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Syrian-Russian Alliance Forces Have Committed Violations that Constitute Crimes Against Humanity and War Crimes Through Unlawful Attack Against Northwestern Syria

Approximately **45** Civilians Killed, Including
13 Children, and **51** Vital Civilian Facilities
Targeted From October 5-12, 2023



Friday 13 October 2023

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 analyzes in Syria.

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I. Introduction & Methodology

On October 5, 2023, Syrian regime forces escalated their attacks on northwestern Syria. While some of those attacks involved deliberate bombardment of some targets, it was clear that these attacks had an indiscriminate aspect to them, with Syrian regime forces using various kinds of weapons, including cluster munitions. The attacks were concentrated in Idlib city and the surroundings areas in eastern, southern, western, and northern rural Idlib, as well as western rural Aleppo governorate. A stand-out development in those attacks was Russian forces' involvement and support for the Syrian regime in those attacks, by carrying out multiple airstrikes concentrated in western rural Idlib governorate, which killed and injured dozens of civilians, including women and children, as well as destroying numerous vital civilian facilities, including hospitals, schools, and markets. As a natural result of this ruthless offensive, tens of thousands of families fled in search for safer areas. The areas of western Aleppo, Sarmin city and its vicinity in northern Idlib, and Ariha city and its vicinity in southern Idlib saw the highest displacement waves.



👁️ *Smoke rising over Idlib city following intensified ground attacks by the Syrian regime - October 6, 2023 © SNHR*

Methodology

In this report, the Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) has attempted to document the civilian deaths and attacks on civilian objects during this critical escalation in the period between October 5-12, 2023. Our daily monitoring has shown that the attacks carried out by Syrian regime forces and their Russian allies were indeed directed at heavily populated civilian areas, which are remote from the military facilities operated by the factions controlling those areas. Meanwhile, this offensive marked the first time that Syrian regime forces have used cluster munitions in 11 months. At the time, [Syrian regime forces targeted a heavily populated area housing camps for internally displaced persons \(IDPs\) near Idlib city](#). This report will also shed light on regime attacks involving the use of munitions believed to contain incendiary substances.

The report also provides a number of examples of the incidents covered by our team. We have archived details of all of these incidents, painstakingly documented through the daily monitoring of our researchers on the ground, in our database.

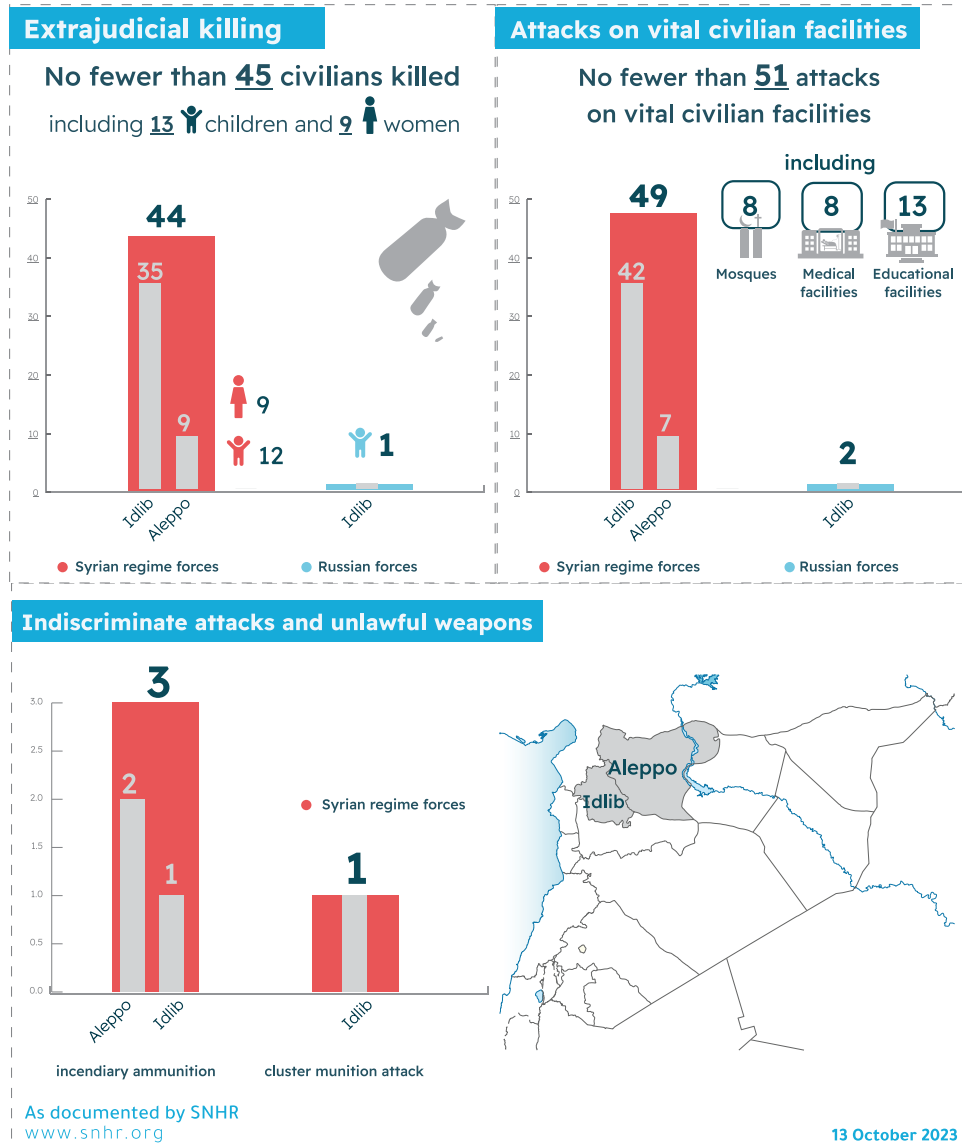
SNHR has also analyzed videos and photos posted online, or submitted to us by local activists via e-mail, Skype, or social media channels. Some of the footage published by activists shows the attack sites, the bodies of the dead and the injured, and the massive destruction following the attacks.

