

Escalation in the Pace of Breaches of the Sochi Agreement Following the Fourth Trilateral Summit

At Least 4,594 Breaches Resulted in the Deaths of 248 Civilians, including 82 Children, Since the Sochi Agreement Entered into Force

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.

Contents

- I. Introduction and Methodology
- II. The Fourth De-escalation Zone Following the Sochi Agreement
- III. Examples of the Most Notable Breaches of the Sochi Agreement
- IV. Legal Profile and Recommendations

I. Introduction and Methodology

The announcement of the Sochi Agreement on September 17, 2018, as a result of the meeting between the Russian and Turkish presidents, was considered a way to preserve the fourth and final de-escalation zone (Idlib governorate and parts of the governorates of Hama, Aleppo and Latakia). It succeeded in the short term in reducing the intensity of the bombardment on that area, and limiting the bombardment to artillery shelling of the areas adjacent to the contact line.

On January 23, the Russian and Turkish Presidents met in the Russian capital Moscow. In their meeting, they discussed the situation in the fourth de-escalation zone, the formation of a constitutional committee, and the need to implement the Adana Agreement between the Syrian and Turkish governments, which was agreed upon in the Turkish city of Adana on October 20, 1998, under Egyptian-Iranian auspices following a period of great tension between the two countries against the backdrop of the Syrian regime's support for the Kurdistan Workers Party; Annex IV of this agreement clearly states the right of Turkey to pursue the "terrorists" to a depth of five kilometers inside Syria to protect its national security from any potential danger.

The meeting on January 23 was followed by the fourth in a series of trilateral summits bringing together the presidents of the states of Russia, Turkey and Iran on February 14, 2019 in the Russian city of Sochi, which was also the location of the first such trilateral summit on November 22, 2017. Meanwhile, the second trilateral summit was held in Ankara, on April 4, 2018, and the third one in the Iranian capital, Tehran, on September 7, 2018.



In the [final communiqué issued](#) at the conclusion of the summit, the three presidents stressed several points, of which the most important was the need to intensify efforts to launch the work of the constitutional committee in Syria, the need to create the conditions for the return of Syrian refugees, and the need to continue to fight terrorism throughout Syria, along with the intensification of efforts to implement the cease-fire agreement in Idlib governorate.

Methodology:

This report highlights the fourth and final de-escalation zone (consisting of Idlib governorate and parts of the governorates of Hama, Aleppo and Latakia) and outlines the record of the most notable human rights violations in the period since the Sochi Agreement entered into force on September 17, 2018, up to March 14, 2019. The report also focuses on the violations that followed the Fourth Tripartite Summit in Sochi on February 14, 2019, and its impact on the large displacement of populations within Syria.

The Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) has relied on field researchers working for us, who helped to obtain direct testimonies from survivors, relatives of victims, relief workers and media activists, bolstered by the extensive network of relationships we have built up through our seven years of work.

This report contains eight first-hand accounts that we've collected through speaking directly with eyewitnesses, none of which are cited from any open sources. We explained the purpose of these interviews beforehand to the eyewitnesses, 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 eyewitnesses 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.

The Syrian Network for Human Rights 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, and distributes 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 our methodology. ¹

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>



SNHR also analyzed videos and photographs that our team has documented, or which were posted online, or submitted by local activists via e-mail, Skype, or social media platforms. These videos and photos show, amongst other things, sites of attacks, and the bodies of the deceased victims and the injured, as well as giving an indication of the scale of destruction caused by the attacks.

We also retain copies of all the videos and photographs included in these reports, which are also reviewed in this report, in a confidential electronic database, as well as keeping hard disk backup copies, and we ensure always that all these data are stored with their original source. We do not claim, however, that we have documented all cases, given the severe prohibitions, restrictions and persecution by the Syrian Regime forces and some other armed groups.

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

II. The Fourth de-escalation zone following the Sochi agreement

The report outlines the most notable breaches of the Sochi agreement in the fourth de-escalation zone and the resulting human rights violations:

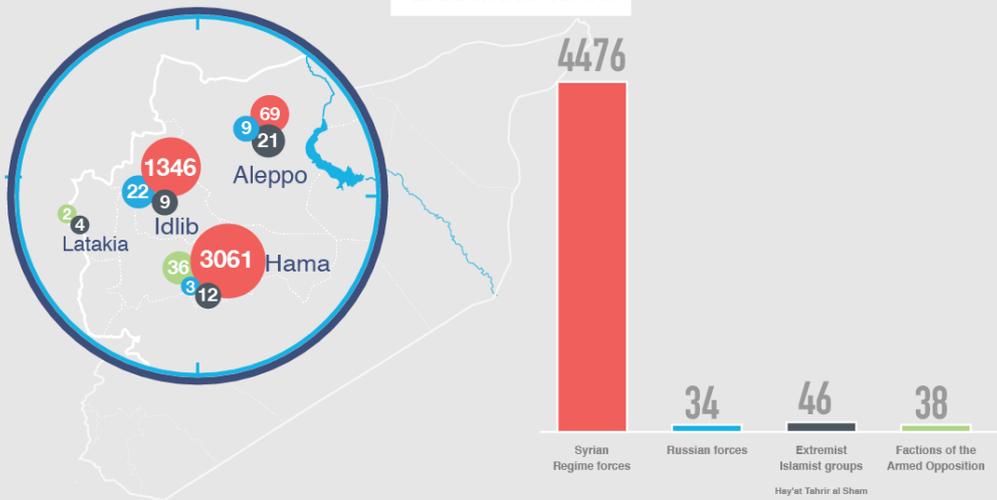


The most notable breaches of the Sochi agreement and the resulting human rights violations

From September 17, 2018, to March 14, 2019

At least
4594
breaches

distributed as follows:



Resulted in:

Massacres and other unlawful killings

The deaths of
248



Attacks on vital civilian facilities

At least
87 attacks on vital civilian facilities



Outlawed attacks



Nearly **105.000** persons were forcibly displaced as a result of Syrian-Russian alliance forces' breaches



The Sochi Agreement, which entered into force on September 17, 2018, contributed to the suspension of air strikes carried out by the Syrian regime; however, ground attacks have been incessant on villages and towns adjacent to the contact line and at a depth of approximately 16 kilometers across that line, particularly targeting towns and villages in the northern suburbs of Hama and the southern suburbs of Idlib (such as al Latmaena, Kafr Zita, al Lahaya, and Morek in the northern suburbs of Hama, and al Tah, al Khuain, Jarjanaz and Khan Sheikhoun in the southern suburbs of Idlib), resulting in the displacement of the population from an area comprising about 20 percent of the de-escalation zone area of Idlib.

