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Analytical report

Facts of human rights violations in the Idlib de-escalation zone and other districts of Syria

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Introduction

Syrian civilians tell us exactly about the injuries they and their relatives got as a result of the actions of militants and rocket-bombing or artillery attacks by the coalition. People tell how they or their children and relatives lost their sight, hands, and became disabled. The witnesses tell how the militants were shooting at civilians who tried to escape from captured settlements, and those who were captured were then transported to prisons for possible exchange. Many of the interviewed spent several years in militant prisons, and then they were exchanged for militants thanks to the activities of the legitimate government of Syria. The victims mention lack of food, beatings and other humiliations they have experienced in militant prisons, killings of prisoners, and absence of medical care. Witnesses also tell about pillaging which took place in the settlements occupied by terrorists, as well as about the new code of conduct introduced by terrorists in the occupied towns and villages, forced propagation of the “Sharia law” as it was understood by militants.

The testimonies of ordinary Syrian civilians about the bombing by the American coalition are also revealing. Witnesses and victims emphasize that there were no militant positions near the locations where the coalition forces attacked civilians, and only in a few cases the militant positions were at a distance of 200-300 meters from the civilians. In a number of cases, attacks on civilians were deliberate. For example, the coalition forces attacked both those people who escaped from ISIS and tried to cross the Euphrates River, and those who left their homes to escape the threat of bombing, and moved to live in temporary shelters in the fields.

In a significant number of cases, women and children were victims of the coalition. Many of them lost their arms and legs, some of them got blind, burned, received shrapnel wounds to the head, etc. The victims say that during these coalition strikes they were either in their own homes or in the homes of their relatives, and in crowded places - at crossings or at refugee camps.

International humanitarian law¹ establishes legal norms that all parties to a war or armed conflict are obliged to adhere to. These norms guarantee protection to civilians who are not directly involved in hostilities. The United States is a party to the four Geneva Conventions of 1949. Great Britain and France are also parties to these conventions, as well as to the three additional protocols.

One of the basic principles of international humanitarian law is the “principle of distinction.” It requires the parties to the conflict to “distinguish between civilians and combatants.” The implementation of this principle ensures that “attacks can only be directed against combatants” and ensures that attacks “are not directed against

¹ <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde24/8367/2018/en/>

civilians.”² According to international humanitarian law, if civilians do not take part in hostilities, then targeting them is a war crime.

Another crucial principle of international humanitarian law is the prohibition of indiscriminate attacks. Carrying out an indiscriminate attack resulting in the death or injury of a civilian population is a war crime³.

Another principle of international humanitarian law is the principle of proportionality. It prohibits disproportionate attacks that may cause “incidental loss of civilian life, injury to civilians, damage to civilian objects, or a combination thereof, which would be excessive in relation to the concrete and direct military advantage anticipated.”⁴ Carrying out a deliberate disproportionate attack that results in excessive accidental death or injury of the civilian population constitutes a war crime.

It is clear that the militants do not adhere to these conventions, but the coalition of the United States and its allies – France, Great Britain and others are parties to these conventions. It is noteworthy that the witnesses – ordinary Syrian citizens – emphasize that the militants left their locations in towns and villages a few days before the start of the airstrikes and conclude that the American coalition and the militants in Syria acted together. Moreover, some interviewees testify how the US troops arranged evacuation of several ISIS leaders, and their escorts were shot from helicopters.

According to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, a “war crime” means:

1) Grave breaches of the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, namely, any of the following acts against persons or property protected under the provisions of the relevant Geneva Convention:

- Willful killing;
- Torture or inhuman treatment, including biological experiments;
- Willfully causing great suffering, or serious injury to body or health;
- Extensive destruction and appropriation of property, not justified by military necessity and carried out unlawfully and wantonly;

² International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Customary IHL Study, Rule 1. The Principle of Distinction between Civilians and Combatants

³ Article 20(b)(ii) of the 1996 ILC Draft Code of Crimes against the Peace and Security of Mankind

⁴ International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Customary IHL Study, Practice Relating to Rule 14. Proportionality in Attack, Section A. General, I. Treaties Additional Protocol I, Article 51(5)(b) of the 1977 Additional Protocol I https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/customary-ihl/eng/docs/v2_cha_chapter4_rule14

2) Other serious violations of the laws and customs applicable in international armed conflict, within the established framework of international law, namely, any of the following acts:

- Intentionally directing attacks against the civilian population as such or against individual civilians not taking direct part in hostilities;
- Intentionally directing attacks against civilian objects, that is, objects which are not military objectives;
- Intentionally launching an attack in the knowledge that such attack will cause incidental loss of life or injury to civilians or damage to civilian objects or widespread, long-term and severe damage to the natural environment which would be clearly excessive in relation to the concrete and direct overall military advantage anticipated.

If the actions of the American coalition do not fall under all of these cases, then the ISIS militants have absolutely committed all of the above war crimes. According to international humanitarian law, the United States bears full responsibility not only for the killings of Syrian civilians committed by the Americans, but also for the actions of pro-American militants whom they have trained, armed and whose activities they pay for.

Killings and shelling of civilians

The prohibition of the killing of civilians was recognized as early as in the Lieber Code of 1863. The killing of civilians was included in the list of war crimes in the Statute of the International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg.

Common article 3 of the Geneva Conventions prohibits “attacks to the life and physical integrity, in particular, all kinds of killing” of civilians. In all four Geneva Conventions, the “premeditated murder” of protected persons is listed among the serious violations of the Conventions. The prohibition of murder is recognized as one of the main guarantees in Additional Protocols I and II.

Murder is also listed among war crimes in the Statute of the International Criminal Court for both international and non-international armed conflicts, and in the Statutes of the International Criminal Tribunals for the Former Yugoslavia and Rwanda and the Special Court for Sierra Leone. The prohibition of the killing of civilians is enshrined in many military regulations and manuals, as well as contained in the legislation of many states.

According to numerous testimonies of victims and witnesses, ISIS militants deliberately killed civilians in the towns and villages they had occupied. This is largely due to the fact that civilians supported the legitimate Syrian government. In addition, the militants purposefully killed representatives of the civil administration and shot at people who wanted to escape from the settlements.



Murhej Arad Al-Humaidan, Deir ez-Zor Governorate, Jibli, 68 years old, peasant: *“My cousin’s name was Ahmad Traud, his house was attacked, he was killed, his son Nazar was also killed, now his brother is lame. Ahmad was killed because he was an official, he worked for the government, so he was against the Free Syrian Army and against the ISIS. He didn’t want our country to be destroyed. They attacked him at 2.00 a.m It was in 2015 or 2016, the militants killed 18-20 people in our village.*

When the ISIL people came to us, they started intimidating us, they made us very scared. They cut off the heads of those who cooperated with the government and hung them on the gates. They were using schools as accommodation, after that they destroyed the schools, they destroyed even water storages. We asked about those water tanks, located at a height, why they destroyed them, that was just potable water. They said because if the Syrian government returns, they will use these water

tanks for snipers, they will put snipers at the top of the tanks. We were obliged to pay 'zakat' (tax) for the harvest that we have grown on our Syrian land. They said they took only the money, but they lied - they took everything. They took 100%. They use the funds from these taxes to help only the people who support and help them."



