Documenting the Death of 6,964 Civilians in Syria in 2018

Including 108 in December

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.

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I. Introduction and Methodology

Since the popular uprising for freedom started in Syria in March 2011, SNHR has taken it upon itself to record a wide range of violations that are being perpetrated daily against the Syrian people, such as killing, enforced-disappearance, arbitrary arrest, destruction, indiscriminate bombardment, and torture as SNHR sheds light on the most notable violations it recorded that were committed by the parties to the conflict in Syria in hundreds of reports. SNHR has largely focused, since it was founded, on documenting victims who were killed at the hands of the parties to the conflict, and created a database for the victims’ names and their information such as sex, age, occupation, way of killing, the party that killed them, and the type of weapon used.

Most of the victims who were killed in the first months were killed in gunfire by Syrian regime forces, who used excessive force against peaceful protesters, or due to torture inside government detention centers. In the subsequent years, most of the victims were killed in air attacks carried out by the parties that possess an air force – primarily the Syrian regime, then Russian forces and international coalition forces. In addition, there have been hundreds of victims who were killed due to shortage of food and medication in light of the siege, and hundreds of victims who were killed in chemical and cluster attacks as well as killed by landmines while other died from cold, or drowning as they were attempting to find a refuge. SNHR’s archives, also, contains victims killed in attacks by factions from armed opposition, extremist Islamist groups, and Kurdish Democratic Union Party forces.
**Methodology**

This report includes only the toll of civilians that were killed by the main seven influential parties in Syria:

- Syrian regime forces (army, security, local militias, and Shiite foreign militias)
- Russian forces
- Extremist Islamist groups
- Factions from the armed opposition
- Self-management forces (consisting primarily of the Democratic Union Party forces, a branch for the Kurdistan Workers’ Party)
- International coalition forces
- Other parties

As for armed victims, they are divided into two categories:

- Victims from the armed opposition: We face additional difficulties as many of these victims are killed on battlefronts rather than inside cities. Also, we aren’t able to obtain information on the victims such as names, pictures and other important personal details on account of the armed opposition forces’ unwillingness to reveal such information for security concerns among other reasons. Therefore, the actual number of victims is much greater than what is being recorded.

- Victims from Syrian regime force, extremist Islamist groups, and Kurdish Democratic Union Party forces: It is almost impossible to access information about this category of victims and the margin of error is considerably higher due to the lack of any applicable methodology in this type of documentation. The Syrian government and ISIS don’t publish, reveal, or record their victims. From our perspective and given these facts, the statistics published by some groups concerning this category of victims are fictitious and not based on any actual data.

Therefore, we are only going to include civilian victims who were killed by all parties and compare these figures.

This report draws upon the ongoing monitoring of news and developments by SNHR’s team, and on an extensive network of relations with various sources that have been built up over the course of our work. When we receive information, or learn some news about violations via the internet or media outlets, we work to follow up these reports and attempt to verify and collect evidence and data. In some cases, researchers are able to visit the incident location promptly. However, this is a rarity in light of the incredibly high security risks, and given the frequency of daily incidents and the scarcity of human and material resources. Therefore, the opportunities available to access evidences vary from one case to another. Usually, what we do, at SNHR, in such cases is to rely on accounts from survivors.
who experienced the violation firsthand, with whom we try to establish direct contact, and, to a secondary degree, to liaise with eyewitnesses who saw or filmed the violations. It is also important to note that many of the incidents that result in fatalities might not be officially deemed to be violations of international humanitarian law. However, since these incidents involve collateral damages, we record and archive them in order to preserve historically accurate documentation and store these as part of a national record, but we don’t describe these incidents as crimes.

Please see SNHR methodology for documenting victims:

II. December Outline
December, 2018 saw an unprecedented increase in the number of civilian casualties compared to the previous months of the year.

Over the same period, bombings and assassinations continued to take civilian lives, especially in regions in northern Syria – specifically Idlib and Hama governorates - while the military operations carried out by the International Coalition forces in Deir Ez-Zour governorate, under the pretext of eliminating ISIS, also resulted in civilian deaths. Meanwhile, the Syrian Regime’s artillery forces also continued to violate the Sochi agreement and to kill civilians in the fourth de-escalation zone.

The Syrian-Russian alliance forces, in 2018, inflicted the highest percentage of civilian casualties of all the parties, being responsible for 67 percent of the total annual civilian death toll, including 45 percent of those killed in Damascus Suburbs governorate, which suffered the highest level of civilian casualties amongst all Syria’s governorates with 31 percent of the total civilian death toll of 2018, followed by Idlib governorate with 24 percent and Aleppo with 11 percent.

III. Report Details
A. Civilian deaths in 2018:
SNHR has documented the killing of 6,964 civilians at the hands of the main parties to the conflict in Syria in 2018, including 1,436 children and 923 women (adult females). 4,629 of these victims were killed at the hands of the Syrian-Russian alliance forces. The death toll was distributed according to the perpetrator party as follows:
6964 civilians were killed at the hands of the main parties to the conflict in Syria in 2018

As documented by SNHR

1436 children were killed at the hands of the main parties to the conflict in Syria in 2018

As documented by SNHR
A. Syrian regime forces (army, security, local militias, and Shiite foreign militias): 4,162 civilians, including 713 children, and 562 women.

