

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	878
Land:	Syrien
Kilde:	Syrian Network for Human Rights
Titel:	No less than 31 Attacks on Vital Civilian Facilities in Syria in September 2018
Udgivet:	6. oktober 2018
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	11. oktober 2018

No less than 31 Attacks on Vital Civilian Facilities in Syria in September 2018

Including 16 by Russian-Syrian
Alliance Forces



SYRIAN NETWORK FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

الشبكة السورية لحقوق الإنسان

Thursday, October 4, 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

Article 52 of the Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949 defines Civilian Objects as: **“....all objects which are not military objectives” with Military Objects being: “military objectives are limited to those objects which by their nature, location, purpose or use make an effective contribution to military action and whose total or partial destruction, capture or neutralization, in the circumstances ruling at the time, offers a definite military advantage.”**

Civilian objects include medical facilities, educational facilities, infrastructures, places of worship, and other facilities that are used for civilian purposes.

Since March 2011, Syrian regime forces, and then Syrian-Russian alliance forces, have trumped all parties in targeting vital civilian facilities – especially in the areas under the control of armed opposition, and to a lesser degree in ISIS-held areas. We have recorded repeated attacks on thousands of vital facilities, which proves that these facilities were deliberately destroyed and damaged. We have also recorded hundreds of massacres that resulted from attacks on such objects.

Certainly, other parties committed similar violations, but to varying degrees, and never to the extent of the crimes committed by the Syrian-Russian-Iranian forces.



The attacks we have recorded include deliberate bombardments that targeted civilian objects, lootings, and attacks that involve disabling these objects and undermining their purpose in serving civilians despite the lack of any imperative military necessity or these objects being used for combat purposes by a party which would have justified targeting them by the other parties to the conflict.

In light of the prolonged duration of the conflict and these facilities being continually targeted, as well as the ongoing demographic changes, a need rose for alternating the functions of some facilities (for example, many schools have been turned into IDPs shelters). We have also noticed that some facilities moved between multiple buildings and areas more than once in order to evade bombardment, while others were moved to secure sites such as caves.

SNHR has dedicated a periodic monthly report to monitor attacks on vital civilian facilities. In addition, SNHR has released extensive reports and researches on vital facilities that have been destroyed by the parties to the conflict.

Methodology

The report monitors the attacks on vital civilian facilities that we were able to document in September. This report draws upon, firstly, the daily, ongoing documentation and monitoring efforts by SNHR team, and, secondly, on accounts from survivors, eyewitnesses, and local media workers that we've talked to via phone or social media. We have also analyzed a large number of the videos and pictures that were posted online or we received from local activists via e-mail, Skype, and social media. Videos posted by local activists have shown wide destruction in vital civilian facilities. We have copies of all the videos and pictures included in this report in a secret online database, as well as backup copies on hard drives. For more information, please see the methodology adopted by SNHR for [classifying vital civilian facilities](#).

This report documents a number of incidents of attack that were the result of bombings. However, we weren't able to identify the groups behind them in light of the considerable difficulty in identifying the responsible party in such bombings.

Most of the attacks we have documented targeted civilian areas, as our investigations have concluded, where no military bases or armories were found during or before the attacks. The attacking forces didn't take into consideration the principle of proportionality. We also didn't record that the attacking forces put out warnings for civilians prior to the attack as the international humanitarian law requires.



The type and number of evidences vary from one case to another. In light of the challenges we mentioned above, many of the incidents' legal description change based on new evidences or clues that surface after we had released the report. We add these evidences and clues to our data archive. On the other hand, many incidents don't constitute a violation to the international humanitarian law, but it involved collateral damages, so we record and archive these incidents to know what happened historically and to preserve it as a national record. However, they don't necessarily qualify as crimes.

