

Report Documenting Violations by Russian-Syrian Alliance since December 15 in Northwest Syria, many of Which Constitute War Crimes

86 Civilians Killed, Displacement
Routes Bombed 9 Times, 3 IDP
Camps Bombed, and a Massacre
Committed During the Truce
Declared by OCHA



SYRIAN NETWORK FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

الشبكة السورية لحقوق الإنسان

Friday, December 27, 2019

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. Russia and China Use Veto Power to Extend the Security Council's Resolution to Introduce Aid Across Borders
- III. The Displacement Wave from Ma'aret al Numan City and Its Suburbs Doubles the Number of IDPs in Limited Areas, Amid a Near-Total Absence of Relief Assistance
- IV. The Record of the Most Notable Violations Committed by Russian-Syrian Alliance Forces as a Result of Their Recent Military Escalation in Northwest Syria, According to the SNHR's Database
- V. Since the OCHA Announced a Truce, Russian-Syrian Alliance Forces Have Violated It 14 Times, With One of the Violations Resulting in a Massacre of IDPs
- VI. Map Showing the Advance of the Syrian Regime's Forces and Allies from December 15 to December 26, 2019
- VII. The Most Notable Violations Committed by Russian-Syrian Alliance Forces as a Result of Their Recent Military Campaign in Northwest Syria
- VIII. Legal Profile and Recommendations

I. Introduction and Methodology

Since April 26, 2019, Syrian-Russian alliance forces have been engaged in a military campaign with the aim of controlling the area known as the “fourth de-escalation zone”, although in Syria the term “de-escalation zone” has become a total inversion of the truth, with all the areas defined as such being the scenes of massive escalation in military operations, leading to the Syrian regime and Russia controlling these zones one after the other; they are currently reprising this strategy in the fourth and final de-escalation zone. The de-escalation agreement that came into effect in September 2017 once again turned out to be meaningless verbiage, as with all its predecessors. As for the unannounced covert agreements, special investigations are required to uncover the details of these.



Since April 2019 to date, Russian and Syria Regime forces have continued to launch several brutal military campaigns, which resulted in the seizure of large areas including towns and villages, the latest of which was a campaign that resulted in their taking control of Khan Sheikhoun city and its environs. After controlling Khan Sheikhoun, the regime's and Russia's warplanes went on to bomb other cities and towns in the region, including the southern and western part of Ma'aret al Numan city and Kafranbel, bombing these and other cities and towns almost daily to terrorize and intimidate the population and push them towards displacement. Since April up to the date of issuing this report, the Syrian regime has taken control of almost 20 percent of the total area of the fourth de-escalation zone. We have covered this military campaign in several previous reports documenting the most notable violations committed during it, the associated [massacres](#) and [attacks on medical facilities](#) and [Civil Defense centers](#), [the most notable weapons used in the campaign](#) and [the resulting destruction](#).

Despite convening sessions of the Constitutional Committee (the Committee's Large Body met on October 30 – November 1, with the first meeting of the Committee's Small Body between November 4-8, and the second meeting between November 25-30), Russia and the Syrian regime continued with violent bombing attacks even during these sessions, being wholly indifferent about their effect, in an attempt to impose a fait accompli on the ground, to achieve the ultimate goal of military subjugation, to end any hope of political solution and maintain the rule of the Assad family's regime by force; [we have documented the most notable violations committed during that period](#).

During the few days directly before and after the fourteenth round of Astana Talks on Syria in the Kazakh capital, Nursultan (December 10-11), the region witnessed an almost complete cessation of raids by the Russian and Syrian Air Forces, which lasted from December 8 to December 15.

On December 15, however, we recorded the beginning of a new military campaign aimed at controlling Ma'aret al Numan city and its environs, in which Russian forces applied the same tactic they pursued in taking control of Khan Sheikhoun, which is ferocious carpet-bombing similar to the Grozny model by destroying as many civilians' homes as possible, terrorizing the people and forcing them to surrender and leave.

On December 17, UN Spokesman Stéphane Dujarric [called on](#) all parties to the conflict to do their utmost to ensure the safety and well-being of civilians in the conduct of military operations and to strictly follow international humanitarian law principles of distinction, proportionality and precaution.



On December 18, Ms. Najat Rochdi, Senior Humanitarian Adviser to the United Nations Special Envoy for Syria, [condemned](#) the intensification of hostilities in northwest Syria, in particular aerial bombardments and the reported use of barrel bombs, killing tens of civilians including women and children.

On December 23, the [Spokesman](#) for the UN Secretary-General emphasized the Secretary-General's concern about the military escalation in northwest Syria and his call for an immediate cessation of hostilities.

Fadel Abdul Ghany, Chairman of the Syrian Network for Human Rights, says:

“These days coincide with the third anniversary of the displacement of tens of thousands of civilians from the eastern neighborhoods of Aleppo by Russian-Syrian alliance forces, and the alliance itself displaces the people of Ma’aret al Numan and its environs. Why would everyone who can escape do so, leaving behind his home, his belongings, his shop, except if he knows that all he can expect from these forces is humiliation, forced conscription, torture or death? Moreover, 95 percent of the total number of IDPs have not returned to their areas; Daraya, the Ghouta [round Damascus], and other areas controlled by these forces are still almost empty. It is impossible to imagine a safe and voluntary return of IDPs and refugees as long as the current regime remains in place and without a political change towards democracy and accountability taking place.”

Methodology:

This report outlines the record of the most notable human rights violations that have taken place as a result of the military escalation by Syrian-Russian alliance forces in northwest Syria from December 15 to 26, 2019. It also highlights the recent wave of displacement from Ma’aret al Numan city and the targeting of the IDPs during their displacement by Syrian-Russian alliance forces, as well as providing the details of a massacre that occurred as a result of an aerial attack by Russian forces on an apparently randomly selected IDPs’ camp in Joubas village in the eastern suburbs of Idlib, after OCHA circulated a humanitarian truce in the area.

The Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) has relied on field researchers working with us, who helped to obtain direct testimonies from survivors, relatives of victims, relief workers and media activists, assisted by the extensive network of contacts we have built up through our eight years of work. This report contains five first-hand accounts that we’ve collected through speaking directly with witnesses or survivors, none of which are cited from any



open sources. We explained the purpose of these interviews beforehand to the witnesses, who gave us permission to use the information they provided without us offering or giving them any incentives. Also, SNHR endeavors always to spare the witnesses the agony of remembering the violations as much as possible, providing assurances that we will conceal the identity of any witness who prefers to use an alias.