We have retained copies of all the photos and videos included in this report in a secret online database, as well as backup copies offline. Despite all of our team's exhaustive work, we do not claim to have documented all the cases that have occurred in light of the ban on SNHR's work and pursuit of our personnel by Syrian regime forces and other armed groups. For more details, readers can see SNHR's working methodology at this [link](#).

This report includes two first-hand accounts, which we selected from among the many accounts we collected through directly talking with eyewitnesses, rather than from any second-hand sources. In all of our interviews, we explained the purpose of these interviews beforehand to the eyewitnesses, who gave us permission to use the information they provided in the service of this report, without offering or promising any incentives. We have also tried, insofar as possible, to spare the eyewitnesses the agony of recalling the traumatic violations that occurred, and we gave assurances to protect the confidentiality of any eyewitness who requested to use an alias.

This report only reflects the bare minimum of the magnitude and gravity of the violations that occurred. It also does not include any analysis of the social, economic, and psychological ramifications of these events.

II. Most Notable Violations at the hands of the Syrian-Russian Alliance Forces in Northwestern Syria From October 5 Until October 12, 2023, as Documented by SNHR



A. Extrajudicial killing

SNHR documented the killing of 45 civilians, including 13 children and three women (adult female), as well as three humanitarian workers in attacks carried out by the Syrian-Russian alliance forces on a number of areas in the governorates of Idlib and Aleppo in northwestern Syria between October 5, and October 12, 2023. These deaths are distributed as follows:

- **Syrian regime forces:** 44 civilians, including 12 children and nine women. These are distributed by governorate as follows:
 - **Idlib governorate:** 35 civilians, including 11 children and six women.
 - **Aleppo governorate:** Nine civilians, including one child and three women.
- **Russian forces:** One child in Idlib governorate.

We also documented one massacre at the hands of Syrian regime forces in Aleppo governorate.

B. Attacks on vital civilian facilities

Between October 5 and October 12, 2023, SNHR recorded no fewer than 51 attacks on vital civilian facilities at the hands of Syrian-Russian alliance forces in northwestern Syria. These are distributed as follows:

- Syrian regime forces: 49 attacks - 42 in Idlib and seven in Aleppo.
- Russian forces: two attacks in Idlib governorate.

Of these attacks, we documented 13 attacks on schools, eight on medical facilities, five on Civil Defense (White Helmets) facilities and vehicles, eight on mosques, and six on IDPs gatherings/camps.

