

The Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in November 2020

Syria Is an Unsafe Country for the
Return of Refugees and IDPs Due
to the Survival of the Same Security
Services Since 2011



Friday 4 December 2020

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

Syria has seen an unprecedented number of violations since the start of the popular uprising for democracy in March 2011. Extrajudicial killings, arrests, torture and enforced disappearances are the violations most frequently perpetrated against Syrian citizens. While the Syrian regime and its affiliated militias were the sole perpetrators of these violations for the first seven months or so of the uprising, other parties subsequently joined in, also violating the rights of Syrian citizens. The Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) has continued to document every incident that its team members are able to verify, with these violations escalating very dramatically in 2012 and 2013, prompting us to expand our publication of periodic monthly reports recording and highlighting the continued suffering of the Syrian people, which subsequently grew to eight reports on different issues issued at the beginning of each month. In the course of our work, SNHR has compiled a massive database cataloguing hundreds of thousands of incidents, each of which involves a pattern of violations that we have been able to document.

By the end of 2018, with a reduction in the level of violence compared to previous years, we changed our previous strategy and now compile our reports into a single monthly report featuring the most prominent violations in Syria which we have been able to document in the preceding month.

This month's report focuses on the human rights situation in Syria in November 2020, and catalogues the death toll of civilian victims whom we documented killed by the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces during this period, as well as the record of cases of arrests and enforced disappearance. The report also highlights indiscriminate attacks and attacks on civilian objects, which SNHR's team was able to document during this period. To find out more about our working [methodology](#) in documenting and archiving data, please visit the following link that explains this in detail.

This report only represents the bare minimum of the actual severity and magnitude of the violations that occurred. Also, it doesn't include any analysis of the profound social, economic, and psychological ramifications.

II. Summary of the Most Notable Events in November:

In regard to bombardment and military operations:

Syrian Regime forces and militias continued carrying out artillery and missile bombardment on the cities and towns of the southern suburbs of Idlib and the western suburbs of Hama, with bombardment expanding in November, reaching the cities of [Idlib](#) and [Ariha](#) on November 4, 2020, causing casualties; these forces also bombed many areas in Sahl al Ghab in the suburbs of Hama.

The pace of Russian airstrikes decreased compared to October; we recorded raids on the outskirts of the villages of Beneen and Sarja in Jabal al Zaweya area in the southern suburbs of Idlib at the beginning of last month, while the outskirts of Balshoun village in Jabal al Zaweya were subjected to raids on the 29th of this month.

The Armed Opposition factions and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham continued their artillery shelling on areas under the control of Syrian Regime forces in the suburbs of Hama, Idlib and Aleppo, in response to the bombardment targeting the areas under opposition control; we have monitored the killing of many members of Syrian Regime forces in the outskirts of the cities of Ma'aret al Numan and Kafranbel in the southern suburbs of Idlib.

The Ein Eisa district in the northern suburbs of Raqqa was also bombed by Syrian National Army forces, accompanied by clashes with Syrian Democratic Forces in an attempt to advance and control the area.

Explosions (using improvised explosive devices (IEDs), motorcycle and car bombs) continued in most areas outside the control of Syrian Regime forces, particularly in the areas of al Bab and Afrin in the suburbs of Aleppo, with these explosions causing civilian casualties. Ras al Ein city in the northwestern suburbs of Hasaka also witnessed several explosions, most of which targeted Syrian National Army checkpoints.

Landmines continue to claim civilian lives, especially in the southern suburbs of Idlib and the northern and eastern suburbs of Hama; most of these incidents occurred in agricultural areas, causing the death of civilians, most of whom were farmers.

Also in November, we recorded continuing assassinations in the northwest and eastern areas of Aleppo governorate, as well as in the east and north of Deir Ez-Zour governorate and in Daraa governorate; these operations targeted civilians, policemen, and former leaders of Armed Opposition factions, with the most prominent one being the assassination of the former leader Ibrahim al Atteya, known as Abu Bakr al Qadisiya, along with his friend Mahmoud al Hamad, in Daman village in the eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour.

November did not witness any patrols by the Turkish and Russian forces, while Jisr al Nahl (al Nahl Bridge), located on the 'M4' International Road in Mhambel area in the western suburbs of Idlib, which the patrols use, was subjected to an explosion on November 24, destroying it and blocking the road.

On November 7, [Russian media](#) outlets published a statement by Sergey Shoigu, the Russian Minister of Defense, stating that the military campaign in Syria was a test of the effectiveness of almost all of the Russian army's weapons, as well as allowing Russia to test the effectiveness of its military education system.

In regard to arrests and enforced disappearances:

Syrian Regime forces in November continued to persecute Syrian citizens in connection with their political dissent and expression of opinions, despite the right to both being guaranteed by the constitution and international law; among the most notable cases the SNHR's team documented in November was the persecution and arbitrary arrest of a number of former detainees released in recent months, who have been harassed or rearrested under various pretexts, such as claiming that they have destroyed their personal documents or that their arrest warrants are still outstanding, or in order to conscript them for military service. We have recorded multiple arrests and acts of persecution of citizens in connection with reserve conscription, as well as of individuals who have concluded settlements of their security status with the Syrian regime these arrests have been concentrated in Aleppo, Daraa and Damascus Suburbs governorates.

In the context of cases in which individuals have been released, we recorded in November that Syrian Regime forces released 90 detainees. Most of these individuals were released under a special presidential pardon as part of a reconciliation process that targeted detainees from Daraa governorate who had previously made settlements, including dissidents from Syrian Regime forces, whose duration of detention ranged from one to two years.

Meanwhile, Syrian Democratic Forces continued enforcing the group's policies of arbitrary detention and enforced disappearance throughout the month of November, targeting civilians for their kinship relationships with individuals in the Armed Opposition/ the Syrian National Army. Syrian Democratic Forces also carried out campaigns of mass raids and arrests, targeting many civilians on the pretext of fighting ISIS cells, with some of these campaigns backed by US-led coalition helicopters. We also recorded arrests that targeted media activists, with these arrests being concentrated in Deir Ez-Zour and Hasaka governorates. In November, we also recorded Syrian Democratic Forces carrying out abduction of children with the aim of taking them to its training and recruitment camps and forcibly conscripting them.