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

II. September Outline

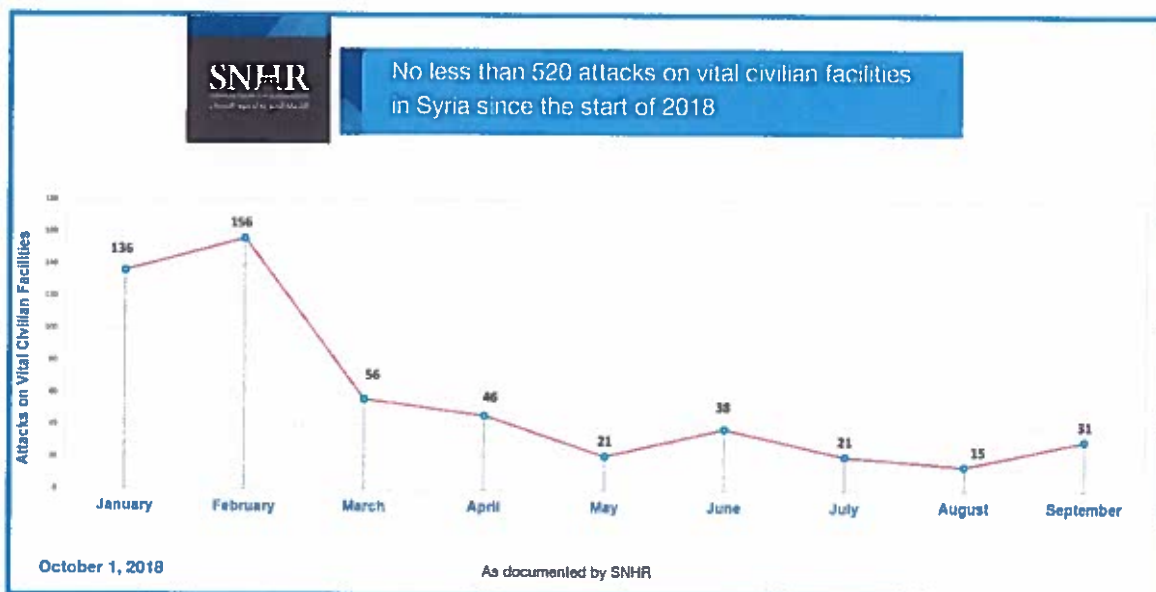
The first third of September saw a military escalation by Russian-Syrian alliance forces on north Syria that led to many vital civilian facilities being damaged – all of them were in Idlib and Hama governorates.

In addition, bombings, carried out by parties we weren't able to identify, have been on an unprecedented rise for the sixth month in a row across north Syria, causing damages to an increasing number of vital civilian facilities, as we documented seven incidents in north Syria. Idlib governorate recorded the highest number of attacks on vital civilian facilities with 16, including 13 attacks by Russian-Syrian alliance forces.

