

# No less than 28 Massacres in January 2018

Including 22 at the Hands of  
Syrian-Russian Alliance Forces



SYRIAN NETWORK FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

الشبكة السورية لحقوق الإنسان

Tuesday, February 6, 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

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 January 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" is used to refer 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 documents one massacre that was the result of bombings that we couldn't identify the groups behind them in light of the difficulties in identifying the responsible party for such bombings.

This report also contains a number of attacks by shell that we couldn't accurately determine who fired them, as we weren't able to visit the site or obtain evidences to assist in properly identifying the source of these shells.

This report contains four accounts that we've collected through speaking directly to eyewitnesses, and not are 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 insurances to conceal the identify 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 who were killed in attacks in which missiles, barrel bombs, and artillery shells were used. Most of the victims were children and women, while other pictures showed victims killed in bombings the perpetrators of which haven't been identified.

We have copies of all the pictures and videos included in this report in a secret online database and back up copies on hard drives. We always make sure to store this data with its respective source. Nonetheless, we can't claim that we have document 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. Summary of January 2018

We have recorded that Syrian-Russian alliance forces perpetrated 22 massacres in January, divided evenly between Syrian regime forces and Russian forces. Most of the Syrian regime's massacres were concentrated in Eastern Ghouta that saw seven massacres using artillery while most of the Russian forces' massacres (eight massacres) were in Idlib governorates.

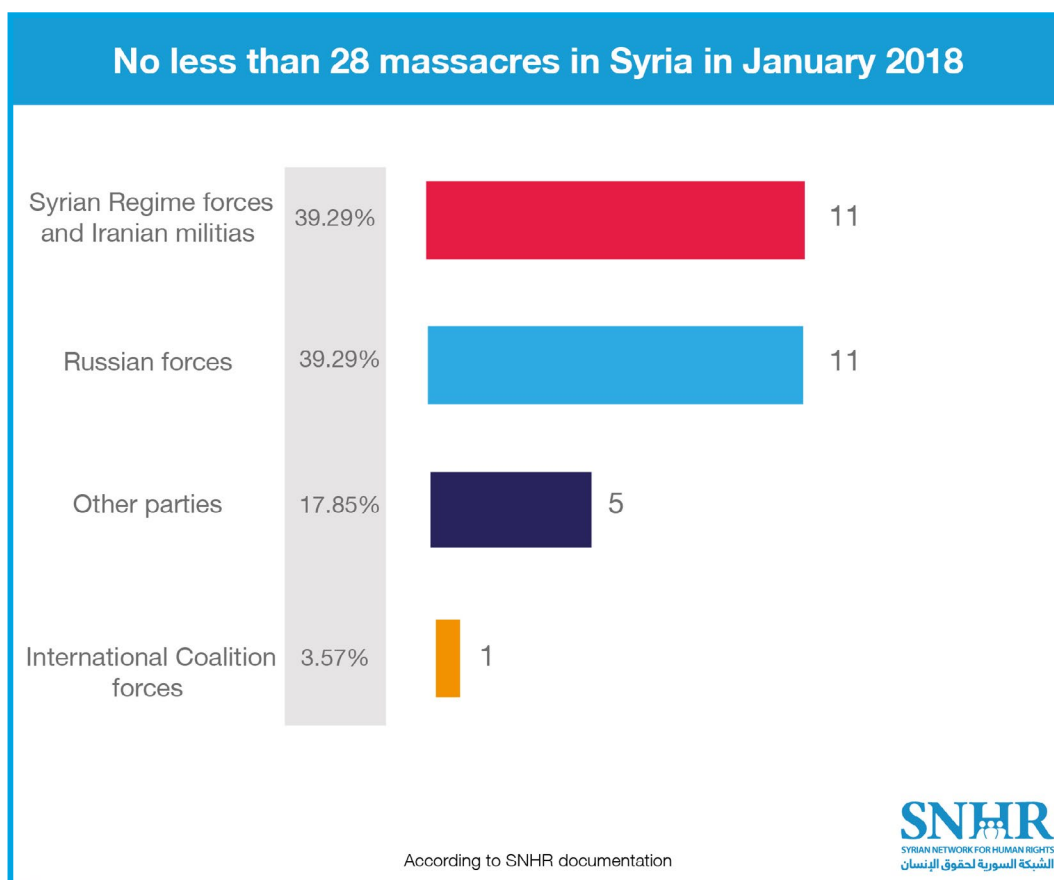
Idlib governorate saw the most massacres with 11 massacres, followed by Damascus suburbs governorate with nine massacres, and then Aleppo with six massacres.



