

Four Medical Personnel Killed, and Six Incidents of Attack on Vital Medical and Civil Defense Facilities in October 2017

Syrian Regime Forces Top all other
Parties in Terms of Violations against
Medical Personnel

SNHR

SYRIAN NETWORK FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

الشبكة السورية لحقوق الإنسان

Tuesday, November 7, 2017

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

The constant 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 areas for the de-escalation in 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 a special 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.

In addition, there have been a number of other local agreements in July and August 2017, such as Eastern Ghouta agreement between armed opposition factions, on one side, and officials from the Russian side, while a similar agreement was struck with the opposition in northern suburbs of Homs. However, the texts of these agreements haven't been made public on Russian government's websites, and the same for armed opposition factions who didn't publicize these agreements, except for Failaq al Rahman who published the [text of the agreement](#) on their official website. At the end of the agreement, according to the copy on Failaq al Rahman's website, a signature by a Russian sponsor was shown but without an explicit name, which was a grave mistake, as apparently all of this helps the sponsoring Russian side to easily dissolve from these agreements with no subsequent political or legal obligations and repercussions.

On Saturday, July 22, 2017, Russian Ministry of Defense announced that a de-escalation agreement has been signed in Eastern Ghouta following a round of talks between Russian military officials, on one side, and Jaish al Islam faction, on the other side, in Egypt's capital Cairo. The agreement was to come into effect at 12:00 of the same day. On Wednesday, August 16, 2017, a Failaq al Rahman representative and a Russian representative signed an agreement in Geneva city that established Failaq al Rahman's inclusion in the de-escalation zone in Eastern Ghouta. The agreement was to come into effect at 21:00 of Friday, August 18, 2017.



On Monday, July 31, 2017, another de-escalation agreement was signed in Egypt's capital Cairo for northern Homs suburbs and southern Hama suburbs following a round of talks between armed opposition factions in the area and the Syrian regime represented by the Russian government as a sponsoring party, as the agreement was to commence at 12:00 on Thursday, August 3, 2017. Following the agreement's commencement, two meetings were held between a committee representing the military and civilian activities in northern suburbs of Homs and southern suburbs of Hama, on one side, and a Russian representative, on the other side, in a tent that was built for the meeting in a neutral area - near the al Dar al Kabira crossing in al Dar al Kabira village, northern suburbs of Homs governorate. The meeting was held to further discuss the provisions of Cairo's de-escalation agreement, as some armed opposition factions weren't fully in agreement with the de-escalation.

Most notably, the two most recent agreements provided for a full cessation of hostilities between the conflicting parties in the relevant areas -with the exclusion of the areas in which ISIS and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham are present- and for humanitarian aids to enter these areas and for detainees to be released as per the demands of each party as to which detainees are to be released.

Since the agreements' commencement in the included areas, we have noticed a relatively good drop in the rates of killing in relation to the past 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 -especially the guarantors- won't see are still going on as nothing had changed.

With the end of the sixth round of talks in the Kazakhstani capital, Astana, which were held over the course of two days (September 14-15, 2017), a de-escalation zone was [established](#) in Idlib governorate and the surrounding areas, as military forces were to be deployed (Russian, Turkish, and Iranian) to monitor the agreement, with the passage of humanitarian aids.

On September 19, Syrian-Russian alliance started a heavy offensive against Idlib governorate in response to Hay'at Tahrir al Sham's "Ya Ebadallah Uthbotou" battle. Supported by some opposition faction (The Islamic Turkistani Party, Jaish al Izza, and Jaish al Nukhba), Hay'at Tahrir al Sham started this battle in northeastern Hama governorate, as they took over some villages, but Syrian regime forces, backed by Russian forces, managed to re-seize the same



areas on the same day. We have released [a report](#) documenting the most notable violations of the first week of that offensive. Subsequently, these forces expanded the offensive to include the suburbs of Aleppo and Hama governorates and Eastern Ghouta in Damascus suburbs.

On October 8, 2017, Jaish al Islam, Aknaf Bait al Maqdis, and Jaish al Ababil (armed opposition factions) signed an agreement with a Russian Ministry of Defense representative in the Egyptian capital Cairo. The agreement stated that southern Damascus city would be added to the de-escalation zones, as [the agreement](#) was to come into force at 12:00 of October 12, 2017. The agreement provided for a ceasefire in the area, and ensured that the area residents would not be displaced, in addition to the passage of humanitarian aids to the area.

The Kazakhstani Minister of Foreign Affairs read the final statement of the guarantor states (Russia, Turkey, Iran) at the conclusion of the final session of Astana talks' round 7 that were held on 30th and 31st of October 2017. The guarantor states called on the parties to the conflict in Syria to take steps towards building trust, including releasing detainees and forcibly-disappeared persons, delivering dead bodies, and ensure the passage of humanitarian aids into besieged areas.

We recorded a notable decrease in the rate of violations against medical personnel and their facilities that hasn't been recorded since last July.

Methodology

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.