III. Executive Summary

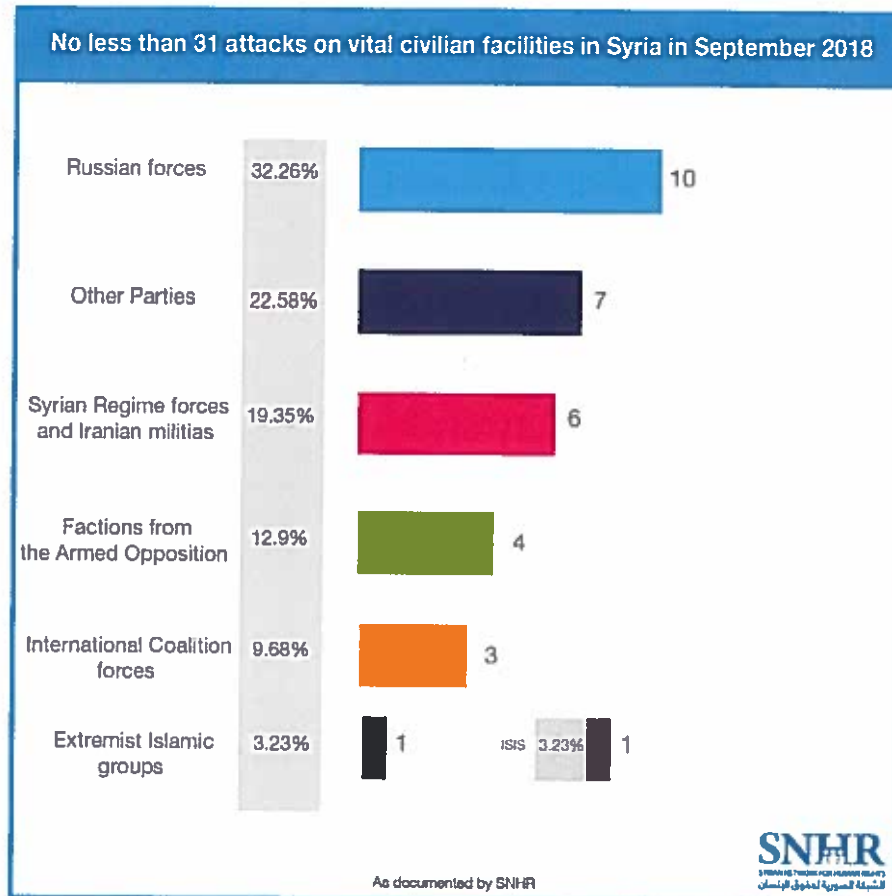
A. Attacks on vital civilian facilities since the start of 2018

SNHR has documented 520 attacks on vital civilian facilities at the hands of the parties to the conflict in Syria between the start of 2018 and October of the same year. Attacks are distributed as follows:



B. Most notable attacks on vital civilian facilities in September

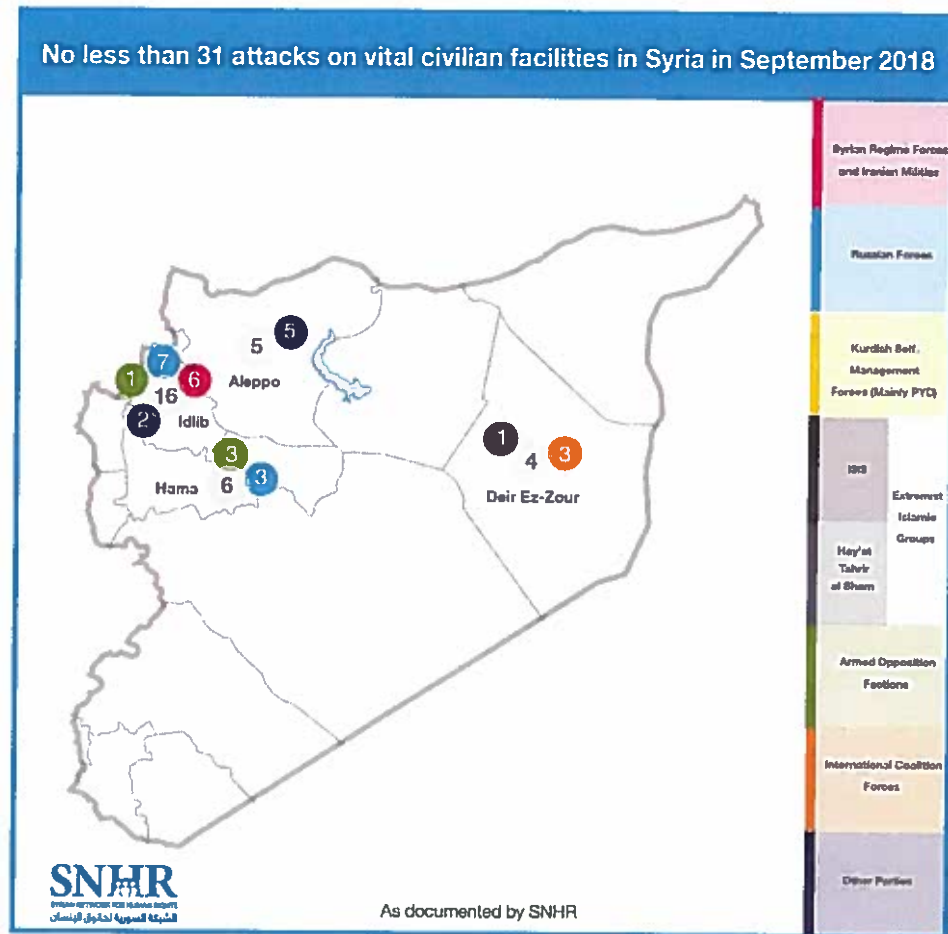
Through daily documentation and monitoring, we, at SNHR, have recorded no less than 31 attacks on vital civilian facilities in September 2018, distributed by the perpetrator party as follows:



