

Russian Warplanes Perpetrate Three Consecutive Massacres in Idlib City

A Bloody Day in Idlib despite the
Ceasefire Agreement

SNHR

SYRIAN NETWORK FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

الشبكة السورية لحقوق الإنسان

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The Syrian Network for Human Rights, founded in June 2011, is a non-governmental, non-profit independent organization that is a primary source for the United Nations on all death toll-related statistics in Syria



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I. Introduction

With a current population of no less than 320,000 people, Idlib city has been under the joint control of armed opposition factions and Fateh al Sham Front since March 28, 2015.

On September 24, 2015, the city was the subject of a truce mainly between Ahrar al Sham Movement -one of the factions composing Jaish al Fateh- and the Syrian regime. The agreement established a full cease of military operations and airstrikes on Idlib city and some of the villages that follow the city in exchange of passing food supplies to al Fou'a and Kafrayya villages, which are of a Syrian regime-supporting majority. The truce was breached multiple times, as we highlighted one of the most notable massacres in the report: "[Russian Forces Breach Security Council Resolution 2254 and Kills Idlib City Residents](#)"

On June 11, 2016, the two sides agreed to extend the agreement for six months. However, Syrian regime forces breached the truce again on the next day, targeting the vegetable market in the city, which resulted in a massacre that we detailed in the report: "[The Syrian Regime even Betrays the Local Truces it Makes](#)" and then Russian forces targeted the same market again, breaching the truce on September 10, 2016, which we highlighted in the report: "[Russian Forces Breach Idlib City Truce](#)"

Presently, the city is under the control of a number of armed opposition factions and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham (An assembly that is composed of Fateh al Sham Front, Ansar al Din, and three armed opposition factions – Lewa' al Haq, Jaish al Sunna, and Kata'eb Nour al Din Zenki)



In this report, we will be documenting three consecutive massacres in Idlib city that were perpetrated by fixed-wing warplanes we believe were Russian. SNHR team contacted a number of residents, eyewitnesses, survivors, and local media activists. This report contains three accounts. We have explained the purpose of the interviews for the eyewitnesses who gave us permission to use the information they provided in this report, without offering or presenting any incentives. Additionally, SNHR tried to spare them the agony of remembering the violation, and we gave guarantees to conceal the identity of the eyewitnesses who preferred to use an alias.

Furthermore, we have reviewed the pictures and videos we received, and verified their authenticity. These pictures show the great destruction in the aftermath of the bombardment, in addition to pictures showing the children victims who were killed in the massacres. We have copies of all the pictures and videos included in this report on an online secret database, in addition to backup copies on hard drives. For more information, please see our general work methodology.

The investigations included in this report have proven that the targeted areas were civilian areas, where no military centers or weapon warehouses for armed opposition factions or extremist Islamic groups were found during or before the attack.

This report only represents the bare minimum, which we were able to document, of the severity and magnitude of the violation that occurred. Also, this report doesn't cover the social, economic, and psychological ramifications.

II. Details

Tuesday, February 7, 2017, around 03:45, fixed-wing warplanes we believe are Russian carried out no less than five airstrikes in which 11 missiles at least were fired. The airstrikes lasted for roughly 50 minutes, targeting a number of sites, which resulted in the killing of 29 civilians including 15 children and 11 women (Adult female). The targeting was as follows:

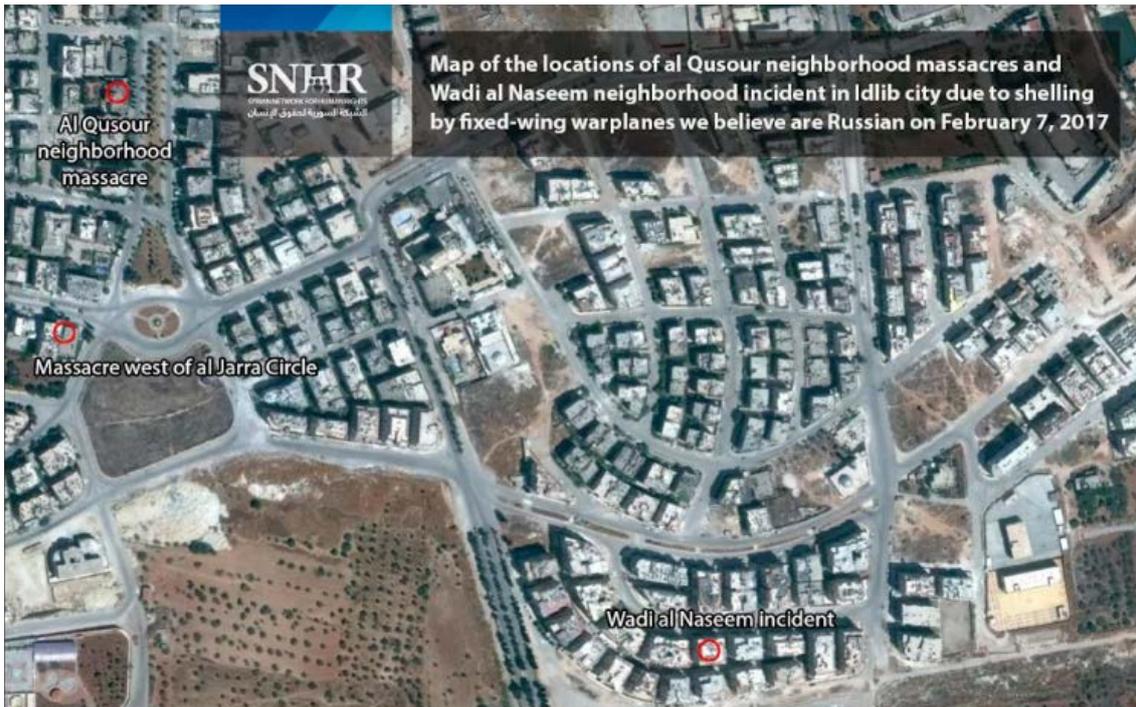
- Two missiles that targeted Masaken al Dubbat area in western Idlib city – this neighborhood is resided by Uzbek fighters' families, which killed six civilians (Two female children and four women).
- Two missiles that targeted Wadi al Nasim neighborhood in southern Idlib city, which killed four children.
- Four missiles that targeted two residential buildings to the west of al Jarra circle in al



Qosour neighborhood in southern Idlib city, which killed 14 civilians including eight children and four women. Additionally, the two buildings were heavily destroyed.

- Two missiles that targeted two residential buildings in al Qosour neighborhood in southern Idlib city, which killed five individuals including one child and three women. Additionally, the two buildings were heavily destroyed.
- One missile that fell near the Doctor Union building -the building is currently occupied by a lithotripsy medical center- in southern Idlib city.

A map illustrating the location of two massacres of al Qosour neighborhood and the incident of Wadi al Nasim massacre



A map illustrating the location of the massacre of Masaken al Dubbat



Mr. Ammar al Hamdou, head of the civil defense organization in Idlib city whom we contacted via Facebook, told SNHR of what he saw after he headed to the bombardment site after the first airstrike: “Immediately after we arrived at the bombardment site in Masaken al Dubbat neighborhood, we suffered another airstrike. We transferred and aided the injured. There were tens of civilians who were trapped in the rubbles. On that day, we worked for more than 23 hours non-stop to pull out the tens of victims who were trapped in the rubbles.”

“We pulled out a woman from the ruins of her house after both of her two daughters (children) were killed in the bombardment. We also managed to save an entire family that had been trapped in the rubbles after hours of continuous work. I saw entire families buried under the ruins. Death was everywhere.”

Mohammad, who works at the documentation department at the specialized surgical hospital in the city, told SNHR, via Facebook, that more than ten airstrikes and huge explosions occurred at dawn. And he assured that the bombardment was Russian, as it was more severe than the usual government bombardment, according to him. He adds: “I saw a young child calling for his sister Hanan who went missing along with her father in the bombardment. Hanan died, while her father, who got injured, was transferred to the border hospitals in Turkey. ”

Mohammad described the destruction that resulted from the bombardment in al Qosour and Wadi al Nasim neighborhoods as huge and big: “The destruction was really big. Whole buildings were leveled, even though the targeted areas were civilian areas. It was a bloody day.”

Ahmad Rahhal, a media activist living in al Nasim neighborhood -one of the neighborhoods that were bombed-, told SNHR, via Facebook, that he counted no less than 10 airstrikes on the day, and he heard children and women calling for help from under the rubbles: “The warplanes targeted a six-floor building. The fifth and sixth floors were destroyed completely. I saw three girls who fell from top of the building due to the bombardment.”

Ahmad went to the west of al Jarra circle, which was bombed as well: “The missile that targeted the area to the west of al Jarra circle destroyed three buildings completely. Civil defense members were pulling out 13 people who were trapped under in the rubbles, mostly children, but after hours of work, everyone met their demise.”



III. Attachments

[Victims' names](#)

Video showing [victims and wounded](#) in the aftermath of the bombing

Video showing the destruction in the [aftermath of the Russian bombing](#)

[Pictures](#) showing the [great destruction](#) in the [aftermath](#) of the bombardment in [Idlib city](#)



Pictures showing the [children victims](#) who were killed in the bombardment by fixed-wing warplanes we believe are Russian



I. Conclusions and Recommendations

Legal conclusions

1- The Russian regime has, beyond any doubt, violated Security Council Resolutions 2139 and 2254 which both state that indiscriminate attacks must be halted. Also, the regime violated Article 8 of Rome Statute through the act of willful killing which constitutes war crimes

2- We can confirm that the bombardment mentioned in this report has targeted armless civilians. Therefore, the Syrian 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 amounts to a war crime where all elements were fulfilled.