C. Indiscriminate attacks and unlawful weapons

SNHR documented one cluster munition attack at the hands of Syrian regime forces during their bombardment of Idlib governorate. This attack resulted in the killing of one civilian and injured eight others.

We also documented three attacks involving the use of incendiary ammunition targeting civilian areas distant from the frontlines. The three attacks, all of which were carried out by Syrian regime forces, were distributed as follows:

- **Idlib governorate:** One attack.
- **Aleppo governorate:** Two attacks.

These attacks resulted in the deaths of three civilians and caused several fires.

Analyzing the figures above in the context of these violations, suggest that Syrian-Russian alliance forces, especially Syrian regime forces, have directed most of their attacks at residential civilian areas and civilian objects that often have a heavy civilian presence.

III. Examples of the Most Notable Violations at the hands of the Syrian-Russian Alliance Forces in Northwestern Syria From October 5 Until October 12, 2023, as Documented by SNHR

In the first hours around dawn on Thursday, October 5, 2023, Syrian regime forces fired two thermal rockets at a house inhabited by an IDP family in al-Wasata village to the north of Kafr Nouran town in western rural Aleppo governorate. The bombardment resulted in the [deaths of five civilians from the same family, including three women](#), and injured another woman. The area was under the control of armed opposition factions and Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) at the time of the incident.



👁️ The dead bodies of an IDP family killed in a massacre committed by Syrian regime forces in al-Wasata village in western rural Aleppo - October 5, 2023 © SNHR

On Thursday, October 5, 2023, Syrian regime forces used a rocket launcher to target [Jisr al-Shoghour city](#) in western rural Idlib governorate, killing [one child](#), and injuring six other civilians. The rockets also struck the main market in the center of the city, [moderately damaging the market facilities, as well as many shops](#). The city was under the joint control of armed opposition factions and HTS at the time of the attack.

On Thursday, October 5, 2023, Syrian regime forces used a rocket launcher to target Ariha city in southern rural idlib governorate, killing one woman, and injuring 14 other civilians, including four children and a woman, in addition to [damaging many houses and public facilities](#). One of the rockets also struck the ambulance entrance of the Civil Defense (White Helmets) center in northwest of the city, inflicting some destruction and damaging three vehicles (an ambulance, a vehicle used to transport kidney patients, and a fire extinguisher attachment vehicle), to varying degrees. It should be noted that the Civil Defense (White Helmets) use the garage building as its center in Ariha city. The city was under the joint control of armed opposition factions and the HTS at the time of the attack.



👁 Damages inflicted on the Civil Defense (White Helmets) center in Ariha city in Idlib in a ground attack by Syrian regime forces - October 5, 2023 © SNHR

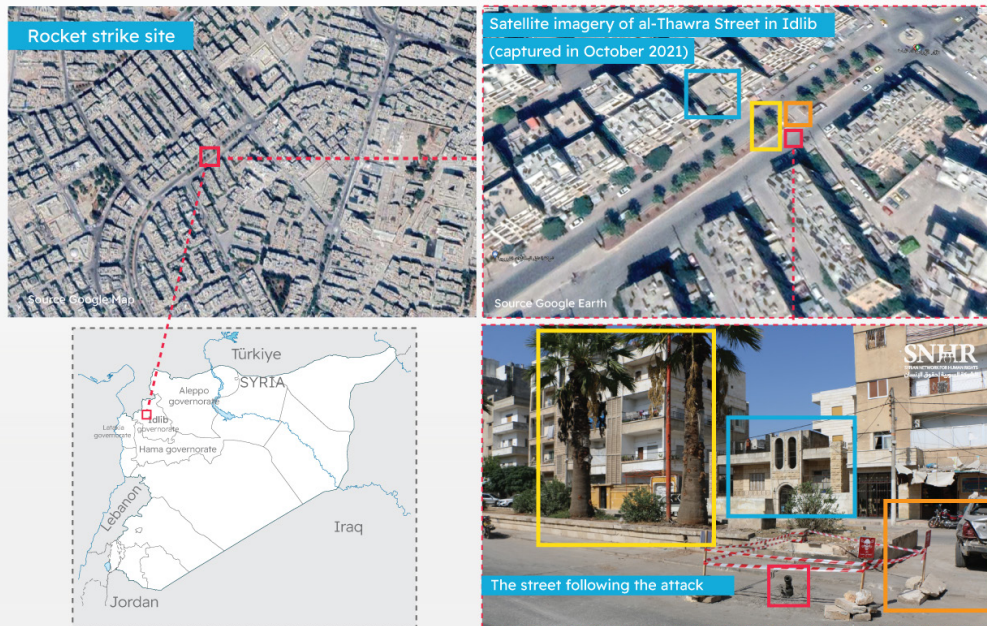
On Thursday, October 5, 2023, Syrian regime forces used a rocket launcher to target Darat Ezza city in western rural Aleppo governorate; this attack was followed by another attack by regime artillery forces, who fired mortar shells at the city. The bombardment resulted in the [deaths of three civilians](#), including one child, and injured 13 others, including six children, two women, and one Civil Defense (White Helmets) rescue worker, in addition to inflicting varying degrees of destruction on residential buildings. The attack also damaged the building and interior furnishings of both the [Ali bin Abe Talib Mosque](#) and the Ali bin Abe Talib School (formerly known as the al-Shamaliya School), near which some of the shells had landed. Another rocket struck the popular market in the center of the city, partially destroying and damaging market facilities and shops, as well as a nearby gas station. The city was under the joint control of armed opposition factions and HTS at the time of the attack.

