

الائتلاف الوطني لقوى
الثورة و المعارضة السورية



National Coalition of Syrian
Revolution and Opposition Forces

Representative Office to the United Nations

15 August 2013

Mr. Ban Ki-moon
United Nations Secretary-General
United Nations, Room S-3800
New York, NY 10017

ACTION
COPY

Kane / Feltman
LSC
Cdc
S'Brien / Amos
AG

TRANSMISSION NOTE:



Your Excellency,

As the Representative Office to the United Nations for the Syrian National Coalition, we would like to draw to your attention a new report developed by our team documenting some of the heinous war crimes committed by the Assad Regime during the holy month of Ramadan.

Please find attached a transmission of this report, which covers the period between 8 July - 7 August 2013. The evidence used to compile this report was gathered from activists on the ground, corroborated by civilian testimonies and supported by photographic and video coverage. Due to the security situation in Syria, this report is limited in its ability to cover the full scale of assaults on the civilian population. However, crimes of particular gravity are the regime's aerial bombardments, shelling and use of chemical weapons in the Yarmouk refugee camp and the use of chemical weapons in Adra and Douma.

We ask that the United Nations Security Council take immediate action to support measures that will ensure the delivery of humanitarian aid to the vulnerable population and take the necessary safeguards to ensure the protection of our civilian population. ✓

The Coalition continues to be ready to cooperate fully with members of the UN to conduct comprehensive investigations and deliver humanitarian aid into all territories under our control.

Sincerely,

Dr. Najib Ghadbain
UN Representative of the Syrian Coalition

الاتحاد الوطني لقوى
الثورة و المعارضة السورية



National Coalition of Syrian
Revolution and Opposition Forces

Representative Office to the United Nations

Documentation of Assad regime atrocities committed during Ramadan 2013

Executive Summary

The period between 13 July and 5 August 2013 witnessed some of the most appalling massacres in Syrian history. The most heinous of these crimes occurred in the village of Al Bayda in Banyas where Assad regime forces burned 13 people alive, including women and children. The slaughter by knife of 17 civilians, including women and children, at the hands of "shabiha" in al-Sukhna in Homs province, also constitutes another in the long list of crimes committed by the Assad regime and its supporters.

In addition to events such as these, the regime undertook extensive aerial bombardment, resulting in at least 10 separate massacres, in which many of those killed were women and children. Such massacres occurred in Sameen, Areeha, Maghara and Saraqab in the countryside of Idlib. Field executions were recorded in Al Zara in the countryside west of Homs, Al Qaboun and in the countryside of Damascus.

Multiple parties were responsible for the commitment of a range of war crimes in Syria. "Shabiha," "peoples' committees," informal sectarian groups and Hizbullah militants all committed atrocities. However, it is clear that the Assad regime and its forces bear the greatest responsibility for the crimes recorded in this document and countless others throughout the two-year conflict.

1. Background

Hafez Assad died on 10 June 2000 after ruling Syria for a period of 30 years. His regime was known for its brutality--most notably in Hama in the 1980's, where his forces kidnapped, imprisoned, and massacred thousands of civilians. His government was characterized by a strong security apparatus that permeated all walks of life. This system suppressed personal freedoms and allowed the government to engage in extrajudicial arrests of political opponents, many of whom were imprisoned for up to 25 years and/or executed. After Hafez Assad's death, the security apparatus pressured the People's Council serving at the time to amend the constitution, allowing Bashar Assad--Hafez' son--to take power. This amendment changed the required age of the president from 40 years of age to 34 years of old, which was Bashar Assad's age at the time. The constitutional amendment was procedurally invalid and did not comply with the requirements of the Syrian constitution in 2000. Thus,

Bashar Assad became president of the Syrian Republic through unlawful means. Since then, his administration has been distinguished by severe political and economic corruption. Under Bashar, the Syrian economy has deteriorated, and according to some estimates, a quarter of the population lives below the poverty line. Furthermore, his regime actively uses extrajudicial detention against all known political opponents and puts leading Syrian thinkers on trial.

