

One Civil Defense Personnel Killed in Syria, Four Attacks on Vital Medical Facilities in July 2018

36 Civil Defense Personnel
Killed in 2018

SNHR

SYRIAN NETWORK FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

الشبكة السورية لحقوق الإنسان

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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

Since the popular uprising for Democracy started in March 2011, medical facilities and their personnel have seen blatant violations of the international humanitarian law, which established special protection for medical facilities and their personnel, in addition to the general protection for civilians and civilian facilities.

Nonetheless, hospitals, dispensaries, clinics, and pharmacies have been bombed, and hundreds of medical personnel have been arrested while some of them have been tortured to death. Additionally, medical teams and their vehicles have become a target as saving the wounded is branded now as a dangerous profession that might lead to death.

The Syrian regime has been, and still is, the main and primary perpetrator of crimes against medical personnel and their facilities, as its forces have raided hospitals and abducted some of the wounded, and targeted hospitals and medical points using shells, missiles, and barrel bombs, while civil defense facilities have been bombed repeatedly and civil defense personnel have suffered many casualties. Even international humanitarian insignia weren't safe from the attacks that targeted their facilities and killed their personnel despite the fact they are neutral, impartial entities.

We also recorded the use of the double-strike method¹ by Syrian-Russian alliance forces -in many attacks- and the victims in most cases are paramedics and civil defense members. On the other hand, we have documented similar violations by the rest of the parties to the conflict, but to less extents and at smaller rates. ISIS members raided makeshift hospitals

¹ A policy adopted by the Syrian and Russian regimes where they bomb the same site again a few minutes later in order to inflict as much losses as possible in the ranks of civil defense personnel, medical teams, and doctors.



and dispensaries and abducted some of the wounded, doctors, and paramedics. Also, ISIS barred some doctors from practicing as per their discriminative laws while the Coalition forces (international coalition and SDF) have targeted a number of hospitals and medical points.

Violations against medical and civil defense personnel does not only impact them, but also extends to the lives of the people who are in need of medical care services, treatment, and rescue. Consequently, these violations result in the death of many of the wounded and those who were trapped in rubble.

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 indiscriminate, 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.”

Methodology

This report outlines the death toll among medical personnel, civil defense personnel, and Red Crescent personnel who were killed by the parties to the conflict in July, and the attacks on their vital facilities, with highlighting the most notable of these incidents.

According to SNHR’s methodology, the term “medical personnel” includes all who are active in medical fields, including doctors, paramedics, pharmacists, medical laboratory scientists, and managing officials, in addition to workers who operate and transport medical equipment. Secondly, the term “vital medical facilities” refers to hospitals, medical points, dispensaries, makeshift hospitals, and ambulances.

This report draws upon, firstly, the daily, ongoing documentation and monitoring efforts by SNHR team, and, secondly, on accounts from survivors, eyewitnesses, and local media workers that we’ve talked to via phone or social media. We have also analyzed a large number of the videos and pictures that were posted online or we received from local activists via e-mail, Skype, and social media. Videos posted by local activists show wide destruction in vital medical facilities. We have copies of all the videos and pictures included in this report in a secret online database, as well as backup copies on hard drives. For more information, please see our methodology for [documenting victims](#) and for [classifying vital civilian facilities](#).



This report contains two attacks that were carried out by an air force. However, we weren't able to accurately determine the party responsible for those attacks – the Syrian regime or Russian forces. Therefore, we assigned responsibility, in these attacks, to the Syrian/Russian regime forces.

This report contains one account that we have collected by speaking directly to eyewitnesses, and were not cited from open sources. We have explained the purpose of these interviews for the witnesses who gave us permission to use the information they provided in the report without offering or giving them any incentives. Also, SNHR team tried to spare them the agony of remembering the violations as much as possible, and we concealed the identity of any witnesses who preferred to use an alias.

Most of the attacks we have documented targeted civilian areas, as our investigations have proven, where no military bases or armories were found during or before the attacks. The attacking forces didn't take into consideration the principle of proportionality. We also didn't record that the attacking forces put out warnings for civilians prior to the attack as the international humanitarian law requires.

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.

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 mental ramifications.

