



## Russian and Syrian Regime Forces Committed Violations That Constitute War Crimes During Unlawful Attacks on and Around the Jabal al Zaweya Area

Around 61 Civilians Killed, 33 of Them by Russian Forces, Including 20 Children, While 13 Vital Facilities Targeted, Between June and September 2021

Thursday 9 September 2021

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.

## Content

I. Introduction and Methodology.....	3
II. The Importance of Jabal al Zaweya Area and the Reality of Control over It.....	4
III. Syrian-Russian Alliance Forces Violate the Ceasefire and Launch Military Attacks on and around Jabal al Zaweya Area.....	5
IV. The Record of the Most Notable Violations Documented by SNHR at the Hands of Syrian-Russian Alliance Forces in and around Jabal Zaweya Area.....	8
V. International and Human Rights Condemnations of the Bombardment of Jabal al Zaweya Area and Its Vicinity in Northwest Syria, without Any Response or Investigation by Russia or the Syrian Regime.....	21
VI. Conclusions and Recommendations.....	22

## I. Introduction and Methodology:

Since the beginning of June 2021, we documented a sudden military escalation by the Syrian-Russian alliance forces, targeting Jabal al Zaweya area and its surroundings which remain outside the Syrian regime's control in northwest Syria, mostly by ground attacks on civilian areas, causing civilian casualties and significant material damage to vital facilities; this came after a period of relative calm that lasted for months in the wake of the Turkish-Russian ceasefire agreement concluded in March 2020, which did not prevent the Syrian regime and its Iranian ally from carrying out ground bombardment almost daily; this was concentrated on the lines of contact, especially the fronts of al Fattira, Sfuhun, Kansafra, al Bara, Be-neen and al Ruwaiha in the Jabal al Zaweya area, in addition to the villages located on the line of contact in Sahl al Ghab area in the western suburbs of Hama. The al Fattira, Sfuhun, and al Ruwaiha fronts also witnessed intermittent periodic clashes between Syrian regime forces and their allies on one side, and the Armed Opposition factions and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham on the other, through which the first party tried to make advance on the ground.

The Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) documented the deaths of 83 civilians, including 44 children and 17 women (adult female), as a result of military attacks by the Syrian-Russian alliance forces on Jabal al Zaweya and its vicinity between March 6, 2020, and September 1, 2021.

This report documents details of the unlawful military attacks by the Syrian-Russian alliance forces between June 5, 2021, and September 1, 2021, and the casualties these attacks caused, as well as of the targeting of vital facilities and residential neighborhoods and the accompanying destruction, based on what was recorded in our database, through our daily monitoring and observation.

Through field researchers working for SNHR, we have obtained direct testimonies from survivors, relatives of victims, aid workers and media activists, none of which are cited from any open sources, with this report providing eight of these testimonies. We explained the purpose of these interviews beforehand to the eyewitnesses, who gave us permission to use the information they provided in this report without us offering or providing them with any incentives. Also, SNHR endeavors always to spare the eyewitnesses the agony of remembering the violations as much as possible, as well as providing assurances that we will conceal the identity of any witness who prefers to use an alias. All of this is in accordance with our internal protocols, which we have worked under for years, and we always strive to develop these to keep pace with the best levels of psychological care for victims.

SNHR also analyzed videos and photographs that were posted online, or submitted by local activists via e-mail, Skype, or social media platforms. Videos posted by activists show, amongst other things, sites of attacks, bodies of the victims and the injured, and the extent of the significant destruction as a result of these attacks.

Furthermore, we retain copies of all the videos and photographs included in this report on a confidential electronic database, as well as keeping hard disk backup copies. We do not claim, however, that we have documented all cases, given the severe prohibitions, restrictions and persecution by Syrian regime forces and some other armed groups. Readers are welcome to find out more about SNHR's [methodology](#).

The investigations detailed in this report have proved conclusively that the targeted locations were civilian areas where no military bases or armories for factions of the Armed Opposition or Hay'at Tahrir al Sham were situated during or even before the attack. Also, Syrian regime forces failed to issue any warnings to civilians prior to any of the attacks, despite such warnings being required under international humanitarian law.

We faced additional challenges other than those mentioned in our general methodology, which were typified by the difficulties in definitively assigning responsibility for the attack in some incidents of ground bombardment during this campaign, if we suspect the attack to have been perpetrated by either Syrian regime forces or Russian forces, facing the same challenges if we suspect the attack to have been perpetrated by either Syrian regime forces or the Iranian militias; we shall continue our investigations until we are able to conclusively identify the party responsible for the bombardment, with the main and direct responsibility being the Syrian regime's, due to its being responsible for illegally bringing in the Iranian militias and Russian forces, due to their support for the Syrian regime, which is involved in crimes against humanity and war crimes.

The information contained in this report only represents the bare minimum of incidents which we have been able to document, and of the severity and magnitude of the violations that occurred. Also, it doesn't include any analysis of the profound social, economic, and psychological ramifications.

## II. The Importance of Jabal al Zaweya Area and the Reality of Control over It:

Jabal al Zaweya is located in the southern suburbs of Idlib, on a high plateau extending over an area of about 400 square kilometers and containing about 35 towns and villages, the most prominent of which are Ebleen, Ein Larouz, Farkya, Bazabour, Balyoun, Kafr Haya, al Bara, Kansafra and Kafr Aweed. It is bordered on the east by the Aleppo-Damascus international motorway<sup>1</sup> known as M5, on the west by Sahl al Ghab area, and on the north by the Aleppo-Latakia international motorway<sup>2</sup> known as M4; those who manage to control this region are able to monitor large geographic areas surrounding it, with the height of the highest hills - the hill of al Nabi 'the Prophet' Ayyoub - being about 930 meters above sea level.

---

<sup>1</sup> It is under the control of Syrian regime forces up to the time of preparing this report

<sup>2</sup> It is under joint control of the Armed Opposition factions and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham

Armed Opposition factions took control of the region in 2014, with this situation remaining unchanged until the first quarter of mid-2018, when it came under the joint control of the Armed Opposition factions and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham. Now, with the end of the recent violent military campaign in northwestern Syria at the beginning of 2020 and with the Syrian regime forces establishing control over several cities, towns and villages, including the cities of Ma'aret al Numan and Kafranbel, the southern boundary of the Jabal al Zaweya area has become a line of contact with Syrian regime forces and its allies. Following the military campaign by the Syrian-Russian alliance forces (at end of 2019), Turkish forces were deployed throughout the Jabal al Zaweya area within nearly 20 fixed posts, reinforced by around twenty heavy vehicles, in many villages and towns, including al Bara, Balyoun, Ebeleen, Kansafra and Ihsem.

