

Violent Military Escalation in Northwest Syria Despite the Convening of the Constitutional Committee Meetings

56 civilians, including 19 Children, Were Killed by Syrian-Russian Alliance Forces in 16 Days

SNHR

SYRIAN NETWORK FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

الشبكة السورية لحقوق الإنسان

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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.

Contents

- I. Introduction
- II. The Russian Regime Further Denies Carrying Out Raids on Northwest Syria
- III. HTS Practices a Policy of Restricting Civilians in Areas under Its Control in Northwest Syria
- IV. The Record of the Most Notable Violations by Syrian-Russian Alliance Forces in Northwest Syria According to the SNHR's Database
- V. The Most Notable Violations by Syrian-Russian Alliance Forces in Northwest Syria
- VI. Legal Profile and Recommendations

I. Introduction

It is clear that the military campaign launched by the Russian-Syrian alliance on April 26 against the areas of northwest Syria which are outside the control of the Syrian regime is still continuing, and has so far caused enabled Russian-Syrian alliance forces to seize control of nearly 20 percent of the total area of that region; we have [issued a number of reports monitored the most notable violations](#) associated with [this military campaign](#).

On August 1, the Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA), citing a military source, announced [a ceasefire agreement](#) in the de-escalation zone in Idlib from the night of the same day, subject to the implementation of the Sochi Agreement which concerns the area. Four days after this on August 5, the Syrian regime's General Command of the Army and Armed Forces announced the collapse of this agreement, and the hostilities were resumed, although the ceasefire had not been fully achieved since it was initially announced, and Syrian Regime forces continued to launch ground attacks throughout the period preceding the formal declaration of the agreement's collapse.



At 06:00 on August 31, a ceasefire agreement announced by Russian forces came into force; despite this supposed ceasefire, we, nevertheless, documented the Syrian regime's non-compliance, as it did not cease its ground attacks on the cities and towns of the southern suburbs of Idlib and the western suburbs of Hama adjacent to the contact lines of control of Syrian Regime forces. We observed the absence of the Syrian regime's or Russia's air forces until Tuesday, September 12, when fixed-wing Russian warplane bombarded al Sheghr village in the suburbs of Jisr al Shoghour city. The Syrian regime's Air Force continued to launch raids over two consecutive days targeting the southern suburbs of Idlib (the villages of Ma'ar Zita and al Dar al Kabira, the southern outskirts of Ma'aret al Numan city, and the eastern outskirts of Sarja, and the and Harsh Beneen area); thereafter the aerial bombardment briefly stopped, although the artillery shelling continued, extending to Kaf-ranbel city and the surrounding area in the southern suburbs of Idlib.

On October 22, the Syrian Presidency announced a visit by the President of the Syrian regime and the Commander-in-Chief of the Army and Armed Forces to al Habeit town in the southern suburbs of Idlib. [Videos and photos](#) broadcasted by [Presidential media sources](#) showed that the regime leader met with members of Syrian Regime forces during the visit and directly supervised bombardment carried out by artillery forces stationed in Tal'as town in the southern suburbs of Idlib; this indicates that he is still has primary responsibility for all violations committed by the Syrian armed forces and for violating the ceasefire declared.

On Saturday, October 19, the Russian Air Force resumed its raids by bombing the Taftanaz area and continued its bombardment on the towns of the southern suburbs of Idlib on a daily basis, with the scope of the raids gradually expanding later to Jisr al Shoghour city and its suburbs.

At the end of October, Syrian Regime forces stepped up ground bombardment of villages and towns in the southern and western suburbs of Idlib, in particular Bdama town and al Najeyya village in the western suburbs of Idlib. On November 4, the Syrian regime's Air Force returned to the skies over the area and bombarded al Kfair area in the suburbs of Jisr al Shoghour city in the western suburbs of Idlib, resulting in the deaths of three civilians from one family, including two children. The next day, the air force heavily bombed Jisr al Shoghour city in a focused manner, hitting several civilian facilities in the city.



On November 13, we recorded the return of Syrian regime helicopters to carry out barrel bomb attacks for the first time since August 25, violently attacking villages and towns in the southern suburbs of Idlib, far from contact lines.

The contact axis in al Kbaina village in the eastern suburbs of Latakia have also witnessed a military escalation and attempts to advance by Syrian Regime forces and their allies since October 20, accompanied by aerial and ground bombardment by Syrian Regime forces, with helicopters contributing significantly to these attacks.

At the end of October, the olive harvest season was accompanied by the return of some displaced families from the north to their agricultural lands to harvest the crop, especially in areas near al Habet town, Khan Sheikhoun city, and the cities and towns of Kafranbel, Hass and Hazarin in the southern suburbs of Idlib. We have recorded many cases of reconnaissance flights over farmers' gatherings followed by ground and air bombardment throughout the area, causing casualties and material losses.

On October 30, northwest Syria saw a further escalation by the Syrian-Russian alliance forces, spreading to populated areas, with SNHR documenting a significant increase in the record of civilian casualties and the displacement of thousands, and in targeting of their vital facilities. We monitored continuous coordination between the Russian and Syrian Regime forces in the implementation of these attacks, with the Russian Air Force carrying out air raids after reconnaissance planes overflew the area, followed by Syrian regime ground forces carrying out intensive attacks on the same area, causing more casualties, with this process being repeated more than once.

On November 14, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator [Mark Lowcock expressed](#) his concern after the recent escalation in northwest Syria in preceding weeks caused a large number of civilian casualties and damaged at least four health care facilities.

