

3,098 Individuals Killed, including 531 Children, at the hands of the Syrian Regime in Massacres of a Sectarian Nature

Approximately a Year and a Half of
Continued Investigations to Prove
the Occurrence of the Sectarian
Massacre of al Haswiya

SNHR

SYRIAN NETWORK FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

الشبكة السورية لحقوق الإنسان

Wednesday, May 16, 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.



Contents

- I. Introduction and Methodology
- II. Death Toll of the Syrian Regime's Massacres that Exhibited an Explicit Sectarian Nature and their Geographical Distribution
- III. Details of the Sectarian Massacre of al Haswiya
- IV. Attachments
- V. Conclusions and Recommendations

I. Introduction and Methodology

The Syrian regime has been working on eroding all residential and tribal bases and communities in Syria for many years. Talking about the existence of a coherent sectarian group with a hierarchy and allegiance is only possible to minimal extents. After dissolving these entities, it has become significantly easier to recruit and employ the members of any sectarian group provided you have power and money, especially in the case of Syria, where the Syrian regime has worked diligently on undermining any national vision that would serve as an umbrella for all sectarian groups under one unified state. Since the very first days of the popular uprising, the Syrian regime has worked on evoking and sustaining sectarian grudges in order to use them to further divide the Syrian people.

The depiction of the situation in Syria as a sectarian conflict is undoubtedly in the interest of the Syrian regime because, in such scenario, all parties are almost evenly responsible. However, this is a blatant disregard for the basis of the conflict that started as country-wide-popular revolt in the face of a mafia-like regime that adopts the various means of killing and authoritarianism.

In light of this, a number of local militias from the Alawite sectarian group, where the Syrian regime recruited them specifically from this group, had perpetrated a large number of massacres in which they practiced rudimentary means of murder, and deliberately leaked pictures and videos of disfigured dead bodies, and for children who were slaughtered with knives and had their limbs cut off, as well as women who were stripped of their clothes. Fueling sectarianism in this manner was heavily deliberate and thoroughly purposed.



The first two years of the popular uprising saw the greatest portion of sectarian-cleansing massacres, which lasted until June 2013. The Syrian regime did not only recruit and compose Alawite-originated militias, but also recalled Iranian militias to fuel a Sunni-Alawite-Shiite conflict that takes the attention away from the primary conflict between a popular uprising and a family tyranny that established for years a rule of oppression and terrorism.

Methodology

The investigations on al Haswiya massacre took nearly one year and a half, as accessing survivors and eyewitnesses to the incident proved to be an extraordinary challenge for our team. The research efforts continued until we were able to present this report in its current form.

In the course of the ongoing monitoring for incidents and developments by SNHR team through a wide network including tens of various sources that have been built over an accumulation of extensive relations since the start of our work. When we receive information, or hear some news about a violation via the internet or media outlets, we work on following-up on this news and try to verify and collect evidences and data. In some cases, the researcher is able to visit the incident location at the soonest. However, this is a rarity in light of the incredibly high security risks, and given the frequency of daily incidents and in light of the human and material resources at hand. Therefore, the possibility to access evidences vary from one case to another, and, hence, the degree of its classification. Usually, what we do, at SNHR, in such cases is relying on accounts from survivors who experience the violation firsthand, where we try to access those directly, and, to a second degree, who saw or filmed the violation, in addition to analyzing available materials from open sources such as the internet and media outlets.

This report contains six accounts that were collected through speaking directly with eyewitnesses, and are not cited from any open sources. We have explained the purpose of these interviews to the eyewitnesses who gave us permission to use the information they provided in this report without offering or giving them any incentives. Also, SNHR has tried to spare the eyewitnesses the agony of remembering the violation, and gave guarantees to conceal the identity of any witnesses who preferred to use an alias. This report doesn't cover the social, economic, and mental damages and ramifications.

SNHR has analyzed the videos and pictures that were posted online, or were sent to us by local activists via e-mail, Skype, or social media. Among those recordings were [four videos of women](#) who said that they survived the massacre through fleeing to the groves in the



neighborhoods of Old Homs, as well as al Wa'er neighborhood and northern suburbs of Homs. The claims made by the women who appeared in the videos has been largely consistent with the accounts we collected, as those spoke of local militias and other foreign militias that practiced acts of killing by slaughter using knives which was followed by burning dead bodies. In addition, those women spoke of lootings and rapes.