- A. Syrian regime forces (army, security, local militias, and Shiite foreign militias): 6
- B. Russian forces: 10
- C. Extremist Islamic groups:
 - ISIS (self-proclaimed the Islamic State): 1
- D. Factions from the armed opposition: 4
- E. International coalition forces: 3
- F. Other parties: 7



Attacks on vital civilian facilities in September were distributed across governorates by the perpetrator party as follows:



- Most notable facilities that were attacked in September 2018:

Attacks on vital civilian facilities were distributed as follows

11 infrastructures, four places of worship, seven vital medical facilities, and nine vital educational facilities



Distribution of Attacks on Vital Civilian Facilities by the Perpetrator Party in September 2018						
Perpetrator Party	Syrian Regime Forces	Russian Forces	Extremist Islamic Groups	Factions from the Armed Opposition	International Coalition Forces	Other Parties
Attacked Facility			ISIS			
Places of Worship						
Mosques		1			1	2
Vital Educational Facilities						
Schools	4	3	1			1
Vital Medical Facilities						
Medical Facilities	1	2			1	1
Ambulances		2				
Infrastructures						
Power Stations		1				
Civil Defense Facilities	1	1				
Official Headquarters				1	1	3
Agricultural Lands						
Transportation Systems				3		
Total	6	10	1	4	2	7

IV. Details of Most Notable Incidents in September 2018

This report outlines the most notable attacks on vital civilian facilities. We have the details of the complete incidents stored in SNHR's database.

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

Vital medical facilities

- Schools

Wednesday, September 5, 2018, Syrian regime forces rocket launchers shelled the Martyr Hussein al Ali Elementary School in [Heesh](#) town, southern suburbs of Idlib governorate. The rocket landed in the middle of the schoolyard. The school building was slightly damaged. The town was under the control of armed opposition factions at the time of the incident.

Monday, September 10, 2018, Syrian regime forces rocket launchers, which were stationed in eastern suburbs of Idlib governorate, fired rockets that landed near [al Nedal School](#), which is located next to al Quds School, in [Jarjanaz](#) town, eastern suburbs of Idlib governorate during school hours. A number of students were wounded. In addition, the schoolyard was slightly damaged. The town was under the joint control of armed opposition factions and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.

Vital medical facilities

- Medical facilities (hospitals – dispensaries – medical points – makeshift hospitals)

Saturday, September 8, 2018, Syrian regime forces helicopters dropped [two barrel bombs](#) in front of [Nabd al Haya Hospital's](#) entrance (formerly [Sham Surgical Hospital](#)) in southern [Hass](#) village, southern suburbs of Idlib governorate. [The hospital building](#), which is built underground and supported by Syria Relief & Development (SRD), and [equipment](#) were [heavily damaged](#), while [its power generators were burned](#). The village was under the control of armed opposition factions at the time of the incident.



