



A house destroyed by Syrian regime forces' bombardment of al Yadouda village in the western suburbs of Daraa - July 29, 2021

The Syrian Regime Takes Revenge on Daraa Governorate for Its Peaceful and Civilized Rejection of the Regime's 'Presidential Elections'

Two Months of Siege, Bombardment, Killing and Arbitrary Arrests to End Freedom of Opinion and Expression and Achieve Absolute Control

Monday 9 August 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.

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SYRIAN NETWORK FOR HUMAN RIGHTS
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I. A Brief Background on the Gradual Advance by the Syrian, Iranian and Russian Regime in Extending Their Control over Southern Syria and the Failure of All Agreements to Protect Civilians from Forced Displacement:

Southern Syria is one of the de-escalation zones that were agreed upon in the fourth Astana talks which entered into force in May 2017. Since that time, all these de-escalation zones have been completely seized by the Syrian regime or subjected to other agreements; what distinguishes Southern Syria from the other regions is that it is subject to another agreement that is more important than the Astana talks, which is the Russian-US bilateral ceasefire agreement that entered into force on July 9, 2017. The two agreements provided for a comprehensive cessation of hostilities and aerial bombardment, which succeeded to some extent in ending military operations, with the severity of the violations that we have recorded in Daraa governorate, in particular the indiscriminate aerial bombardment with barrel bombs and missiles, having decreased. The situation continued in this way until mid-2018, specifically in June 2018, when the Syrian regime, backed by Iranian forces and the Russian air force, led a military campaign against the Southern region of Syria (parts of the governorates of Daraa, Quneitra and Suwayda), which resulted in the Syrian regime completing its control over the region, forcibly ending the de-escalation agreement, with the US-Russian agreement being revoked.

[In a report we issued in July 2019](#), we documented that a complete collapse of the so-called "de-escalation agreements" had taken place, forcing thousands of people, under the weight of bombardment and brutality, to accept settlements that led to the forced displacement of nearly 13,000 people, while about 200,000 were subjected to forced security settlement processes.

Daraa governorate has moved to new agreements between the Syrian regime on the one hand and factions of the Armed Opposition on the other, but under Russian auspices. These agreements were distinguished by their different terms between one area and another, despite containing supposedly comprehensive terms, leading to the establishment of different circumstances of control, as some areas are completely under the control of the Syrian regime (such as most of the eastern suburbs of Daraa and the southern suburbs of Quneitra), while there are still areas that actually remain under the control of former Armed Opposition factions (fighters from among the people of the region), where the regime's presence is limited to civil institutions (such as most of the neighborhoods of Daraa al Balad, Tareeq al Sadd, and Camps in Daraa city, Tafas city, al Yadouda village and al Mzayreeb town in the western suburbs of Daraa, in addition to the villages of the central suburbs of Quneitra). Meanwhile, other areas have remained under the control of the Fifth Corps, which consists mostly of former members of the Armed Opposition factions backed by Russian forces.

This situation has prevailed in the region generally, with its people being exposed to operations of forcible expulsion and imposition of control by the Syrian regime, typified by the horrendous abuse inflicted on hundreds of those who remained in the region, who have been subjected to arbitrary arrest, enforced disappearance and torture, as well as assassinations, while the young people in the region have been forcibly conscripted into Syrian regime forces, who have seized control of residents' land and property; we will soon be issuing a report detailing the most notable types of violations that the region has been subjected to since July 2018.

At the end of May 2021, the Syrian regime held 'presidential elections' whose illegitimacy was unanimously agreed by the majority of the world's democratic countries, with [SNHR issuing a report](#) on the subject of these 'elections' and their wholly illegitimate nature. The people of Daraa governorate clearly expressed their rejection of these farcical 'elections' through demonstrations, banners and stinging criticism, revealing a popular rejection by areas considered to have accepted settlement with the regime, some of which are either completely or almost completely under the control of the Syrian regime and its allies. Dozens of Arab and international media reported the Daraa governorate's reaction to these 'elections'. We believe that this angered the Syrian regime, represented by Bashar al Assad, who considered these expressions of dissent to be a personal insult, even though they were peaceful demonstrations and banners, with all such protests falling within the framework of freedom of opinion and expression, which is one of the most fundamental axioms of basic human rights.

