. Abo Rateb, a local media activist, gave SNHR his testimony:

“Russian warplanes did not leave our airspace since the morning and performed continuous raids. At about 9 a.m. the warplane launched a rocket on a residential house northern of the town. The building sheltered dozens of displaced individuals from Al Assaf family. It is worth noting that the family was related to a member of an armed opposition group, who was in the battlefield during the shelling time. Only civilians, children and women were in the house.

The rocket was incredibly explosive and killed all of the residents who were in the building in addition to some sheep that were near the building. The shelling also destroyed 5 nearby houses.

Most of the victims were my relatives and cousins. There were more than 30 children and the total number of the victims was more than 46. We were able to pull out 15 bodies from under the rubble only. The rockets that were used were extremely explosive and that is how we were able to differentiate the Russian shelling from the Syrian regime’s one. The northern suburbs of Homs are free of any ISIL presence but like usual, the Russian warplanes shells random targets.”

Media activist Al Mou’tasim Sawees Zar visited the shelling location and gave SNHR his testimony:

“During the morning time we heard the town’s loudspeakers and mosque’s minarets announced the importance of evacuating the streets since 4 Russian warplanes entered the airspace of Homs’s northern suburbs. I went to the roof of one the buildings and started to videotape the entrance of the warplanes to our airspace from the





northern side. It was roaming on a very high altitude then deviated with an angle of 45 degrees then launched two rockets on the road between Al Ghanto and Talbisa towns. Two powerful explosions occurred then the Syrian regime rocket launchers started to shell the center of the town. The regime's forces were stationed in the sheep market in Al Ashrafeya town.

I went to the shelling location. It was horrible. Everywhere I looked, I saw children's body parts and dead bodies. One of the rockets fell on a simple shelter that had more than 50 individuals from Al Assaf family, while the other rocket fell on a nearby building.

For two days we kept pulling victims' bodies from under the rubble. We were able to pull body parts for 20 individuals only. Our town is under the control of the Free Syrian Army and other armed opposition groups. Our region is free of any ISIL presence in the region.”

III. Attachments:

[Video](#) footages that depict the shelling aftermath on the town and [pulling out the victims' bodies](#) from under the rubble to alleged Russian shelling on Al Ghanto town in Homs on 15 October 2015

III- Legal Conclusions and Recommendations:

- Conclusions:

1. Russian forces violated UN Security Council resolution 2139 through its indiscriminate and deliberate shelling.
2. Russian forces deliberately targeted unarmed civilians and therefore violated the international humanitarian law. Hence, it is responsible for these violations, which were mentioned through this report. Russia must bear the consequences of all these violations, and avoid its recurrence.
3. Indiscriminate bombardment is considered a clear violation of the International Humanitarian Law, and these indiscriminate killings amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity.
4. The indiscriminate shelling caused loss of lives and damages which is a strong indicator that Russian forces used excessive force when compared with its military benefit.

- Recommendations:

To the UN Security Council:

- The UN Security Council must take further action as a year has passed since the adoption of resolution No. 2139 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

Our heartfelt thanks and appreciations go to the victims’ families, eyewitnesses, and local activists whose testimonies contributed majorly to this report. Our most profound consolations go out to the victims’ families and friends.