SNHR works on daily documentation of violations. Murder is considered the gravest of crimes, and is therefore a key indicator for assessing the impact of agreements, as well as the targeting of vital civilian facilities. This report records only the civilian victims, categorizing them according to where they were killed rather than according to the governorate which they originally came from. Readers are welcome to find out more about SNHR's methodology.

SNHR also analyzed videos and photographs that were posted online, or submitted by local activists via e-mail, Skype, or social media platforms. Videos posted by activists show, amongst other things, the sites of attacks, and the bodies of the deceased victims and the injured, as well as the scale of destruction caused by the attacks.

We also retain copies of all the videos and photographs included in this report in a confidential electronic database, as well as keeping hard disk backup copies. We do not claim, however, that we have documented all cases, given the severe prohibitions, restrictions and persecution by Syrian Regime forces and some other armed groups.

This report only represents the bare minimum of incidents that we were able to document of the actual severity and magnitude of the violations that have occurred. Also, it doesn't include any analysis of the profound social, economic, and psychological ramifications of these events.

II. Russia and China Use Veto Power to Extend the Security Council's Resolution to Introduce Aid Across Borders

The Russian support for the Syrian regime has not been limited to the provision of military forces, warplanes, ammunition, and the provision of experts and consultants, with Russia also using its UN Security Council veto 14 times in favor of the Syrian regime, which was involved in committing hundreds of crimes against humanity and war crimes, the most recent of which was on the 20th of this month, when both Russia and China used [veto power](#) against the renewal of Security Council Resolution 2449, which requires that the United Nations be

¹ "Syrian Network for Human Rights Methodology", Syrian Network for Human Rights, <http://sn4hr.org/public_html/wp-content/pdf/english/SNHR_Methodology_en.pdf>



re-authorized to enter aid into Syria using border crossings not controlled by Syrian Regime forces, which will expire on January 10, 2020, and this will adversely affect the provision of desperately needed relief to tens of thousands of civilians who were displaced by the Russian and Syrian regimes' bombardment.

This veto will leave the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs open to further extortion and theft by the Syrian regime, which is not keen or trustworthy with regard to distributing aid according to those who deserve it and to the most affected areas, and will give the regime more control over the aid that was provided to bring relief and benefit to the Syrian people in northwest Syria; this action on Russia's and China's part means that the Syrian regime, which is the main cause of the displacement of the Syrian people in northwest Syria and across the country, will benefit materially and in terms of a boost in morale from this displacement and the violations which it caused, encouraging it to commit further similar violations and even to boast about them. This, in turn, means that, as a direct result of the Russian-Chinese veto, the Syrian people are subjected to the corrupt political logic of rogue mafias and criminal gangs, with such morally bankrupt decisions posing the gravest threat to international law in recent history. All this makes it imperative for human rights activists globally to champion the cause of the Syrian people in this field.

III. The Displacement Wave from Ma'aret al Numan City and Its Suburbs Doubles the Number of IDPs in Limited Areas, Amid a Near-Total Absence of Relief Assistance

Ma'aret al Numan district (Ma'aret al Numan city and its suburbs), which lies to the south of Idlib governorate, has an area of approximately 500 square kilometers, and includes many towns and villages such as Jarjanaz, Kfarrouma, Talmennes and Ma'ar Shoreen. This area has gained its strategic importance as a result of the passage of the Damascus-Aleppo M5 International Road through it. The area has been under the control of factions of the Armed Opposition since the end of 2014. Approximately 65,000 civilians have been living in Ma'aret al Numan city and its suburbs, most of whom had been displaced previously from other areas such as Hama Governorate, especially its northern suburbs, Homs Governorate and Eastern Ghouta of Damascus Suburbs governorate.

With the increasing brutality of the bombing, which fails to distinguish between civilians and combatants, and the targeting of civilian neighborhoods in a widespread manner, thousands of civilians were forced to leave the area, with many of these lacking any means of transportation, forcing some to flee on foot. Meanwhile, some others returned to their homes after fleeing because they couldn't obtain tents or any places of residence in the areas they fled to, with even schools and places of worship already full in those areas, and no more room remaining for any more IDPs, forcing people to return despite their fear that they might be subjected to indiscriminate and fatal shelling.





After meeting a large number of IDPs and listening to their testimonies, Karim al Saleh, field researcher at the SNHR, said: **“For months, the area has seen campaigns of displacement, whether collectively or individually, so that the only people left were those who were unable to move due to the difficult economic conditions and their lack of any means of transportation, or their inability to obtain alternative housing, but the latest military campaign forced them to flee; some of them went out on motorcycles or on foot, and some were waiting for the arrival of the individuals and organizations that worked to transport them. On December 20, I went with some people in our cars to Ma’aret al Numan city to contribute to the transportation of the people. The situation there cannot be described. People on the streets were carrying only a handful of their belongings and trying to get in any available vehicle,”** Karim adds, **“The suffering also lies in the lack of ready housing to accommodate them under bad weather conditions. The current humanitarian catastrophe exceeds the capabilities of charity organizations and organizations on the ground, and international efforts must be made to mitigate the impact of this tragedy.”**



Local organizations and charity bodies play the largest role in providing places for new IDPs, as many mosques, schools, halls, and unequipped buildings have been turned into accommodation places for them, with a large percentage of the IDPs being children, women, and elderly people. It is the responsibility of these organizations and bodies to provide most of the essentials of life, especially food, medicine and heating materials.

IV. The Record of the Most Notable Violations Committed by Russian-Syrian Alliance Forces as a Result of Their Recent Military Escalation in Northwest Syria, According to the SNHR's Database

A: Extrajudicial killing:

SNHR has documented the deaths of 86 civilians, including 21 children and 18 women (adult female) at the hands of Russian-Syrian alliance forces in northwest Syria, between December 15 and December 26, 2019 in northwest Syria, and the perpetration of at least 6 massacres, distributed as follows:

- Syrian Regime forces: Killed 42 civilians, including 10 children, 11 women, and committed four massacres
- Russian forces: Killed 44 civilians, including 11 children, seven women, and committed two massacres

B: Incidents of attacks on vital civilian facilities:

SNHR's team has documented at least 47 incidents of attacks against vital civilian facilities at the hands of Russian-Syrian alliance forces in northwest Syria, between December 15 and December 26, 2019, including nine attacks on schools, two on medical facilities, 13 on places of worship, six on markets, and two on Civil Defense centers (facilities and vehicles). The record of incidents of attack is distributed as follows:

- Syrian Regime forces: 38 attacks, including six on schools, two on medical facilities, 12 on places of worship, six on markets, and two on Civil Defense centers (facilities and vehicles).
- Russian forces: Nine attacks, including three on schools and one on a place of worship.

