

# No less than 11 Massacres in Syria in May 2018

Including 5 Massacres at the hands  
of International Coalition Forces

# SNHR

SYRIAN NETWORK FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

الشبكة السورية لحقوق الإنسان

Thursday, June 7, 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.



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### I. Introduction and Methodology

Since the popular uprising for freedom started in Syria in March 2011, SNHR has taken it upon itself to record a wide range of violations that are being perpetrated daily against the Syrian people, such as killing, enforced-disappearance, arbitrary arrest, destruction, indiscriminate bombardment, and torture as SNHR shed light on the most notable violations it recorded that were committed by the parties to the conflict in Syria in hundreds of reports.

The Syrian regime, and its militias, were the only perpetrator of violations at the start of the popular uprising, and they remain the main perpetrator, as the Syrian regime is responsible for the majority of violations. Subsequently, other parties emerged gradually such as the armed opposition, extremist Islamic groups, Democratic Union Party forces, international coalition forces, and Russian forces.

The first two years of the popular uprising saw the largest portion of ethnic and sectarian cleansing massacres, where the Syrian regime and its militias were responsible for the majority of these massacres. In mid-2013, Syrian regime forces started relying heavily on warplanes and they were also used later by international coalition forces and Russian forces. The wide use of aerial bombardment doubled the numbers of victims and caused huge destruction to the infrastructure, as one or two new massacres at least are recorded almost every day.

The Syrian regime used improvised weapons, such as barrel bombs, to bomb the areas that are out of its control while Russian forces used more deadly weapons, relying more on bunker-buster missiles, incendiary ammunitions, and cluster munitions.



Also, we have recorded in our database tens of massacres that were perpetrated by extremist Islamic groups and factions from the armed opposition. In addition, we've monitored massacres by Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) which are backed by the international coalition forces' air force, where we have recorded a significant rise in the rate of massacres perpetrated by the coalition (international coalition - SDF) since the end of 2016.

## **Methodology**

This report records the massacres perpetrated by the parties to the conflict in Syria in May that SNHR team was able to document. This report also sheds light on the most notable massacres. We have the details of the complete incidents stored in SNHR's database. The term "massacre" refers to any attack that resulted in the killing of five peaceful individuals in the same attack.

This report draws upon the ongoing monitoring of news and development by SNHR team, and on an extensive network of relations with tens of various sources that have been built over the course of our work. When we receive information, or hear some news about a violation via the internet or media outlets, we work on following 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 the limited human and material resources. 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 experienced the violation firsthand, where we try to access those directly, and, to a second degree, who saw or filmed the violation.

This report contains a number of attacks that were carried out using an air force. However, we haven't been able to accurately assign responsibility in these attacks to either Syrian regime forces or Russian forces. Therefore, we've assigned responsibility to Syrian regime/ Russian forces.

This report also contains one massacre that were the result of a bombing, but we haven't been able to accurately identify the parties responsible for them on account of the considerable difficulties in identifying the responsible groups in such bombings. This report also contains a massacre perpetrated by unknown gunmen who shot civil defense team.



This report contains two accounts that we've collected through speaking directly to eyewitnesses, and are not cited from any open sources. We have explained the purpose of these interviews for the eyewitnesses who gave us permission to use the information they provided without offering or giving them any incentives. Also, SNHR tried to spare the eyewitnesses the agony of remembering the violation as much as possible, and gave assurances to conceal the identity of any witness who preferred to use an alias.

All of the attacks included in this report have targeted civilian areas. We didn't identify any military presence or armories during the attacks or even before it. Additionally, the forces that attacked civilians didn't put out a warning prior to their attacks as the international humanitarian law requires.

SNHR has analyzed videos and pictures that were posted online, or were sent by local activists via e-mail, Skype, or social media. Some of the videos showed victims killed in attacks in which missiles were used, while most victims were children and women. Other pictures showed victims who were killed in shootings and bombings where we haven't been able to identify the groups responsible for them.

We have copies of all the pictures and videos included in this report in a secret online database and backup copies on hard drives. We always make sure to store this data with its respective source. Nonetheless, we can't claim that we have documented all cases in light of the ban and pursuit by Syrian regime forces as well as other armed groups.