The response of the Syrian regime was swift and brutal; nearly a month after the end of the 'presidential elections', on June 23, the Southern region of Syria began to witness tension as a result of the Syrian regime placing additional terms on previous agreements, which the local Negotiations Committee considered unacceptable, resulting in a series of developments in the region that led to a dangerous military escalation at the end of July which is still continuing to date.

In this report, we outline the most notable violations committed by the Syrian regime and its allies in the Southern region of Syria between June 23 and August 9, 2021, without going into the details of the negotiation processes, military clashes and the complex conflict of control between Iran and Russia, since SNHR's primary focus remains on those issues which fall within our jurisdiction, and what matters most to us in this context is civilians' safety, ensuring that civilians are not targeted in military operations, and that both parties uphold and respect the rules of international humanitarian law during the clashes, and respect international human rights law.

Through our team of field researchers, we have obtained direct testimonies from members of the Negotiation Committees in Daraa governorate, and civilians who have been displaced; we obtained these testimonies through speaking directly with witnesses, with none of the testimonies, including the two provided in this report, cited from any open sources. 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, as well as providing assurances to the inter-

viewees that we will conceal the identity of any witness who prefers to use an alias. All these procedures are carried out under the terms of SNHR's internal protocols, which we have rigorously adhered to for years, and which we strive constantly to develop.

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 on SNHR. Readers are welcome to find out more about SNHR's [methodology](#).

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 Record of the Most Notable Violations Recorded by the Syrian Network for Human Rights between June 23 and August 9, 2021:

A. Extrajudicial killing:

The Syrian Network for Human Rights documented the deaths of 11 civilians, including five children and one woman, in the attacks launched by the Syrian regime on Daraa governorate, most of them in al Yadouda village in the governorate's western suburbs.

B. Arbitrary arrest and enforced disappearance:

The Syrian Network for Human Rights documented the arrest of 104 individuals by Syrian regime forces, including two children and two women.

C. Forced displacement:

The military operations launched by Syrian regime forces, backed by Iranian militias, have caused the displacement of at least 35,000 people from the neighborhoods of Daraa al Balad, Tareeq al Sadd and Daraa Camp to the neighborhoods of Daraa al Mahatta.

D. Targeting vital civilian facilities:

The Syrian Network for Human Rights documented that Syrian regime forces carried out two attacks on vital civilian facilities; both attacks targeted a mosque in Daraa city.

III. The Syrian Regime Takes Revenge Through Military Escalation Against Daraa Governorate for Its Peaceful and Civilized Rejection of the Regime's Illegitimate 'Presidential Elections':

On May 24, 2021, [the Negotiation Committees in Daraa announced](#) their boycott of the 'presidential elections' in Syria. In a statement, the committees and clan dignitaries asserted that these 'elections' are a link in the chain of the Iranian regime's hegemony over the decisions of the Syrian state which circumvent the decisions of international legitimacy, describing any participation in them as "shameful and disgraceful." Demonstrations took place in Tafas city, west of Daraa, Busra al Sham city, east of Daraa, and the al Omari Mosque square in Daraa city rejecting the Syrian regime's 'presidential elections', with the protesters raising banners emphasizing the illegitimacy of these 'elections', which are held by military force and not by voters' free will.

In order to provide itself with pretexts and pave the way for the process of completely controlling Daraa and violating all previous agreements, the Syrian regime requested on June 23, 2021, through the Russian officer in charge of the Southern region of Syria, that the heads of the Negotiation Committees in Daraa, hand over 200 Kalashnikovs and 20 BKC machine guns; when the committees refused this request, considering it contrary to the terms of previous agreements, and noting the likelihood that the Syrian regime would attempt to storm Daraa after obtaining the weapons, Syrian regime forces responded by closing the roads leading to the neighborhoods of Daraa al Balad and Tareeq al Sadd and both camps housing Palestinian refugees and IDPs from the Golan, leaving only the Sajna Bridge Road, which connects Daraa al Mahatta and Daraa al Balad, where three military checkpoints are stationed, with regime personnel carrying out rigorous searches of pedestrians.

