



Remote Bombings, Including Suicide/ Forced Suicide, and the Inability to Identify the Criminal... The Unknown Killer!

At Least 9,967 Civilians, Including
1,683 Children and 1,126 Women,
Have Been Killed by Remote
Bombings, Including Suicide/
Forced Suicide Bombings, Since
March 2011

Friday 13 November 2020

* Site of a massacre caused by the explosion of a car bomb of unknown origin in a popular market in Afrin, northwestern suburbs of Aleppo – April 28, 2020

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.

SNHR
SYRIAN NETWORK FOR HUMAN RIGHTS
الشبكة السورية لحقوق الإنسان

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I. Remote Bombings; the Killers Are Often Unknown to Us:

Syrian citizens have been subjected to relentless and intensive extrajudicial killings ever since the start of the popular uprising in March 2011, in which they demanded freedom from the tyrannical regime and for dignity from the humiliation of the brutal security services; this is the essence of the Syrian issue, regardless of the variables, factors and regional and international interventions that subsequently occurred. Various types of weapons have been used in the killing of Syrian civilians, including: machine guns, knives, machetes and similar bladed weapons (in the massacres that carried a sectarian or ethnic character), mortars, bombs, barrel bombs, missiles of various types, cluster munitions, mines, chemical weapons, and suicide bombings, as well as death due to torture, and others.

In the course of our work at the Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR), which has been ongoing for nearly ten years, we have tried as much as possible to attribute each killing to the party responsible; we were able to do so in the vast majority of the cases we recorded about extrajudicial killings, relying on several factors that we have indicated extensively in [our methodology](#) in documenting violations. The majority of the victims were killed through air strikes using missiles and barrel bombs, with the air force being controlled solely by the Syrian regime and Russia. Deaths were also recorded in attacks by US-led coalition forces, although they bomb within confined areas. We can also determine those responsible for artillery shelling operations, to a good extent, depending on the area where the shell fell, its angle, type, etc., and we also determined the party that carried out the killings using bladed weapons, based on survivors and eyewitnesses, who witnessed the storming operations and were able to identify the perpetrators through their clothing or accents, the place from which they came and other criteria. The same goes for killings by dropping barrel bombs, with this shameful and heinous weapon only possessed by the Syrian regime army. We have also counted the types of cluster munitions that were used in Syria, and identified the party that used each type, which is either Russia or the Syrian regime, and so on with various types of weapons. Overall, we were largely able to attribute each of the killing incidents to the party that carried it out, according to the evidence and data available to us.

Despite this, we have faced many difficulties in assigning specific responsibility for dozens of other killings, in particular attacks launched by the Syrian regime and the Russian regime simultaneously, which makes it difficult to determine exactly which of them was responsible for the attack, and in this case we use the term Syrian / Russian alliance.

Two cases are excluded from the process of assigning responsibility:

- Anti-personnel landmines.
- Remote bombings, including suicide or forced suicide attacks.

There is great difficulty in assigning responsibility for killings caused by landmines or their remnants, because we were unable to determine which party planted the landmines in the vast majority of cases, since all parties to the conflict use this type of weapon, and also because of the multiple changes of control over the areas where minefields exist. We will address the issue of landmines in more detail in an upcoming report.

In this report, we are specifically concerned with the second type of attack, which is remote bombings, including suicide or forced suicide attacks, which include person-borne or vehicle-borne IEDs, with the detonation primarily carried out either via a wireless device or a timer.

There are distinctive difficulties and challenges that face and prevent us from identifying the perpetrator in the case of remote bombings, which are added to the challenges mentioned in our general methodology, with the most prominent of these being:

- In many cases, a person may be used to carry an IED without knowing it, (There are car maintenance workshops working for all parties to the conflict that specialize in laying booby traps), or under coercion, threat and terror, and an IED may be installed on a vehicle without its owner knowing, which is detonated remotely while he is driving it, or after he stops.
- The person-borne IED may be in the form of a belt, which is a garment encircling the body worn by a suicide bomber or a person forced to do so; it will be filled with explosives, may have a stun gun, and may contain small iron balls or nails, which act as shrapnel, in order to inflict the largest possible damage.

