

The Syrian-Russian Alliance Forces Commit 33 Massacres in the Fourth De-Escalation Zone Within Three Months

Russia Denies Committing the Massacre of Ma'aret al Numan City in Idlib and Will Continue to Do So as Long as the International Community Is Silent



Wednesday, July 31, 2019

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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I. Introduction and Methodology

Since the beginning of the recent military campaign by the Russian and Syrian forces on the fourth de-escalation zone on April 26, the Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) has documented hundreds of violations of international humanitarian law, many of which constituted war crimes. Accordingly, the focus of our work in recent months, as shown [through the various reports](#) and hundreds of news bulletins we've issued, has shifted from solely documenting events to including demands to the international community to intervene to protect civilians in an area where the most egregious violations are being committed, including extrajudicial killings, indiscriminate and deliberate bombardment, enforced displacement, and bombing of residential buildings and vital facilities, including hospitals and schools, up to the use of chemical weapons. These atrocities continue to take place up to the time of the publication of this report, although three months have already passed during which the Syrian-Russian alliance forces have carried out dozens of air raids and ground attacks targeting populated areas in villages and towns in the northern and northwestern suburbs of Idlib and the western suburbs of Aleppo, which became clearer in the last month, after most of the attacks in the previous two months were concentrated on the villages and towns of the southern suburbs of Idlib and the northern suburbs of Hama.



The SNHR documented the deaths of at least 781 civilians, including 208 children and 140 women (adult female), in the fourth de-escalation zone between April 26, 2019, and July 27, 2019. These were distributed as follows:

- **Syrian Regime forces:** 625 civilians, including 170 children and 115 women, distributed as follows:

Idlib governorate: 483, including 143 children, and 91 women.

Hama governorate: 91, including 14 children and 16 women.

Aleppo governorate: 51, including 13 children and eight women.

- **Russian forces:** 156 civilians, including 38 children and 25 women. These were distributed as follows:

Idlib governorate: 124, including 32 children and 18 women.

Hama governorate: 32, including six children and seven women.

In [a press release](#) issued by the United Nations' Deputy Regional Humanitarian Coordinator for the Syria Crisis, Mark Cutts, on July 22, concerning the civilian casualties in the Idlib area on that day. Mr. Cutts referred to the Ma'aret al Numan massacre that took place the same day, without specifying which party was responsible for the bombardment.

On July 24, the Save the Children Organization stated in [a press release](#) that the number of children killed in the Idlib area in the previous four weeks had exceeded the total number of children killed in the area for the whole of 2018.

On July 26, the United Nations' High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet issued [a press statement](#) in which she expressed her concern that the continued carnage in Syria "is no longer on the international radar," concluding her statement by saying: "Influential parties, including those that agreed to reduce hostilities as part of the de-escalation agreement, should urgently use their influence to halt the current military campaign and bring the warring parties back to the negotiating table." In addition, the High Commissioner asserted, "It is essential that there is a cessation of hostilities in order to give the on-going political negotiations room to breathe. The alternative is just more mindless death and destruction in a war without end."

On July 26, the OCHA issued [its eighth report](#) on the human rights situation in Syria, which outlined some of the killing incidents in the area. The report said that the United Nations has satellite imagery demonstrating that at least 16 out of 27 assessed communities have been almost completely destroyed as a result of the recent military operations. The report noted the displacement of approximately 453,000 civilians in the fourth de-escalation zone between May 1, and July 14, 2019.



Fadel Abdul Ghany, Chairman of the Syrian Network for Human Rights, says:

“ The massacres reflect incidents in which large numbers of civilians are killed at one time, five or more civilians. This usually indicates the extent of disregard to civilian lives by the attacking party, or indicates a strong desire to kill them and get rid of as many of them as possible. It seems to us through our work of monitoring the daily incidents and the pattern of brutal attacks carried out by these barbaric forces that this is precisely what the political leadership of the Russian and Syrian forces want. ”

Methodology:

This report catalogues the record of the most notable massacres committed by the Syrian-Russian alliance forces in the fourth and final de-escalation zone (consisting of Idlib governorate and parts of the governorates of Hama, Aleppo and Latakia) from April 26, 2019, to July 27, 2019, and outlines the details of the largest of these massacres, highlighting in particular the massacre committed by the Russian forces in Ma'aret al Numan city in the southern suburbs of Idlib on July 22.

This report draws upon the ongoing daily monitoring of news and developments by SNHR's team, and on our extensive network of various credible sources that have been built up over the course of our work since 2011. When we receive information or learn some news about violations via the internet or media outlets, our team works to follow up these reports and attempts to verify information and collect evidence and data. In some cases, researchers are able to visit the incident location promptly, although this is a rarity in light of the incredibly high security risks involved, and given the frequency of daily incidents and the scarcity of human and material resources to carry out this work. Therefore, the opportunities available to access evidence vary between one case and another, and consequently the level of certainty in the classification of each incident varies. SNHR's customary policy in such cases is to rely on accounts from survivors who experienced the violation firsthand or those who saw or photographed the violation, in addition to analyzing available materials from open sources such as the Internet and media outlets. We also talk with medical personnel who treated the injured in these incidents, examined the deceased victims' bodies, and identified the cause of death.

In the course of our work on this report, we sometimes had difficulty in documenting incidents because of the heavy bombardment these areas were subjected to.

SNHR also analyzes videos and photographs that were posted online, or submitted by local activists via e-mail, Skype, or social media platforms. These videos and photos show, amongst other things, the sites of attacks, the bodies of victims and injured, and the extent of the great destruction inflicted by these attacks.



