

# Four Medical and Civil Defense Personnel Killed, and Seven Incidents of Attack on their Vital Facilities in July 2017

Syrian Regime Forces Top all other Parties in Terms of Violations

# SNHR

SYRIAN NETWORK FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

الشبكة السورية لحقوق الإنسان

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The Syrian Network for Human Rights, founded in June 2011, is a non-governmental, non-profit independent organization that is a primary source for the United Nations on all death toll-related statistics in Syria



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### I. Introduction and Methodology

The consistent bombing and targeting of medical facilities and civil defense centers by Syrian regime forces since 2011, and the killing and arrest of medics and civil defense personnel at the hands of different conflict parties, especially Syrian regime forces, indicates a systematic policy that only aims to shed more blood and deepen the suffering of the injured – civilians and armed.

#### **Fadel Abdul Ghany, chairman of SNHR, says:**

“Attacks on medical and civil defense centers as well as medical and civil defense personnel are considered a blatant violation of the international humanitarian law and constitute war crimes given the chaotic, and in many cases, deliberate, targeting of protected objects. All of this have only deepened the suffering of the wounded and injured and is one of the main reasons behind the displacement of the Syrian people as it sends a very clear message: there is no safe area, or a red line, including hospitals, you either flee or perish.”

The fourth round of negotiations was held in Astana city, Kazakhstan's capital, on 3 and 4 of May 2017. Russian, Turkish, and Iranian representatives attended as the sponsoring states of Ankara Ceasefire Agreement. The three states agreed on establishing four de-escalation zones, wherein the agreement is to commence on May 6, 2017. The agreement outlined four major de-escalation areas – Idlib governorate and the surrounding areas (parts of Aleppo, Hama, and Latakia governorates), northern Homs governorate, Eastern Ghouta, and parts of Daraa and al Quneitra governorates in the southern parts of Syria. It was provided that an expert committee would accurately assign the borders of said zones at a later date. The agreement provided for a cessation of combat operations, passage of humanitarian aids, and for IDPs to go back to their areas.



Following an extensive round of talks between Russia, USA, and Jordan that commenced in May 2017 in Amman, Jordan's capital, the American and Russian presidents announced, on the sidelines of the 2017 G20 summit in Hamburg, that a ceasefire agreement has been reached in southwestern Syria – Daraa, Quneitra, and Suwayda governorates. The agreement went into force at 12:00 on Sunday July 9, 2017, and provided for the passage of humanitarian aids in addition to a ceasefire between the conflicting parties (Syrian regime forces and their allies on one side, and armed opposition factions on the other side). Also, the agreement specifies that maintaining security in this region is the Russian forces' responsibility in coordination with the Americans and Jordanians.

Since the agreement went into effect, the included areas saw a significant and relatively good drop in killings rates in comparison with previous months since March 2011.

Nonetheless, breaches didn't stop, mainly by the Syrian regime, who is seemingly the party that would be most affected should the ceasefire go on, and in particular extrajudicial killing crimes and, more horrendously, deaths due to torture. This strongly asserts that there is a ceasefire of some sort on the table, but the crimes that the international community -particularly the sponsoring states- won't see are still going on as nothing had changed.

In July, SNHR documented a significant drop in rates of violations against medical and civil defense personnel and their respective facilities for the second month in a row following the de-escalation agreement's commencement. However, the Syrian regime remains the party that was responsible for most of the violations in relation to other parties.

SNHR's high-level methodology for documentation relies on survivors and families' direct accounts in addition to the process of verifying and analyzing pictures, videos, and some medical records. However, we can't claim that we have documented all cases in light of the ban and pursuit by Syrian regime forces and some of the other armed groups.

The type and number of evidences vary from one case to another. In light of the challenges we mentioned above, many of the incidents' legal description change based on new evidences or clues that surface after we had released the report. We add these evidences and clues to our data archive. On the other hand, many incidents don't constitute a violation to the international humanitarian law, but it involved collateral damages, so we record and archive these incidents to know what happened historically and to preserve it as a national record. However, they don't necessarily qualify as crimes.