In some remote bombing incidents, there may be clues indicating who committed the bombing, like the case of the bombing that [occurred on December 23, 2012](#), in Branch 293 in Kafrsousa area in Damascus, as it is difficult for a car bomb to reach this area through several security checkpoints which have devices that detect explosives, as well as the bombings that occurred in the Alawite-majority al Zahraa neighborhood in Homs city; this has added to suspicions that the Syrian regime has carried out these types of bombings with the aim of mobilizing public opinion in support of the regime, but we cannot conclusively assign responsibility for these bombings to the Syrian regime simply by relying on such clues.

Similarly, while many bombing incidents were claimed by the ISIS terrorist group or al Nusra Front, we cannot rely on these claims as a sole source in conclusively attributing responsibility for the bombing.

We wish to emphasize that the process of conclusively proving the responsibility of a party for a remote bombing incident is a very complex procedure, requiring extensive effort and great logistical capabilities, as well as the ability to visit the site, with many of these factors not available to us.

This report aims to show the human losses suffered by the Syrian civilian population caused by these remote bombings, including suicide bombings, between March 2011 and November 2020, particularly highlighting the death toll of victims, including children and women, the medical, media and Civil Defense personnel, and their distribution according to the governorates in which they were killed, as well as highlighting some of the most prominent massacres caused by these bombings. The killings by remote bombings in residential areas and the indiscriminate targeting of civilians are considered violations of a large number of customary humanitarian law rules in cases where they are carried out in connection with the conflict, but in cases where they are carried out by the controlling party against the community that it controls to terrorize the populace, they are classified as extrajudicial killings and a flagrant violation of the right to life and of many principles of international human rights law.

II. The Death Toll of Victims Killed by Remote Bombings/ Suicide or Forced Suicide Bombings:

One of the most prominent goals of remote bombings/ suicide or forced suicide bombings is to destabilize society by spreading an atmosphere of threat, fear and terror that pushes the population to leave, due to the indiscriminate nature of such attacks and their use of people rather than guided weapons. We are particularly referring here to bombings that target civilian locations, rather than those targeting military forces, sites, or checkpoints, with the use of this type of weapon being inconsistent with the most prominent rules of international humanitarian law, including the principle of distinction between civilians and combatants and the principle of proportionality. The detonation devices used are primitive and easy to manufacture, which is why all the parties to the conflict can use them, so they are not limited to the Syrian or Russian regimes like, for example, the air force; this accessibility also explains the intensity of their use and the diversity of the governorates and regions where they were used, leaving a terrible toll of human and material losses, and inflicting a severe psychological state of fear and terror on entire regions.

A. Total Death Toll:

In its database, the Syrian Network for Human Rights has documented hundreds of remote bombing incidents, including suicide/ forced suicide bombings