Please see SNHR methodology for [documenting victims](#).

This report only represents the bare minimum of the actual magnitude and severity of the violation that occurred. It also doesn't cover the social, economic, and mental ramifications.

## II. May Outline

We've recorded a notable drop in toll of massacres in Syria for a second month in a row. May saw a number of agreements that resulted in Syrian regime forces, backed by Russia, completely seizing control of south Damascus, as well as areas in northern suburbs of Homs governorate. The residents of those areas were forcibly displaced to north Syria. In the wake of those agreements, rates of bombardments by Syrian-Russian alliance forces have notably dropped in most areas, which, in turn, reflected on the civilian death toll and massacres against civilians.

However, rates of international coalition airstrikes in the eastern region of Syria have raised in May, particularly in southern suburbs of Hasaka governorate, as international coalition forces topped all parties in terms of massacres with five massacres, in which 60 civilians were killed. Of those, 80% were children and women.

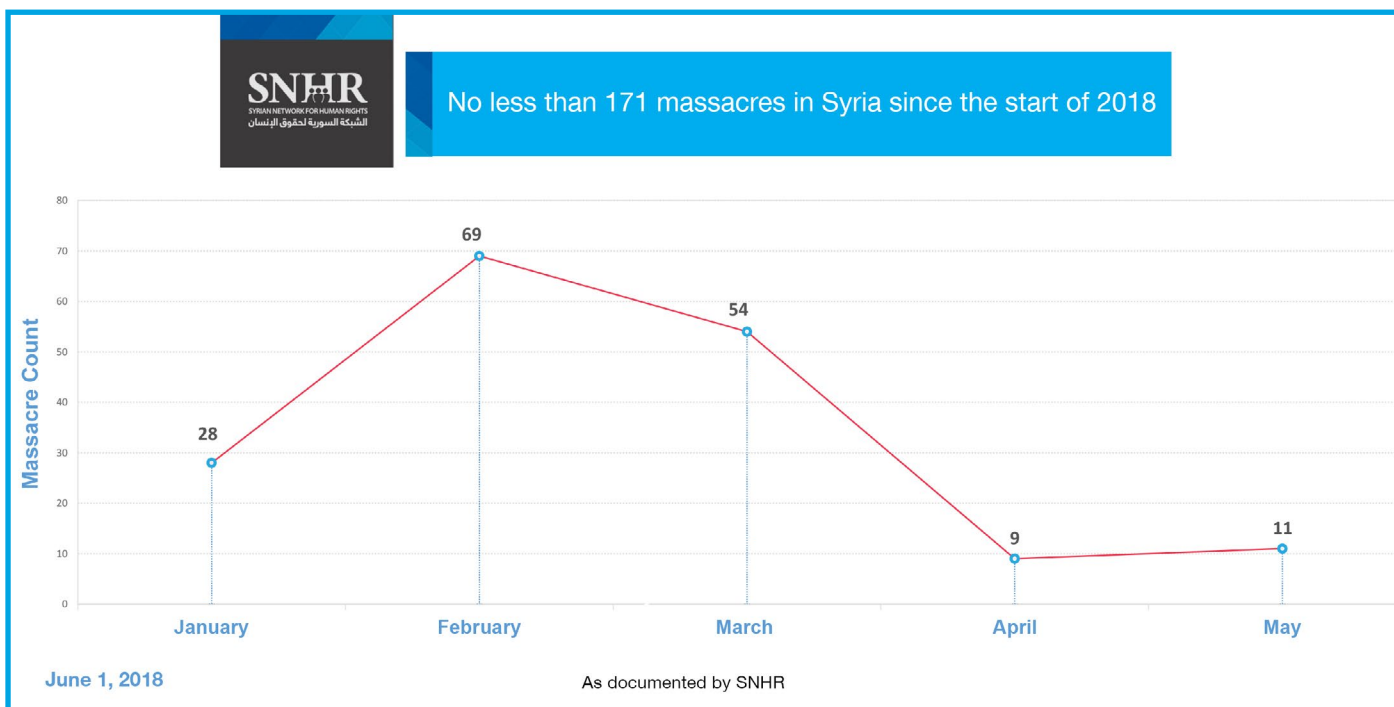


Also, we recorded a notable increase in numbers of bombings and killings by the way of gunshot in most of the areas that aren't under the control of Syrian regime forces.

