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No less than 17 Attacks on Vital Civilian Facilities in Syria in October 2018

No less than 537 Attacks on
Vital Civilian Facilities since
the Start of 2018



SYRIAN NETWORK FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

الشبكة السورية لحقوق الإنسان

Sunday, November 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 October. 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 these bombings 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 required by the international humanitarian law.

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, which we have been able to document, of the actual severity and magnitude of the violations that occurred. Also, it doesn't cover the social, economic, and mental ramifications.

II. October Outline

October saw a significant de-escalation in terms of the scope of military operations by the various parties to the conflict, except for international coalition forces and Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) who escalated their attacks in the second half of the month on ISIS-held areas in east Syria. Meanwhile, most of the areas that have broken away from Syrian regime control saw an unprecedented rise in bombings, whose perpetrators we have been unable to identify, for the consecutive seventh month, which resulted in an increase in the number of damaged vital facilities.

The most heavily attacked vital civilian facilities in October were places of worship, which were subjected to six attacks, followed by vital educational facilities with five attacks. Meanwhile, Deir Ez-Zour saw the largest number of attacks in October with six attacks.

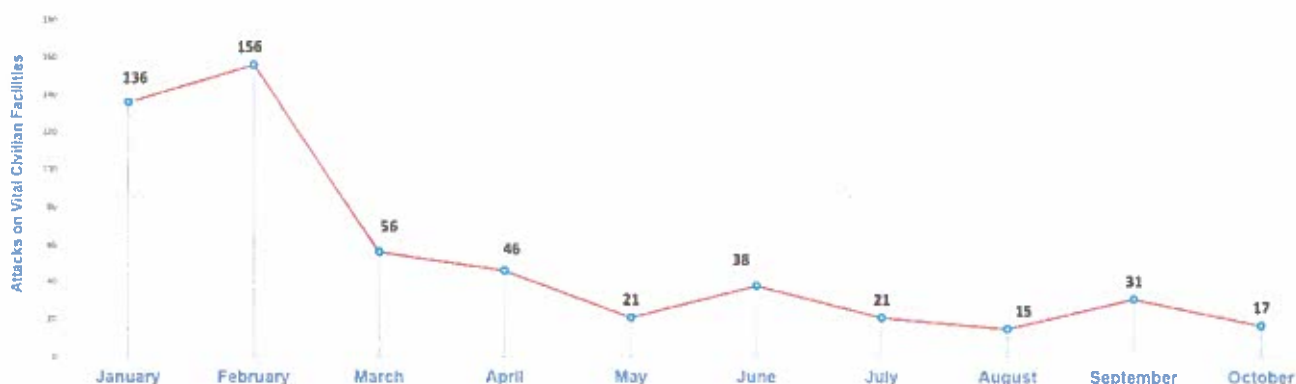
III. Executive Summary

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

SNHR documented 537 attacks on vital civilian facilities at the hands of all parties to the conflict in Syria between the start of 2018 and November of the same year. The attacks are distributed by month as follows:



No less than 537 attacks on vital civilian facilities in Syria since the start of 2018



