

No less than 39 Massacres in October 2017

Including 27 by Syrian-
Russian Alliance Forces

SNHR

SYRIAN NETWORK FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

الشبكة السورية لحقوق الإنسان

Wednesday, November 8, 2017

The Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR), founded in June 2011, is a non-governmental, independent group that is considered a primary source for the OHCHR on all death toll-related analyses in Syria.



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I. Introduction

The fourth round of negotiations was held in Astana city, Kazakhstan's capital, on 3 and 4 of May 2017. Russian, Turkish, and Iranian representatives attended as the sponsoring states of Ankara Ceasefire Agreement. The three states agreed on establishing four de-escalation zones, wherein the agreement is to commence on May 6, 2017. The agreement outlined four major areas for the de-escalation in Idlib governorate and the surrounding areas (parts of Aleppo, Hama, and Latakia governorates), northern Homs governorate, Eastern Ghouta, and parts of Daraa and al Quneitra governorates in the southern parts of Syria. It was provided that a special committee would accurately assign the borders of said zones at a later date. The agreement provided for a cessation of combat operations, passage of humanitarian aids, and for IDPs to go back to their areas.

Following an extensive round of talks between Russia, USA, and Jordan that commenced in May 2017 in Amman, Jordan's capital, the American and Russian presidents announced, on the sidelines of the 2017 G20 summit in Hamburg, that a ceasefire agreement has been reached in southwestern Syria – Daraa, Quneitra, and Suwayda governorates. The agreement went into force at 12:00 on Sunday July 9, 2017, and provided for the passage of humanitarian aids in addition to a ceasefire between the conflicting parties (Syrian regime forces and their allies on one side, and armed opposition factions on the other side). Also, the agreement specifies that maintaining security in this region is the Russian forces' responsibility in coordination with the Americans and Jordanians.



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

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

On Monday, July 31, 2017, another de-escalation agreement was signed in Egypt's capital Cairo for northern Homs suburbs and southern Hama suburbs following a round of talks between armed opposition factions in the area and the Syrian regime represented by the Russian government as a sponsoring party, as the agreement was to commence at 12:00 on Thursday, August 3, 2017.

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



Despite all of this, breaches haven't stopped, mainly by the Syrian regime, who is seemingly the party that would be most affected should the ceasefire go on, and in particular extrajudicial killing crimes and, more horrendously, deaths due to torture. This strongly asserts that there is a ceasefire of some sort on the table, but the crimes that the international community -especially the guarantors- won't see are still going on as nothing had changed.

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

On September 19, Syrian-Russian alliance started a heavy offensive against Idlib governorate in response to Hay'at Tahrir al Sham's "Ya Ebadallah Uthbotou" battle. Supported by some opposition faction (The Islamic Turkistani Party, Jaish al Izza, and Jaish al Nukhba), Hay'at Tahrir al Sham started this battle in northeastern Hama governorate, as they took over some villages, but Syrian regime forces, backed by Russian forces, managed to re-seize the same areas on the same day. We have released [a report](#) documenting the most notable violations of the first week of that offensive. Subsequently, these forces expanded the offensive to include the suburbs of Aleppo and Hama governorates and Eastern Ghouta in Damascus suburbs.

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

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



In October, we recorded that Russian forces, for the first time in a year, topped again all other parties in terms of massacres in October by perpetrating 42% of all of October's massacres. This comes in light of the heavy Russian bombing despite the de-escalation agreements. Syrian regime forces were responsible 29% of all massacres in October, only topped by Russian forces, followed by international coalition forces at 24% of all massacres documented in October, as all of the international coalition forces' massacres were in Raqqa governorate. It is worth noting that 59% of all massacres documented in October were in Deir Ez-Zour governorate.

Methodology

SNHR incorporates high documentation standards that rely on direct accounts from survivors or victims' families and local media activists. In addition, we have analyzed the pictures and videos and some medical records we received. We have all the pictures and videos that are mentioned in this report in a secret online database, and backup copies on hard drives. Certainly, we can't claim that we have documented all cases in light of the ban and pursuit by Syrian regime forces and other armed groups.

The type and number of evidences vary from one case to another. In light of the challenges we mentioned above, many of the incidents' legal description change based on new evidences or clues that surface after we had released the report. We add these evidences and clues to our database 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, we don't describe it as crimes.