On Friday, October 6, 2023, Syrian regime forces used a rocket launcher to target [al-Thawra Street](#) in the center of Idlib city. The rocket struck a site with a heavy civilian presence, [killing four civilians](#), including one child and a woman, as well as a humanitarian worker identified as Mohammad al-Bakkour who was a volunteer with the 'Kulna Sawa' [We are all together] aid organization. The bombardment also [damaged the street and civilian properties](#). The city was under the joint control of armed opposition factions and HTS at the time of the attack.

Visual analysis



showing the strike site of a rocket in al-Thawra Street in the center of Idlib city, which was fired by Syrian regime forces, killing four civilians, including one child and one woman, on October 6, 2023



□ Strike site of a rocket in al-Thawra Street in Idlib city that was fired by Syrian regime forces.

13 October 2023

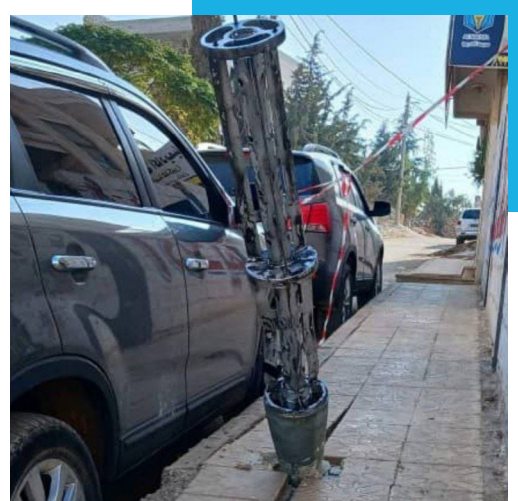
By: SNHR

SNHR spoke with Anwar Abdull Latif,¹ a media worker in Idlib city, who told us that he heard strong consecutive explosions around 20:00, at which point he followed the ambulances in order to report on the incident, and arrived in al-Thawra Street:

“I arrived at the scene three minutes after the rockets had struck. The civil defense and medical teams were evacuating the wounded and the martyrs. The rockets struck the middle of the street, and there were four damaged cars. The victims were inside one of those two cars, while the other car had some of the wounded. It was a blood-filled sight. I saw the hole created by the rocket. It was small and the rocket’s remnants were visible across the street. We did not hear the sound of the rockets launching, and we only felt them when they struck. They were rockets fired by a regular heavy rocket launcher.” Anwar told us that he then went to the hospital where the victims and the wounded had been transferred. He told us of what he saw: “There were injured and martyrs. I saw the bodies of a man and a woman who were referred to as, ‘a groom and his bride’ from Hafsarja, and I saw three wounded people. There were also more in the operation room.”

1. Via WhatsApp on October 9, 2023.

On Friday, October 9, 2023, Syrian regime forces used a rocket launcher to target residential neighborhoods in [Termanein town](#) in northern rural Idlib governorate, killing five civilians, including one child, and injuring 19 others. [The attack also damaged buildings and civilian properties to varying degrees](#). About an hour after the first attack, regime forces carried out a second attack using a 9M5KK rocket [carrying cluster submunitions](#), which killed [one civilian](#) and injured eight others. The town was under the joint control of armed opposition factions and HTS at the time of the attack.