Damages in the aftermath of a bombing by Syrian regime forces on Nabd al Haya Hospital in Hass village, Idlib – September 8, 2018



B. Russian Forces

Places of worship

Mosques

Monday, September 10, 2018, fixed-wing warplanes we believe were Russian fired a missile at the main mosque in Hasraya village, northwestern suburbs of Hama governorate. The mosque was bombed out of service, as its building was completely destroyed. The village was under the control of armed opposition factions at the time of the incident.

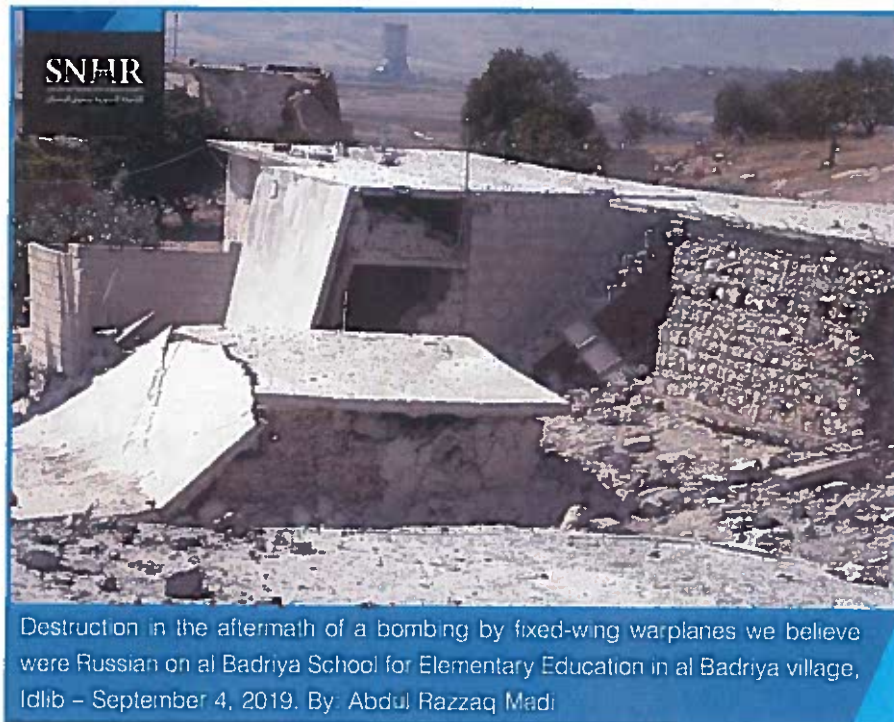


Vital educational facilities

- Schools

Tuesday, September 4, 2018, fixed-wing warplanes we believe were Russian fired a number of missiles at [al Badriya School for Elementary Education](#) in al Badriya village, western suburbs of Idlib governorate. The school was bombed out of service, as its building and fence were [heavily destroyed](#) while its furniture was [heavily damaged](#). The village was under the joint control of armed opposition factions and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.





Vital medical facilities

- Medical facilities (hospitals – dispensaries – medical points – makeshift hospitals)

Saturday, September 8, 2018, fixed-wing warplanes we believe were Russian fired two missiles near al Latamena Surgical Hospital in [al Latamena](#) town, northwestern suburbs of Hama governorate. The missiles landed about 15 meters from the hospital. An ambulance and a power generator belonging to the hospital were moderately damaged. The town was under the control of armed opposition factions at the time of the incident.

Infrastructures

- Civil defense facilities

Thursday, September 6, 2018, fixed-wing warplanes we believe were Russian fired a number of missiles at [the civil defense center](#), which is built inside a cave underground next to [al Taman'a High School](#), in al Taman'a town, southern suburbs of Idlib governorate. The center was bombed out of service, as its building was partially destroyed, while the furniture was heavily damaged. The town was under the joint control of armed opposition factions and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.