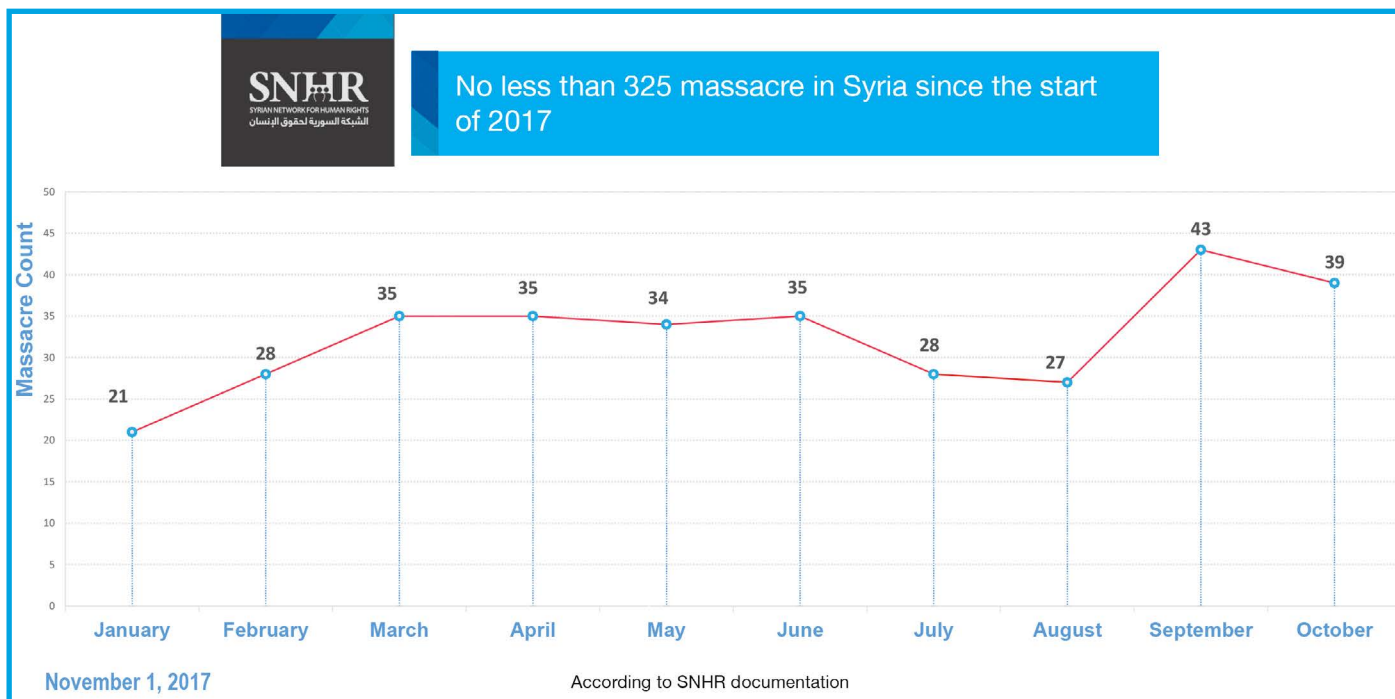
SNHR describes an incident as a massacre if it involves the killing of five peaceful individuals at the same time. For more information about our methodology in [documenting victims](#), please see the Following URL