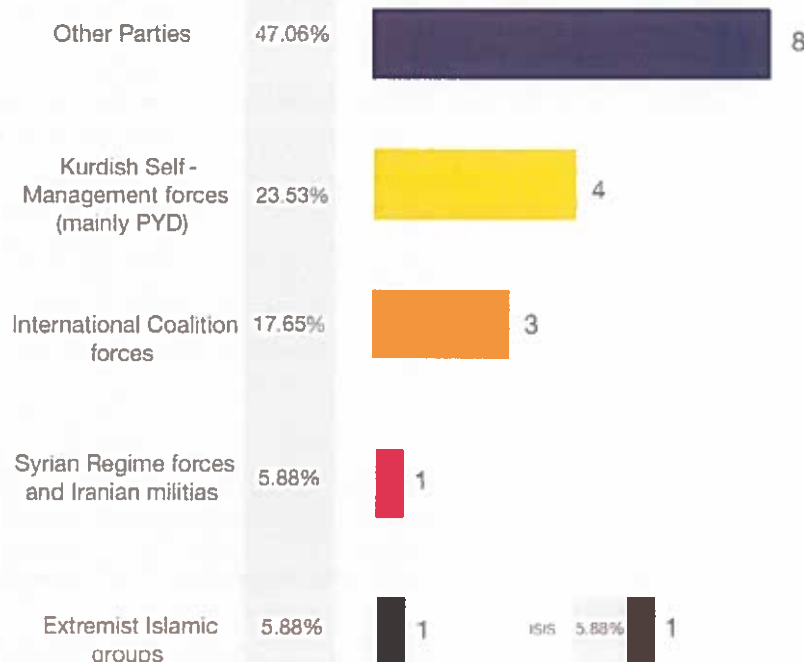
November 1, 2018

As documented by SNHR

B. Most notable attacks on vital civilian facilities in October

Through daily documentation and monitoring, we, at SNHR, recorded no fewer than 17 attacks on vital civilian facilities in October 2018, distributed according to the perpetrator party involved in the conflict in Syria as follows:

No less than 17 attacks on vital civilian facilities in Syria in October 2018



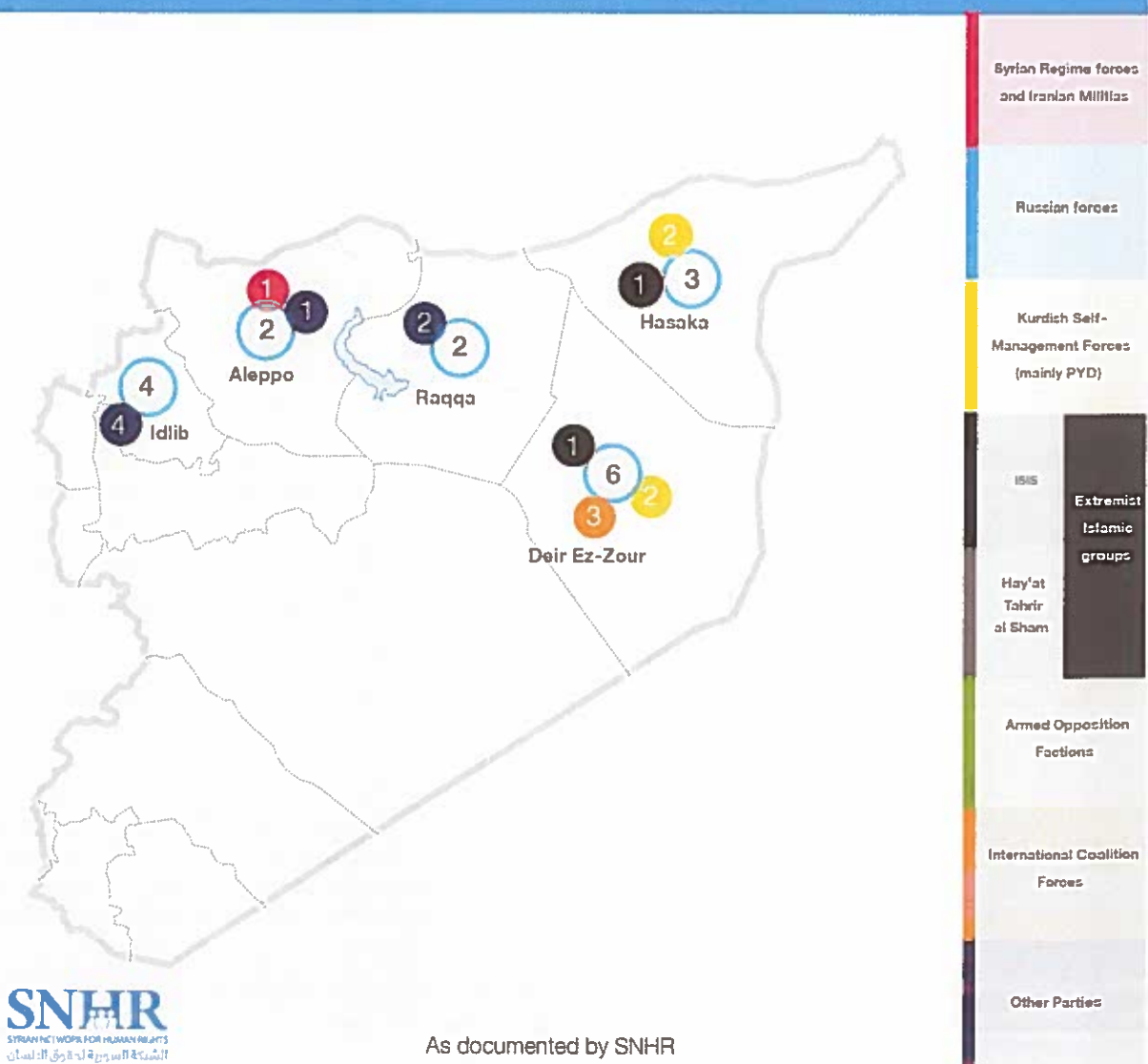
As documented by SNHR



- A. Syrian regime forces (army, security, local militias, and Shiite foreign militias): 1
- B. Extremist Islamic groups:
 - ISIS (the self-proclaimed Islamic State): 1
- C. Self-Management forces (primarily consisting of the Democratic Union Party – a branch of the Kurdistan Workers' Party): 4
- D. International coalition forces: 3
- F. Other parties: 8

Attacks on vital civilian facilities in October were distributed across governorates according to the perpetrator party involved in the Syrian conflict as follows:

No less than 17 attacks on vital civilian facilities in Syria in October 2018



- Most notable facilities that were attacked in October 2018:

Attacks on vital civilian facilities were distributed as follows:

Four infrastructure facilities, six places of worship, one communal facility, five vital educational facilities, and one refugee camp

Distribution of Attacks on Vital Civilian Facilities According to the Perpetrator Party in October 2018					
Perpetrator Party	Syrian Regime Forces	Extremist Islamic Groups	Self-Management Forces	International Coalition Forces	Other Parties
Attacked Facility		ISIS			
Places of Worship					
Mosques			2	3	1
Vital Educational Facilities					
Schools	1		2		2
Communal Facilities					
Gardens					1
Infrastructures					
Official Headquarters					2
Bakeries					2
Refugee Camps					
Refugee Camps		1			
Total	1	1	4	3	8

IV. Details of Most Notable Incidents in October 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 educational facilities

- Schools

On the night of Wednesday October 24, 2018, Syrian regime artillery forces fired a shell at [Kafr Hamra Elementary School](#) in southern [Kafr Hamra](#) village in the western suburbs of Aleppo governorate. The school fence and one of its walls were [partially destroyed](#), and the school's furniture was heavily damaged. The village was under the control of armed opposition factions at the time of the incident.



Destruction in the aftermath of a ground attack by Syrian regime forces on Kafr Hamra Elementary School in Kafr Hamra village in Aleppo – October 24, 2018



B. Extremist Islamic groups

- ISIS

Refugee camps

On Thursday, October 11, 2018, at around 06:00, ISIS raided an IDPs camp, which was originally established by the Kurdish-majority SDF on Thursday, September 20, 2018 to receive civilian IDPs from Hajin city and the surrounding villages, which are located in the Badiya Hajin city area in the eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate, after SDF guards withdrew from the camp. As a result of the attack, ISIS managed to loot the contents of the tents, some of which were burned. In addition, the group transferred the civilians from the camp to Hajin city which is under the group's control.

C. Self-Management forces (primarily consisting of the Democratic Union Party – a branch for the Kurdistan Workers' Party)

Places of worship

- Mosques

On Wednesday, October 3, 2018, Kurdish-majority SDF artillery fired a number of mortar shells that landed near [Aisha Mosque](#) in Hajin city in the eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate. The mosque building was moderately damaged. The city was under the control of ISIS at the time of the incident.

D. International coalition forces

Places of worship

- Mosques

On Friday, October 19, 2018, at around 12:00, fixed-wing international coalition forces war-planes fired a number of missiles at [Ammar bin Yasser Mosque](#), formerly al Mustafa Mosque and also known as [Ali al Dagher Mosque](#), in al Boubadran neighborhood of al Sousa town, which is administratively a part of al Boukamal city in the eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate. The attack resulted in a massacre. In addition, the mosque building was destroyed completely, making it unusable. The town was under the control of ISIS at the time of the incident.





Destruction to the Ammar bin Yasser, formerly al Mustafa Mosque, in the aftermath of an attack by international coalition forces on al Susa town in Deir Ez-Zour – October 19, 2018

On Monday, October 22, 2018, fixed-wing international coalition forces warplanes fired a number of missiles at al Aziz Mosque in al Sousa town, which is administratively a part of al Boukamal city in the eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate. The mosque building was heavily damaged, with the mosque rendered unusable. The town was under the control of ISIS at the time of the incident.