II. Death Toll of the Syrian Regime's Massacres that Exhibited an Explicit Sectarian Nature and its Geographical Distribution

Between March 2011 and February 15, 2018, we recorded that Syrian regime forces committed no less than 50 massacres of a sectarian nature that resulted in the killing of 3,098 individuals, divided into:

- 3,028 civilians, including 531 children and 472 women (adult female).
- 70 fighters from the armed opposition

This means that the percentage of the civilian death toll out of the overall death toll is no less than 98%.

The massacres are distributed by governorate as follows:

Homs governorate: 22 massacres, in which 1,040 individuals were killed: 10 fighters from the armed opposition and 1,030 civilians, including 209 children and 200 women.

Aleppo governorate: 8 massacres, in which 416 individuals were killed: 5 fighters from the armed opposition and 411 civilians, including 63 children and 34 women.

Hama governorate: 8 massacres, in which 197 civilians were killed, including 21 children and 20 women.

Damascus suburbs governorate: 5 massacres, in which 686 individuals were killed: 55 fighters from the armed opposition and 631 civilians, including 120 children and 113 women.

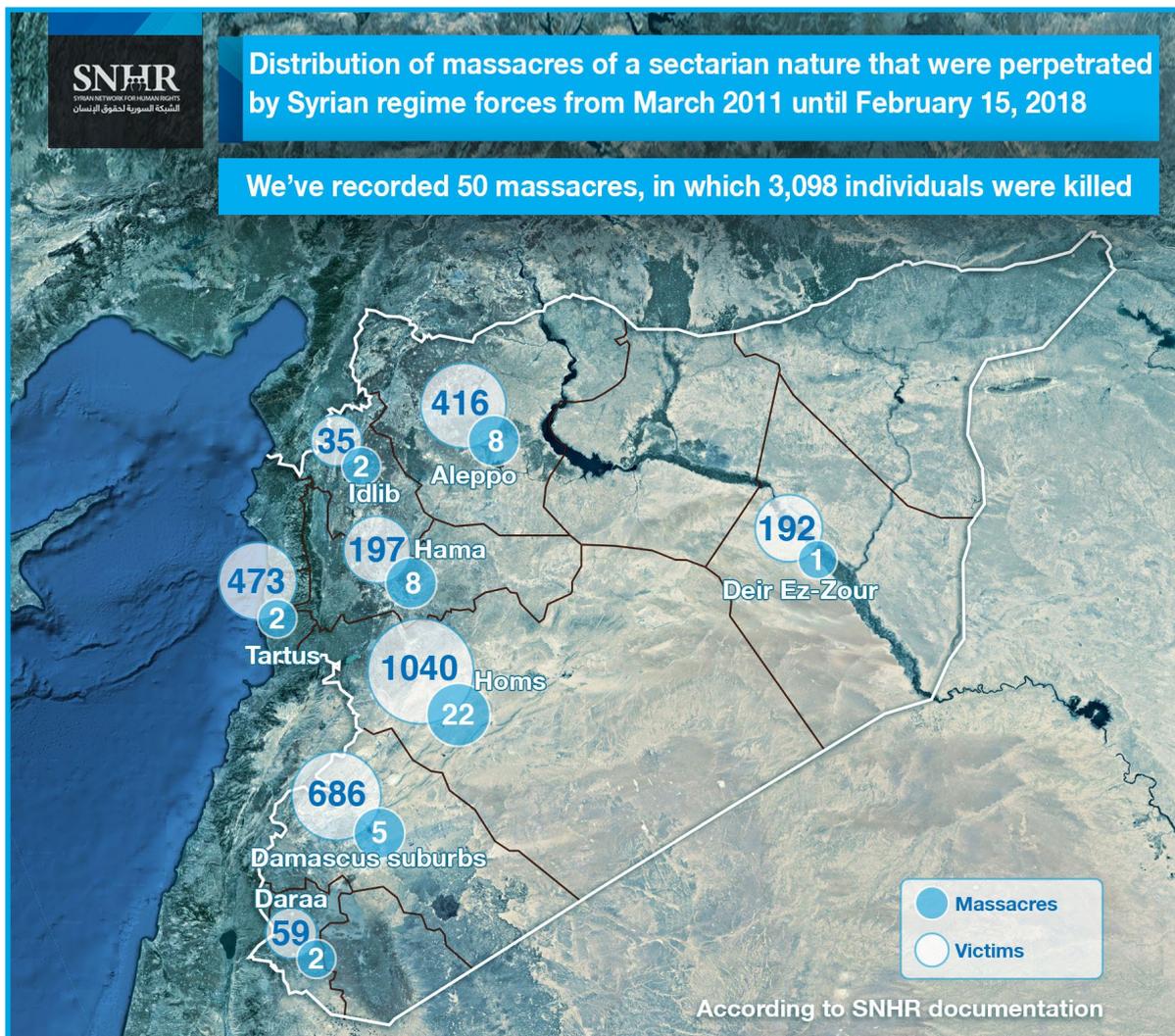
Tartus governorate: 2 massacres, in which 473 civilians were killed, including 98 children and 75 women.

