

No less than Three Massacres in Syria in August 2018

No less than 204 Massacres in 2018

SNHR

SYRIAN NETWORK FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

الشبكة السورية لحقوق الإنسان

Thursday, September 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.



Contents

- I. Introduction and Methodology
- II. August Outline
- III. Executive Summary
- IV. Details of the Most Notable Massacres in August
- V. Conclusions and Recommendations

I. Introduction and Methodology

Since the popular uprising for freedom started in Syria in March 2011, SNHR has taken it upon itself to record a wide range of violations that are being perpetrated daily against the Syrian people, such as killing, enforced-disappearance, arbitrary arrest, destruction, indiscriminate bombardment, and torture as SNHR shed light on the most notable violations it recorded that were committed by the parties to the conflict in Syria in hundreds of reports. The Syrian regime, and its militias, were the only perpetrator of violations at the start of the popular uprising, and they remain the main perpetrator, as the Syrian regime is responsible for the majority of violations. Subsequently, other parties emerged gradually such as the armed opposition, extremist Islamic groups, Democratic Union Party forces, international coalition forces, and Russian forces.

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

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



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

Methodology

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

The report documents two massacres that resulted from two different bombings.

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

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



SNHR has analyzed videos and pictures that were posted online, or were sent by local activists via e-mail, Skype, or social media. Some of the videos showed victims of attacks in which missiles were used, while most victims were children and women. Other pictures showed victims who were killed in bombings.

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

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

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

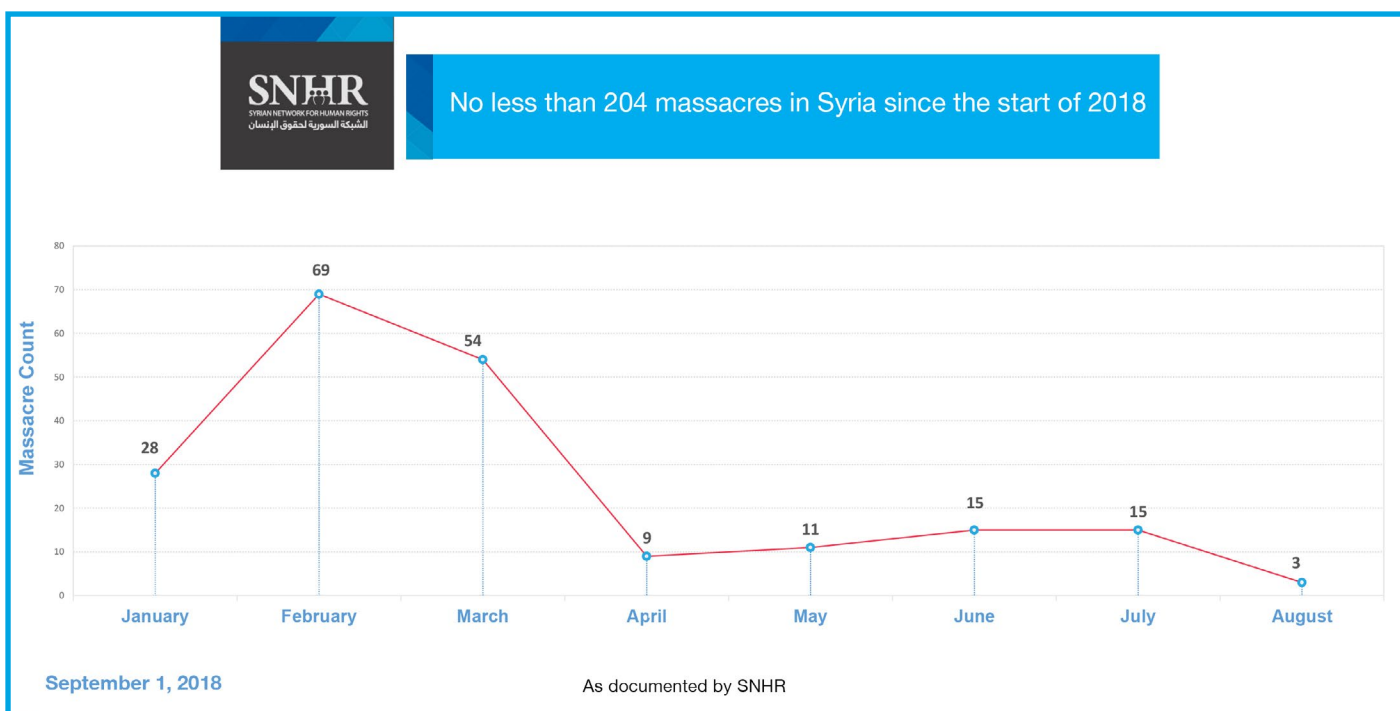
II. August Outline

August saw a significant drop in terms of massacres as the scope of military operations by the different parties to the conflict in Syria have diminished. On the other hand, bombings continued in most of north Syria areas, causing two massacres in August.