C: Indiscriminate attacks and attacks using outlawed weapons:

We documented at least 248 barrel bombs dropped by the Syrian regime's helicopters and fixed-wing warplanes between December 15 and December 26, 2019.



D: Russian-Syrian alliance targeted the exit routes of IDPs 9 times, and targeted IDP tents 3 times:

The Russian-Syrian alliance forces have obstructed the movement of IDPs, with the aim of further terrorizing them and subjecting them to more difficulties and additional humiliation. In most cases, these attacks occurred through warplanes strafing the main roads crowded with vehicles carrying tens of thousands of IDPs with machine guns.

During the period covered by this the report, SNHR's team documented at least nine incidents of attack on the main roads used by the IDPs, which forced the residents to change roads and flee by them at night.

In addition to strafing and bombing the roads used by IDPs to escape the hell of the bombing of their towns and villages, the Russian-Syrian alliance forces also bombed apparently randomly selected groups of IDP tents, with the aim of sending a message to the IDPs that they would be hunted down and subjected to persecution and terror even after fleeing and displacement. During the period covered in this report, SNHR's team documented at least three incidents in which Syrian-Russian alliance forces attacked random groups of tents sheltering IDPs.

SNHR spoke with a number of people from Ma'arat al Numan, with testimonies including that of field activist Omran Qetaz², who told us: **“The situation in the city is very bad; the bombing doesn't stop and the people have gathered in the streets, waiting for someone to come to take them out of the city, due to the deterioration of their financial situation. Some of them left and came back again, as they did not find any refuge to take shelter in in the cold weather,”** Omran adds, **“The bombardment targets even the displaced people during their displacement. Just a short time ago, Russian warplanes bombed IDPs in a car on the International Road near al Ma'arra Hospital. They were blown to pieces, and they have not been identified yet.”**

² Via social networking website, Facebook, on December 22, 2019





V. Since the OCHA Announced a Truce, Russian-Syrian Alliance Forces Have Violated It 14 Times, With One of the Violations Resulting in a Massacre of IDPs

In the early hours of December 24, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in Turkey sent an email in English to organizations operating in Idlib, stating that it had “managed to obtain approval for a temporary pause of targeting of two main routes in Idlib governorate. The first is the M-5 Highway from Ma’aret al Numan city to Saraqeb city, and the second is the road from Ma’aret al Numan city to Ariha city, and calls for the circulation of this information so that the largest number of people can benefit from this ‘open window’ and flee from the targeted areas.”

We note that this is the first time that the OCHA has announced a humanitarian truce by e-mail alone, and that it did so only in the English language, although it is assumed that the addressees are Syrians and their native language is Arabic. OCHA also failed to clarify the details of the agreement or announce it through its official channels, greatly limiting its ability to reach significant numbers of people, and making its message accessible to only a limited number of people.

The Russian-Syrian alliance did not respect this announced truce any more than previous ones, with the SNHR recording at least 14 air and ground attacks by Russian-Syrian alliance forces, which were carried out within the announced truce period.



Among the most prominent of these attacks, both on the same day, December 24, were two aerial attacks by Syrian Regime forces on the two roads supposedly covered by the truce; the first of these was at 10:23 on the M5 International Road M5 near Babilla village, north of Ma'aret al Numan city, and the second was at around 12:05 near Hantoutin village on the road between the cities of Ma'aret al Numan and Ariha.

The biggest breach of the truce and the most horrific violation occurred at the hands of the Russian forces, whose warplanes bombed an IDP camp near the M5 International Road in Joubas village, south of Saraqeb city. The attack resulted in a massacre whose victims were IDPs.

The **following is a documentation of the massacre details:**

At around 09:29 on Tuesday, December 24, warplanes, which we believe were Russian, fired two missiles, one of which hit a random IDP camp (consisting of approximately 25 tents), in the southern outskirts of Joubas village, south of Saraqeb city in the eastern suburbs of Idlib governorate, while the second missile hit the preparatory school adjacent to the camp, [which resulted in the deaths of 10 civilians](#), most of whom were from [one family](#), including [five children](#) (three males and two females) and [four women](#) (adult female), in addition to destroying [five tents](#). The bombing also destroyed part of the school perimeter wall, and caused significant [material damage](#) to the school cladding materials and [furniture](#). Joubas village was under the joint control of factions of the Armed Opposition and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.