On June 25, 2021, Syrian regime forces deployed massive numbers of military reinforcements, including dozens of tanks, heavy vehicles, hundreds of members of the Fourth and Ninth Divisions' forces, and Iranian militias to various areas in Daraa governorate, with the bulk of the reinforcements being concentrated in and around Daraa city, as well as in residential areas in Daraa suburb; forces from the Iranian-backed Fourth Division seized a number of residential zones in al Dhahya area west of the city, and groups of members were distributed among houses and buildings owned by civilians, while part of the reinforcements were deployed in al Manshiya and Sajna neighborhoods in Daraa al Balad, where they seized a number of civilian houses.

On June 28, 2021, Russia, through the officer in charge in the region, informed the Negotiation Committees that in the event of continued refusal to hand over weapons, there would be a possibility of bringing more Iranian militias to Daraa. [In a statement](#), the Negotiation Committees blamed Russia and the Syrian regime for the consequences of destabilizing Daraa governorate and demanded the lifting of the siege imposed on Daraa al Balad and other neighborhoods, explaining that the pressure exerted by Russia and the regime was being imposed in response to the governorate's rejection of the recent 'presidential elections'.

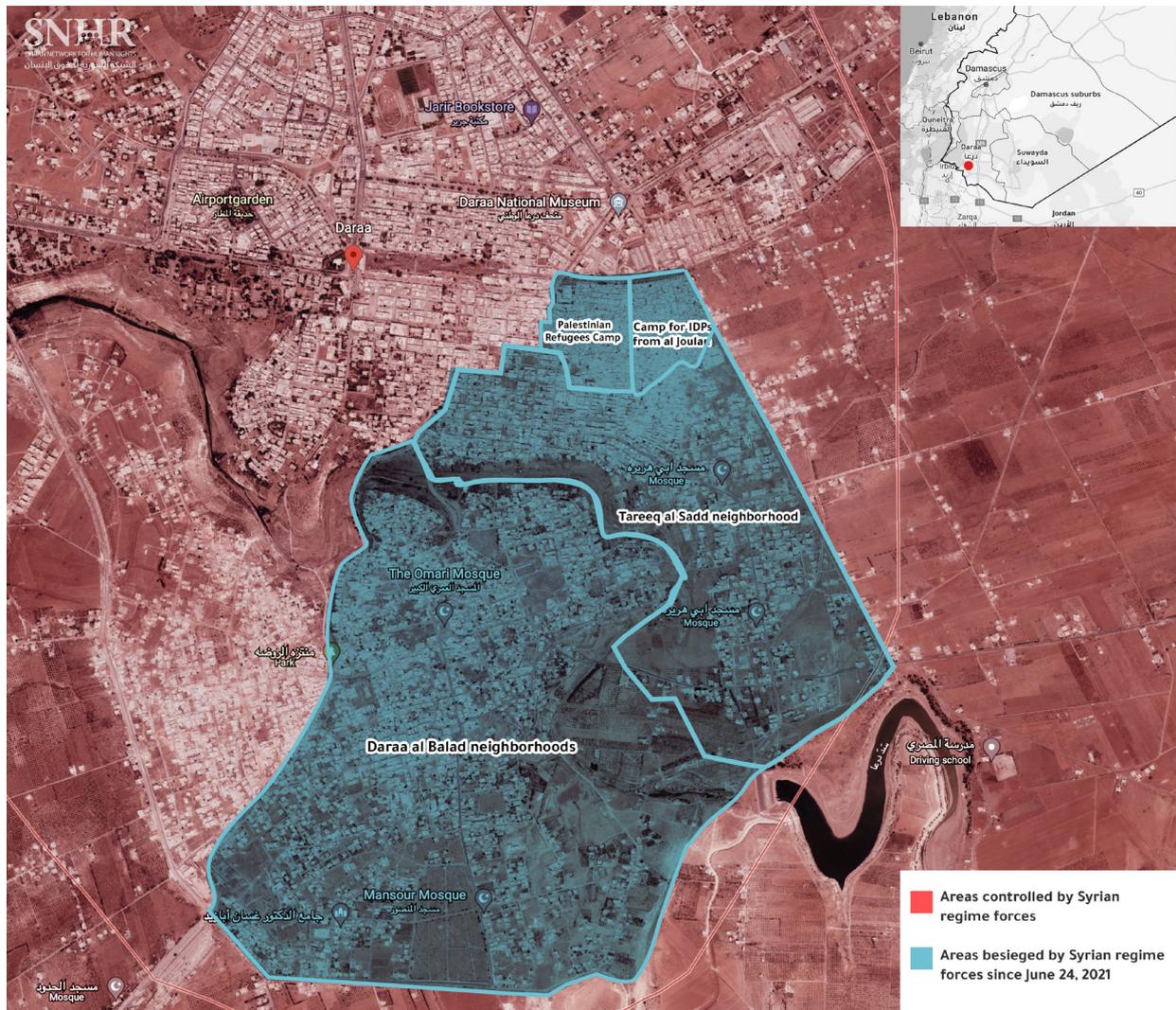
The SNHR spoke with Mr. Khaled¹, a member of the Central Committee and a representative of the Daraa clans, who said: **“On June 23, 2021, our meetings with the Russian officer began. We later learned that he was the new official in charge of the southern region. The officer informed us of several demands that were conveyed on behalf of the regime, the first of which was handing over 200 Kalashnikovs and 20 light machine guns. He also requested a search of some homes in the neighborhoods of Daraa al Balad and Tareeq al Sadd, the Palestinian refugee camp, and the Camp of IDPs from the Golan Heights, and requested the establishment of military points affiliated with the regime forces inside the area to establish security and stability.”**