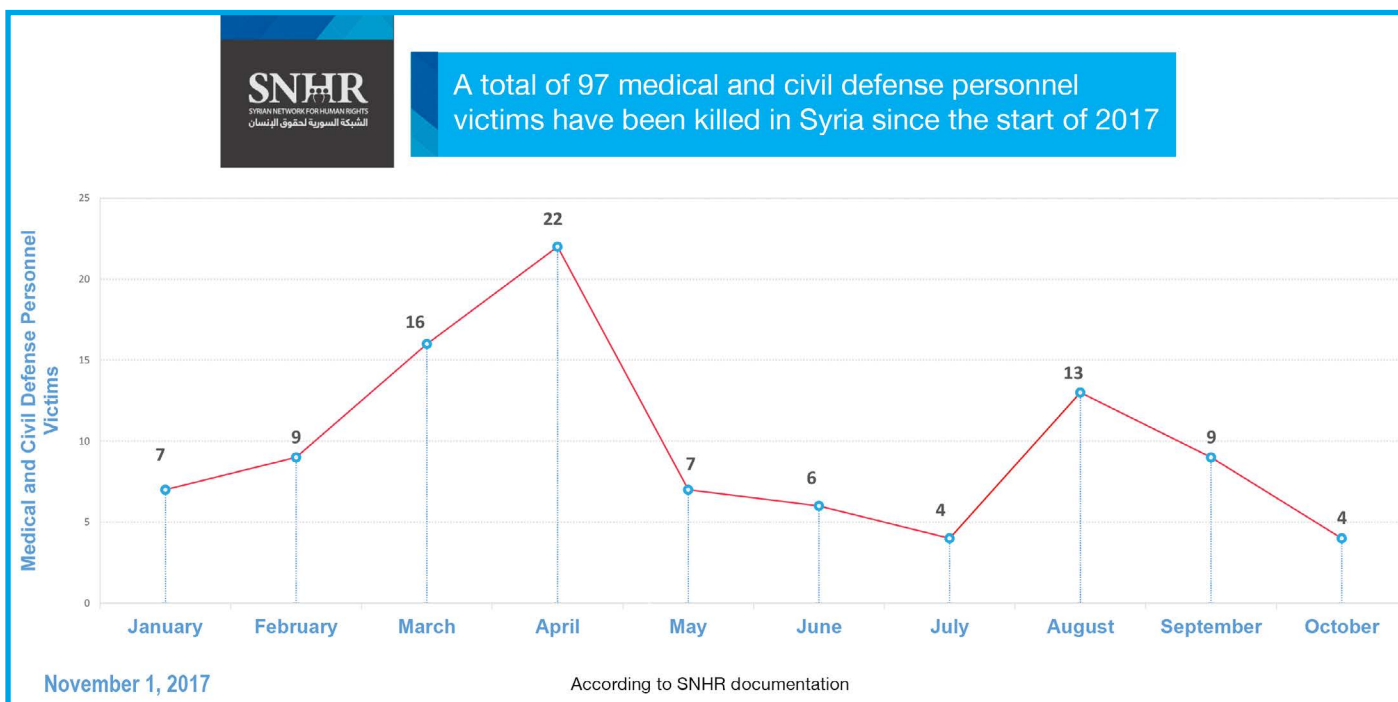
Please see the methodology adopted by SNHR in [victim documentation](#) and [classifying civilian vital facilities](#)

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 since the start 2017

SNHR has documented the killing of 97 medical personnel and civil defense personnel at the hands of the parties to the conflict in Syria between the start of 2017 and November of the same year.



B. Toll of Violations in October 2017

SNHR has documented in the month of October 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 personnel





As follows:

- Syrian regime forces (army, security, local militias, Shiite foreign militias): 1 paramedic
- Russian forces: 1 pharmacist
- Armed opposition factions: 1 doctor
- International coalition forces: 1 pharmacist

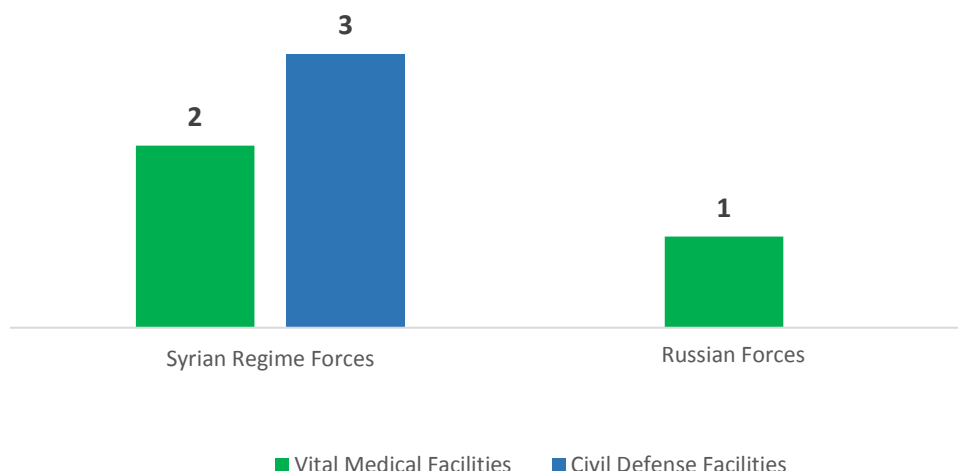
- Targeting vital medical and civil defense facilities