### III. Executive Summary

#### A. Toll of massacres since the start of 2018

SNHR has documented 171 massacres at the hands of the parties to the conflict in Syria between the start of 2018 and June of the same year. Massacres are distributed by month as follows:

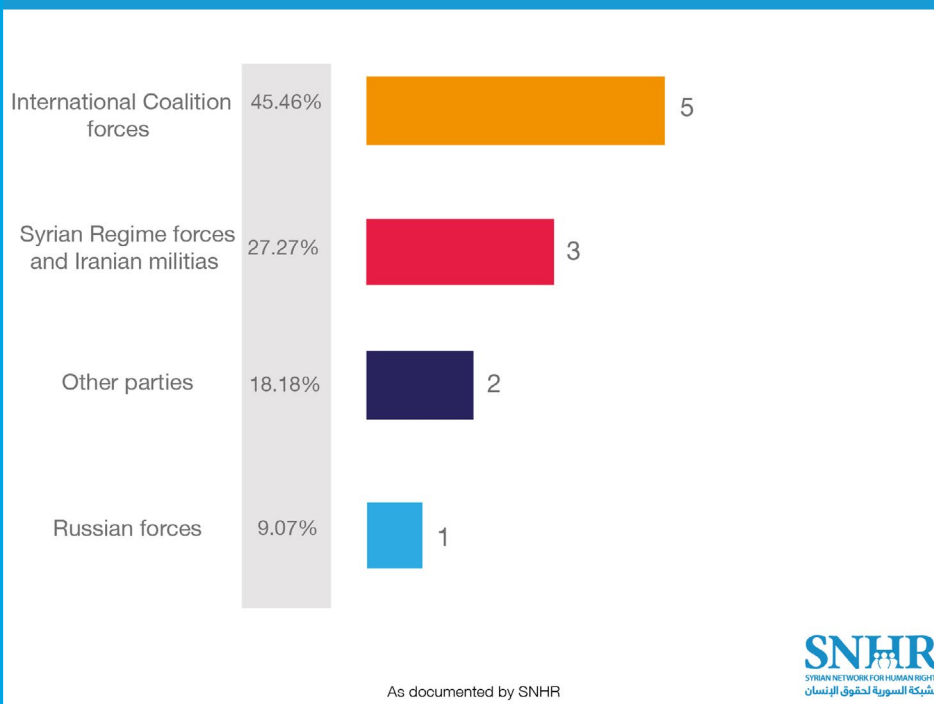


#### B. Massacres in May

SNHR has documented no less than 11 massacres in May, distributed as follows:

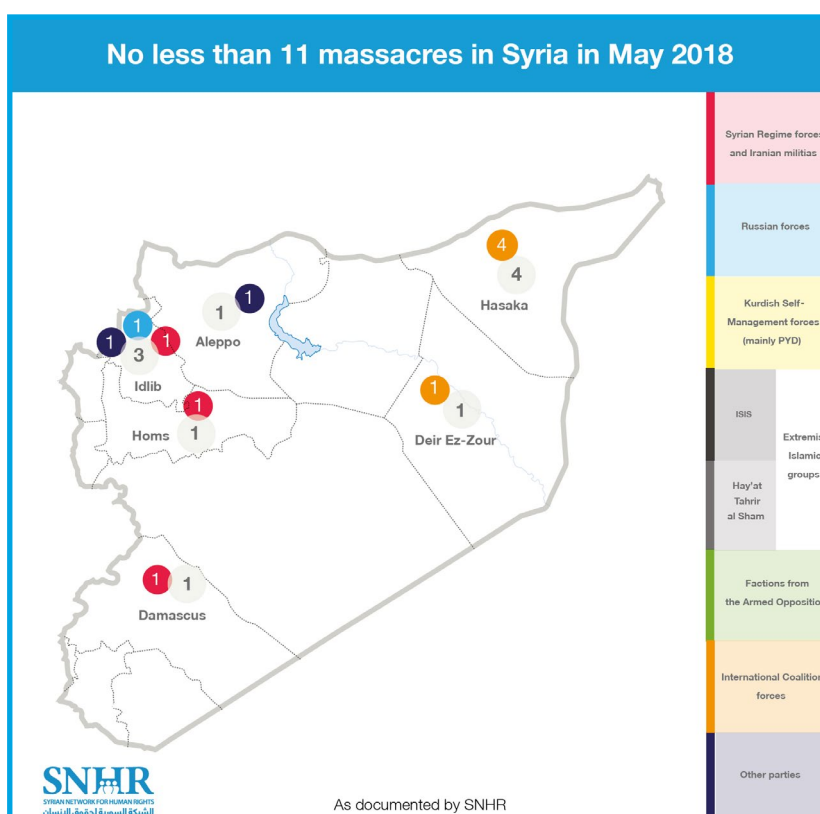


## No less than 11 massacre in Syria in May 2018



- A. Syrian regime forces (army, security, local militias, Shiite foreign militias): 3
- B. Russian forces: 1
- C. International coalition forces: 5
- D. Other parties: 2

The following map shows the distribution of May's massacres across Syrian governorates by the parties to the conflict



The massacres perpetrated by Syrian regime forces in May were distributed across areas of control as follows

- 1 massacres in areas under the control of factions from the armed opposition
- 1 massacre in an area under the control of factions from the armed opposition and Hay'at Tharir al Sham
- 1 massacre under the control of ISIS

According to the victim documentation team at SNHR, these massacres resulted in the killing of 103 civilians, including 45 children and 28 women (adult female). This means that 71% of all victims were women and children, which is a considerably high percentage, and an indication that civilian residents were targeted in most of these massacres.

Death toll of these massacres is distributed by the perpetrator party as follows:

- A. Syrian regime forces: 19 civilians, including 9 children and 6 women.
- B. Russian forces: 8 civilians (5 children and 3 women)
- C. International coalition forces: 60 civilians, including 29 children and 19 women
- D. Other parties: 16 civilians, including 2 children

#### **IV. Details of the Most Notable Massacres in May**

##### **A. Syrian regime forces (army, security, local militias, and Shiite foreign militias)**

###### **Damascus governorate**

Friday, May 18, 2018, fixed-wing Syrian regime/Russian forces warplanes (the incident is still being investigated to accurately identify the party) fired a number of missiles in parallel with a shelling by Syrian regime forces rocket launchers on a house basement, used by civilians as a bunker, in al Yarmouk Camp neighborhood, southern Damascus city. Seven civilians, who were mostly from the same family, were killed, including five children. It is worth noting that the attacks by Syrian regime/Russian forces warplanes on the neighborhood resulted in the killing of 11 civilians, including six children and three women, on that day. Al Yarmouk Camp was under the control of ISIS at the time of the incident.

###### **Hama governorate**

Wednesday, May 16, 2018, Syrian regime forces, stationing in [Jourien Camp](#), fired two shoulder-mounted rockets on [two cars transporting](#) civilians as they were passing through the public road "al Zeyara – Qal'at al Madiq" near al Mansoura village, Sahl al Ghab area, western suburbs of Hama governorate, which resulted in the killing of [six civilians](#) at once, including [one child](#), and three women. The village was under the control of armed opposition factions at the time of the incident.





Victims killed in a massacre by Syrian regime forces near al Mansoura village, Hama – May 16, 2018

## **B. Russian forces**

### **Idlib governorate**

Wednesday, May 9, 2018, fixed-wing warplanes we believe were Russian fired [one missile](#) at a bunker (a cave) in Ma'ar Zita village, southern suburbs of Idlib governorate, which resulted in the killing of [eight civilians](#) from the same family, including [five children](#) and [two women](#). The village was under the control of armed opposition factions at the time of the incident.