According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the military escalation by the Syrian alliance forces has caused the displacement of approximately 630,000 civilians, some of whom have been forced to flee more than once; as the latest ceasefire came into effect on August 31, we observed that some 50,000 of these displaced people were gradually returning to several areas in the southern and eastern suburbs of Idlib, such as the suburbs of Ma'aret al Numan, with ground bombardments by Syrian Regime forces preventing tens of thousands from returning to their homes.



With the resumption of the military escalation on October 30, residents of some villages and towns that had not previously been displaced began to flee northwards, such as the residents of the towns of Bsqla, Heesh, Kafr Sajna, Kfarrouma, and Hass, who are estimated to number approximately 35,000 in total.

Displaced people in northwest Syria are suffering from horrendous and deteriorating humanitarian conditions in camps and residential villages due to massive overcrowding and to the extremely poor response of humanitarian organizations. Many of the non-residential facilities such as schools, poultry farms, shops and other buildings that had been converted into shelters for the displaced have been bombed, including the Idlib electricity warehouse near al Nayrab village in the northern suburbs of Idlib, where IDPs from the eastern suburbs of Idlib have been living, which was targeted by a Russian airstrike on November 8, injuring several IDPs, as well as a makeshift IDP camp near al Trunba village in the northern suburbs of Idlib, which was bombed by the Russian Air Force on November 9, killing a displaced female child and causing severe material damage to some of the tents there.

As winter approaches, the already catastrophic humanitarian situation is worsening with a desperate need to provide heating and to protect the traumatized residents of the camps from rainstorms.

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

“The Russian-Syrian alliance did not care about the Constitutional Committee starting its work, and continued to kill civilians and bomb vital facilities and populated areas and to displace the population, thus committing violations, some of which amounting to war crimes. This completely contradicts the committee’s name and course, because any genuine discussion of or preparations for creating a constitution can come only in the final stages of the conflict and after serious negotiations that are framed in a new constitutional declaration; by contrast, the continuing bombing by the Syrian regime and its Russian ally, the inventor of the idea of the Constitutional Committee in cooperation with former UN envoy Staffan de Mistura, confirms the Russian-Syrian alliance’s lack of seriousness and the absolute absurdity of the current course of events, with the international community unable since the beginning to pressure the Syrian regime and its Russian ally to even stop bombing medical centers at least.”



Methodology:

This report sheds light on events in northwest Syria (consisting of Idlib governorate and parts of Hama, Aleppo and Latakia governorates), outlining the record of the most notable human rights violations as a result of the military escalation by the Syrian-Russian alliance forces on the area between April 26, 2019, and November 15, 2019. The report also outlines the record of the most notable violations committed following the recent escalation on October 30, following the ceasefire declared by Russian forces on August 30.

The Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) has relied on field researchers working for us, who helped to obtain direct testimonies from survivors, relatives of victims, relief workers and media activists, bolstered by the extensive network of contacts we have built up through our eight years of work. This report contains seven first-hand accounts that we've collected through speaking directly with witnesses or survivors, 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, providing assurances that we will conceal the identity of any witness who prefers to use an alias.

The Syrian Network for Human Rights works on daily documentation of violations. Murder is considered the gravest of crimes, and is therefore a key indicator for assessing the impact of agreements, as well as the targeting of vital civilian facilities. This report records only the civilian victims, categorising them according to where they were killed rather than according to the governorate which they originally came from. Readers are welcome to find out more about SNHR's methodology¹.

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, the sites of attacks, and the bodies of the deceased victims and the injured, as well as the scale of destruction caused by the attacks.

We also retain copies of all the videos and photographs included 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 Syrian Regime forces and some other armed groups.

¹ "Syrian Network for Human Rights Methodology", Syrian Network for Human Rights, <http://sn4hr.org/public_html/wp-content/pdf/english/SNHR_Methodology_en.pdf>



This report only represents the bare minimum of incidents 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 of these events.

II. The Russian Regime Further Denies Carrying Out Raids on Northwest Syria

Since the military intervention of Russian forces in Syria in September 2015, the Russian Air Force has carried out tens of thousands of aerial sorties, and Russian forces have committed hundreds of violations of international humanitarian law, most of which can be categorized as war crimes, with the Russian regime being grotesquely innovational in using Syrian territory as a centre for weapons tests, with the Russian regime also openly and unashamedly stating and even boasting that they consider the region to be a real and effective training ground for testing weapons manufactured by Russian companies, effectively using Syria as a laboratory rather than testing the weapons in empty areas within Russia itself.

According to our observations, most of these weapons have been used against civilian targets, including hospitals, schools, markets and residential buildings, amid unprecedented international silence. Syrian society no longer hears from any state or political officials even statements of concern or condemnation of the massacres committed in northwest Syria, or of the barbaric and ferocious deployment of different types of weapons.

Despite all this, the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation has denied carrying out certain attacks; according to those incidents which the SNHR has been able to access and monitor, of the eight largest massacres denied by Russian forces despite overwhelming evidence of their responsibility, the SNHR team has been able to prove its involvement in seven of them. The frequency of attacks, which the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation has denied responsibility for, has increased in the fourth de-escalation zone since the start of its latest military campaign against the region, with the Russian Defense Ministry denying any presence of Russian ground forces in the area, in an attempt to distort the facts and change the narrative; despite all the Russia's efforts, the investigations we have conducted conclusively refute its account of events.