Question: *"What did the militants do? How did they treat people, women, men?"*

Abdulrazak Mustafa Al-Shihada, Raqqa Governorate, Zor Shamar, 57 years old, peasant: *"If anyone dared to say bad things about the militants, they could easily kill him. If they get to know that this person is a civil servant, they will kill him. The militants captured my friend, he was a party member, his name was Hussein Mnuekh. They were asking him if he was a party member. He disappeared. He was sent to Tel-Abyad, people are said to vanish there. That was where he disappeared."*



Ali Abdelkarim Shaifun, Idlib Governorate, Shtabraq, 47 years old, disabled, 47 years old: *"We lived in the town of Shtabraq when the militants attacked us. Me with my father and sisters. The militants killed my whole family – my father, sisters and my brother, totally six people. It was on April 24, 2015. A grenade was thrown into the house where my parents were – my sister and two brothers died. The brother's wife was shot when she tried to leave the village – right in the street. My father and I were captured, the militants cut off my father's head and put it between his legs."*



Ismail Ibrahim Horo, Idlib Governorate, Shtabraq, 40 years old, odd-jobber: *"For 3 years and 3 months I spent in captivity by terrorists – from April 25, 2015 to July 5, 2018. My father used to be the Mayor of Shtabraq. When the militants began to surround our village from all sides, my father, my mother, sister and other residents of the village tried to escape from Shtabraq. When he was 1 km away from the village, he was shot by the sniper. The car hit the wall and turned over. My sister Samar came up to her father and she was shot by the sniper. She was 16. Lots of people were injured, many died, the rest were captured."*



Pictured: Ibrahim Yunis Huru, the mayor of Shtabraq and his daughter Samar, 16 years old, killed by a militant sniper

Ismail Ibrahim Horo, Idlib Governorate, Shtabraq, 40 years old, odd-jobber:
“When my brother and I were captured, at first they beat us with everything they could – sticks, wires, pieces of iron, sometimes very hard. There were militants from different states, some Dagestanis, some Arabs, they spoke the dialect of the Persian Gulf. After that they delivered us to the Harem prison.

In prison, they began to put pressure on us, they didn’t give us bread, my brother was killed 5 days after his arrest. My brother’s name was Farez Ibrahim Khorro, he was 25. They tortured him a lot, and then killed. There were battles between our army and the militants, the militants lost lots of soldiers when fighting near some village and, in order to raise the spirit of the militants, they killed my brother. Another brother, Hassan Ibrahim Horror, who was captured, and they got his head cut off. He was 27. His wife was also captured as a prisoner. She was four months pregnant, gave birth to a daughter there. My cousin was also put in that prison. I had nine close relatives there.”



Pictured: Farez Ibrahim Horro (in the second photo, blue clothes), a resident of Shtabraq, Idlib Governorate, 25 years old, killed by militants in Harem prison to raise the spirit of the militants

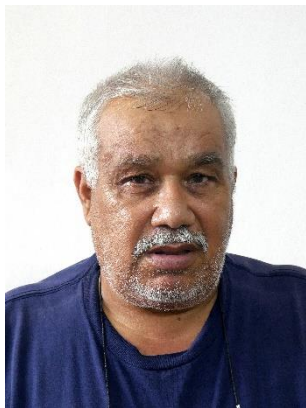


Pictured: Hassan Ibrahim Horro, a resident of Shtabraq, Idlib Governorate, 27 years old, killed by the militants in Harem prison and his daughter Samar Hassan Horro, who was born in Harem prison



Syrian army.”

Ibrahim Imad Al-Sheikh Ibrahim, Idlib Governorate, Inbada, 35 years old, civil servant, 35 years old: *“The militants attacked our village about 5 a.m. I lived next to my parents, but when I went to their house, I didn’t see anyone there because they had escaped from the attack. My father hid his family and came back to our house to protect it. My sister was with him. When the militants saw them, they started shooting and killed them immediately. They were killed immediately. I was hiding from the militants and managed to reach the*



Ibrahim Hassan Mahmoud, Idlib Governorate, Harem, 58 years old, peasant: *“They wanted us to leave Harem because they wanted to steal everything from our houses – household appliances, cars.*

About 20,000 people lived in Harem, but only 1,500 of them managed to escape. When we escaped from there and passed through the checkpoint in Kafr Takharim, if the militants found out that a person was from Harem, they also killed him. In Kafr Takharim, 170 persons from Harem were killed. They were asking us - who are from Harem? If anyone was saying that he was from Harem - they immediately killed him. If anyone still stayed in this district - they could find him and later they killed this person. Or they took them, and after that they killed them.



Juma Muhammad Mahmud, was disabled as a result of a shot fired by militants in 2012, Idlib Governorate, Harem, 38 years old (photo 33 - Juma Muhammad Mahmud):

“I usually went shopping, from my home to the store to buy something - things, eggs, hummus, kefir. I was standing outside, in the street, and I felt something hit my head.”

Ibrahim Hassan Mahmoud, Idlib Governorate, Harem, 58 years old, peasant: *“He was standing near a 2-floor house. His parents were asking him to go back home, but he didn’t have enough time to do that. He got a bullet in his head. Jabhat An-Nusra militants were shooting at everyone. Even when they saw some animal - a sheep, or a dog - they started shooting at it.*



Muteb Samir Khaims, Idlib Governorate, Idlib, 39 years old, construction worker: *“When the militants were pushing forward, they killed many of my relatives and friends. My brother was killed. My elder brother was a shop owner, he was selling meat. Some people came and started destroying his store, where the owner and his family lived, when he went outside and asked why they had done this, they ran away, escaped. Next day they met him at the road, and they shot him immediately. They were gunmen from the Free Syrian Army.*

They obeyed Feilak al-Sham.”



Nasima Mohammed Zanza, Idlib Governorate, al-Fu'ah, 69 years old, retired: *“During the month of Ramadan, the first year of the blockade, one mine hit the house, my daughter, aged 23, and my granddaughter, died, my daughter was a student at the institute. 40 days later her father, and the granddaughter’s father were also killed.*



Nashrad Mashhad Skhada, Idlib Governorate, Mbodi, 58 years old, school worker: *“On August 4, 2013, at around 4.30 a.m. the militants occupied our village. We were captured and taken prisoners. After 30 hours we wanted to escape, but the militants started shooting at us and my daughter Yasmin, she was 9 years old at that time, was wounded in the legs and stomach.”*



Yasmin Nashrad Shkhada, Idlib Governorate, Mbodi, student, 19 years old: *“My brother and my mother came to the militants, but they said: We won’t give her any medical treatment.” Then I was transported to Turkey, where they performed an operation, put my leg into plaster. The doctor contacted my father and he took me back to Syria. When I had my medical treatment in Turkey, there was a nurse and one doctor who spoke Arabic, she translated from Turkish.*

They said that the militants came and asked the doctor to sell the girl's organs. But the doctor there refused to do that, as he managed to find my parents in Syria."



