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Rights Group Says Russia-Backed Offensive In Northern Syria Has Killed 544 Civilians

A British-registered Syrian rights watchdog says that at least 544 civilians have been killed and more than 2,000 injured since a Russia-backed assault on the final rebel stronghold in northwestern Syria began two months ago.

The Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR), which monitors casualties and has briefed UN agencies, accused the Russian military and its Syrian government ally on July 5 of deliberately targeting civilians in rebel-held Idlib Province and neighboring regions.

"The Russian military and its Syrian ally are deliberately targeting civilians with a record number of medical facilities bombed," Fadel Abdul Ghany, chairman of SNHR, was quoted by Reuters as saying.

The SNHR (<http://sn4hr.org/sites/news/>), which is registered in Britain, keeps tabs on reported civilian deaths in Syria and says its information is gathered by some 120 members working inside and outside of Syria.

In late April, Russian jets backed the Syrian Army's massive offensive against parts of the provinces of Idlib and Hama in the biggest escalation in the war between Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and rebels in months.

'Cluster Munitions, Incendiary Weapons'

The U.S.-based Human Rights Watch (HRW) said the Russian-Syrian joint military operation had used cluster munitions and incendiary weapons in the attacks along with large air-dropped explosive weapons with wide-area effects in populated civilian areas, based on reports by first responders and witnesses.

The Idlib-based Civil Defense spokesman Ahmad al Sheikh said that "whole villages and towns have been emptied" in the offensive.

SNHR and witnesses (<http://sn4hr.org/sites/news/2019/07/06/one-children-wounded-bombing-syrian-regime-mhambel-town-idlib-july-5/>) said that 15 people, including children, were killed on July 5 in the village of Mhambil in western Idlib after Syrian Army helicopters dropped barrel bombs on a civilian quarter.

Moscow and Damascus have denied that their jets target civilian areas with cluster munitions and incendiary weapons.

Russia's UN ambassador, Vassily Nebenzia, said all military activities are in response "to provocations from terrorists."

UN chief Antonio Guterres last month called on Russia and Turkey to stabilize Syria's Idlib Province, which he said was suffering "a humanitarian disaster."

Russia, Syria's main ally, and Turkey, which has backed anti-government rebels in the eight-year civil war, last year co-sponsored a de-escalation agreement for the area in northwest Syria.

But the deal has failed to hold, forcing hundreds of thousands of civilians to flee Idlib, where the last remaining antigovernment rebels are holding out against a Syrian government military offensive.

With reporting by Reuters, The Daily Sabah, and TRT World

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ecoi.net summary:

Idlib: According to British-registered Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) at least 544 civilians killed in Russian-backed military operation of government forces



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Syrian Arab Republic

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