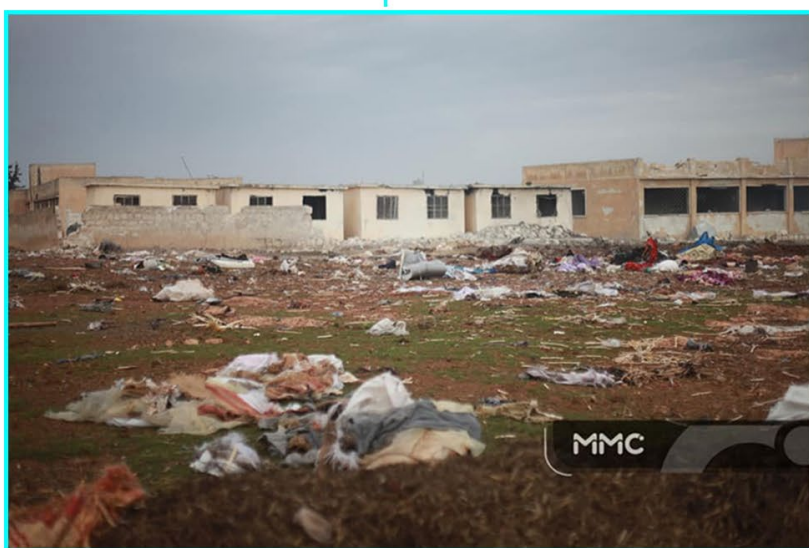
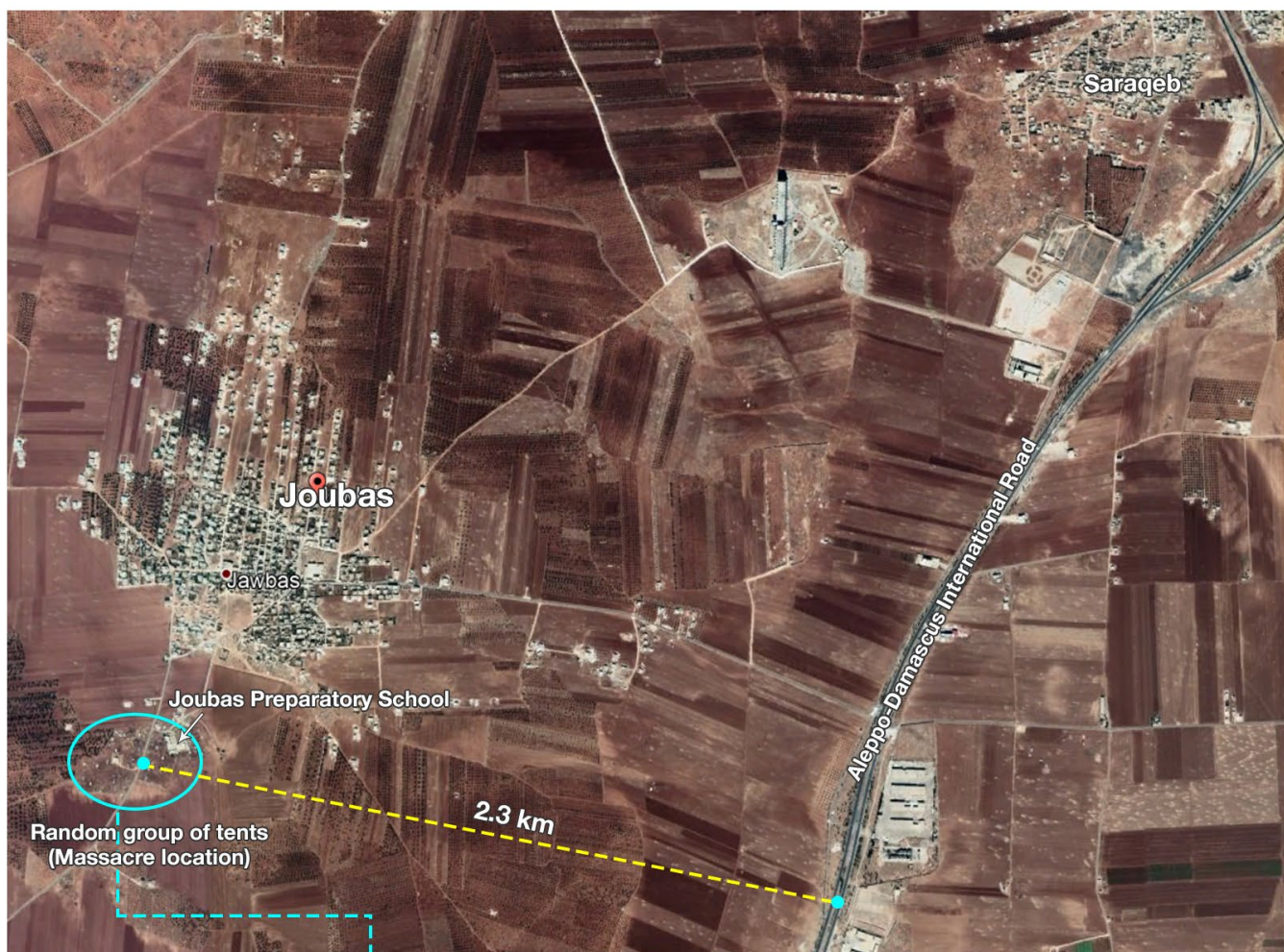
We note that this random camp is located about 2.3 km from Damascus-Aleppo M5 International Road within the area covered by the humanitarian truce, which OCHA circulated to local organizations to facilitate the exit of civilians from the area.

Victims' names:



Map showing the location of the massacre committed by Russian forces in Joubas village in the eastern suburbs of Idlib governorate on December 24, 2019:

Location of a Russian air attack on a random camp in Joubas village in the eastern suburbs of Idlib, resulting in a massacre – December 24, 2019



SNHR contacted Hussein Absi al Qaddour³, who is in charge of managing the local council in Joubas village. He told us that he was in his home, located about 800 meters from the site of the massacre, at the time of the attack: **“Suddenly I heard a very violent explosion, which blew out my house’s windows. We initially thought that the site of the bombing was very close, but it became clear to us later that it was near the preparatory school. I arrived at the place after the martyrs and the injured had been transferred to the Odai Abu Hussein Hospital, and I saw five tents completely destroyed, in addition to some torn tents.”**

We spoke to Asaad Haj Na’san⁴, a local activist from Joubas village, who said: **“While I was in the village that morning, the observatories circulated reports about Russian war-planes flying in the sky, then circulated news of them conducting a raid on the Dadikh Road in the southwestern outskirts of the village; I estimated immediately that the raid was in the area of the preparatory school and the camp adjacent to it. I went directly to the place where the Civil Defense teams were evacuating the martyrs and the injured.”** Asaad added, **“An old woman who was there told me that the bombing killed a whole family, many of whose members were children and women; I saw the hole caused by the missile impact and the great damage to the tents due to the bombing.”** Asaad told us that the camp residents were preparing to leave when the massacre occurred.



