

**Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale**

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OHCHR – UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

## Increasing airstrike casualties in Syria being ignored – Bachelet

GENEVA (26 July 2019) – The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet rang the alarm Friday at the apparent international indifference to the rising civilian death toll caused by a succession of airstrikes in Idlib and other parts of north-western Syria.

“Despite repeated calls by the United Nations to respect the principle of precaution and distinction in their conduct of hostilities, this latest relentless campaign of airstrikes by the government and its allies has continued to hit medical facilities, schools and other civilian infrastructure such as markets and bakeries,” Bachelet said.

“These are civilian objects, and it seems highly unlikely, given the persistent pattern of such attacks, that they are all being hit by accident,” she added. “Intentional attacks against civilians are war crimes, and those who have ordered them or carried them out are criminally responsible for their actions.”

At least ten different locations (eight in Idlib and two in rural Aleppo) have experienced civilian casualties as a result of airstrikes in the past ten days alone, causing a minimum of 103 civilian deaths, including at least 26 children. Three of the attacks took place on Wednesday, 25 July. (See details below\*).

Bachelet said she was concerned that the continued carnage in Syria “is no longer on the international radar.”

“Several hundreds of thousands of children, women and men have been killed in Syria since 2011,” the High Commissioner said. “So many that it is no longer even possible to give a credible estimate. During the early years of this murderous conflict, when the casualties were in the tens, then hundreds, then thousands, the world showed considerable concern about what was happening.”

“Now, airstrikes kill and maim significant numbers of civilians several times a week, and the response seems to be a collective shrug, with the Security Council paralysed by the persistent failure of its five Permanent Members to agree to use their power and influence to stop the fighting and killing once and for all,” Bachelet said.

“This is a failure of leadership by the world’s most powerful nations, resulting in tragedy on such a vast scale that we no longer seem to be able to relate to it at all.”

The UN Human Rights Chief said her Office has documented the killing of at least 450 civilians, including the 91 killed by airstrikes over the past ten days, since the latest campaign by the Government and its allies in north-west Syria began more than three months ago.

She said her staff is also continuing to gather information on three recent attacks, resulting in at least 11 civilian casualties, carried out by non-state armed groups on government-controlled areas, in the town of Masyaf, in Hama (21 July), and in the al-Hamadaniya and al-Jamiliya neighbourhoods of Aleppo city (on 22 and 24 July).

“Despite being the subject of the 2017 de-escalation agreement, and the 2018 de-militarized zone agreement, Idlib and surrounding areas are witnessing a grave military escalation with dire human rights and humanitarian consequences for the millions of civilians trying to survive there,” Bachelet said.

“Influential parties, including those that agreed to reduce hostilities as part of the de-escalation agreement, should urgently use their influence to halt the current military campaign and bring the warring parties back to the negotiating table,” the High Commissioner said. “It is essential that there is a cessation of hostilities in order to give the on-going political negotiations room to breathe. The alternative is just more mindless death and destruction in a war without end.”

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*\* While all casualty numbers cited in this news release should be treated as provisional, the airstrikes causing the highest number of reported fatalities over the past ten days were the following:*

- **16 July, Maar Shurin, Idlib:** 12 civilians, including 3 children, reported killed and 15 others injured as a result of airstrikes in this village. The first strike reportedly hit a square with a bookshop, bakery and poultry shop, killing the bookshop owner and his son. Ten minutes later, a second strike hit another square containing a small supermarket, Internet café, and men’s hairdresser. Six civilians, including two children, were killed on the spot, and another died the following day.

- **21 July, Urum al-Jawz, Idlib:** 12 civilians, including two children, reported killed by airstrikes on this village, south of Idlib city. The airstrikes hit an area containing homes, small shops and a mosque, causing extensive damage.

- **22 July, Ma'arat al-Nu'man, Idlib:** 40 civilians reported killed, and dozens injured, by airstrikes that hit two areas in this town in southern rural Idlib. One of the strikes hit a busy street containing the main wholesale and retail vegetable market, as well as a motorcycle market, near the town centre. The victims included both shoppers and merchants.

- **22 July, Saraqib, Idlib:** At least 8 civilians, including 4 children, killed and several others seriously injured as a result of an alleged airstrike by Government forces and their allies that hit one of the town’s residential areas.

• **24 July, Ariha, Muhambal and Tabish, Idlib:** At least 18 civilians reported killed and many others injured by airstrikes that hit a number of areas in southern rural Idlib, including the villages of Ariha, Muhambal and Tabish. Eight of the victims, including 3 women and 3 children, were from the same family in Tabish.

Other airstrikes since 16 July that resulted in civilian fatalities were reported in **Kafrouma, Idlib** (hit twice, on **21 and 25 July**); and **Atareb and Al Bawabiya in rural Aleppo** (both struck on **25 July**).

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**ecoi.net summary:**

According to UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet, Syrian government and its allies continue to conduct air strikes against civilian targets in Idlib and other parts of North-Western Syria



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