the deaths of at least



Of the 9,967 killed in such attacks, at least

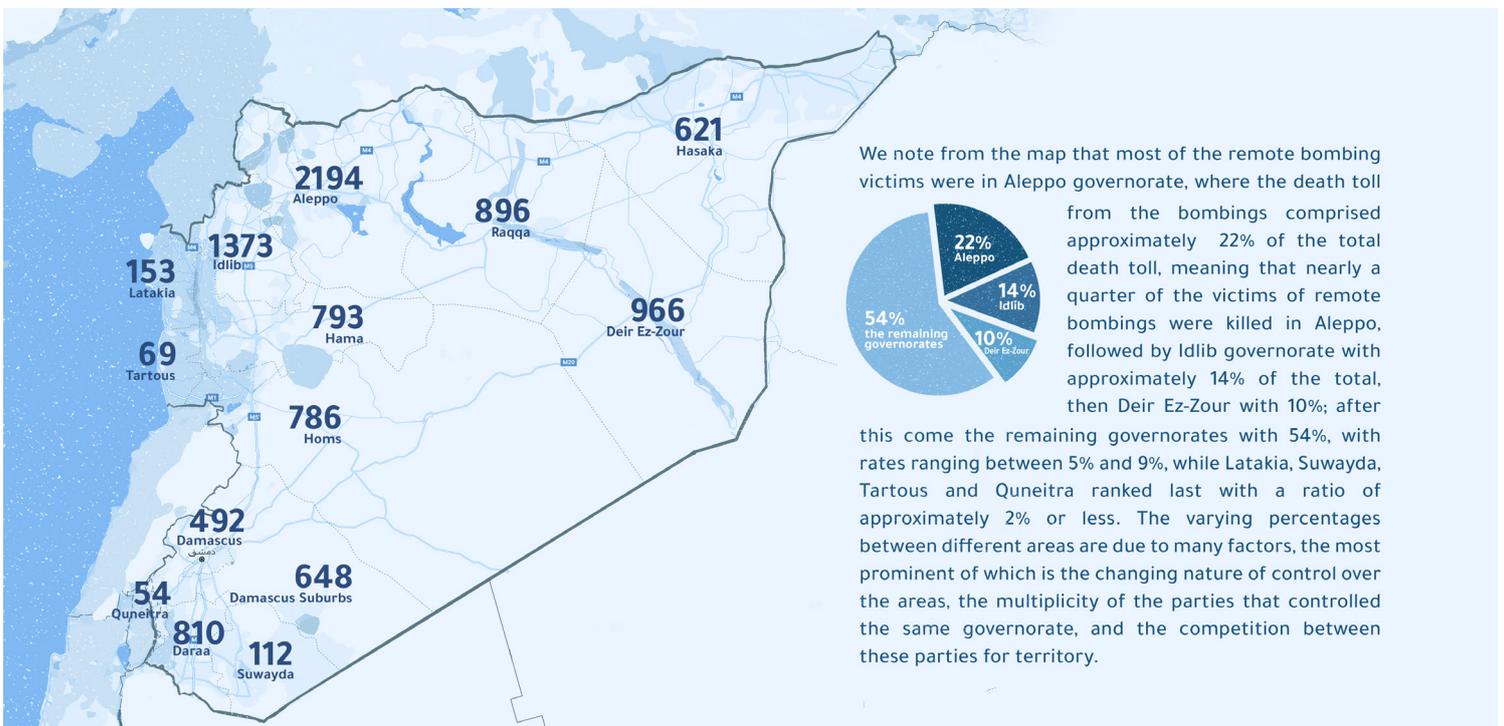


B. The death Toll of Medical, Civil Defense and Media Personnel:

Among the 9,967 civilians, there were also casualties among medical, Civil Defense, and media personnel, which were distributed as follows:



C. Distribution of the Death Toll of Victims Across the Syrian governorates:



D. Distribution of the Death Toll by Years Since 2011 to Date:

- Between March 2011 and the end of 2011: We documented the deaths of 168 civilians, including four children, which constitutes approximately 2% of the total death toll of victims.
- 2012: We documented the deaths of 698 civilians, including 71 children and 49 women, which constitutes approximately 7% of the total death toll of victims.
- 2013: We documented the deaths of 802 civilians, including 91 children and 51 women, which constitutes approximately 8% of the total death toll of victims.
- 2014: We documented the deaths of 1,274 civilians, including 276 children and 207 women, which constitutes approximately 13% of the total death toll of victims.
- 2015: We documented the deaths of 1,368 civilians, including 141 children and 156 women, which constitutes approximately 14% of the total death toll of victims.
- 2016: We documented the deaths of 1,481 civilians, including 246 children and 207 women, which constitutes approximately 15% of the total death toll of victims.
- 2017: We documented the deaths of 1,786 civilians, including 292 children and 236 women, which constitutes approximately 18% of the total death toll of victims.
- 2018: We documented the deaths of 1,204 civilians, including 273 children and 106 women, which constitutes approximately 12% of the total death toll of victims.
- 2019: We documented the deaths of 863 civilians, including 203 children and 91 women, which constitutes approximately 8% of the total death toll of victims.
- Between January 2020 and November 2020: We documented the deaths of 323 civilians, including 86 children and 23 women, which constitutes approximately 3% of the total death toll of victims.