November also saw Hay'at Tahrir al Sham carrying out detentions of civilians, with arrests concentrated in Idlib city, including activists working with civil society groups, media workers, lawyers, and clergymen; most of these arrests occurred due to the detainees expressing opinions critical of the HTS's management of areas under its control.

The Armed Opposition/ the Syrian National Army also continued carrying out arbitrary detentions and kidnappings in November, targeting civilians who took part in protests criticizing opposition policies in the areas under their control and in protest against the poor living conditions; we also recorded mass arrests targeting those coming from areas under the control of the Syrian regime.

As for the COVID-19 pandemic:

November was no better than previous months in terms of COVID-19, as it saw an unprecedented increase in the number of cases recorded throughout Syria in light of the almost complete absence of any precautionary measures.

In areas under the control of Syrian Regime forces, the Ministry of Health in November officially announced 2,159 cases of infection and 129 deaths, which is the highest monthly record to date, bringing the official total to [7,887 cases of infection with 417 deaths, as of November 30](#). We at the SNHR believe, however, that the officially reported figures represent only what the Syrian regime wishes to disclose; we have monitored dozens of reports of deaths from the disease published on social media personal accounts. On November 29, the regime's Ministry of Health issued [a decision](#) requiring all hospitals to move to 'Emergency Plan B', so that the hospital departments would expand to deal with the coronavirus patients.

A report issued by OCHA on November 30 revealed that the Syrian regime's Ministry of Health had [reported 239 cases of infections](#) among healthcare workers, with 12 of them having died. Reports of cases in schools have also sharply increased in recent weeks, with 828 cases reported to date, more than double than as of 1 November (399 cases). The report emphasized that the current official numbers remain relatively low.

On November 12, [Amnesty International said that](#) the Syrian regime has failed to adequately protect its health workers, and still lacks a robust response to the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, adding that it is refusing to provide transparent and consistent information about the country's COVID-19 outbreak.

A spike in [new infections and deaths due to coronavirus in northwestern Syria](#) meant that the casualty figures recorded in November were three times those documented the previous month, with the Early Warning Alert and Response Network (EWARN) announcing that 11,264 infections and 192 deaths had been documented for November, compared to 3,666 cases of infection and 44 deaths documented in October; the total number of infections and deaths announced by the EWARN as of November 30 reached 16,002 cases of infection and 242 deaths.

In northeastern Syria, [as of November 30](#), a total of 7,031 coronavirus infection cases, including 195 deaths, had been announced by the Health Authority in the Self-Management Authority of Northern and Eastern Syria. We note that 2,427 cases of infection and 70 deaths were recorded in November. The Self-Management Authority of Syrian Democratic Forces issued [Decision No. 198](#) which stipulated a complete lockdown in the areas of Hasaka, Qameshli, Tabaqa, and Raqqa for a ten-day period starting from November 26.

On the living situation level:

In light of the repercussions of the continuing economic collapse, and with widespread unemployment and scarcity of available job opportunities, all parts of Syria are witnessing exorbitant prices, especially food and fuel costs, in addition to citizens having no option but to join long queues to obtain these basic goods; the already harsh conditions worsen during winter with the increase in need for expensive heating fuel.

In the areas of eastern Syria that are under the control of the Syrian Democratic Forces, premium grade diesel' (heating fuel) is available at a price of 70,000 Syrian pounds per barrel (200 liters), working out at roughly 350 Syrian pounds per liter; although the Syrian Democratic Forces distribute poor-quality diesel at local petrol stations a subsidized price of 125 Syrian pounds per liter, this type is unpopular with citizens despite its relatively low cost due to its poor quality and ineffectiveness in generating heat.

We note that the towns and villages of the eastern and [western](#) suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour have been witnessing regular protests against corruption and the deterioration of humanitarian conditions for several months.

In November, the already extreme suffering of Syrian citizens in the areas under the control of Syrian Regime forces worsened further, due to the increased hours of electricity-rationing, which in some areas means daily power cuts of six hours and no more than one hour per day of 'constant' electricity; even during this hour, the electricity supply is intermittent, going off repeatedly, with regime officials claiming that this power-rationing is due to the power stations' failure to generate sufficient quantities of electricity coupled with the heavy pressure on the power grid which they say is almost twice the normal level due to citizens' heavy electricity use. These power shortages further worsen the already bleak humanitarian situation, especially in light of the lack of sufficient quantities of diesel and gas available to Syrian citizens for heating and cooking purposes.

Syrian citizens in areas that were previously subject to violent military operations are suffering due to the dilapidated state of the buildings they're living in, many of which are severely damaged and dangerously structurally unsound as a result of bombardment, with the struggling residents unable to afford repairs; this means that there is a serious risk of the buildings collapsing completely on top of those living in them. The SNHR has already documented several cases of this nature, including incidents of damaged homes suddenly collapsing, [resulting in](#) the [deaths of civilians](#).

In parallel with the continued [looting](#) by Syrian Regime forces in the areas they control, and despite the Syrian state's ongoing economic collapse, the Syrian regime on November 17 inaugurated the '[Golden Knight Basil al Assad](#)' Museum in al Assad Sports City in Latakia city, following its lavish refurbishment; the facility appears to be very extravagant, and we estimate that millions of dollars from the state treasury were spent on this vanity project as a way to consolidate the family's rule.

On the level of displacement and forced displacement:

Some areas of Sahl al Ghab region in the western suburbs of Hama witnessed a temporary displacement movement of hundreds of civilians during November due to the bombardment inflicted on the area, with the displaced returning to their homes when the frequency of the bombing decreased. The Ein Eisa district in the suburbs of Raqqa also witnessed a displacement movement of hundreds of civilians fleeing their homes due to shelling of the area by the Syrian National Army, with most of those displaced heading towards Raqqa city.