SNHR has documented at least 4,594 breaches of the agreement by the main parties in the area, most of them by Syrian Regime forces, in the demilitarized zone since the signing of the Sochi Agreement on September 17, 2018, until March 14, 2019, distributed as follows:

- Syrian Regime forces (army, security, local militias, and Shiite foreign militias): 4,476 breaches, distributed as follows:

Idlib governorate: 1,346

Aleppo governorate: 69

Hama governorate: 3,061

- Russian forces: 34 violations, distributed as follows:

Idlib governorate: 22

Aleppo governorate: Nine

Hama governorate: Three

- Hay'at Tahrir al Sham (an alliance composed of Fateh al Sham Front and a number of factions of the Armed Opposition): 46 breaches, distributed as follows:

Idlib governorate: Nine

Aleppo governorate: 21

Hama governorate: 12

Latakia governorate: Four

- Factions of the Armed Opposition: 38 breaches, distributed as follows:

Hama governorate: 36

Latakia governorate: Two



These breaches have resulted in the deaths of 248 civilians, including 82 children, one of whom was a fetus, and 43 women (adult female), in addition to five massacres, distributed as follows:

- Syrian Regime forces: 185 civilians, including 71 children, one of whom was a fetus, and 36 women, as well as massacres, distributed as follows:

Idlib governorate: 129 civilians, including 49 children and 28 women.

Aleppo governorate: 18 civilians, including four children and two women.

Hama governorate: 38 civilians, including 18 children, one of whom was a fetus, and six women.

- Russian forces: 63 civilians, including 11 children and seven women, as well as two massacres, distributed as follows:

Idlib governorate: 56 civilians, including eight children and seven women.

Aleppo governorate: Six civilians, including two children.

Hama governorate: One child.

These breaches also resulted in at least 87 attacks on vital civilian facilities, including 17 incidents involving attacks places of worship, 19 on schools, six on medical facilities and four on markets. The record of incidents was distributed as follows:

- Syrian Regime forces: 71 attacks on vital civilian facilities, including 17 on places of worship, 19 on schools, four on medical facilities, and four on markets, distributed as follows:

Idlib governorate: 49

Aleppo governorate: Six

Hama governorate: 16

- Russian forces: 13 attacks on vital civilian facilities, one of which was on a medical facility, distributed as follows:

Idlib governorate: 12

Aleppo governorate: One

- Factions of the Armed Opposition: Three attacks on vital civilian facilities in Hama governorate, one of which was on a medical facility.

We also documented 11 attacks using cluster munitions, in addition to one attack using incendiary weapons by Syrian Regime forces on Idlib governorate.

Following the conclusion of the fourth Tripartite Summit in Sochi on February 14, 2019, the SNHR observed a change in the bombing policy adopted by Syrian Regime forces, according to which they deliberately bombed villages and towns that had not previously been



subjected to intensive bombing since the Sochi Agreement came into force, such as Saraqeb city in Idlib, Hraitan town and Anadan city in Aleppo, or others bombed a few times, such as the cities of Ma'aret al Nu'man and Khan Sheikhoun in Idlib, and Qal'at al Madiq town in Hama. The bombing extended to areas up to 30 kilometers from the contact line, focusing particularly on cities and towns overcrowded, with both indigenous residents and displaced people. We also documented incidents in which the Syrian regime deliberately followed a 'double-tap' policy to inflict the greatest number of victims.

Syrian Regime forces have sharply escalated their ground attacks in this period, with the most dangerous development being the resumption of air strikes by fixed-wing warplanes for the first time since the Sochi Agreement entered into force. On February 24, we recorded air strikes by fixed-wing Syrian regime forces' warplanes using machineguns on the outskirts of Skik town in the southern suburbs of Idlib, as well as recording similar strikes on other villages and towns such as al Khuain, al Taman'a and Saraqeb. On the day immediately after these attacks, the Syrian Air Force used missiles - for the first time since the agreement went into effect - targeting Kafr Zita city in Hama governorate. We documented, in [a previous report](#) on the violations of the Sochi agreement, the first bombing incident by the Russian warplanes on al Rashidin neighborhood in Aleppo city on November 25, 2018. Also, On January 19, the same warplanes bombed the towns of Khan al Sebel and Bakserya in the suburbs of Idlib governorate, after which they continued targeting the area with air strikes.

After February 14, we documented an extensive and repeated use of cluster munitions by Syrian Regime forces, with these munitions being deployed in multiple areas and targeting Idlib governorate in particular. We had previously documented the use of these munitions by the Syrian regime in two successive attacks since the Sochi agreement entered into force up until February 14. Local activists and residents also told us that the Syrian regime has been using new types of missiles with a far greater destructive capability. Up to the time of publishing this report, we have been unable to verify the type of these new weapons, visit the sites where they were used, or obtain photographs of their remnants in order to conduct a preliminary analysis.

After February 14, we also monitored breaches by factions of the Armed Opposition and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham; most of these took place following the recent military escalation, with these groups launching attacks on some areas controlled by Syrian Regime forces, mostly targeting military points.



SNHR contacted a lawyer Abdul Naser Houshan³, who is from Kafr Zita city in the northern suburbs of Hama governorate. He told us: **“After the end of the tripartite summit, the frequency of the military escalation escalated in terms of the intensity of the missiles launched and the expansion of the areas targeted. The number of missiles and shells that targeted the areas of the de-escalation zone in Hama governorate reached nearly 5,000 missiles and shells distributed on al Latamena, Kafr Zita, Morek, al Zaka, al Arba’in, Qal’at al Madiq, and al Ghab villages, where the share of Kafr Zita and al Latamena was more than 3,000 missiles.** “ Abdul Naser added, **“ This campaign resulted in the displacement of nearly 50,000 people, including those who went to agricultural lands near their towns, while some of them went to the camps in the north, and others are still stranded, waiting for calmness to return. “**

On February 19, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet issued [a statement](#) calling on all concerned parties to ensure that the protection of civilians in the fourth de-escalation zone is a priority in planning military operations, in accordance with international humanitarian law.

On February 27, Ambassador Jonathan Cohen, Acting Permanent Representative of the United States Mission to the United Nations in the Security Council, [spoke](#) about the United States’ concern over the recent escalation of hostilities by Syrian Regime forces in Idlib governorate, calling on all parties to abide by the ceasefire.

The [report](#) issued by the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic on February 28 also spoke about the continuation of hostilities throughout Syria, referring to violations perpetrated in the de-escalation zone, and stressing that any plans to return the displaced persons inside and outside Syria must be carried out according to an existing approach to human rights.

On March 8, in accordance with the Sochi agreement, the first Turkish military patrol entered Syria via the Kafr Lousin crossing before heading towards the al Eys hill in Aleppo, then to Saraqeb city, then to the Turkish checkpoint at Tal al Touqan in Idlib.

³ We contacted him via WhatsApp on February 28, 2018



SNHR documented at least 2,176 breaches of the agreement by the main parties in the area, most of them by Syrian Regime forces in the demilitarized zone, since the Fourth Tripartite Summit on February 14, 2019, up until March 14, 2019, which were distributed as follows:

- Syrian Regime forces: 2,073 breaches, distributed as follows:

Idlib governorate: 709

Aleppo governorate: 18

Hama governorate: 1,346

- Russian forces: 28 breaches, distributed as follows:

Governorate of Idlib: 22

Aleppo governorate: Six

- Hay'at Tahrir al Sham: 46 breaches, distributed as follows:

Idlib governorate: Nine

Aleppo governorate: 21

Hama governorate: 12

Latakia governorate: Four

- Factions of the Armed Opposition: 29 breaches, distributed as follows:

Hama governorate: 27

Latakia governorate: Two

These breaches resulted in the deaths of 171 civilians, including 54 children, one of whom was a fetus, and 28 women (adult female), as well as three massacres, distributed as follows:

- Syrian Regime forces: 117 civilians, including 46 children, one of whom was a fetus, and 22 women, as well as one massacre, distributed as follows:

Idlib governorate: 76 civilians, including 31 children and 17 women.

