



## Multiple Evidences Indicating that Russian and Syrian Forces Deliberately Targeted the U.N. Aid Convoy in Aleppo

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### **I. Incident Details, Evidences, and Accounts**

On Monday 19 September 2016, government helicopters and fixed-wing warplanes we believe that were evidently Russian took part in a concentrated attack that comprised multiple airstrikes on a center for the Red Crescent in eastern Urm Al Kubra town where the bombardment lasted for three hours.

The government helicopters dropped no less than four barrel bombs while the fixed-wing Russian warplanes carried out nine airstrikes at least in which they used missiles and heavy machine guns.

The bombardment targeted mostly the Syrian Red Arab Crescent (SARC) center and destroyed an U.N. aid convoy of trucks that was supposed to deliver and drop the aids in warehouses belonging to the Red Crescent center. Additionally, the bombardment targeted also medical and civil defense teams that tried to rescue the wounded and injured relief workers.

SNHR documented that 12 civilians, who were all relief workers and truck drivers, were killed in these attacks. Among the victims were Omar Barakat, head of the Red Crescent in the town. Furthermore, the Red Crescent building in the town was largely destroyed and no less than 10 aid trucks were burned.





SNHR asked a cooperating individual to visit the site of the incident after the bombardment to take and record pictures and videos. The pictures and videos that we obtained as well as a number of the pictures and videos that were published on YouTube and social media by local media activists showed the huge destruction in the humanitarian aids. One of the pictures was of missile remnants that we believe were Russian. Also, some of the pictures were of the victims who were reduced to shreds (We haven't published these photos for it was too graphic) we have copies of all the pictures and videos in our records.

Furthermore, SNHR contacted a number of eyewitnesses, civil defense members, survivors, and local media activists who all had similar accounts of what happened which also corresponded to the pictures and videos we received. This report includes three accounts where we explained the purpose of these interviews for the eyewitnesses who gave us permission to use the provided information. The investigations mentioned in this report have proven that the targeted areas were civil areas where there is no military centers or weapon storehouses belonging to any armed opposition factions or Islamic extremist groups during or before the attack. Also, this report includes only the bare minimum of the severity and magnitude of the violation that occurred and also doesn't cover the social, economic, and psychological ramifications.

[A link](#) that shows the location of Urm Al Kubra town

The following map shows an approximate location where the Red Crescent center and the aid convoy were targeted in Urm Al Kubra town, 19 September 2016





**Fadel Abdul Ghani, chairman of SNHR, says:**

*“It is not peculiar for a regime who besieges whole areas and obstructs aids access to destroy aids and those who are working on it. U.N. delegation have been targeted before, we shouldn’t forget that. It is also not unlikely that the Russian regime, who targeted and bombed 59 medical centers with all the patients, wounded, and equipment inside, targeted the Red Crescent center and the U.N. aid convoy. The various crimes and violations are happening in Syria because there has been no real deterrent since 2011. It is just an open green light.”*

The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs issued a statement expressing its disappointment over the attack that targeted the Red Crescent and the aids convoy. the [statement](#) doesn’t address the type of the attack and the attacker and it only stated that the aids were supposed to be delivered to nearly 78,000 in the western Aleppo of suburbs. However, the statement does affirm that “Notification of the convoy – which planned to reach some 78,000 people - had been provided to all parties to the conflict and the convoy was clearly marked as humanitarian.”

The Red Crescent organization also issued a [statement](#) to mourn the death of Omar Barakat, head of the Red Crescent in Urm Al Kubra town, who was killed in the incident and has suspended all of its activists for three days in protest.

There are additional indicators that strongly suggest that the attack was deliberate: First: The prolonged duration of the attack on the convoy and the center which spanned over three hours which entails an utter insolence and disregard during the attack for the perpetrator was certain that nothing would happen if the crime was exposed.

Second: The frequency of the strikes during the three hours, meaning that more than one missile was used and more than one strike were carried out so the attack wasn’t indiscriminate or by accident. In fact, four barrel bombs were dropped and the area was targeted with several missiles. Also, heavy machine guns were used to keep medics and civil defense teams away.





Third: The statement by Mr. Stephen O'Brien, United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs which states: "Notification of the convoy – which planned to reach some 78,000 people - had been provided to all parties to the conflict." So the Russian and Syrian regimes are already aware of the place of the time at which the convoy was passing.

SNHR contacted, via WhatsApp, Mr. Barakat Barakat who is a relative of the head of the Red Crescent in Urm Al Kubra Omar Barakat's who was killed in the incident. Mr. Barakat told us:

"I stopped about 200 meters away from the Red Crescent center when I heard the sound of helicopters attacking the location. I saw two helicopters dropped four barrel bombs at approximately 7:12. A few minutes later, another strike was carried out by two Russian warplanes which targeted the same location with two thermobaric missiles that caused a huge explosion and fires. We couldn't see anything in the darkness of the night but the flames. After that, the helicopters came back and dropped other four barrel bombs."

"We tried to get to the injured but other Russian warplanes started targeting the area and up to 200 meters of its vicinity with heavy machine guns. This went on for two hours and a half. The airstrikes have already shut down all routes to the location of the attack to block medical and civil defense teams."

"The flames didn't stop until 3:00 AM, after that we were able to pull out the victims including Omar Barakat who is the head of the Red Crescent in the town and other workers. Also, the Red Crescent was damaged and no less than 10 aid trucks were completely burned and the nearby houses were damaged including the house of Omar Barakat."