In a statement on July 18, the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation denied that Russian special forces were involved in the fighting in the Idlib area, insisting that no Russian ground forces are deployed in Syria. Contradicting this claim, Russian media accounts published [photos](#) showing the presence of Russian fighters on the ground, including ANNA Agency, which published photos on May 25 which it said showed members of the Russian military intelligence services engaged in a mission in the southwest of Idlib. On August 25, the 'U News' agency published [a video](#) showing Russian ground troops deployed in Morek city in the northern suburbs of Hama.



On Monday, July 22, at around 08:35, fixed-wing warplanes, which we believe were Russian, launched a double-tap attack in the center of Ma'aret al Numan city, in the southern suburbs of Idlib, causing a massacre of 39 civilians, including four children and seven women. Hours after the attack, the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation denied in [a statement](#) that its aircraft had carried out any military operation in that area, accusing the Civil Defense of making false statements.

On July 29, the head of the Main Operations Directorate of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation, Colonel General Sergei Rudskoy, held a [briefing](#) at which he claimed: “The Russian Aerospace Forces grouping in Syria conducts operational and combat training activities, is in readiness to perform tasks to counter terrorism. Aviation flights have been reduced to a minimum number as part of combat training and additional reconnaissance.”

Only a few hours after this announcement, a fixed-wing warplane, which we believe was Russian, launched an air raid on a market in Ma'aret al Numan city in the southern suburbs of Idlib, resulting in the deaths of four civilians and causing severe damage to the market. The local observatories used by citizens in northwest Syria to monitor reports on flights in order to enable them to seek shelter have received continuous reports of Russian warplanes taking off from Khmeimim Military Base and carrying out raids in various areas of the northwest Syria.

On Wednesday, September 10, the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation issued a statement denying that the Russian air force had carried out raids on the Jabal al Akrad area in northwest Syria, describing the reports published on the case as “fake” and insisting that the Russian and Syrian air forces had not carried out any raids since the ceasefire in Idlib took effect on August 31. Hours after issuing this denial, the Russian Air Force carried out a raid on al Daher village in the western suburbs of Idlib on September 11, resulting in the death of one civilian.

On Friday, October 18, the Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations addressed a letter to the UN Secretary-General containing information bulletins issued by the Russian Ministry of Defense concerning its supposed commitment to implementing the ceasefire agreement in the de-escalation zones from September 21 to October 18, 2019; these bulletins show a number of gunfire incidents that were not attributed to any of the involved parties on the ground, and through monitoring conducted by the SNHR, it is clear that the incidents mentioned in this letter only represent a few of the attacks carried out by the Syrian-Russian alliance forces during this period.



III. HTS Practices a Policy of Restricting Civilians in Areas under Its Control in Northwest Syria

The residents of northwest Syria are not only suffering from aerial and artillery bombardment by the Russian-Syrian alliance, but those under the control of the extremist organization Hay'at Tahrir al Sham are also subjected to various types of additional repression and violations, i.e., the people in these areas are between the jaws of a grotesque pincer movement of state and non-state terror formed by the regime and its allies on one side and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham on the other, with their living conditions steadily worsening and currently reaching the worst ever nadir to date. HTS has tightened its grip on large swathes of northwest Syria and has harnessed most of its resources in the military sector, with part of this burden imposed on civilians who are already suffering from poor material conditions as a result of frequent displacement exacerbated by the decision of a large number of international humanitarian organizations to cease operations in HTS-controlled areas; almost a year ago, the Salvation Government of HTS began to tighten its grip on civilian facilities in areas under the group's control and issued successive orders tightening the noose on civilians there, such imposing high fees for registering cars and generators; seizing control of bakeries; and controlling the prices of bread, amperes (subscription volume of rented power from private generators to homes) and fuel; the last such order from HTS imposed a tax on the olive crop, with a delegate being appointed by HTS in each olive press to collect the tax. This escalation of restrictions on already suffering civilians has resulted recently in several demonstrations by people to speak out against the terrorist group, with these demonstrations escalating in the cities and towns of Idlib, including Ma'aret al Numan, Saraqeb, Sarmada, Salqin and Ariha following the siege imposed by HTS on Kafr Takhareem city in the western suburbs of Idlib on November 6, during which the group besieged the town from several surrounding axes, and used medium weapons to indiscriminately attack the city to further restrict on the city's residents in its attempt to tighten control over civil activities and control financial resources there.

The SNHR contacted activist Walid Jebes², from Kafr Takhareem, to talk about HTS' actions in the city: **“The Salvation Government took control of the city in February 2019 and vowed not to interfere in the work of the city’s civil administrations or its resources, but HTS immediately seized control of the automatic bakery and stole wheat stocks from it. After the Salvation Government took control of the ‘Free’ University of Aleppo with the support of HTS, it worked to dismantle the equipment of the faculties of medicine and dentistry affiliated to the university located in the city under the pretext of transferring them to Idlib city. The people prevented the cargo vehicles loaded with the equipment from moving, so HTS had to return them.”**