Khaled said that the committees rejected the request after consulting with the families and dignitaries. He added: **“We do not have military factions, all of them were dissolved after the August 2018 settlement, all medium and heavy weapons were handed over to the regime, and all the weapons that remained are individual light weapons used by the people of the area to protect homes because the security situation is unstable. The regime responded to our refusal by imposing a siege on the Daraa al Balad area and bringing in military reinforcements and threatening us with a massive military operation if we did not yield to its demands. A few days later, we handed the regime half of the required number of weapons in an attempt to calm the area, but it insisted on deploying at least 12 military points inside the besieged area, with this action being rejected by us and the people of the area because it cuts off the area into many parts, and the people there can't coexist with the regime's army. After we refused that, the regime's response came in the form of bombardment operations on Daraa al Balad, which resulted in martyrs and injured among civilians, in addition to the destruction of dozens of civilian homes. During the military operation, Syrian regime forces and Iranian militias seized control over about 80 homes in the Gharz area, east of Daraa; these houses are inhabited by dozens of families, while the Fourth Division detained civilians and used them as human shields, and dozens of them are still being detained to date.”**

On July 4, 2021, the Syrian regime closed Sajna Road, which was the last road that could still be used to reach the Daraa al Balad area and the Tareeq al Sadd and Camps neighborhoods, meaning the areas were now completely besieged, leaving their population, estimated at about 45,000 people (it is difficult to obtain an accurate estimate of the number of besieged people, with this estimate based on the number of remaining families and with the cooperation of local activists), at the mercy of the Syrian regime, which prevented the entry of food, medical supplies and fuel. The siege lasted for nearly 20 days, during which time the shops ran out of goods, and the neighborhoods saw a severe shortage of infant formula and some medicines for chronic diseases, with food prices doubling.

¹ We contacted him via WhatsApp on August 1, 2021

Map shows the neighborhoods in Daraa city besieged by Syrian regime forces since June 24, 2021



On July 24, 2021, an agreement was reached between the regime's security committee and the Negotiation Committee in Daraa city. The agreement stipulated that the siege imposed on the area would be lifted, in exchange for the people handing over some individual light weapons to the Syrian regime, conducting a "security settlement" for nearly 200 individuals, and establishing three military points, at the Post Office in Daraa al Balad, the roundabout in al Karak neighborhood in Daraa al Balad, and the Electricity Company building in the Tareeq al Sadd neighborhood. On July 26, the implementation of the first terms of the agreement began, including handing over weapons and conducting a settlement in return for lifting the siege on the area; on July 27, the regime forces entered the Electricity Company building in Tareeq al Sadd neighborhood and al Karak neighborhood roundabout in Daraa al Balad to establish the military points that were agreed upon. The agreement was quickly and very clearly violated, however, by military groups from the Syrian regime forces' Fourth and Ninth Divisions, both backed by Iranian militias, when they stormed al Shayyah area in the southern plains of the Daraa al Balad area in Daraa city and the Gharz area in the eastern part of the city; as a result, clashes took place between Syrian regime forces and the remaining fighters of the Armed Opposition factions from the area. The regime forces used mortar

shells, tank shells, and heavy machine guns to bombard the Daraa al Balad area and the Tareeq al Sadd and Camps neighborhoods, with the bombardment characterized by its indiscriminate nature and lack of any distinction between civilian and military areas, [which resulted in the death of one adult civilian and the injury of two children](#). In addition, hundreds of families have been displaced for fear of indiscriminate shelling on the neighborhoods of Daraa al Mahatta.