### III. Syrian-Russian Alliance Forces Violate the Ceasefire and Launch Military Attacks on and around Jabal al Zaweya Area:

With the beginning of June 2021, Syrian regime forces and Russia escalated their artillery bombardment of the villages and towns of Jabal al Zaweya, reaching Ariha city in the southern suburbs of Idlib. We have recorded cases of targeting of civilian populated areas with concentrated artillery strikes. We also monitored daily overflights of Jabal al Zaweya by Russian and Iranian reconnaissance planes, and we documented these forces' targeting of towns far from the contact lines.

The SNHR spoke with activist Ahmad Khatib<sup>3</sup>, from Mar'yan village in Jabal al Zaweya, who told us:

**"The recent campaign against the villages of Jabal al Zaweya was distinguished from its predecessors by intense daily flights of Russian and Iranian reconnaissance aircraft; civilians can distinguish between them, as the Iranian aircraft has a strong and clearly audible sound, while the sound of the Russian aircraft is less intense. We generally feel more fearful from Russian aircrafts, as their flight is often followed by the bombardment of the area."** Ahmad added that: **"Despite the continuous bombardment, the people did not leave the area but resorted to caves and basements in the morning until the end of the reconnaissance flights. We do not know why we are bombed more in the morning than at other times of the day."**

We contacted Hussam al Sheikh<sup>4</sup>, a team leader at the Syrian Civil Defense Center in Balyoun village, and asked him about the most prominent features of the recent military campaign in Jabal al Zaweya compared to previous campaigns. He said:

**"Previously, the bombardment we were subjected to in Jabal al Zaweya was with aimless artillery shells that often fell randomly, and we used to hide as soon as we were alerted to the shelling. These days, the shells that bombard Jabal al Zaweya are precision-targeted Russian-made ones directed through reconnaissance and achieve great destruction; reconnaissance aircraft also have a great impact on our movements, as they monitor our movements before the bombardment, and we are afraid that they will cause us to be targeted."**

---

<sup>3</sup> We contacted him via WhatsApp on July 31, 2021

<sup>4</sup> We contacted him via WhatsApp on July 28, 2021

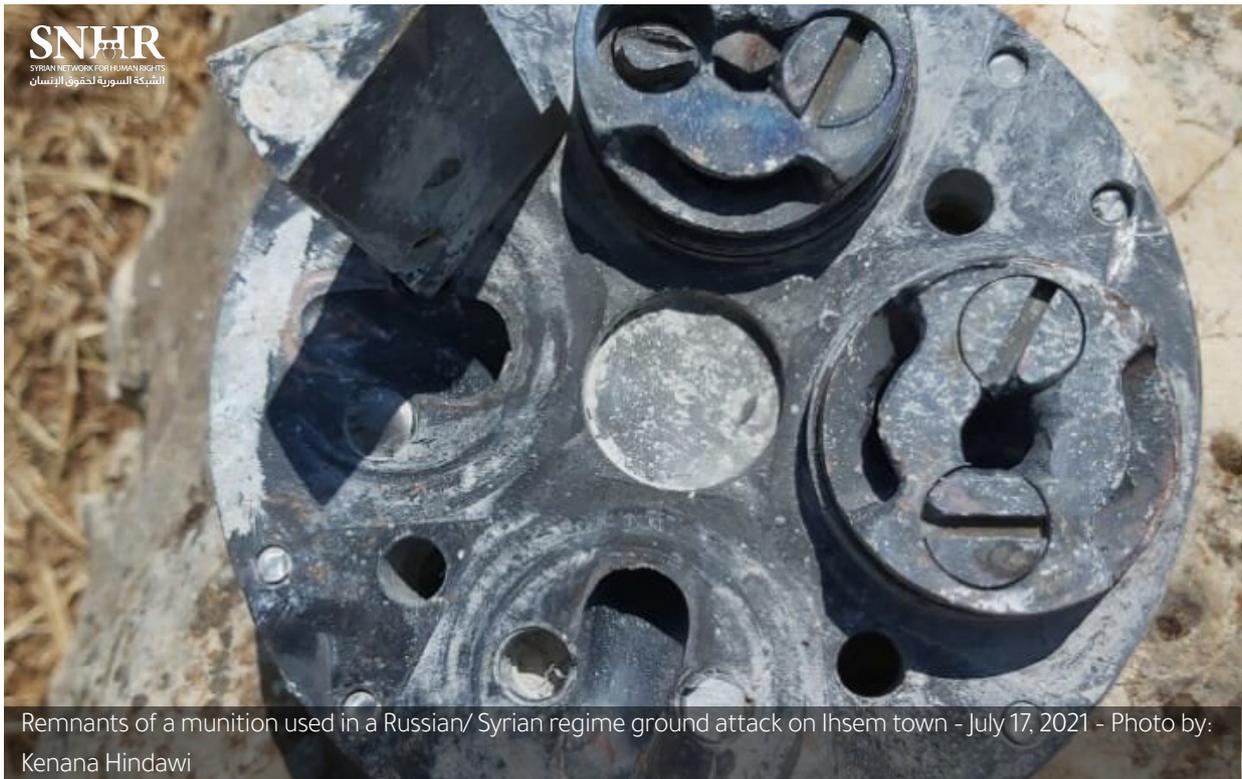
Among the most prominent features that distinguished the latest campaign on Jabal al Zaweya and its vicinity from the previous campaigns, are the following:

1. Intense bombardment following the flight of reconnaissance planes, which concentrates on targeting gatherings people, whether in front of shops or people gathering for ceremonies, such as weddings, funerary rituals, and others.
2. The use of higher-quality weapons in terms of their accuracy in hitting the target and in the great destruction caused to the target site, with the weapons being laser circuit-guided, with the Russian forces using the same type of laser guidance circuit first seen on the Krasnopol missile on various other types of missiles, which achieves a higher degree of accuracy in hitting their targets, in addition to having a greater destructive impact. The laser guidance circuit consists of a group of circuits and capacitors whose task is to direct the shell towards the laser light spot using a miniature camera located on the side of the shell. We note that the spotlight is created in one of the following two ways: (1) a P-12 or P-15 laser rangefinder, (2) a Russian Orlan-10 reconnaissance plane (which are widely used in Syria).