Furthermore, we retain copies of all the videos and photographs outlined in this report in 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 the Syrian Regime forces and some other armed groups. Readers are welcome to find out more about SNHR's [methodology](#).

This report contains seven accounts that we've collected through speaking directly with eyewitnesses, none of which are 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 without us offering or giving them any incentives. Also, SNHR endeavors always to spare the eyewitnesses the agony of remembering the violations as much as possible, and to provide assurances that we will conceal the identity of any witness who prefers to use an alias.

This report only represents the bare minimum that we were able to document of the actual 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 Responsibility to Protect Civilians in Syria

For eight years, the Syrian regime has committed heinous crimes and violations against Syrian civilians. It has also consistently failed to respond to any of the demands of the International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, or to those of the High Commission for Human Rights, or even to Security Council resolutions. The Security Council, which was supposed to take collective measures and action under Article 41 and 42 of the Charter of the United Nations, also failed because of the immunity granted by Russia to the Syrian regime, with Russia routinely using its veto in the case of the Syrian regime, which not only failed to abide by its responsibility for the protection of civilians, but committed the most egregious violations against them, reaching the level of crimes against humanity, and extermination within detention centers through torture.

In a report issued in December 2001, the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty stressed that: "The Security Council should take into account in all its deliberations that, if it fails to discharge its responsibility to protect in conscience-shocking situations crying out for action, concerned states may not rule out other means to meet the gravity and urgency of that situation"



Such conscience-shocking situations are exactly what have continued to happen in Syria, not only in the form of one massacre or one violation but in industrial-scale killings and torture, sexual violence, enforced disappearances, the use of chemical weapons and barrel bombs, and besieging civilians. The list of crimes against humanity perpetrated by the Syrian regime and its allies goes on. The Security Council has signally failed to assume its responsibilities in the Syrian case, despite the Syrian Network for Human Rights, international organizations and UN commissions of inquiry crying out for action by the Security Council many thousands of times. In this context, the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty affirmed in the same report: “it would be impossible to find consensus, in the Commission’s view, around any set of proposals for military intervention which acknowledged the validity of any intervention not authorized by the Security Council or General Assembly. But that may still leave circumstances when the Security Council fails to discharge what this Commission would regard as its responsibility to protect, in a conscience-shocking situation crying out for action. It is a real question in these circumstances where lies the most harm: in the damage to international order if the Security Council is bypassed or in the damage to that order if human beings are slaughtered while the Security Council stands by.”

III. Russian Forces Commit the Largest Massacre in Ma'aret al Numan City Since the Recent Military Escalation

Summary:

Ma'aret al Numan city is located in the southern suburbs of Idlib governorate, 45 km south of Idlib city. Syrian Regime forces stormed the city on August 8, 2011, after its residents participated in the popular uprising for democracy, stationing troops in al Hamediya Military Camp south of the city and in Wadi al Dhief Military Camp to its east. On October 8, 2012, factions of the Armed Opposition took control of the city, with Syrian Regime forces remaining in control of the two camps until December 15, 2012, when factions of the Armed Opposition gained control of the entire area.

The city had been a safe haven for thousands of displaced persons who were displaced by the military operations in Idlib governorate or other governorates. During the recent military campaign, the city saw the displacement of thousands of people. Most of the displacement movements were towards the villages of Jabal al Zaweya, to the eastern suburbs of the city, and to the Turkish border to the north. The current number of residents in the city - including indigenous people and families displaced to the city from the suburbs of Hama, Aleppo and Damascus Suburbs - is estimated to be 135,000 people.



The city houses many central vital civilian facilities, which provide services to a wide area in and around the city; the most important of these facilities is the Ma'aret al Numan Central Hospital, which is considered one of the largest hospitals in the north of Syria, and is listed in the humanitarian de-confliction mechanism; this hospital was targeted by Syrian Regime forces on July 10, 2019. The Syrian American Medical Society (SAMS), which support the hospital, issued [a statement](#) condemning the attacks on health facilities and calling on the United Nations to investigate the attacks on them and to take steps to protect them.

Among the other prominent facilities in the city is the UNICEF-supported Zarqa reservoir, which includes pumping stations in addition to a catchment ground reservoir that provides drinking water for about 250,000 people in the area. Russian forces bombed the reservoir on July 14, 2019, causing extensive damage to it, putting it out of service, with the UNICEF subsequently issuing [a statement](#) on July 20 calling on all parties to stop attacks on water facilities.

The attacks by Syrian-Russian alliance forces on Ma'aret al Numan city resulted in the deaths of 102 civilians, including 22 children and 17 women (adult female), since the beginning of the recent military campaign on April 26, up until July 27, 2019, distributed as follows:

- **Syrian Regime forces:** 63, including 18 children and 10 women

- **Russian forces:** 39, including four children and seven women

The Syrian-Russian alliance forces also committed five massacres in the city during the same period. The massacre committed by Russian forces in the city on July 22 was the largest which the fourth de-escalation zone has seen since the beginning of the recent military campaign.



Recovering one of the victims of the massacre committed by Russian forces in Ma'aret al Numan, Idlib -
July 22, 2019



The attack details:

On Monday, July 22, 2019, at around 08:35, fixed-wing warplanes, which we believe were Russian, launched a double attack in the center of Ma'aret al Numan city. The first attack used a missile to target a group of residential buildings located at one end of the vegetable market in the city center, causing several civilian injuries. After about five minutes, when other civilians and Civil Defense personnel had gathered to rescue the injured, one of these warplanes launched a new raid on the same site, with the second missile landing in the middle of the street, about 10 meters from the first one, resulting in the deaths of [39 civilians](#), including [four children](#) and seven women. Among the victims was the Civil Defense personnel member, [Amir al Benni](#), who was engaged in inspecting the site of the first strike. Another Civil Defense member, Mahmoud Abdul Karim Zakra, as well as media activist [Omran Okasha](#), were also among those injured as a result of this bombardment.