Idlib governorate: 2 massacres, in which 35 civilians were killed, including 7 children and 8 women.

Daraa governorate: 2 massacres, in which 59 civilians were killed, including 6 children and 10 women.

Deir Ez-Zour governorate: 1 massacre in al Qosour and al Joura neighborhood in which 192 civilians were killed, including 7 children and 12 women.





To read more on the massacres that exhibited an ethnic or sectarian cleansing nature by all parties, please refer to our extensive study, entitled [the Society's Holocaust](#), that was released in mid-2015.

III. Details of the Sectarian Massacre of al Haswiya

A Background: al Haswiya village

Al Haswiya village is located in western Homs city, about 5 kilometers from its center. The village is composed of two parts: a residential area and an agricultural area that encompasses a number of farms. In 2011, it had a population of approximately 5,000 people, following the start of the popular uprising for freedom in March 2011. The village became a destination for hundreds of IDPs who fled the neighborhoods of Old Homs and al Wa'aer neighborhood. Even though most of the village's residents are opposition fighters' families, the armed conflict, according to what we've recorded, never reached the area which remained, until the date of the massacre, distant from combat operations with no actual military presence for armed opposition fighters to be found in the village.



By contacting a number of activists and massacre survivors, we were able to pinpoint the location for a number of military points and bases in the vicinity of the village. Prior to the massacre, Syrian regime forces were stationed at a number of points including:

The military college from the west, the industrial sector and the textile factory from the east, and the Air Force Intelligence branch from the south, in addition to a number of military checkpoints surrounding the village from all sides.

The massacre

Backed by local and foreign Shiite militias, Syrian regime forces raided al Haswiya village on Tuesday, January 15, 2013, between 07:00 and 07:30. Some of the residents said that the raid was a retaliatory act for the killing of a fighter from the Shiite militias in Homs suburbs.

Syrian regime forces and pro-regime militias carried out wide search operations in conjunction with shooting indiscriminately and terrorizing and intimidating the residents. Over the course of seven hours following the raid, the attacking forces used live bullets, as well as cleavers and bayonets to kill residents, in addition to lootings properties, jewels, and cars. Additionally, they arrested most of the village's males, where some of them were released later, while tens are still considered forcibly-disappeared.

Most of the accounts assigned responsibility for the slaughter, killing, and torture to the Shi-ite militias. Most of these crimes took place in the farms' area, whereas the residential area saw also a number of deaths but to a lesser degree, as well as arrests and beatings that were carried out by fighters from the Syrian regime army.

In many cases, we recorded that a large number of dead bodies were burned inside their homes. Also, the residents told us about dead bodies who were desecrated and disfigured as some of them were hung in the same manner meats are hung at slaughterhouses.



Haswiya massacre, January 15, 2013

Most notable sites where Syrian regime forces and pro-regime militias committed the killings in al Haswiya village, suburbs of Homs governorate – Tuesday, January 15, 2013



Abu Baker, a survivor whom we contacted via WhatsApp, said that he lost seven of his family members, including two siblings. He added that he saw the dead body of his cousin in a video published by pro-government channels, and it was cut to pieces and hung like animal meat.