Aleppo Governorate: Seven.

Hama governorate: 34 civilians, including 15 children, one of whom was a fetus, and five women.

- Russian forces: 54 civilians, including eight children and six women, as well as two massacres, all in Idlib governorate.

These breaches also resulted in at least 50 attacks on vital civilian facilities, including eight on places of worship, eight on schools, four on medical facilities, and three on markets, distributed as follows:

- Syrian Regime forces: 36 attacks on vital civilian facilities, including eight on places of worship, eight on schools, four on medical facilities, and three on markets, distributed as follows:



Idlib governorate: 27

Aleppo governorate: Three

Hama governorate: Six

- Russian forces: 11 attacks on vital civilian facilities, one of them on a medical facility, all in Idlib governorate.

- Factions of the Armed Opposition: Three attacks on vital civilian facilities, one on a medical facility, all in Hama governorate.

We also documented Syrian Regime forces carrying out nine attacks using cluster munitions, as well as one attack using incendiary weapons on Idlib governorate.

The above statistics indicate that 69 percent of the total death toll since the signing of the Sochi agreement occurred after the Fourth Tripartite Summit, and all the victims were killed as a result of attacks of the Syrian-Russian alliance forces, which is a clear indication of its military escalation on the populated areas.

The continuous breaches have resulted in an almost complete suspension of the educational process in some areas within the demilitarized zone and fluctuation of the process in other areas, while some schools have been partially or completely transferred into shelters in areas in the northern Idlib.

The military breaches have also contributed to the disruption of the work of humanitarian personnel and their operating facilities, especially following the double strikes, where we documented on March 13, some hospitals in Idlib suspended their work in part or in whole and withdrew treatment from patients following a Russian air attack on the city.

The continuous bombings since the signing of the Sochi agreement have resulted in the displacement of nearly 105,000 civilians, most of whom have not been able to return to their homes. New IDPs are finding it hard to find camps that can accommodate them, and many IDPs resorted to live on agricultural lands or with host families or in rented homes. They also suffer from a lack of basic requirements due to their poor material conditions, frequent displacement, and the inability of organizations and relief agencies to meet the needs of all displaced persons.





Some IDPs from al Shari'a village, Hama, in tents near the Turkish observation post in Sheer al Maghar village, Hama, following the Syrian-Russian military campaign - March 4, 2019

We spoke with Eng. Tareq al Idlbi⁴, Operations Manager at the Syrian Response Coordinators Team, on the most important observations by the team on the humanitarian situation in the fourth de-escalation zone: **“Since Feb. 2, the military campaign of the regime has escalated over the demilitarized zone, which includes some 212 villages, apart from farms and very small towns, which had a population of about 557,000 civilians, of whom 128,000 were displaced from other areas, while some 475,000 live in what’s left of the fourth de-escalation zone. The demilitarized zone has suffered three escalation campaigns since the signing of the Sochi agreement, the first in October 2018 and the second in December 2018. Approximately 70,000 civilians from the area were displaced as a result of this campaign, some of whom returned after the bombing stopped. During the last continuing campaign so far, we have documented the displacement of 17,467 families and the number is increasing daily; [these people] are distributed to 86 villages and towns ranging from the demilitarized zone to Bab al Hawa, while some families went towards Afrin and the areas of the Euphrates Shield.”** Eng. Tariq talked about the weakness of the response of the organizations in the recent campaign and the lack of coping with the needs in light of the confusion between the former and the new displaced persons, in addition to the instability of the displacement population movements, which takes place in several stages starting between neighborhoods within the town or city,

⁴ We contacted him via WhatsApp on March 15, 2019



and with the expansion of the bombing circle, the residents flee towards the farms, and after the hope that shelling stops fades, they move to the far and safer areas. Tareq added: **“There are areas that are empty of people, such as Jarjanaz, al Tah, areas of eastern suburbs of Idlib, and suburbs of Hama, which is adjacent to the control areas of the Syrian regime. We recorded a slight number of families returning because of the continued threat of shelling of these areas.”**

III. Examples of the most notable violations of the Sochi Agreement

A. Syrian Regime forces (army, security, local militias, and Shiite foreign militias):

On Thursday, December 27, 2018, Syrian Regime artillery forces [fired four shells](#) at [al Enkawi Mosque](#) in al Enkawi village in the western suburbs of Hama governorate, resulting in partial destruction of the mosque building, and huge material damage to its furnishings. The village was under the control of factions of the Armed Opposition at the time of the incident.



Destruction inflicted by Syrian Regime artillery forces shelling on al Enkawi Mosque in al Enkawi village, Hama – December 27, 2018

On Monday, December 31, 2018, the 14-year-old [child Yousef al Khader](#) was killed, and five other individuals injured by Syrian Regime forces' attack using missile launcher on a group of IDPs' tents north of Hass village in the southern suburbs of Idlib governorate. The village was under joint control of factions of the Armed Opposition and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.



On Friday, January 18, 2019, Syrian Regime artillery forces fired several shells at residential neighborhoods in Morek town in the northern suburbs of Hama governorate, resulting in the deaths of two civilians (a female child and a woman). The town was under the control of Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.

On Tuesday, January 22, 2019, Syrian Regime artillery forces fired a number of shells at houses in Hwair al Eys village in the southern suburbs of Aleppo governorate, resulting in the deaths of three civilians and the injury of a number of others. The village was under the control of Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.

On Monday, January 28, 2019, a young boy identified as Abdullah Amer al Faraj was killed while he was on the way home from school shortly after sustaining fatal injuries in the explosion from a shell that fell nearby when Syrian Regime artillery forces fired a number of shells on al Zaka village in the northern suburbs of Hama governorate. Al Zaka village was under the control of factions of the Armed Opposition at the time of the incident.