In this environment of limited personal freedoms and rampant corruption, Syrian people took to the streets in March of 2011. After the first few days, government forces fired live rounds into the peaceful demonstrations, which had spread throughout much of the country. When the protesters refused to leave the streets, Bashar Assad's regime launched a full-scale military operation, employing weapons and tactics banned by international law. Assad's forces, along with the "Shabiha" militias and civilian "Social Committees" have committed some of the worst massacres in history. Syrian activists and civilians have been subject to random kidnappings, arbitrary arrests, extrajudicial executions, and targeted sexual abuse against detainees with the goal of forcing the displacement of the native populations. The numbers of victims are staggering, and methods of execution cruel. This policy coincided with deliberate starvation campaigns and crippling blockades preventing the delivery of food items and medicine to contested or opposition areas. Thus, many of Assad's tactics in the Syrian conflict have had the secondary effects of disease, starvation, and forced migration, causing more death. In pursuit of security for themselves and their families, 1.9 million Syrians have now fled to surrounding countries, where they live in destitution as refugees. Over 4 million individuals have been internally displaced -- some as many as 10 times. Due to the intransigence of the Russian Federation at the United Nations Security Council, international intervention on behalf of Syrian civilians has been prohibited thus far.

1.1 The time frame and type of offenses covered by the report

This report focuses specifically on crimes committed by the Assad regime during Ramadan (8 July - 7 August 2013).

One of the deadliest months in the Syrian conflict, Assad's forces continued to use heavy weaponry, including but not limited to tanks and mortars, to bombard Syrian cities and towns. His forces were also documented using fighter jets and ballistic missiles to target mosques. This is an especially egregious tactic as Muslims across Syria observed Ramadan beginning on 8 July. These missile attacks were often timed to the nightly group prayer service, which led to the deaths of many who were in targeted mosques.

1.2 Geographical framework of the report

This report covers a large area of the Syrian Arab Republic, acknowledging that it is impossible to obtain information from the entirety of Syrian territory due to security measures, ongoing military operations, the continued blockade of large areas, and the severance of means of communication from these areas. For these reasons it is impossible to comprehensively describe all of crimes committed.

1.3 The methodology used to prepare this report

This report is based on evidence documented by activists in Syria and the corroborated testimonies of civilians in the areas where the crimes were committed. Our researchers also used video clips and photographs to support this report.

2. Evidence of the crimes committed

2.1 Use of chemical weapons

- Shelling of the Yarmouk Refugee Camp with surface-to-surface missiles, mortars, and chemical weapons

On the evening of 21 July, activists in Damascus announced the death of an individual affected by Sarin gas after the regime targeted the Yarmouk Refugee Camp, where Palestinian refugees live alongside Palestinian Resistance groups close to the regime. According to our sources, this is not the first time the Yarmouk camp has been targeted with chemical weapons.

According to reports from on-site medical workers, 22 civilians were killed on the same day in the southern district of Damascus due to the shelling of civilian homes with surface-to-surface missiles.

- Shelling of Adra and Douma with chemical weapons

On 5 August 2013 the cities of Adra and Douma were shelled with missiles carrying chemical warheads. This led to the injury and death of many civilians.

It has been proven by a number of external sources that Assad's forces have used chemical weapons against civilians. In the absence of international intervention and despite these reports, Assad continues to use all means at his disposal, including chemical weapons. Because this type of weapon causes fear and panic, the cities targeted by the regime have emptied as civilians flee to areas of greater security. In addition to the incidents in Daraya and the eastern section of Damascus, there have been unconfirmed reports of chemical weapons use in the Idlib province.

2.2 Slaughter and incineration

Bashar Assad's forces used excessive violence as a tool of intimidation. Its actions have fostered a culture of impunity, which has given free rein to other extreme acts of violence, including by opposition forces. Assad forces have applied this policy during the past month in several locations, including:

- Bayda – Banyas second massacre of 2013

On Sunday 21 July regime forces set fire to a family residence in the village of Al Bayda, burning alive a family of 13 people including four women and six children. Three men from the same family were executed on the same day. These atrocities were committed in the context of a regime siege of the village. They then entered the village from three positions on Saturday 30 July only after severely shelling a number of homes.

Al Bayda, which is directly on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea, had already seen a massive military campaign on 2 May 2013. Hundreds of innocent people were killed by the “Shabiha” militia, which was en route to Ras al-Naba’a, where they carried out a similar operation.

- 23 July 2013 massacre in Homs eastern countryside

In Sukhna (eastern Homs countryside), Assad forces raided a village and killed seventeen people with knives before burning and mutilating their bodies.