On July 29, Syrian regime forces (the Fourth Division, the Ninth Division and the Fifth Division), backed by Iranian militias, mostly from the 'Arab National Guard', launched a new attack and stormed the neighborhoods of Daraa al Balad, Tareeq al Sadd neighborhood and the Palestinian refugee camp, from axes of east of Daraa city, amid heavy artillery and missile shelling targeting residential neighborhoods. We have documented a number of violations committed by these forces, most notably the seizure of the homes of dozens of displaced people, and the arrest of four civilians.

As a result, the clashes expanded, and members of the Armed Opposition factions carried out attacks on the regime's military checkpoints and barracks in the cities of Jasem and Tafas, al Yadouda village, and the towns of Um al Mayathen, al N'eima, Nasib and Tseel in the suburbs of Daraa governorate, while Syrian regime forces responded with indiscriminate shelling; SNHR monitored these clashes, noting that much of the regime shelling apparently deliberately targeted civilian areas, and we documented the use of Golan-type missiles with a high destructive capacity. This shelling resulted in the deaths of five people, including three children and one woman. **The following are the most notable incidents in which we recorded the death of civilian victims:**

On July 29, Syrian regime forces stationed in the al Muftara area used missile launcher to fire a Golan-type missile, which landed in the center of al Yadouda village, resulting in [the deaths](#) of [three children](#) from [one family](#). In a [similar attack](#) on [al Yadouda village](#) in the [western suburbs](#) of Daraa, missile shelling by Syrian regime forces resulted in the deaths of a woman and her child, after the missile targeted their house located in the center of the village.

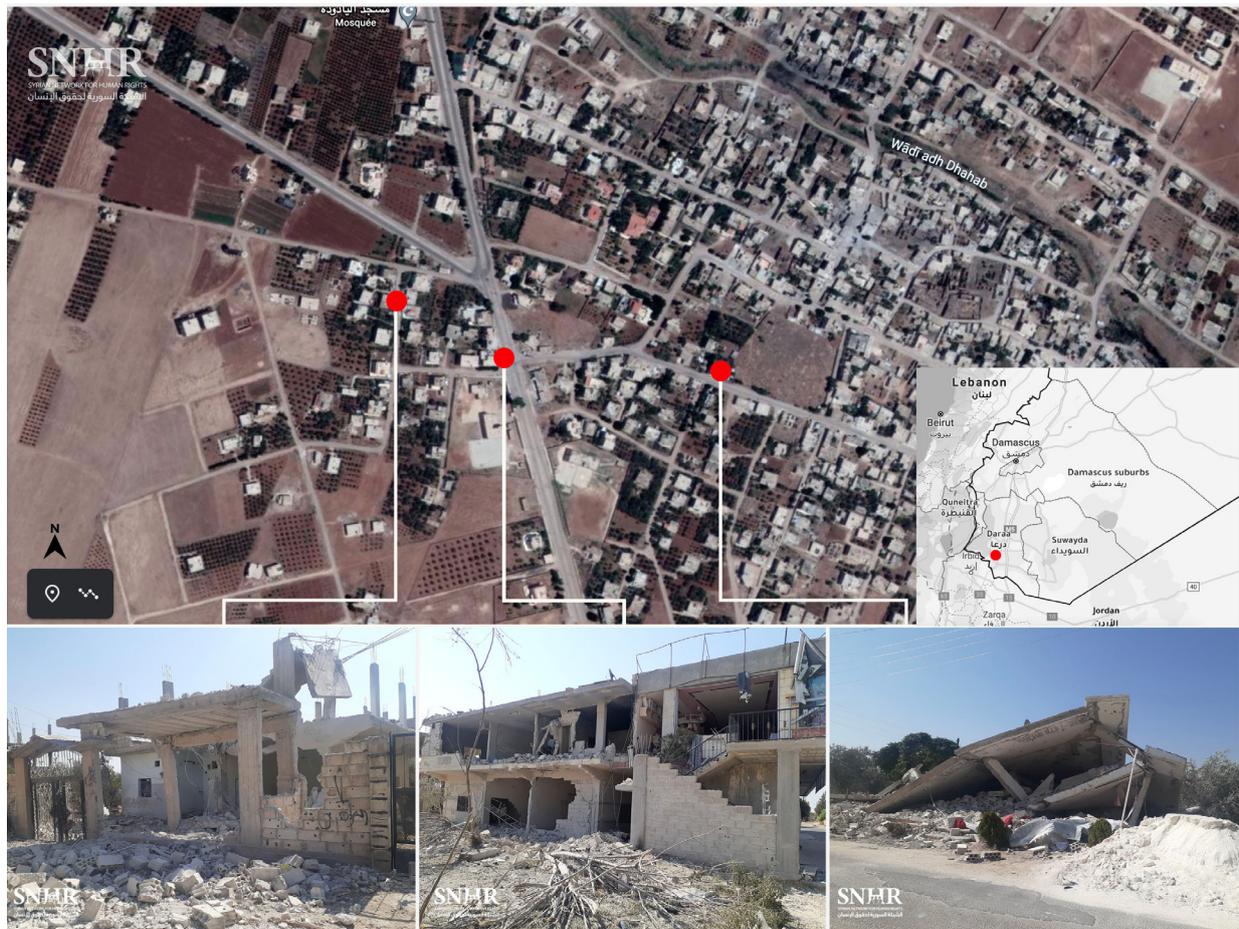
The SNHR spoke with Mr. Mu'ath al Hourani², a media activist in al Yadouda village in the western suburbs of Daraa. Mu'ath, who participated in retrieving or aiding the victims killed or injured in the attack on the village, said:

"I heard the sound of two 'elephant' missiles' explosions that fell in the center of the town. I was in an area five minutes away from the place of the bombing, and I immediately went to the place on my motorcycle. When I arrived, I saw people helping a woman and two children. The scene was terrifying - three children were under the roof of the two-story house; we tried to lift the roof in primitive ways and we spent more than two and a half hours trying until we were able to lift it, then we pulled out the bodies of the three children. I carried them with my hand, and the bodies of the children were smashed and the bones of their bodies were crushed. After 15 minutes of trying to retrieve the bodies, two missiles landed in a nearby area, and then the pace of the bombing accelerated.

² We contacted him via WhatsApp on August 3, 2021

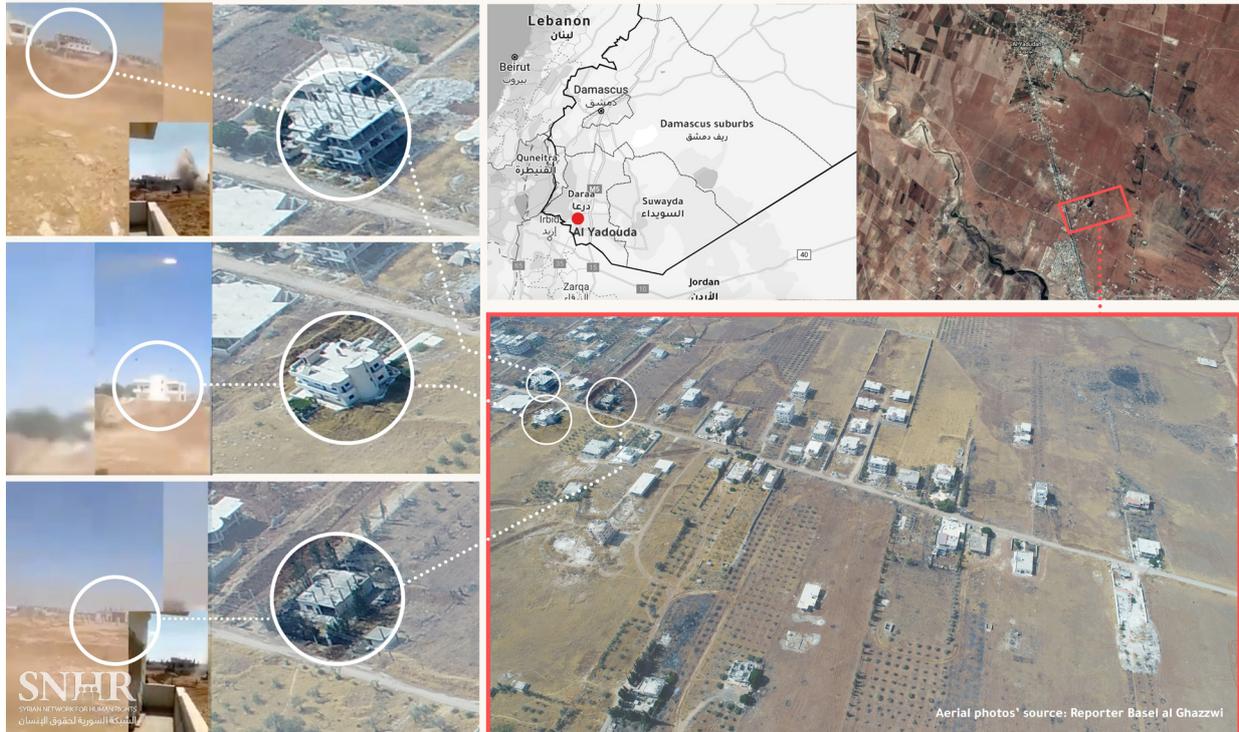
"I counted that day at least 20 'elephant' missiles that fell on the town, all of them fell on civilian areas and on houses inhabited by women and children. The sound of the bombing with 'elephant' missiles was frightening, the intensity of the explosions was massive and the resulting destruction was extensive, with most of the missiles falling in densely populated areas, while every missile that landed on a house completely destroyed it."