B. Russian forces: 467 civilians, including 169 children and 51 women

C. Extremist Islamist groups: killed 478 civilians, including 89 children and 42 women, divided between:
   • ISIS (the self-proclaimed ‘Islamic State’): killed 446 civilians, including 82 children and 41 women.
   • Hay’at Tahrir al Sham (an alliance composed of Fateh al Sham Front and a number of factions of the armed opposition): killed 32 civilians, including seven children and one woman.

D. Factions of the armed opposition: 48 civilians, including 14 children and seven women.

E. Self-Management forces (consisting primarily of the Democratic Union Party – a branch for the Kurdistan Workers' Party): 285 civilians, including 28 children and 26 women.

F. International coalition forces: 417 civilians, including 175 children and 90 women.

G. Other parties: 1,107 civilians, including 247 children and 145 women.
Death toll distributed by month, as follows:

Civilian death toll of 2018 is distributed across governorates by the perpetrator party as follows:
B. Civilian deaths toll in December:
SNHR documented the killing of 108 civilians in December, 2018, at the hands of the parties to the conflict in Syria, as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Deaths</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Other Parties</td>
<td>44.45%</td>
<td>48 (7 children, 4 women)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Coalition forces</td>
<td>23.15%</td>
<td>25 (11 children, 7 women)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syrian Regime forces and Iranian militias</td>
<td>19.44%</td>
<td>21 (3 children, 1 woman)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extremist Islamist groups</td>
<td>10.18%</td>
<td>11 (3 children, 1 woman)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kurdish Self - Management forces (mainly PYD)</td>
<td>1.85%</td>
<td>2 (1 child, 1 adult)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factions of the Armed Opposition</td>
<td>0.93%</td>
<td>1 (1 adult)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As documented by SNHR
Death toll distributed by the parties to the conflict, as follows:

1. Syrian regime forces (army, security, local militias, and Shiite foreign militias)
   We documented the killing of 21 civilians by Syrian regime forces, including three children, and one woman (adult female). Also, among the victims were 12 who died due to torture.

2. Extremist Islamist groups: killed 11 civilians, including three children and one woman, divided into:
   - ISIS (the self-proclaimed ‘Islamic State’): killed nine civilians, including two children and 1 woman.
   - Hay’at Tahrir al Sham (an alliance composed of Fateh al Sham Front and a number of factions from the armed opposition): killed two civilians, including one child.
3. Factions from the armed opposition
SNHR documented the killing of one civilian.

4. Self-Management forces (consisting primarily of the Democratic Union Party – a branch for the Kurdistan Workers’ Party)
SNHR documented the killing of two civilians, including one child.

5. International coalition forces
We documented the killing of 25 civilians, including 11 children and seven women, in air attacks by International Coalition forces’ warplanes.

6. Other parties
We documented the killing of 48 civilians, including seven children and four women, by other parties. This category includes victims who were killed in bombings whose perpetrators we were unable to identify, by gunfire from unknown sources, and by landmines of unknown origin, in addition to victims who died in fires and as a result of indiscriminate shelling by Turkish land and air forces, as well as victims who were killed by Jordanian and Lebanese forces.

We would like to emphasize that the figures included in this and other SNHR reports are solely for those incidents which we were able to document and verify with full name, place, and time through our members who are spread across Syria. It also should be noted that there are many cases where we were unable to access and document events, especially in reported massacres where towns and villages are sealed off and communication is cut off. The high number of such reports suggests that the actual number of civilian deaths is far greater. All of this is because the Syrian government bans any human rights organization from working in the territory it controls.

IV. Conclusions and Recommendations
• SNHR stresses that the Syrian-Russian alliance forces have violated the rules of international human rights law which guarantee the right to life.
• Numerous articles of evidence and proof, substantiated by testimony from hundreds of eyewitnesses indicates that at least 90 percent of the multiple and single attacks were directed against civilians and civilian facilities.
• All of this discredits the Syrian government’s and the Russian government’s claims that they are fighting “Al-Qaeda and terrorists”
• SNHR notes that these incidents of killing constitute crimes against humanity where the qualifying characteristic of widespread or systematic attacks against a group of civilian residents was fulfilled in most of these cases.
• Self-management forces have carried out extrajudicial killings that constitute war crimes.
• Extremist Islamist groups have carried out extrajudicial killings that constitute war crimes.
• Some of the armed opposition factions have carried out extrajudicial killings that constitute war crimes.
• International coalition forces have carried out extrajudicial killings that constitute war crimes.

Condemnation and liability
Every internationally unlawful act committed by the state means that the state in question is legally accountable for that action. Equally, customary international law states that the state is responsible for all the acts committed by the members of its security and military forces. Consequently, the state is responsible for the unlawful acts, including crimes against humanity, that have been perpetrated by the members of the Syrian regime’s military and security forces.
Additionally, the Russian regime and all the Shiite militias, as well as ISIS, are all foreign parties who were effectively involved in acts of killings and are all responsible legally and judicially for their crimes, along with the funders and supporters of the Syrian regime that is perpetrating massacres systemically and ceaselessly on a daily basis.