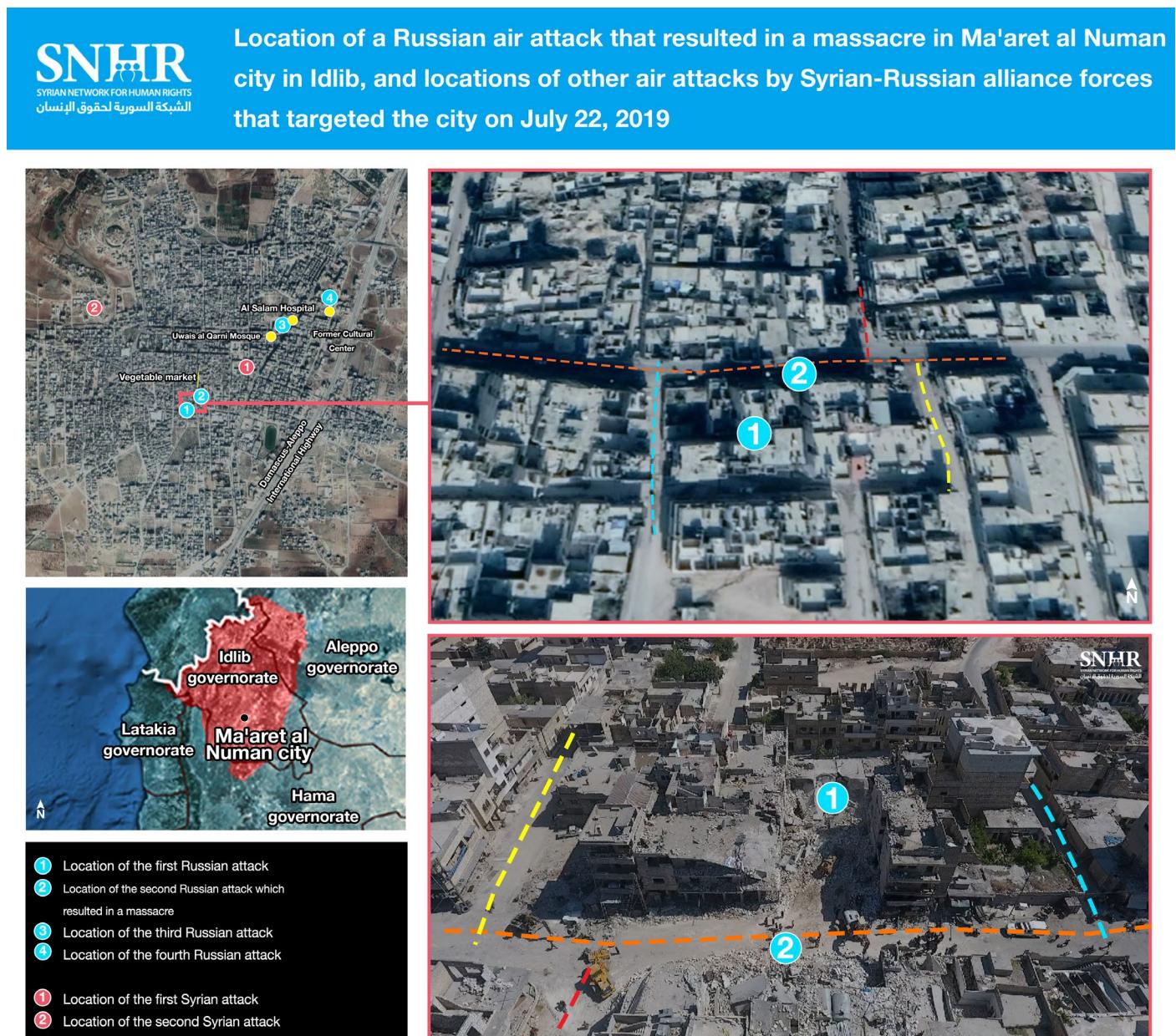
The same warplane then headed to the east of the city and carried out a third air raid, again using a missile, this time in the vicinity of Ma'aret al Numan Prison near the Uwais al Qarni Mosque in al Sharqi neighborhood. The air raid caused moderate material damage to both the mosque and to al Salam Hospital, which is supported by the Syrian-American Medical Society (SAMS), located 100 meters from the raid site. It was followed by a fourth air raid on the building that formerly housed the Cultural Center.