Khudi Muhammad Said Baher, Idlib Governorate, al-Fu'ah, 50 years old, housewife: *"We were starving. The militants captured my husband, then they shot him and burned his body. I had three daughters left with me. Almost all my cousins were killed."*



Or Najib Salin, Idlib Governorate, Bluta, 36 years old, housewife: *"On August 4, 2013, the militants attacked at 4 a.m., we wanted to escape by car, but could not leave because the roads were already blocked. We stopped and got out of the car and my son Haidara was walking about there when the militants shot his the arm. His brother Hayat was also wounded, when he was walking near his car. He was 8 years old. They were shooting at us when we got off the car."*



Pictured: Haidara Majgur Yasin, 11 years old, Idlib Governorate, Bluta, wounded hands as a result of an attack by militants



Wad Salum Mariam, Idlib Governorate, Baruda, 29 years old, housewife, 29 years old: *It happened back in 2013. We were at home, we heard a blow not far from us, everyone ran to the car, we left for the village of Budda, and the militants were already there, they shot at us, I received three shots, one at the arm, one at the stomach, the third - at the thigh.*”

Question: *“Did the militants shot your shoulder, thigh, and stomach deliberately?”*

Wad Salum Mariam, Idlib Governorate, Baruda, 29 years old, housewife, 29 years old: *“I was pregnant, standing there in front of them, and they saw it. The first shot hit the stomach and the child died. There were about 10 people around me. All together we managed to flee. My sister was also wounded there. My father, my brother, my uncle, his wife, cousin, cousin, children of relatives, all died. 31 persons were killed at that time.*



Muhammad Badr Dib, Idlib Governorate, Bluta, 64 years old, retired: *“I live next to my parents, with my parent, we live next to each other. My brother lives 100 meters from me. On August 4, 2013 at 4.30 a.m. we heard automatic rifles shooting. The militants were coming in from the village of Baruda. They blocked the house where my brother was living and started shooting at it. My brother was calling me at that time. After that I got to know that my brother was killed by a mine blast in his own house Children were scared and were asking for help. The militants captured his son, who was 16 years old, took him away and nobody knows where he is now. His name is Amjad Gazir Dib. We still don't know anything about him. After that, his wife, his brother and his son, who is 10 months old, were taken away and sent to Baruda. She was asking why they killed her husband, where was her son? She was crying and asking where to find her son, and a man speaking with an accent, probably a foreigner, told her to shut up. ‘If you don't shut up, our Amir will come and beat you.’ After that Amir came and asked, ‘Who is this woman? What does she want?’ She said she wanted to find her son and asked why they had killed her husband. Amir said that they did not kill him, grabbed his pistol and emptied a magazine into her. She was survived by a girl called Zena Gazir Dib, a seven-grader, and a 10-month child called Vityat Gazir Dib. The militants took them all and brought to different destinations. It took us a year to take them back.”*



Ramid Badiya Selim, Idlib Governorate, Bluta, 45 years old, odd-jobber, 45 years old: *“On August 4, 2013 at 4 a.m the militants attacked us. My father was 90 years old. They cut his head. My father’s sister was executed by shooting. My wife’s body was found some time later. I could only recognize her by her hair. About 100 bullets were fired at my brother. I saw on the Internet afterwards – they put a photo of Sheikh Hassan Nasrullah on his stomach and wrote that this was a man who wanted to kill him.*”

Another brother of mine lived in Latakia. He came home. At that time the militants were on the offensive. I saw a video on the Internet of the militants killing him. His photo was posted online. We don’t know anything about my third brother. Where he was killed, or at least where we can find his body. All three wives of my brothers were killed by the militants. And we also don’t know where their bodies are, and where their children are. My brother’s son was shot right in front of me. His name was Alyam Azen Sevi, he was 4 years old. About 30 of my relatives were killed.”



Pictured: Aya Nasr Fakhro, 14 years old, schoolgirl, Asma Nasr Fakhro, 12 years old, schoolgirl, Idlib Governorate, Shtabraq

Question: *“What happened to you? How did you end up in a militant prison?”*

Asma Nasr Fakhro, Idlib Governorate Shtabraq, a 12-year old school girl *“When the terrorists started to take over our village, we and our parents managed*

to escape by car. The terrorists were shooting at our car, I was wounded, and my parents were killed. I got a bullet in my arm.”



Pictured: wounds resulting from shelling by the militants of a car in which Asma Nasr Fakhro (a schoolgirl, 12 years old) and her family tried to escape from Shtabraq, Idlib Governorate. Asma's parents were killed in the shelling

Asma Nasr Fakhro, Idlib Governorate Shtabraq, a 12-year old school girl *After I was wounded, the militants took me to Al Bab where I got some medical treatment. Then they took us to different places, I do not know the names of these places, but*

they constantly brought us everywhere, forced us to wear clothes according to Sharia law and learn the Quran.”



Fayad Ibrahim Mariam, Idlib Governorate, Hambushia, 52 years old, civil servant: *At 7 a.m we were at home and heard automatic rifles shooting. We came out and asked what was happening. We heard that the militants were coming in. I took my children, we couldn't escape through the door of our house, we escaped through the window in the room of the house.*

When we were running away, I got a chest wound. My wife wanted to help me, but I told her that I would help myself and told her to run on. When they ran 50 meters, the militants saw them and shot them all. My wife and children were killed. Khalaf Fayat Ibrahim was 15 years old, Maraj Fayad Ibrahim was 14 years old. My wife, her name is Vissam Ali Torgush She was 38. My father was with them, he was also killed. Ibrahim Bayam, he was 60 years old. I was unconscious for about 15 minutes. When I regained consciousness, I didn't know what had happened, I walked on and after 50 meters I saw all my children, they were lying on the ground and all were dead.”



Gaida Yousef Hammoud, Idlib Governorate, Shtabraq, 43 years old, textile worker: *“On January 15, 2015, at seven in the morning, I was on my way to work to a textile factory and a mine exploded under the bus. I was wounded, so I have traces of that wound on my face. In addition, I had a shrapnel wound to my arm and leg. Because of the damaged nerve, I cannot use two fingers on my hand. There were 30 people on the bus, only three girls survived, the rest died. These terrorists are mulhids – they do not know Allah, they do not recognize him, they are not afraid of him.”*

Question: *“Who put that mine there?”*

Gaida Yousef Hammoud, Idlib Governorate, Shtabraq, 43 years old, textile worker: *“Terrorists. All around there was nobody, only them, that's the reason why it happened so.*

The life of ordinary citizens of Syria in the territories captured by militants

In the occupied territories of Syria, the militants established their own code of conduct in accordance with their understanding of “Sharia law.” Women were forbidden to walk unaccompanied by men, a mandatory requirements was to cover up face, residents of the occupied territories were subjected to corporal punishment for smoking or other violation of the newly established rules. They prohibited women and girls to visit public schools. Women and children were only allowed to study the Quran, and boys were taught handling weapons.