Remnants of a Krasnopol circuit-guided shell used by Russian forces in a ground attack on Balshoun village - August 19, 2021 - Photo by: Ahmad Rahhal

3. The use of intense missile bombardment, noting the absence of the Syrian regime's aircraft, both helicopters and warplanes, and the air raids carried out solely by Russian warplanes, with most of these being on non-civilian areas.
4. The Syrian-Russian alliance forces again deployed munitions whose use we hadn't previously documented in the Syrian conflict, with an unprecedented intensity. These munitions have high accuracy and great destructive impact, including the munition used in the ground attack on Kafr Haya village on July 4, 2021, and on Ihsem town on July 17, 2021.



Remnants of a munition used in a Russian/ Syrian regime ground attack on Ihsem town - July 17, 2021 - Photo by: Kenana Hindawi

5. We faced great difficulty in definitively identifying the responsibility for some of the attacks between Russia or the Syrian regime, due to the presence of launching platforms belonging to the Syrian regime, and others belonging to Russia, with these platforms moving from one place to another.
6. We recorded a noticeable increase in use of the double-tap strike policy in dozens of incidents, which resulted in an increase in the number of deaths and injuries.

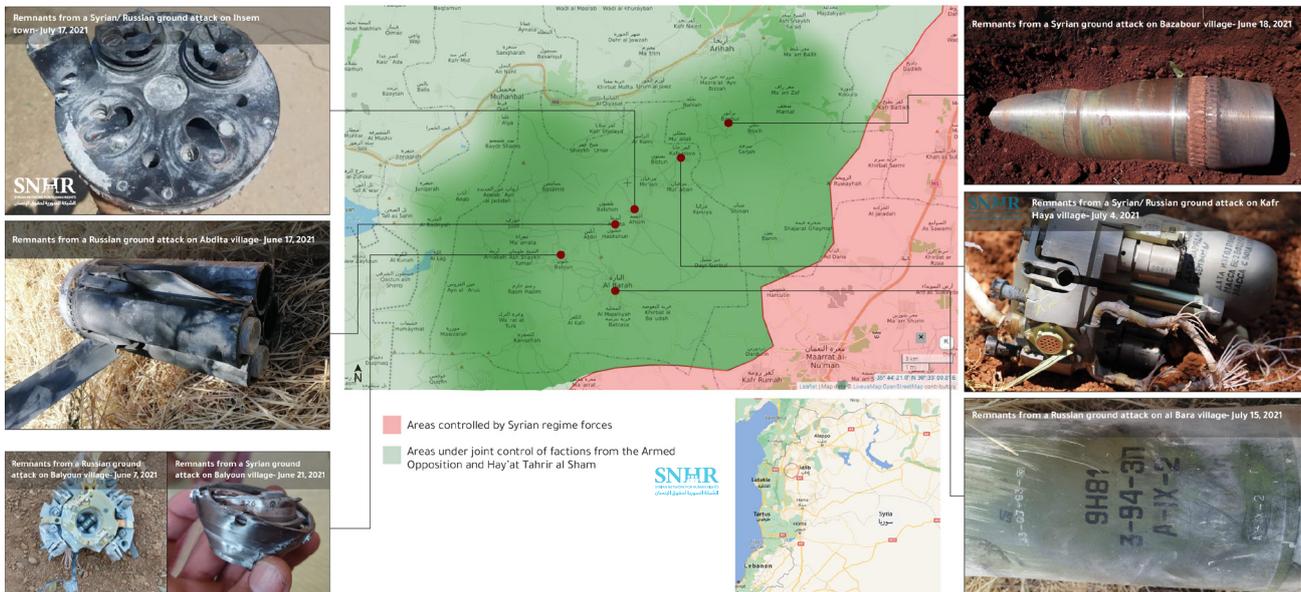
Media activist Ahmad Rahhal<sup>5</sup>, an activist in Jabal al Zaweya, told us about what he went through during the recent military campaign by the Syrian-Russian alliance forces in his area. He said:

**“The bombardment that we are exposed to is usually in the early hours of dawn, and, in most of the incidents, the number of deaths and injured increases as a result of both Syrian regime forces and Russian forces carrying out the double-tap airstrike policy, which hindered my arrival, in several incidents, directly to the site to document the bombardment, as the reconnaissance aircraft do not leave the airspace over the area; when residents and paramedics gather to save lives from under the rubble, the bombardment is repeated. When we were bombarded by warplanes [previously], we had a chance to escape from the site before the bombardment resumed, but now we don’t have this chance.”**

Ahmad added: “I also saw in some of the sites that were bombarded the remnants of new types of shells equipped with advanced electronic circuits that we did not see before this campaign. The bombardment became focused and hit targets accurately and not randomly as in the past, and the scale of destruction achieved by these shells is equivalent to that of warplanes’ missiles.”

<sup>5</sup> We contacted him via WhatsApp on July 31, 2021

The following are photos of remnants of a number of munitions used by Syrian-Russian alliance forces in their ground attacks on some areas of Jabal al Zaweya and its vicinity between June 5, 2021 and September 1, 2021:



## IV. The Record of the Most Notable Violations Documented by SNHR at the Hands of Syrian-Russian Alliance Forces in and around Jabal Zaweya Area:

### A. Extrajudicial killing:

The SNHR documented the deaths of 61 civilians, including 33 children and 12 women, one medical worker, one media worker, and one Civil Defense worker in the attacks launched by the Syrian-Russian alliance forces on Jabal al Zaweya and its vicinity, between June 5, 2021, and September 1, 2021, distributed as follows:

- **Syrian regime forces:** 28, including 13 children, seven women, and one medical worker.
- **Russian forces:** 33, including 20 children, five women, one media worker, and one Civil Defense worker.