The two preceding examples are not isolated incidents; rather, committing war crimes has become pursued and systematic behavior by Assad’s forces, the “Shabiha,” and the “Social Committees.”

2.3 Indiscriminate bombing of civilian areas

In early April, with the help of Iran and Hizbullah, the regime launched a massive military campaign in areas near the Lebanese border (Tal Kalakh, Al Qusayr, and other villages) and northern Syrian territory such as Aleppo and the mountains of Latakia. Despite the initial push, the regime has since seen losses in Aleppo, the Latakia countryside and strategic points in Idleb, which pushed Hizbullah and regime forces to begin shelling liberated areas from a distance. This Ramadan:

- 13 July – Regime forces targeted and killed a number of paramedics who were working to save people injured by mortar shelling.
- 19 July – Regime forces fired a rocket on the Al Andalus School in the Al Dablan district in Homs, which displaced 250 families. Also, the regime targeted the school with its fighter jet which led to the death of a large number of people. Activists reported that they found the charred bodies under the rubble, but were unable to give a definitive number of victims.
- 29 July – According to activists in Homs, the Housami Mosque was hit by severe mortar shelling during prayer time, which led to the destruction of large portions of the mosque, numerous injuries, and the death of 10 worshippers. This story is corroborated by numerous photos and videos available online.
31 July – According to the consolidated human rights report of the Bureau of Eastern Ghouta, from 29 July to 2 August 2013, the combined forces of the FSA and Islamic Brigades on 29 July 2013 liberated Hittit al Turkman on the road to the airport. This victory was important due to both the strategic location of the village and the mill and surrounding grain storage facilities. When the mills were liberated by the FSA, civilians rushed to collect much-needed flour, as they had been cut off from bread for three months. During this

time the shelling from mortars, 3 surface-to-surface missiles, air raids by fighter jets, and live fire from heavy machine guns and smaller **mounted** mortars did not stop. This led to the injury and deaths of large numbers of FSA fighters and civilians. Data from medical posts in the area report that the number of injured people during the following days was more than 1,000. Their injuries ranged from light to very severe, and over 100 people were killed.

- 14 July – A helicopter dropped an explosive barrel on the village of Maghara in the Idlib countryside which led to the deaths of at least 10 civilians and injured at least 10 people.
- 18 July – Assad regime fighter jets dropped cluster bombs, bombs with white phosphorous war heads, and explosive barrels on Saraqeb in Idlib which led to the death of 15 civilians and the removal of 15 corpses from beneath the rubble of destroyed houses.
- 21 July – The town of Areeha was struck by severe mortar shelling focused on a local market at a peak time during the day in the month of Ramadan, resulting in the deaths of 22 people and the injury of 44 others according to conservative estimates.
- 23 July – Fighter jets dropped cluster bombs on Sirmeen in the Idlib countryside which killed three children and a young man all from the same family.
- 30 July - A fighter jet fired an air-to-ground guided missile, killing 6 people from the same family including a child in the village of Al Atala 40 KM south of Al Hassaka.
- 1 August – At least 22 were killed by mortar shelling on Al Wa'r in western Homs; this was only a few hours after the FSA Brigade Al Haq targeted Assad regime ammunition storage facilities in Wadi Al Thahab, which led to large explosions and the killing of at least 140 regime troops.

Most of the listed actions were carried out by military forces ordered by the military leadership. These actions were frequently employed against civilians who were either in places of worship or trying to secure food items.

2.4 Targeting women, children, and non-combatants

Over the past five months the Assad regime has developed a media system within the military in order to prevent the leakage of videos that would further tarnish the image of the army among the international community and the loyal Syrian population. The regime has succeeded in its efforts to reduce the distribution of such videos as evidenced by the few videos leaked from soldiers' or "Shabihas'" phones uploaded onto YouTube. But this media system could not entirely hide the truth, especially with the increase in crimes committed in areas where the regime is not in control. Many of these crimes have been committed against children who have not been able to attend school for over two years.

- Child victims of regime violence in Nayreb, Aleppo

Tens of people were killed, including 19 children, on the evening of 19 July when regime forces targeted civilian homes with severe mortar shelling, air raids, and rocket attacks on Nayreb, Aleppo.