Civilians

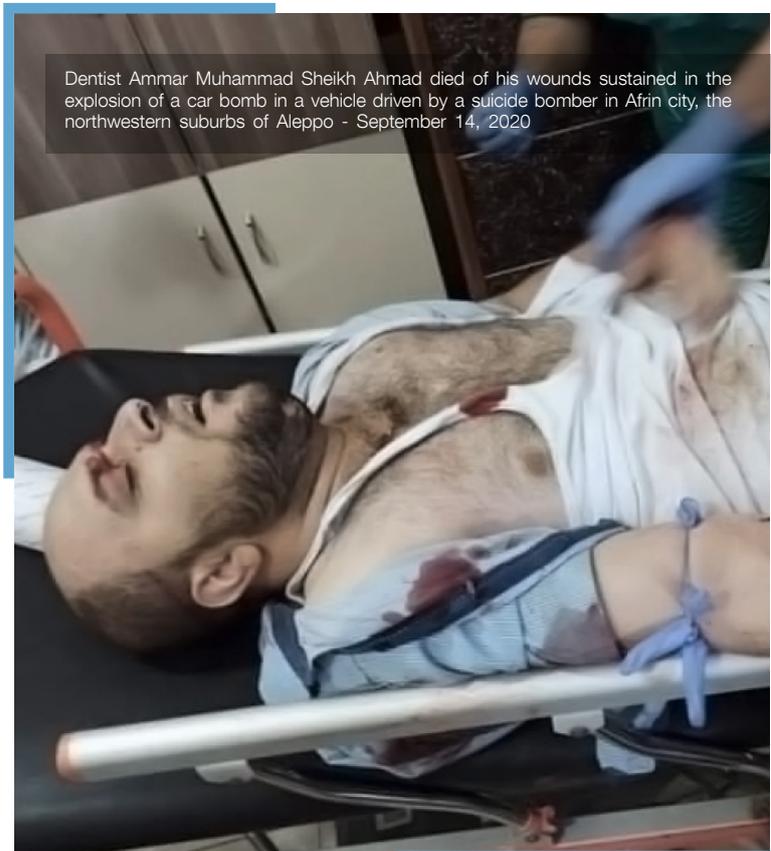
Women
(adult female)male
childrenfemale
childrenMedia
WorkersCivil Defense
PersonnelMedical
Personnel

III. Notable Incidents of Remote Bombings/ Suicide or Forced Suicide Bombings That Caused Human and Material Losses:

A. Medical Personnel:

[Fatima Khair Bekk](#), a nurse at al Qerdaha Hospital, located in al Qerdaha city in the southern suburbs of the Latakia governorate, from al Qerdaha city, died on Saturday, February 21, 2015, as a result of a car bomb explosion in the garage of al Qerdaha Hospital. We have been unable to identify the party that carried out the bombing up to the publication of this report, due to the extreme difficulty in identifying the perpetrators of bombings. The city was under the control of Syrian Regime forces at the time of the incident.

[Ammar Muhammad Sheikh Ahmad](#), from Saraqeb city in the eastern suburbs of Idlib governorate, a dentist and coordinator of physical therapy projects in the '[Hand in Hand for Aid and Development](#)' organization, was the director of the ambulance system in Saraqeb city, and also worked as [the referral coordinator](#) in the Syria Relief and Development (SRD). On Monday, September 14, 2020, he died of wounds sustained in the explosion of an unknown-origin vehicle driven by a suicide/ forced suicide bomber in Afrin city in the northwestern suburbs of Aleppo governorate in a main street near the Dawwar Kawa in the city center. The explosion caused a massacre, with the SNHR still trying to reach witnesses and survivors of that incident to obtain more details.



