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No fewer than Five Massacres in Syria in October 2018

Including Four at the hands of
International Coalition Forces



SYRIAN NETWORK FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

الشبكة السورية لحقوق الإنسان

Tuesday, November 6, 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.



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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 October that SNHR team was able to document. 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 or more in the same attack.

This report draws upon the continued 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.

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

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 victims of attacks in which missiles and firearms were used, while most victims were children and women. We always make sure to store this data with its respective source. Nonetheless, we can't claim that we have documented 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, which we have been able to document, of the actual magnitude and severity of the violation that occurred. It also doesn't cover the social, economic, and psychological ramifications.

II. October Outline

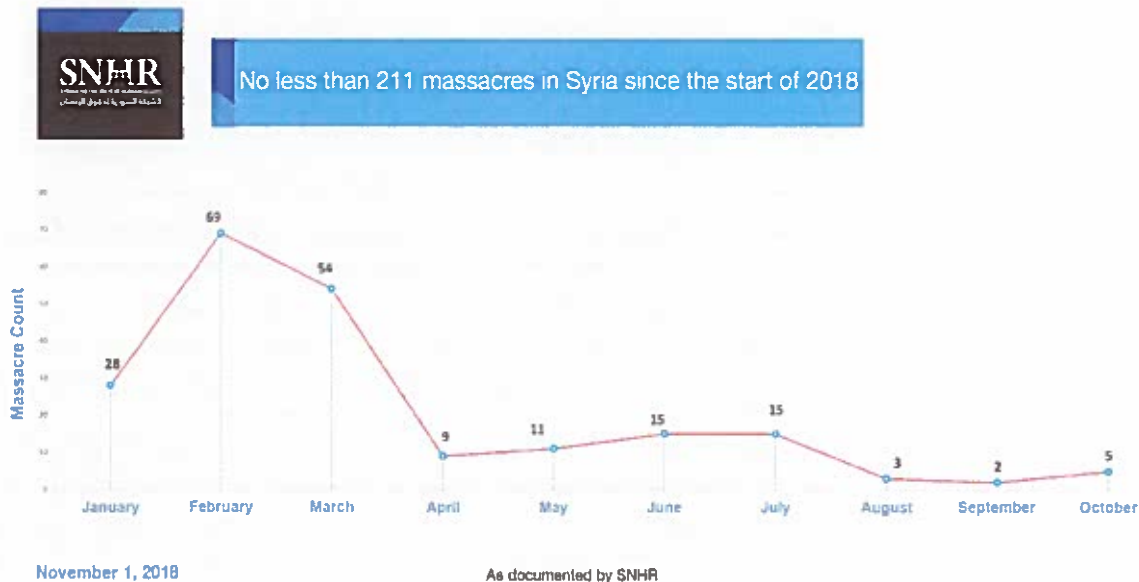
October saw a significant fall in terms of the scope of military operations by most of the parties to the conflict, except for international coalition forces and Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) who escalated their attacks on the ISIS-held areas in east Syria.

We documented five massacres in October, all of which took place in Deir Ez-Zour governorate. Of these, four massacres were by international coalition forces, bringing the total number of massacres for which international coalition forces have been responsible in Deir Ez-Zour governorate since the start of 2018 to 13.