² We contacted him via WhatsApp on November 13, 2019



Walid added that despite the promises made by HTS not to interfere in the work of the local council and police force in the city, the group issued a decree forcing police personnel and postal and telephone service employees to join the fronts under the penalty of dismissal if they rejected these orders. He added: **“The residents started to demonstrate in protest against the decisions of the HTS and to demand the dissolution of the Salvation Government and its exit from the city. In response, HTS charged about 70 activists of the city with organizing these demonstrations with charges of corruption, vandalism, banditry, and others. Then, HTS moved a number of heavily armed military convoys towards the city and besieged it on Wednesday evening, November 6. At 6:20 a.m the following day, the shelling of the city began from five axes with mortars, tank shells, BMP and B-9 shells, with the city’s rebels responding to the shelling with their weapons. This continued until 4 pm, when a ceasefire was announced between the two parties and a call for negotiations that resulted in an agreement being reached between them that is still in effect.”**

Between April 26 and November 15, we also documented that artillery forces stationed in areas under the joint control of HTS and factions of the Armed Opposition fired several shells at areas under the control of Syrian Regime forces in the governorates of Hama and Aleppo, resulting in the deaths of 13 civilians, including eight children and one woman. We were unable to identify which party was responsible for the bombing up until the time of preparing this report.

IV. The Record of the Most Notable Violations by Syrian-Russian Alliance Forces in Northwest Syria According to the SNHR’s Database

Since the beginning of the military campaign on April 26 to November 15:

A. Extrajudicial Killing:

SNHR documented the deaths of at least 1,124 civilians, including 301 children and 186 women (adult female), as well as 42 massacres in northwest Syria at the hands of Syrian-Russian alliance forces between April 26, 2019, and November 15, 2019, distributed as follows:

- Syrian Regime forces (army, security, local militias, and Shiite foreign militias): Killed 853 civilians, including 234 children and 143 women, and committed 31 massacres, distributed as follows:

Idlib governorate: 681 civilians, including 201 children and 118 women.

Hama governorate: 114 civilians, including 18 children and 16 women.

Aleppo governorate: 58 civilians, including 15 children and nine women.



- Russian forces: 271 civilians, including 67 children and 43 women, as well as committing 11 massacres, distributed as follows:

Idlib governorate: 215 civilians, including 58 children and 29 women.

Hama governorate: 48 civilians, including seven children and 13 women.

Aleppo governorate: Eight civilians, including two children and one woman.

We also documented the deaths of at least 15 medical personnel, including one woman (adult female), distributed as follows:

- Syrian Regime forces: Nine, including one woman.

- Russian forces: Six.

In addition to the deaths of 10 Civil Defense personnel, distributed as follows:

- Syrian Regime forces: Two.

- Russian forces: Eight.

We also documented the deaths of at least two media workers, one of whom was killed at the hands of Syrian Regime forces and the other at the hands of Russian forces, during the same period.

B. Attacks on vital civilian facilities:

SNHR documented at least 500 attacks on vital civilian facilities in northwest Syria between April 26, 2019, and November 15, 2019, including 139 on schools, 117 on places of worship, 61 on medical facilities, 54 on Civil Defense facilities (centers and vehicles) and 19 on markets. These incidents were distributed by the main perpetrator parties as follows:

- Syrian Regime forces: 374 attacks, including 113 on schools, 100 on places of worship, 37 on medical facilities, 31 on Civil Defense facilities (centers and vehicles) and 18 on markets.

- Russian forces: 126 attacks, including 26 on schools, 17 on places of worship, 24 on medical facilities, 23 on Civil Defense facilities (centers and vehicles), and one on a market.

C. Record of indiscriminate attacks and attacks using outlawed weapons:

SNHR documented at least 28 cluster munitions attacks at the hands of Syrian-Russian alliance forces in northwest Syria, distributed as follows:

- Syrian Regime forces: 25 attacks, all in Idlib governorate, resulting in the deaths of 14 civilians, including one child and five women (adult female), and injured 21 persons.

- Russian forces: Three attacks that injured four persons. These attacks were distributed across governorates as follows:

Hama governorate: One

Idlib governorate: Two



We also recorded at least 24 incendiary weapons attacks on civilian areas far from the front-lines, all of which were carried out at the hands of Syrian Regime forces, distributed across governorates as follows:

Idlib governorate: 15

Hama governorate: Nine

These attacks resulted in the deaths of two civilians, including one woman.

SNHR documented one chemical attack carried out by Syrian Regime forces in Latakia governorate on May 19, 2019.

In addition, between April 26 and November 15, the Syrian regime carried out several attacks using nail-filled missiles fired by heavy machine guns mounted on fixed-wing L-39 warplanes, with the SNHR able to document at least seven such attacks.

In addition, the Syrian Regime's air force, using both fixed-wing aircraft and helicopters, also dropped at least 3,631 barrel bombs on northwest Syria during the period covered by the report, distributed across governorates as follows:

Idlib governorate: 1,658

Hama governorate: 1,544

Latakia governorate: 429

Since the recent military escalation on October 30 to November 15:

A. Extrajudicial Killing:

SNHR documented the deaths of at least 56 civilians, including 19 children and six women (adult female), as well as one massacre in northwest Syria at the hands of the Syrian-Russian alliance forces from October 30, 2019, to November 15, 2019, distributed as follows:

- Syrian Regime forces: 20 civilians, including six children and two women, distributed as follows:

Idlib governorate: 19 civilians, including five children and two women.

Hama governorate: One child.

- Russian forces: 36 civilians, including 13 children and four women, as well as committing one massacre, distributed as follows:

Idlib governorate: 28 civilians, including 11 children and three women.

Hama governorate: Eight civilians, including two children and one woman.

We also documented the deaths of one medical worker, one Civil Defense worker and one media activist, all at the hands of Syrian Regime forces, during the same period.