According to the residents we interviewed, in person and the ones we contacted, the killings and slaughters, as well as the house lootings that followed, targeted houses for Sunni families, whereas houses owned by Shiite families were left unharmed. In addition, the Christian-majority al Dwyer area, which is adjacent to al Haswiya village, was unharmed as well.

Syrian regime forces [acknowledged](#) that they carried out military operations in al Haswiya village, but said that they were in pursuit of gunmen and terrorists. We've heard many similar statements before every massacre committed by Syrian regime forces.

On January 19, 2013, [BBC TV Channel](#) aired a report from inside al Haswiya village. The report says that the channel team entered the village along with Syrian regime forces and showed pictures of burned houses and burned dead bodies. The report contained an interview with a woman who said that she was beaten and insulted by “the gunmen” who were responsible for the massacre. Also, the report shows that all of the accounts the re-



porters were able to listen to were in front of Syrian regime forces, which hugely questions their credibility. The report also notes that a woman was able to contact the reporters away from Syrian regime forces' surveillance and confirmed that the massacre was committed by pro-Syrian regime forces gunmen.

We were able to document the killing of 108 civilians with names and details, including 25 children and 17 women (adult female). Also, among the victims were entire families from the houses of Ghaloul, al Saho, and Mahbani. However, many accounts confirmed that about 200 individuals were killed, where the features of the dead bodies were distorted due to the burning and disfigurement.

The killings and disfigurements, as well as the lootings and destruction that followed, were carried out in a widespread, systematic manner, which suggests that the Syrian regime intended to forcibly displace the Sunni residents from this area and prevent them from going back as a form of collective punishment.

Samira, whom we contacted via Facebook, told SNHR that al Haswiya area is a quiet area that is distant from the popular uprising. The area is resided by IDPs families from various areas in Homs, but most of the residents oppose the rule of the Syrian regime: **“On the day of the massacre, we’ve heard about military activity in the nearby areas. Fearing arrest, my father and brothers headed for the groves, as they were known for opposing the Syrian regime since the start of the revolution. Despite the military activities, I decided to go to the village’s school where I work, and I saw tanks, military vehicles, and fighters. Some of the fighters were carrying flags that reads: “O Hussein” and others affiliated to the National Guard. I could distinguish some of their dialects. Some of them were speaking in Persian.”**

“The soldiers entered the school and inspected it. Then, they surrounded us along with the students. We started hearing interrupted shots and noticing fires and smoke rising. This was around 11:00. Afterwards, I called my brothers. I was able to hear the sound of bullets and it was close from them.”

“Around 14:00, we were allowed to leave the school. I headed home. On the way, I heard people screaming and weeping. I saw the dead body of a pregnant woman with her son. Her son is one of my students at the school. Both of the dead bodies were disfigured and tossed in the middle of the street. The child’s dead body had no eyes. That woman came to our school and insisted on taking her son back home. She took him to his death.” Samira said that she saw dead bodies hung on trees, and saw decapitated heads for youngsters who were no older than 20 years old. She added that she saw



a number of houses whose groves were burned: **“I arrived at our farm. Everything has burned. The dead bodies of my mother, sisters, and nephew. I saw the bottles they used to burn the dead bodies and houses. I can still remember the smell of the flesh burning. They directed their vengeance against my mother and sisters, just because my brothers and father oppose the regime.”**

“Some of the survivors who were able to hide in the groves and survived the slaughter told me the details of my family’s murder and how their dead bodies were burned. They told me that my mother tried to defend my sisters and insulted the officer and assaulted him, which is why they retaliated against my family more severely.”

Abu al Baraa, who was able to flee to the outskirts of the village, as the Syrian regime forces were entering the village, told us in a phone call: **“I hid inside a water pipe all day. I snuck back to the village at night and saw what happened. I saw tens of women who gathered near the slaughterhouse area near Orontes River. They were trying to flee as they were fearing another massacre. I snuck to the houses that are near mine. I entered a house for the Khazzam family, and inside there were 18 dead bodies. All of them were women and children. One of the victims was an infant that I found inside the heater. Among the victims were a pregnant woman whose dead body was riddled with bullets.”**

“Most of my neighbors were executed. Za’rour family alone suffered 72 casualties, while Ghaloul family saw the death of 22 members, in addition to victims from the families of al Sahou, al Mahbani, Dyab, Roumiya, Arafat, al Tayyar, and al Qabouni. All of the killings were against Sunni families, while the Shiite and Christian families were left unscathed. Rather, some of the people who took part in the killing and slaughtering were from the Shiite family: al Halabi who live with us in the same village.”