### III. Executive Summary

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

SNHR has documented no less than 28 massacres in January, distributed as follows:



A. Syrian regime forces: 11

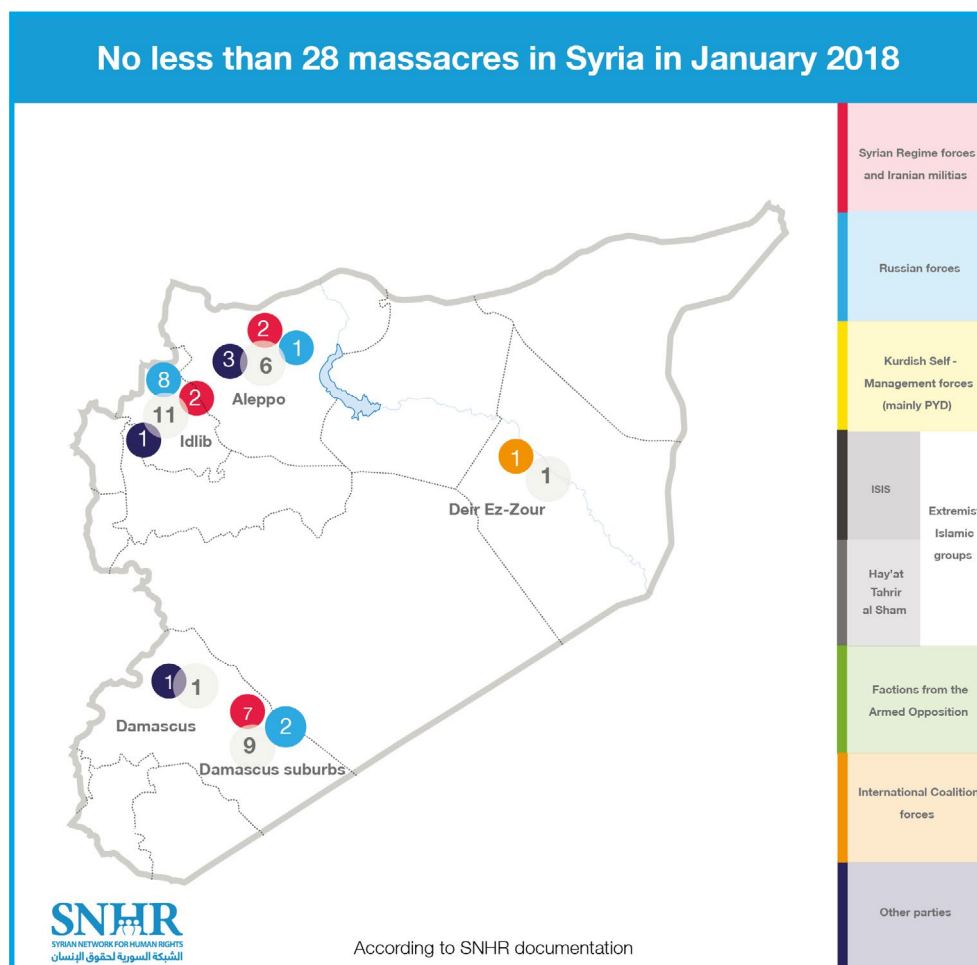
B. Russian forces: 11

C. International coalition forces: 1

D. Other parties: 5



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



Syrian regime forces' massacres in January were distributed by area of control, as follows:

- 9 massacres in areas under the control of factions from the armed opposition.
- 2 massacres in areas under the joint control of Hay'at Tahrir al Sham and factions from the armed opposition.

According to the victim documentation team at SNHR, these massacres resulted in the killing of 260 civilians, including 88 children and 71 women (adult female). This means that 62% 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:

Syrian regime forces: 94 civilians, including 36 children and 20 women.

Russian forces: 94 civilians, including 27 children and 30 women.

International coalition forces: 5 civilians, including 1 child.

Other parties: 67 civilians, including 24 children and 21 women.





