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No less than 18 Attacks on Vital Civilian Facilities Documented in Syria in November 2018

Including 7 at the Hands of Syrian
Regime Forces



SYRIAN NETWORK FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

الشبكة السورية لحقوق الإنسان

Wednesday, December 5, 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, followed by Syrian-Russian alliance forces, have been far ahead of all other 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, proving conclusively that these facilities were deliberately destroyed and damaged. We have also recorded hundreds of massacres that resulted from attacks on such facilities.

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 of these facilities being continually targeted, as well as the ongoing demographic changes, a need arose for alternating the functions of some facilities (for example, many schools have been turned into IDPs shelters). We have also noticed that some facilities have been forced to transfer to many other buildings and areas more than once in order to evade bombardment, while others were moved to secure locations such as caves.

SNHR has dedicated a periodic monthly report to monitoring 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 November. 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 that we received from local activists via e-mail, Skype, and social media. Videos posted by local activists have shown widespread destruction to 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 incidents.

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



found no trace of any warnings to civilians by the attacking forces prior to these attacks as required by the international humanitarian law.

The type and number of items of evidence vary from one case to another. In light of the aforementioned challenges, the legal description of many of these incidents has altered based on new evidence or information that surfaced after we had released the report. We have added this evidence and information to our data archive. Meanwhile, although many of the incidents documented don't constitute a violation to international humanitarian law, they resulted in collateral damages, so we have recorded and archived these incidents to provide historical documentation of these events which can be preserved as a national record. However, they don't necessarily qualify as crimes.

This report only represents the bare minimum of incidents which we have been able to document, giving only a sample of the actual severity and magnitude of the violations that occurred. The report also doesn't cover the social, economic, and psychological ramifications.

II. November Outline

The second half of November saw an escalation in bombings by Syrian regime forces in Idlib de-escalation zone. These attacks caused severe damage to several vital civilian centers, as did the continued insecurity in the Syrian north, which was accompanied by an unprecedented rise in bombings, whose perpetrators we have been unable to identify, for the eighth consecutive month, which resulted in an increase in the number of vital facilities damaged.

Meanwhile, Idlib governorate saw the largest number of attacks on civilian vital centers in November with 11 incidents, followed by Aleppo governorate with 5 incidents.

III. Executive Summary

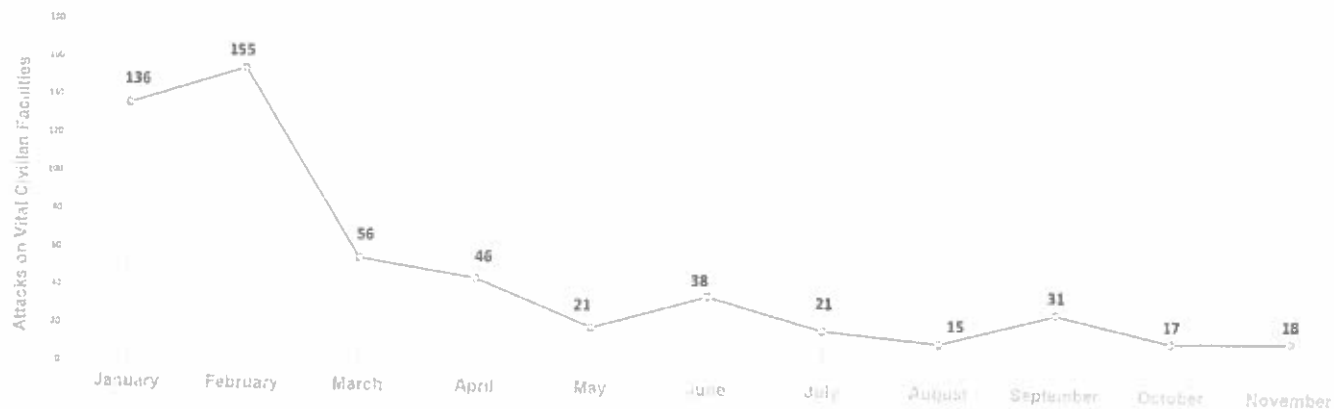
A. Attacks on vital civilian facilities since the start of 2018

SNHR documented 554 attacks on vital civilian facilities at the hands of all parties to the conflict in Syria between the start of 2018 and December of the same year. The attacks are distributed by month as follows:





No less than 554 attacks on vital civilian facilities in Syria since the start of 2018