Ahmad Muhammad Mahmud, Idlib Governorate, Harem, retired, 60 years old: *“Women are not allowed to show their face, so they ordered all women to cover their faces, use hijabs or veils so that nobody could see them. They could choose any woman, take her and make her become a wife of one of the militants. It doesn’t matter if she wants it or not, she will live with that person, and he will be her husband. If I have a daughter, she is 15 years old, then they will find out that there is a 15-year-old girl, they will immediately take her away from there, they give her to any person among them.”*



Question: *“What did the militants do? How did they treat people, women, men?”*

Abdulrazak Mustafa Al-Shihada, Raqqa Governorate, Zor Shamar, 57 years old, peasant: *“Our life was really hard at that time. If they managed to find anyone who was a smoker, they immediately put this person in prison. I was walking near the house, a minibus with militants stopped, they did a kind of inspection, checked my pockets and found a pack of cigarettes, so they punished me with 40 stick strikes and I paid a \$10 fine.”*



Murhej Arad Al-Humaidan, Deir ez-Zor Governorate, Jibli, 68 years old, peasant: *“People ran away from them because they could get 100 blows with a stick because of a cigarette. They could beat women who didn’t wear a burqa, such situations often happened in the market. My son’s wife was whipped once in the market. She is 22 years old, her name is Alya Hammoud Zwuadi al-Abbed, she was punished with 50 stick blows in the market for not wearing a burqa.”*



Sausan Ahmed Al-Jaber, Raqqa Governorate, Ghanem al-Ali, 35 years old, housewife: *“Being under control of the militants, women had to wear burqas so that nobody would see their faces, they were not even allowed to talk to men. They said that there is a law prescribing women to go around all covered up.”*



Hamada Mahmoud Al-Saju, Deir ez-Zor Governorate, Western Shrida, 48 years old, housewife: *“My house was located near the school building where the militants used to live. I was scared to leave my house. Women are allowed to walk out in the street only accompanied by a man, if they see a man walking with a woman they asked them to show the documents confirming that they were husband and wife. I was afraid that if I go out of the house with my son, the militants would take my son away.”*

If a woman went out of her house without a burqa, she was sent to a Sharia court, where she was cursed and beaten with sticks. I was not among those who were punished, but I heard that 10 or 15 women were punished.”



Juriya Muhammad al-Khalaf, Deir ez-Zor Governorate, Sabha, 43 years old, housewife: *“There were militants in Sabha, they established their Muslim, Islamic state called ISIL. We were prohibited to leave our houses. Those who go out of the house, had to cover their faces, only leave their eyes open.”*



Ahmad Muhammad Mahmud, Idlib Governorate, Harem, 60 years old, retired: *“They did not allow us to go to school. Women were prohibited to go to school, they were only allowed to learn how to read the Quran. My daughter is very young, they took her away, made her wear black clothes covering her body completely, and sent her to a special place where they will teach her their rules and read the Quran. My daughter was 14. The boys were taken away and taught how to handle weapons, they began to train them to become militants. They were offered money for this. It was considered to be a salary. They took boys aged 10-15. They spent about 4 hours every day to train the militants, the training usually took 4 months, then they were sent them to war.”*

“There, in Harem, my sister left. They didn’t managed to escape. For today there is no road to go out of that location. Their life there is truly hard. We didn’t have enough food to eat. She says that they were not allowed leave the house where they lived, only her husband could go out to do his work, to earn some money for living. It was enough just for one day. He can only earn 3,000 Syrian liras a day, so he tells his son, who is 13 years old, to find and do some job to get some more money.”

In addition, residents of territories controlled by militants talk about the difficult financial situation of ordinary citizens, about pillaging by militants, about the resale of humanitarian aid by militants.

Pillaging is defined as a war crime in the report of the Responsibility Commission established after the First World War, as well as in the Statute of the International Military Tribunal (Nuremberg) established after the Second World War. Under the Fourth Geneva Convention pillaging is also prohibited.

The Hague Regulations prohibit pillaging under any circumstances. According to the Statute of the International Criminal Court, “Pillaging a town or

place, even when taken by assault,” is a war crime during international armed conflicts.

Pillage is prohibited in many military regulations and instructions.

Pillaging is considered a crime under the laws of many states.

This prohibition was applied in a number of cases studied by the national courts after the Second World War.

Pillaging is also a crime during non-international armed conflicts when it comes to domestic violence.

For example, in its decision about the Military Junta case in 1985, the National Court of Appeal of Argentina applied the rule on the prohibition of pillage contained in the Hague Regulations to actions committed in a situation of domestic violence.



Muteb Samir Khaims, Idlib Governorate, Idlib, 39 years old, construction worker: *“We have recently had a state exam at schools, and Jehab An-Nusra banned these exams. All children were ready for the exam, they had to take such an exam - but the militants prohibited the exams, they said we had no right to do that. We are waiting for the moment when we can liberate ourselves or fight against the international coalition.”*



Pictured: Waffa Abdulrahman Habbush, 42 years old, housewife, Viam Mahmoud Habbush, 24 years old, housewife and Rua Mahmoud Habbush, 12 years old, schoolgirl, Idlib Governorate, Orekho.

Waffa Abdulrahman Habbush, Idlib Governorate, Orekho, 42 years old, housewife: *“In 2015, the militants occupied Orekho which is 15 minutes away by car from Idlib. It was truly hard time, we had to stay at our houses and were scared to go out. If our son fell ill, we couldn’t take him to the hospital. We could only go shopping to the store and back, buy the necessary food, and all this lasted for 5 years. I went shopping once a week, and the maximum distance from my house was 15 minutes away.*

They forced us to follow the Shariah laws. They prescribed to wear clothes in a way that only women’s eyes could be seen. What Viyam is wearing right now, is not good clothes at all. The rules applied for little girls as well, it was all prohibited.”



Ahmad Muhammad Mahmud, Idlib Governorate, Harem, 60 years old, retired: *“They (the militants from Jabhat An-Nusra and Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham_ stole everything people had, every family had, their stores, their land, they stole it and they gave that to other people who worked with them. The militants destroyed our house, our car, I had two cars, they crushed them and set them on fire.”*



Muteb Samir Khaims, Idlib Governorate, Idlib, 39 years old, construction worker: *“Jabhat an-Nusra receive the humanitarian aid and distribute it among its soldiers or militants who cooperate with them. There is a place called Baba Haru, a settlement near the border with Turkey, they open a box there, and they will close it putting a different brand and label, and sell it to the market. They change marking and labels and use it for their militants.”*

“There is a whole factory in Babi Haru that was repackaging the humanitarian aid. That’s not a secret. All people know this, and they know that this plant is for Jehab An-Nusra and they make money from everything.”

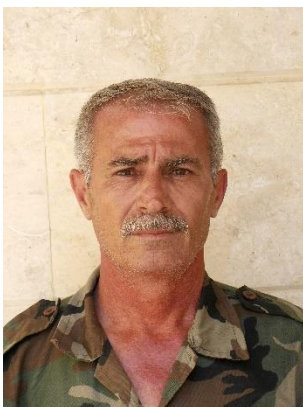


Hasin Jamil Asad, Idlib Governorate, al-Fu'ah, 51 years old, electrician: *“When the militants surrounded our village, we were unable to do our agricultural work during the first year of blockade. Then we started growing vegetables, tomatoes, cucumbers. And that was the way we used to live. Many people who were simple agriculture workers were killed by snipers. There was a man, he got wounded with 5 bullets and he’s still alive.*

We starved. One has children. It used to be so that he didn’t eat himself, but he was giving all his meal to the children. Diseases were the biggest risk. Because there were no fruits, no normal food, no vitamins, there were many diseases, liver inflammation and others. The militants kept shooting at the water storage points. The main problem is weakness, pain in joints and muscles, scabies, allergies due to dirty water... memory loss due to contusions.”