[With the arrival of winter, the already abysmal humanitarian conditions](#) in the camps in northern Syria have worsened, amid fears of torrential rainstorms causing tents to collapse, sweeping them away or creating an impassible muddy morass into which the tents sink, as happened in previous years, especially in the Atma area and al Sheikh Bahr Camps in the western and northern suburbs of Idlib; this is coupled with an increased risk of fires due to the use of unsuitable heaters.

In November, Syrian Democratic Forces allowed two groups of residents of al Hawl Camp in the suburbs of Hasaka to leave, with [the first group](#), which left the camp on November 16, consisting of approximately 515 people, and the second which left on November 24, consisting of approximately 356 people; on leaving the camp, both groups headed towards towns in the eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour. The departure of these people follows the decision issued by Syrian Democratic Forces on October 10, which we mentioned in [a previous report](#). On November 12, the Self-Management Authority of Syrian Democratic Forces [handed 30 Russian children](#) of parents allegedly linked to ISIS to the Children's Rights Commissioner for the President of the Russian Federation.

The residents of al Rukban Camp, which is located east of Homs near the Syrian-Jordanian border, particularly children and those with special needs, are suffering from the spread of diseases, especially chest flu, under a continuing complete siege and the absence of any medical centers.

On November 16, we monitored [Syrian Regime forces using tents](#) bearing the logo of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees which are specified for the use of refugees, during a military parade for the 17th Infantry Division in Deir Ez-Zour, which is based in the Ba'ath Vanguard camp, which further confirms the Syrian regime's exploitation of aid provided by international organizations which is distributed according to the regime's whims; we have warned in several reports that the drive by Russia and the Syrian regime to stop cross-border aid in order to plunder and seize control of as much as possible of what aid does enter is intended to allow both parties to use the aid to serve their own interests rather than distributing it according to the needs of the most deprived areas and the worst-affected people.

On November 25, Ramesh Rajasingham, the Acting Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, explained in his briefing to the Security Council, that one-third of the [6.7 million internally displaced people in Syria](#) lack proper shelter that provides adequate protection from severe weather conditions, suffering from lack of basic essentials to protect the displaced from cold, such as heating fuel, blankets, warm clothes and shoes.

On the political and human rights level:

On November 7, Ambassador James F. Jeffrey, the [Special Representative](#) for Syria Engagement and Special Envoy for the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS, who had adopted a position in support of the Syrian people, resigned.

On November 11, the International Conference on the Return of Syrian Refugees began at the Conference Palace in Damascus over a period of two days, with [the participation of 27 countries and 12 organizations](#), including Russia, China, Iran, Lebanon, UAE, Pakistan and Oman, and the absence of hundreds of countries, including the United States of America, the [European Union and Canada](#).

In [its closing statement](#), the conference recommended the necessity of combating terrorism and assisting in the voluntary safe return of the displaced to their chosen places of residence and the reconstruction of the affected areas under the stipulations of Security Council Resolution No. 2254; the conference called on the international community to provide adequate support for the provision of housing for the displaced and their return to normal life and to increase its contribution and support for Syria. We at the SNHR believe that the Syrian regime's promotion of the return of refugees is a sham staged to obtain possible financial support under the pretext of reconstruction; we explained in [a previous report](#) that Syria remains an insecure country which is completely unsafe for the return of refugees.

On November 16, the Syrian regime's Prime Ministry published [an obituary mourning](#) the death of Walid al Muallem, Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates, who died at dawn on the same day. On November 22, the President of the Syrian regime issued Legislative Decree 322 stipulating the [appointment](#) of Faysal al Miqdad as Foreign and Expatriates Minister.

On November 16, Muhammad al Rahmoun, the Syrian regime's Minister of Interior, said in [his speech](#) before the People's Assembly that more than \$ 21.5 million had been collected from payments for passports issued to Syrian citizens outside the country. We believe that these funds obtained from Syrian citizens will be used for military operations, arrests and torture.

On November 16, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov stated in [an article](#) he wrote marking the 75th anniversary of the founding of UNESCO: “It is time for the international community, under the auspices of UNESCO, to take effective action to restore international antiquities in Syria that have been destroyed by terrorists.”

SNHR notes that we have maintained a database of attacks on archaeological sites in Syria since March 2011 and we have been working for months to prepare a report about them, which will confirm the role of Russia and the Syrian regime in sabotaging many of these sites in several ways.

On November 20, Save the Children stated in [a report](#) entitled “Stop the War on Children” that Syria was among the countries most dangerous to children’s lives in 2019.

On November 23, in a letter addressing the United Nations agencies, [Human Rights Watch](#) called on them to activate the UN’s human rights framework for Syria in their aid plans; HRW confirmed that despite the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, aid agencies continue to face significant longstanding obstacles in transporting materials and personnel from Damascus to nongovernment-controlled areas of northeast Syria as well as within government-held areas, including delays in permission to move aid shipments, barriers to collecting test samples, and discriminatory distribution of protective personal equipment.

On November 25, the Cluster Munition Coalition (CMC) released its eleventh [annual report](#), which concluded that 80 percent of the cluster munition casualties documented in 20 countries and other areas covered by the Cluster Munition Monitor between 2010 and 2019 have fallen in Syria. Of particular concern, the report stated, a total of 286 new cluster munition casualties was recorded in 2019 alone, with the highest number of 2019 casualties being recorded in Syria with 232 casualties.

On November 26, Ireland [announced](#) the arrival of about 160 Syrians, including more than 90 children, to its territory under the Irish Refugee Protection Programme.

On November 28, the Syrian regime, through [a statement](#) issued by the regime’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates, took advantage of a state of alert witnessed in the Bcharre region in Lebanon against the background of the killing of a Lebanese citizen by a Syrian refugee, to renew the call for Syrian citizens to return to their homeland and to live in it with ‘dignity and safety’, provided that all facilities are provided for this return and guarantee the requirements of their decent living.

On November 30, [the fourth round of talks between the Syrian parties](#) hosted by the United Nations in Geneva began, in order to find a peaceful political solution, with the round of talks continuing until December 4.