We also documented the Syrian-Russian alliance forces committing five massacres during the same period, two of which were at the hands of Syrian regime forces and three at the hands of Russian forces.

### The most notable extrajudicial killing incidents are:

On Thursday, June 10, 2021, Russian artillery forces, stationed in areas controlled by Syrian regime forces, working in coordination with a Russian reconnaissance aircraft, fired several shells (equipped with Krasnopol laser guidance systems) targeting the al Asi family's complex of houses in the southeastern outskirts of the rural development project in the center of Ebleen village in Jabal al Zaweya; while other local residents were evacuating the injured and retrieving the dead, in conjunction with the arrival of a military Sentafé-type vehicle carrying Hay'at Tahrir al Sham leaders to help transport the injured, the same ar-

tillery forces shelled the same location. [The attack](#) resulted in [the deaths](#) of [11 individuals](#), including six civilians, two of them children and [one a woman](#), as well as five fighters, in addition to injuring about 11 people. Ebleen village was under the joint control of factions of the Armed Opposition and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.

We note that on the same day, RusVesna Russian channel broadcast [a video](#) taken from the air showing the bombardment of Ebleen village by Russian forces.

#### Victims' names:

1. Walid Samih Harmoush.
2. Muhammad Abdul Hamid al Asi, a head for Ebleen School for girls.
3. Ms. Walaa Muhammad al Asi.
4. A child, named as Huthaifah Tareq al Asi.
5. A 17-year-old boy, named as Abdullah Muhammad al Asi.
6. Ahmad Sakhr Deqmaq.
7. Muhammad al Qasem, known as Abu Mus'ab al Humsi, a fighter from Homs governorate, worked as an official in Hay'at Tahrir al Sham's media office, and was responsible for military coordination with media personnel.
8. Mu'taz al Droubi, known as Abu Tamer al Humsi, a fighter from Homs governorate, worked in supervision of administrative affairs with press delegations in Hay'at Tahrir al Sham's media relations office.
9. Abdullah Abdul Qader Subhi al Asi, a fighter.
10. Walid Subhi al Asi, a fighter.
11. Abu Khaled al Shami, a military spokesperson for Hay'at Tahrir al Sham, a fighter.



Victims killed in a ground attack by forces we believe to be Russian that targeted the center of Ebleen village, south of Idlib - June 10, 2021

On Saturday, July 3, 2021, at around 05:45 local time, Russian artillery forces, stationed in areas controlled by Syrian regime forces, working in coordination with a Russian reconnaissance aircraft, fired a shell (equipped with a Krasnopol laser guidance system) targeting a house west of Ebleen village in Jabal al Zaweya, resulting in the deaths of five civilians from one family, namely three children (two males and one female) and their parents, in addition to injuring two other children from the same family. Ebleen village was under the joint control of factions of the Armed Opposition and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.



Remnants of the shell used by Russian forces in their ground attack on Ebleen village, south of Idlib - July 3, 2021 - Photo by Ahmad Rahhal

**Victims' names:**

1. Subhi Abdul Hamid al Asi, a fourth-year college student at Damascus University's Sharia faculty, from Ebleen village in Idlib, worked as an official at the Ebleen Health center, and as a volunteer for Violet Organization for relief and development.
2. Suad Subhi al Asi, a woman, Subhi al Asi' wife and cousin.
3. The child Ibrahim Subhi al Asi
4. The child Saed Subhi al Asi
5. The female child Banan Subhi al Asi



Funeral ceremonies for the victims of the massacre committed by Russian forces in Ebleen village, south of Idlib - July 3, 2021 - Photo by Ahmad Rahhal

On Saturday, July 3, 2021, at around 06:00 local time, Syrian regime artillery forces, working in coordination with a Russian reconnaissance aircraft, fired several shells targeting a house belonging to one of the Civil Defense personnel in the northeast of Balyoun village in Jabal al Zaweya, resulting in [the deaths](#) of two sister children, and injuring their parents, in addition to causing massive destruction to the house; when Civil Defense teams arrived to evacuate the injured and retrieve the dead, the same artillery forces shelled the same location, without inflicting more casualties. Balyoun village was under the joint control of factions of the Armed Opposition and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.

#### Victims' names:

1. The female child Nour Omar al Omar
2. The female child Iman Omar al Omar

We contacted Hussam al Sheikh<sup>6</sup>, a team leader at the Syrian Civil Defense Center in Balyoun village in Jabal al Zaweya, who went to the site of the incident and helped retrieve the victims:

**“On July 3, 2021, I woke up to the sound of shelling, and I learned that a shell had fallen near Bsames village. Then shells fell on Ebleen town, causing a massacre of a family. Then the house of our colleague in the Civil Defense, Omar al Omar, in Balyoun village was bombarded. I went to the site, after we left our car in a remote place for fear of being bombed, and there I found Omar and his wife looking for their children. Their situation was deplorable, as the reconnaissance aircraft was**

<sup>6</sup> We contacted him via WhatsApp on July 28, 2021

**in the air, his children were under the rubble and he was slightly injured. We pulled out the body of a girl before we heard through the walkie-talkie that a shell had been launched from the side of Kafranbel. I asked the team to evacuate the site immediately, and as we expected, the second shell landed in the same location, an accurate Krasnopol shell.”** Hussam added that they returned to the site after the second shell fell and worked for many hours: **“Finally, we were able to find the body of his second daughter, badly disfigured, on the outskirts of the site, and we buried them.”**

On Saturday, July 3, 2021, at around 07:00 local time, a home in Balshoun village in Jabal al Zaweya was hit by a shell whose source hasn't yet been identified by SNHR as of this writing, with the primary parties suspected of responsibility for the attack being either Syrian regime forces or Russian forces, as the shelling emanating from an area controlled by them. The investigation process is still underway to identify the party responsible for the attack.

The attack resulted in the death of a child and an unborn female baby, along with the injury of other civilians, in addition to extensive destruction to the house. Balshoun village was under the joint control of factions of the Armed Opposition and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.