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

- Syrian regime forces (army, security, local militias, Shiite foreign militias): 5 incidents of attack, as follows:
 - Two medical facilities
 - Three civil defense facilities
- Russian forces: One medical facility



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



III. Details

A. Acts of killing

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

Alaa Mohamad al Shawwaf, [paramedic](#), works for al Sakhour Dispensary, eastern Aleppo city, from al Bab city, eastern suburbs of Aleppo governorate, 26-year-old, has a degree in communication engineering, married. He was arrested by Syrian regime forces in December 2016 at a checkpoint in Jibreen neighborhood, eastern Aleppo city. On Thursday, October 19, 2017, we received information that he died due to torture in December 2016 at a detention center.

- Russian forces

Ass'ad Gharbi al Suliman, [pharmacist](#), from al Mayadeen city, eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate, born in 1975, married and a father of five. He was killed on Wednesday, October 4, 2017, in a bombing by fixed-wing warplanes we believe were Russian that targeted the water-crossing between al Ashara city and Darnej village in al Ashara city, eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate.



- Armed opposition factions

Rami Khaled Najib al Zheili, [doctor](#), specializes in cardiac and vascular diseases, from Deir Attya city, northern suburbs of Damascus suburbs governorate. He was killed on Sunday, October 15, 2017, around 13:00 by a mortar shell that landed in al Qashla Street in Bab Touma neighborhood, southern Damascus city. We believe that shell was fired from an artillery stationed in an area under the control of armed opposition factions.



- International coalition forces

Alaa Hasan Allawi al Hammam, pharmacist, from al Dar'iya neighborhood, northeastern Raqqa city, born in 1978, has a degree in pharmacy from an Ukrainian university, and continued his studies, specializing in medical laboratories studies. He was killed on Tuesday, October 3, 2017, in a bombing by fixed-wing international coalition forces warplanes that fired missiles at al Badou area in northwestern Raqqa city.



B. Targeting vital medical and civil defense facilities

We are going to shed light on the most notable attacks on vital medical and civil defense facilities

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

Vital medical facilities

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

Friday, October 6, 2017, around 12:00, fixed-wing Syria regime forces warplanes fired a missile near [Shefa Medical Institution](#) – contains clinics, [medical laboratories](#), and a pharmacy- in Douma city, Eastern Ghouta, eastern Damascus suburbs governorate. The building was [partially destroyed](#) and its [cladding materials](#) and [medical equipment](#) were heavily damaged, as it was rendered out of commission. The city was under the control of armed opposition factions at the time of the incident.



Damages in the aftermath of a bombing by Syrian regime forces on Shefa Medical Institution in Douma, Damascus suburbs – October 6, 2017

Civil defense facilities

Saturday noon, October 7, 2017, Syrian regime forces artillery fired a mortar shell near an ambulance belonging to center 90, affiliated to the civil defense, on the outskirts of [Madyara](#) village, Eastern Ghouta, eastern Damascus suburbs governorate, as the ambulance team were tending to the wounded from a previous shelling. The bombing wounded a civil defense member. In addition, the ambulance structure was [moderately damaged](#). The village was under the control of armed opposition factions at the time of the incident.





Damages in the aftermath of a bombing by Syrian regime forces on a civil defense ambulance in Madyara village, Damascus suburbs – October 7, 2017

- Russian forces

Vital medical facilities

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

Monday, October 2, 2017, fixed-wing warplanes we believe were Russian fired a number of missiles at a warehouse for a vaccination center in [al Mayadeen](#) city, eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate. The warehouse was heavily destroyed, as it was rendered out of commission. In addition, MMRs and Polio P.O.'s were ruined. The city was under the control of ISIS at the time of the incident.

SNHR contacted doctor Emad al Mustafa, from Buqrus town, eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate, via Facebook. Doctor Emad is the founder of the vaccination campaign in Deir Ez-Zour. His account is as follows:

“The vaccines that were in the warehouse, in al Mayadeen city, were pentavalent vaccines, BCGs, hepatitis vaccines, Polio I.M.'s, and Polio P.O.'s The BCGs, hepatitis vaccines, and Polio I.M.'s were distributed among the vacation centers in the rest of the villages and towns in Deir Ez-Zour suburbs before the warehouse was bombed by Russian warplanes. The bombing, however, destroyed the center and ruined the MMRs, as well as over 170,000 Polio P.O.'s.”



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, international coalition forces, and some armed opposition factions 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.

The Russian guarantor

- The Syrian regime has to be stopped from dooming the de-escalation agreements. Otherwise, it will only be seen as an exchange of roles between the Russian regime, on one side, and the Syrian/Russian alliance on the other side.
- Start making progress in the detainees issue by revealing the fates of 76,000 forcibly-disappeared persons at the hands of the Syrian regime.

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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