On the course of the pursuit of accountability:

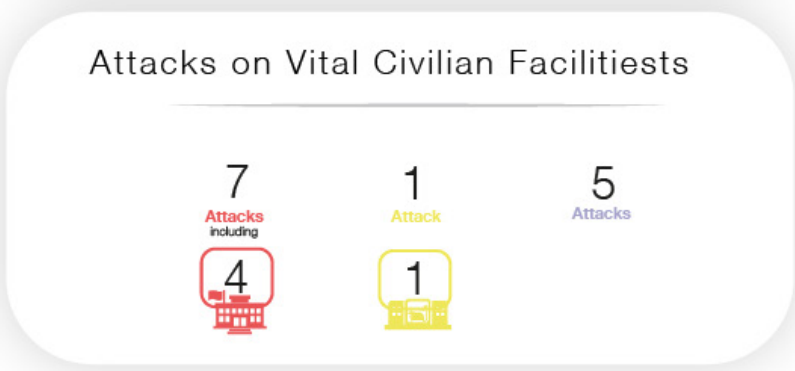
On November 6, [eight ministers from the Syrian regime's new government](#) were added to the European Union sanctions list.

On November 9, the [U.S. Department of the Treasury imposed](#) Syrian-related sanctions on seven individuals and 10 new entities, with these sanctions focusing on individuals and entities providing support to the Syrian regime's oil production network.

On November 11, Denmark's Financial Crimes Unit [announced](#) charges against a Danish company for violating the European Union sanctions on Syria by selling kerosene to Russian companies, which as a result was delivered to Syria.

III. The Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in November:

This report outlines the most notable human rights violations that were documented by the SNHR in November 2020 at the hands of the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in Syria.



- Syrian Regime forces
- Russian forces
- ISIS
- Hay'at Tahrir al Sham
- The Armed Opposition\ The Syrian National Army
- SDF (mainly PYD)
- Other parties



A. Extrajudicial killing:

In November 2020, SNHR documented the deaths of 172 civilians, including 16 children and 11 women (adult female), the largest percentage of whom were killed at the hands of other parties; among the victims were 30 individuals who died due to torture. We also recorded at least two massacres. We issued a report on the first of this month detailing the civilian victims documented killed in November at the hands of the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in Syria.

The death toll of civilian victims was distributed according to the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in Syria as follows:

A. The main parties:

- **Syrian Regime forces (army, security, local militias, and Shiite foreign militias¹):** 39 civilians, including five children.
- **Russian forces:** One civilian.
- **ISIS (the self-proclaimed 'Islamic State')**: 11 civilians.
- **Hay'at Tahrir al Sham²:** Four civilians.
- **The Armed Opposition/ The Syrian National Army:** Four civilians, including one child.
- **Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (the Democratic Union Party):** Seven civilians, including one child and one woman.

B. Other parties:

We documented the deaths of 106 civilians, including nine children and 10 women, at the hands of other parties, distributed as follows:

- **Landmines of unknown origin:** 12 civilians, including three children and three women.
- **Gunfire of unknown source:** 65 civilians, including two children and four women.
- **Bombings whose perpetrators have not yet been identified:** 10 civilians, including one child.
- **Killings by unknown persons:** 19 civilians, including three children and three women.

B. Arbitrary arrest and enforced disappearance:

In November 2020, SNHR documented at least 167 cases of arbitrary arrests, including two children and three women (adult female), at the hands of the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in Syria. The largest number of arrests was carried out by Syrian Regime forces

¹ We generally use the term 'the Syrian regime' rather than 'the Syrian government', because the nature of the ruling power in Syria is a totalitarian dictatorship based on ruling the nation in an authoritarian fashion through a very limited group of individuals, primarily the President of the Republic and his selected leaders of the security services, while the ministers, including the Prime Minister and the Minister of Interior, play a restricted, largely ceremonial role, which is limited to implementing precisely what the ruling regime orders, without any decision-making power or active role; this means that the government's role is wholly subordinate and limited to serving the regime, with all the main powers being concentrated in the hands of the President of the Republic and the security services. Governance in Syria is wholly decided by the autocratic authority of the ruling family and there is no independent decision-making structure. Rather, the government is an empty façade there for show; the Minister of Interior receives orders from the security branches over which he nominally presides which are in turn under the command of the President, while the Minister of Justice cannot summon a civilian-level security agent other than the head of a security branch; the security branches, along with the president, are the true power and the governing regime in Syria.

Although we acknowledge that the United Nations and its agencies use the term 'the Syrian government' in general, we believe that this is a completely inaccurate and misleading term in the Syrian context.

² The United Nations has designated it as a terrorist organization

in the governorates of Damascus, Damascus Suburbs, then Daraa. We issued a report on the second of this month detailing the record of cases of arrests and enforced disappearances which we documented in November 2020 at the hands of the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in Syria.

The record of cases of arbitrary arrests was distributed according to the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces as follows:

Syrian Regime forces: 82, including one woman.

Hay'at Tahrir al Sham: 17, including one woman.

The Armed Opposition/ The Syrian National Army: 32, including one woman.

Syrian Democratic Forces: 36, including two children.

C. Attacks on vital civilian facilities:

In November 2020, SNHR documented at least 13 incidents of attacks on vital civilian facilities, seven of which were perpetrated by Syrian Regime forces, which concentrated in Idlib governorate.

Among these attacks, we documented four on schools and one on a medical facility.

These attacks were distributed according to the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces as follows:

A. The main parties:

- **Syrian Regime forces:** Seven.
- **Syrian Democratic Forces:** One.