B. Civil Defense Personnel:

[Abdullah Hussain al Sarhan](#), the Director of the Civil Defense organization in Daraa governorate, from the IDP camp in Daraa city, born in 1977, was a graduate with a degree in Genetic Science. He was married with four children. On Monday, March 20, 2017, he was killed by the explosion of an IED on the Ghraz-al Sawamea Road in the eastern suburbs of Daraa governorate, while he was driving along the road. We were unable to verify who planted the IED up to the publication of this report.



[Mustafa Nabil Qassab](#), a member of the [Civil Defense center](#) in Idlib city, from Idlib city, born in 1988, was killed on Thursday, June 21, 2018, by the explosion of a car bomb behind the Syrian Red Crescent center south of Idlib city, while he was retrieving people wounded by a previous explosion of a motorcycle bomb at the same site. We were unable to identify the party responsible for the explosion up to the publication of this report, due to the extreme difficulty in identifying the perpetrators of bombings.

[The Syrian Civil Defense](#) published a tribute to Mustafa on its official account on the 'Twitter' social networking platform.

C. Media Workers:

[Media activist Moayad Omar al Jark](#) died on Monday, May 16, 2016, of wounds sustained in the explosion of an IED in al Hama town in Damascus Suburbs governorate, which was then under the control of factions of the Armed Opposition, while he was passing nearby on Saturday, May 14, 2016. We were unable to verify who planted the IED up to the publication of this report.

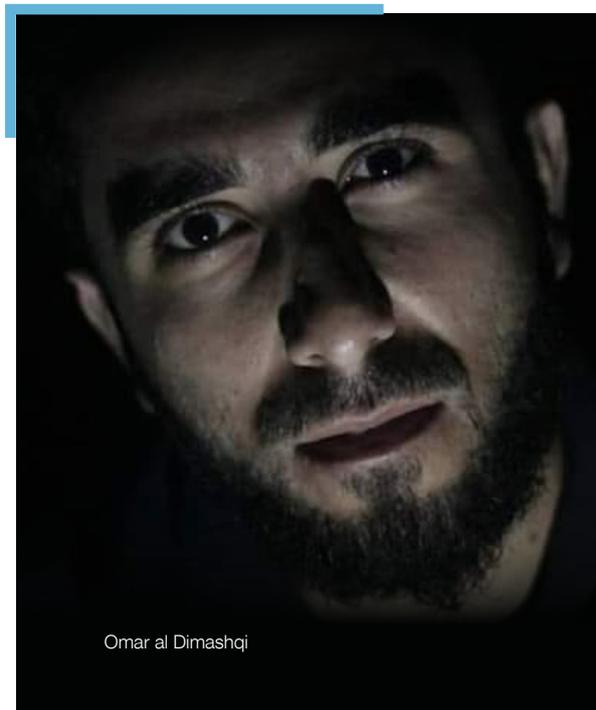
Moayad, a photographer for the media office of his hometown, al Hama town, born in 1995, held a preparatory certificate. He was single.

[Delishan Ibish](#), the correspondent of the Kurdish Hawar News Agency (ANHA), [died](#) on Thursday, October 12, 2017, in the explosion of a car bomb driven by a suicide/ forced suicide bomber, while IDPs from Deir Ez-Zour governorate were gathered near a checkpoint of the Kurdish-majority Syrian Democratic Forces in the Abu Fas area in the southern suburbs of Hasaka governorate. We were unable to identify the party responsible for the explosion up to the publication of this report, due to the extreme difficulty in identifying the perpetrators of bombings.

[Delishan](#), from [Ein al Arab city](#) in the northern suburbs of Aleppo governorate, born in 1993, was a university student at the Technical Institute for Business and Marketing.