II.Executive Summary

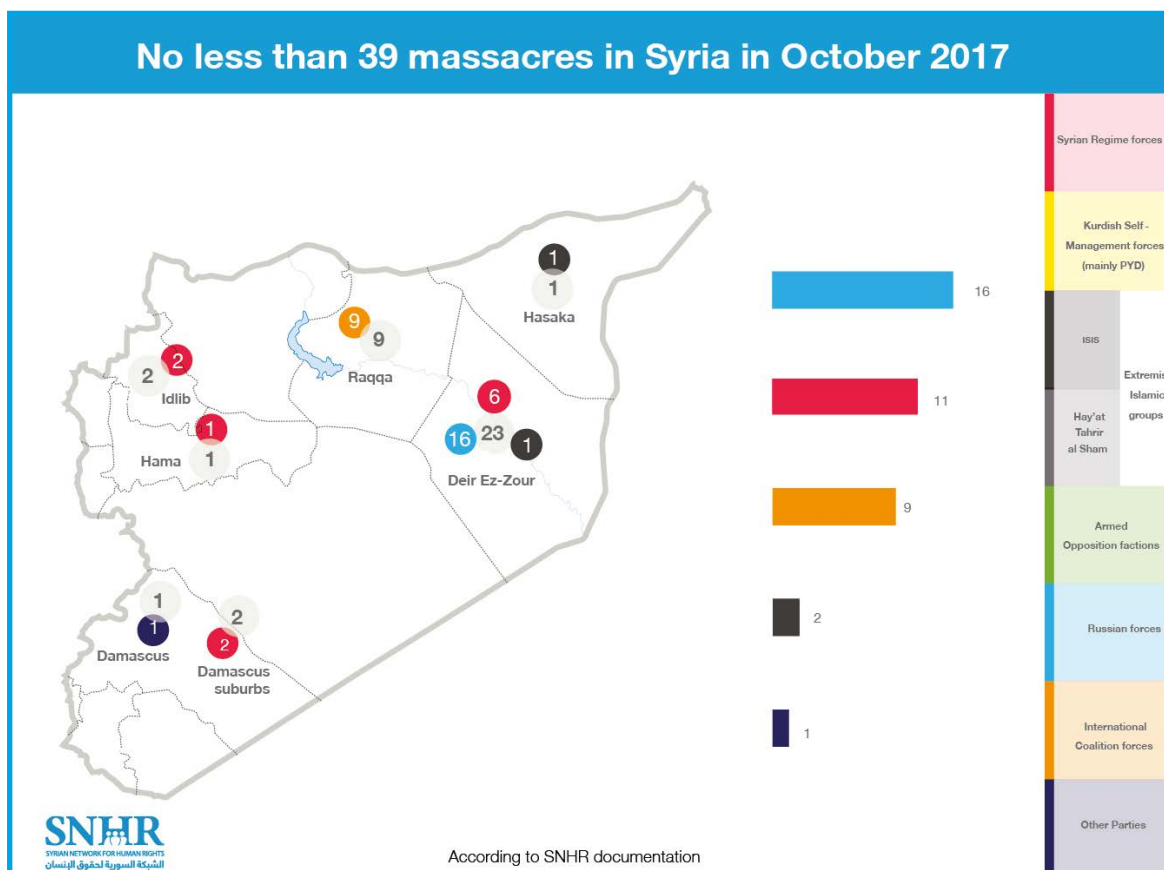
A. Toll of massacres in 2017

SNHR has documented 325 massacres at the hands of the parties to the conflict between the start of 2017 and November of the same year



B. Toll of massacres in October 2017

SNHR has documented no less than 39 massacres in October



The massacres perpetrated by Syrian regime forces in October 2017 were distributed by area of control as follows:

- Two massacres in areas under the control of armed opposition factions
- One massacre in areas under the control of Syrian regime forces
- Two massacres in areas under the joint control of armed opposition factions and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham
- One massacre in areas under the control of Hay'at Tahrir al Sham
- Five massacres in areas under the control of ISIS

According to the victim documentation team at SNHR, 435 individuals were killed in those massacres, including 145 children and 85 women (adult female). This means that 53% of all victims were women and children, which is a considerably high percentage and an indication that civilians were targeted in most of these massacres.

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

Syrian regime forces: 93 individuals, including 28 children and 20 women

Russian forces: 186 civilians, including 65 children and 35 women

ISIS: 35 civilians, including 15 children and five women

International coalition forces: 104 civilians, including 37 children and 25 women

Other parties: 17 individuals

II. Most Notable Massacres in October

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

Deir Ez-Zour governorate

Thursday, October 5, 2017, fixed-wing Syrian regime forces warplanes fired a number of missiles at the water-crossing between al Baghouz village and al Bokamal city in [al Baghouz](#) village, eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate, which resulted in the killing of seven civilians at once. The village was under the control of ISIS at the time of the incident.

Friday, October 6, 2017, fixed-wing Syrian regime forces warplanes fired a number of missiles at [Mahkan](#) town, eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate, which resulted in the killing of 13 civilians, including six children and five women. The town was under the control of ISIS at the time of the incident.



Monday, October 23, 2017, fixed-wing Syrian regime forces warplanes fired a missile at residential building in al Qosour neighborhood, western Deir Ez-Zour city, which resulted in the killing of 15 civilians, including one child, while about 30 others were wounded. The neighborhood was under the control of Syrian regime forces at the time of the incident.