Recommendations
Security Council
• The Security Council must take new steps after adopting resolution 2139, although no pledges to stop the indiscriminate bombing have been made to date. All parties to the conflict should adhere to these steps as well as the rules of the international humanitarian law.
• The Syrian case should be referred to the International Criminal Court and all those who are responsible should be held accountable, including the Russian regime whose involvement in war crimes has been repeatedly proven.
• Expand sanctions to include the Syrian, Russian, and Iranian regimes who are directly involved in crimes against humanity and war crimes against the Syrian people.
• List the militias who are fighting on the side of the Syrian government and responsible for widespread massacres across Syria - including Iranian militias, the Lebanese group Hezbollah, other Shiite groups, the National Defense Army, and the Syrian regime’s Shabiha - on the international list of terrorist groups.
• Abstain from acknowledging the Syrian government to be an official entity worthy of rec-
cognition after it perpetrated crimes against humanity with regard to any relief efforts, and
stop giving it the largest portion of financial and other aid as this is being distributed only
to Syrian government loyalists as a reward for their support rather than to people who are
truly in need of it.

International Community
• In light of the split within the Security Council and its resulting utter inability to act deci-
sively, it is imperative that action should be taken on the national and regional levels to form
alliances to support the Syrian people and to protect them from the daily killing and siege
they are subjected to and to increase levels of support for relief efforts. Additionally, the
principle of universal jurisdiction should be implemented in local tribunals regarding these
crimes in order to conduct fair trials for all those involved.
• SNHR has repeatedly called for the implementation of the ‘Responsibility to Protect’ prin-
ciple in dozens of studies and reports and as a member of the International Coalition for the
Responsibility to Protect (ICRtoP) after all political channels, from the Arab League’s plan to
Mr. Kofi Annan’s plan, were exhausted with no result, along with the Cessation of Hostilities
statements and Astana agreements that followed. Therefore, steps must be taken under
Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations, and the norm of the ‘Responsibility to Pro-
tect’, which was established by the United Nations General Assembly, must be implement-
ed. Without any such action, the Security Council is still actively hindering the protection of
civilians in Syria.
• Renew pressure on the Security Council to refer the case in Syria to the International Crim-
nal Court.
• Work on fulfilling justice and achieving accountability in Syria through the United Nations
General Assembly and the Human Rights Council and work on actively applying the princi-
ple of universal jurisdiction.

OHCHR
The OHCHR should submit a report to the Human Rights Council and other organs of the
United Nations on the death toll mentioned in this report and the incidents of killing that
preceded it, especially since these are a glaring, powerful indication of regular smaller,
less-frequent massacres. The OHCHR should also work to act upon the recommendations
included in this report.
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.

International, Impartial, and Independent Mechanism (IIIM)
Address the cases mentioned in this report and previous reports. SNHR is willing to cooperate and provide further evidence and data.

European Union and United States of America
Support the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism that was established in accordance with General Assembly Resolution 71/248, adopted on December 21, 2016, and establish local tribunals that enjoy universal jurisdiction, to address the war crimes perpetrated in Syria.

Syrian regime
• Stop treating the Syrian state as a private family property.
• Cease the terrorization of the Syrian people through killing using every conceivable means (bombing, siege, torture, displacement…)
• Take full responsibility for the legal and material repercussions of its actions, and compensate victims and their families from the Syrian state’s resources.

Russian regime
• Launch investigations into the incidents that resulted in civilian casualties, make the findings of these investigations public for the Syrian people, and hold the people involved accountable.
• Compensate all affected facilities and centers, and reconstruct and rehabilitate them. Also, compensate all the victims’ families, who were killed by the current Russian regime, as well as the all the wounded.
• Immediately cease bombing hospitals, protected structures and artefacts, and civilian areas, and respect customary international humanitarian law.

The Coalition (international coalition forces and Syrian Democratic Forces)
• The states of the coalition must unequivocally and sincerely acknowledge that some of their bombardment operations have resulted in the killing of innocent civilians. Rather than resorting to denial of well-documented facts, these states should take speedy steps to launch serious investigations, and immediately compensate and apologize to the victims and those who were affected.
• Those states supporting the SDF should apply pressure on these forces in order to compel them to cease all of their violations in all the areas and towns under their control.
• All forms of support, weapons and otherwise, should be suspended until the SDF commits to implementing the previous recommendations. This is primarily the responsibility of the supporting states. Providing the SDF with weapons and support while knowing that these can be and have been used in war crimes or crimes against humanity can be seen as a contribution to these crimes.

**Armed opposition factions**
Ensure the protection of civilians in all areas under their control. Also, armed opposition factions should distinguish between civilian and military targets, and cease any indiscriminate attacks.

**Acknowledgment and Condolences**
Our thanks to the residents, victims’ families, eyewitnesses, and local community activists who contributed effectively to this report. Also, our most heartfelt condolences to the victims’ families and friends.