Please see the methodology adopted by SNHR in [victim documentation](#) and [classifying civilian vital facilities](#)



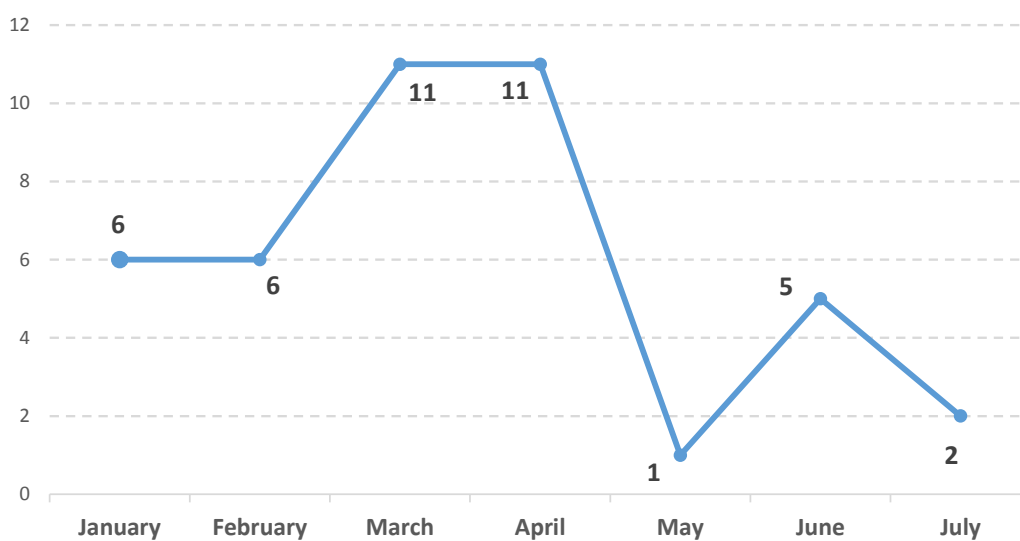
This report only represents the bare minimum of the actual severity and magnitude of the violations that occurred. Also, it doesn't cover the social, economic, and psychological ramifications.

## II. Executive Summary

### A. Victims among medical personnel and civil defense personnel in 2017

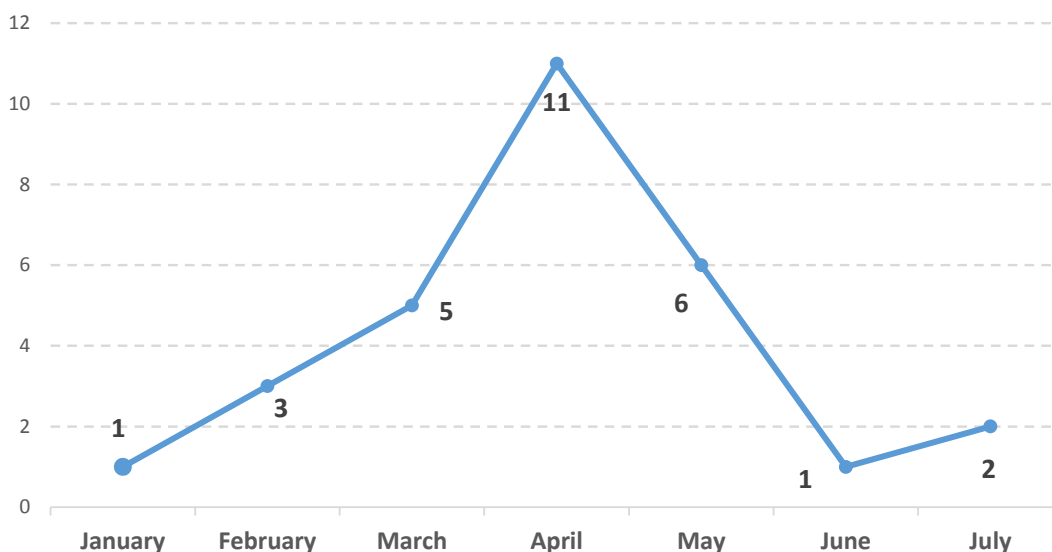
SNHR has documented between the start of 2017 and August 2017 the killing of 42 medical personnel at the hands of the parties to the conflict in Syria.