Video showing the site of the massacre committed by Russian forces in Joubas, Idlib - December 24, 2019 - Media activist Mohammad Bal'as

³ Via WhatsApp on December 25, 2019

⁴ Via WhatsApp on December 25, 2019

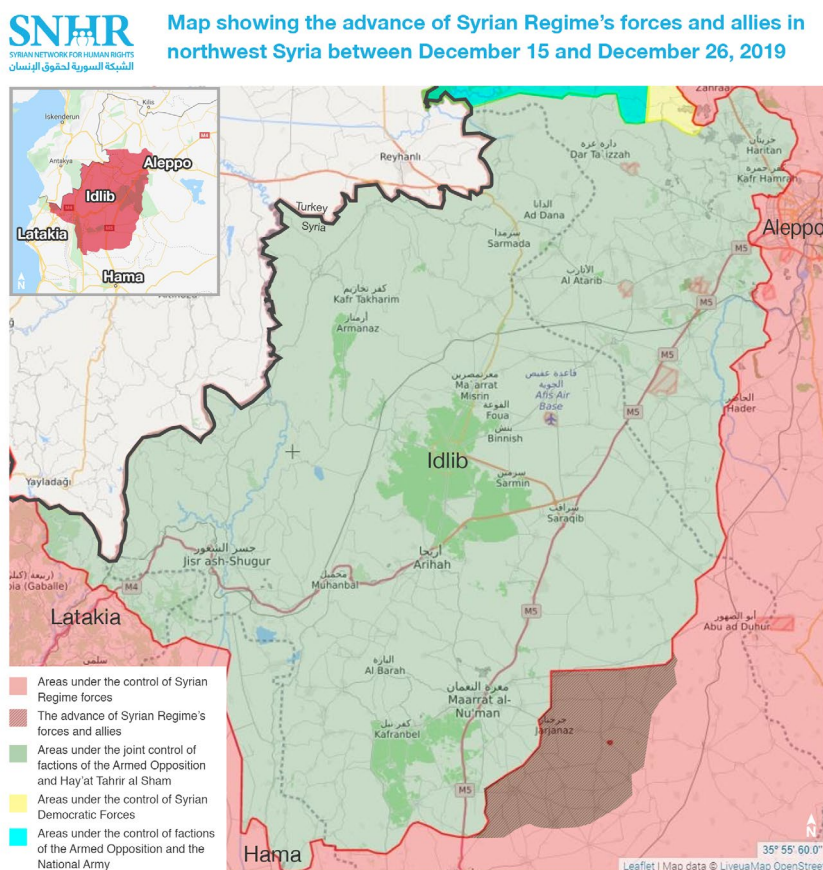


Ibrahim Asaad Arsan⁵, from Joubas village, whom SNHR spoke with, said that he was outside the village at the time of the attack, and arrived at the site half an hour afterwards: **“When I arrived at the site, I saw the impact site of one of the missiles among the tents - about 20 meters from the school - which destroyed six tents and burned some of them, while the second missile hit the school perimeter wall; I knew all the martyrs personally. The rest of the camp residents were gathering what remained of their possessions to be transported to another place.”**

Ibrahim confirmed that the area was free of any military presence, and that Russian war-planes had carried out the raid, according to the observatories transmissions via their walkie-talkies.

VI. Map Showing the Advance of the Syrian Regime's Forces and Allies from December 15 to December 26, 2019

The intensification of the military campaign on the eastern and southern suburbs of Idlib since December 15 was accompanied by a military advance on the ground by Syrian regime's forces and allies; up to the publication of this report, they have taken control of at least 30 villages and towns, the most prominent of which is Jarjanaz town, with regime forces now advancing to within a few kilometers of Ma'aret al Numan city; the area these forces have taken control of has thus expanded to around 10 percent of the total area under the joint control of factions of the opposition and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham, as the following map shows:



VII. The Most Notable Violations Committed by Russian-Syrian Alliance Forces as a Result of Their Recent Military Campaign in Northwest Syria

A: Extrajudicial Killing:

- Syrian Regime forces:

On Tuesday, December 17, 2019, at around 11:30, fixed-wing (Su-22) Syrian regime war-planes fired missiles at the main market in the middle of [Ma'saran](#) village in the eastern suburbs of Idlib governorate, [resulting](#) in [the deaths](#) of five civilians [at once](#), and injuring others, in addition to inflicting varying level of destruction [on a number](#) of [shops](#), and causing [extensive material damage](#) to the [market facilities](#). We further note that artillery shelling by the same forces targeted the village immediately after the air attack, resulting in the deaths of two more civilians, one of them a woman. Ma'saran village was under the joint control of factions of the Armed Opposition and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.

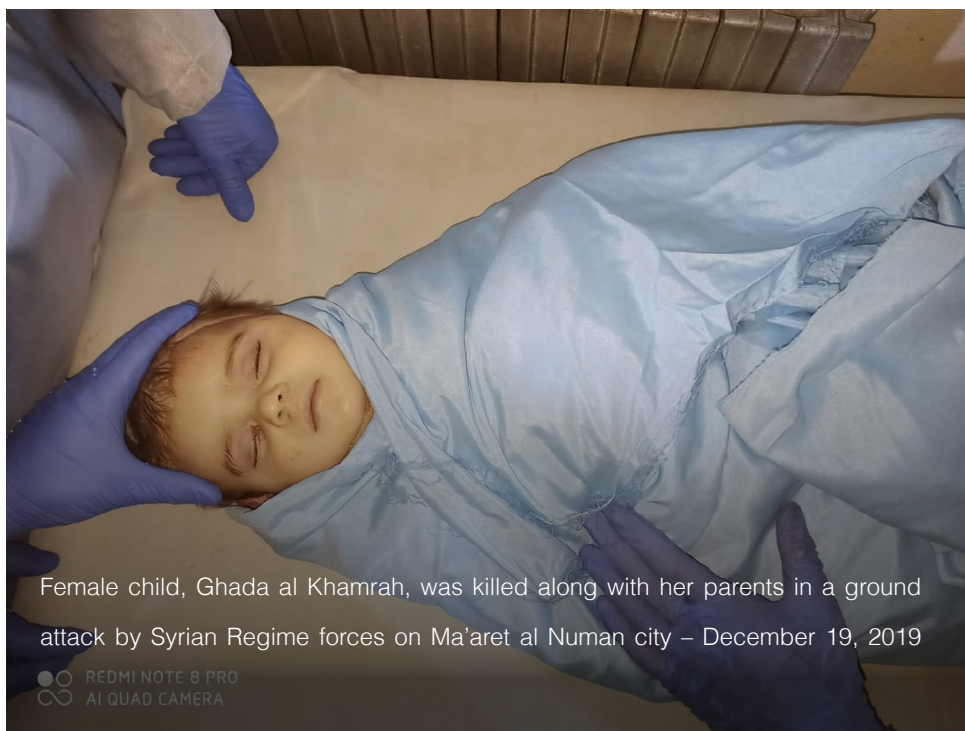
On Tuesday, December 17, 2019, at around 15:45, fixed-wing (Su-22) Syrian regime war-planes fired a number of missiles at Zahret Talmennes area in [Talmennes](#) town in the eastern suburbs of Idlib governorate, [resulting](#) in [the deaths](#) of [seven civilians at once](#), most of whom were from one family, including three children (one male and two females), and two women. 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.