E. Other parties

Places of worship

- Mosques

On Sunday, October 21, 2018, an IED put inside a car near [al Rawda Mosque](#) in al Qo-sour Street in southern Idlib city exploded. The explosion took place in front of the military headquarters of the Turkistan Islamic Party around 50 meters away from the mosque. No damage was recorded to the mosque building. At the time of this writing, we haven't been able to identify the group responsible for the bombing due to the considerable difficulty in identifying the perpetrator in such bombings. The city was under the control of Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.



Vital educational facilities

- Schools

On Thursday, October 4, 2018, a landmine exploded near Sadeq Henday Elementary School which is located in the center of Jarablus city in the northern suburbs of Aleppo governorate. The explosion took place about five meters from the school, injuring three civilians, with no damage recorded to the school building. At the time of this writing, we haven't been able to identify the group that planted the landmine due to the considerable difficulty in identifying the perpetrator in such bombings. The city was under the control of armed opposition factions at the time of the incident.

Infrastructures

- Official headquarters

At around dawn on Friday, October 26, 2018, gunmen raided the headquarters of the Hama Free Health Administration in Kafranbel city in the southern suburbs of Idlib governorate after assaulting the guards. The gunmen looted some equipment and a car belonging to the administration. At the time of this writing, we have yet to identify the group responsible for the assault. The city was under the joint control of armed opposition factions and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.

Bakeries

On Tuesday, October 9, 2018, a motorbike bomb exploded near al Enizan Bakery in al Qetar Street of Raqqa city. The bakery building was slightly damaged. At the time of this writing, we haven't been able to identify the group responsible for the bombing due to the considerable difficulty in identifying the perpetrator in such bombings. The city was under the control of the Kurdish-majority SDF forces 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 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 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 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.

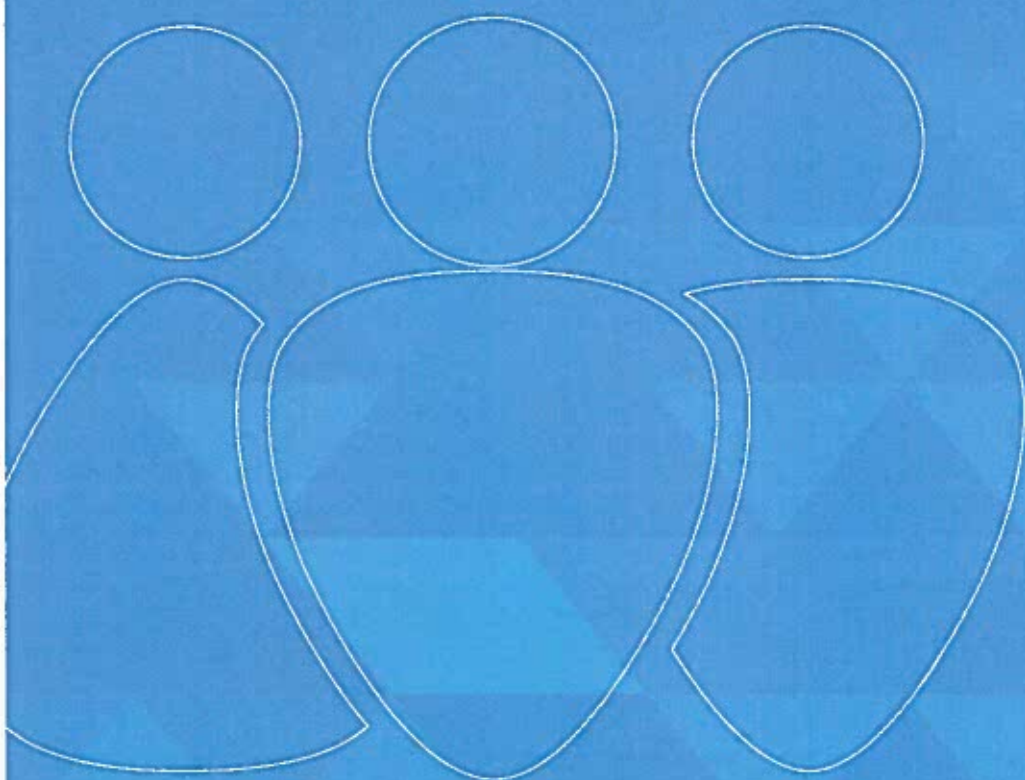
Armed opposition factions

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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