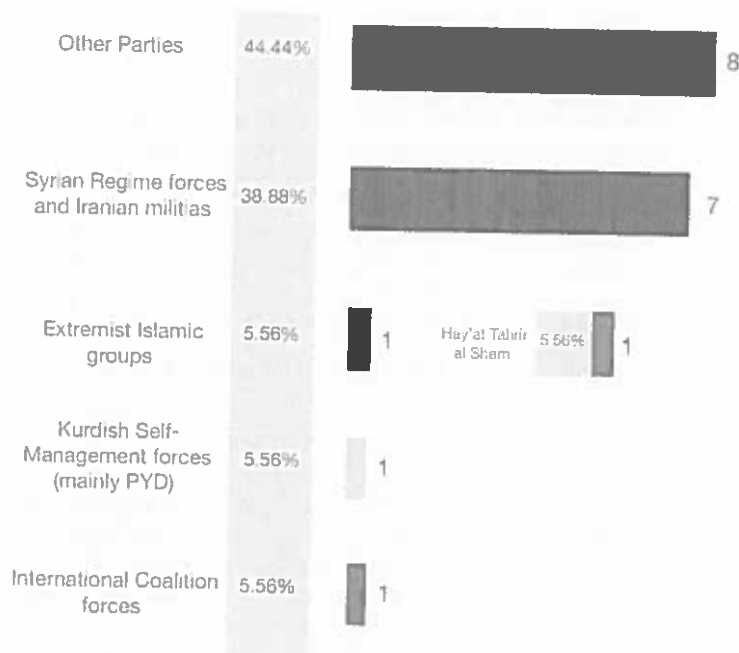
December 1, 2018

As documented by SNHR

B. Most notable attacks on vital civilian facilities in November

Through daily documentation and monitoring, we, at SNHR, recorded no fewer than 18 attacks on vital civilian facilities in November 2018, distributed according to the perpetrator party involved in the conflict in Syria as follows:

No less than 18 attacks on vital civilian facilities in Syria in November 2018

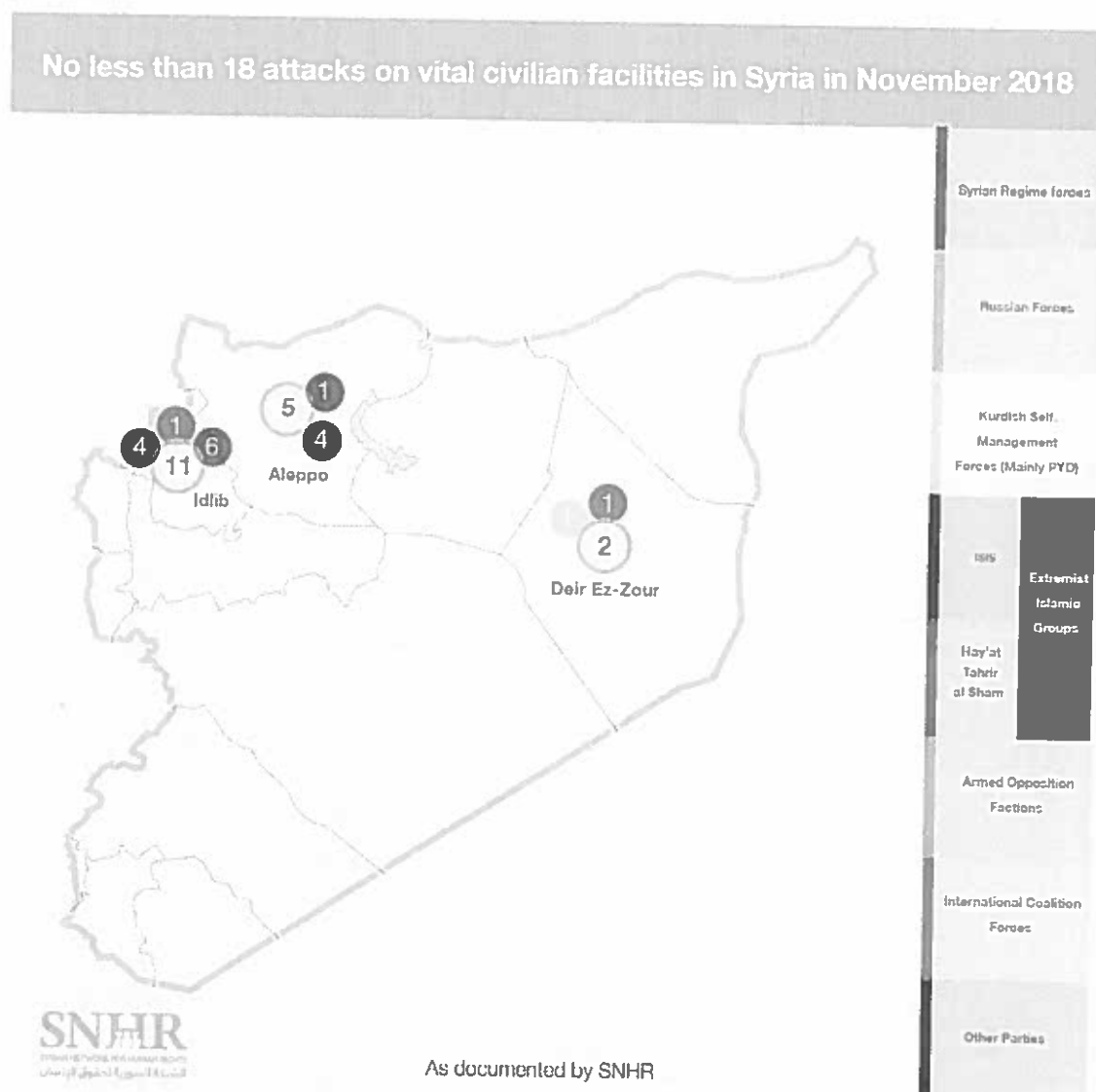


As documented by SNHR



- A. Syrian regime forces (army, security, local militias, and Shiite foreign militias): 7
- B. Extremist Islamic groups:
 - Hay'at Tahrir al Sham: 1
- C. Self-Management forces (primarily consisting of the Democratic Union Party – a branch of the Kurdistan Workers' Party): 1
- D. International coalition forces: 1
- F. Other parties: 8

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



- Most notable facilities that were attacked in November 2018:

Attacks on vital civilian facilities were distributed as follows:

Two infrastructure facilities, five places of worship, two vital medical centers, seven vital educational facilities, and two refugee camps

Distribution of Attacks on Vital Civilian Facilities According to the Perpetrator Party in November 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
Vital Educational Facilities					
Schools	1	1	1		3
Institutes	1				
Vital Medical Facilities					
Medical Facilities				1	1
Infrastructures					
Civil Defense Centers	1				
Industrial Facilities					1
Refugee Camps					
Refugee Camps	2				
Total	7	1	1	1	8



IV. Details of Most Notable Incidents in November 2018

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

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

Places of worship:

- Mosques:

On Tuesday, November 20, 2018, at around 16.30, Syrian regime artillery forces fired a shell that landed on Talafeh mosque in Talafeh village in Aleppo southern suburbs. The mosque building and furniture were severely damaged. The village was under the control of factions of the armed opposition at the time of the incident.

Vital educational facilities:

- Schools

On Saturday, November 24, 2018, Syrian regime forces rocket launcher, stationed at Abu Dali village in the eastern suburbs of Idlib governorate, fired a number of rockets that landed near al Khansaa School, to the south of Jarjanas town in the eastern suburbs of Idlib governorate, as students were returning home after the end of the school day, which resulted in a massacre; most of casualties were children. In addition, the school furniture and building's cladding were moderately damaged. The village was under joint control of armed opposition factions and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.

Refugee camps:

On Friday, November 2, 2018, Syrian regime artillery forced fired a number of shells that landed on al Sarman IDPs camp in al Sarman village in the eastern suburbs of Idlib governorate. A number of tents were moderately damaged. The village was under joint control of armed opposition factions and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.

B. Extremist Islamic groups

- Hay'at Tahrir al Sham:

Vital Educational Facilities:

- schools:

On Friday, November 23, 2018, gunmen affiliated to Hay'at Tahrir al Sham broke into Basem Wahed Elwi School in Darkoush village in the western suburbs of Idlib governorate. They removed the school's main door, moved its furniture out, and turned it to a legal institute of Hay'at Tahrir al Sham preventing the school students from entering.



We note that the school had previously been seized for use as a 'legal institute' by Hay'at Tahrir al Sham before they were forced out by civil society figures, who then returned the school to its original state, with students resuming their education again 15 days before this incident. The village was under the control of Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.