A child victim being pulled out in the aftermath of a massacre by Russian forces in Ma'ar Zita village, Idlib – May 2, 2018

SNHR contacted the media worker Bilal Bayyoush<sup>1</sup> from Kafranbel city who told us that a scout plane was soaring over Ma'ar Zita village and al Mughayr village when observatories announced around 19:30 that Russian warplanes took off from Hmeimim Airbase and are heading towards the area. The observatories warned that the warplanes might target the area scouted by the scout plane; **“I tracked the arrival of the Russian warplanes from**

<sup>1</sup> We contacted him via Facebook on June 5, 2018





**the rooftop of my house. Afterwards, observatories announced that an airstrike was carried out in Ma'ar Zita area, followed by a second one in the same area. The targeted site is 3 km away from my home and I recorded the attack.”** Bilal added that the first airstrike didn't cause any injuries, unlike the second one, **“I immediately headed for the site to cover the incident. I learned that the missile landed on a cave that a family took shelter in, as they were trying to protect themselves from the first airstrike. Civil defense members were digging with their hands until a bulldozer arrived. After two and half hours of work, they were able to get to the site of the victims. They pulled out a two-month-old infant, and then his mother and the rest of the family, except for a female child, as it took hours before they managed to pull her out.”**

### **C. International coalition forces**

#### **Hasaka governorate**

Tuesday, May 1, 2018, fixed-wing international coalition forces warplanes fired a number of missiles at Tal al Jayar town, southern suburbs of Hasaka governorate, which resulted in the killing of 25 civilians, including 16 children and seven women. It should be noted that the same warplanes committed another massacre on that day as they targeted the town with missiles, where eight civilians were killed (four children and four women) from the same family who were IDPs from Kafranbel city, southern suburbs of Idlib governorate. The town was under the control of ISIS at the time of the incident.

#### **Deir Ez-Zour governorate**

Thursday, May 31, 2018, fixed-wing international coalition forces warplanes fired a number of missiles at Baghouz Foqani village, eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate, which resulted in the killing of eight civilians at once, including two children. The village was under the control of ISIS at the time of the incident.

### **D. Other parties**

#### **Aleppo governorate**

Saturday, May 26, 2018, gunmen raided the civil defense's [al Hader Center](#) in Tal Hadya village, southern suburbs of Aleppo governorate. They opened fire inside the center, and killed [five civil defense member](#) at once. As of this writing, we have yet to identify the party responsible for the attack. The village was under the control of armed opposition factions at the time of the incident.





Civil defense members killed in an attack by unknown gunmen on their center in Tal Hadya village, Aleppo – May 26, 2018

Abdul Mu'ti Abeid<sup>2</sup>, head of the civil defense's Barada Center told SNHR that he was at home which is about 20 km from the incident site: **“Around 02:00, I learned from the civil defense observatory that al Hader Center was attacked by unknowns who shot the members who were on duty at the time. I rushed to the center and arrived there about 45 minutes later, where I found four members who already died, and four others who were injured. We aided them, but one of them died hours later.”** Abdul Mu'ti added that the contents of the center, vehicles and equipment were looted, as well as the phones and the motorbikes belonging to the civil defense members.

## V. Conclusions and Recommendations

### Syrian regime and Russian forces

- The Syrian-Russian alliance has, beyond any doubt, violated Security Council resolutions 2139 and 2254 which both state that indiscriminate attacks must be ceased. Also, The Syrian and Russian regime have violated Article 7 and 8 of Rome Statute through the act of willful killing which constitutes war crimes.
- We can confirm that the bombardment mentioned in this report has targeted defenseless civilians. Therefore, Syrian and Russian 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.

<sup>2</sup> Via WhatsApp on June 5 2018



- The attacks mentioned in this report that were carried out by The Syrian and Russian regimes, are considered a violation of the customary international law as the shells were fired at a populated area rather than a specific military object.
- Aerial bombardment has caused collateral damages that involved loss of lives, injuries, or significant damages to civil facilities. There are strong indicators suggesting that the damage was too excessive compared to the anticipated military benefit.
- The magnitude of the massacres, their frequent nature, the exaggerated use of power, the indiscriminate manner of the bombing, and the coordinated approach of these attacks must be based on high orders, and a state policy.