## IV. Details of the Most Notable Massacres in January

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

#### Damascus suburbs governorate

Saturday, January 6, 2018, around 14:00, [fixed-wing](#) Syrian regime forces warplanes fired [a number of missiles](#) at the residential neighborhoods in [Hamouriya](#) town, Eastern Ghouta, eastern Damascus suburbs governorate, which resulted in the killing of [17 civilians](#), including [six children](#) and six women, while about 25 others were wounded. The city was under the control of armed opposition factions at the time of the incident.

Abdul Rahman Yasin<sup>1</sup>, a media activist at Hamouriya Media Office who was near the attack site: **“Around 14:00 on Saturday, January 6, Syrian regime forces warplanes carried out an airstrike with four highly-explosive missiles that landed 10 meters away from each other on the residential neighborhoods, west of the town. I couldn’t see because of all of the dust.”** Abdul Rahman added that the sight was too grim after the dust settled: **“Dead bodies and wounded people were everywhere, and you could hear women and children screaming. I had to document the massacre and help aid the wounded which were about 50.”** Abdul Rahman confirmed to us that the targeted area is a residential area with no military bases.



Child killed in a massacre by Syrian regime forces in Hamouriya town, Damascus suburbs – January 6, 2018

<sup>1</sup> We contacted him via WhatsApp on January 17, 2018

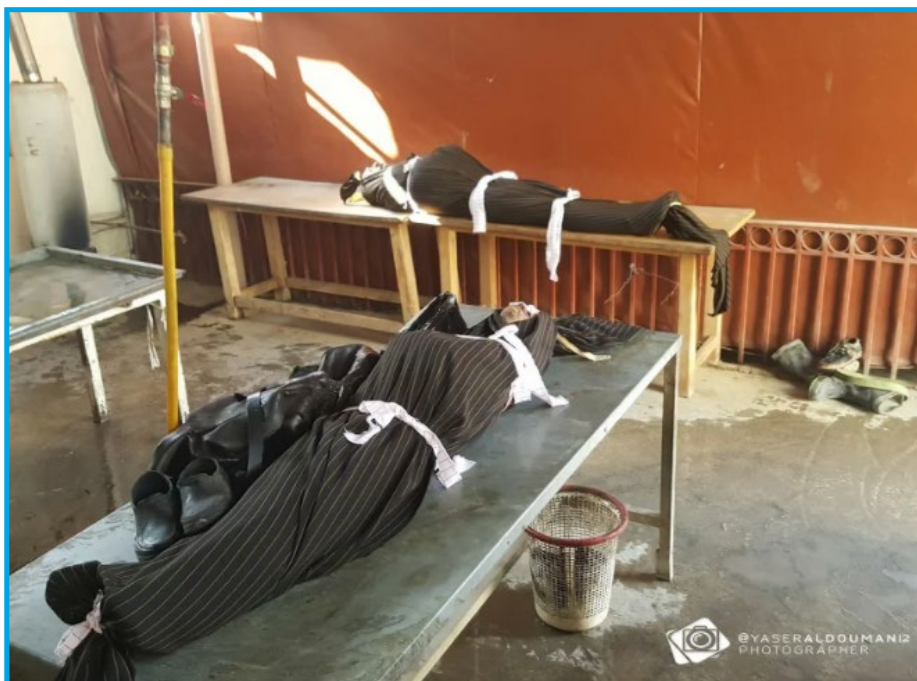


Tuesday, January 9, 2018, fixed-wing Syrian regime forces warplanes fired a number of missiles at Hamouriya town, Eastern Ghouta, eastern Damascus suburbs governorate, which resulted in the killing of [25 civilians](#), including [13 children](#) and eight women while about 50 others were wounded. The town was under the control of armed opposition factions at the time of the incident.



Victims killed in a massacre by Syrian regime forces in Hamouriya town, Damascus suburbs – January 9, 2018

Sunday, January 28, 2018, Syrian regime forces artillery fired [a number of shells](#) at Douma city, Eastern Ghouta, eastern Damascus suburbs governorate, which resulted in the killing of [five civilians](#) at once, including two children and one woman, while about 10 others were wounded. The city was under the control of armed opposition factions at the time of the incident.