👁 Remnants of a cluster munition container in Termanein town in Idlib fired by Syrian regime forces - October 6, 2023

On Friday, October 6, 2023, fixed-wing warplanes believed to be Russian fired multiple missiles at [Bdama](#) town, administratively a part of Jisr al-Shoghour city, in western rural Idlib governorate, injuring 14 civilians, including four children and four women. The attack also [destroyed](#) many buildings. One of the missiles landed near the dispensary in the town, [partially destroying the surrounding perimeter fence](#) and slightly damaging the dispensary's medical equipment. The town was under the joint control of armed opposition factions and HTS at the time of the attack.

On Friday, October 6, 2023, fixed-wing warplanes believed to be Russian [fired multiple missiles](#) targeting houses in Jafatlek Haj Hammoud village, administratively affiliated with Jisr al-Shoghour city in western rural Idlib governorate, killing one child and injuring two others. [The attack also heavily destroyed many houses](#). The village was under the joint control of armed opposition factions and HTS at the time of the attack.



👁 Destruction caused to houses in Jafatlek Haj Hammoud village in Idlib by a Russian aerial attack - October 6, 2023 © SNHR

On Saturday, October 7, 2023, Syrian regime artillery forces fired multiple shells targeting al-Atareb city in western rural Aleppo governorate, killing [one civilian IDP](#) from Hama governorate, and injuring others. The attack also destroyed many houses. The city was under the joint control of armed opposition factions and HTS at the time of the attack.

On Saturday, October 7, 2023, Syrian regime artillery forces fired multiple shells targeting [Ihsim](#) town in Jabal al-Zawiya in southern rural Idlib governorate, killing two civilians - a girl and a woman - [and injuring three other children](#). The attack also destroyed many houses and public properties. The town was under the joint control of armed opposition factions and HTS at the time of the attack.

On Saturday, October 7, 2023, Syrian regime forces used a rocket launcher to [target](#) Ariha city in southern rural Idlib governorate, killing two civilians and injuring two others. One of the rockets struck a popular market in the city, [heavily damaging a number of shops as well as market facilities](#). Additionally, the bombardment struck [Abu Hanifa al-Shaybani Mosque](#), [partially destroying its building and heavily damaging its interior furnishing](#). The city was under the joint control of armed opposition factions and HTS at the time of the attack.

On Saturday, October 7, 2023, Syrian regime forces used a rocket launcher to target Jisr al-Shoghhour city in western rural Idlib governorate. The rockets struck al-Karim Mosque and al-Tamra Mosque, [moderately damaging the perimeter fence of the former](#), and [partially destroying the structure of the latter, as well as moderately damaging its interior furnishing](#). One of the rockets also landed near the Rabe'a al-Adawiya Mosque, but did not damage the building. The city was under the joint control of armed opposition factions and HTS at the time of the attack.

On the morning of Sunday, October 8, 2023, Syrian regime forces used a rocket launcher to target multiple neighborhoods in Idlib city. The rockets struck in a quick succession, [killing five civilians - two children, two women](#), and a humanitarian worker - and wounding 28 others, including 10 children, four women, and two Civil Defense personnel. The attack also caused varying levels of damage to residential buildings and public facilities. Moreover, one of the rockets landed [near an IDP camp](#) in al-Jame'a neighborhood, and damaged many tents, while another directly struck the [building of the Education Directorate](#), partially destroying it. The city was under the joint control of armed opposition factions and HTS at the time of the attack.

At around noon on Sunday, October 8, 2023, Syrian regime forces used a rocket launcher to target multiple areas in the center of Idlib city. The attack killed one humanitarian worker and injured two women. The rockets also hit a hospital building comprising six stories aboveground, and two underground (basement) levels, known as the University Hospital building, which houses the University Hospital, Ibn Sina Hospital, and the Maternity Hospital, as well as a center for heart surgery. [The rocket struck the building's perimeter fence at the ambulance entrance, partially destroying it, as well as heavily damaging the building itself. Other rockets directly struck the building of the National Hospital](#), located near the University Hospital's building, which consists of two aboveground stories and a lobby. [The building, whose top floor also houses the central aid network, was partially destroyed, with its equipment damaged to varying degrees](#). Additionally, one of the rockets landed near al-Manahel Kindergarten, moderately damaging the building. The city was under the joint control of armed opposition factions and HTS at the time of the attack.