Muhammad Jamil Al-Din, Idlib Governorate, al-Fu'ah, 71 years old, retired: *“We starved heavily. We could see meat only in the pictures, on TV screens. We grew vegetables, tomatoes, cucumbers... They were our main food to survive. We picked even wild plants to eat. During the blockade, many people died of hunger. About 200-300 persons. Most of them were children. Because we were starving. It was a true famine...”*



Mustafa Musa Muhammad, Idlib Governorate, Kafriya, 51 years old, member of militia: *“We had no food to eat, no water at all. We depended on the rain, as we had to pick the rain water. About 300 persons died of hunger and cold. Let alone some other diseases. Most of them were children.*

There are 6 persons in my family, me, my wife and children. I could cook a kilo of rice only once per 2-3 days. Without any salt, any oil, without anything. One kilo of rice cost 10,000 liras, flour cost 8,000 - 10,000 liras per one kilo. We had no bread at all. We were picking the eatable grass, to have at least something to eat.

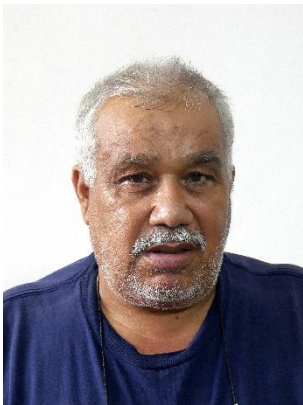


Nasima Mohammed Zanza, Idlib Governorate, al-Fu'ah, 69 years old, retired: *“If the militants could block the access to air for us to breathe, they would block it completely for us. We had no more food left at home. I tried to cook bread from rice, I tried to use other products, but it didn’t work out. Unfortunately, many children died some time after their birth, because our hospitals almost did not work, though our doctors did what they could.”*



Muteb Samir Khaims, Idlib Governorate, Idlib, 39 years old, construction worker: *“Now we have information that the life there is very difficult, as our people said, they live under control of An-Nusra militants, they are obliged to pay an Islamic tax from every person every month. Everything we have, stores, land, for example, a tree of olives or pistachios, they made us pay for that, we paid money to Jhab An-Nusra.*

If a person works all day long, he will not be able to buy food for his children at least not to be hungry, because it is very expensive and all the money we receive, we have to pay to Jabhat An-Nusra. If they don’t like the way they work, they won’t give them any humanitarian aid, which is international and intended for ordinary people.”



Ibrahim Hassan Mahmoud, Idlib Governorate, Harem, 58 years old, peasant: *“Militants from the Juhad Idlib group blocked the area and didn’t allow anyone to enter and leave from there. We could eat only the food that we had at home. It lasted for four months.*

A resident of Raqqa, Raqqa Governorate, on the phone: *“Life became very difficult now, everything is expensive, one gas cylinder for household needs costs 40,000 liras, bread is very expensive. If a person, for example, has three children and he works all day, he will not be able to buy at least food for one of them, for one child. Jabhat An-Nusra steal a lot of money, for example, if you buy bread or*

vegetables or fruits, you have to pay them money, this is for Jabhat An-Nusra, they get money for Jabhat An-Nusra.

After 9 p.m., any person who is driving a car or walking outside in the street, they can stop him on his way and either steal the car or steal everything in the car. Ordinary civilians live very poorly, except for those who join Jabhat Al-Nusra, or fight on their side. These people's life is pretty good. The militants stole all the metals which contained brass, and sold them to Turkey. If they see a child and this child has some staff made of brass, they will punish him.

Life in the locations surrounded by the terrorists

It should be mentioned separately about such crimes of militants as the blockade of two villages - al-Fu'ah and Kafriya in Idlib Governorate. Residents of these villages spent several years surrounded by militants, being subjected to regular sniper attacks and artillery shelling. In addition, residents talk about the terrorist attack at Rashidin, committed by militants when the villagers were entering the territories controlled by the legitimate government of Syria.

The residents of those villages told us how they managed to survive during the blockade.



Musab Yousef Ajiti, Idlib Governorate, Kafriya, 49 years old, civil servant: *“On March 25, 2015, terrorists surrounded our village, completely from all sides and began shooting from various weapons. We were completely surrounded, a blockade was made around us, they did not give us food, our state dropped food and necessary products by aviation.*

We spent 3.5 years in the blockade until the exchange took place – the terrorists were allowed to go in there, and we were allowed to go out. On July 18, 2018 the last residents left the village. There were 18 thousand inhabitants in Kafriya, and 8 thousand in al-Fu'ah. During the blockade, about 3,000 residents died.

Question: *“What did you eat?”*

Musab Yousef Ajiti, Idlib Governorate, Kafriya, 49 years old, civil servant: *“We were so starved we had to eat grass. Sometimes they were dropping food packages from helicopters. When our aviation began to bring us bread and food, the militants fired at helicopters. Sometimes terrorists misappropriated the humanitarian aid, many cases were reported. At the same time, we noticed that large trucks were passing through Al-Bab, they were bringing humanitarian aid for the terrorists who surrounded us.”*

Over 60% of houses were destroyed. It was impossible to find at least one apartment suitable for living. They were all destroyed. The greatest distance between us was 700 meters, not only snipers were shooting at us, but they also used machine guns, 23 caliber, we were not able to go out of our houses. They used rockets and mortars during their fire attacks. We were not able to help sick and

wounded people, we were starving. We were unable to sleep, a lot of the wounded died because they didn't get any help."

Question: "When you left the village, were there any provocations from the militants?"

Musab Yousef Ajiti, Idlib Governorate, Kafriya, 49 years old, civil servant: "In April 2017, there was an attack against our people who were getting off the bust, they even attacked a bus. And there was a blast under the buses which were used for people transportation. About 250 persons were killed. So far, we have 80 children listed as missing, we don't know anything about them. Children who were inside the buses.

It happened in the district called Rashidin. There is a Rashidin checkpoint where the exchange took place. The residents were coming out of their houses, and there was a blast, not far from the main passage to Aleppo. We were escaping from Idlib to Aleppo.



Pictured: consequences of the terrorist attack at Rashidin.

RIA New wrote the following about this terroristic act⁵: "More than 130 people, including 67 children, were killed and about 200 injured as a result of a terrorist attack that was carried out in the Syrian district of Rashidin on April 15, said the UN Special Envoy for Syria Staffan de Mistura.

"As a result of the explosion, according to the latest data, more than 130 people, including 67 children, were killed, perhaps more than 200 were injured. That was shocking news for everybody," de Mistura said.