On Sunday, June 23, 2019, [a media activist](#) known as [Omar al Dimashqi](#), whose real name we reserve for [security reasons](#), died in a Turkish hospital of several shrapnel wounds to most parts of his body caused by the explosion of an IED planted in a car belonging to his employers at al Rahmon Humanitarian Relief Society, in Sarmada city in the northern suburbs of Idlib governorate on Monday, June 17, 2019. We were unable to identify the party responsible for planting the IED up to the publication of this report. The city was under the control of Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.

Born in 1996, Omar, a photographer with al Rahmon Humanitarian Relief Society, who originally came from Aqraba in the south of Damascus Suburbs governorate, held a preparatory certificate. He was single.



Omar al Dimashqi

The SNHR spoke with the media worker, Hazem al Qalamouni¹, who told us what Omar's friend, who was with him, had told him about the incident and subsequent events: **“On Monday, June 17, while Omar was about to get in a car belonging to the association he works for to drive to Atma Camps to distribute bread to the displaced, an explosive device planted in the car blew up, injuring him with several shrapnel wounds all over his body. He was immediately taken to the university hospital in the Turkish city of Antakya where he underwent several surgeries, in which his left foot was amputated and a number of fingers of his hands were removed. He was then transferred to Kaderli Hospital in the Turkish city of al Othmaniya where he died six days later due to the wounds sustained. “**

D. Massacres and a Large Number of Victims Killed:

On Friday, April 18, 2014, a car bomb exploded near Bilal al Habashi Mosque in Masaken al Waleed outskirt in Tareeq al Sham neighborhood of Homs city, which was under the control of Syrian Regime forces at the time of the incident, with the bombing, which coincided with worshipers leaving the Friday prayer, resulting in [the deaths of 13 people](#), including [one child](#). We were unable to identify the party responsible for the explosion up to the publication of this report, due to the extreme difficulty in identifying the perpetrators of bombings.

On Saturday, July 26, 2014, a car bomb exploded in the vegetable market in Izaz city in the northern suburbs of Aleppo governorate, resulting in the deaths of [10 people](#), including [two children](#). We were unable to identify the party responsible for the explosion up to the publication of this report, due to the extreme difficulty in identifying the perpetrators of bombings. The area was under the control of factions of the Armed Opposition at the time of the incident.

On Saturday, January 10, 2015, two car bombs exploded at the entrance to Mesqan village in the northern suburbs of Aleppo governorate, which was under the control of factions of the Armed Opposition at the time of the incident, resulting in [the deaths of 17 civilians](#), including four Civil Defense personnel. We were unable to identify the party responsible for the explosion up to the publication of this report, due to the extreme difficulty in identifying the perpetrators of bombings.

On Sunday, July 3, 2016, a suicide/ forced suicide bomber blew himself up using an explosive belt he was wearing inside a residential house in Inkhel city in the western suburbs of Daraa governorate, which was under the control of factions of the Armed Opposition at the time of the incident, resulting in the deaths of seven people (one child, one woman, and five armed men). We were unable to identify the party responsible for the explosion up to the publication of this report, due to the extreme difficulty in identifying the perpetrators of bombings.

¹ Via his personal Facebook account on June 26, 2019

On Thursday, October 12, 2017, a [car bomb exploded](#) among a gathering of IDPs near a [check-point](#) of Syrian Democratic Forces in Abu Fas village in the [southern suburbs](#) of Hasaka, [resulting in the deaths](#) of [24 civilians](#), including [nine children](#) and [three women](#) (adult female). The village was under the control of Syrian Democratic Forces at the time of the incident. We were unable to identify the [party responsible](#) for [the explosion](#) up to [the publication](#) of this report, due to the extreme difficulty in identifying the perpetrators of bombings.