Victims killed in a massacre committed by Syrian Regime forces in Talmennes town, Idlib
– December 17, 2019



On the evening of Thursday, December 19, 2019, Syrian Regime forces used a missile launcher to heavily bomb Ma'aret al Numan city in the southern suburbs of Idlib governorate, with one of the missiles hitting a house, resulting in the [deaths of five civilians](#), most of whom were members of one family, including one female child and two women. Another of the missiles targeted the Hasan Kamel School for Basic Education - supported by Syria Relief - partially destroying the school building, and causing moderate material damage to its furniture, while another missile fell in the center of the yard of [al Kabir Archaeological Mosque](#), located in the middle of Ma'aret al Numan, [causing partial destruction to the yard](#), and inflicting moderate material damage to the mosque furniture. We note that the Syrian regime's air and ground attacks on Ma'aret al Numan city and its outskirts on the same day also resulted in the deaths of three other civilians, including one female child and one woman, in addition to causing damage to two centers belonging to civil society organizations. 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.



Female child, Ghada al Khamrah, was killed along with her parents in a ground attack by Syrian Regime forces on Ma'aret al Numan city – December 19, 2019

●○ REDMI NOTE 8 PRO
∞ AI QUAD CAMERA

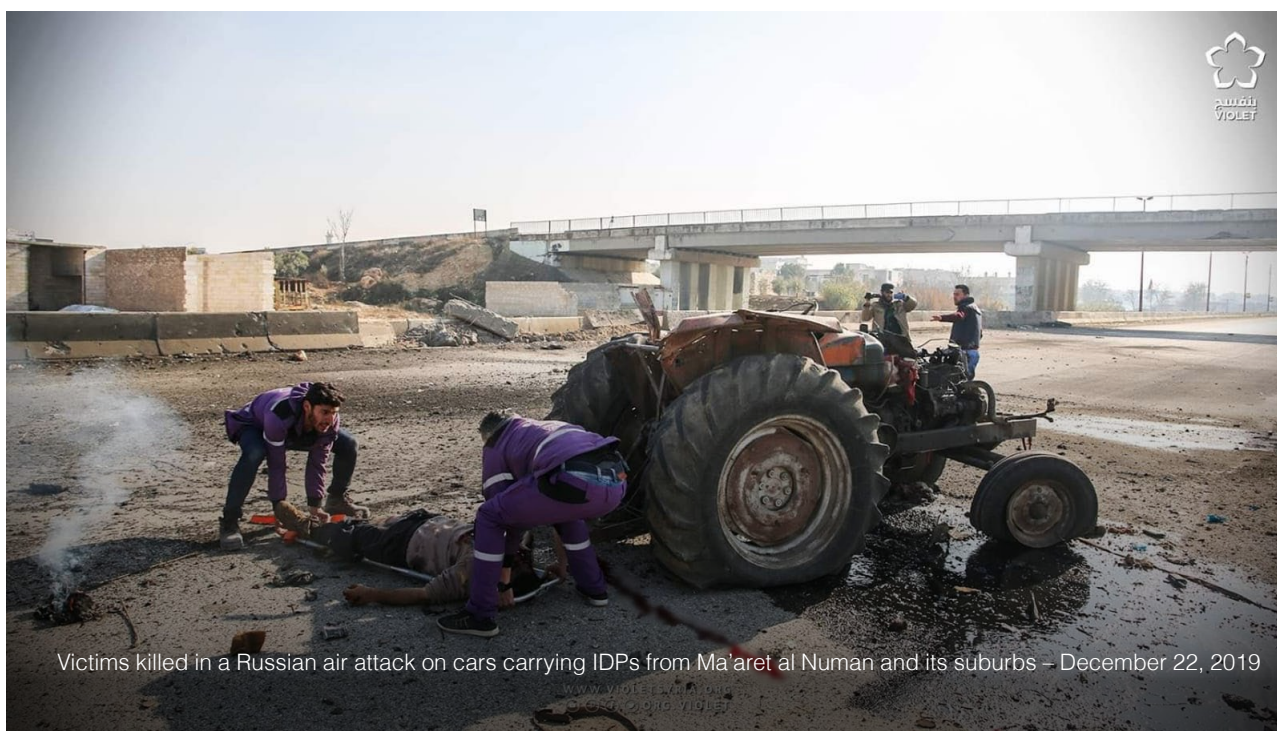
- Russian forces:

On Monday, December 16, 2019, at around 12:30, fixed-wing warplanes, which we believe were Russian, fired missiles at homes in Ma'ar Shamarin village, which is administratively a part of Ma'aret al Numan city in the eastern suburbs of Idlib governorate, resulting in the deaths of three civilians from one family (one female child and two women), and injuring several other civilians. The village was under the joint control of factions of the Armed Opposition and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.



On Saturday, December 21, 2019, fixed-wing warplanes, which we believe were Russian, fired missiles at a house in [al Deir al Sharqi](#) village in the eastern suburbs of Idlib governorate, resulting in [the deaths](#) of [one civilian](#) and [his wife](#), in addition to completely destroying the house. The village was under the joint control of factions of the Armed Opposition and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.

On Sunday, December 22, 2019, fixed-wing warplanes, which we believe were Russian, fired missiles at cars and vehicles in which IDPs were traveling on the M5 International Road, north of Ma'aret al Numan city in the southern suburbs of Idlib governorate, resulting in [the deaths](#) of [four civilians](#), including a father and his two sons, and injuring others. We note that the same warplanes also bombed an assembly point where internally displaced residents of Ma'aret al Numan and the surrounding villages awaiting for their evacuation to safer areas had gathered in Ma'aret al Numan city, injuring a number of the people there. 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.



Victims killed in a Russian air attack on cars carrying IDPs from Ma'aret al Numan and its suburbs – December 22, 2019



On Sunday, December 22, 2019, fixed-wing warplanes, which we believe were Russian, fired missiles at a farm located on the outskirts of Ma'saran village in the eastern suburbs of Idlib governorate, resulting in the deaths of five civilians from one family. 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.