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

Vital Educational Facilities:

- schools:

On Sunday, November 18, 2018, members of the Kurdish-majority SDF opened fire on al Zeraa Primary School in al Qahawi neighborhood in Abu Hamam village in the eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate during school hours. The school walls were slightly damaged. The city was under the control of Kurdish-majority SDF at the time of the incident.

D. International coalition forces

Vital medical centers

- Medical facilities:

On Thursday, November 29, 2018, fixed-wing international coalition forces warplanes fired a number of missiles at al Yarmouk women's hospital in the Twenty-Four neighborhood in al Sh'afa city in the eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate, which resulted in a massacre. In addition, the hospital was mostly destroyed, being bombed out of service in the attack. The city was under the control of ISIS at the time of the incident.

E. Other parties

Places of worship

- Mosques

On Saturday, November 10, 2018, an IED affixed to a motorbike in front of Elyekn Mosque in Qebbasin town in the eastern suburbs of Idlib governorate exploded. The mosque building was moderately 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 perpetrators of such bombings. The town was under the control of armed opposition factions at the time of the incident.



Vital educational facilities

- Schools

On Thursday, November 8, 2018, an IED affixed to a car near al Andalous Primary School at the center of Izaz city in the northern suburbs of Aleppo governorate exploded during the school hours. The school fence was partially damaged, and two schoolrooms' cladding was moderately 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 perpetrators in such bombings. The town was under the control of armed opposition factions at the time of the incident.



Damage caused by the explosion of an IED of unknown provenance, near al Andalous School in Izaz city, Aleppo, 8/11/2018

On Monday, November 12, 2018, an IED affixed to a car near Ahmad Salim Mallia Primary School to the north of Jarablos city in the eastern suburbs of Aleppo governorate exploded 10 meters away from the school during the school hours. Casualties were recorded, in addition to moderate damage to the school 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 perpetrators in such bombings. The town was under the control of armed opposition factions at the time of the incident.



Infrastructures:

- Industrial facilities:

On Friday, November 2, 2018, an IED affixed to a pickup-type military vehicle in the industrial area in Ma'aret Misreen village in the northern suburbs of Idlib exploded. A number of industrial shops and facilities were moderately 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 perpetrators in such bombings. The town was under the joint control of armed opposition factions and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.

V. Conclusions and Recommendations

Syrian regime and Russian forces

- The Syrian-Russian-Iranian alliance has, beyond any doubt, violated Security Council resolutions 2139 and 2254 which both state that indiscriminate attacks must be stopped.
- We can confirm that the incidents of bombardment cited in this report have 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 cited in this report that were carried out by the Syrian-Russian-Iranian alliance forces, are considered a violation of the rules of customary international humanitarian law (rules 7 through 10).
- Aerial bombardment has inflicted collateral damage which involved loss of lives, injuries, or significant damages to civil facilities. There are strong indicators suggesting that the damage was excessive compared to the anticipated military benefit.
- The indiscriminate manner of the incidents of bombing, and the coordinated approach of these attacks, as well as the repeated targeting, shows that these attacks are the result of high-level orders, and form part of 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 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 may 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 must take additional steps following the adoption of resolutions 2139 and 2254, with no pledges to cease the indiscriminate bombing having been made to date. All parties to the conflict should respect these steps, and adhere to the rules of international humanitarian law.
- The Syrian crisis 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 repeatedly proven.
- Expand sanctions to include the Syrian, Russian, and Iranian regimes which are directly involved in crimes against humanity and war crimes against the Syrian people.
- Include the militias fighting on the side of the Syrian government who have committed multiple massacres, such as the Iranian militias, the Lebanese group Hezbollah, other Shi-ite groups, the National Defense Army, and Assad's Shabiha, on the international list of terrorist groups.
- Abstain from identifying the Syrian government as an official party in relation to the provision of humanitarian relief due to the government's responsibility for continuous and multiple crimes against humanity, and stop giving it the largest portion of financial and other aid, as this aid is being distributed solely to government loyalists rather than to people truly in-need.