II. July Outline

July saw an unprecedented drop in the rates of violations against medical and civil defense personnel and their respective facilities, while violations were concentrated in Daraa governorate which was targeted in military operations by Syrian-Russian alliance forces who aimed to seize control of the areas that were out of their control.

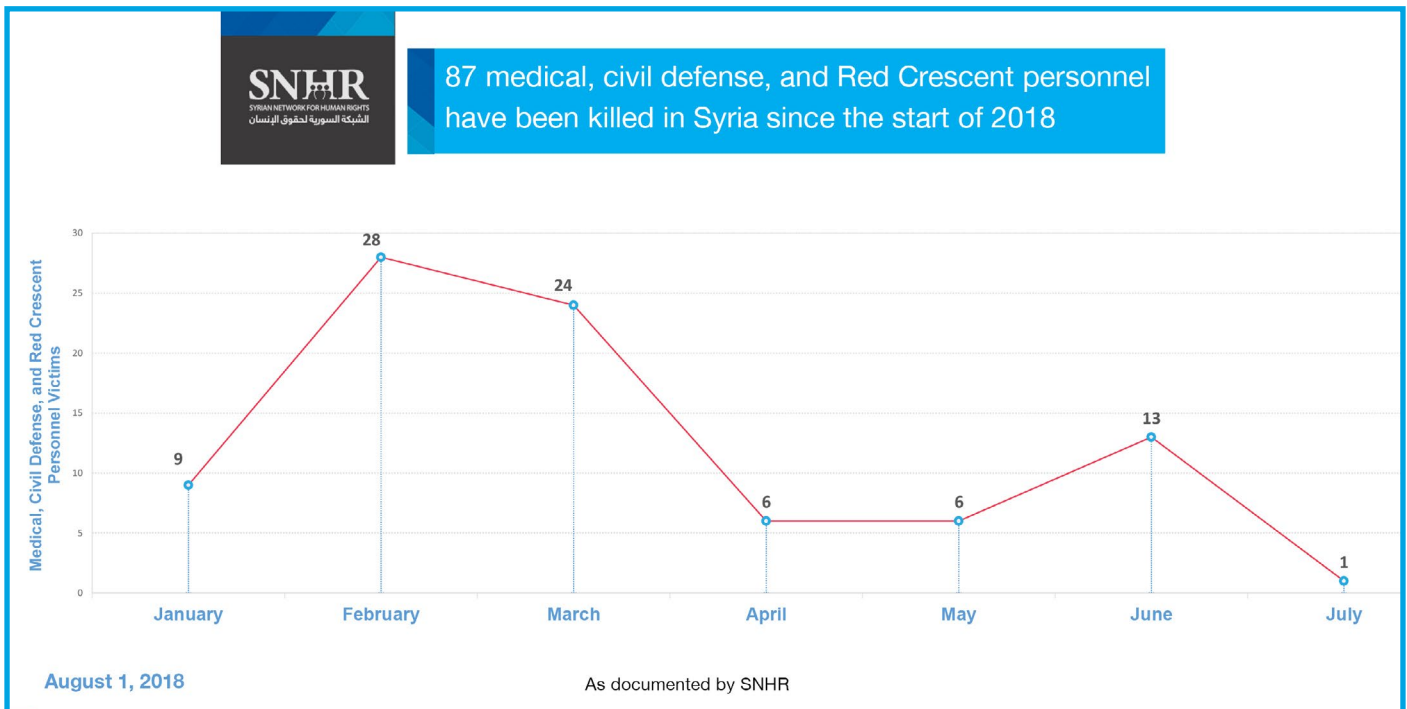
In addition, bombings, which have been on a rise recently in north Syria, had an impact on the medical sector.



III. Executive Summary

A- Medical, civil defense, and Red Crescent personnel victims since the start of 2018

SNHR has documented the killing of 87 medical, civil defense, and Red Crescent personnel at the hands of the parties to the conflict in Syria between the start of 2018 and August of the same year, including 52 killed at the hands of Syrian regime forces. Death toll is distributed by month as follows:



B- Most notable violations in July

SNHR has documented the following main violations against medical and civil defense personnel and their respective facilities in July 2018.

- Acts of killing

We have documented the killing of 1 civil defense personnel at the hands of Syrian regime forces

- Attacks on vital medical, civil defense, and Red Crescent facilities

SNHR has documented 4 attacks on vital medical facilities. Attacks are distributed by the perpetrator party as follows:

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

2 attacks on a medical facility.