B: Incidents of Attack on Vital Civilian Facilities:

- Syrian Regime forces:

On Monday, December 16, 2019, at around 17:30, Syrian regime helicopters dropped a barrel bomb on the [Ma'ar Shoreen School](#) for boys in Ma'ar Shoreen village in the eastern suburbs of Idlib governorate. The barrel fell in the middle of the schoolyard, partially destroying the school building, and causing severe [material damage](#) to its furniture. Ma'ar Shoreen village 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, December 17, 2019, at around 09:45, Syrian regime helicopters dropped a cylinder bomb on the Martyr Myassar [al Hamdou Hospital](#) in al Ghadafa village in the eastern suburbs of Idlib governorate. The cylinder fell on the hospital perimeter wall, partially destroying both the building and wall. We note that the hospital suffered several attacks previously, putting it out of service more than 20 days previously as a result of the ongoing attacks by Syrian-Russian alliance forces on the area since April 26, 2019. Al Ghadafa village 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, December 17, 2019, at around 12:00, fixed-wing Syrian regime warplanes fired missiles at al Sayyedah Fatima Prayer Place in Ma'ar Shamarin village in the eastern suburbs of Idlib governorate, [completely destroying](#) the [mosque building](#) and putting it out of service. Ma'ar Shamarin village was under the joint control of factions of the Armed Opposition and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident





Photo showing al Sayyedah Fatima Prayer Place in Ma'ar Shamarin village before and after being subjected to a Syrian air attack – December 17, 2019

On Wednesday, December 18, 2019, Syrian regime helicopters dropped a number of barrel bombs on Talmennes town in the eastern suburbs of Idlib governorate, with shrapnel from one of the bombs injuring two media activists who were covering the shelling. One of the barrel bombs fell on the popular market in the middle of the town, causing significant destruction to a number of shops and market facilities, and the other fell on the [Hassan Bin Thabet Mosque](#), [partially destroying](#) the [mosque building](#), and [inflicting severe](#) material damage to its furniture. Talmennes town was under the joint control of factions of the Armed Opposition and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident

On Friday, December 20, 2019, at around 10:30, fixed-wing (Su-22) Syrian regime warplanes fired missiles at the al [Eman Mosque](#) in Ma'ar Shoreen village in the eastern suburbs of Idlib governorate, [partially destroying](#) the mosque building, and [inflicting severe](#) material damage to its furniture. Ma'ar Shoreen village was under the joint control of factions of the Armed Opposition and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident

- Russian forces:

On Saturday, December 21, 2019, fixed-wing warplanes, which we believe were Russian, fired missiles at Talmennes town in the eastern suburbs of Idlib governorate, some of which hit a feed factory, resulting in the deaths of three civilian factory workers, in addition to causing partial destruction to the factory building. After a team of Civil Defense rescue workers arrived in the area and while they were removing the victims' bodies and evacuating the wounded, the same warplanes returned and repeated their bombardment on the same area without inflicting any injuries, as several missiles targeted the [Abu Bakr al Siddiq Mosque](#), [partially destroying](#) the mosque building, and causing moderate material damage to its furniture. Talmennes town was under the joint control of factions of the Armed Opposition and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident



VIII. Legal Profile and Recommendations

- Syrian and Russian forces violated several rules of international humanitarian law, primarily by failing to discriminate between civilians and combatants or between civilian and military targets, instead bombing hospitals, schools, centers and civilian neighborhoods, with these violations amount to war crimes.
- Launching a deliberate attack on medical personnel in the context of a non-international armed conflict is a war crime punishable under international humanitarian law and international criminal law (Articles 8 (2) (b), 24, 8 (2) (e) (2) of the Statute of the International Criminal Court), and we believe that Russian and Syrian forces deliberately targeted medical personnel in a number of attacks.
- Displacement or forced displacement is a war crime in non-international armed conflicts when committed as part of a deliberate or widespread attack against the civilian population (Articles 8 (2) (b) (7) and 8 (2) (e) (8) of the Statute of the International Criminal Court), and may also be considered crimes against humanity (Articles 7 (1) (d) of the Statute of the International Criminal Court).
- The Syrian-Russian alliance forces have violated the de-escalation zone agreement in all regions, including the Idlib region, and repeatedly violated the Sochi Agreement signed in September 2018.
- Syrian Regime forces have explicitly violated the Sochi Agreement by carrying out artillery bombardment of a number of villages and towns in northwest Syria. These attacks have resulted in civilian casualties.
- The Syrian Regime forces and Shiite militias violated the Sochi agreement by attacking factions of the Armed Opposition and killing a number of their members.
- The Syrian Regime forces have practiced the crime of displacement in a systematic, widespread and organized manner against the civilian population. This constitutes a flagrant violation of the Geneva Conventions and amounts to a crime against humanity under Article VII of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. We have not recorded any measures by these forces to provide shelter, health care or food to the displaced civilians.
- The report issued by the delegates to the 2005 Summit states unanimously that each country had a responsibility to protect its population from crimes against humanity and war crimes. This responsibility entails the prevention of such crimes, the prevention of incitement to commit them by all possible means, and when the state clearly fails to protect its population from egregious crimes, or itself is committing such crimes as in the case of the Syrian regime, means that it is the responsibility of the international community to intervene to take protective measures in a collective, decisive and timely manner.



Recommendations:

The United Nations special envoy to Syria

- Condemn the perpetrators of crimes and massacres, and those who are primarily responsible for obstructing the political process.
- Re-sequence the peace process so that it can resume its natural course after Russia's attempts to divert and distort it, empowering the Constitutional Committee prior to the establishment of a transitional governing body.
- Request that the Syrian regime and its Russian ally stop all violations and secure good faith measures by stopping the bombing and at least disclosing the fate of the forcibly disappeared persons.

UN Security Council:

- The Security Council must pass a resolution to stabilize the ceasefire in Idlib and include punitive measures for all violators of the ceasefire.
- Provide genuine support for serious implementation of the peace process in Syria and for achieving a just political transition that guarantees security and stability.
- The Syrian issue must be referred to the International Criminal Court and all those involved, including the Russian regime, must be held accountable, having been implicated in committing war crimes.
- Ensure the establishment of peace and security and the implementation of the principle of the Responsibility to Protect civilians and save Syrians' lives, heritage and cultural artefacts from destruction, pillage and vandalism.
- The UN Security Council must pass a resolution concerning some seven million internally displaced persons in Syria that addresses forced displacement, to ensure that this does not become a long-term crisis, and must put pressure on the Syrian regime to end displacements, and enact laws aimed at preventing the plunder of displaced persons' properties and possessions.