#### **Distribution of Medical Personnel Victims by Month since the Start of 2017**



And the killing of 29 civil defense personnel in the same period of time

#### **Distribution of Civil Defense Personnel Victims by Month since the Start of 2017**



## **B. Toll of Violations in July 2017**

SNHR has documented in the month of July 2017 the following main violations against medical personnel, civil defense personnel, and their respective facilities:

- Acts of killing

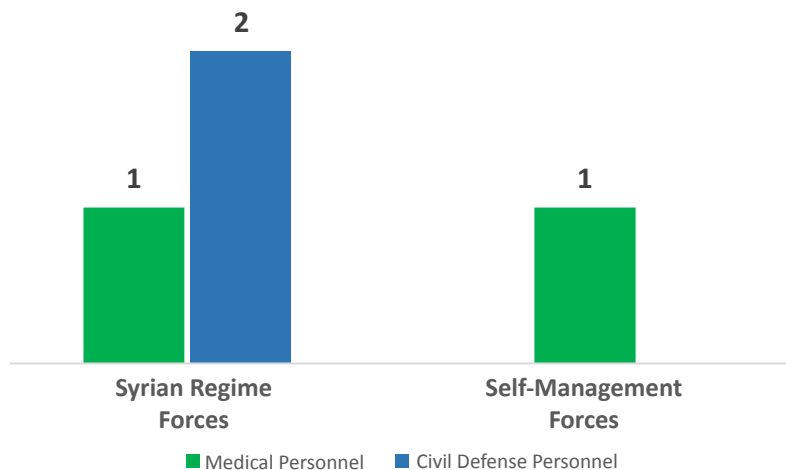
We documented the killing of four medical and civil defense personnel, as follows

- Syrian regime forces (army, security, local militias, Shiite foreign militias): killed three medical and civil defense personnel, as follows:

- One doctor
- Two civil defense personnel

- Self-Management forces (primarily consisting of the Democratic Union Party – a branch for the Kurdistan Workers' Party): killed one doctor

### **Distribution of Medical and Civil Defense Personnel by the Parties to the Conflict in July 2017**



- Targeting vital medical and civil defense facilities

SNHR has documented seven incidents of attack on vital medical and civil defense facilities, as follows

- Syrian regime forces (army, security, local militias, Shiite foreign militias): two incidents of attack on civil defense facilities.

- Russian forces: one incident of attack on a medical facility.

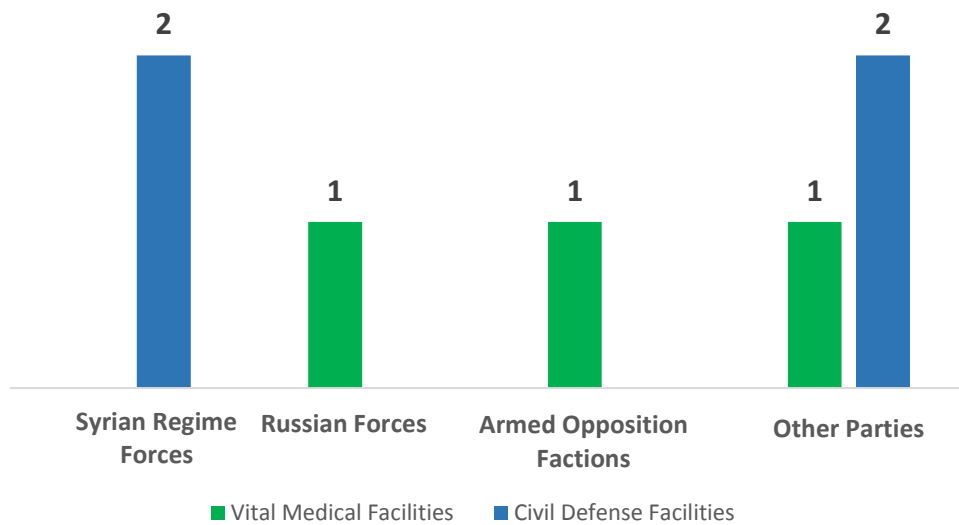
- Armed opposition factions: one incident of attack on a medical facility

- Other parties: three incidents of attack, as follows:

- Two civil defense facilities
- One medical facility



## Distribution of Incidents of Attack on Vital Medical and Civil Defense Facilities by the Parties to the Conflict in July 2017



### III. Details

#### **First: Acts of killing**

##### **- Syrian Regime forces (army, security, local militias, Shiite foreign militias)**

Huthayfa Turkey [Obayda al Mekhlef](#), a medical student, from al Dahla village, eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour, works at the orthopedics department in a makeshift hospital, 27-year-old, married and a father of two. He was killed on Friday, June 9, 2017, in a bombardment by fixed-wing Syrian regime forces warplanes that targeted the makeshift hospital in Jdeed Ekidat village, eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate. On Monday, July 31, 2017, we were able to contact activists from the area who confirmed the incident.