The SNHR contacted an official with the local observatory, Nader al Shbib¹ , to ask him about what he had observed that day. He told us: **“At 08:03 am on Monday, July 22, a Russian warplane took off from Khmeimim airbase and headed towards the south-east, then entered the airspace of Ma'aret al Numan city at around 08:35, and targeted the center of Ma'aret al Numan city with four raids.”** Nader added, “ **I am stationed in a high place where I can see all of Ma'aret al Numan city. I saw the Russian warplane carrying out its raids on the city. “**

¹ Via WhatsApp on July 22, 2019



Map showing the location of a Russian air attack that resulted in a massacre in Ma'aret al Numan city in Idlib, and locations of other air attacks by Syrian-Russian alliance forces that targeted the city on July 22, 2019



Names of the massacre victims according to the SNHR's database



The SNHR also spoke with Obada Zekra², the Director of the Civil Defense Center in Ma'aret al Numan city, who went to the site of the massacre to recover the victims and injured. He told us: **“The air observatories and the Civil Defense observation service³ provided general information that morning that a Russian warplane has arrived in the airspace of Ma'aret al Numan city after taking off from Khmeimim airbase. Less than a minute later, a violent explosion shook the center of the city. One of the Civil Defense teams headed to the site. The attack took place at the end of the street leading to the vegetable market near a motorcycle repair shop.”** Obada added that another air raid, also carried out by a Russian warplane, occurred minutes after the first attack, with the missile exploding 10 meters away from him, causing the largest number of casualties: **“The majority of the victims of the second attack were civilians who rushed to the site to take part in recovering those injured in the first attack, and one of the Civil Defense members was martyred. We retrieved the bodies of martyrs and the wounded and took them to the medical centers. We also recovered the remains of a person that we could not identify.** “ Obada added that the Russian warplane then carried out other air raids in the east of the city, after which Syrian warplanes bombarded the city. He confirmed that the targeted areas were free of any military presence of factions of the Armed Opposition or Hay'at Tahrir al Sham.

² Via WhatsApp on July 22, 2019

³ A rapid warning system that sends alerts within seconds of aircraft taking off, monitoring the planes' movements and disseminating the information to civilians in coordination with civilian observatories, in coordination with local benefactors, media outlets and through social media, to help civilians protect themselves before the raids occur.



Mustafa Gharib⁴ , the Civil Defense media official for Ma'aret al Numan sector and an activist from the city, told the Syrian Network for Human Rights that he had heard the observatories providing general information that a Russian warplane which took off from Khmeimim airbase had carried out an attack in the vegetable market area near Yara Hall. He added: “ **The Civil Defense team headed to the site and worked on the transfer of four injured, and headed to the hospital, while two members remained in place and, with the gathering of civilians, the warplane returned to launch another attack targeting all those who tried to rescue those injured in the first attack. The second attack caused a horrific massacre. The civilians did not expect the warplanes would re-target them. Dozens of civilians, including one of the Civil Defense members, were killed, while another was injured. The bombardment did not cease that day, with the warplanes returning and targeting the prison area, Uwais al Qarni Mosque, and the Cultural Center in al Shamali neighborhood of the city.** “

Media activist Mu'az al Abbas⁵ , a resident of Ma'aret al Numan city, went to the bombing site after the second attack and saw the destruction and the victims. He said: “ **The two attacks targeted a popular market that includes restaurants, motorcycle maintenance shops, and residential buildings. The attacks caused great destruction. Most of the shops and houses were damaged and the scene was crowded with the victims' bodies. I saw scattered body pieces everywhere and I was able to count more than 15 martyrs. Several hours after the attack, the number has risen to twenty martyrs.** “ Mu'az said that Russian warplanes are responsible for the attacks, stressing that the observatories belonging to the factions of the Armed Opposition and the Civil Defense had determined this based on the military base from which the aircraft took off.

⁴ Via WhatsApp on July 22, 2019

⁵ Via WhatsApp on July 22, 2019



Aerial images obtained by the SNHR showed the extent of the destruction at the site of the massacre:



Hours after the attack, the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation in [a statement](#) denied its warplanes had carried out any military operation in that area, accusing the Civil Defense of making false statements. This was not the first time that the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation had denied carrying out certain attacks. According to those incidents we were able to monitor, of eight of the largest massacres for which Russian forces have denied responsibility since the beginning of Russia's military intervention in Syria in September 2015, the SNHR team was able to conclusively prove Russian involvement in seven of them, with one of these being the massacre of Ma'aret al Numan city, our subject above.

On July 29, the Chief of the Main Operational Directorate of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation, Colonel General Sergei Rudskoy, held a press conference in which he [emphasized](#) that: "Only previously reconnoitered targets are taken to the defeat [targeted] by Russian aviation, whose position is repeatedly checked through no less than three independent channels." All strikes are precisely aimed and targeted, Rudskoy claimed, further asserting that satellite photographs taken by Russian spacecraft and other reconnaissance photos from UAV drones confirmed that the market of Ma'aret al Numan, which activists and the Civil Defense Organization had reported as being destroyed in a Russian airstrike, was completely intact. In this regard, Rudskoy said: " On July 24 and 26, Russian unmanned aerial vehicles twice conducted reconnaissance of the site and the surrounding area to check reports of the destruction of the market in Maaret al-Numan, after allegations of carrying out an air strike. "

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation posted [a video](#) on its Twitter account purportedly taken by its drones on July 26 of what it said was the targeted market in Ma'aret al Numan. Through research, we concluded that the site shown in this footage is actually of another market in Ma'aret al Numan city, the [al Hal market](#), which is about 375 meters from the site that was bombed, resulting in a massacre.

The Ministry also published other video footage purportedly filmed on July 27 which it claimed was of the targeted market. [The video](#) footage in question, was filmed with a mobile phone camera by a person riding a motorcycle SNHR spoke with local activists in the area, who confirmed to us that the market shown is again al Hal market, not the targeted vegetable market, adding that the video was filmed from the western side of the market showing the entrance to the market from the south.



Through publication of these misleading videos, the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation is trying to distort the facts and change the factual narrative, but the investigation decisively refutes its false account of events.