### **The Coalition (international coalition and SDF)**

The attacks by Coalition forces have caused collateral damages that involved loss of lives, injuries, or significant damages to civilian facilities. There are strong indicators suggesting that the damage was too excessive compared to the anticipated military benefit.

### **Other forces**

International coalition forces and other parties have perpetrated massacres, according to this report, that constitute war crimes. However, we don't believe that these massacres qualify as crimes against humanity, as with the Syrian regime and pro-regime forces who perpetrate massacres in a systematic and widespread manner.

## **Conclusions**

### **Security Council**

- The Security Council has to take additional steps after resolution 2139 and 2254 were adopted, and no pledges to cease the indiscriminate bombing have been made. All parties to the conflict should respect these steps, and adhere to the rules of the international humanitarian law.
- The Syrian case should be referred to the International Criminal Court and all those who are responsible should be held accountable including the Russian regime whose involvement in war crimes has been proven.
- Expand sanctions to include the Syrian, Russian, and Iranian regimes who were directly involved in 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 committed wide massacres - such as Iranian militias, the Lebanese group Hezbollah, other Shiite groups, the National Defense Army, and Shabiha, on the international list of terrorist groups.



- Abstain from considering the Syrian government an official side after it perpetrated crimes against humanity with regard to the relief aspect, and stop giving it the largest portion of financial and other aids as they are being delivered to the people who support the Syrian government instead of people who are truly in-need.

### **International community**

- In light of the split of the Security Council and its utter inability, action 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 raise the support for the relief efforts. Additionally, the principle of universal jurisdiction should 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 drought out 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 the Human Rights Council and other organs of the United Nations on the incidents included in this report and the massacres that preceded, given that they are a glaring mark in a string of daily sporadic massacres of a smaller scope. Also, the OHCHR should work on implementing the recommendations in this report.

### **Commission of Inquiry (COI)**

Launch investigations on the cases included in this report and past reports. SNHR is willing to cooperate and provide more evidences and data.



## **International, Impartial, and Independent Mechanism (IIIM)**

Address the cases mentioned in this report and past reports. SNHR is willing to cooperate and provide more evidences and data.

## **European Union and United States of America**

Support the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism that was established in accordance with General Assembly Resolution 71/248, adopted on December 21, 2016. And establish local tribunals that enjoy a universal jurisdiction, and address the war crimes that were perpetrated in Syria.

## **Russian regime**

- Launch investigations regarding the incidents that resulted in civilian casualties, make the findings of these investigations public for the Syrian people, and hold the people involved accountable.
- Compensate all affected facilities and centers, and reconstruct and rehabilitate them. Also, compensate all the victims' families, who were killed by the current Russian regime, as well as the all the wounded.
- Immediately cease bombing hospitals, protected objects, and civilian areas, and respect the customary international law.

## **The Coalition (international coalition forces and Syrian Democratic Forces)**

- The states of the coalition have to unequivocally and truly acknowledge that some of the bombardment operations have resulted in the killing of innocent civilians. Instead of denying, these states should take speedy steps to launch serious investigations, and immediately compensate and apologize to the victims and those who were affected.
- The SDF-supporting states should apply pressure on these forces in order to compel them to cease all of their violations in all the areas and towns that are under their control.
- All forms of support, weapons and otherwise, should be ceased until SDF commit to the previous recommendations. This is primarily the supporting states' responsibility. Providing SDF with weapons and support while knowing that they can be used in war crimes or crimes against humanity can be seen as a contribution to these crimes.



## **Armed opposition factions**

Ensure the protection of civilians in all of their areas of control. Also, armed opposition factions should distinguish between civilians and military targets, and cease any indiscriminate attacks.

## **Acknowledgment and Condolences**

Our thanks to the residents, victims' families, eyewitnesses, and local community activists who contributed effectively to this report. Also, our most heartfelt condolences to the victims' families and friends.





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