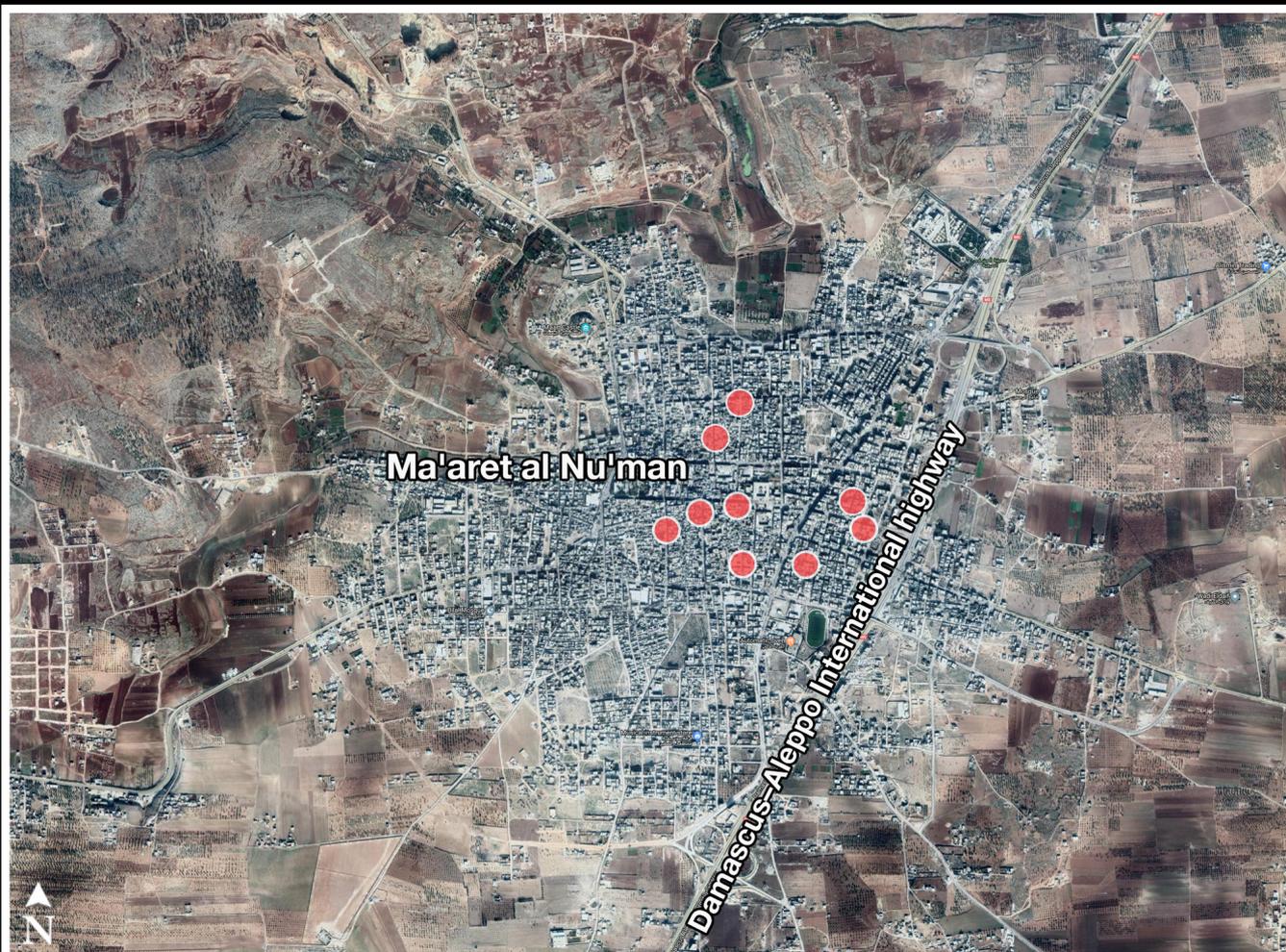
On Tuesday, January 29, 2019, Syrian Regime forces who we believe were stationed in Qbaibat Abu al Huda village used [missile](#) launchers to subject [residential neighborhoods](#) in Ma'aret al Nu'man city in the southern suburbs of Idlib governorate to sustained and intensive bombardment. At least 13 missiles landed in the city's eastern, southern and western neighborhoods and in [al Bezr Market](#) in the city center, causing the deaths of 11 civilians, including [two children](#) and one woman, and injuring about 15 others. The city was under the control of factions of the Armed Opposition at the time of the incident.



A map showing locations where missiles fell in Ma'aret al Nu'man:

Locations where Syrian Regime forces' artillery shells fell, resulting in civilian deaths in Ma'aret al Nu'man city, southern suburbs of Idlib – January 29, 2019

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Media activist, Ahmed al Jarban⁵, from Ma'aret al Nu'man city, told the SNHR that he was informed via walkie-talkie while he was in Ma'arshimsha camp near the city that Ma'aret al Nu'man had been targeted, resulting in the death of one person and injuring others. He recalled: **“I finished my work and went to the city. While I was on the way, I was receiving news of the increase in the number of casualties. I arrived at the city and headed to ‘Nazlet Talmennes’ Street where there is a row of car repair shops. I saw the impact site of the missile, which caused the injury of some civilians, then I went to al Masaken Street where I saw the impact site of the missile in the middle of the street near the bank, and another missile landed on al Ghazali Street in the western neighborhood in front of the house of a civilian, which resulted in the death of a displaced person from Homs. And I passed through al Bezr Market where a number of casualties fell - I do not know the exact number – and caused significant material damage to the market, including, I remember, the damage to one car and three motorcycles, in addition to the destruction of a number of shops. A third missile landed in al Afran Road [road where furnaces are located] in the northern neighborhood; causing casualties, both dead and wounded, while the shelling also targeted one of the houses behind al Nu'man Mosque in the western neighborhood and caused only material damage “** Ahmed added that the shelling lasted for about half an hour, during which 15 high-explosive missiles fell, killing 11 people and injuring more than 30 others. Ahmad told us that he accompanied the civil defense teams as they worked to collect the victims' remains for burial later. Ahmed said, **“During my tour I heard the screams and cries of children and women in every location I went through. It was a black day for the people of the city; they'd felt almost complete calmness after the city was completely emptied of the headquarters of the military factions the day before, and members of the local council took charge of the city, until they were bombed by the Syrian regime again on this day. “**

We also spoke with another activist Mustafa al Gharib⁶, a media worker for the Syrian Civil Defense, from Ma'aret al Nu'man city. He told us: **“ While I was in my shop, Ma'aret al Nu'man city was shelled by a heavy missile attack from the regime's positions in the eastern suburbs of Idlib, after several months of suspension [of military activity]. I heard about 13 consecutive explosions, and went out immediately to inspect the bombing sites. The shelling was spread across the city in the middle, the eastern, western and southern sides. All the sites where the missiles landed were civilian and densely populated, I counted more than ten martyrs who were killed in the various areas where the shelling took place. We took the injured to the hospitals, and inspected all the sites of the shelling to evacuate the wounded and dead “** Mustafa added: **“We**

⁵ We contacted him via his Facebook account on January 29, 2019

⁶ We contacted him via WhatsApp on January 30, 2019



noticed that the missiles that hit the city this time were larger than the ones that were previously used, a new winged quality, which I expect to be modern Russian-made missiles.”

On Tuesday, February 5, 2019, Syrian Regime forces stationed in the Braidij Military Camp in the western suburbs of Hama governorate used a missile launcher to shell [al Farooq Mosque](#) in al Janoubi neighborhood in Kafr Nbouda town in the northwestern suburbs of Hama governorate. The missiles hit the mosque’s mihrab [the ornamental recessed niche marking the qiblah, the direction of the Kaaba in Mecca, and thus the direction in which Muslims pray], causing partial destruction of the building and moderately damaging the furnishings. The town was under the control of factions of the Armed Opposition at the time of the incident.

On Wednesday, February 6, 2019, a young boy identified as Rahil Mohammad Rahil was killed after being injured in shelling by Syrian regime forces who were using a missile launcher to bombard Jarjanaz town in Idlib governorate eastern suburbs. The 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 Saturday, February 9, 2019, Syrian Regime artillery forces fired a number of shells at al Sharqi neighborhood of Khan Sheikhoun city in the southern suburbs of Idlib governorate, resulting in the deaths of six civilians from one family, including two women and three children - one male and two females. The city was under the joint control of factions of the Armed Opposition and Hay’at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.

[This link](#) shows the location where the shells that caused the massacre fell.