3- The attacks mentioned in this report, which were carried out by the Russian regime, are considered a violation of the customary international humanitarian law, as the shells were fired at a populated area rather than a specific military object.

4- The bombardment operations have caused collateral damages that involved casualties or injuries, or significant damages to civil facilities. There are strong indicators suggesting that the damage was too excessive compared to the anticipated military benefit.

Recommendations

The Security Council

- The Security Council has to take additional steps after Resolution 2139 was adopted and no pledges to cease the indiscriminate bombardment operations have been made. All the parties to the conflict must respect these steps and adhere to the rules of the international humanitarian law.
- The Syrian case must be referred to the International Criminal Court and all those who are responsible must be held accountable
- Instill security and peace in Syria and implement the norm of the Responsibility to Protect in order to protect the lives, culture, and history of the Syrian people from being destroyed, looted, and ruined.
- Expand the sanctions to include the Russian and Iranian regimes who are directly involved in committing crimes against humanity and war crimes against the Syrian people.

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

The Office must submit a report to the Human Rights Council and other organs of the United Nations on this massacre in particular, given that it was perpetrated by forces we believe are Russian.



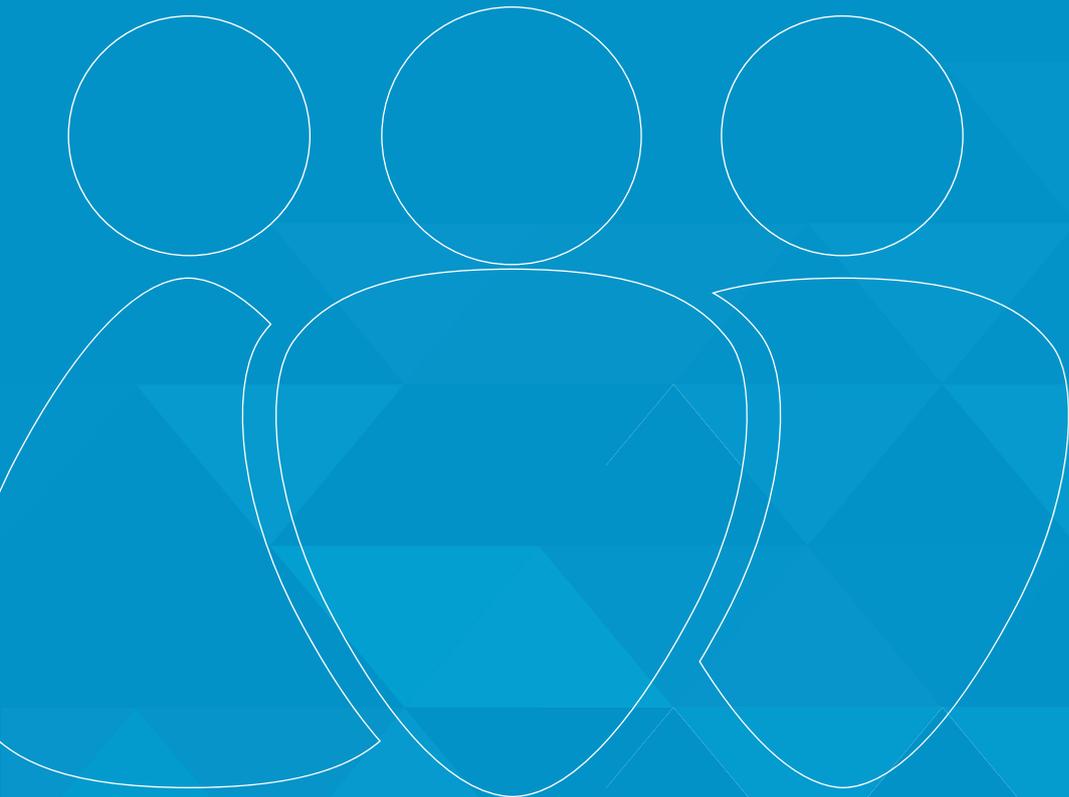
The International Community

- In light of the split in the Security Council and its utter inability, steps must be taken on the national and regional levels to form alliances to support the Syrian people that would protect them from the daily killings and siege, and enhance the support for the relief efforts. Additionally, the principle of universal jurisdiction must 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 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 were brought out. Therefore, steps under Article 7 of the Rome Statute must be taken and the norm of the Responsibility to Protect, which was established by the United Nations General Assembly, must 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.

Acknowledgment and Condolences

Our thanks and condolences for the families and local activists who contributed effectively to this report.





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