III. Executive Summary

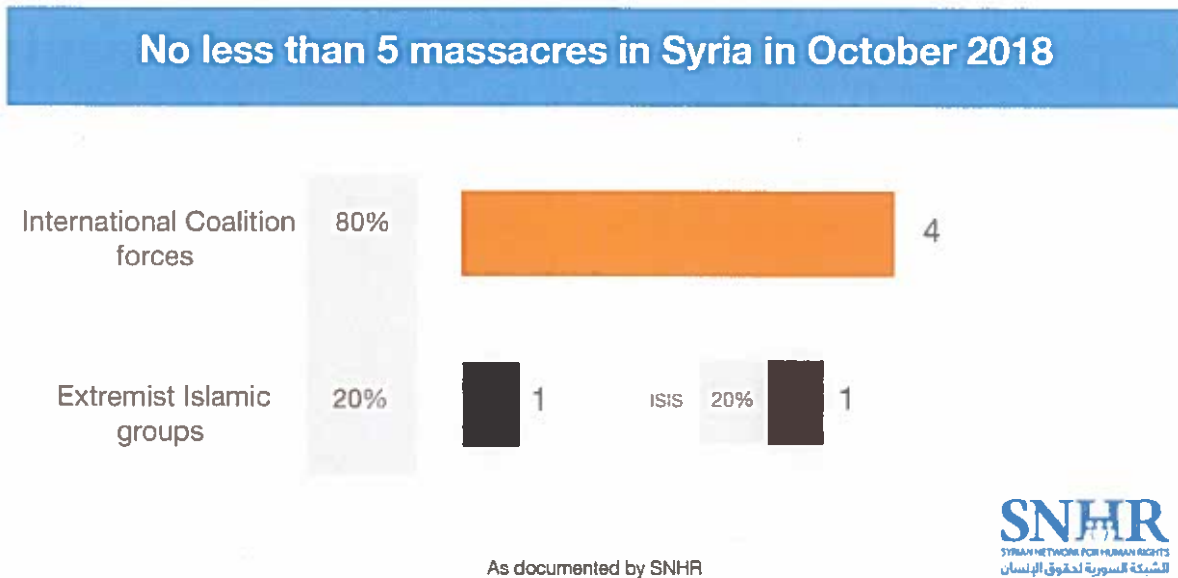
A. Toll of massacres since the start of 2018

SNHR documented 211 massacres at the hands of all parties to the conflict in Syria between the start of 2018 and November of the same year. Massacres are distributed by month as follows:



B. Massacres in November

SNHR documented no fewer than five massacres in October, all of which took place in Deir Ez-Zour governorate. The massacres were distributed as follows:



A. Extremist Islamic groups

- ISIS (the self-proclaimed Islamic State): 1

B. International coalition forces: 4

According to the victim documentation team at SNHR, the massacres documented this month resulted in the deaths of 41 civilians, including 14 children and four women (adult female). This means that 44percent of all victims were women and children, which is an alarmingly high percentage, and an indication that civilian residents were targeted in most of these massacres.

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

A. Extremist Islamic groups

- ISIS: five civilians.

B. International coalition forces: 36 civilians, including 14 children and four women.



IV. Details of the Most Notable Massacres in October

A. Extremist Islamic groups

- ISIS

Deir Ez-Zour governorate

On Wednesday, October 17, 2018, ISIS executed five civilians simultaneously by shooting in al Sha'fa city, which is administratively a part of al Boukamal city in the eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate. To justify their crimes, the ISIS members used the pretext of allegations that the victims had been in contact with the Kurdish-majority SDF and divulged the coordinates of ISIS international coalition forces. The city was under the control of ISIS at the time of the incident.

B. International coalition forces

Deir Ez-Zour governorate

Al Susa town, where international coalition forces perpetrated three massacres

Al Susa town is administratively a part of al Boukamal area in the eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour. The town, with a population of approximately 30,000, is located around 130 kilometers from the center of Deir Ez-Zour city. Al Susa town is currently under the control of ISIS. In late 2012, factions of the armed opposition took over the town which remained under their control until mid-2014 when ISIS carried out an attack on the area. Since then, the town has been under the control of the group.

The town was the target of multiple offensives carried out by Syrian regime forces after they lost control of the town. However, these offensives stopped after the town fell under ISIS's control, when international coalition forces warplanes began launching airstrikes on the town in support of the SDF under the pretext of fighting ISIS.

The most recent offensive by international coalition forces, which was launched four months ago, resulted in the deaths of dozens of civilians, with many residents forced to flee to nearby areas that are free of ISIS' control.

On Thursday, October 18, 2018, at around 23:00, an international coalition forces warplane fired a number of missiles at the home of a civilian identified as Mohammad Ibeid al Hattab which is located in the town's al Alyat neighborhood. The attack resulted in the deaths of nine civilians, all of whom were Iraqi refugees. Among the victims were four children and two women.



On Friday, October 19, 2018, at around 12:00, during the Friday Prayer, international coalition forces warplanes fired a number of missiles at al Mustafa Mosque, which ISIS had renamed Ammar bin Yasser Mosque but which was known locally as the Ali al Dagher Mosque, in the town's al Bobadran neighborhood. The attack resulted in the deaths of 16 civilians, including five children.