"Nobody can say who is in charge of this (attack) - editor) The only thing we knew was that they were terrorists. I think a lot of people are trying to figure out

⁵ <https://ria.ru/20170420/1492661585.html>

what has happened, and a lot of people would like to see these terrible killers brought to justice,” Jan Egeland, assistant to the UN Special Envoy for Syria, said at a briefing.

On April 15, terrorists blew up a truck near a convoy of buses with refugees. At that moment, the convoy was still in the territory controlled by the militants – there were three kilometers left to the demarcation line. For almost a day, refugees were left without water and food waiting for permission from the militants to continue going further. A car came up to them, they began to distribute chips and water from this car, and after that there was a new explosion. 126 persons, most of them were women and children, they all died. According to eyewitnesses, the terrorist himself fled from the crime scene, leaving a bomb in his car.”



Mustafa Musa Muhammad, Idlib Governorate, Kafriya, 51 years old, member of militia: *“The militants burned crops, shot at peasants, shot at everything that moves. In our villages, al-Fu'ah and Kafriya, about 80% of houses were destroyed, more than 4,200 civilians were killed. We don't know how many people are missing, about 500 people were captured, we still don't know what happened to them.”*

Question: *“Did anyone die during the evacuation?”*

Mustafa Musa Muhammad, Idlib Governorate, Kafriya, 51 years old, member of militia: *“Yes, he was killed. This district is called Rashidin. Lots of people were killed and injured on that day... They deliberately put all the buses next to each other. Our children, they are about 3 years old, they do not know any cookies, or any sweets for children. And the militants pretended as if they wanted to give them some cookies, pretending to treat them well. Offered some tasty things. And when all the children got off the bus, they started gathering the children at one place. When all our children gathered there, there was a terrorist attack with the help of a jihad mobile. There was a severe blast, about 550 persons were killed immediately, most of them were children. And many children were injured, they were left at the border, they were collected at the border with Turkey. We still don't know what's happened to the guys. And we still don't know where he is now. There were about 100-200 persons like this, among the 10,000 persons who were evacuated.”*



Pictured: consequences of the terrorist attack at Rashidin.



Question: *“So you are saying that the militants shelled residential buildings with mortars and artillery, and were not targeting the positions of militias?”*

Hasin Jamil Asad, Idlib Governorate, al-Fu'ah, 51 years old, electrician: *“Yes, They (militants) were shooting at civilians houses deliberately. And in general, if they had any information about some group of people gathering with some purpose or going somewhere, they deliberately shot at them. As a result of shelling by militants, three-quarters of all houses were destroyed, about 4,000 residents out of 16,000 living in al-Fu'ah were killed.*

They were constantly shooting at us with gas cylinders, from 60-mm mortars. That was them who were shooting our houses. Lots of civilians were killed during this shooting.

There is a type of a rocket, they call it Fiel. A large rocket. The killing zone is 100 meters. One day the rocket hit a house and the whole family was killed – husband, wife and 3 children. There are plenty of stories like this. The other house was hit by a similar rocket. There were 2 persons - an old man and an old woman, over 80. They were killed almost immediately. And also during school hours, when children go to school, they were shooting at us deliberately at this time and many of our children who were first-graders were injured - they lost their legs, arms...”

Question: *“Did the militants deliberately shoot at schools or hospitals?”*

Hasin Jamil Asad, Idlib Governorate, al-Fu'ah, 51 years old, electrician: *“This was the first thing they did. When they attacked us, they attacked the school first. It was actually totally destroyed, laid to waste. We even arranged our own small medical center, but they still deliberately destroyed it twice. But then, we had no other choice, and we found a local house to accommodate the hospital, and the militants did not know about that place. The hospital building was destroyed for 3 times. We couldn’t accept more sick people, so we brought her to a smaller house. They used some kind of a dressing gown instead of a partition, as they had nothing else.*



Mayada Haj Hussein, Idlib Governorate, al-Fu'ah, 53 years old, housewife: *“It is difficult, very difficult to describe how we lived, our life was very hard, we were surrounded, we were starving, it was impossible to climb up to the roof or our house. The life was truly hard. Our children were starving, we had no food to eat, even if someone went to nature to pick some grass to eat, there were snipers who could shoot at a child if they saw a child driving a toy car. My niece, her son, my grandson who was two and a half years old, they were killed. There was a lot of fear among us, a lot of rockets hit us, it was dangerous everywhere, there was not a single safe place. At first for their fire attacks they used mortars, then rockets, if we wanted to escape from home, we went to open air, they watched us and started shooting at the place where we were. My 26-year-old son was seriously injured, he became disabled, his knee was severely damaged.”*

Capture and abduction of civilians

According to the International Convention against Hostage—Taking of 1979 (Article 1), the crime of hostage-taking is committed by any person who captures or holds another person and threatens to kill, injure or continue to hold a hostage in order to force a State, an international intergovernmental organization, any natural or legal person or group of persons to commit or to refrain from committing any act as a condition for the release of a hostage, as well as an attempt to commit the above actions or complicity in them.

During the occupation of the territories of Syria, the militants captured a significant number of civilians, who were subsequently held in prisons in various localities. According to eyewitnesses, the main purpose of the hostage-taking was to create an exchange pool for subsequent exchange for certain militants who were captured by the legitimate authorities of Syria.

International humanitarian law prohibits torture, humiliation, and the killing of civilians who are captured or held hostage.

Witnesses interviewed by the staff of the Foundation for the Study of Democracy Problems told about the executions of men to raise the spirit of militants and intimidate civilians in the occupied territories.

According to witnesses, almost all the men, when captured, were beaten by militants, and some were executed later.



Pictured: Mohammed Husam Masri, 19 years old, student, Ali Husam Masri, 22 years old, student, Warda Ahmed Ibrahim, 55 years old, cleaner at school, Idlib Governorate, Shtabraq

Warda Ahmed Ibrahim, 55, school cleaner, Idlib Governorate, Shtabraq: *“The three of us spent three years and three months in Harim prison after militants attacked our village in 2015. 4 of our relatives were there.*

I am ill, I have high blood pressure. When I asked for a blood pressure medication, they put me in a separate cell, where there were a lot of rats. My cousin was with me. There wasn't enough food, and it was of poor quality. The food we were given for the whole day included a glass of soup and a piece of bread. We were given drugs to cope with high blood pressure only in exceptional cases.”



Ali Khusam Masri, student, 22 years old, Idlib Governorate, Shtabraq *“When they arrested us, they forced me to put off my clothes and lie on the floor. Six or seven terrorists came and beat me with sticks, then with metal rods, then with belts, and so they beat me until I could no longer moan, could not get up, then they stopped. From time to time they hung me up by the hand and also beat me with sticks while I was hanging like this. After that, I was transferred to a separate cell, with two or three people neighboring the cell.*

They used us for different kinds of work. We either cut wood or buried bodies, if there were any. I was 16 and they used me to do some work.”



Muhammed Khusam Masri, student, 19 years old, Idlib Governorate, Shtabraq *“The same happened to me. Some cases were reported when Syrian army soldiers were captured, terrorists cut off their heads, or simply killed them, put them in one room and forced us to live next to their bodies for several days. Sometimes they killed 10-15 people a month and forced us to bury them afterwards.*

They were killed either in a special room in the prison, or on the prison square. There were times where I could see 20-25 dead bodies, either inside the prison or in the square behind the prison. They forced to bury them.