Victims killed in a massacre by Syrian regime forces in Douma city, Damascus suburbs – January 28, 2018





## Aleppo governorate

Wednesday, January 31, 2018, Syrian regime forces helicopters dropped two barrel bombs on [Talafeh](#) village, southern suburbs of Aleppo governorate, which resulted in the killing of six civilians, including three children and two women. The village was under the control of armed opposition factions at the time of the incident.

## Idlib governorate

Tuesday, January 30, 2018, [fixed-wing](#) Syrian regime forces warplanes fired [three missiles](#) at [al Hal market](#) in the middle of [Ariha](#) city, southern suburbs of Idlib governorate, which resulted in the killing of [seven civilians](#) at once -what we have been able to document at the time of this writing- while about [20 others](#) were wounded. The city was under the joint control of armed opposition factions and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.



Victims killed in a massacre by Syrian regime forces in Ariha city, Idlib – January 30, 2018

## B. Russian forces

### Idlib governorate

Tuesday, January 2, 2018, fixed-wing warplanes we believe were Russian fired [two missiles](#) at an agricultural land -used in [an agricultural project](#)- in eastern [Khan al Sebel](#) village, eastern suburbs of Idlib governorate, which resulted in the killing of five civilians (four children and one woman), who are IDPs from Taybat al Imam city, northern suburbs of Hama governorate, from the same family. The village was under the joint control of armed opposition factions and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.



Sunday, January 7, 2018, fixed-wing warplanes we believe were Russian fired seven missiles -in consecutive strikes- on al Fa'loul farm which is located in eastern Jarjanaz town, eastern suburbs of Idlib governorate. The first two missiles hit a residence for an IDP family from Jarjanaz town, while the rest of the missiles hit who survived the first bombing as they were fleeing the site. The bombardment resulted in the killing of 13 civilians, including two children and three women, who were mostly from the same family. The area was under the joint control of armed opposition factions and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.

Wednesday, January 24, 2018, fixed-wing warplanes we believe were Russian fired a number of [missiles](#) at the houses in Sanqara village, Sahl al Rouj area, western suburbs of Idlib governorate, which resulted in the killing of [eight civilians](#), who were mostly from the same family, including two children and two women. The village is under the joint control of Hay'at Tahrir al Sham and the Islamic Turkistani Party at the time of the incident.

Monday, January 29, 2018, fixed-wing warplanes (Su-25) we believe were Russian carried out a machine gun airstrike, using [small-sized missiles](#), on the [new potato market](#), formerly al Wees Factory, in northern [Saraqeb](#) city, eastern suburbs of Idlib governorate, which resulted in [the killing](#) of [11 civilians](#), while about 10 others [were wounded](#). The city was under the joint control of armed opposition factions and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.



Victims killed in a massacre by Russian forces in Saraqeb city, Idlib – January 29, 2018



## Damascus suburbs governorate

Wednesday, January 3, 2018, around 21:00, fixed-wing warplanes we believe were Russian fired [a number of missiles](#) at the residential neighborhoods in the center of [Irbeen](#) city, Eastern Ghouta, eastern Damascus suburbs governorate, which resulted in the killing of [six civilians](#) from the same family, including three children and one woman, while about 20 others were wounded. The city was under the control of armed opposition factions at the time of the incident.

Anas al Ta'an <sup>2</sup>, a civil defense volunteer, told us that observatories announced that Russian warplanes took off from Hmeimim Military Airbase between 20:30 and 21:00, before the operators told us that these warplanes carried out three airstrikes on Misraba town, followed by another three in the middle of Irbeen city -each airstrike with one missile: **“We headed for the attack site in Irbeen and found two buildings that were completely destroyed. The first missile didn’t cause any injuries while the third didn’t explode. However, the second one caused a massacre. We couldn’t start working until the scouting planes left, which was nearly at 23:00.”** Anas mentioned that the residents who survived told them about a family living in the destroyed house: **“We were able to pull out three dead bodies - two men and one child. After we left, we learned that the other three family members were found at another location. It seems that the pressure that the explosion produced had killed and tossed them far away.”**

Wednesday, January 3, 2018, [fixed-wing warplanes](#) we believe were Russian fired a number of [missiles](#) at the residential neighborhoods in [Misraba](#) town, Eastern Ghouta, eastern Damascus suburbs governorate, which resulted in the killing of [20 civilians](#), including 11 women, while about [80 others](#) were wounded. The city was under the control of armed opposition factions at the time of the incident.