One of the victims of the massacre perpetrated by Syrian regime artillery shelling of Khan Sheikhoun city, Idlib – February 9, 2019



On Tuesday, February 12, 2019, a young boy, Shehab Adnan al Akel, died of his injuries shortly after being wounded in bombardment by Syrian Regime forces who used a missile launcher to shell Kafranbel city in the southern suburbs of Idlib governorate. The city was under the joint control of factions of the Armed Opposition and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.



The child Shehab Adnan al Akel were killed following a Syrian Regime missile launcher shelling on Kafranbel city, Idlib – February 12, 2019

On Wednesday, February 13, 2019, Syrian Regime artillery forces fired a number of shells at al Twaina village in the western suburbs of Hama governorate, resulting in the deaths of two female children from one family, and the injury of 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 Wednesday, February 13, 2019, Syrian Regime artillery forces fired a number of shells at the Martyr Ahmad al Yousef High School for girls in the middle of Khan Sheikhoun city in the southern suburbs of Idlib governorate. One of the shells fell in the schoolyard, leaving a crater in the center of the yard. The city was under the joint control of factions of the Armed Opposition and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.





Damages inflicted by Syrian regime artillery forces' shelling of the Martyr Ahmad al Yousef High School for girls in Khan Sheikhoun city, Idlib – February 13, 2019

On Wednesday, February 13, 2019, Syrian Regime artillery forces fired a number of shells which landed near the Civil Defense center - which had been established in a cave to withstand bombardment - in al Sharqi neighborhood in Khan Sheikhoun city in the southern suburbs of Idlib governorate, causing moderate material damage to the center building. The city was under the joint control of factions of the Armed Opposition and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.

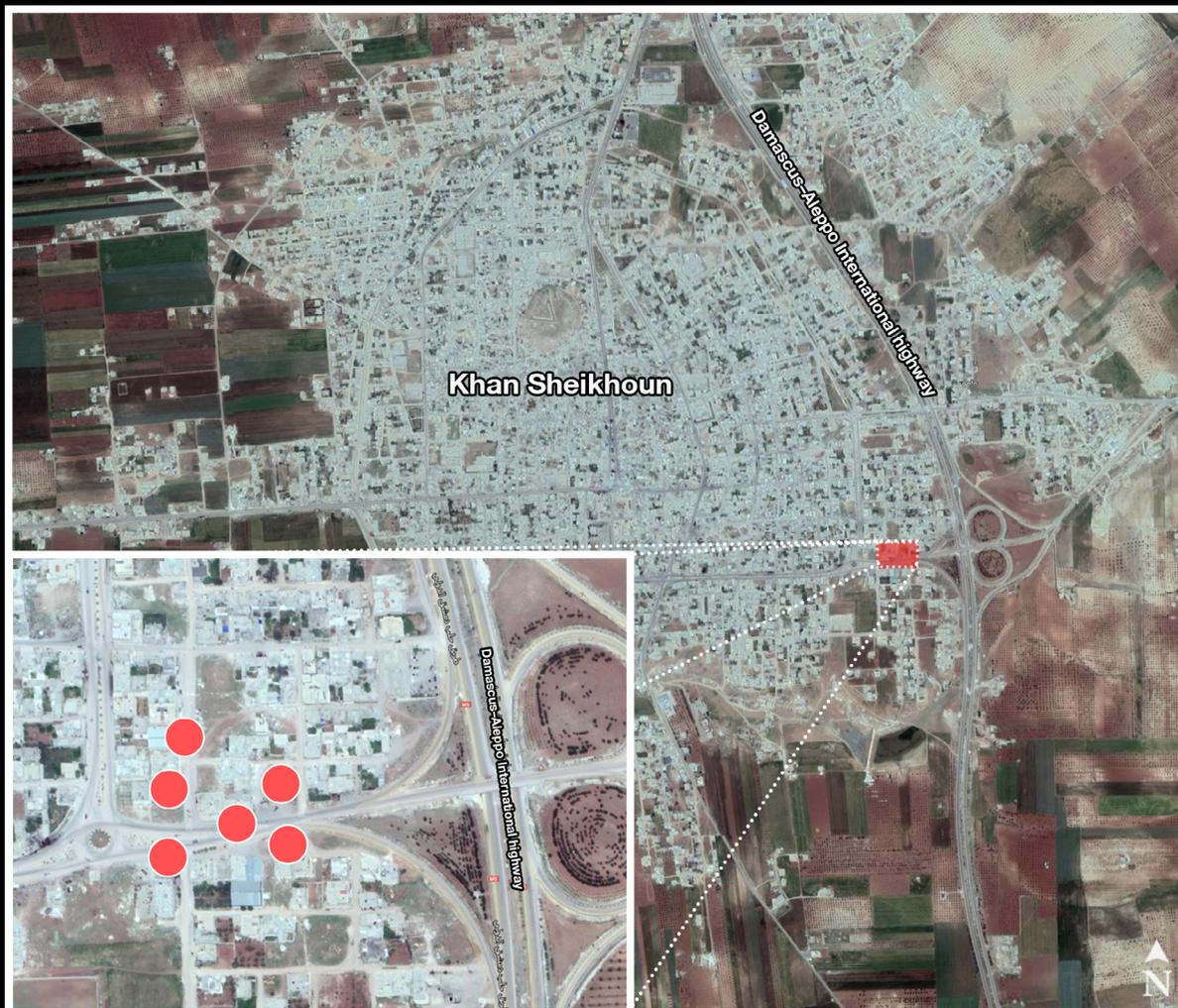
On Friday, February 15, 2019, Syrian Regime forces used missile launchers and other [heavy artillery simultaneously](#) to shell [al Sharqi neighborhood](#) of Khan Sheikhoun city. The shells and [missiles](#) fired in rapid succession landed near the Aleppo – Damascus International Highway, resulting in [the deaths](#) of nine civilians ([three women](#) and six children - four males and two females) and injuring approximately 20 others. The city, which is located in the southern suburbs of Idlib, was under the joint control of factions of the Armed Opposition and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.



A map showing locations where missiles fell in Khan Sheikhoun city, Idlib:

Locations where Syrian Regime forces' artillery shells fell, resulting in civilian deaths in Khan Sheikhoun city, southern suburbs of Idlib – February 15, 2019

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The SNHR contacted Anas al Diab⁷, a member of the Civil Defense, from Khan Sheikhoun city. He told us: **“The city has been subjected to heavy shelling throughout the day for more than a week with missiles and artillery shells fired from the positions of the regime in the villages of Qbaibat Abu al Huda, Abu Omar and Abu Dali. Most of them fall on al Sharqi neighborhood, which is a residential neighborhood full of civilians. The regime frequently deliberately attacks the same site a few minutes after a first attack to target civilians and paramedics. On February 15, the regime targeted the area with several missiles and artillery shells simultaneously. The missiles were distributed approximately 700 meters west of the eastern bridge. At least five martyrs were killed in several houses, all of them children and women. The shelling caused the displacement of the residents who used to seek refuge in the villages surrounding the city in search of a safe place.”**

Anas described the missiles as being larger than the ones residents had previously witnessed the regime using, adding that the extent of the destruction inflicted by them was far greater.