B. Attacks on vital civilian facilities:

SNHR documented at least 46 attacks on vital civilian facilities in northwest Syria at the hands of Syrian-Russian alliance forces from October 30, to November 15, 2019, including 10 on schools, seven on places of worship, seven on medical facilities, 11 on Civil Defense facilities (centers and vehicles) and one on a market. These incidents were distributed according to the main perpetrator parties as follows:

- **Syrian Regime forces:** 34 attacks, including eight on schools, five on places of worship, four on medical facilities, 11 on Civil Defense facilities (centers and vehicles) and one on a market.

- **Russian forces:** 12 attacks, including two on schools, two on places of worship, and three on medical facilities.

C. Record of indiscriminate attacks and attacks using outlawed weapons:

SNHR documented the Syrian Regime's air force, using both fixed-wing aircraft and helicopters, dropped at least 54 barrel bombs between October 30, and November 15, 2019, distributed across governorates as follows:

Idlib governorate: 18

Latakia governorate: 36



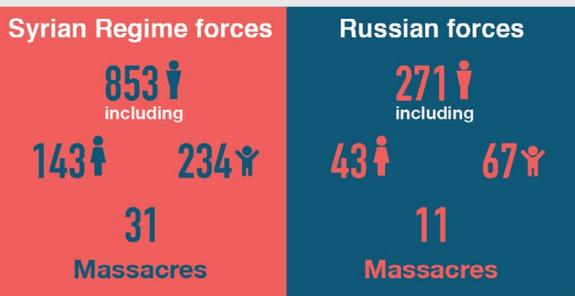
Infographic showing the record of the most notable human rights violations at the hands of Syrian-Russian alliance forces in northwest Syria:



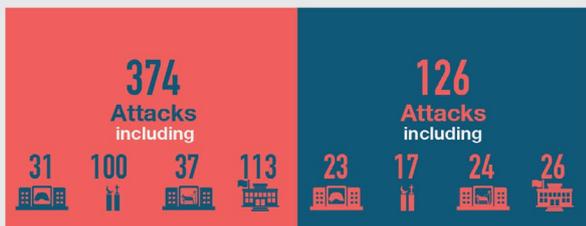
Record of the Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Northwest Syria as a Result of the Military Campaign by Syrian-Russian Alliance Forces

From April 26, 2019, to November 15, 2019

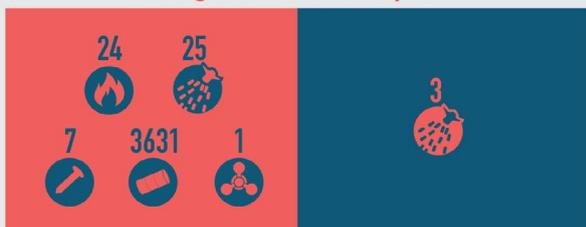
Extrajudicial Killing



Attacks on Vital Civilian Facilities



Record of Indiscriminate Attacks and Attacks Using Outlawed Weapons



From October 30, 2019, to November 15, 2019

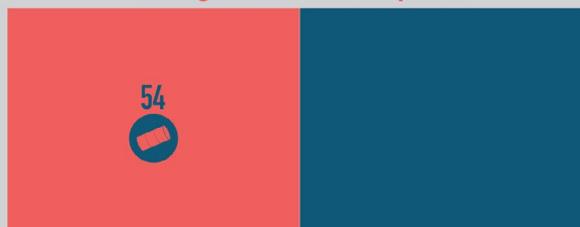
Extrajudicial Killing



Attacks on Vital Civilian Facilities



Record of Indiscriminate Attacks and Attacks Using Outlawed Weapons



V. The Most Notable Violations by Syrian-Russian Alliance Forces in Northwest Syria

On Friday, November 1, 2019, Syrian Regime forces used a missile launcher to fire missiles at the elementary school in [Bdama](#) town in the western suburbs of Idlib governorate, partially destroying the school building, and [igniting a fire](#) in a book storage area inside the school. Bdama town was under the joint control of factions of the Armed Opposition and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.

On Sunday, November 3, 2019, Syrian Regime artillery forces fired a number of shells at [the Civil Defense Center](#) in Anadan city in the northern suburbs of Aleppo governorate, causing the partial destruction of the [center's building](#), and [inflicting varying levels of material damage](#) to its equipment and four vehicles belonging to the center (two [tank](#) trucks, a fire rescue vehicle and a dump truck). We note that the same artillery forces also targeted the center repeatedly over the next two days, putting it out of service. Anadan city was under the joint control of factions of the Armed Opposition and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.



Damage to vehicles belonging to the Civil Defense Center in Anadan city, Aleppo, caused by three days of ground attacks by Syrian Regime forces; these photos were taken on November 5, 2019 - Syrian Civil Defense



The SNHR contacted Mohammad Walid³, a staff member at the Civil Defense center of Anadan city, who told us that on Sunday morning, November 3, at around 10:15 am, Syrian regime artillery began shelling the city intensively: **“The shells were fired consecutively every one-and-a-half minutes, with a number of shells hitting the Civil Defense Center in the city directly. The shells hit the garage while most of the vehicles were inside, causing damage to many of them; the reconnaissance flights were accompanied by artillery shelling.”** Mohammad informed us that the Civil Defense personnel were unable to evacuate the equipment and vehicles from the center, and added: **“The next day, at the same time, the regime’s artillery repeated the shelling, also in conjunction with the reconnaissance flight, and with the first shell landing, we evacuated the center and left the site. The shelling on that day focused on the center’s building, with most of it coming from the regime’s artillery stationed in the areas of Jam’iyeat al Zahraa and al Ramousa near Anadan city. The damage was significant, as four vehicles belonging to the center and several items of equipment sustained moderate material damage, in addition to several motorbikes belonging to the center’s members, solar panels and surveillance cameras that were also damaged, and 6,000 liters of diesel fuel were burned as a result of the shelling.”** Mohammad confirmed that there were no military headquarters in the area.