B. Other parties:

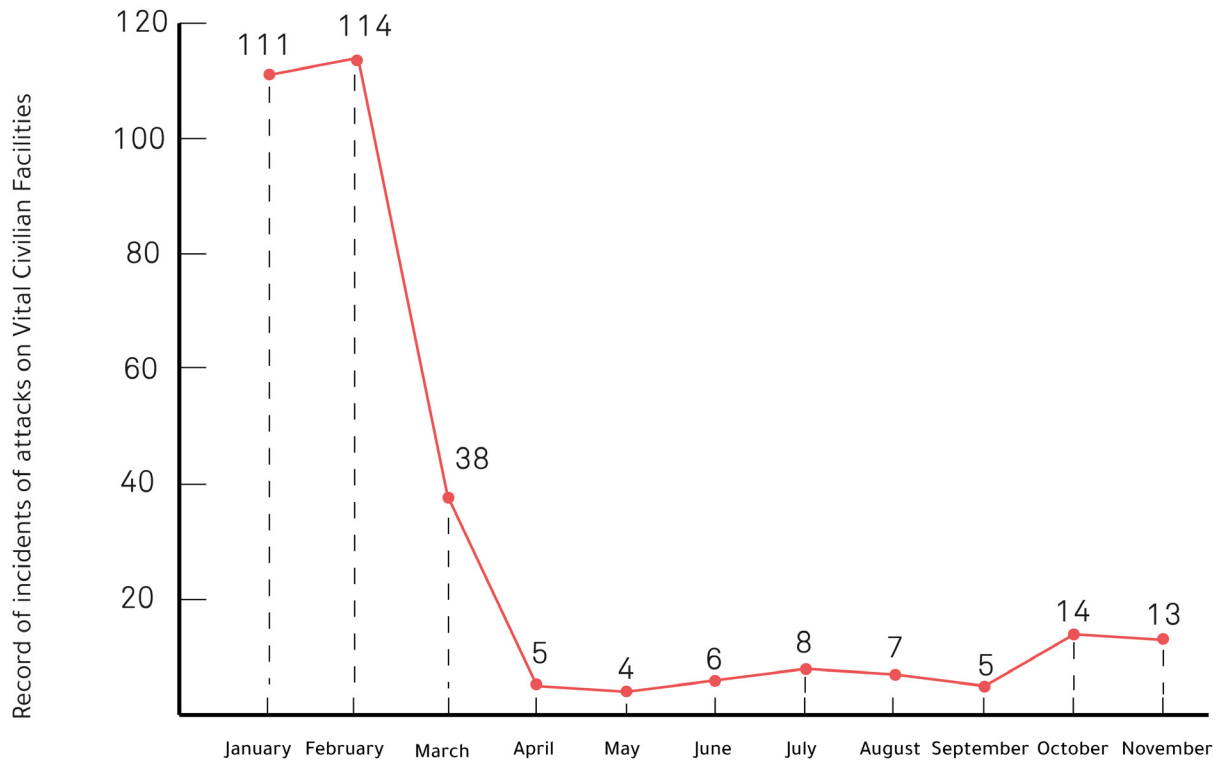
Other parties perpetrated five incidents, distributed as follows:

- **Bombings whose perpetrators have not yet been identified:** Three.
- **Explosion of unknown source:** Two.

The record of attacks documented in November 2020 on vital civilian facilities was distributed according to the perpetrator parties as follows:

Attacked Facility	Perpetrator Party			
	Syrian Regime forces	Syrian Democratic Forces	Other parties	
			Bombings whose perpetrators have not yet been identified	Explosion of unknown source
Vital Educational Facilities				
Schools	4			
Nurseries	1			
Vital Medical Facilities				
Medical facilities		1		
Communal Facilities				
Markets			1	
Infrastructure				
Power stations and energy facilities			1	
Civil Defense centers				1
Transport features				1
Industrial facilities	2		1	
Total	7	1	3	2

The record of attacks on vital civilian facilities documented since the start of 2020 up to the start of December of the same year at the hands of the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in Syria has now reached 325 in total, is distributed monthly as follows:



The chart shows a marked increase in the number of incidents of attacks on vital civilian facilities in November as in October, over the numbers documented in the previous six months, with the Syrian regime continuing its indiscriminate shelling, which often affected civilian areas far from the contact lines with the Armed Opposition factions and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham, despite the ceasefire agreement that entered into force on March 6.

The most notable attacks on vital civilian facilities in November:

On Monday, November 2, 2020, an IED of unknown origin exploded in the covered vegetable market in [Ras al Ein city](#) in the northwestern suburbs of Hasaka governorate, [injuring](#) a number of [civilians](#), and [causing moderate material damage](#) to the [market facilities](#). SNHR is still trying to contact witnesses to obtain more details of the incident. The city was under the control of the Syrian National Army at the time of the incident.

On the morning of Wednesday, November 4, 2020, Syrian Regime forces used artillery to fire dozens of shells at [Ariha](#) city in the southern suburbs of Idlib governorate; one of the shells fell on the Martyr Zakariya Saedou School in the city, [partially destroying the schoolyard](#), and causing minor [material damage](#) to the [school building](#). SNHR notes that the school was subjected to a previous artillery attack by the same forces on the night of Friday, October 30, 2020. Ariha city was under the joint control of factions of the Armed Opposition and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.



On the morning of Wednesday, November 4, 2020, Syrian Regime artillery forces, stationed in Saraqeb city in the eastern suburbs of Idlib governorate, fired a number of shells at Idlib city; one of these shells fell on the industrial zone east of the city, injuring a number of civilians, and causing moderate material damage to a number of industrial units. Idlib city was under the joint control of factions of the Armed Opposition and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.

On Tuesday, November 24, 2020, an explosion of unknown type and origin occurred at Jisr al Nahl (al Nahl Bridge), known as Jisr al Khashab, located on the 'M4' Latakia-Aleppo International Road, near Mhambel town in the western suburbs of Idlib governorate, [partially destroying](#) the bridge, [putting it out of service](#). SNHR is still trying to contact witnesses to obtain more details of the incident. The area was under the joint control of factions of the Armed Opposition and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.



On Wednesday, November 25, 2020, unidentified gunmen used IEDs to blow up a gas pipeline which runs through the Badiya (desert area) of Abu Khashab, which is administratively a part of Soor district, in the northern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate, igniting fires and causing severe material damage to the pipeline, which was put out of service as a result. SNHR is still trying to contact witnesses to obtain more details of the incident. The area was under the control of Syrian Democratic Forces at the time of the incident.