Hamid Qatini⁸, the media officer with the Syrian Civil Defense in Khan Sheikhoun, told us about the incident, saying: **“On the morning of February 15, Khan Sheikhoun city came under heavy shelling from the artillery and missile launchers stationed in Qbaibat Abu al Huda village. The shelling focused on al Sharqi neighborhood to the west of the bridge. We rushed to the location where about three missiles and several shells had fallen on civilian houses and on the main street. We pulled out nearly six martyrs, all of them children and women, and we helped to take about eight injured people to hospitals,”** Hamid added that the commercial movement in the city has been almost completely paralyzed because of incessant shelling on a daily and continuous basis, adding that about 10,000 civilians had been displaced in the previous days, fleeing towards the countryside and farms around the city to seek shelter from bombardment.

On Saturday, February 16, 2019, Ahmad Qaddour al Hamwiya, a pharmacist, born in 1987, died of his injuries sustained a short time beforehand when Syrian Regime artillery forces fired a number of shells at Qal’at al Madiq town in the western suburbs of Hama governorate. The town was under the joint control of factions of the Armed Opposition and Hay’at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.

⁷ We contacted him via WhatsApp on February 15, 2019

⁸ We contacted him via WhatsApp on February 16, 2019



On Saturday, February 16, 2019, Syrian Regime artillery forces fired a number of shells at residential neighborhoods in Khan Sheikhoun city in the southern suburbs of Idlib governorate, resulting in the deaths of three civilians (two children and one woman). At around 17:00, the same artillery forces resumed shelling the city's neighborhoods, resulting in the deaths of three other civilians from one family, including two women. The city was under joint control of factions of the Armed Opposition and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.

On Saturday, February 16, 2019, Syrian Regime forces used a missile launcher to fire a number of missiles carrying cluster munitions at al Sharqi neighborhood in Ma'aret al Nu'man city in the southern suburbs of Idlib governorate, resulting in the death of one civilian. The same forces later used the missile launcher to resume shelling of the same neighborhood in the evening, resulting in the deaths of three more civilians, including a woman and her child. The city 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, February 17, 2019, Mrs. Zahra Khaled al Dabbous, from al Zaka village in the northern suburbs of Hama governorate, was burnt to death as a result of shelling by Syrian Regime artillery forces. At the same time, Syrian Regime forces also used missile launchers to bombard Khan Sheikhoun city in the southern suburbs of Idlib governorate. The city was under the joint control of factions of the Armed Opposition and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.



Mrs. Zahra Khaled al Dabbous burned to death in a heavy artillery shelling by Syrian Regime forces on Khan Sheikhoun city, Idlib – February 17, 2019



On Sunday, February 17, 2019, Syrian Regime forces used a missile launcher to shell the Martyr [Omar al Ulwan School](#) in Babolin village in Idlib governorate southern suburbs, causing severe material damage to the perimeter fence. 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, February 17, 2019, Syrian Regime forces using a missile launcher shelled the popular market known as al Khudar Market in the middle of Ma'aret al Nu'man city in the southern suburbs of Idlib governorate, which set fire to several shops, causing severe material damage to them. The city was under the joint control of factions of the Armed Opposition and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.



A number of shops were burned down following shelling of the popular market in the center of Ma'aret al Nu'man city in Idlib by Syrian Regime forces using a missile launcher – February 17, 2019

On Tuesday, February 19, 2019, Syrian Regime forces' artillery fired a number of shells at the center of Khan Sheikhoun city in Idlib governorate southern suburbs. One of the shells fell on al Rawda bakery, resulting in the deaths of [two civilians](#), and igniting a fire in the fuel tanks on the bakery's roof, as well as causing severe material damage to the building, putting it out of service. In addition, another shell fell on a residential house located 50 meters away from the bakery, resulting in the deaths of three civilians. The city was under the joint control of factions of the Armed Opposition and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.





Fire caused by Syrian Regime artillery forces' shelling of al Rawda automatic bakery in Khan Sheikhoun city, Idlib – February 19, 2019 – By: Saed al Din Zaidan

On Wednesday, February 20, 2019, Mrs. Sara al Hasan was killed, while her husband and some of their children were injured in shelling by Syrian Regime forces, who used a missile launcher to bombard al Zaka village in the northern suburbs of Hama governorate, which was under the control of factions of the Armed Opposition at the time of the incident.

On Thursday, February 21, 2019, Syria Regime artillery forces fired a shell near [Abu Bakr al Siddiq Mosque](#) in [Hraitan town](#) in the northern suburbs of Aleppo governorate, [partially destroying](#) the building and [moderately damaging](#) its furnishings. The town was under the control of Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.



Remnant of an artillery shell fired by Syrian Regime artillery forces at the Abu Bakr al Siddiq Mosque in Hraitan town, Aleppo – February 21, 2019



On Friday, February 22, 2019, Syrian Regime forces used a missile launcher to fire a number of missiles at northwestern neighborhood of the city of [Ma'aret al Nu'man](#) in Idlib governorate: [three of the missiles](#) landed in an open area of ground surrounded by homes located near the [ancient citadel](#). At the time of the bombardment [children](#) were playing in the open area, with the bombing resulting in the deaths of six civilians at one time (five male children and one woman). The city was under the joint control of factions of the Armed Opposition and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.

Obada Thekra⁹ - Director of the Civil Defense Center in Ma'aret al Nu'man – told the SNHR that the city has been subjected to sporadic ground shelling from time to time since February 16, 2019 by the Syrian Regime forces stationed at Abu Dali and Abu Omar positioning sites: **“Today is February 22, Ma'aret al Nu'man was shelled by a variety of missiles, including a large one with massively destructive effects and ordinary launcher missiles. They targeted residential neighborhoods in the city. Some of these missiles landed in an empty space surrounded by a number of houses, next to the ancient citadel in the northwest of the city, causing a massacre in which five children were killed, including three brothers and another relative, in addition to a woman. All the victims were at the same site; we responded [to the emergency call-out] and headed there to recover the victims and the wounded.**” Obada added that 13 other people had been killed and nearly 30 injured in the previous six days as a result of the ongoing shelling, which led to a state of great fear among the people in the city that houses more than 40,000 displaced people as well as 100,000 of its original inhabitants, causing paralysis to the movement in the city and the closure of markets and schools in anticipation of repeated bombing at any moment.

On Tuesday, February 26, 2019, Syrian Regime forces warplanes fired a missile at al Sharqi neighborhood of Khan Sheikhoun city in the southern suburbs of Idlib governorate, resulting in the deaths of three children from one family (two females and one male) The city was under the joint control of factions of the Armed Opposition and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.

On Monday, March 4, 2019, Syrian Regime forces used missile launcher to fire a number of 9m55k missiles [loaded](#) with [9n235 cluster submunitions](#), which targeted the southern outskirts of Ma'aret al Nu'man city in the southern suburbs of Idlib governorate, injuring two persons. The area was under the control of factions of the Armed Opposition and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham.