On Monday, November 4, 2019, at around 15:30, Syrian Regime forces used a missile launcher to fire missiles at the Dispensary in Jisr al Shoghour city directly at the center’s building, causing partial destruction of the facility, and [inflicting moderate material damage to its equipment](#). We note that the dispensary has been providing services to about 9,000 patients per month. Jisr al Shoghour city was under the joint control of factions of the Armed Opposition and Hay’at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.

The Union of Medical Care and Relief Organizations (‘UOSSM’) issued [a statement](#) condemning the assault on the center.

On Tuesday, November 5, 2019, fixed-wing warplanes, which we believe were Russian, fired missiles at a house in al Dar al Kabira village in the southern suburbs of Idlib governorate, where IDPs from al Latamena town in the suburbs of Hama governorate were living, resulting in the deaths of [three siblings](#) (two females and one male), and injuring their mother. 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.

³ We contacted him via WhatsApp on November 13, 2019



On Tuesday, November 5, 2019, at around 23:55, fixed-wing warplanes, which we believe were Russian, launched an air raid, firing two missiles that landed near al Ikhlas Children's and Women's Hospital, southeast of Shnan village in Jabal al Zaweya area in the southern suburbs of Idlib governorate; the planes subsequently launched a second air raid with two missiles shortly afterwards at around 00:20 on November 6, targeting the hospital directly, injuring two medical staff, [in addition](#) to [severely destroying](#) the [hospital building](#), [igniting fire](#) in a part of [the hospital](#), and inflicting significant [material damage](#) to its equipment, furniture and an ambulance belonging to the Syrian American Medical Association (SAMS), putting the hospital out of service. Shnan village was under the control of factions of the Armed Opposition at the time of the incident.

Visual guidance showing the site of an air attack, which we believe was Russian, on al Ikhlas Hospital in Shnan village, Idlib:



Adham Hamrin, a nurse from Me'rata village, who was working in the ambulance department of al Ikhlas Hospital in Shnan village, was suffocated by the fire that broke out in the hospital as a result of the attack. Adham⁴ told us: **“I woke up a few minutes before midnight of November 6 to the sound of a huge explosion that rocked the area. I later learned that it was the explosion of two missiles, one of which fell 50 meters east of the hospital, while the other fell a little further away than the first one. The bombing injured a number of the hospital’s reviewers. We gave them first aid, then we immediately started evacuating the nursing mothers, infants in the incubators, and staff from the hospital.”** Adham said that he returned with one of his colleagues to the hospital to make sure that it was empty: **“After we arrived, the aircraft returned to carry out a raid with two missiles that hit the hospital building directly, causing its destruction and igniting fire in it; we were able to get out only after the arrival of the Civil Defense members and the people who extinguished the fire got us out.”** Adham added: **“The hospital was severely destroyed in most of its departments, generators and equipment, and an ambulance was damaged. It is currently out of service.”**



⁴ We contacted him via WhatsApp on November 13, 2019



Media activist Ahmad Amin⁵, a Syria TV reporter, from Shnan village, who was present there at the time of the attack, told us: **“While I was at my house that night, I heard a strong warplane roar followed by the sound of a missile fired then the sound of a powerful explosion. I went up to the roof of my house and I found that the bombing was on an area between the villages of Shnan and Sarja near al Ikhlas Hospital. Twenty minutes later, the warplanes returned and fired two missiles at the hospital and I saw fire breaking out at the southern side of the hospital, with my house being about 1 km away from the site. The warplanes were Russian according to the information circulated by the Civil Defense Observatories.”** Ahmad added that he could not go to the site directly because of the panic suffered by his child: **“The next morning, I went to the site and saw the great destruction, especially in the southern and eastern parts of it; the attack put the hospital out of service.”** Ahmad confirmed that there was no military presence in the area.

On Wednesday, November 6, 2019, fixed-wing warplanes, which we believe were Russian, fired a number of missiles at residential neighborhoods of [al Sahhara](#) town in the western suburbs of Aleppo governorate, resulting in the deaths of [eight civilians](#) at once, including [two female children](#) and [one woman](#), and [injuring 25 others](#). Al Sahhara town was under the joint control of factions of the Armed Opposition and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.