Idlib governorate

Friday, October 6, 2017, fixed-wing Syrian regime forces warplanes fired four [missiles](#) at the eastern neighborhood in [Khan Sheikhoun](#) city, southern suburbs of Idlib governorate, which resulted in the killing of five civilians at once, including one child and two women. The city was under the joint control of armed opposition factions and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.



A victim killed in a massacre by Syrian regime forces in Khan Sheikhoun city, Idlib suburbs
– October 6, 2017

Damascus suburbs governorate

Tuesday morning, October 31, 2017, Syrian regime forces artillery [fired a shell](#) in front of Mohammad Naser Ash'oush Elementary School in the middle of [Jisreen](#) town, Eastern Gh-outa, [Damascus suburbs governorate](#), as students were leaving the school, which resulted in the killing of [seven individuals](#) at once, including [six children](#) of the school's students, while about 20 others were wounded. The town was under the control of armed opposition factions at the time of the incident.





Hama governorate

Friday dawn, October 20, 2017, Syrian-Russian alliance warplanes (Investigations are still ongoing to determine the perpetrating party accurately) fired missiles at [Mwayleh bin Hdaib](#) village, which [administratively follows](#) al Hamra county, eastern suburbs of Hama governorate, which resulted in the killing of five civilians from the same family (four children and one woman). The village was under the control of Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.

B. Russian forces

Deir Ez-Zour governorate

Wednesday, October 4, 2017, fixed-wing warplanes we believe were Russian fired missiles at the water-crossing that connect [al Ashara city](#) and Darnej village in al Ashara city, eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate, which resulted in the killing of 31 civilians, including six children and three women. Additionally, about 30 others were wounded. The city was under the control of ISIS at the time of the incident.

Wednesday, October 11, 2017, fixed-wing warplanes we believe were Russian fired a number of missiles at al Bokamal city, eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate, which resulted in the killing of 13 civilians from the same family, including seven children and five women. The city was under the control of ISIS at the time of the incident.



Wednesday, October 11, 2017, fixed-wing warplanes we believe were Russian fired a number of missiles at the water-crossing that connect al Qouriya city and al Tayyana village in al Qouriya city, eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate, which resulted in the killing of 21 civilians, including seven children and one woman, while about 30 others were wounded. The city was under the control of ISIS at the time of the incident.

Wednesday, October 18, 2017, fixed-wing warplanes we believe were Russian fired a number of missiles at a gathering of commercial car near al Masriya Circle in al Bokamal city, eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate, which resulted in the killing of eight civilians at once. The city was under the control of ISIS at the time of the incident.

Thursday, October 19, 2017, fixed-wing warplanes we believe were Russian fired a number of missiles at the river-crossing that connects al Bokamal city and al Baghouz village in al Bokamal city, eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate, which resulted in the killing of 20 civilians, including three children and six women. The city was under the control of ISIS at the time of the incident.

Monday, October 30, 2017, fixed-wing warplanes we believe are Russian fired a number of missiles at al Sousa village, eastern suburbs of Aleppo governorate, which resulted in the killing of five civilians from the same family -IDPs from Aleppo governorate- including two children and one woman. The town was under the control of ISIS at the time of the incident.

C. Extremist Islamic groups

- ISIS (Self-proclaimed the Islamic State)

Deir Ez-Zour governorate

Thursday, October 5, 2017, an ISIS artillery fired a number of mortar shells at [al Qosour](#) neighborhood, northwestern Deir Ez-Zour city, which resulted in the killing of 11 civilians, including six children and two women, while about 15 others were wounded. The neighborhood was under the control of Syrian regime forces at the time of the incident.

Hasaka governorate

Thursday, October 12, 2017, a bomb car driven by ISIS suicidal bomber blew in a gathering of civilians near a [checkpoint](#) for the Kurdish-majority Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) in Abu Fas village, southern suburbs of Hasaka governorate, which resulted in the killing of 24 civilians, including nine children and three women. The village was under the control of the Kurdish-Majority SDF at the time of the incident.



D. International coalition forces

Raqqa governorate

Sunday, October 1, 2017, fixed-wing international coalition forces warplanes fired a number of missiles at a gathering of civilians near a well near al Ansar Mosque in al Tawse'eya neighborhood, northeastern Raqqa city, which resulted in the killing of eight civilians at once. The neighborhood was under the control of ISIS at the time of the incident, while it is currently under the Kurdish-majority SDF as of this writing.