Malek al Herek <sup>3</sup>, a member of Ghouta Media Office, told us that observatories announced that Russian warplanes have taken off and are heading south around 21:00 on January 3: **“We notified all newsrooms so civilians can take precautions. We learned that the warplanes carried out airstrikes in Misraba and Irbeen and committed two massacres in the two towns. I headed with my friend to Misraba, which was about 3 km from my house, and civil defense members were pulling out the victims from rubbles, I documented and took pictures of the people who were in rubbles before heading back home.”** Malek added that the warplane carried out four airstrikes in Misraba – each airstrike was one or two minutes from the one before. Also, Malek said that he learned later that 10 victims were killed in an airstrike while seven were killed in a second airstrike, and three in the last two airstrikes: **“The destruction caused by the missiles was huge. The first missile created a hole with a depth of five meters and a diameter of 20 meters after penetrating three roofs.”**

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<sup>2</sup> We contacted him via Telegram on January 6, 2018

<sup>3</sup> We contacted him via Telegram on January 6, 2018





## **Aleppo governorate**

Sunday, January 21, 2018, around 17:00, fixed-wing warplanes we believe were Russian fired a missile at [Zmar](#) village, southern suburbs of Aleppo governorate, which resulted in the killing of six civilians, including [two children](#) and three women. The village was under the control of armed opposition factions at the time of the incident.

## **C. international coalition forces**

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

Saturday, January 13, 2018, fixed-wing international coalition forces fired a number of missiles at [Hajin](#) city, eastern Deir Ez-Zour governorate, which resulted in the killing of five civilians, who were mostly from the same family, including one woman. The city was under the control of ISIS at the time of the incident.

## **D. Other parties**

### **Aleppo governorate**

Sunday, January 21, 2018, fixed-wing warplanes we believe were [Turkish fired a missile](#) at a chicken farm housing IDPs from Anabka village, which is administratively a part of Ifreen city, northern suburbs of Aleppo governorate. The bombardment resulted in the killing of 10 civilians, who were mostly from the same family, including six children and one woman. The village was under the control of Democratic Union Party – a Kurdistan Workers' Party branch- at the time of the incident.

### **Idlib governorate**

Sunday, January 7, 2018, around 18:30, an [explosion occurred](#) in front of an eight-floor residential building, known as al Miri Supermarket, in [al Thalatheen Street](#) on the southwestern outskirts of Idlib city. [The bombing](#) resulted in the killing of [32 civilians](#), including nine children and [11 women](#), while about 98 others were wounded. We haven't been able to identify the nature and the group responsible for the bombing as of this writing due to the considerable difficulty in identifying the groups responsible for such bombings. The area was under the control of Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident. It should be noted that one of the floors is used as a management base for Ajnad al Qawqaz.

Ammar al Hamdo <sup>4</sup>, a media worker with the civil defense center who operates in the sector containing Idlib city and its vicinities, told us that he heard an explosion on the afternoon of Sunday, January 7, in Idlib city, adding that the explosion's echo reached Jisr al Shoghour and Ma'aret al Nu'man city in the governorate's suburbs: **"I arrived with the civil defense team to the explosion site. The destruction was huge and I saw more than seven cars that were burned. Fires broke out in a number of buildings, and women and children**

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<sup>4</sup> We contacted him via WhatsApp on January 8, 2018



were in the streets. The team worked quickly on putting out the fires and rushing the injured, who were about 96, to hospitals.” Ammar added that he couldn’t determine the nature of the bombing, as no remnants of a bomb car or a missile were found: “I’ve only seen three circle-shaped holes in the bombing site.”



Victims killed in a bombing of unknown source in al Thlatheen Street, Idlib – January 7, 2018

### Damascus governorate

Monday, January 22, 2018, a number of mortar shells landed on [Bab Touma](#) neighborhood, eastern Damascus governorate. One of the shells landed in a garage for buses used for internal transportation. The shelling resulted in the killing of 10 civilians, including three children and three women, while about 21 others were wounded. We haven’t been able to identify the group responsible for the shelling as of this writing. Bab Touma neighborhood was under the control of Syrian regime forces at the time of the incident.

## 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.
- 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 forces 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 have been 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.

## **The 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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