⁵ We contacted him via WhatsApp on November 13, 2019



On Sunday, November 10, 2019, fixed-wing warplanes, which we believe were Russian, fired missiles at houses in al Gharbi neighborhood of Kfarrouma village in the southern suburbs of Idlib governorate, resulting in [the deaths](#) of [four civilians](#), including three children, and injuring others. Some ten minutes later, while civilians and ambulance personnel were gathering to recover the victims and rescue the wounded, this bombardment was followed by artillery shelling by Syrian Regime forces, with a number of shells landing in the same area, resulting in the deaths of three civilians, including a nurse, [Amer Kamal al Basal](#), and a media activist, [Abdul Hamid al Yousef](#). Kfarrouma 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 body of media activist Abdul Hamid al Yousef, who was killed in a ground attack by Syrian Regime forces on Kfarrouma village, Idlib - November 10, 2019

The SNHR contacted Abdul Mu'in al Khatib⁶ from Kfarrouma village, who was inside a house in al Gharbi neighborhood of Kfarrouma village when the attack took place on the morning of Sunday, November 10: **“I heard a sudden explosion that was not preceded by a sound of warplanes or a missile, and was not preceded by any circulation of information from the observatory either. I rushed out and I saw smoke rising from the side of the neighborhood I live in. I headed straight to the site where I found my brother’s house, which was heavily destroyed by the bombing. I shouted to call out to the house’s residents with no answer, but I found my cousin at one of the sides of the house with her foot severed, then I called for an ambulance for her; a few meters**

⁶ We contacted him via WhatsApp on November 13, 2019



away from her, I found her three children dead; her daughter's body was blown to pieces, while the skull of her son was broken; after that, I heard a voice from inside a building east of the bombing site and went there and found my sister and her young daughters, whom we took to hospital; in the same building, I found my second sister and her son. The observatories then circulated reports about the presence of Russian warplanes in the sky, so I carried her to the shelter when the warplane carried out the second raid. I went out immediately and found Abdul Hamid with one of the paramedics and the Civil Defense members. Upon the return of the warplanes, we took refuge in the shelters and buildings then they carried out the third raid, but without human casualties, thank God.”

Abdul Mu'in told us that the Syrian regime's artillery stationed in Khan Sheikhoun targeted the neighborhood with missiles about 15 minutes after the Russian warplanes' attacks: **“When we left, we found Abdul Hamid, his cousin, the medic Amer al Basal, had died near the cave door near Abdul Hamid's house; how they were was awful.”**

On Tuesday, November 12, 2019, Syrian Regime artillery forces fired a number of shells at [an agricultural field](#) southwest of Ma'aret Harma village in the southern suburbs of Idlib governorate, one of which hit a Civil Defense ambulance – Ma'aret Harma Center, while its staff were working to evacuate those injured in a previous bombing by fixed-wing warplanes, which we believe were Russian, that used missiles to target the same field, resulting in the deaths of three civilians, including a [Civil Defense member](#), and injured some others. In addition, an ambulance was completely [burned](#) and [put out of service](#). The moment another Civil Defense team arrived from Sfuhun Center to evacuate victims and injured from the area, several shells fired by the same artillery forces landed near the team, injuring three members of the team, in addition to causing significant material damage to a vehicle belonging to the team. Ma'aret Harma 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 Bassam al Hamad⁷, a member of the Civil Defense in Ma'aret Harma who was injured in the incident. He told us: **“We received a call about Russian warplanes targeting civilians who were picking olives southwest of Ma'aret Harma. Upon arrival, we found two men and two women who were injured, then we put them in the ambulance. After moving about 20 meters, we were hit by artillery shells. The shells fell behind the ambulance, in front of it and to its left about 50 meters away. I was hit in the thighs and the driver Ahmad al Najjar was also injured; my colleague Ahmad al Ali was hit in the head.**

⁷ We contacted him via WhatsApp on November 13, 2019



I went out with the driver and two of the injured away from the vehicle. Artillery bombardment resumed, with shells falling respectively. We holed up behind a dirt barrier and asked for a support team to help us. In the meantime, the shells hit the ambulance and set it on fire, killing Ahmad and the two injured who could not leave the vehicle.”

The SNHR contacted Abdul Salam Walid al Khalaf⁸, a Civil Defense member at the Sfuhun Center, who went with his team to support the Ma’aret Harma team: **“At the call of the sunset prayer, while we were following the shelling reports, we received the news that the Ma’aret Harma Center team had been bombed and asked for support; I went with the team in response despite the reconnaissance flights. We headed to them with the headlights off for fear of being bombed. Nearly half an hour later and about 100 meters before reaching them, a shell landed near us, injuring me in the eye and injuring the driver in the foot. We contacted the center and notified them that we were injured and that the ambulance of Ma’aret Harma Center was burning in front of us, and our vehicle was also hit and we were no longer able to use it. We waited at the site until the support arrived. We evacuated the Civil Defense team of Ma’aret Harma and the two civilians who were with them to the nearest medical point, while the bodies of the three martyrs were charred in the vehicle.”**

On Wednesday, November 13, 2019, Syrian Regime forces’ helicopters dropped a number of barrel bombs on al Othman football ground, located on the outskirts of Kafr Sajna village in the southern suburbs of Idlib governorate, resulting in the deaths of [three civilian siblings](#), and causing moderate material damage to the playground facilities. 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.

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.
- Launching a deliberate attack on medical personnel in the context of a non-international armed conflict is a war crime punishable by international humanitarian law and international criminal law (Articles 8 (2) (b), 24, 8 (2) (e) (2) of the Statute of the International Criminal Court), and we believe that Russian and Syrian forces deliberately targeted medical personnel in a number of attacks.

⁸ We contacted him via WhatsApp on November 13, 2019



- 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 have violated the de-escalation zone agreement in all regions, including the Idlib region, and repeatedly violated the Sochi Agreement signed in September 2018.
- Syrian Regime forces have explicitly violated the Sochi Agreement by carrying out artillery bombardment of a number of villages and towns in northwest Syria, 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.
- The Syrian Regime forces and Shiite militias violated the Sochi agreement by attacking factions of the Armed Opposition and killing a number of their members.
- The Syrian Regime forces have practiced the crime of displacement in a systematic, widespread and organized manner against the civilian population. This constitutes a flagrant violation of the Geneva Conventions and amounts to a crime against humanity under Article VII of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. We have not recorded any measures by these forces to provide shelter, health care or food to the displaced civilians.