On Friday, November 27, 2020, Syrian Democratic Forces used artillery to fire three shells at [Izaz](#) city in the northern suburbs of Aleppo governorate, one of which fell in front of the National Hospital in the city, causing minor [material damage](#) to its building and furniture. SNHR notes that the Turkish forces are stationed in a building near the hospital, using it as a military post. Izaz city was under the control of the Syrian National Army at the time of the incident.

D. Record of indiscriminate attacks and attacks using outlawed weapons:

The Syrian Network for Human Rights was unable to document any indiscriminate attacks or attacks using outlawed weapons in November.

IV. The Syrian Regime Bears Primary Responsibility for the Spread of the COVID-19 Pandemic:

The COVID-19 pandemic has swept across most of the world, and caused massive numbers of infections and deaths, with most of the world's stable countries worldwide dealing with it seriously and taking exceptional measures to protect the population; many countries have announced their desire to attract and employ more medical personnel, and some governments have released large numbers of imprisoned people and detainees as a precautionary measure to stop the disease from spreading.

By contrast, since the beginning of the global pandemic outbreak, the Syrian regime has dealt with it with callous, total and extreme disregard and absolute negligence, with several countries announcing the arrival of infected cases from Syria since the beginning of March 2020. Despite this, the Syrian regime continued to deny the existence of any infections in Syria until March 22.

The COVID-19 coronavirus does not distinguish between one person or another or between one region and another, and all the regions of Syria, particularly Idlib and surrounding areas, that have witnessed bombings, destruction and forced displacement are suffering from further challenges in addition to the usual ones, which cannot be compared to those in any other location; at the forefront of these challenges are the nearly 1.1 million Syrian citizens displaced between mid-December 2019 and the beginning of March 2020, with exceptional humanitarian aid efforts required to focus particularly on these people in the areas to which they were displaced. There are a number of factors which make them more vulnerable than others to infection with COVID-19, most notably:

- The Idlib region and the northwestern suburbs of Aleppo and its environs are already experiencing massive overcrowding due to the earlier displacement of tens of thousands of Syrians to these places from several areas such as the Eastern Ghouta, the northern suburbs of Homs, southern Syria, and recently the suburbs of Idlib and Hama, which has caused a drastic increase in the existing overcrowding, making the process of social physical distancing virtually impossible.
- Most of these people live in hastily constructed camps or structures which are wholly inadequate and unsuitable for housing (such as schools, shops, unfinished apartments, demolished buildings, caves, etc.), which lack the most basic sanitary infrastructure such as toilets, functioning sewage networks, or clean water, which makes the available water allocations necessary for periodic personal hygiene for each person far less than would be available in normal conditions or in other areas in Syria. The IDPs are struggling to obtain enough tents, and are sometimes forced to live in a tent collectively, which particularly negatively affects women due to their special needs.

- The healthcare system in and around Idlib continues to suffer from the repercussions of violent and focused targeting by the Syrian and Russian regimes' forces, which has contributed to a large number of health centers being put out of service. According to estimates from a number of local relief and humanitarian organizations, the number of doctors in the region ranges between 500 to 600, while the number of beds in medical centers ranges between 2,500 to 3,000, with the number of beds in intensive care units numbering 201 in total; in addition, only 95 ventilators are available for adults, with all of these being in use. The tremendous disparity between these figures and the population levels in northwest Syria shows the immensity of the grave deficit.

On April 14, Médecins Sans Frontières [warned](#) that the health system in Idlib, which is currently overstretched and low on supplies, will be overrun if COVID-19 spreads there.

The Syrian Jazira region (Deir Ez-Zour, Hasaka, Raqqa), which is controlled by the Kurdish-majority Syrian Democratic Forces, suffers from a similar situation, and also includes large numbers of IDPs living in camps. Russia's use of its United Nations veto has caused the cancellation of three of the four crossings, with al Ya'rubiya crossing with Iraq being one of the crossings canceled; this caused the region to be denied direct UN aid, which is now provided exclusively through the Syrian regime that deliberately creates obstacles to aid provision and systematically carries out large-scale extortion, which we addressed extensively in our report: [Sanctions Are Linked to the Syrian Regime's Continuing Violations and Don't Include Medical Supplies and Food, Which Shouldn't Be Delivered](#) Through the Regime, with the United Nations Secretary-General speaking about this in [his report issued on February 21, 2020](#). [Human Rights Watch also issued a report](#) on the crisis facing the medical sector in that region and the complex difficulties it faces due to the closure of al Ya'rubiya crossing.

As for the areas under the control of the Syrian regime, whilst these are better off than the Idlib region, its environs, and the Syrian Jazira region, they suffer mainly from the exodus of medical personnel, and from the massive corruption in all the regime's organs, as well as from the depletion of the Syrian state's monetary reserves, which are spent on bombings, military operations, and security services at the expense of supporting the medical sector and services. SNHR has also demanded that Russia, a massively wealthy country, help its ally, the Syrian regime, given the circumstances of the spread of the COVID-19, as this would be far better and less costly than air strikes on medical facilities, cities and towns in and around Idlib.