Human executions usually took place on Fridays. Every Friday, after the afternoon prayer, they took five villagers from prison and killed them to intimidate

the residents of that village. Next Friday, they took prisoners from another village, took them to their native village, gathered the residents and publicly executed these five villagers. They killed people in villages to intimidate residents so that they would not cooperate with the Syrian authorities.

The first year it happened every week – so 20-25 people were killed per month, in the second year it happened not so often, in the third year of my imprisonment, too, there were such murders almost every week.”

Question: *“What do you think, how many prisoners were jailed in the Kharima prison?”*

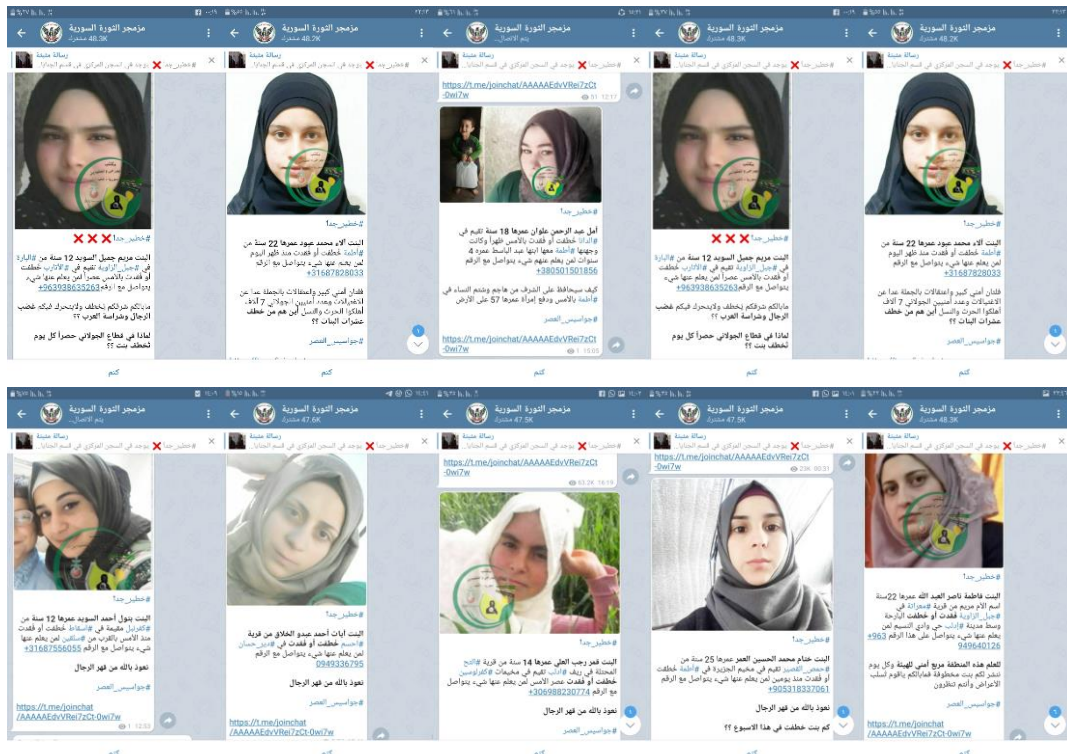
Muhammed Khusam Masri, student, 19 years old, Idlib Governorate, Shtabraq *There was a period when there were over 2,000. It is believed that this is the central prison of Harim.” I sometimes heard that our troops would do an air strike.*

Question: *“How many people approximately, do you think, have been killed in this prison during these three years?”*

Muhammed Khusam Masri, student, 19 years old, Idlib Governorate, Shtabraq *“Let’s say there were about fifty soldiers, only ten of them were release as part of exchange for the militants, the rest were killed. There were about 100 police officers, almost ninety were killed, and they exchanged the remaining 10 guys for their militants. 80 people from militia were also killed. As to me, I made graves for about 200 people. One day I was preparing graves for 36 persons who were killed in the prison by the militants. In general, when the militants were pushing forward, they killed about 2,000 people in our village and in the neighboring villages.”*



Muteb Samir Khaims, Idlib Governorate, Idlib, 39 years old, construction worker: *“Now ordinary people are in a very bad situation, their life is very hard, people are afraid of Jabhat an-Nusra. About 1,000 persons from Idlib went missing. They were kidnapped right from their houses, or simply captured in the streets. There are lots of 7-8 aged children missing, who had disappeared. They are sending them to unknown destinations, nobody knows - where to. Young girls go missing here almost every day. My friends who stayed there tell me about that by phone and sent photos of girls who were stolen in the city of Idlib. The information was written there: name, surname, age, from where the person is. Very many girls were kidnapped recently. It was exactly in the city of Idlib.*



Photos of the missing Idlib residents, who are searched by their relatives

Question: *Were these photos sent to you by your friends? ”*

Muteb Samir Khaims, Idlib Governorate, Idlib, 39 years old, construction worker: *“Yes, This is what my friends sent me, and a have a lot of information like this. A lot of young girls were captured by Jabhat An-Nusra militants. As an example of one ad: a girl was stolen, or lost, the locality is called Al-Mastuma. Please, if you find or see this girl, inform us by this phone number. Here it says the child was lost, she was taken away when she was near the school and brought to an unknown place. Her father wrote her name and surname, it happened in the daytime.*

My friends told me that these girls went missing, they were stolen from Idlib, as they heard, and sent to some unknown destination, but some say that the girls are being sold as a source of organs. No one of them came back home. People say that there is some kind of business, dealing with things like selling people’s organs. It was considered to be a secret job, nobody knows them, their names They are actually Jabhat An-Nusra They have observation posts at all roads that lead to Idlib Governorate, so everyone has to get the permission and is put under the control of Jabhat an-Nusra. It’s not clear who these people are, or where they are from, but we know that they sell organs.”



Ilyin Ali Shakuri, Idlib Governorate, Hambushia, 34 years old, civil servant: *“On August 4, 2012 we were sleeping in our houses. About 4.00 a.m we were wakened by shooting and shouting militants. In the morning they killed my father, my husband and my husband’s father and his brother. They killed 38 men in our village. Me, my children and other women were captured as prisoners. About 106 persons were captured as prisoners - 50 women and 56 children. I spent 3 years and 6 months in captivity with my children. All 106 people lived in one two-floor house with an area of approximately 80 sq.m.”*

Question: *“Tell us, how did the militants treat you?”*

Ilyin Ali Shakuri, Idlib Governorate, Hambushia, 34 years old, civil servant: *“They treated us terribly. When they want to capture me, to take me away, I first refused, and then one of them threw a hand grenade into my back (without pulling the pin). I was anxious about my children. So they did what they wanted to. They didn’t give us even any bread to eat. They kept saying bad things about our religion. Sometimes he (the militant) was coming and battered my children. Sometimes he was coming at night, sometimes in the daytime, and then he went away. The militants were from Jabhat An-Nusra. Many of them could not understand each other as they came from different countries. They said that if they don’t get any ransom for us, they will kill everyone.”*



Pictured: Ramid Badiya Selim, Idlib Governorate, Bluta, 45 years old, a builder with his daughters Linar (12 years old), Rent (5 years old) and Shamis (11 years old), who spent 10 months with the militants.

