

White Helmets Statement on Escalation of Systematic Attacks on Civilians and Civilian Infrastructure in Northwestern Syria by the Syrian Regime and Russia

Since October 4th, Northwest Syria has witnessed an escalation in violence through systematic air, artillery, and missile attacks, resulting in the loss of 46 civilian lives, including 13 children and 9 women, and injuring 213 civilians, among them are 69 children and 41 women.

These attacks targeted civilian populations, residential neighborhoods, and civilian infrastructure including 10 schools and educational facilities, 5 mosques, 5 medical facilities including 2 hospitals, 3 displacement camps, and 4 markets. In addition, the regime used globally banned weapons during these attacks, including using cluster munitions in Termanin on 7 October, and the use of incendiary munitions (ignited napalm) on four separate occasions between 4 and 8 October. These weapons are globally banned due to their indiscriminate harm, as well as the long-term civilian harm by leaving behind unexploded remnants that act as landmines for years.

This escalation came after a bloody month and an increased number of attacks on northwest Syria. In September alone, White Helmets (Syria Civil Defence) volunteers responded to more than 223 military attacks. These systematic attacks targeted civilian neighborhoods, vital facilities and infrastructure, crowded areas, as well as White Helmets teams and humanitarian workers. The pattern of targeting suggests an intent to cause as much civilian harm as possible. This blatant disregard for human life and the deliberate targeting of civilians, humanitarian workers and civilian infrastructure constitute war crimes under international humanitarian law.

Northwest Syria is in the midst of a humanitarian catastrophe. The approaching winter and the start of a new wave of displacement will further compound human suffering, on top of a preexisting humanitarian needs from 12 years of crisis and the recent earthquakes. According to the Camp Coordination & Camp Management Cluster (CCCM) 31,300 new displacements have been recorded between 30 September and 6 October, and the number is expected to rise. Displaced families are being evacuated to temporary shelters, and SCD volunteers have been supporting this process by providing transportation to shelters, and medical services to affected people in the shelters, as well as preparing the land to set up new shelter centers in Aleppo countryside and Idlib. The consequences of this displacement will be catastrophic and have impacts across the region. Displaced families are in desperate need of food, clean water, shelter, healthcare, and education.

Humanitarian workers have been no exception to this violence. Since October 4, our volunteers have been subjected to targeted and double-tap strikes while responding in the field in Jisr Alshugour and Idlib, and four White Helmets Centres in Sarmin, Idlib centre, and Ariha have been damaged by the shelling. The international community must condemn in the strongest terms these attacks on humanitarian workers and demand that they are protected and allowed access to affected populations in line with International Humanitarian Law.

The people of Syria have endured years of violence, displacement, and humanitarian crises in continued impunity without any progress towards the implementation of the UN Security Council Resolution 2254. The Assad regime's continued disregard of this resolution, the continued impunity, and the absence of meaningful efforts to broker a political settlement have allowed the regime to continue its deliberate and systematic atrocities against the people of Syria.

This fresh violence has put the lives of 4.5 million Syrians in danger and has worsened the already severe conditions. We are appalled by the lack of international attention to this ongoing escalation and targeting of civilians and civilian infrastructure and humanitarian workers. We call on the international community to act decisively towards a political solution, which is the only true guarantee to civilian protection, and to work through all available legal and diplomatic channels to end impunity for war crimes and crimes against humanity.

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