Victims' names:

1. The child Hasan Hayel Ajaj
2. [Unborn baby](#) of Ms. Nouriyah Hatem Harmoush, female.

On Saturday, July 17, 2021, Russian artillery forces, stationed in areas controlled by Syrian regime forces, working in coordination with a Russian reconnaissance aircraft, fired a shell (equipped with a Krasnopol laser guidance system) targeting a house in the southeast of Sarja village in Jabal al Zaweya, resulting in the immediate deaths of three sisters - female children - and injuring the other family members; when Civil Defense teams arrived and other local residents gathered to evacuate the injured and retrieve the dead, the same artillery forces shelled the same location, resulting in the deaths of three civilians, including an elderly woman, and Hammam al Asi, a Civil Defense media worker with the Bazabour center, as well as the injury of two Civil Defense personnel with various injuries, in addition to causing extensive destruction to the house and the surrounding area. [The total](#) death toll [resulting](#) from the attack as of this writing reached [seven civilians](#), including four sister female children, and an elderly woman. Sarja village was under the joint control of factions of the Armed Opposition and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.

The SNHR spoke with Kamel Zreiq<sup>7</sup>, a team leader at the Syrian Civil Defense Center in Bazabour in Jabal al Zaweya, who reported on the incident:

“On July 17, 2021, we received a report from the emergency room that Sarja village was bombed, and I went with the media worker Hammam al Asi to the site; before I got there, I learned that the targeted house belonged to a relative [of mine]. Upon our arrival, we asked the driver to return for fear of being targeted.” Kamel added: “I learned upon our arrival that four female children were inside the house while the rest of the family was in the field. We recovered three of them who were taken to a hospital, and one female child remained under the rubble. During our work, the children’s grandmother and their father arrived, and some civilians gathered at the site. The reconnaissance aircraft did not leave the airspace during our work, but we continued our work until we were informed through the walkie-talkies of the necessity of evacuating the place for fear of being bombed. Immediately after that, I heard the sound of artillery firing, which I believe came from the Khan al Sebel area. We immediately went to a nearby olive field to take cover, but the shell that landed near the first site killed the grandmother, whom we took away by ambulance. Then I took cover with Hammam and another colleague in a small nearby house, fearing that we would be bombed again. Indeed, we heard the sound of a new shell being fired, which we expected to hit the first location, but it fell in front of us and injured the three of us, so I called our driver who came and took us with another civilian to the hospital, where Hammam and the civilian died.”

Kamel confirmed that the bombardment of the area was carried out using laser-guided shells, and that he also saw them used in the bombardment of Bazabour village, where five shells fell in one location. These were new weapons to him, which he had not seen before this recent military campaign in the area.

#### Victims’ names:

1. A 11-year-old female child, named as Retaj Ezzou Zreiq.
2. A 13-year-old female child, named as Mais Ezzou Zreiq.
3. A 16-year-old female child, named as Saeedeh Ezzou Zreiq.
4. A five-year-old female child, named as Maram Ezzou Zreiq, died due to wounds sustained on July 26.
5. A 60-year-old woman, named as Saeedah al Asi, the grandmother of the four girls.
6. A 40-year-old man, named as Hussein Muhammad Haj Musa.
7. A 30-year-old man, named as Hammam Muhammad al Asi, a media worker with the Civil Defense- Bazabour center, from Bazabour village in the southern suburbs of Idlib governorate, a first-year college student at Tishreen University’s science faculty, was also a married father of three children.



<sup>7</sup> We contacted him via WhatsApp on July 28, 2021

The SNHR spoke with Hassan al Asi<sup>8</sup>, director of the Civil Defense Center in Bazabour village, who told us: “On Saturday, July 17th, the southeastern outskirts of Sarja village in the southern suburbs of Idlib were subjected to artillery shelling by forces we believe were Russian stationed in Khan al Sebel village, which is under the control of Syrian regime forces, resulting in the deaths of a number of civilians. During Hammam’s media coverage of the location of the shelling, the same forces repeated their artillery shelling with an artillery shell equipped with a Krasnopol laser guidance system, with reconnaissance aircraft, which we believe were Russian, flying overhead. The shell landed near Hammam, injuring him with shrapnel in the chest. He was immediately taken to al Shami Hospital in Ariha city, and then to the al Muhafatha Hospital in Idlib city for surgery, but he died during the surgery. It is worth mentioning that the double-tap attack caused a massacre of five civilians, including three children and one woman, and injured five others, including two Civil Defense personnel.”

On Saturday, July 17, 2021, at around 22:50 local time, a two-storey house, located on the northern outskirts of Ihsem town in Jabal al Zaweya in the southern suburbs of Idlib governorate, was hit by a shell, whose source hasn’t yet been identified by SNHR as of this writing, with the primary parties suspected of responsibility for the attack being either Syrian regime forces or Russian forces, as the shelling emanating from an area controlled by them. The investigation process is still underway to identify the party responsible for the attack.

[The attack](#) resulted in [the deaths](#) of [nine civilians](#) from one family, namely five female children and four women, including a nurse, and the injury of nearly seven other civilians, mostly women and children, in addition to extensive destruction to the house. Ihsem town was under the joint control of factions of the Armed Opposition and Hay’at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.

#### Victims’ names:

1. A six-year-old female child, named as Khadijah Samer Tqeiqah.
2. A four-year-old female child, named as Iman Samer Tqeiqah.
3. A five-year-old female child, named as Tasnim Samer Tqeiqah.
4. A female child, named as Ayah Soufia Samer Tqeiqah, died due to wounds sustained on July 19.
5. A 14-year-old female child, named as Hadil Muhammad Taha Tqeiqah, died due to wounds sustained on August 6.
6. A 20-year-old woman, named as Hebah Muhammad Tqeiqah.
7. A 20-year-old woman, named as Mariam Barakat a nurse worked for ‘Save A Soul’ Hospital in Salqin city in the northwest of Idlib governorate, from Mhambel town in the western suburbs of Idlib governorate, Taha’s wife.
8. A 50-year-old woman, Yusra Serjawi, Muhammad Tqeiqah’s wife.
9. A 45-year-old woman, named as Wedad, Sadeq Tqeiqah’s wife.