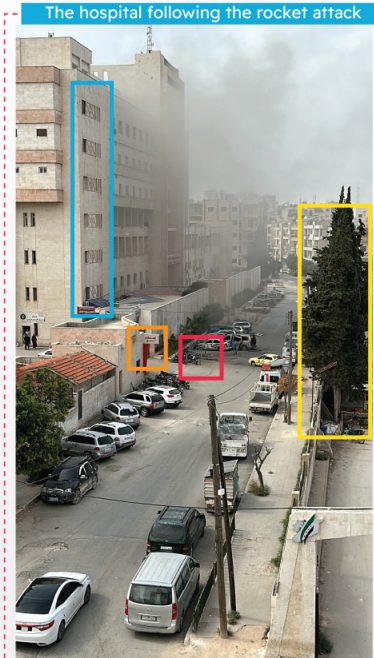
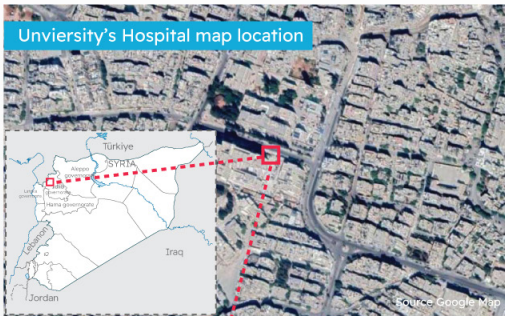


👁 Destruction at the National Hospital in Idlib city caused by a regime ground attack - October 8, 2023 © SNHR

Visual analysis



of a rocket attack by Syrian regime forces that targeted the University's Hospital in the center of Idlib city on October 8, 2023



📍 The site of the rocket attack by Syrian regime forces that targeted the University's Hospital in Idlib city

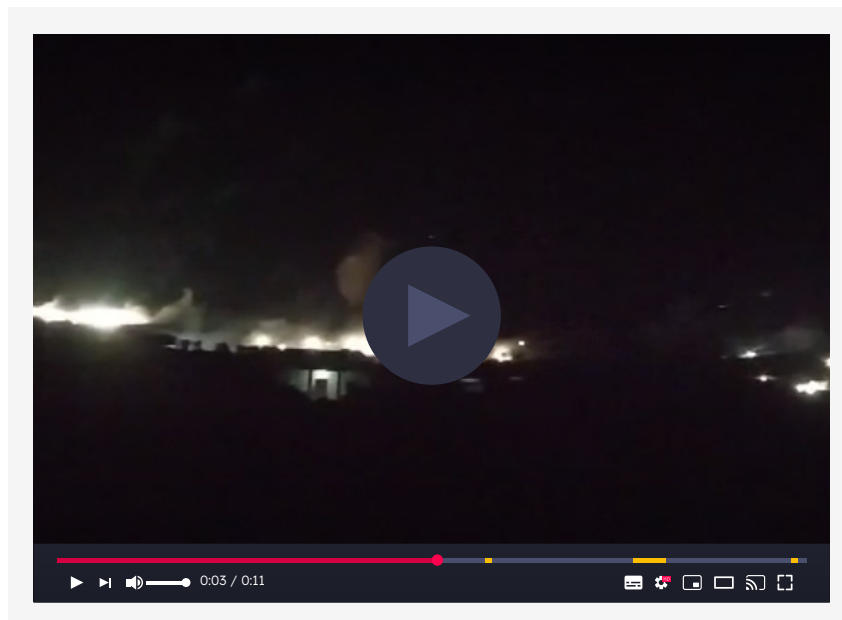
13 October 2023

By: SNHR

SNHR spoke to Abdullah Hallaq,² a medical staff member at the National Hospital in Idlib city. Abdullah told us that he heard an explosion while he was in the break room, which was caused by a rocket that landed in front of the University Hospital entrance. He continued:

“A second rocket struck the clinics corridor in the National Hospital some meters away from where we were. The rocket penetrated the wall of the hospital and landed on the first floor. Patients started screaming, and we rushed to evacuate the hospital. We carried seven patients who were in the clinics wing outside, and then the medical staff came out. After we made sure the attack had ended, about half an hour later, we evacuated the wounded and went down to the basement in fear of another attack.” Abdullah said that they did not hear the sound of the rocket, and were surprised by the explosion, which he described as “very strong”. Abdullah also noted that he noticed that the remnants that fell in the hospital came from a rocket. He added: **“A young man who was in his car in front of the University’s Hospital died while waiting for a relative who was a patient. The destruction amounted to a hole in the wall and [another] in the floor. The worst damage was in the clinics wing, since the rocket landed in a bathroom and a washroom near the nephrology clinic.”**

On Sunday, October 8, 2023, Syrian regime forces used a rocket launcher to fire multiple rockets believed to contain [incendiary munitions](#), targeting [al-Abzemou](#) town in western rural Aleppo governorate. The attack injured three civilians and caused several fires in various locations where the rockets struck. We also recorded that one of the rockets struck a middle school for boys in the town, [partially destroying the school building and moderately damaging its interior furnishing](#). The town was under the joint control of armed opposition factions and HTS at the time of the attack.



👁 A regime ground attack using ammunition believed to contain incendiary substances that targeted al-Abzemou town in Aleppo - October 8, 2023

2. Via WhatsApp on October 9, 2023.

IV. Conclusions & Recommendations

Conclusions:

1. Syrian-Russian alliance forces have categorically violated Security Council resolutions 2139 and 2254 that call for ending indiscriminate attacks,³ as well as violating a large number of the rules of customary international humanitarian law.⁴ Furthermore, through the crime of murder, the Syrian-Russian alliances forces have violated Article 7 & 8 of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC),⁵ with these violations constituting war crimes and crimes against humanity.
2. These bombardment operations have collaterally caused loss of civilian lives, injuries, and/or heavy damage to civilian objects. There are also significant strong indicators suggesting that the damage was exceptionally excessive in relation to the anticipated military advantage. In most cases, the attacks did not distinguish between civilians and military fighters; indeed, it seems that some of the attacks deliberately targeted vital facilities and civilian areas.
3. The use of cluster munitions by Syrian regime forces, under the leadership of the Commander-in-Chief, Marshal Bashar Assad, violates both the principles of distinction and proportionality according to international humanitarian law, which constitute a war crime.
4. States unanimously agreed at the World Summit 2005⁶ that every state is responsible for the protection of its residents against crimes against humanity and war crimes. This responsibility entails the prevention of such crimes, including the prevention of incitement to commit them by all possible means, and when the state clearly fails to protect its population from crimes of atrocity, or is itself committing such crimes, as in the case of the Syrian regime, this means that it is the responsibility of the international community to intervene to take protective measures in a collective, decisive and timely manner.⁷
5. The bombardment on IDPs camps and civilian gatherings have created a state of terror and fear among the displaced, substantially exacerbating their already-catastrophic situation which already suffers from an extremely poor humanitarian response.
6. International humanitarian law stresses that civilian objects must be provided with special protection. By the same law, targeting those objects constitutes a war crime. Article 52 of Protocol I to the Geneva Convention⁸ defines civilian objects as “all objects which are not military objects” With military objects being “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.
7. Syrian-Russian alliance forces have violated the de-escalation agreement in all the zones to which it applies, as well as in the areas of Idlib. Those forces have also violated the Sochi agreement by bombing a number of villages in towns in de-escalation zone 4.

3. The resolution also specifically mentions “the obligation to distinguish between civilian populations and combatants, and the prohibition against indiscriminate attacks, and attacks against civilians and civilian objects as such;” United Nations Security Council, Resolution [2139 \(2014\)](#), Paragraph 3.

“Demands that all parties immediately cease any attacks against civilians and civilian objects as such, including attacks against medical facilities and personnel, and any indiscriminate use of weapons, including through shelling and aerial bombardment.” United Nations Security Council, Resolution [2254 \(2015\)](#), Paragraph 13.

4. “The parties to the conflict must at all times distinguish between civilian objects and military objectives. Attacks may only be directed against military objectives. Attacks must not be directed against civilian objects.” International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), [Rule 7](#) of the international humanitarian law.

“Indiscriminate attacks are prohibited.” International Committee of the Red Cross, [Rule 11](#) of the international humanitarian law.