III. Executive Summary

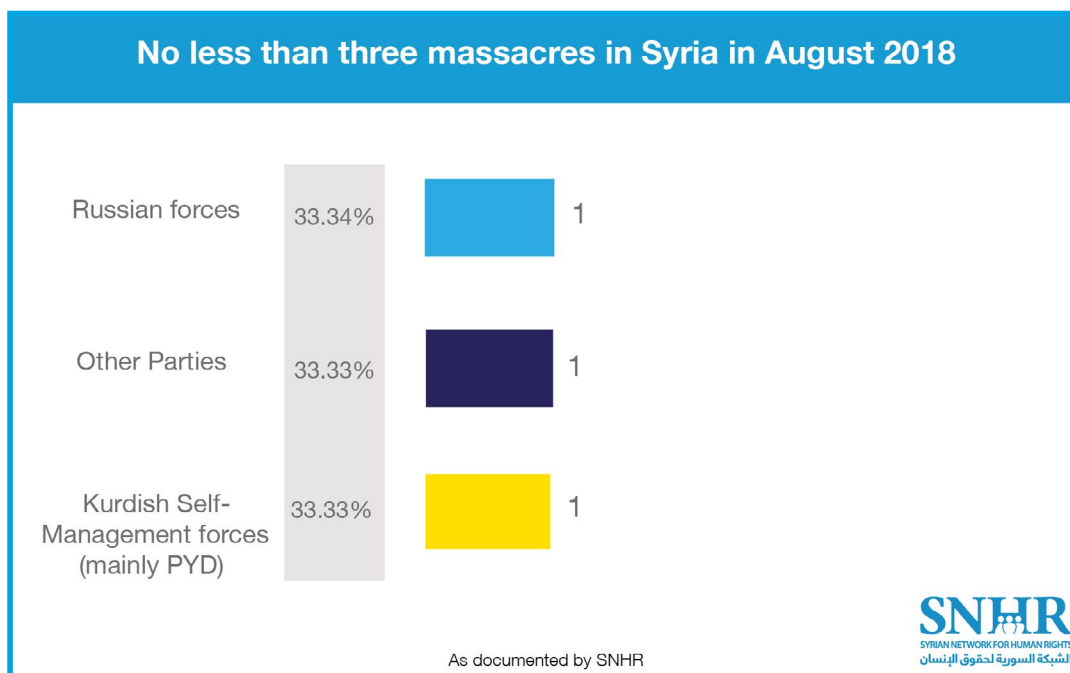
A. Toll of massacres since the start of 2018

SNHR has documented 204 massacres at the hands of the parties to the conflict in Syria between the start of 2018 and September of the same year. Massacres are distributed by month as follows:



B. Massacres in August

SNHR has documented no less than three massacres in August, distributed as follows:



A. Russian forces: 1

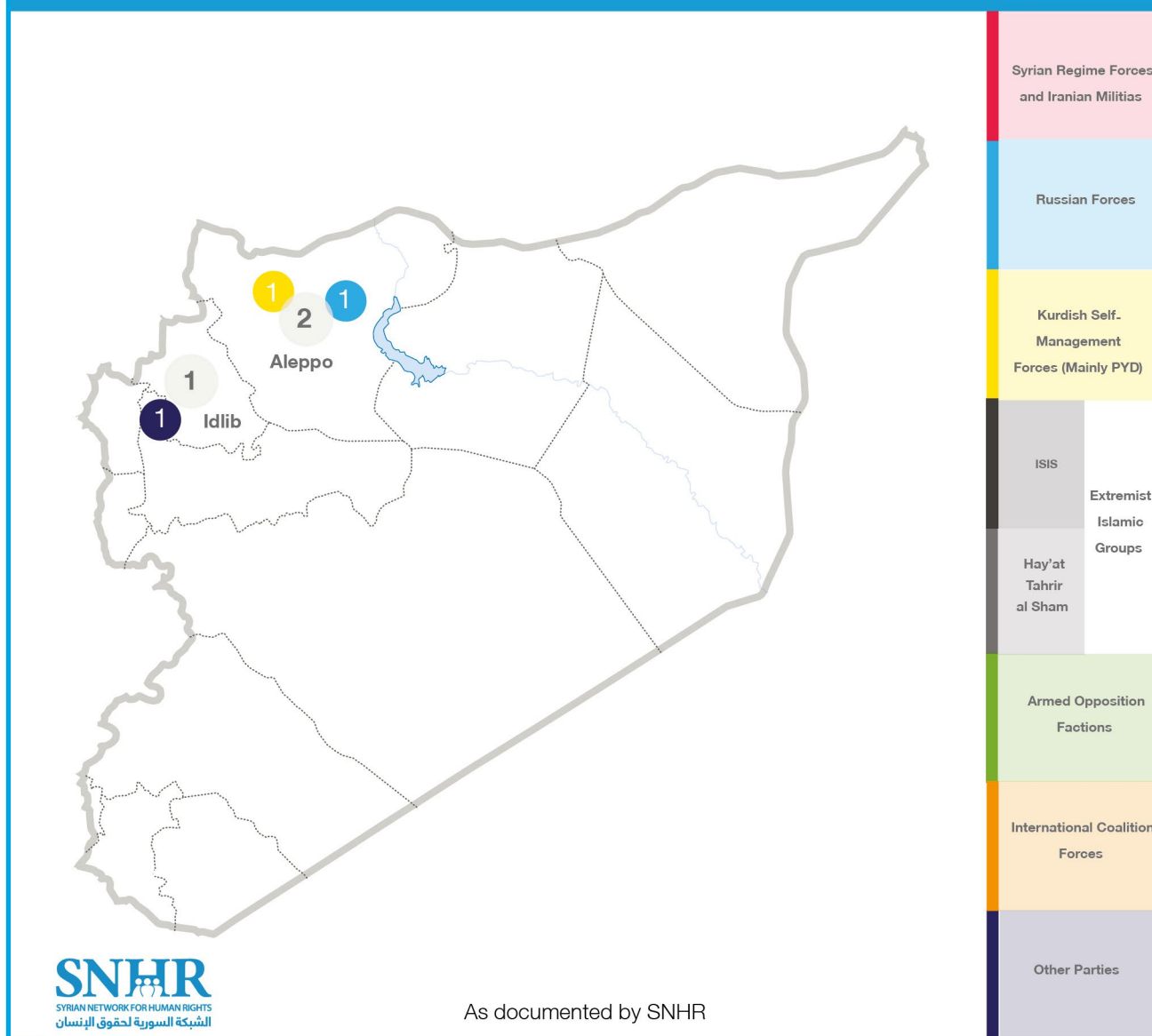
B. Self-Management forces (consisting primarily of the Democratic Union Party a branch for the Kurdistan Workers' Party): 1

C. Other parties: 1

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



No less than three massacres in Syria in August 2018



According to the victim documentation team at SNHR, the massacres documented this month have resulted in the killing of 87 civilians, including 40 children and 21 women (adult female). This means that 71% of all victims were women and children, which is a considerably high percentage, and an indication that civilian residents were targeted in most of these massacres.

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

- A. Russian forces: 36 civilians, including 20 children and 7 women
- B. Self-Management Forces: 11 civilians, including 1 child and three women.
- C. Other parties: 40 civilians, including 19 children and 11 women.



IV. Details of the Most Notable Massacres in August

A. Russian forces

Aleppo governorate

Friday, August 10, 2018, around 18:30, fixed-wing warplanes [we believe](#) were Russian carried out consecutive [attacks on](#) a residential zone in [Urm al Kubra village](#), western suburbs of Aleppo governorate, which resulted in the killing of [36 civilians](#), including [20 children](#) and [seven women](#). In addition, [about 70 others](#) were wounded. The village was under the control of armed opposition factions at the time of the incident.