---

<sup>8</sup> We contacted him via WhatsApp on July 25, 2021



Destruction in a house that was attacked, resulting in a massacre, in Ihsem town, south of Idlib - July 17, 2021 -  
Photo by: Abdul Raouf Qentar

We contacted an observer, Mudar Salhab<sup>9</sup>, from Ihsem town, who monitors the aerial and artillery bombardment of the Jabal al Zaweya area, and who monitored the bombardment of Ihsem that day. He recalled: "I used to monitor the presence of reconnaissance aircraft in the areas close to the contact lines extensively, but during this campaign its flight range expanded to include the entire Jabal al Zaweya area and reached Ariha city. On July 17, I monitored the presence of a reconnaissance aircraft and its concentrated circling in the area over Ihsem town, so I alerted [the public] to its presence through the walkie-talkies, and warned civilians against gatherings before we heard the sound of firing [of artillery] from the areas controlled by Syrian regime forces in the south. The first shell landed, followed by a second one at the same location. I first learned that there were injured people in the place, but with the arrival of the Civil Defense personnel, it became clear that a massacre had taken place. I kept following the monitoring and alerting them to be careful, lest they be exposed to new bombardment and the number of victims and deaths would increase."

On Thursday, July 22, 2021, a house located on the southern outskirts of Ebleen village in Jabal al Zaweya in the southern suburbs of Idlib governorate, was hit with a shell, whose source hasn't yet been identified by SNHR as of this writing, with the primary parties suspected of responsibility for the attack being either Syrian regime forces or Russian forces, as the shelling emanating from an area controlled by them. The investigation process is still underway to identify the party responsible for the attack.

<sup>9</sup> We contacted him via WhatsApp on July 29, 2021

The attack resulted in [the deaths](#) of [seven civilians](#) from one family, including four children and one woman, and injured seven others. Ebleen village was under the joint control of factions of the Armed Opposition and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.

Victims' names:

1. A female child, named as Khadijah Mustafa Harmoush.
2. A female child, named as Aalaa Mustafa Harmoush.
3. A female child, named as Mariam Mustafa Harmoush.
4. A child, named as Fouad Mustafa Harmoush.
5. A woman, named as Fatimah Namr, the mother of the four children.
6. A 60-year-old man, named as Fouad Mustafa Harmoush, the grandfather of the four children.
7. A 30-year-old man, named as Emad Fouad Harmoush.



Victims of the massacre killed in a Syrian/Russian attack on Ebleen village, south of Idlib - July 22, 2021

On Thursday, August 19, 2021, at around 05:35 local time, Russian artillery forces, stationed in areas under the control of Syrian regime forces, accompanied by a Russian surveillance plane overhead, fired five shells, equipped with the Krasnopol laser guidance system, at Balshoun village in Jabal al Zaweya in the southern suburbs of Idlib governorate. One shell fell in the middle of a house in the west of the village, killing [four civilians](#) from the [same family](#) ([three children](#) and their mother) and severely damaging the house. Another shell hit another house, located near al Rahman Mosque in al Gharbi neighborhood of the village, killing a child. Balshoun village was under the joint control of factions of the Armed Opposition and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.

Victims' names:

1. Ms. Nisreen Ajaj
2. Child Murad Muhammad Ajaj, Ms. Nisreen's son
3. Child Mustafa Muhammad Ajaj, Ms. Nisreen's son
4. Child Ahmad Muhammad Ajaj, Ms. Nisreen's son
5. Child Hamza Khaled Habib

**B. Attacks on vital civilian facilities:**

Between June 5, 2021, and September 1, 2021, the Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) documented at least 13 attacks on vital civilian facilities at the hands of Syrian-Russian alliance forces in Jabal al Zaweya area and its vicinity, distributed as follows:

1. **Syrian regime forces:** 12.
1. **Russian forces:** One

Among these attacks, we documented three on educational facilities, and three on places of worship.

The most notable incidents of attack on vital civilian facilities are:

On Saturday, June 19, 2021, the Civil Defense center in [Qastoun](#) village in the western suburbs of Hama governorate was subjected to a ground attack, whose source has not yet been identified, using several shells; the primary parties suspected of responsibility for the attack are either Syrian regime forces or Russian forces, with the attack emanating from an area controlled by them. The investigation process is still underway to identify the party responsible for the shelling.

The shelling caused the death of a Civil Defense worker, and the injury of three other Civil Defense workers, [in addition](#) to [completely destroying](#) the [center's structure](#) and causing moderate [material damage](#) to two of the vehicles belonging to the Civil Defense organization (one fire truck and one service car). As a result, the center has been put out of service. The area was under the joint control of factions of the Armed Opposition and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.

The Civil Defense Organization published [a statement](#) about the incident on its official website.



Destruction caused by a ground attack by Syrian regime forces/ Russian forces on the Civil Defense Center in Qastoun village, Hama - June 19, 2021 - Ahmad Rahhal

The SNHR spoke with Hasan Hashoum<sup>10</sup>, the media worker at the Civil Defense Center in Qastoun town, who told us the details of the incident: “Around 08:10 in the morning of June 19, while I was preparing a maté drink in the center’s kitchen, my surroundings suddenly turned black and items started flying before I found myself under the roof of the center; I was able to get out of there with a bloody head without any other injuries and ran with my colleagues towards the neighboring olive trees, where we discovered that we were only seven, while the eighth of us, Dahham al Hussein was not present, so we went back to pull him out from under the building and take him to the car. As we left the site, the second shell fell near us, and my colleague Fateh was seriously injured, then I pulled him towards the olive trees, but we no longer had means of transportation to be able to transport him.” Hasan told us that: “When the head of the town council arrived on his motorcycle to check on us, the third shell fell near us, without causing any injuries; after Fateh was taken to the hospital, I fell to the ground and was taken to a hospital in Jisr al Shoghour, where my injuries were treated and I learned that Dahham had been martyred. At first I imagined that we were subjected to aerial bombardment, but after returning to visit the site, I learned that they were laser shells, with five minutes apart between the first and the second and seven minutes between the second and the third; the center has been completely destroyed.” Hasan added: “In the past, the first shell in cases of double-tap strikes used to fall in the vicinity of the targeted place, so we could hide while the next shell hit us, which is more accurate than the first, but this time the first shell was a high-precision one and hit the building directly, so we were unable to escape it. We were fortunate that we lost one martyr and only three of us were injured after this bombardment that we were subjected to.”