IV. Record of the Most Notable Massacres Committed by the Syrian-Russian Alliance Forces in the Fourth De-Escalation Zone

The SNHR documented that Syrian-Russian alliance forces committed 33 massacres in the fourth de-escalation zone between April 26, 2019, and July 27, 2019. These were distributed as follows:

- Syrian Regime forces: 26, distributed as follows:

Idlib governorate: 25

Aleppo governorate: One.

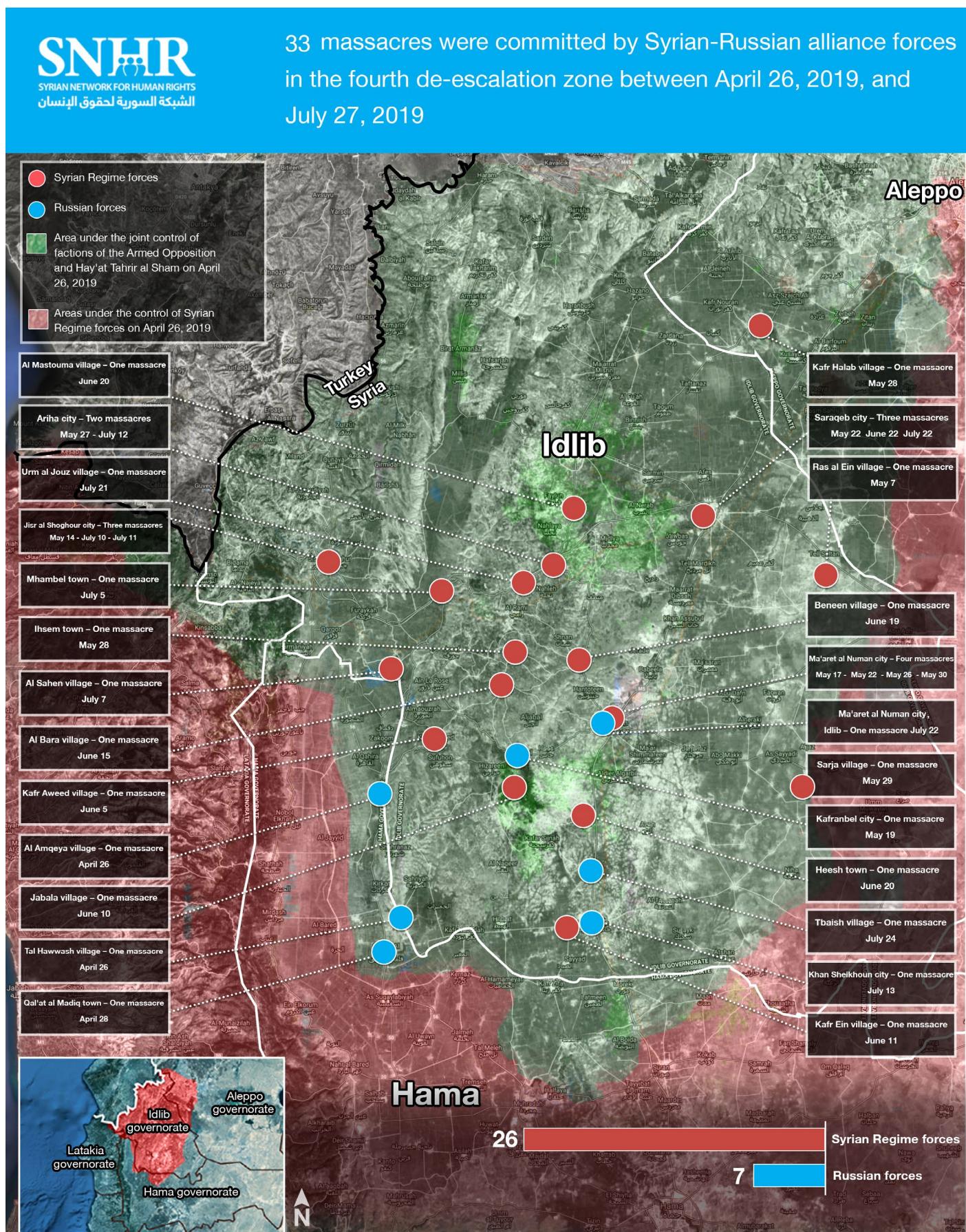
- Russian forces: Seven, distributed as follows:

Idlib governorate: Four.

Hama governorate: Three.



Map showing the approximate locations of the most notable massacres committed by Syrian-Russian alliance forces in the fourth de-escalation zone during their recent military campaign on the area:



The map shows that Syrian-Russian alliance forces committed 29 massacres in Idlib governorate, five of which were in Ma'aret al Numan city, and three each in the cities of Sarqeb and Jisr al Shoghour.

According to the SNHR's Victim Documentation team, the massacres documented resulted in the deaths of 271 civilians, including 85 children (48 males, 36 females and one unborn baby) and 58 women (adult female). This means that 53 percent of all the victims were women and children, which is a very high proportion of the casualties, and a clear indication that civilian residents were specifically targeted in most of these massacres.

The death toll of these massacres was distributed by the perpetrator parties as follows:

- Syrian Regime forces: 188 civilians, including 63 children (38 male and 25 females) and 44 women.

- Russian forces: 83 civilians, including 22 children (10 males, 11 females and one unborn baby) and 14 women.