On Sunday, January 7, 2018, at around 18:30, an explosion occurred in front of an eight-storey [residential building](#) - known as al Miri [supermarket building](#) - on al Thalathin Street located in the southwestern outskirts of Idlib city, resulting in the deaths of [32 civilians](#), including [nine children](#) and [11 women](#), and injuring about 98 others. We were unable to identify the nature of the explosion and the party responsible for the explosion up to the publication of this report, due to the extreme difficulty in identifying the perpetrators of bombings. The area was under the control of Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident. We note that the Ajnad al Kavkaz faction has an administrative headquarters on one floor of the building.

Ammar al Hamdo, a media worker with the Civil Defense Center responsible for the Idlib city sector and its environs, told us that on the evening of Sunday January 7, 2018, he heard an explosion in Idlib city, which was also heard in the cities of Jisr al Shoghour and Ma'aret al Numan in the governorate's suburbs. He added, **"I arrived with the Civil Defense team to the site of the explosion; the destruction was immense in the area, and I saw more than seven burning cars, and fires burning in a number of buildings, with women and children in the streets. The team's crew quickly put out the fires and took the injured, who numbered about 96, to the medical hospitals."** Ammar added that he could not determine the nature of the explosion, as the place did not contain any remnants of a car bomb or a missile, adding, **"I saw only three circular craters at the site of the explosion."**



On Monday, April 9, 2018, at around 19:15, [32 civilians](#), including [15 children](#) and [nine women](#), [were killed](#), and nearly [130 others](#) were [injured](#), as a result of an explosion in Wadi al Naseem, south of Idlib city, most likely caused by a car bomb. We were unable to identify the party responsible for the explosion up to the publication of this report, due to the extreme difficulty in identifying the perpetrators of bombings. Idlib city was under the control of Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident. We note that area around the explosion site contains two HTS headquarters.

On Sunday, December 16, 2018, a car bomb exploded in al Hal Market in [Afrin](#) city center in the northwestern suburbs of Aleppo, resulting in the deaths of [10 civilians](#), including one woman, and injuring about 13 others. We were unable to identify the party responsible for the explosion up to the publication of this report, due to the extreme difficulty in identifying the perpetrators of bombings. The area was under the control of factions of the Armed Opposition at the time of the incident. On Sunday, June 2, 2019, [a car bomb](#) exploded in the main street near Izaz Court in the middle of [Izaz](#) city in the northwestern suburbs of Aleppo governorate, resulting in the deaths of [22 civilians](#), including [seven children](#) (five males, one female, and one unborn baby) and three women. We were unable to identify the party responsible for the explosion up to the publication of this report, due to the extreme difficulty in identifying the perpetrators of bombings. Izaz city was under the control of factions of the Armed Opposition at the time of the incident.



A child victim of the massacre perpetrated as a result of a car bomb of unknown origin in the middle of Izaz city, Aleppo – June 2, 2019

On Tuesday, October 6, 2020, [a car bomb](#) of an unknown [origin exploded](#) in Othman bin Affan Street on the northeastern outskirts of al Bab city in the eastern suburbs of Aleppo governorate, resulting in [the deaths](#) of [20 civilians](#), [including five children](#) and [one woman](#), and injuring nearly 30 others, including three medical personnel who were traveling in an ambulance belonging to the Syria Relief and Development Organization (SRD) that was at the site of the bombing. The SNHR is still trying to contact witnesses and survivors of that incident to obtain more details. Al Bab city is under the control of the Syrian National Army.

IV. Conclusions and Recommendations:

- The disparity in the balance of power prompts the parties to the internal armed conflict to avoid direct clashes, and to use the method of remote bombings, including suicide bombings, with this method falling within the framework of the confrontation, aiming to spread fear and terror among the people in opposition areas. It should be noted that spreading terror is prohibited under customary Humanitarian law, along with indiscriminate attacks, which are defined as those which are not directed at a specific military objective, those which employ a method or means of combat which cannot be directed at a specific military objective, or those which employ a method or means of combat whose effects cannot be limited². Consequently, remote or suicide bombings are inaccurate and unguided explosions that clearly violate the principle of distinction between civilian and military objectives³, and the principles of precautions and proportionality in attacks⁴.
- According to the Syrian Network for Human Rights' database, which contains details of hundreds of remote bombing incidents that have caused the death of thousands of Syrian civilians, as mentioned in this report, we confirm that these attacks were not directed at a military objective or justified by military necessity, but rather targeted the civilian population, markets, places of worship, vital civilian facilities, and others, with international humanitarian law prohibiting the employment of material and methods of warfare of any nature likely to cause superfluous injury or unnecessary suffering⁵. Failure to respect these provisions constitutes a war crime under international humanitarian law and under the statute of the International Criminal Court.