The UN Secretary-General:

- Should clearly identify perpetrators of violations and contribute to condemning their actions, disclosing their practices, sending a message of solidarity to the affected communities. Meanwhile, ignoring any mention of the perpetrators of apparent violations encourages them to commit more violations and repeat them.
- Should request that the Security Council take urgent action, and hold an emergency meeting to ensure a ceasefire and to protect tens of thousands of displaced civilians.



International Community:

- In light of the split within the Security Council and its utter inability, action should be taken at the national and regional levels to form alliances to support the Syrian people that can protect them from the daily killings and siege and increase support for relief efforts. Additionally, the principle of universal jurisdiction should be applied in local courts regarding these crimes in order to conduct fair trials for all those who were involved.
- The SNHR has repeatedly called for the implementation of the 'Responsibility to Protect' principle in dozens of studies and reports and as a member of the International Coalition for the Responsibility to Protect (ICRtoP) after exhausting all political channels from the Arab League's plan, then Mr. Kofi Annan's plan proved fruitless. Therefore, the steps recommended under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations should be adopted 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 pressure on the Security Council to refer the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court
- Work to fulfil justice and achieve accountability in Syria through the United Nations General Assembly and the Human Rights Council and to implement the principle of universal jurisdiction.
- The countries that support the parties to the conflict in Syria, especially Russia, must put pressure on their allies on the ground to ensure the neutrality of the Idlib area from combat operations, and protect the lives of at least three million people living there.

UN General Assembly

- Must attribute full responsibility to the Syrian regime for the displacement of one-third of the Syrian people, including legal and material responsibility, and must also ensure that victims receive full compensation for the heavy losses they have suffered, including the return of looted properties to their owners.

OHCHR

- The OHCHR should submit a report to the Human Rights Council and other organs of the United Nations concerning the violations committed by the Syrian-Russian alliance forces, and should condemn the violations taking place in northwest Syria and clearly identify the perpetrators of the violations.



Donor countries and OCHA

- The international community and donor countries must ensure basic living conditions, pay attention to the needs of and help provide care for thousands of displaced Syrians who are displaced in the north-western Idlib suburbs, with the most pressing basic needs, primarily water, food, housing, clothing and medical care.

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.
- Clearly identify those responsible for the attacks in the event that results reached are likely, especially Russian forces; the reports of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic are virtually devoid of any attribution of responsibility for air strikes, with the exception of only one case in three years of Russian intervention in Syria.

The Syrian regime

- Stop violating the Syrian constitution by killing Syrian citizens, destroying their homes and disappearing and torturing tens of thousands of them.
- Stop indiscriminate shelling and targeting of residential areas, hospitals, schools and markets, and end the use of internationally outlawed weapons and barrel bombs.
- End the acts of torture that have caused the deaths of thousands of Syrian citizens in detention centers.
- Ensure compliance with UN Security Council resolutions, customary humanitarian law and the Syrian constitution and law.

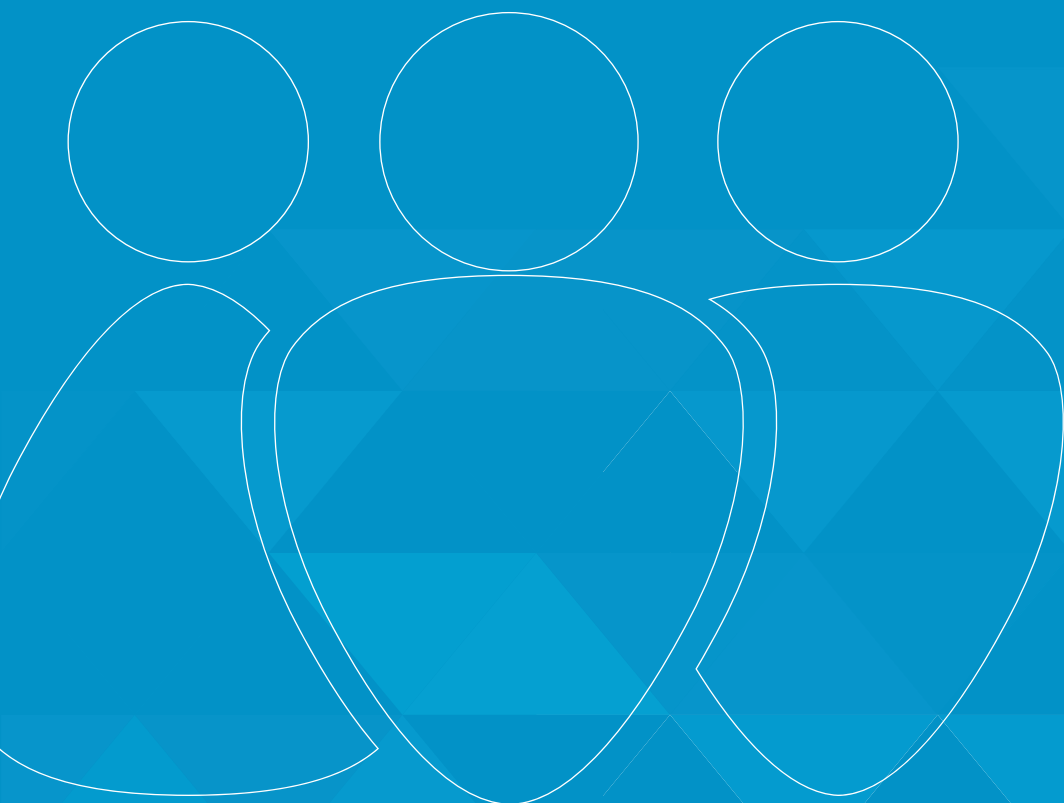
The Russian regime

- Launch investigations into the incidents included in this report, make the findings of these investigations public for the Syrian people, and hold the 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.

Acknowledgment and Condolences

We offer our sincere condolences and gratitude to all local people and activists, whose contributions have enriched this report.





@snhr



Info@sn4hr.org

www.sn4hr.org