V. The Most Notable Massacres Committed by the Syrian-Russian Alliance Forces During Their Recent Military Campaign on the Fourth De-Escalation Zone

On the night of Sunday, May 19, 2019, fixed-wing warplanes, which we believe were Russian, carried out consecutive air raids using missiles on a residential neighborhood in the west of Kafranbel city in Idlib governorate's southern suburbs, which resulted in the deaths of [11 civilians](#), mostly members of one family, including [seven children](#) (three males, three females and one unborn baby) and two women. 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 Tuesday, May 28, 2019, fixed-wing Syrian regime warplanes fired a number of missiles at a public street in the middle of [Kafr Halab](#) village in Aleppo governorate's western suburbs, [resulting in the deaths of 10 civilians](#) as far as [is documented](#) up to the time of publication; [the victims](#) include four children (three males and one female), and one woman. 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.





Civilian victims killed in a massacre perpetrated by an air raid by Syrian regime warplanes on Kafr Halab village, Aleppo
– May 28, 2019

On Monday, June 10, 2019, fixed-wing Syrian Regime warplanes fired missiles at a residential neighborhood in middle of Jabala village in Idlib governorate's southern suburbs, resulting in the deaths of at least [13 civilians](#), including [seven children](#) (Six males and one female) and [two women](#). Jabala village was under the joint control of factions of the Armed Opposition and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.



A victim of a massacre perpetrated by Syrian regime air attack on Jabala village, Idlib – June 10, 2019



On Thursday, June 20, 2019, fixed-wing Syrian Regime warplanes fired a number of missiles at the northern parts of [al Mastouma](#) village in Idlib governorate's northern suburbs, resulting in the deaths of [nine civilians](#), including [four male children](#) and one woman, most of whom were members of one family which had previously been displaced from Um Mwilat village in Idlib governorate's southeastern suburbs. Al Mastouma village was under the joint control of factions of the Armed Opposition and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.



Evacuating the body of a victim of a massacre perpetrated by Syrian regime air attack on al Mastouma village, Idlib – June 20, 2019

On Friday, July 5, 2019, at round 21:00, two Syrian Regime helicopters dropped a number of barrel bombs on three sites in Mhambel town in Idlib governorate's western suburbs, which resulted in the deaths of [13 civilians](#), including [seven children](#), [an unborn baby](#), and [three women](#), and injured 20 others. The civilian death toll was distributed across the three sites as follows:

The first site: Some barrel bombs fell on [a complex of residential buildings](#) about 200 meters from the [Martyr Mohammad Saleh Abdul Aal Primary School](#) in the western outskirts of the town, perpetrating a massacre of seven civilians from one family, including four children (three males and one female) and two women, who were inside the lobby of a house.

The second site: [Residential buildings](#) located in front of the Martyr Mohammad Saleh Abdul Aal Primary School, resulting in the deaths of three civilians, including two children.

The third site: [Residential buildings](#) located near the Agricultural Extension building in the northern outskirts of the town, resulting in the deaths of three civilians who were IDPs from Damascus Suburbs governorate, namely a woman, her child and her unborn baby. Mhambel town was under the joint control of factions of the Armed Opposition and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.



SNHR also documented that Mhambel town had been subjected to another air raid earlier the same day, at around 18:00, this time by fixed-wing Syrian regime warplanes which used missiles to target [houses](#) located about 200 meters from the court building which currently houses the personal status department headquarters, resulting in the deaths of four civilians, including two children. Three of the victims died instantly, while the fourth died as a result of his wounds in a Turkish hospital on July 8th.



Destruction to the Agricultural Extension building in Mhambel town in Idlib caused by a Syrian air attack using barrel bombs resulting in the deaths of three civilian victims – July 5, 2019

Hassan al Ali⁶, the director of the Civil Defense Center in Mhambel town, told the SNHR: **“At around 9:00 pm on July 5, the observatories publicized that helicopters had taken off from Hama Military airport, specifying that their destination was Idlib’s western suburbs. When the helicopters arrived in the airspace over the town, they began to drop their load of barrel bombs respectively, and when they finished the airstrikes, our teams headed to the places where the barrel bombs had fallen, where we retrieved about 14 martyrs and aided 14 others, some of whom are displaced from other governorates and reside in the town.”**

⁶ Via WhatsApp on July 6, 2019



On Sunday, July 7, 2019, Syrian Regime forces used artillery to fire a number of shells at agricultural land in an area situated between the villages of Qastoun and al Sahen in Idlib governorate's western suburbs, which resulted in the deaths of [six civilians](#) from one family, including four women, who were working on the agricultural land at the time. We note that Qastoun village is located in Hama governorate's western suburbs, while al Sahen village is located in Idlib governorate's western suburbs. 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.

On Friday, July 13, 2019, fixed-wing warplanes, which we believe were Russian, fired a number of missiles at agricultural land to the west of Khan Sheikhoun city in Idlib governorate's southern suburbs. The missiles targeted an underground cave used by civilians as a shelter, which resulted in the deaths of [eight civilians](#) from [one family](#), IDPs from al Latamena town in Hama governorate's northwestern suburbs, including [four children](#) (two males and two females) and [two women](#). Khan Sheikhoun city was under the joint control of factions of the Armed Opposition and the Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident. The SNHR contacted Eisa Jalloul⁷, a team leader with the Syrian Civil Defense in the al Habeit Center, who contributed to recovering the bodies of the massacre victims and rescuing the injured survivors. He told us: **“Observers informed us of the take-off of a Russian warplane from Khmeimim airport at around 12:20. Ten minutes later, the warplane carried out four consecutive raids on a farm containing houses inhabited by IDP farmers from al Latamena town. When we arrived, we found out that one of the missiles had targeted a cave where the IDP families had sought refuge, which had been destroyed on top of them. We worked for more than four hours to retrieve the victims despite the fact that the reconnaissance planes were still flying over us. We were able to retrieve eight martyrs, including children and women. Some Civil Defense members suffocated as they descended into the cave that was full of dust. “**

⁷ Via WhatsApp on July 25, 2019





Child victims of a massacre perpetrated by Russian forces west of Khan Sheikhoun city, Idlib – July 13, 2019

On Sunday, July 21, 2019, fixed-wing (SU-24) Syrian regime warplanes fired a number of missiles that landed [in front of al Eman Mosque](#) in al Karaj area in the middle of Urm al Jawz village in Idlib governorate's southern suburbs, which resulted in [the deaths](#) of [ten civilians](#), including [three children \(two males\)](#) and [one female](#)) and [one woman](#), and [injured 22 others](#). 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.