⁹ We contacted him on WhatsApp on February 22, 2019



On Wednesday, March 6, 2019, Syrian Regime forces used missile launcher to fire a number of missiles loaded with cluster submunitions, which targeted Khan al Sebel village in the southern suburbs of Idlib governorate, resulting in the death of Mrs. Khadija Hussein al Safar, and injuring four others. The area was under the control of Hay'at Tahrir al Sham. <https://drive.google.com/open?id=1mYLUh-MDMeiDivDLsDFoRnzM5am01bnb>

On Sunday, March 10, 2019. Syrian Regime artillery forces fired several shells at the residential neighborhoods in Khan Sheikoun city in the southern suburbs of Idlib governorate, resulting in the death of four civilians, a child and his parents, as well as the [media activist Nasif al Sermani](#). The city 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, March 10, 2019. Syrian Regime artillery forces fired several shells at the [Civil Defense center](#) in Morek town in the northern suburbs of Hama governorate, resulting in the [death of Noor al Din Haj Hussein](#), a member of the Civil Defense, in addition to partial destruction in the center building. The town was under the control of Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.



Destruction inflicted by Syrian Regime forces' ground attack on the Civil Defense center in Morek town, Hama – March 10, 2019 – By: Iyad Abu al Joud



On Tuesday, March 12, 2019, Syrian Regime forces, stationed at Abu Dali village in the eastern suburbs of Idlib, used a missile launcher to shell about [40 missiles](#) in two consecutive stages. [Most of the missiles](#) were loaded with incendiary materials that fell indiscriminately on all the neighborhoods of al- Taman'a town in the southern suburbs of Idlib in areas located away from front lines. The attack set fires in homes and farmlands, and we recorder no civilian casualties. The area was under the control of factions of the Armed Opposition and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham.



Remnants of incendiary weapons used by Syrian Regime forces in a ground attack on al Taman'a town, Idlib – March 12, 2019 – By: Mohammad al Mer'e

B. Russian forces:

On Friday, January 4, 2019, at around 22:09, fixed-wing warplanes, which we believe were Russian, fired a number of missiles that landed near a farm for raising livestock and poultry in the west of Darat Ezza city in the western suburbs of Aleppo governorate, resulting in the deaths of three civilians from one family, including a child. The bombardment also killed a number of livestock, as well as causing considerable material damage to the farm and out-buildings. The city was under the control of Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.

On Sunday, January 20, 2019, at around 3:00, fixed-wing warplanes, which we believe were Russian, fired [two missiles](#) at [al Taqwa automatic bakery](#) in the north of [al Janoudiya](#) village near the city of [Jisr al Shoghour](#) in the western suburbs of Idlib governorate, causing massive destruction to the bakery building, as well as [severely damaging](#) its [equipment](#). The village was under the control of Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.





The scale of destruction at al Taqwa automatic bakery in al Janoudiya village, Idlib, inflicted by a Russian airstrike – January 20, 2019

On Saturday, March 9, 2019, fixed-wing warplanes, which we believe were Russian, launched a number of consecutive strikes using missiles at the residential neighborhoods in al Mantar village, which is administratively a part of Jisr al Shoghour city in the western suburbs of Idlib governorate, resulting in the deaths of four civilians, including a female child and two women from the same family, in addition to Mahmoud Emad Abdul Aal, a media worker at the Civil Defense center, who was killed as he was inspecting the site of one of the earlier airstrikes before warplanes returned to attack the same site. The city was under the control of Hay'at Tahrir al Sham and the Turkistan Islamic Party.



Mahmoud Abdul Aal, a media worker at the Civil Defense center, who was killed in a Russian air strike on al Mantar village, Idlib – March 9, 2019



On Wednesday, March 13, 2019, at around 3:00, fixed-wing warplanes, which we believe were Russian, [fired two missiles](#) at [a makeshift](#) camp for [displaced people](#) and an adjacent poultry farm consisting of “[chicken](#), goat and sheep” east of Kafr Amem village in the eastern suburbs of Idlib, resulting in the deaths of two women, and injuring about ten children, in addition to damaging a number of tents. The area was under the control of Hay’at Tahrir al Sham and factions of the Armed Opposition.

On Wednesday, March 13, 2019, at around 15:15, fixed-wing warplanes, which we believe were Russian, fired missiles at Idlib Central Prison, west of Idlib city, resulting in the deaths of 31 prisoners. Up to the time of writing, the incident is still under investigation. The same warplanes returned to fly over the city at around 17:15, then bombed al Kasih area in the center of Idlib city with eight missiles that targeted the Government Square, which includes the civil services of the Salvation Government (Idlib Electricity Department and its warehouses, the Central Electricity Transformer Substation, the Civil Registry building, the Salvation Government building, the Social Insurance building and Ministry of the Interior building).

Two missiles landed on a residential building opposite the Social Insurance building, resulting in the deaths of 12 civilians, including five children (three females and two males) and one woman.

We note that one missile fell in an area between residential buildings, located opposite the Electricity company around 250m away from the site of the massacre, resulting in the deaths of four other civilians, all from the same family, namely two children – a male and a female - and their grandparents. Idlib city was under the control of Hay’at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.

The attack caused significant material damage to the buildings of [Idlib Electricity Department and its warehouses](#), [the Central Electricity Transformer Substation](#), the Civil Registry building and the [Salvation Government](#) building, all of which were put out of service, in addition to inflicting moderate material damage to the [Social Insurance](#) building and the Yousef al Azma Elementary School, located opposite the Civil Registry building.

This link shows the [location](#) of the Central Prison.

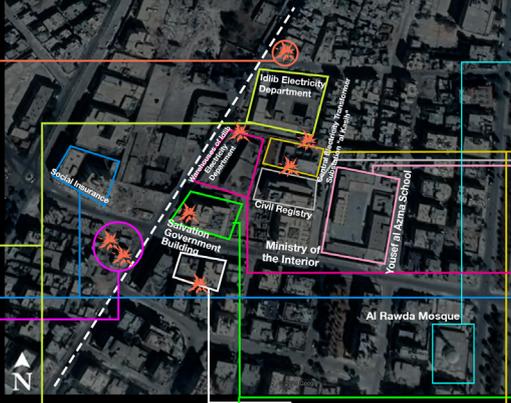


Optical analysis showing the map of al Kasih area and the details of the Russian air attack on it:

Site of an air attack, which we believe was Russian, on al Kasih area, Idlib city – March 13, 2019



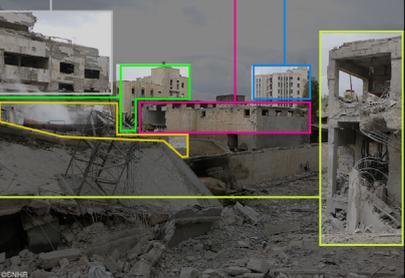












○

Area where victims died

○

Area where a massacre took place

✦

Impact site of missiles



Idlib city
Location of the attack

As documented by SNHR



SNHR contacted the activist Suhaib Mkahhal¹⁰, from Idlib city, who was in the city at the time of the incident: **“At around 3:15 pm, two Russian Sukhoi 34 warplanes, according to the Observatory, launched several air strikes, and targeted Idlib Central Prison, west of the city in Arab Saeed area, [which is] a large prison divided into four floors that holds detainees on charges of various crimes,”** Suhaib told us that in each of the air raids, the warplanes launched more than one missile, adding that many of the bodies were taken to hospitals in the city of Idlib and its suburbs. He added: **“Two hours later, a Russian Sukhoi 35 warplane, which took off from the airport of Hmeimim, according to the Observatory, returned and targeted the center of Idlib city in the area of the headquarters of the Salvation Government, electricity, and civil registry. The missiles hit the Zeers’ buildings, which collapsed completely, and hit buildings opposite the government headquarters and next to it, where civilians live, which were massively destroyed. In addition, the missiles resulted in two massacres occurring in two locations less than 300 m away from each other”** Suhaib said that he was at al Zera’a Circle at the moment of bombing al Kasih area, and saw the missiles’ explosion: **“The warplanes were firing four missiles in each raid, and these raids hindered the rescue operations that were coming from the Central Prison, and resulted in the destruction of the infrastructure of the city. The residential and service buildings have been destroyed, especially the electricity station, which was massively destroyed and put out of service. “**

C. Factions of the Armed Opposition:

On Saturday, February 16, 2019, a number of missiles landed at the [Misyaf National Hospital](#) in Misyaf city in the western suburbs of Hama governorate. We believe that the source of the missiles was a missile launcher stationed in an area controlled by factions of the Armed Opposition. The attack caused [moderate material](#) damage to the hospital’s garage and buildings. The city was under the control of Syrian Regime forces at the time of the incident.