On Saturday, October 27, 2018, fixed-wing international coalition forces warplanes fired a number of missiles at the town, which resulted in the deaths of five civilians, including two children and one woman.

Hajin city

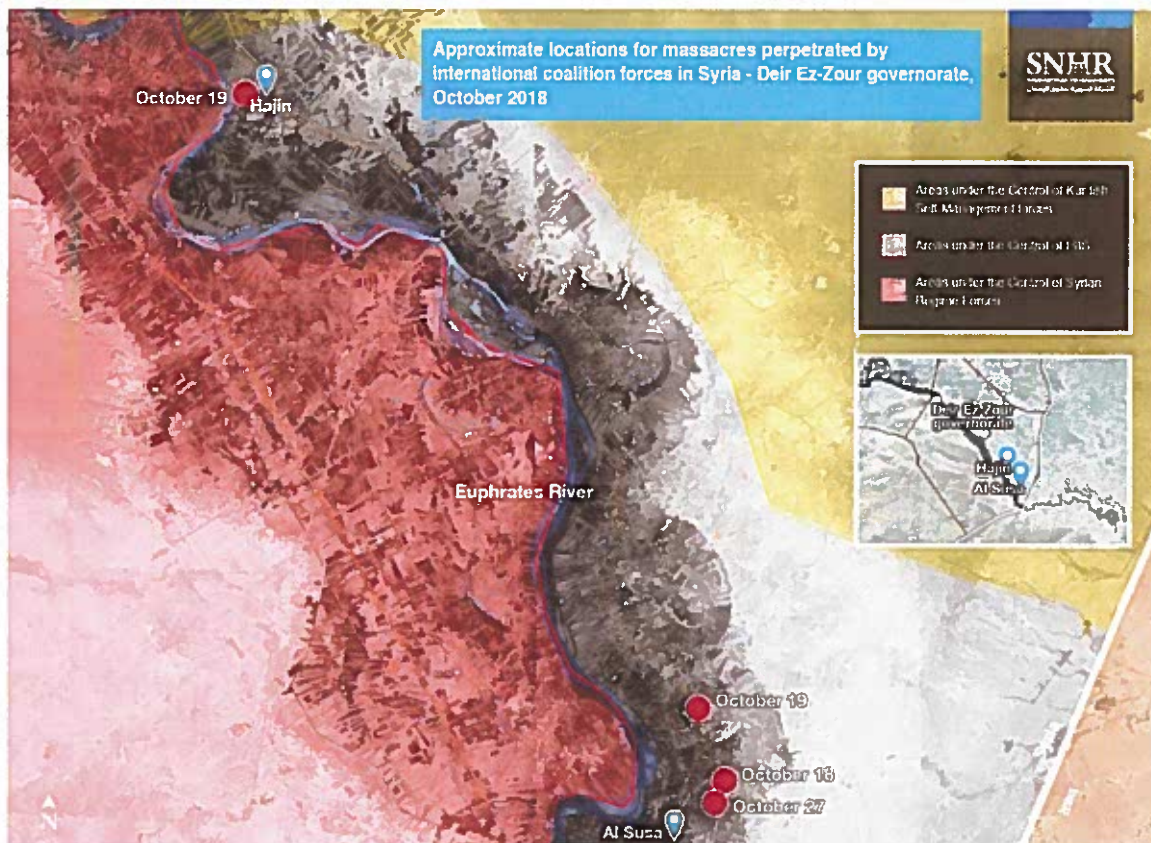
Located in the eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour, [Hajin city](#) is about 110 kilometers from the center of Deir Ez-Zour city. The ISIS-held city, which has a population of approximately 50,000, is considered the largest city still under the control of the group in terms of area. In late 2012, factions of the armed opposition managed to take over the city. However, ISIS seized control of Hajin city in mid-2014 after armed opposition factions withdrew from the city in the wake of clashes with the group which is still in control to this day.

The city was the target of multiple offensives by Syrian regime forces after they lost control of the town. However, these offensives stopped after the town fell under ISIS' control, when international coalition forces warplanes began carrying out airstrikes on the town as backers of SDF under the pretext of fighting ISIS.