We spoke with Mr. Loay Mustafa Sahloul⁸ , a village resident who owns a shop in al Karaj area opposite al Eman Mosque, near the site of the massacre. He told us: “ **At around 12 pm, I went out of the shop towards my house, which is about 300 meters away. Suddenly, violent explosions rocked the village, after which I heard a powerful sound of warplanes in the air, which the observatories had reported as belonging to the Syrian regime. I went back to the highway and went to the site of the shelling immediately. Fires were breaking out everywhere and the destruction was indescribable. I saw many people cut by shrapnel and burned and dozens of injured among pedestrians and shop owners. Shops were demolished on top of their owners. One of the damaged houses, which I was able to recognize, was Ahmad Kharfan's house, in addition to three other houses sheltering IDPs from Hama and Damascus Suburbs. I know most of the victims because they are my neighbors. My cousins and their mother**

⁸ Via WhatsApp on July 26, 2019



were also injured in the bombing, and were taken to a hospital in Ariha city. When I went to visit them in the hospital, they told me that the hospital received six more victims who were killed in the same attack, in addition to about twenty wounded. “ Loay told us that the same warplanes had carried out an air raid on the village’s middle school just before carrying out the attack near al Karaj area.

On Wednesday, July 24, 2019, fixed-wing warplanes, which we believe were Russian, fired a number of missiles at houses in [Tbaish village](#) to the north of Khan Sheikhoun city in Idlib governorate’s southern suburbs, which resulted in the deaths of [ten civilians](#), most of whom were members of [one family](#), including [six children \(four males\)](#) and two females) and one woman. The village was under the joint control of factions of the Armed Opposition and the Hay’at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.

VI: Legal Profile and Recommendations

- Syrian and Russian forces violated several rules of international humanitarian law, primarily by failing to discriminate between civilians and combatants or between civilian and military targets, instead bombing hospitals, schools, centers and civilian neighborhoods, with these violations amount to war crimes.
- Displacement or forced displacement is a war crime in non-international armed conflicts when committed as part of a deliberate or widespread attack against the civilian population (Articles 8 (2) (b) (7) and 8 (2) (e) (8) of the Statute of the International Criminal Court), and may also be considered crimes against humanity (Articles 7 (1) (d) of the Statute of the International Criminal Court).
- The Syrian-Russian alliance forces has violated the de-escalation zone agreement in all regions, including the Idlib region.
- The Syrian-Russian alliance forces have explicitly violated the Sochi Agreement by carrying out bombardments of a number of villages and towns in the fourth de-escalation zone, mostly in the demilitarized zone, in the eastern suburbs of Hama and in the south-eastern suburbs of Idlib. These attacks have resulted in civilian casualties.

Recommendations:

UN Security Council:

- The Security Council must pass a resolution to stabilize the ceasefire in Idlib and include punitive measures for all violators of the ceasefire.
- Genuine support for serious implementation of the peace process in Syria and for achieving a just political transition that guarantees security and stability.



- The Syrian issue must be referred to the International Criminal Court and all those involved, including the Russian regime, must be held accountable, having been implicated in committing war crimes.
- The establishment of peace and security and the implementation of the principle of Responsibility to Protect civilians and to save Syrians' lives, heritage and cultural artefacts from destruction, pillage and vandalism.
- The UN Security Council must pass a resolution concerning some seven million internally displaced persons in Syria that addresses forced displacement, to ensure that this does not become a long-term crisis, and must put pressure on the Syrian regime to end displacements, and enact laws aimed at preventing the plunder of displaced persons' properties and possessions.

The UN Secretary-General:

- Should clearly identify perpetrators of violations contributes in condemning their actions, disclosing their practices, sending a message of solidarity to the affected community, while acknowledging that failure to identify the perpetrators of apparent violations encourages them to commit more violations and repeat them.
- Should request that the Security Council take urgent action, and hold an emergency meeting to ensure a ceasefire and to protect tens of thousands of displaced civilians.

International Community:

- In light of the split within the Security Council and its utter inability, action should be taken at the national and regional levels to form alliances to support the Syrian people that can protect them from the daily killings and siege 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.
- 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



- Work to fulfil justice and achieve accountability in Syria through the United Nations General Assembly and the Human Rights Council and on implementing the principle of the universal jurisdiction.
- The countries that support the parties to the conflict in Syria, especially Russia, must put pressure on their allies on the ground to ensure the neutrality of the Idlib area of combat operations, and protect the lives of at least three million people living there.

UN General Assembly

- Must hold the ruling Syrian regime responsible for the displacement of one-third of the Syrian people, including legal and material responsibility, and must ensure that victims receive full compensation for the heavy losses they have suffered, including the return of looted properties to their owners.