On Saturday, February 16, 2019, two missiles hit the Mharda thermal power station in Mharda city in the northern suburbs of Hama governorate. We believe that the source of these missiles was a missile launcher stationed in an area controlled by factions of the Armed Opposition. The attack caused [moderate material](#) damage to the automated control building and to the automatic fuse box. We note that the Syrian Regime forces had earlier turned part of the station into a military base where heavy military vehicles are stationed. The city was under the control of Syrian Regime forces at the time of the incident.

¹⁰ We contacted him on WhatsApp on March 16, 2019



IV. Legal Profile and Recommendations

- The Syrian-Russian alliance' forces has violated the de-escalation zone agreement in all regions, and in 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 the area of the fourth de-escalation zone, mostly in the demilitarized zone, in the eastern suburbs of Hama and in the south-eastern suburbs of Idlib. These attacks have resulted in civilian casualties.
- The Syrian Regime forces and Shiite militias broke the Sochi agreement by attacking factions of the Armed Opposition and killing a number of their members.
- The Islamic factions violated the Sochi Agreement and bombed areas under the control of Syrian Regime forces. They also exploited the cessation of fighting and extended their control over additional areas at the expense of factions of the Armed Opposition.
- Some Armed Opposition factions broke the Sochi Agreement by bombing areas controlled by Syrian Regime forces.
- The Syrian Regime forces has 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.

Recommendations:

International Security Council:

- The Security Council must pass a resolution to stabilize the ceasefire in Idlib and include punitive measures for all violators of the cease-fire.
- 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.
- The establishment of peace and security and the application of the principle of responsibility for the protection of civilians and to 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 displace-



ments, and enact laws aimed at preventing the plunder of displaced persons' properties and possessions.

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.
- 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, as did the Cessation of Hostilities statements and Astana agreements that followed. 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 on implementing the principle of the 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 of combat operations, and protect the lives of at least 4.7 million people living there.

UN General Assembly

- The Syrian regime has full responsibility for the displacement of one-third of the Syrian people, including legal and material responsibility, and must 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.



UN Envoy to Syria

- Condemn the perpetrators of the crimes and massacres and the main culprits in the collapse of agreements on de-escalation zones, and thus declare the collapse and the end of the political process in full, as well as holding the Syrian-Russian alliance to account for its actions.
- Disclose to the Syrian people Russia's pursuit of full control of Syrian territory by force, and its public desire to rehabilitate the current regime, which means the creation of a political solution which satisfies only its own interests.

Donor countries and UNOCHR

- 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 being primarily water, food, housing, clothing and medical care.

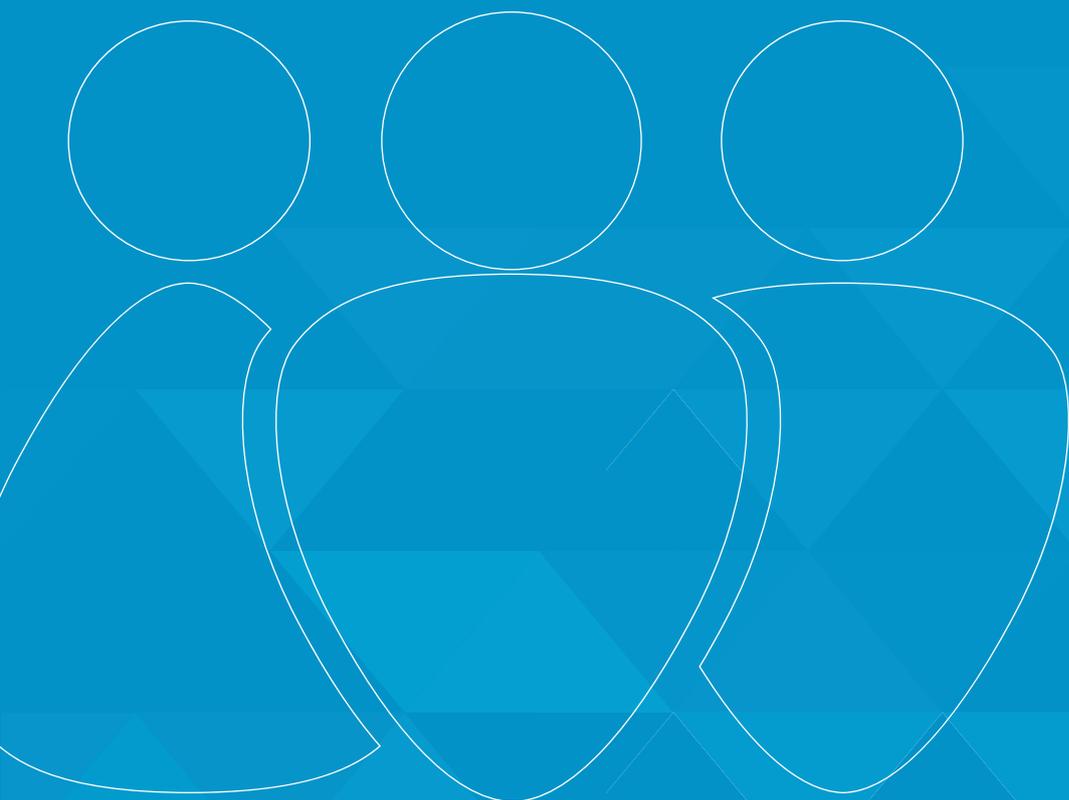
Russian forces

- Stop committing all types of war crimes in Syria.
- Reconstruct what was destroyed by the Russian war machine.
- Compensate victims financially and morally and apologize publicly.
- Commit to the outcome of the Sochi Summit and not to repeat the scenario of violations we have seen in the agreements of de-escalation zone.
- Stop supporting the war crimes and crimes against humanity which the Syrian regime has been committing for eight years, with the current support being considered as direct involvement in these crimes.
- Contribute to the assistance of displaced persons who were displaced by the Russian war machine from the Eastern Ghouta in the Damascus Suburbs governorate and the governorates of Homs and Daraa, and protect the residents of those areas who remained from the arrests, persecution, kidnappings and enforced disappearances being perpetrated by the Syrian Regime and the Iranian militias.

Acknowledgment and Condolences

Our thanks to the residents, victims' families, 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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