Huthayfa Obayda al Mekhlef

[Hamed Bekdash](#), a member of civil defense's center 103 in Damascus suburbs governorate, from Joubar neighborhood, east of Damascus city, 26-year-old. He was killed on Saturday, July 1, 2017, by a Syrian regime sniper in Zamalka town, east of Damascus suburbs governorate.



Hamed Bekdash



[Samer Rezq](#), a member of civil defense's center 250 in Damascus suburbs governorate, from Douma city, [Eastern Ghouta](#), eastern [Damascus suburbs](#) governorate, born in 1995. He died on Thursday, July 20, 2017, of an injury caused by a shrapnel to the head from an [artillery shelling](#) by Syrian regime forces in Douma city on Wednesday, July 19, 2017.



Samer Rezq

**- Self-Management forces (primarily consisting of the Democratic Union Party – a branch:**

for the Kurdistan Workers' Party)

[Ghazi Ali al Zamar](#), dentist, from al Kasrat village, southern suburbs of Raqqa governorate, born in 1964. He died of wounds on Sunday, July 2, 2017 sustained on Monday, June 26, 2017 after he was shot by a sniper from the Kurdish-majority Syrian Democratic Forces that was stationed on the outskirts of al Kasrat village.



Ghazi al Zamar

**B. Targeting vital medical facilities and civil defense facilities**

**- Syrian regime forces (army, security local militias, Shiite foreign militias)**

Civil defense facilities

Saturday, July 1, 2017, fixed-wing [Syrian regime forces](#) warplanes fired a missile near an [ambulance belonging](#) to the civil defense's center 215 on the outskirts of [Saqba city](#), Eastern Ghouta, eastern [Damascus suburbs](#) governorate, while its staff was tending to the wounded from a previous shelling. The ambulance structure was moderately damaged and the glass windows were shattered. The city was under the control of armed opposition factions at the time of the incident.



Tuesday, July 4, 2017, around 11:00, fixed-wing [Syrian regime forces](#) warplanes fired two missiles at civil defense' center 114 in Otaqa town, al Marj area, Eastern Ghouta, eastern Damascus suburbs governorate. The center building's cladding materials and equipment were heavily damaged. The town was under the control of armed opposition factions at the time of the incident.

SNHR contacted Hosam Hashish, head of the publishing department at civil defense's center 114, in Otaqa town, eastern Damascus suburbs governorate, via WhatsApp:

“On the morning of Wednesday, July 4, warplanes -I think they were the Syrian regime's- carried out a number of airstrikes in the towns of al Nashabiya, Tal al Nashabiya, and Otaqa. These airstrikes resulted in six injuries (four children, one man, and one woman.) We took them to medical points.”

“One of the airstrikes targeted our center, which operates in al Nashabiya, Tal al Nashabiya, Otaqa, Hazrama, Housh al Salhiya, al Zriqiya, Mazare' al Ash'ari, and Bait Nayem towns. The airstrikes caused only material damages that manifested in breaking the equipment of the center in addition to some shrapnel that hit the center building, but, thank God, there weren't any injuries.”

“This is not the first time we have been bombed, as we were targeted a number of times and in several towns. The heaviest shelling we were subjected to was in last August.”

## **- Russian forces**

### Vital medical facilities

- Medical facilities (hospitals – dispensaries – medical points – makeshift hospitals)

Monday, July 24, 2017, fixed-wing warplanes we believe were [Russian fired missiles](#) at the maternity dispensary in Ma'dan city, eastern suburbs of Raqqa governorate. The dispensary building was heavily destroyed and was rendered out of commission. The city was under the control of ISIS at the time of the incident.

## **- Armed opposition factions**

### - Vital medical facilities

- Medical facilities (hospitals – dispensaries – medical points – makeshift hospitals)

Thursday, July 20, 2017, fighters from [Ahrar al Sham Islamic](#) Movement, an armed opposition faction, opened fire at Kafr Nabbol Surgical Hospital, north of Kafr Nabbol city, southern suburbs of Idlib governorate, after they circled the hospital as they were trying to arrest a wounded fighter from Hay'et Tahrir al Sham. The hospital building was slightly damaged. The city was under the joint control of armed opposition factions and Fateh al Sham Front at the time of the incident.