International community

- In light of the schism within the Security Council and its utter inability to take any effective action, 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 being perpetrated against them and increase support for relief efforts. Additionally, the principle of universal jurisdiction should be implemented in local courts regarding these crimes in order to conduct fair trials for all those involved.
- SNHR has repeatedly called for the implementation of the "Responsibility to Protect" commitment in dozens of studies and reports and as a member of the International Coalition for the Responsibility to Protect (ICRtoP), with the efforts of all political entities from the Arab League's plan and then Mr. Kofi Annan's plan, as well as the Cessation of Hostilities statements and Astana agreements that followed, failing to provide any protection. Therefore, steps should be taken under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations and the norm of the "Responsibility to Protect", which was established by the United Nations General Assembly, should be implemented. This is especially crucial since 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 on activating the principle of universal jurisdiction.

OHCHR

The OHCHR should submit a report to the Human Rights Council and other organs of the United Nations on the incidents included in this report and the previous incidents, which are glaring abuses amongst a series 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 into the cases included in this report and previous 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. Also, establish local tribunals granted universal jurisdiction, and address the war crimes 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 individuals 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 all the wounded.
- Immediately cease bombing hospitals, protected objects, and civilian areas, and respect customary international humanitarian law.



The Coalition (international coalition forces and Syrian Democratic Forces)

- The states of the coalition must unequivocally and truly acknowledge that some of their bombardment operations have targeted civilian objects, while some attacks resulted in the killing of innocent civilians. Rather than adopting a policy of denial, these states should take speedy steps to launch serious investigations, and immediately compensate and apologize to the victims and all civilians 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 under their control.
- All forms of support, military and otherwise, should be ceased until the SDF commits itself to adhering to the previous recommendations. This is primarily the supporting states' responsibility. Providing SDF with weapons and support while knowing that these can be used in war crimes or crimes against humanity can be seen as a contribution to these crimes.

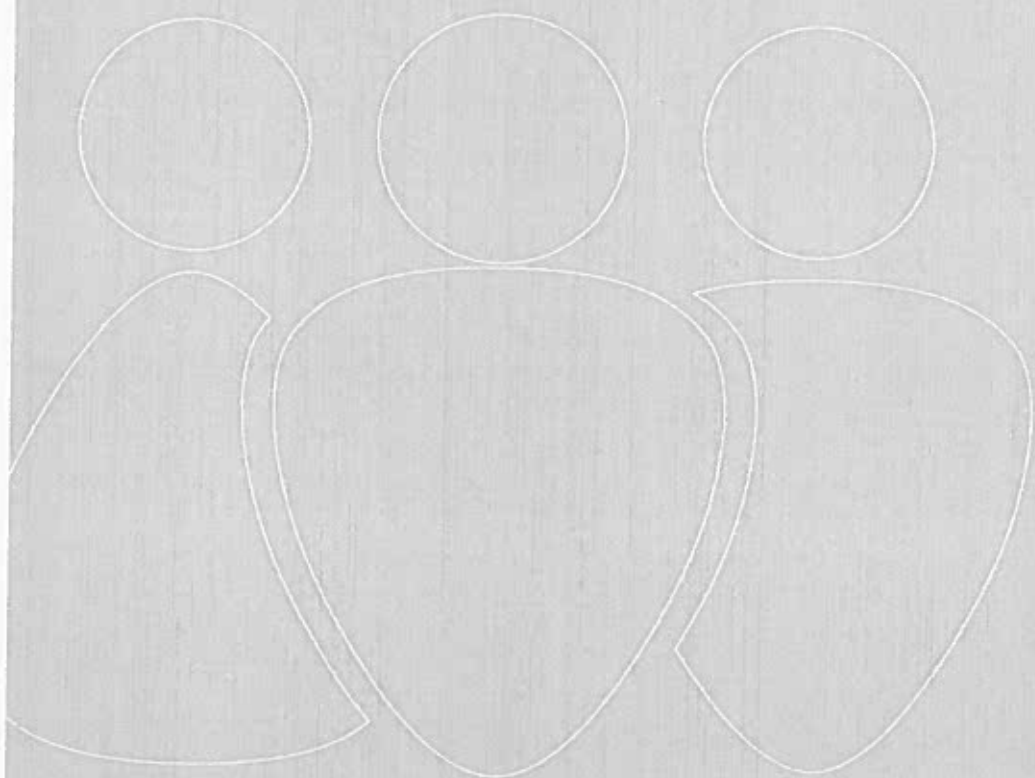
Armed opposition factions

Ensure the protection of civilians and civilian objects in all areas under their control. Also, armed opposition factions should launch investigations into 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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