The most recent offensive by international coalition forces, which was launched four months ago, resulted in the deaths of dozens of civilians, with many residents being forced to flee to nearby areas free of ISIS' control.

On Friday, October 19, 2018, at around 12:00, fixed-wing international coalition forces warplanes fired a number of missiles at the Hawwama city of Hajin city, which resulted in the deaths of six civilians, all of whom were Iraqi refugees. Among the victims were three children and one woman.





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 cease. Also, the Syrian and Russian regimes have violated Articles 7 and 8 of the Rome Statute through acts of willful killing which constitute war crimes.
- We can confirm that the incidents of bombardment documented in this report have targeted defenseless civilians. Therefore, Syrian and Russian forces have violated the rules of international human rights law which guarantees the right to life. Additionally, these violations were perpetrated in a non-international armed conflict which means that they constitute war crimes, meeting all the criteria for this definition.
- The attacks documented in this report which 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 extremely excessive compared to the anticipated military benefit.



- The magnitude of the massacres, their frequent nature, the exaggerated use of firepower, the indiscriminate manner of the bombing, and the coordinated approach of these attacks means that they must be based on high-level orders and constitute 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 extremely excessive compared to the anticipated military advantage.

Other forces

ISIS has perpetrated massacres, according to this report, which 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 must 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 and Iranian regimes who are 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.

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.
- Completely cease bombing hospitals, protected objects, and civilian areas, and respect the customary international humanitarian 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.

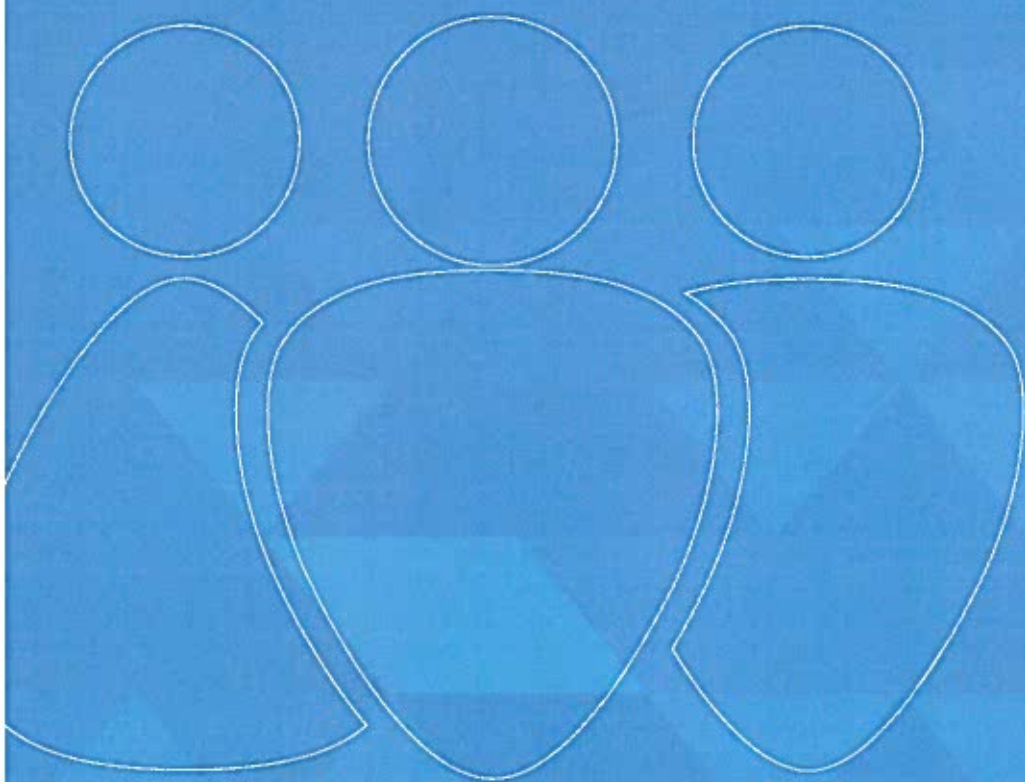
Armed opposition factions

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.





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