According to Abu al Baraa, most of those who were arrested were the men who remained in the village: **“About 200 individuals were arrested. Some of them were released, while others are still in detention centers. There have been lootings. They seized houses and cars, and I learned about incidents of rape that took place in al Basatin Street and near the slaughterhouse.”**

“Some of the survivors told me that the village was raided by pro-regime Shabiha, including Alawites and Shiites, and with them were fighters who were speaking in an unknown language.”

Mohammad is an armed opposition fighter in northern suburbs of Homs whose family lives in al Haswiya village. Mohammad told us in a phone call: **“Our village is surrounded completely by military points. There was only one exit towards northern suburbs of Homs. We tried to make this village a safe haven for the IDPs and the displaced. And we had no presence in the village.”**



Mohammad said that his wife and children witnessed the massacre, as his house was raided by Shiite militias who beat his wife and children and looted the jewelry: **“My wife and children survived, but they shot and killed my nephew and cousin, before they raided my sister’s house and raped her in front of her children.”**

Mohammad said that he kept finding dead bodies tossed in Orontes River for a month after the massacre. These dead bodies were buried in the villages of northern suburbs of Homs: **“No less than 23 dead bodies, including three women, were carried by Orontes River to al Dar al Kabra and Ter Ma’la areas. Most of the dead bodies were shot in the head from a close distance, it seems. I could identify one of the dead bodies. His name was Abu Ryad, and his head was shattered using a sharp tool.”**

Um Omar, a resident from al Haswiya village, said, in a personal visit, that she saw a large number of gunmen. Some of them were wearing a military uniform, while others were wearing black attires, and had headbands that read “O Zaynab”. Um Omar added that they were carrying cleavers and shotguns. Additionally, Um Omar confirmed that the majority of them were “Shabiha” (Syrian regime-recruited militias).

Abu Ammar added that he saw a number of dead bodies after the army and Shiite militias left the village. Some of the dead bodies were burned such as those of Ghaloul family that suffered, according to Abu Ammar, 17 deaths. Abu Ammar managed to survive after he fled to one of the neighboring villages when he heard that the village was being surrounded: **“They used shotguns, machine guns, and cleavers to kill the families, and then they burned the dead bodies. The signs of retaliation were clear when looking at the remnants of the dead bodies. Who could in this barbarian way?”**

IV. Attachments

Victims’ names



V. Conclusions and Recommendations

Syrian regime forces have violated many of the international humanitarian law rules, committing crimes that constitute war crimes – mainly through the crimes of extrajudicial killing, sexual violence, forced displacement, enforced-disappearance, collective punishment, and looting properties. All of these crimes were perpetrated in a systematic widespread manner. The crimes of extrajudicial killing, sexual violence, and torture are considered crimes against humanity according to Article 7 of Rome Statute.

Condemnation and liability

Every internationally unlawful act committed by the state entails a legal responsibility on that state. Equally, the customary international law states that the state is responsible for all the acts committed by the members of its security and military forces. Consequently, the state is responsible for the unlawful acts, including crimes against humanity, that have been perpetrated by the members of its military and security forces.

Additionally, the Russian regime and all Shiite militias, as well as ISIS, are all foreign parties who were actually involved in acts of killings and are all responsible legally and judicially, in addition to the funders and supporters of the Syrian regime that is perpetrating massacres systemically and ceaselessly on a daily basis.

Recommendations

Security Council

- All possible steps to implement the resolutions adopted by the Security Council, most notably 2139, should be taken. In addition, The Security Council should take action to put an end to the huge violations that are being practiced by the Syrian authorities and its pro-regime Shiite militias.
- The case in Syria should be referred to the International Criminal Court and all those who were involved in crimes should be held accountable.
- Expand sanctions to include the Syrian, Iranian, and Russian regimes who were directly involved in committing 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 perpetrated wide massacres, such as Iranian militias, the Lebanese group Hezbollah, other Shiite brigades, National Defense Army, and Shabiha on the list of terrorist groups.
- After committing crimes against humanity, the Syrian government shouldn't be considered an "official party" anymore with respect to aid efforts. The Syrian government shouldn't be the receiver of most of the financial and other forms of humanitarian aids, as those aids are being delivered to the supports of the Syrian government instead of those who are truly in-need.