5. [International Criminal Court \(ICC\)](#), Rome Statute, Articles 7 (1-a) and Article 8-2 (a-i). See:

6. [United Nations General Assembly](#), 2005 World Summit Outcome

7. Ibid.

8. Additional Protocol II to the Geneva Conventions, Article 52. See: <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/en/ihl-treaties/api-1977/article-52?activeTab=1949GCs-APs-and-commentaries>

Recommendations:

United Nations Security Council

- The Security Council should take further action after the adoption of resolution 2254, which explicitly “demands that all parties immediately cease any attacks against civilians and civilian objects as such.”
- The Security Council should adopt a resolution to establish a ceasefire in Idlib that must involve punitive procedures in cases of non-compliance for all parties involved.
- Show serious support for the peace process in Syria and bring about a fair political transition that ensures safety and stability.
- The Syrian dossier should be referred to the International Criminal Court, and all those involved in crimes must be held accountable, including the Russian regime whose involvement in war crimes have been well-proven.
- The use of cluster munitions by the Syrian and Russian regimes threatens the safety and security of tens of thousands of Syrians. The Security Council should intervene directly and urgently to protect the Syrian people from the violations of the ruling authority, which constitute a war crime.

UN Secretary-General

- Condemn these senseless attacks in the strongest possible terms. The UN Secretary-General should also not ignore the deliberate killings of Syrian citizens.
- Clearly and explicitly identify the perpetrators of human rights violations which is a step towards their being convicted for their crimes and having their heinous practices exposed to the world. This would also send a message of solidarity to the people affected. Ignoring the explicit mention of the perpetrators of violations emboldens them to repeat and commit more violations.
- Call on the Security Council to act urgently and hold a special meeting with the aim of establishing a ceasefire and protecting the lives of tens of thousands of displaced civilians.

International community

- In light of the division and the state deadlock at the UN Security Council, action must be taken at the national and regional levels to establish alliances to support the Syrian people. This can be achieved through protecting the Syrian people from the daily killings inflicted on them and lifting the siege placed upon them, as well as increasing relief aid, and seeking to activate the principle of universal jurisdiction with respect to these crimes before national courts in fair trials for all those involved.

- As a member of the International Coalition for the Responsibility to Protect SNHR has repeatedly called, in dozens of studies and reports, for the implementation of the principle of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P). Since all political channels have now been used and proved wholly ineffectual, first through the agreement sponsored by the Arab League and then the plan by Kofi Annan, the next natural step is to refer to Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations and implement the R2P principle which was established by the UN General Assembly. Instead, the Security Council is still hindering the protection of civilians in Syria.
- Renew pressure on the UN Security Council in order to refer the dossier on Syria to the ICC.
- Work towards establishing justice and accountability in Syria through the United Nations General Assembly and the UN Human Rights Council, and activate the principle of universal jurisdiction.
- The states supporting parties to the conflict in Syria, especially Russia, should apply pressure on their allies to neutralize the Idlib area from hostilities in order to protect over 4 million people living there.

UN General Assembly

- Hold the Russian and Syrian regimes responsible for these attacks, which resulted in many civilian deaths, and put pressure on the UN Security Council to take action in order to protect the Syrian people, and prevent Russia from claiming impunity simply on the grounds of its status as a permanent member of the Security Council.

UN Human Rights Office (OHCHR)

- The OHCHR should condemn the attacks listed above which resulted in the deaths of dozens of civilians, and submit a report on these violations to the Human Rights Council and other UN organs.
- Train Syrian organizations in the proper removal of landmines and unexploded cluster munitions, and raise awareness at the local level about such threats.

Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (COI)

- Work to document these attacks, most of which have resulted in civilian deaths, and include this documentation in the COI's upcoming report while explicitly identifying the perpetrators.

UN Special Envoy to Syria

- Condemn these attacks and stress that massacres, killings, and torture have shattered the peace process.

Syrian regime

- Cease the killing of Syrian citizens and respect the Syrian constitution and international law.
- Adhere to the rules of customary international humanitarian law, cease perpetrating crimes, and compensate the victims affected in these attacks.

Acknowledgment

We wish to thank all the survivors and the victims' families and friends, as well as eyewitnesses and local activists for their valuable contributions to this report.



SYRIAN NETWORK
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No justice without accountability

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