In short, the whole of Syrian society suffers from mismanagement of the coronavirus crisis, in all areas of control:

One: In the areas under the control of the Syrian regime, these shortcomings are summarized in the following main points:

1. The Syrian regime denied the existence of any cases of COVID-19 in areas under its control until March 22; it should be borne in mind that when the regime finally admitted the existence of a case of infection, it was in a girl coming from outside the country. Another problematic factor is the complete lack of any transparency in the announcement of cases of infection and deaths, which are certainly far greater than those officially announced, due particularly to the constant contact with Shiite religious groups, individuals and militias coming from Iran and Iraq (most notably the al Nujaba Movement, the Imam Ali Brigade, the Fatemiyoun Brigade, the Quds Corps Brigade, the Abu al Fadl al Abbas Brigade and the Haideriyoun Brigade) via the al Boukamal land crossing, with the Syrian regime failing to close the al Sayyidah Zaynab area, which is known to be very crowded with Iranians and Iraqi Shiites, until April 2.
2. The Syrian authorities have not taken any effective measures to limit air traffic from other countries, with Damascus International Airport still witnessing multiple flights to and from many countries, including Iran.
3. Quarantine centers are not equipped and lack the minimum levels of hygiene, in addition to lacking the most basic conditions for healthcare and medical protection and the facilities to provide the medical procedures and services related to COVID-19, which are supposedly intended to contribute to curbing the spread of the disease if discovered. [Press websites](#) and social media platforms have published photos and [videos](#) showing the [dire situation](#) of the [Quarantine Center](#) in [al Dwair area](#), where people were placed [after arriving](#) on a trip from Iran
4. The Syrian regime has not taken any serious measures to prevent overcrowding of citizens in front of retail outlets or in [airports](#). The regime has also failed to take any measures to limit or prevent [crowds from gathering in stadiums](#) to attend football matches and has not imposed measures that oblige citizens to follow precautionary measures; in light of the continued worsening of the bread crisis, [bakeries](#) continue to witness overcrowding, with citizens queuing in front of them for long hours at night in cold weather conditions and without any precautionary measures that prevent the transmission of the pandemic, as we have mentioned in a wide range of [news reports](#) in recent months.

Two: In and around opposition-held areas in Idlib:

1. The areas under opposition control suffer from an absence of a central authority to issue unified instructions, a shortcoming largely reflected in the disparity seen in the individuals' approach to prevention and medical treatment of the COVID-19.

2. There is a low degree of medical and religious awareness of the dangers of overcrowding and gathering. We have noted numerous instances of dozens of people gathering in marketplaces, or attending sporting events in playgrounds and sports halls, without the controlling authorities imposing any restrictions to limit overcrowding or to prevent holding [college student graduation ceremonies](#) within the faculties' headquarters. This is greatly bolstered by a sense of indifference prevailing among many people, primarily caused by what they have been subjected to, including bombings, displacement and torture by Syrian regime's forces and allies.

Based on all the above facts, there is no doubt that the negligence shown by the Syrian regime and its disastrous mismanagement of the Syrian state in recent years are further clear indications of the regime's indifference to citizens' wellbeing, showing once again that the only Syrians which it cares about protecting are the ruling family, the regime's inner circle, and its wealthy elite; this indifference to the Syrian public may well lead to massive additional numbers of deaths among Syrian citizens. It should always be remembered that the Syrian regime and its Russian ally have been primary accused of the targeting, bombing and destruction of most medical facilities in Syria, and the killing of hundreds of medical personnel, as documented on the SNHR's database, with dozens of these lifesaving medics still classified as having been forcibly disappeared at the regime's hands.

The regime's failure to release arbitrarily detained individuals, particularly the elderly and individuals detained with no charges, provides further clear evidence of the Syrian regime's primary responsibility for the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic in Syria, as the regime controls and manages state institutions, and has completely failed to provide even the most rudimentary protection to Syrian civilians, but has instead exploited the state institutions to protect and benefit the ruling family in order to ensure their continued rule, even if 13 million Syrian citizens are displaced from their homes to achieve this, with most of those displaced unable to return home since their homes have been ransacked and subjected to widespread looting and destruction by regime forces and affiliated militias.

V. Attachments:

[Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 172 Civilians, Including 16 Children, 11 Women, and 30 Victims Due to Torture, in November 2020](#)

[\(2\) At least 167 Cases of Arbitrary Arrests/ Detention Documented in Syria in November 2020, Including Two Children and Three Women](#)

VI. Conclusions and Recommendations:

Conclusions:

- The evidence we have gathered indicates that attacks continue to be directed against civilians and civilian objects. Syrian-Russian alliance forces have committed various crimes, including extrajudicial killings, arrest, torture, and enforced disappearance. In addition, the indiscriminate bombardment and other attacks carried out caused the destruction of facilities and buildings. There are reasonable grounds to believe that the war crime of attacking civilians has been committed in many cases.
- The Syrian government has not only violated international humanitarian law and customary law, but has also breached a number of UN Security Council resolutions, particularly resolution 2139, resolution 2042 on the release of detainees, and resolution 2254, all without any accountability.
- We could find no record of any warnings being issued by the Syrian Regime or Russian forces prior to any attack under the requirements of international humanitarian law. This has been the case since the beginning of the popular uprising for freedom, providing another blatant demonstration of these forces' total disregard for the lives of civilians in Syria.
- The magnitude and frequency of the violations, the disproportionate use of military force, the indiscriminate manner of the bombing, and the coordinated approach of these attacks lead to the inescapable conclusion that these acts are wholly deliberate and based on high-level orders, and as such constitute a part of state policy.
- The indiscriminate and disproportionate bombardment carried out by the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces is considered to be a clear violation of international humanitarian law, with indiscriminate killings amounting to war crimes.
- Hay'at Tahrir al Sham has violated international humanitarian law, causing the death of many civilians, as well as damage to vital civilian facilities.
- The Armed Opposition/ the Syrian National Army violated UN Security Council Resolution 2139 through carrying out attacks that are considered to violate customary international humanitarian law, causing civilian casualties or accidental injuries.
- All the attacks documented in this report, particularly bombings, caused massive collateral damage that involved loss of lives, injuries, or significant damage to civilian objects. There are strong indicators suggesting that this damage was excessive compared to the anticipated military benefit.
- The use of explosive arms to target densely populated areas reflects a criminal and wholly deliberate mindset, with the perpetrators clearly intending to inflict the greatest possible number of deaths, which is a clear contravention of international human rights law and a flagrant violation of the Geneva Convention (arts. 27, 31, 32).