Tuesday night, October 3, 2017, fixed-wing international coalition forces warplanes fired a number of missiles at a residential building by the Women Association building in al Badou area, northeastern Raqqa city, which resulted in the killing of eight civilians from the same family, including five children and two women. The area was under the control of ISIS at the time of the incident, while it is currently under the Kurdish-majority SDF as of this writing.

Thursday, October 5, 2017, fixed-wing international coalition forces warplanes fired a number of missiles at a residential building in al Badou area, northwestern Raqqa city, which resulted in the killing of seven civilians from the same family -IDPs from al Sfeira city, eastern suburbs of Raqqa governorate- including an infant and four women. The area was under the control of ISIS at the time of the incident, while it is currently under the Kurdish-majority SDF as of this writing.

Saturday, October 7, 2017, fixed-wing international coalition forces warplanes bombed a residential building -known as al Kneiter building- by al Ansar Mosque parking lot in al Tawse'eya neighborhood, northwestern Raqqa city, which resulted in the killing of 25 civilians, including eight children and five women. The neighborhood was under the control of ISIS at the time of the incident, while it is currently under the Kurdish-majority SDF as of this writing.

D. Other parties

Damascus governorate

Monday, October 2, 2017, two IEDs exploded in the building of al Midan Police Station in [al Midan](#) neighborhood, southern Damascus city, which resulted in the killing of 17 individuals. We haven't been able to identify the group behind the bombing as of this writing. The neighborhood was under the control of Syrian regime forces at the time of the incident.



III. Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

Syrian regime forces and Russian forces

1. SNHR can confirm the bombing cases, deliberate or indiscriminate, targeted armless civilians, thus, the Syrian-Russian alliance forces have violated the rules of the international human rights law which guarantee the right to life. Furthermore, these violations were perpetrated during a non-international armed conflict which amounts to war crimes as all elements of a war crime have been fulfilled.
2. SNHR believes that the acts of killing that took place during these massacres can be classified as crimes against humanity.
3. These attacks, especially bombardment, have resulted in collateral damages that involved casualties, injuries, and damages to civil facilities. There are strong indicators that compel to believe that the damage was deeply severe compared to the anticipated military benefit. In all of the cases, we couldn't confirm that there were any military targets before or during these attacks.
4. The magnitude of the massacres, its frequent pattern, the exaggerated use of strength, its military nature, the indiscriminate manner of the bombing, and the coordinated approach of these attacks must be based on high orders, and a state policy.

Other forces

According to this report, ISIS, international coalition forces, and other parties have committed massacres that constitute war crimes. However, these crimes are not crimes against humanity as with the case of Syrian regime forces and their pro-regime forces that are committing massacres in a widespread and systematic manner.

Recommendations

The United Nations and the Security Council

1. Refer the case in Syria to the International Criminal Court and stop the disrupting of the decisions that must be adopted by the Security Council against the Syrian government. This disruption is a wrong message to all dictatorships around the world and supports the culture of crime.
2. Impose urgent punishments on those who are involved in widespread violations of human rights in Syria.
3. Bind the Syrian government to allow all relief and human rights organizations to enter Syria as well as the International Intendent Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic and journalists and let them work without any obstructions.



4. Insure that all weapon imports to the Syrian government, who is using weapons in wide-spread attacks against civilians, are halted.
5. the Security Council must shoulder its responsibility in preserving security and civil peace in Syria considering that the violations of the Syrian government entail a gross threat to the international peace and security.
6. List the militias that are fighting with the Syrian government and have committed wide-spread massacres, like Iranian militias, the Lebanese group Hezbollah, other Shiite brigades, National defense Army and “Shabiha” militias, on the international list of terrorist organizations.
7. Implement the “Responsibility to Protect” norm, which was established by the United Nations General Assembly in 2005, in Syria as it is direly needed there.
8. With the crimes against humanity committed by the Syrian government, the international community should stop dealing with this government as an “official side” concerning the relief issues, and stop supplying the Syrian government with most of the financial and humanitarian aids that, in most cases, are not being delivered to those who are in need and go instead to the people and parties that support the Syrian government.

The Russian guarantors

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

Acknowledgment and Condolences

Our thanks and appreciations go to the victims’ families, eyewitnesses, and local activists whose accounts contributed majorly to this report. Our most profound consolations go out to the victims’ families and friends.





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