² ICRC, Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions (Protocol I) 1977, Article 51(4), <<https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/applic/ihl/ihl.nsf/Article.xsp?action=openDocument&documentId=4BEFD9920AE0AEAE12563CD0051DC9E>>

³ ICRC, Rules of the International Humanitarian Customary Law, Rules 1 to 10, <<https://www.icrc.org/en/doc/assets/files/other/customary-international-humanitarian-law-i-icrc-eng.pdf>>

⁴ ICRC, Rules of the International Humanitarian Customary Law, Rules 11 to 24, <<https://www.icrc.org/en/doc/assets/files/other/customary-international-humanitarian-law-i-icrc-eng.pdf>>

⁵ ICRC, Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions (Protocol I) 1977, Article 35, <<https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/applic/ihl/ihl.nsf/Article.xsp?action=openDocument&documentId=0DF4B935977689E8C12563CD0051DAE4>>

ICRC, Convention (IV) respecting the Laws and Customs of War on Land (The Hague Convention) 1907, Article 23, <<https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/applic/ihl/ihl.nsf/Article.xsp?action=openDocument&documentId=61CDD9E446504870C12563CD00516768>>

ICRC, Declaration Renouncing the Use, in Time of War, of Explosive Projectiles Under 400 Grammes Weight (Declaration of Saint Petersburg 1868), <<https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/ihl/full/declaration1868>>

- Employing remote bombing tactics, including suicide bombings, to target densely populated areas expresses a criminal mindset and premeditated intent.
- They have incidentally caused civilian casualties or injuries, or damage to civilian objects, with almost no military advantage.
- Civilian and military commanders bear criminal responsibility according to the principle of command responsibility, in the event that they knew or should have known about the violations committed by the forces under their control and did not prevent them or punish their subordinates responsible for them, as they must respect and enforce respect for international humanitarian law.
- The UN Security Council bears the primary responsibility for the state of chaos and insecurity in Syria due to its terrible failure to protect civilians in Syria for ten years, and its failure to achieve a political transition so far.

Recommendations:

All parties to the conflict:

Respect the rules of international humanitarian law and international human rights law.

Stop employing the tactic of remote or suicide bombings targeting civilians and civilian objects, which do not distinguish between civilians and combatants, or which are expected to cause civilian damage disproportionate to the anticipated military advantage.

Participate in respectful cooperation with the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, the High Commissioner for Human Rights, and the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism.

The UN Security Council and International Community:

- There will be no stability in Syria without achieving a political transition towards democracy and human rights in Syria, and this will only be achieved through the application of various pressures, mainly on the Syrian regime and its allies, because it will not give up power voluntarily.
- Increase logistical assistance to local organizations and local police working in the field of detecting and dismantling IEDs.
- Begin to compensate victims and their families, focus on the psychological treatment process for survivors, and support humanitarian organizations working in the field of psychological care.

High Commissioner for Human Rights:

- Shed light on the enormity of the remote bombing tactic on Syrian society and call on the international community to make more resources available to combat it on various levels, including awareness and logistical capabilities.

Independent International Commission of Inquiry (COI):

- Dedicate a paragraph in future reports to dealing specifically with the remote bombing tactic and its devastating impact on society.

Acknowledgment

We offer our sincere thanks to all the families, relatives and friends of the victims, as well as to the eyewitnesses, and local activists whose contributions enriched this report.



www.snhr.org - info@sn4hr.org