Map shows the sites attacked by Syrian regime forces in al Yadouda village in Daraa western suburbs on July 29, 2021:



On the day the attacks took place, pro-Syrian regime accounts on social media published [a video showing](#) vehicles on which missile launchers had been mounted firing missiles. After analyzing the video and comparing features appearing in it with aerial photographs taken by journalist Basel al Ghazzwi of al Muftara area from which the shells that fell on al Yadouda village in the western suburbs of Daraa were launched, we were able to confirm that the video was taken in al Muftara area, which is under the control of Syrian regime forces.

Visual analysis shows one of the sites from which Syrian regime forces carried out bombardment of al Yadouda village in Daraa western suburbs on July 29, 2021



On July 29, Syrian regime forces carried out indiscriminate shelling targeting residential neighborhoods in Jasem city in the northwestern suburbs of Daraa, resulting in the deaths of two civilians.

On July 29, Syrian regime forces stationed in the Market area of Daraa opened fire on Busra Square in Daraa al Mahatta, resulting in the death of a child, [Abdul Rahman Muhammad al Masalmah](#), an IDP from the neighborhoods of Daraa al Balad.

On July 29, members of Syrian regime forces shot dead the civilian [Mamoun al Masri](#) in his house in Gharz area, east of Tareeq al Sadd neighborhood in Daraa city, while the Fourth Division forces were advancing in the area.

The following are the most notable arrest incidents that we were able to document in Daraa governorate during the period covered by the report:

On Monday, July 5, 2021, Syrian regime Air Security Force personnel carried out a campaign of raids and arrests in al Sheikh Maskin city in the northern suburbs of Daraa governorate. SNHR documented the arrest of eight civilians, including two elderly people, all of whom were taken to an undisclosed location.

On Wednesday, July 7, 2021, personnel from the Syrian regime forces' Eighth Brigade carried out a campaign of raids and arrests in al Mata'iya town in Daraa suburbs, in connection with the killing of a leader and a member of the Eighth Brigade, and the injury of another leader and member, as a result of armed clashes with former members of the Armed Opposition factions from the people of al Mata'iya town; this occurred after members of the Eighth Brigade tried to arrest a wanted man. SNHR documented the arrest of 47 civilians, who had previously settled their security status, who were taken to Qal'at Busra Prison in Busra al Sham city in the suburbs of Daraa governorate. On July 10, we recorded the release of seven civilians among those arrested from Qal'at Busra Prison, including Jafar Suleiman al Kafri, a civilian who was suffering from a sharp decline in his health. On July 11, Ja'far died as a result of torture and medical negligence during his detention in Qal'at Busra Prison, after he was transferred to a hospital in Damascus city. We recorded the release of the remaining detainees between July 13 and July 21.