Destruction in the aftermath of a bombing by fixed-wing warplanes we believe were Russian on the civil defense center in al Taman'a town, Idlib – September 6, 2018

C. Extremist Islamic groups:

- ISIS

Vital educational facilities

- Schools

Thursday, September 13, 2018, ISIS bombed the [intermediate school](#) in Marzouq al Aliya neighborhood, al Sha'fa city, administratively part of al Boukamal city, eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate, using IEDs. The school fence and one of its buildings were destroyed. The city was under the control of ISIS at the time of the incident.

D. Factions from the armed opposition

Infrastructures

- Transportation systems

Friday, September 14, 2018, affiliates of al Jabha al Wataniya Leltahrir (The National Liberation Front), an armed opposition faction, bombed al Twaina Bridge, which connects al Twaina village with al Hurra village, in northwestern suburbs of Hama governorate using locally-made landmines. The bridge was put out of work, as it was heavily destroyed. It should be noted that the bridge connects armed opposition factions-held villages with Syrian regime forces-held villages in Sahl al Ghab area, Hama suburbs. The same bridge was damaged on Wednesday, September 5, 2018, by the same group. The bridge is within the parts under the control of armed opposition factions.



E. International coalition forces:

Places of worship

- Mosques

Sunday, September 30, 2018, fixed-wing international coalition forces warplanes fired a number of missiles at al Hashim Mosque in al Susa town, administratively part of al Boukamal city, eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate. The mosque was bombed out of service, as its building and furniture were heavily damaged. The town was under the control of ISIS at the time of the incident.

Vital medical facilities

- Medical facilities (hospitals – dispensaries – medical points – makeshift hospitals)

Thursday, September 13, 2018, fixed-wing international coalition forces warplanes fired a number of missiles at a makeshift hospital, built inside a house, in al Baghouz Fouqani village, administratively part of al Boukamal city, eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate. The hospital was bombed out of service, as its building was heavily destroyed. The village was under the control of ISIS at the time of the incident.

F. Other parties:

Places of worship

- Mosques

Saturday, September 1, 2018, an IED placed inside a car near [al Matyam Mosque](#) in the center of Izaz city, northern suburbs of Aleppo governorate, exploded. The bombing resulted in casualties. In addition, the mosque building was [moderately damaged](#). As of this writing, we have yet to identify the group responsible for the bombing on account of the considerable difficulties in identifying the perpetrator in such bombings. The city was under the control of armed opposition factions at the time of the incident.

Vital medical facilities

- Medical facilities (hospitals – dispensaries – medical points – makeshift hospitals)

Friday, September 14, 2018, an IED placed inside a motorbike near al Amal Surgical Hospital in the center of [Manbej](#) city, northeastern suburbs of Aleppo governorate exploded. The bombing was 15 meters away from the hospital, where no damages were recorded to the hospital building. As of this writing, we have yet to identify the group responsible for the bombing on account of the considerable difficulties in identifying the perpetrator in such bombings. The city was under the control of Self-Management forces (consisting primarily of the Democratic Union Party forces – a branch for the Kurdistan Workers' Party) at the time of the incident.



Infrastructures

- Official headquarters

Saturday, September 1, 2018, an IED planted inside a car near the local council in the middle of [Izaz](#) city, northern suburbs of Aleppo governorate, exploded. The bombing resulted in casualties. In addition, the council building was moderately damaged. As of this writing, we have yet to identify the group responsible for the bombing on account of the considerable difficulties in identifying the perpetrator in such bombings. The city was under the control of armed opposition factions at the time of the incident.

V. Conclusions and Recommendations

Syrian regime and Russian forces

- Syrian-Russian-Iranian alliance has, beyond any doubt, violated Security Council resolutions 2139 and 2254 which both state that indiscriminate attacks must be ceased.
- We can confirm that the bombardment mentioned in this report has targeted civilian objects. Therefore, Syrian-Russian-Iranian alliance forces have violated Articles 52,53,54,55, and 56 of the Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions.
- The attacks mentioned in this report that were carried out by the Syrian-Russian-Iranian alliance forces, are considered a violation of the rules of the customary international humanitarian law (rules 7 through 10).
- 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 indiscriminate manner of the bombing, and the coordinated approach of these attacks, as well as the repeated targeting, must be based on high orders, and a state policy.