- 15 women and children killed by regime forces in Andan, Aleppo

On 30 July, a significant number of women and children were killed due to an airstrike by an Assad regime jet on a school in Andan, Aleppo which had been opened to allow children an opportunity to learn in the absence of formal schooling. Activists reported that the number of people killed was 15 and the number of injured was over 50.

2.5 Kidnappings, field executions, and assassinations

In the recent past the regime has attempted to force the FSA to retreat by kidnapping civilians to use as human shields during assaults. This is a blatant violation of international humanitarian law and is contradictory to the Geneva Convention for the protection of civilians during armed conflicts.

- Cattle herders and their livestock were killed on the outskirts of Damascus in Al Qaboun

On 18 July regime forces shot and killed several civilian men herding livestock near one of the entrances to the city of Al Qaboun as they tried to escape to a safer place, given that Al Qaboun had been destroyed and is now uninhabitable. Activists reported that 6 people were killed in this incident.

- 15 July – “People’s Committees” kill village elders in Al Zara in Homs countryside

Armed, pro-regime “People’s Committees” massacred the elders of Al Raza village in Tal Kalakh city in the western countryside of Homs. It is reported that a delegation of elders from Al Zara were headed to Al Qumayriya village, supportive of the regime, when they reached a “People’s Committee” checkpoint in the village of Al Hajr Al Abyad. The members of the “People’s Committee” proceeded to execute the elders from Al Zara village at the checkpoint. A total of 7 were killed and their corpses were left on the side of the road.

- 100 kidnapped civilians in Hama

On 29 July, in the Sawa’eq neighborhood in Hama, regime forces and “shabiha” kidnapped more than 100 civilians according to the Hama Media Office. There are no reports of their fate with fear of their being killed in a mass killing.

2.6 Genocide

Since the emergence of the first report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, which was established on 22 August 2011 by the UN Human Rights Council in its resolution No. s-17/1, many reports have been published by the Commission which demonstrate the gross human rights violations and war crimes committed by Assad regime forces, “shabiha”, “people’s

committees", terrorist Hizbullah militants, with the help of foreign Shiite fighters from Iraq, Yemen, Iran, and other countries. **The last report by the Commission was published on 4 June 2013. It reported on the scale of these crimes, but did not stop Bashar Assad from continuing to commit human rights violations and war crimes.**

The regime instead continues to commit genocide as is evident in Homs. In their efforts to force the civilian population from the city, regime forces have engaged in murder, arson, rape and forced displacement. These actions clearly constitute a concerted effort of ethnic cleansing. These crimes require urgent intervention to stop the slaughter which aims to change the demographic reality on the ground and erase one of the social components of Homs. The responsibility to protect now lies with the international community according to A/RES/60/1, Paragraph 138 – 140.

3. Video Footage Documenting Regime Atrocities

* 15 minute recording of destruction in Homs:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lk0C2fowQZ8>

* Regime forces kill civilians who were trying to remove their cattle herds from the Qaboun neighborhood in Damascus:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FRtxs2NjnO4>

* The 15 July Al Zara massacre

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1pFmeCN-mI0>

* The 14 July Al Maghara massacre in the Idlib countryside:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9TjxMuB6VQs>

* An appalling massacre in Daraa Al Balad (a double bombing):

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yhd0CO2PKPk>

* The massacre of 4 people from the same family in Sirmeen, Idlib:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kz47MR8zdIM>

* A massacre of civilians in Areeha:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lAYcbLF2T6Q>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DvtBz4jKj8E>

* A massacre in Saraqeb:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-eSs_UUBtJY

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k6h-7BgK_sc

* FSA leader wounded due to a poison gas attack

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vEWOYx8kUaY&feature=youtu.be>

* A massacre in Al Dablan, Homs

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vEWOYx8kUaY&feature=youtu.be>

* A massacre of worshippers in Al Hosami Mosque in Al Dablan, Homs

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CZeAyrVn6w>

* Initial images of the massacre in Waer in August 2013

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oX289VYd8bg>

* Video showing the death of animals affected by poison gas in Adra Rural Damascus:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=YLcqi_dE9SU#at=71

* One of the injuries resulting from shelling with chemical weapons on rural Damascus:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SF7jJ8xMoKA&feature=youtu.be>