Recommendations:

UN Security Council

- The Security Council must take additional steps following its adoption of Resolution 2254, which clearly insists that “ all parties immediately cease any attacks against civilians and civilian objects as such.”
- The Syrian issue should be referred to the International Criminal Court and all those who are responsible for violations should be held accountable, while Russia must stop using the veto, as it is a party to the Syrian conflict, and the UNSC states’ veto power should be withheld when crimes against humanity and war crimes are committed.
- Ensure peace and security and implement the principle of responsibility to protect civilians’ lives and to save the Syrian people’s heritage and historical artifacts from destruction, looting and vandalism.
- The Security Council should adopt a resolution banning the use of cluster munitions and landmines in Syria, similar to the existing prohibition on the use of chemical weapons, and include advice on how to safely remove the remnants of such dangerous weapons.
- The four other permanent member states should put pressure on the Russian government to end its support for the Syrian regime, which uses chemical weapons, and to expose its involvement in this regard.
- Request that all relevant United Nations agencies make greater efforts to provide food, medical and humanitarian assistance in areas where fighting has ceased, and in internally displaced person camps, and to follow-up with those States that have pledged voluntary contributions.

International Community

- In light of the split 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 by protecting them from daily killing and by lifting sieges, as well as by increasing support for relief efforts. Additionally, the principle of universal jurisdiction should be enacted 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 dozens 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 proved fruitless, along with the Cessation of Hostilities statements and Astana agreements that followed. Therefore, steps should be taken under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations, while 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 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 to activate the principle of universal jurisdiction.
- Work to launch projects to create maps revealing the locations of landmines and cluster munitions in all Syrian governorates. This would facilitate the process of removing them and educating the population about their locations.

OHCHR

- The OHCHR should submit a report to the Human Rights Council and other organs of the United Nations on the incidents mentioned in this report since these attacks were perpetrated by the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces.
- Train Syrian organizations to undertake clearance of mines and other unexploded ordnance, and raise local awareness of the dangers of such ordnance.
- Establish a platform that brings together a number of Syrian organizations active in documenting violations and humanitarian assistance, in order to facilitate an exchange of skills and experiences within Syrian society.
- Work on preparing a special report on the use of landmines in Syria and the risks they pose to civilians, and identify the most prominent locations where landmines were planted.

Independent International Commission of Inquiry (COI)

- Launch investigations into the cases included in this report and previous reports. SNHR is willing to cooperate and provide further evidence and data.

International, Impartial, and Independent Mechanism (IIIM)

Collect further evidence about the crimes documented in this report.

Focus on the issue of landmines and cluster munitions within the next report.

The United Nations Special Envoy to Syria

- Condemn the perpetrators of crimes and massacres, and those who were primarily responsible for dooming the de-escalation agreements.
- Re-sequence the peace process so that it can resume its natural course despite Russia's attempts to divert and distort it, empowering the Constitutional Committee prior to the establishment of a transitional governing body.

The Syrian regime

- Stop indiscriminate shelling and targeting of residential areas, hospitals, schools and markets, and end the use of outlawed weapons and barrel bombs.
- End the acts of torture that have caused the deaths of thousands of Syrian citizens in detention centers.
- Reveal the fate of some 84,000 Syrian citizens arrested by the security services whose fate has been concealed to date.
- Ensure compliance with UN Security Council resolutions and customary humanitarian law.
- Provide detailed maps of the locations where the regime planted landmines, especially in civilian areas or near residential communities.

The Russian regime

- Launch investigations into the incidents included in this report, make the findings of these investigations public for the Syrian people, and hold those responsible accountable.
- Compensate all the damaged centers and facilities, rebuild and rehabilitate them, and compensate all the families of victims who were killed by the current Russian regime, as well as all the wounded.
- Completely cease the bombing of hospitals, protected objects, and civilian areas, and respect customary international law.
- As a guarantor party in Astana talks, the Russian regime must stop thwarting de-escalation agreements, and apply pressure on the Syrian regime in order to end all indiscriminate attacks and to allow unconditional passage of humanitarian aid to besieged areas.
- Stop using incendiary weapons in populated areas, compensate the victims and their families for all human and material damage caused by the use of these weapons, and provide treatment for dozens of civilian casualties.
- Provide detailed maps of sites where Russian forces have launched cluster munition attacks, issue these to the United Nations and inform the Syrian public about them, thus facilitating the safe disposal of unexploded ordnance.
- Begin to achieve a breakthrough in the issue of detainees by revealing the fate of 83,000 people forcibly disappeared by the Syrian regime.

The Coalition (US-led coalition and Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces)

- The states of the coalition must unequivocally and sincerely acknowledge that some of their bombing operations have resulted in the deaths of innocent civilians. Rather than attempting denial, these states should take speedy steps to launch serious investigations, and immediately compensate and apologize to the victims and all those affected.
- The states supporting the SDF 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.

- The states supporting the SDF should cease all forms of support until the SDF commits itself to complying with the rules of international human rights law and international humanitarian law. This is primarily the responsibility of the supporting states. Providing the SDF with weapons and support while knowing that the SDF violates the rules of international humanitarian law can be seen as a contribution to these violations.
- Syrian Democratic Forces must immediately stop conscripting children, hold the officers involved in such violations accountable, and pledge to return all children who have been arrested for conscription immediately.
- Provide detailed maps of the locations where the SDF planted landmines, especially civilian sites or near residential communities.

The Armed Opposition/ the Syrian National Army

- The Armed Opposition/ the Syrian National Army must ensure the protection of civilians in all areas under their control. These forces should also take care to distinguish between civilians and military targets and cease any indiscriminate attacks.
- Pledge to cease any arbitrary arrests, and investigate incidents that have resulted in violations of international humanitarian law.
- Take punitive action against those who commit violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law.
- Provide detailed maps of the locations where the Armed Opposition/ Syrian National Army planted landmines, especially civilian sites or near residential communities.

Humanitarian Organizations:

- Develop urgent operational plans to secure decent shelter for internally displaced persons.
- Exert efforts in landmine clearance operations in parallel with relief operations whenever the opportunity arises.
- Provide protected facilities and vehicles, such as medical facilities, schools, and ambulances, with distinctive signs that can be distinguished from long distances.

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