The Coalition (international coalition and SDF)

The attacks by Coalition forces have caused significant damages to civilian facilities. In most cases, these attacks have also resulted in losses that involved casualties or injuries. There are strong indicators suggesting that the damage was too excessive compared to the anticipated military benefit.

Other forces

ISIS, factions from the armed opposition, and other parties have carried out attacks that targeted civilian objects, which also resulted, in some cases, in loss of lives. These violations might qualify as war crimes. However, these violations don't qualify as crimes against humanity, as with the Syrian regime and pro-regime forces who carry out unlawful attacks in a systematic and widespread manner.



Recommendations

Security Council

- The Security Council has to take additional steps after resolution 2139 and 2254 have been 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 brought 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 incidents that preceded, given that they are a glaring mark in a string of daily sporadic violations 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.
- Immediately 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 targeted civilian objects, while some attacks 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.

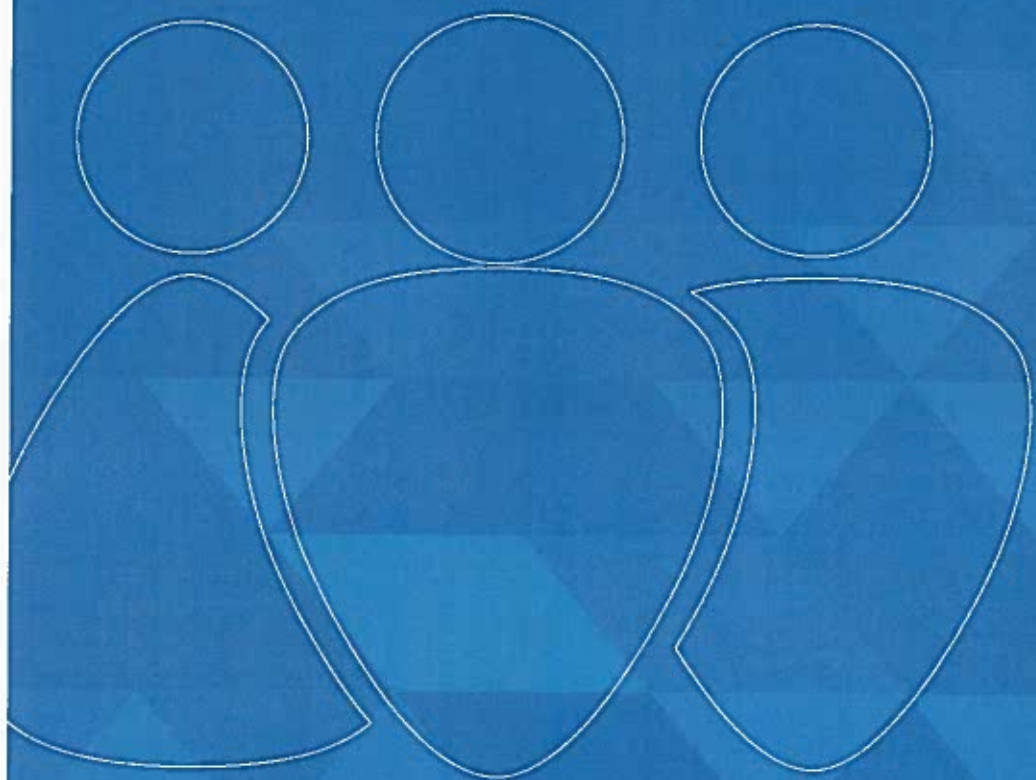
Armed opposition factions

Ensure the protection of civilians and civilian objects in all of their areas of control. Also, armed opposition factions should launch investigations on the incidents included in this report.

Acknowledgment and Condolences

We would like to thank and extend our most heartfelt condolences to all the residents and local activists who contributed effectively to this report.





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