OHCHR

- The OHCHR should submit a report to the Human Rights Council and other organs of the United Nations concerning the violations committed by the Syrian-Russian alliance forces.

UN Envoy to Syria

- Condemn the perpetrators of the crimes and massacres and the main culprits in the collapse of agreements on de-escalation zones, and thus declare the collapse and the end of the political process in full, as well as holding the Syrian-Russian alliance to account for its actions.
- Disclose to the Syrian people Russia's pursuit of full control of Syrian territory by force, and its public desire to rehabilitate the current regime, which means the creation of a political solution which satisfies only its own interests.

Donor countries and UNOCHR

- The international community and donor countries must ensure basic living conditions, pay attention to the needs of and help provide care for thousands of displaced Syrians who are displaced in the north-western Idlib suburbs, with the most pressing basic needs, primarily water, food, housing, clothing and medical care.



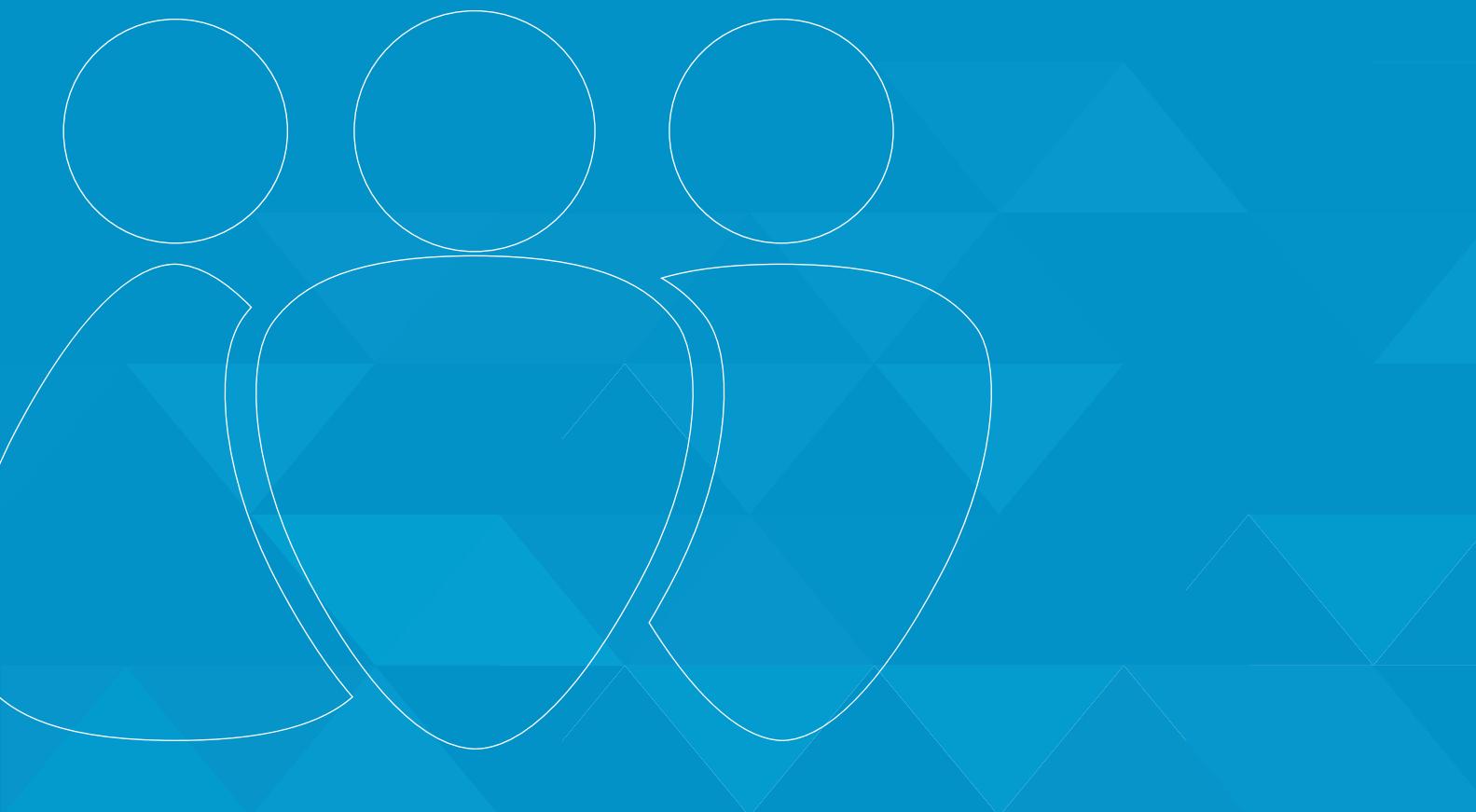
Russian forces

- Stop committing all types of war crimes in Syria.
- Reconstruct what was destroyed by the Russian war machine.
- Compensate victims financially and morally and apologize publicly.
- Commit to the outcome of the Sochi Summit and not repeat the scenario of violations we have seen in the agreements of de-escalation zone.
- Stop supporting the war crimes and crimes against humanity which the Syrian regime has been committing for eight years, with the current support being considered as direct involvement in these crimes.
- Contribute to the assistance of displaced persons who were displaced by the Russian war machine from the Eastern Ghouta in the Damascus Suburbs governorate and the governorates of Homs and Daraa, and protect the residents of those areas who remained from the arrests, persecution, kidnappings and enforced disappearances being perpetrated by the Syrian Regime and the Iranian militias.

Acknowledgment and Condolences

Our thanks and most heartfelt condolences to the residents and local community activists who contributed effectively to this report





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