<sup>10</sup> We contacted him via WhatsApp on July 29, 2021

Visual analysis shows the site of a Syrian/ Russian ground attack on the Civil Defense center in Qastoun village, Hama - June 19, 2021:



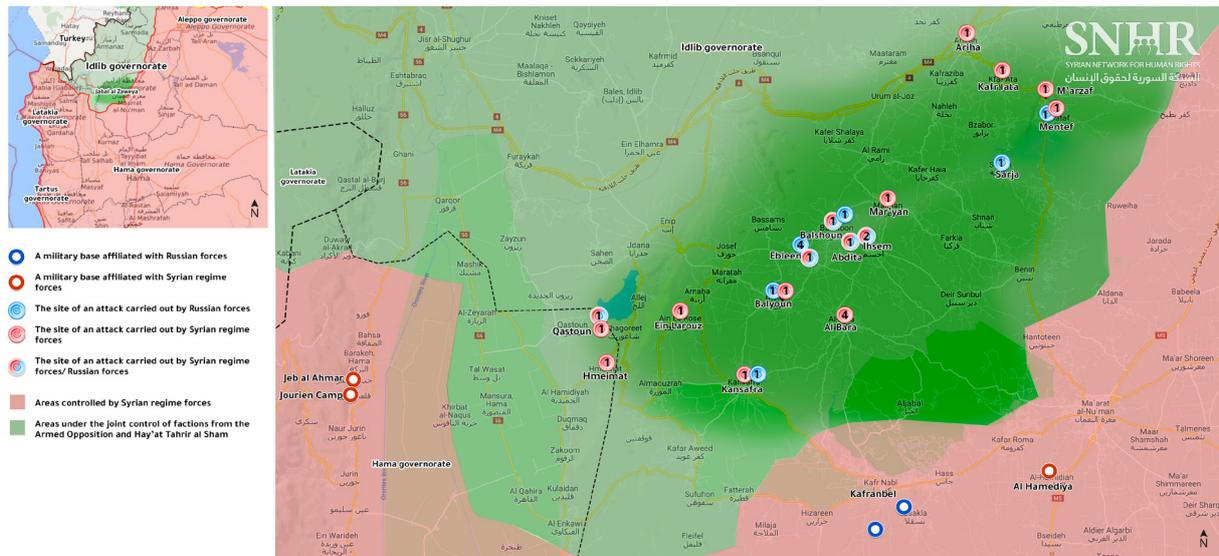
On Wednesday, June 23, 2021, Syrian regime artillery forces fired a number of shells at Kansafra village in the southern suburbs of Idlib governorate located near the contact lines, with one of the shells landing on the Kansafra al Kabir Mosque in the center of the village, causing severe [material damage](#) to the mosque's structure. The village was under the joint control of factions of the Armed Opposition and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.

On Saturday, July 3, 2021, at around 14:45 local time, Syrian regime artillery forces fired a number of shells at Ariha city in the southern suburbs of Idlib governorate, with some of the shells landing on the Tishreen School in al Gharbi neighborhood in the city, injuring four civilians, [in addition](#) to [partially destroying](#) a roof of one of [the school's](#) rooms, as well as causing moderate material damage to the school's furniture. The city was under the joint control of factions of the Armed Opposition and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.



On Wednesday, July 21, 2021, Syrian regime artillery forces fired a number of shells at al Bara village in Jabal al Zaweya in the southern suburbs of Idlib governorate, with one of the shells hitting the Ismail Latah Elementary School, which is located in the same compound as a teacher training institute, partially destroying the school building and causing moderate material damage to its furniture. Al Bara village was under the joint control of factions of the Armed Opposition and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.

Map shows the most prominent sites subjected to Syrian- Russian alliance forces' attacks in Jabal al Zaweya area and its vicinity, and the resulting casualties and damage to vital civilian facilities during the period covered by the report, and the forces main military bases in the area that participated in these attacks:



See the details of the attacks in the map above via [the interactive map link](#).

## V. International and Human Rights Condemnations of the Bombardment of Jabal al Zawayea Area and Its Vicinity in Northwest Syria, without Any Response or Investigation by Russia or the Syrian Regime:

On June 10, the Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor said [in a statement](#) that the Russian and Syrian forces must avoid targeting civilians in military operations in Idlib.

On July 3, the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) confirmed [in a statement](#) that six children were killed and others wounded in several attacks targeting three villages south of Idlib in northwest Syria in one day. Ted Chaiban, UNICEF’s Regional Director for the Middle East and North Africa, said: **“These attacks are the worst since a ceasefire was brokered in March last year. An escalation of violence will only result in cutting short the lives of more children.”** In [another statement](#) he issued on July 15, he spoke about the deaths of 10 children in the last two weeks in northwest Syria, and expressed his fear of violence returning in Syria.

On July 18, Save the Children issued [a statement](#) condemning the killing of at least 13 children within a three-day period in northwest Syria.

On July 23, Farhan Haq, Deputy Spokesman for the UN Secretary-General, [expressed](#) grave concern about the escalation of violence in northwest Syria, stressing that this poses a growing risk to civilians.

On July 23, Mark Cutts, Deputy Regional Humanitarian Coordinator for the Syria Crisis, [in a tweet](#) posted on his Twitter account, condemned the continued bombardment of northwest Syria by the Syrian regime and Russia, with more civilian casualties.

On July 31, Geir O. Pedersen, the UN Special Envoy for Syria, [called on](#) all parties in Syria to recognize that **“the principle of the protection of civilians and international humanitarian law must be upheld.”** also calling on all parties to “deescalate”.

On August 9, Bertrand Bainvel, UNICEF Deputy Regional Director for the Middle East and North Africa, confirmed [in a statement](#) that: “An ongoing escalation of violence in Syria, especially in the north, has killed and injured at least 45 children since the beginning of July.” On August 22, [Bainvel stressed](#) that children should never pay the price for the wars of adults, following the killing of seven children in northwest Syria within a week, and called on all parties to the conflict to stop attacks on children and protect children at all times.

On August 24, in his briefing to the UN Security Council, Geir O. Pedersen, the UN Special Envoy for Syria, [stressed](#) the importance of ensuring an immediate end to the violence and to ending tensions in the north-west of Syria.