SNHR contacted Hussein Badwi¹, director of the civil defense in Urm al Kubra. Hussein heard an alert from the observatory about warplanes soaring in the air, **“I didn’t think, even for one moment, that the village is the target as it is usually a quite area unlike the villages and towns of Idlib suburbs, especially that the village has no military bases and it is not usually a place where shells are fired towards Syrian regime forces’ areas of control. Suddenly, the warplanes carried out an airstrike. We headed afterwards north the city, where the bombing took place, and on our way there the warplanes followed with a second airstrike and then a third.”** Hussein, who decided to wait with the civil defense team until the warplanes leave the sky fearing that they might be targeted, adds, **“After the warplanes left, we arrived at the site and saw a scene that we’ve never seen before. It felt like Armageddon there. The entire place was destroyed and more than 25 houses were levelled to the ground, and underneath children, women, and men were buried. The number of victims was great and dead bodies were everywhere. We pulled out around 35 victims and almost double that number in injuries. It was a horrifying massacre that was perpetrated by Russia’s warplanes against the civilians.”**



A victim killed in a massacre by Russian forces in Urm al Kubra village, Aleppo – August 10, 2018

¹ We contacted him via WhatsApp on August 11, 2018



B. Self-Management forces (consisting primarily of the Democratic Union Party a branch for the Kurdistan Workers' Party)

Aleppo governorate

Thursday, August 2, 2018, a landmine explosion resulted in the killing of 11 civilians, including one child and three women, as they were heading for Afrin city. The landmine was planted by Self-Management forces in an agricultural land in Ma'betli town, northwestern Afrin city, northern suburbs of Aleppo governorate, before they retreated from the town. The city was under the control of armed opposition factions at the time of the incident.

C. Other parties

Idlib governorate

Sunday, August 12, 2018, [an arms depot](#), owned by a arms merchant from Homs governorate, [exploded](#) in the basement of [a residential building](#) in [Sahat Bab al Hawa](#) al Qadima area, northern [Sarmada](#) city, northern suburbs of Idlib governorate. The explosion resulted in the killing of 40 civilians, as we have been able to document so far, including 19 children and 11 women. As of this writing, we have yet to identify the cause of the bombing. The city was under the control of Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.



A girl being pulled from the rubble in the aftermath of an arms depot explosion in Sarmada city, Idlib – August 12, 2018



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

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 were adopted, and no pledges to cease the indiscriminate bombing have been made. All parties to the conflict should respect these steps, and adhere to the rules of the international humanitarian law.
- The Syrian case should be referred to the International Criminal Court and all those who are responsible should be held accountable including the Russian regime whose involvement in war crimes has been proven.
- Expand sanctions to include the Syrian and Iranian regimes who are directly involved in crimes against humanity and war crimes against the Syrian people.
- List the militias who are fighting on the side of the Syrian government and had committed wide massacres - such as Iranian militias, the Lebanese group Hezbollah, other Shiite groups, the National Defense Army, and Shabiha, on the international list of terrorist groups.
- Abstain from considering the Syrian government an official side after it perpetrated crimes against humanity with regard to the relief aspect, and stop giving it the largest portion of financial and other aids as they are being delivered to the people who support the Syrian government instead of people who are truly in-need.

International community

- In light of the split of the Security Council and its utter inability, action should be taken on the national and regional levels to form alliances to support the Syrian people that would protect them from the daily killing and siege and raise the support for the relief efforts. Additionally, the principle of universal jurisdiction should be activated in local courts regarding these crimes in order to conduct fair trials for all those who were involved.
- SNHR has repeatedly called for the implementation of the “Responsibility to Protect” in tens of studies and reports and as a member of the International Coalition for the Responsibility to Protect (ICRtoP) after all political channels through the Arab League’s plan and then Mr. Kofi Annan’s plan have been drought out as well as the Cessation of Hostilities statements and Astana agreements that followed. Therefore, steps under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations should be taken and the norm of the “Responsibility to Protect”, which was established by the United Nations General Assembly, should be implemented. The Security Council is still hindering the protection of civilians in Syria.
- Renew the pressure on the Security Council to refer the case in Syria to the International Criminal Court



- Work on fulfilling justice and achieving accountability in Syria through the United Nations General Assembly and the Human Rights Council and work on activating the principle of the universal jurisdiction.

OHCHR

The OHCHR should submit a report to the Human Rights Council and other organs of the United Nations on the incidents included in this report and the massacres that preceded, given that they are a glaring mark in a string of daily sporadic massacres of a smaller scope. Also, the OHCHR should work on implementing the recommendations in this report.

Commission of Inquiry (COI)

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

International, Impartial, and Independent Mechanism (IIIM)

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

European Union and United States of America

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

Russian regime

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



The Coalition (international coalition forces and Syrian Democratic Forces)

- The states of the coalition have to unequivocally and truly acknowledge that some of the bombardment operations have resulted in the killing of innocent civilians. 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.





@snhr



Info@sn4hr.org

www.sn4hr.org