"Over three hours of true annihilation on a small area that only contain a center for the Red Crescent and U.N. aids convoys. They are murdering humanity."

SNHR contacted a civil defense volunteer (refused to reveal his identity), via WhatsApp, who helped evacuating the wounded:

"The Red Crescent center wasn't the only target as Russian warplanes have also targeted, using missiles and heavy machine guns, civil defense and medical teams for over two hours and a half. The airstrikes continued intermittently until dawn. I heard the screams of Mr. Omar Barakat before he met his demise. We couldn't get to him because of the concentrated bombardment that targeted the area. We entered the center about 90 minutes later and pulled out four wounded and Mr. Omar was dead by then. The airstrikes resumed so we had to retreat again."





“The center and the aid convoys were reduced to rubbles. Everything was destroyed and burned. We learned that the warplanes that carried out the last airstrikes were Russian from the Free Army observatory that reported when the warplanes took off from Hmemeim airbase while in the beginning the bombardment was by government helicopters that dropped barrel bombs.”

According to the international law, the parties to the conflict must insure that humanitarian workers move freely secure their protection and, consequently, the civilians’ access to aids. Nevertheless, the Syrian regime haven’t respected the most basic principles of the international humanitarian law since the breakout of the popular protests in March 2011 or protected those who carry humanitarian insignia but targeted clinics, medical points, and relief personnel as we documented in [the report](#) that is published monthly.

Ahmad Al Ahmad, a local media activist whom we contacted via Facebook, contacted paramedics and eyewitnesses and visited the site after the bombardment:

*“I had been with the convoy since it was taken by the Red Crescent team after it passed a Syrian regime military checkpoint. The surveillance planes were flying above us the whole time until we arrived in the Red Crescent center in Urm Al Kubra.”*

*“I headed to the area at dawn after the airstrikes ended and the paramedics were able to access the center and evacuate the wounded and the victims. All the people who were there told me about horrifying airstrikes by helicopters and warplanes, missiles and machine guns raining the place. Most of the buses and trucks were burned completely and the destruction in the Red Crescent center was huge. Also, two building belonging to the Red Crescent center used for sleeping and resting were targeted.”*

*“The Free Syrian Army observatory announced when the helicopters took off from Al Nayrab airbase in eastern Aleppo which firstly attacked the site as I was told by the residents and then it announced when the Russian warplanes took off from Hmemeim airbase which continued the bombardment with missiles and heavy machine guns.”*





### III. Conclusions and Recommendations

#### Legal Conclusions

1- The Russian and Syrian regimes have, beyond any doubt, violated Security Council Resolutions 2139 and 2254 which both state that indiscriminate attacks must be halted. Also, they 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 Russian and 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 amount to a war crime where all elements were fulfilled.

3- The attacks mentioned in this report, which have been perpetrated by the Russian and Syrian regimes, are considered a violation of the customary international law as the shells were fired at a populated area rather than a specific military object.

4- The aerial bombardment has caused collateral damages that involved loss of lives, injuries, and significant damages to civil facilities. There are strong indicators suggesting that the damage was too excessive compared to the anticipated military benefit.

#### Recommendations

To Russian regime:

- To investigate the incidents included in this report, inform the Syrian people about the results and hold the perpetrators accountable.
- To compensate all the affected centers and facilities, and rebuild and re-prepare them. It also has to redress for the victims and the injured who were killed by the present Russian regime.
- To completely cease the bombardment of hospitals, protected facilities and civil areas and to respect humanitarian customary law.

To the Security Council

- The Security Council has to take additional steps as it has been a year since Resolution 2254 was adopted which states explicitly “that all parties immediately cease any attacks against civilians and civilian objects as such, including attacks against medical facilities and personnel, and any indiscriminate use of weapons, including through shelling and aerial bombardment.”
- The Syrian case must be referred to the International Criminal Court and all those who are responsible must be held accountable including the Russian regime whose involvement in war crimes has been involved.





- To 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 thieved and ruined.
- To expand the sanctions to include the Russian and Iranian regime who are directly involved in committing crimes against humanity and war crimes against the Syrian people.

To 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 specifically considering that it was perpetrated by forces which we believe that they are Russian in coordination with government forces.

### **To the International Community**

- In light of the split of 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 it from the daily killings and siege and increase 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 and as a member of the International Coalition for the Responsibility to Protect (ICRtoP) after all political channels through the Arab League's plan and then Mr. Kofi Annan's plan were drought 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.
- To renew the pressure on the Security Council to refer the case in Syria to the International Criminal Court.
- To 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.





## II. Attachments

Video showing the flames in the U.N. aids convoy

Video showing the burned trucks after a Government-Russian attack on the U.N. aids convoy

Video showing the government forces and Russian forces warplanes bombing the Red Crescent with missiles

Pictures of the aftermath of the bombardment and the great damages to the aids convoy



Pictures showing the damages to the aids convoy







Pictures showing the destruction after the aids convoy was targeted

Picture of the ruined aids after the bombardment and appears in the picture missile remnants that we believe are Russian

Picture of the victim Omar Barakat, head of the Red Crescent center in Urm Al Kubra town, who was killed in the attack

A report by Amnesty International: “‘Horrible’ attack on UN aid convoy is a flagrant violation of international law”

A report by Human Rights Watch: “Investigate Attack on UN Aid Convoy”

### **Acknowledgment**

Our thanks and condolences for the families and local activists who majorly enriched this report.



Syrian Network For Human Rights  
الشبكة السورية لحقوق الإنسان