- Other parties: 2 attacks, distributed as follows:

- 1 medical facility
- 1 ambulance



IV. Most Notable incidents in July

A- Acts of killing

- Syrian regime forces

Suleiman Mohammad al Maf'alani, civil defense member. He was killed on Friday, July 6, 2018, in a bombing by fixed-wing Syrian regime/Russian forces warplanes (the incident is still being investigated to accurately identify the perpetrator party) who fired a number of missiles in Um al Mayathen village, eastern suburbs Daraa governorate, as he was tending to the wounded from a previous bombing.

The [Syrian civil defense](#) mourned Suleiman on their official Twitter account



B- Attacks on vital medical facilities, civil defense facilities, and Red Crescent facilities

- Syrian regime forces

Vital medical facilities

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

Tuesday, July 17, 2018, fixed-wing Syrian regime/Russian forces warplanes (the incident is still being investigated to identify the perpetrator party) fired a number of missiles in parallel with a barrel bomb attack by Syrian regime forces helicopters near the Martyr Walid Khattab Makeshift Hospital in [Nawa](#) city, northern suburbs of Daraa governorate. The hospital building and its equipment were heavily damaged as the hospital was rendered out of commission. The city was under the control of armed opposition factions at the time of the incident.

- Other parties

Vital medical facilities

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

Friday, July 6, 2018, an IED planted inside a car near Jarablos Dispensary in the center of [Jarablos](#) city, eastern suburbs of Aleppo governorate. The bombing occurred about 15m away from the dispensary. As a result, the dispensary building was partly destroyed and its equipment was slightly damaged as the dispensary was temporarily rendered out of commission. It should be noted that the dispensary is the only active medical point that serves Jarablos city and the surrounding areas. As of this writing, we have yet to identify the perpetrator in light of the difficulties in identifying the perpetrator in such bombings. The city was under the control of armed opposition factions at the time of the incident.



Media worker “Abu Qusai”², who was at a friend’s house about 20m from the dispensary building at the time of the bombing, told us, **“We heard a sudden loud sound as some of the house’s windows and doors were smashed. We found out later that what we heard was a car bomb. I rushed to the site.”** Abu Qusai proceeds to describe the scale of the destruction in the dispensary, **“The dispensary front was destroyed and some equipment was damaged. Also, some people were mildly wounded in the bombing. Civil defense teams arrived at the site to remove rubbles. The dispensary administration announced that they are temporarily shutting down until the dispensary is renovated.”**

V. Conclusions and Recommendations

- 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 ceased. Also, these incidents are violations of Article 7 and 8 of Rome Statute through the act of willful killing which constitutes war crimes.
- The attacks mentioned in this report constitute violations of Security Council resolution 2286 which states that attacks and threats against the wounded and sick, medical personnel and humanitarian personnel exclusively engaged in medical duties, their means of transport and equipment should be ceased, as well as hospitals and other medical facilities.
- 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, ISIS, armed opposition factions, Self-Management forces, international coalition forces, and other parties have committed acts that amount to war crimes through the crime of extrajudicial killing or targeting vital civilian facilities.
- The attacks mentioned in this report are considered a violation of the customary international humanitarian law as the shells were fired at populated areas rather than a specific military object.
- 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

Security Council

- The Security Council has to take additional steps after resolutions 2139 and 2254 have been adopted and no pledges to stop 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 must 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 to 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 violations 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.

Syrian regime

- Stop treating the Syrian state as a private family property.
- Cease the terrorization of the Syrian people through killing the teams that provide medical, aid, and rescue services.
- Cease the bombing on hospitals and protected objects, as well as civilian areas, and respect the customary humanitarian law.
- Shoulder all the legal and material repercussions, and compensate victims and their families from the Syrian state's resources.

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 humanitarian 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. Denying so won't do any good for these governments, as documented human rights reports and residents' accounts explicitly expose this fact. 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 vital medical facilities and civil defense facilities and their respective personnel in all areas, and launch investigations on the incidents included in this report.

Medical organizations around the world

There is a severe shortage in medical manpower in Syria in light of the ceaseless killing. 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 and condolences to the residents and local activists who effectively contributed to this report.





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