Jafar Suleiman al Kafri



Photo showing signs of torture on the body of a released civilian



Photo showing signs of torture on the body of a released civilian

On Monday, July 26, 2021, Syrian regime forces personnel carried out a campaign of arrests at one of the regime checkpoints in Daraa al Mahatta area in Daraa city. SNHR documented the arrest of seven civilians from Tafas city, west of Daraa governorate. We also documented their release some hours later.

On Thursday, July 29, 2021, the Syrian regime army's Fourth Division carried out a campaign of raids and arrests in Gharz area, east of Daraa city. SNHR documented the arrest of four civilians, who were taken to an undisclosed location. The raids were accompanied by the looting of the contents of local residents' homes.

On Saturday, July 31, 2021, Syrian regime forces personnel arrested a woman and her 19-year-old daughter, from Daraa city, in a raid on their home in al Qosour neighborhood of Daraa city, before they were released some hours later.

On August 3, we recorded that Syrian regime forces (the Fourth Division and the Ninth Division) extorted large sums of money from people wishing to leave the besieged Gharz area east of Daraa (200,000 Syrian pounds), equivalent to 60 US dollars per person, after the regime forces took control of it on July 27, 2021, with the regime forces stationed in the area preventing dozens of families from leaving their homes; many families there told us that they were being held in their homes, and that they want to leave the area because it is witnessing clashes and there is a high possibility that they will be injured inside their homes. Similarly, we recorded that Syrian regime forces personnel present at al Saraya checkpoint, located between the besieged area and the neighborhoods of Daraa al Mahatta, demanded large sums of money from civilians displaced from the besieged area in exchange for letting them take their furniture and cars, with the amounts ranging from one million to two million Syrian pounds for those who wanted to get their car out, and 50,000 to 100,000 Syrian pounds for each piece of furniture.

IV. Conclusions and Recommendations:

Conclusions:

- The Syrian regime has carried out indiscriminate shelling that did not distinguish between civilians and combatants, resulting in the death of a number of Syrian citizens.
- The Syrian regime has carried out dozens of arbitrary arrests over citizens' expressing their opinion on the illegitimacy of the 'presidential elections' that it held.
- The Syrian regime has besieged tens of thousands of civilians, prevented the entry of food and medicine, and prevented citizens' movement, with all these actions forming a kind of collective punishment for the people's peaceful expression of their opinion of the illegitimacy of the 'presidential elections'.

Recommendations:

The UN Security Council and the United Nations:

- Forced settlement 'agreements' or 'security reconciliations' will not lead to any form of stability and respect for human rights, and there must be an acceleration in the comprehensive political transition process that ensures the start of progress along a path of transitional justice and true national reconciliation based on accountability for the perpetrators of violations and respect for basic human rights and a transition towards democracy.
- The Syrian issue should be referred to the International Criminal Court and all those who are responsible for crimes against humanity and war crimes should be held accountable.
- Monitor claims that the Iranian regime is continuing to supply weapons, equipment and militias to the Syrian regime.
- Ensure the urgent entry of medicine and food for the besieged families and put pressure on the Syrian regime to allow freedom of entry and exit.

International Community:

- SNHR has repeatedly called for the implementation of the 'Responsibility to Protect' doctrine in dozens 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 exhausted, with the Cessation of Hostilities statements and Astana agreements that followed proving equally fruitless. Therefore, steps should be taken under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations, and the norm of the "Responsibility to Protect" doctrine, which was established by the United Nations General Assembly, should be implemented. The UN Security Council is still hindering the protection of civilians in Syria.
- Refer the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court, or quickly establish a tribunal dedicated to trying crimes against humanity and war crimes to end the cycle of impunity that has now spanned a decade in Syria.
- Put real pressure on Russia and Iran, and categorize them as key accomplices in the violations committed in Syria, both due to their continuing supply of weapons to the Syrian regime and through their direct involvement in thousands of violations against Syrian citizens.
- Provide protection and assistance to forcibly displaced women and children, taking into account their specific needs, primarily for protection.

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

- Condemn the siege of civilians and the suppression of freedom of opinion and expression practiced by the Syrian regime.

Independent International Commission of Inquiry (COI):

- Launch investigations into the cases included in this report. SNHR is willing to cooperate and provide further evidence and data.

Thanks and consolation

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.