## VI. Conclusions and Recommendations:

- The attacks by the Russian/ Syrian military alliance included in this report have resulted in deaths of Syrian citizens, and in the injury and disability of many other people, as well as exacerbating the already extreme food and health-related suffering of the population, all of which add to the already catastrophic humanitarian situation in northwest Syria at various levels.
- The Syrian-Iranian-Russian alliance forces have unquestionably violated UN Security Council Resolutions No. 2139 and 2254 to stop indiscriminate attacks, and also violated International Humanitarian Law rules of distinction between civilians and combatants<sup>11</sup>.
- The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court affirms that attacks on hospitals and civilian objects are war crimes when committed in international or non-international armed conflicts<sup>12</sup>.
- The evidence we have collected indicates that the attacks were deliberately directed against civilians and civilian objects, with the Syrian-Russian alliance forces committing the crime of extrajudicial killing, and their attacks and indiscriminate bombardment causing the destruction of facilities and buildings, and there are reasonable grounds to believe that the war crimes of attacking civilians have been committed in many cases.

---

<sup>11</sup> ICRC, International Humanitarian Law, Article 1, [https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/customary-ihl/eng/docs/v1\\_rul\\_rule1](https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/customary-ihl/eng/docs/v1_rul_rule1)

<sup>12</sup> International Criminal Court, Rome Statute, Article 8-2 (b-i, ii, iii, iv, v).

- The Syrian regime violated the procedures established by International Humanitarian Law in regard to causing civilians to panic and flee, at the forefront of which are making civilians the target of attacks<sup>13</sup>, and launching violent and indiscriminate attacks aimed at spreading terror<sup>14</sup>.
- Neither the Russian or Syrian authorities have conducted any serious investigations into these attacks, or even into any other previous ones, with the Russian and Syrian leaderships, both military and political, bearing responsibility for these attacks based on the principle of command responsibility under international humanitarian law<sup>15</sup>, as they did not prevent the attacks and did not punish those responsible. Rather, the widespread repeated attacks indicate that they can only be the actions of a state policy ordered directly by the highest levels of the Russian and Syrian leadership, which implicates them in more crimes against humanity and war crimes, and emphasizes once again that sanctions must be imposed and maintained by various states of the world that target all those involved in these barbaric attacks.

### **Recommendations:**

#### **The UN Security Council:**

- The Syrian case should be referred to the International Criminal Court and all those who are responsible should be held accountable, while UNSC states' veto power should be withheld when crimes against humanity and war crimes are committed.
- Impose UN military and economic sanctions on the Syrian regime, especially the leaders involved in crimes against humanity and war crimes.
- Revive the political transition process in pursuit of stability, to ensure the territorial integrity of Syria, and the dignified and safe return of refugees and IDPs.

#### **International community**

- In light of the split within the Security Council and its utter incapability, action should be taken at the national and regional levels to form alliances to support the Syrian people and increase support for relief efforts. Additionally, the principle of universal jurisdiction should be applied in local courts regarding these crimes in order to conduct fair trials for all those who were involved.
- Support the political transition process and put pressure to compel the parties to implement the political transition within a time period of no more than six months so that millions of displaced people can safely and settled return to their homes.

---

<sup>13</sup> ICRC, International Humanitarian Law, Article 7, [https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/customary-ihl/eng/docs/v1\\_rul\\_rule7](https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/customary-ihl/eng/docs/v1_rul_rule7)

<sup>14</sup> ICRC, International Humanitarian Law, Article 2, [https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/customary-ihl/eng/docs/v1\\_rul\\_rule2](https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/customary-ihl/eng/docs/v1_rul_rule2)

<sup>15</sup> ICRC, International Humanitarian Law, Article 152, [https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/customary-ihl/eng/docs/v1\\_rul\\_rule152](https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/customary-ihl/eng/docs/v1_rul_rule152)

ICRC, International Humanitarian Law, Article 153, [https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/customary-ihl/eng/docs/v1\\_rul\\_rule153](https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/customary-ihl/eng/docs/v1_rul_rule153)

- The SNHR has repeatedly called for the implementation of the 'Responsibility to Protect' principle in dozens of studies and reports and as a member of the International Coalition for the Responsibility to Protect (ICRtoP) after exhausting all political channels from the Arab League's plan, and after Mr. Kofi Annan's plan proved fruitless. Therefore, the steps recommended under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations should be adopted 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 pressure on the Security Council to refer the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court.
- The Russian and Iranian regimes should face heavy fines and financial penalties for the destruction of vital buildings and facilities in Syria. These sums should be reflected in the reparations for the victims and the restoration of the facilities and buildings whose destruction the two regimes contributed to.

#### **Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR):**

- Condemn the attacks included in this report, designate those responsible, and condemn their brutality.

#### **Independent International Commission of Inquiry (COI)**

- Conduct extensive investigations into these attacks, clearly condemn them, and clearly designate the Russian forces as the perpetrators if sufficient evidence is found by COI.
- Work on identifying the responsibility of individuals within the Syrian regime who are involved in crimes against humanity and war crimes, publish their names to expose them to international public opinion and end all dealings with them at every political and economic level.

#### **UN Envoy to Syria:**

- Call for rapid implementation of democratic political change that restores victims' rights and embodies the principles of transitional justice.
- Clearly assign responsibility to the party responsible for the death of the political process, and disclose to the Syrian people the timing of the end of the political transition process.

#### **The Russian regime**

- Must not repeat its bombardments and killings of civilians and targeting of their vital facilities, houses and shops.
- Stop supporting the Syrian regime in the Security Council and stop using its veto to block the passage of any UN resolution punishing the Syrian regime.
- Reconstruct and restore the residential buildings and shops destroyed by Russian military forces, and compensate victims throughout the duration of their displacement.
- Support a real political process that achieves security and restores stability to the Syrian state, moving away from a dictatorial sectarian regime whose existence millions of Syrians will not accept.

## Acknowledgment

We would like to thank the victims' families and relatives and all the local activists from all fields who contributed effectively to this report. If it were not for their contributions and cooperation with us, we would not be able to complete this report to such an exhaustive level. In addition to this, we extend our most heartfelt condolences to the victims' families.



[www.snhr.org](http://www.snhr.org) - [info@sn4hr.org](mailto:info@sn4hr.org)