International Community

- In light of the split of the Security Council and its utter inability, steps 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 enhance the support for the relief efforts. Additionally, the principle of universal jurisdiction must 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 consumed, 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 to the Human Rights Council and other organs of the United Nations on this massacre and the massacres that preceded, considering that those incidents are a glaring point in a string of sporadic, daily massacres of a smaller scope. Also, the OHCHR should work on implementing the recommendations included in this report.

Commission of Inquiry (COI)

Launch investigations into the killings that were mentioned in this report and past reports. SNHR is willing to cooperate and provide more evidences and details.

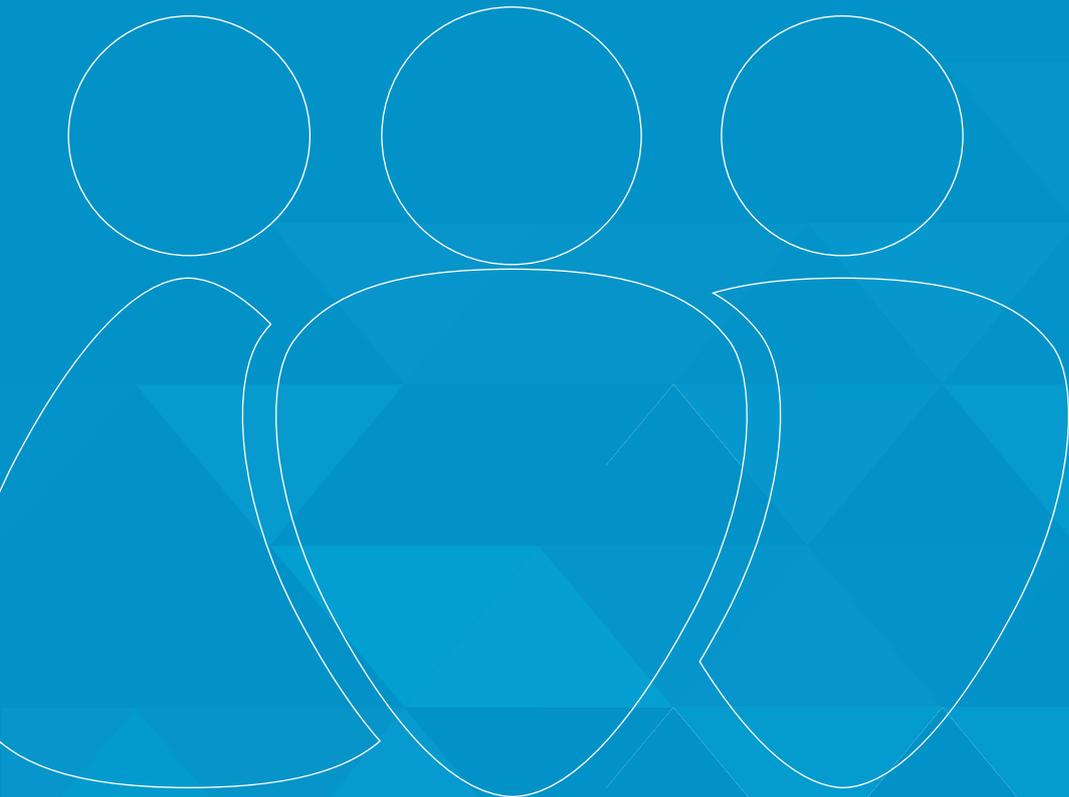
International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism (IIIM)

Address the incident that this report sheds light on, as well as the incidents mentioned in past reports. SNHR is willing to cooperate and provide more evidences and details.

Acknowledgment and Condolences

Our most heartfelt gratitude and condolences to the residents and local activists who contributed effectively to this report.





@snhr



Info@sn4hr.org

www.sn4hr.org