Recommendations:

The United Nations special envoy to Syria

- Condemn the perpetrators of crimes and massacres, and those who are primarily responsible for obstructing the political process.
- Re-sequence the peace process so that it can resume its natural course after Russia's attempts to divert and distort it, empowering the Constitutional Committee prior to the establishment of a transitional governing body.
- Request that the Syrian regime, its Russian ally, and opposition factions stop all violations and secure good faith measures by stopping the bombing and at least disclosing the fate of the forcibly disappeared persons.

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.
- Provide 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.
- Ensure the establishment of peace and security and the implementation of the principle of the Responsibility to Protect civilians and 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 and contribute to condemning their actions, disclosing their practices, sending a message of solidarity to the affected communities. Meanwhile, ignoring any mention of 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, then 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 to implement the principle of 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 from combat operations, and protect the lives of at least three million people living there.

UN General Assembly

- Must attribute full responsibility to the Syrian regime for the displacement of one-third of the Syrian people, including legal and material responsibility, and must also 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.

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.

Independent International Commission of Inquiry (COI)

- Launch investigations into the cases included in this report and previous reports. SNHR is willing to cooperate and provide further evidence and data.
- Clearly identify those responsible for the attacks in the event that results reached are likely, especially Russian forces; the reports of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic are virtually devoid of any attribution of responsibility for air strikes, with the exception of only one case in three years of Russian intervention in Syria.

The Syrian regime

- Stop violating the Syrian constitution by killing Syrian citizens, destroying their homes and disappearing and torturing tens of thousands of them.
- Stop indiscriminate shelling and targeting of residential areas, hospitals, schools and markets, and end the use of internationally outlawed weapons and barrel bombs.



- End the acts of torture that have caused the deaths of thousands of Syrian citizens in detention centers.
- Ensure compliance with UN Security Council resolutions, customary humanitarian law and the Syrian constitution and law.

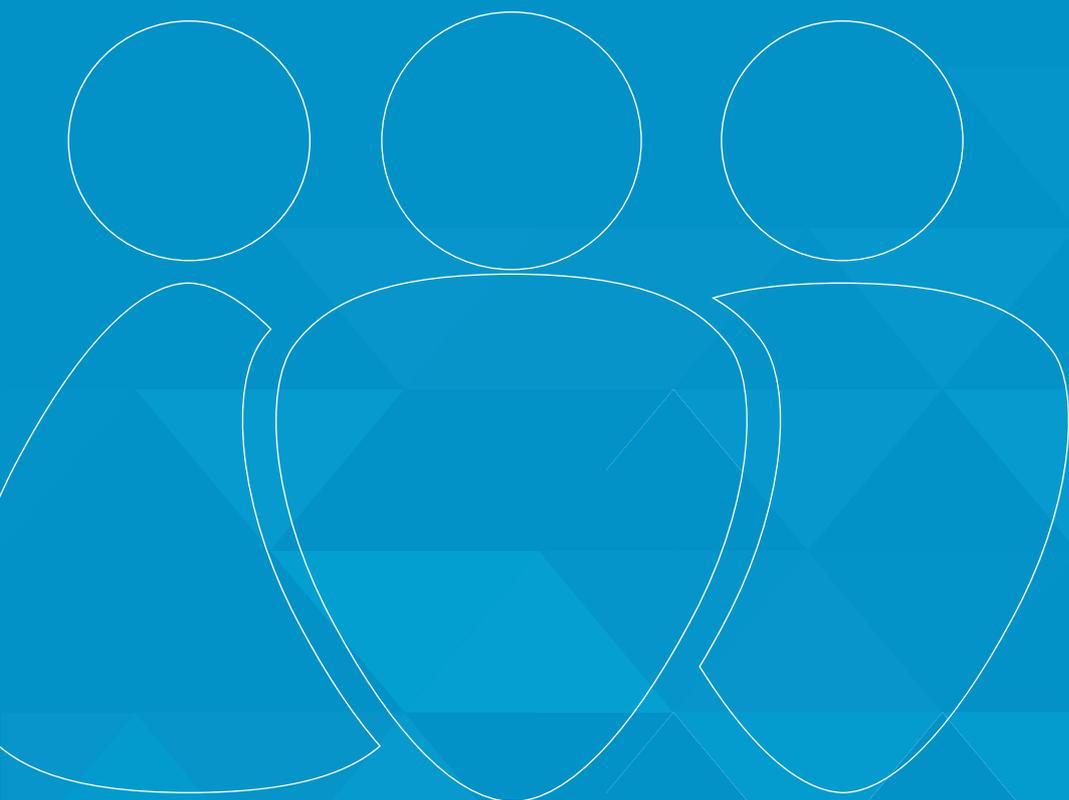
The Russian regime

- Launch investigations into the incidents included in this report, make the findings of these investigations public for the Syrian people, and hold the those responsible accountable.
- Compensate all the damaged centers and facilities, rebuild and rehabilitate them, and compensate all the families of victims who were killed by the current Russian regime, as well as all the wounded.
- Completely cease the bombing of hospitals, protected objects, and civilian areas, and respect customary international law.

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We thank all local people and activists whose contributions have enriched this report.





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