## - Other parties

### Vital medical facilities

- Medical facilities (hospitals – dispensaries – medical points – makeshift hospitals)

Sunday, July 16, 2017, an [IED exploded](#) inside a vehicle in front of the Specialized Surgical Hospital, known as [al Eyadat Hospital](#), in the west side of Idlib city. The hospital building was slightly damaged. As of this writing, we haven't been able to determine the party responsible for the bombing. The city was under the joint control of armed opposition factions and Fateh al Sham Front at the time of the incident.

### Civil defense centers

Wednesday, July 19, 2017, a fire truck for [the Syrian civil defense](#) in al Dana city, northern suburbs of Idlib governorate, was shot at during clashes between Hay'et Tahrir al Sham and Ahrar al Sham Islamic Movement -an armed opposition faction. The vehicle was moderately damaged. The city was under the joint control of armed opposition factions and Fateh al Sham Front at the time of the incident.

Tuesday, July 25, 2017, an IED exploded near the civil defense center in the middle of Idlib city. The bombing happened about 15 meters from the center. We didn't record any damages to the center building. As of this writing, we haven't been able to determine the party responsible for the bombing. The city was under the joint control of armed opposition factions and Fateh al Sham Front at the time of the incident.

## **IV. Conclusions and Recommendation**

### **Legal conclusions**

1- The incidents mentioned in this report are considered, beyond any doubt, violations of Security Council Resolutions 2139 and 2254 which both state that indiscriminate attacks must be halted. Also, these incidents are violations of Article 8 of Rome Statute through the act of willful killing which constitutes war crimes.

2- We can confirm that most of the incidents included in this report have targeted armless civilians. Therefore, Syrian regime forces have violated the rules of the international human rights law which guarantee the right to life. Additionally, these violations were perpetrated in a non-international armed conflict which amount to a war crime where all elements were fulfilled.



Also, Russian forces, Self-Management forces, armed opposition factions, and other parties (which includes parties that we weren't able to identify as well as Turkish, Lebanese, and Jordanian forces) have committed acts that amount to war crimes through the crime of extrajudicial killing or targeting vital civilian facilities.

3- The attacks mentioned in this report are considered a violation of the customary international law as the shells were fired at populated areas rather than a specific military object.

4- Aerial bombardment has caused collateral damages that involved loss of lives, injuries, and significant damages to civil facilities. There are strong indicators suggesting that the damage was too excessive compared to the anticipated military benefit.

## **Recommendations**

### **The Security Council**

- The Security Council has to take additional steps as it has been more than two years since Resolution 2139 was adopted and no pledges to cease the indiscriminate bombardment operations have been made. All the conflict parties must respect these steps and adhere to the rules of the international humanitarian law.
- The Syrian case must be referred to the International Criminal Court and all those who are responsible must be held accountable including the Russian regime whose involvement in committing war crimes have been proven.
- Instill security and peace in Syria and implement the norm of the Responsibility to Protect in order to protect the lives, culture, and history of the Syrian people from being destroyed, stolen, and ruined.
- Expand the sanctions to include the Syrian and Iranian regimes and all of their pillars who are directly involved in committing crimes against humanity and war crimes against the Syrian people.

### **The International Community**

- In light of the split of the Security Council and its utter inability, Steps must be taken on the national and regional levels to form alliances to support the Syrian people that would protect them from the daily killings 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 were drought out. Therefore, steps under Article 7 of the Rome Statute



must be taken and the norm of the Responsibility to Protect, which was established by the United Nations General Assembly, must 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 utilizing the principle of the universal jurisdiction.

### **Medical organizations around the world**

There is a severe shortage in medical manpower in Syria because of the ceaseless killing of medical personnel. Firstly, Syrian doctors must come back to Syria to compensate for the severe shortage in medical personnel. Also, international organizations can send volunteers to safe areas where wounded are sent for treatment. We have recorded many cases where wounded died due to lack of medical resources.

### **Acknowledgment and Condolences**

Our most sincere thanks go to the victims' families and friends and to the local activists who contributed majorly to this report.





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