Ramid Badiya Selim, Idlib Governorate, Bluta, 45 years old, odd-jobber: *“I have 4 children, they were all at home. When I heard that the militants were pushing forward, I wanted to return home with the Syrian army. When I got back home, I didn’t find my children. I did not know if they were still alive or not. Together with our relatives, we found out where they were held by the militants and 10 months later, with the help of the Red Cross, we found them and with the help of the*

Syrian army, we got their three daughters back. They had only their elder daughter left alive.

When they were brought to us, we couldn't recognize them at all. I couldn't recognize them at first, and neither did they. These are the head problems. Their life was pretty hard. And we got them back, they were very thin, skinny. They had lots of bacteria and viruses on their skin and hair. They couldn't say a word. Their destiny was hard. Thanks God, I got my daughters back! Only Samar left with me, she was 16.



Fayad Ibrahim Mariam, Idlib Governorate, Hambushia, 52 years old, civil servant: *"I had 2 more children, and for a long time I had no information about them. After I was wounded, I was taken to hospital, I was unconscious and only the next day I could ask about my children, where I could find them. I was told that the militants showed the children on TV and on the Internet, with the name and surname indicated for each of the children, so I got to know that my children were held by the militants. For 4.5 years I had no information about them.*

Gaida Mariam is 18 years old now, and Khadar Fayat Mariam is 11, a fourth-grader. They returned only in 2017. When they were captured by the militants, they took the children to Salmz, after that to Jisr ash-Shugur in Idlib, and then to Kalad, Al-Madikh fortress in Idlib. There they spent 4.5 years.

Their life was very hard, they were starving all the time. They didn't have regular food, even water, the militants made them work hard and cut woods in winter for heating. Sometimes a man was coming late at night and he said who would be chosen to be killed. Sometimes he had an automatic rifle with him, he took someone. They were sleeping on the bare ground, without any mattresses, nothing to feel better



Ibrahim Imad Al-Sheikh Ibrahim, Idlib Governorate, Inbada, 35 years old, civil servant: *"My relatives were hiding from the militants who were walking across the village at shooting at everything. Some parents were hiding together with their little child, when he started crying of hunger, the militants found them and captured. They captured my mother and three children. They were brought to Sabkha first, then to Khariba. After that I got a phone call from a man named Abukami, he told me to call the commanders of the Russian armed forces*

and ask them to stop bombing Sabkha, otherwise the militants would kill my family. The last call was from the militant named Abul Yama As-Soludi, he proposed to

exchange my family for the woman who was a doctor with the militants. Her name was Chusma She was a doctor helping the militants and she came from the USA. At that moment my family was somewhere in Aleppo Governorate. The Syrian army decided to help us and arrange a phone conversation between Chusma and Abul Yama As-Soludi, after that call all communications with the militants finished. Now I don't know what has happened to my family, they are in captivity now."



Pictured: Gaida Yousef Hammoud, 43 years old, textile worker, Rajab Al-Abed, 12 years old, Fatima Mustafa Hammoud, 65 years old, retired, and a schoolboy - they are all victims of militant actions, Idlib Governorate, Shtabraq

Gaida Yousef Hammoud, textile worker, 43 years old, Idlib Governorate, Shtabraq: *"On April 25, 2015 at 7 a.m the militants attacked our village and we had to escape from them, we ran away to the dessert. But they found us there, as we were unable to escape deeper in the dessert. They arrested us and took somewhere. They arrested all three of us, and Rajab's brother - Ahmed, who was 11. Then they brought us to prison in Khari, a city located at the border with Turkey, there we spent 2 months and 10 days, after that they exchanged us for their guys.*

When we were in prison, we were beaten, starving, we didn't have even enough water, no medical treatment. And I was wounded after the explosion - I had wounds on my face, on my arm and leg. Sometimes they gave us some rotten bread. The only food we could give to our children - Rajab and Ahmed - was water with salt and this rotten bread. Sometimes we had no food at all.

They stole everything we had. All the belongings - for example, my ring - they took everything. They only left the clothes which we were wearing. No spare garments, to change the dirty ones. There were 15 persons held in one room, without

electricity and light. We all had lice and scabies. Children who were born in prison, they all died because of terrible living condition.

The militants regularly battered us, tortured us. They used a cable to beat me. My body became black like my clothes. He battered me so hard, that my skin was black. He was shooting at me twice, and wanted to kill me there, in the presence of other people. They used to say that I was a mulhid and deserved death, as we were Alawites. Or they could come and say - Now we'll cut off your head. They beat our men very hard.

Once they took my son Ahmed, put him on the square and wanted to kill him. They pointed a rifle at him and wanted to kill him. Then one of them took his rifle, and kicked on my head.

Question: *“Rajab, do you remember anything? How did you spend that time in prison with your parents and your brother?”*



Rajab Al-Abed, a school boy, 12 years old, Idlib Governorate, Shtabraq *“They closed us up. We had no food - only bread and salt. They beat us, beat very hard. They battered my grandmother, with a cable, they beat her on her back. We had a metal bed to sleep on. And they kicked my mother with a rifle. I don't remember anything else.*



Zeinab Rajab Hammoud, Idlib Governorate, Shtabraq, 35 years old, housewife: *“On April 24, 2015 the militants attacked us, we were hiding from them in the woods, but they found us and sent to prison. I spent 3 years and 3 months in that prison. On May 1, 2018 I was released under the hostages exchange program.*

My 2-year-old son was with me in that prison. His name is Zei Ayman Fokhrop. My husband was also among the prisoners, he was held somewhere separately. I was pregnant when put in prison, and I felt very sick. I had to give birth to my child there, in prison, and it was very, very hard. My son was born in prison, but he left alive. I got no medical care at all. They said that all the doctors had gone to Turkey. They had no doctors.

The militants wanted to take my child away, to separate us. They tortured my, wanted to take him. They used to give me some milk, but too little, so they wanted to take my son. I begged them to give me some milk for my child, because I had to feed him. But they wanted to take him away. Once or twice per month they could give me a small package of milk. Having this package of milk twice a month was an exceptional case. Then I started feeding my son with mashed bread and water.

The militants tortured and humiliated my elder son, who was 2 years old at that moment. They used to write bad words on his hands. Called him bad names. He still has some mental problems They made the child kiss their feet, put a knife to his throat and a pistol to his head. It happened very, very often. He is still scared. He became mad. They beat him.

They beat us - women. If any of the women started crying or yelling, they beat her even harder. My husband was also battered very often.

We were starving and suffering from cold. It was a torture being there, in prison. The meal they gave us was a wheat porridge called burgot, they gave us boiled potatoes, without butter. They gave a flatbread to everyone, every day. I used to give my bread to my children. The portions were rather small, twice a day - in the morning, and in the evening. I got very sick there, due to lack of food. I had problems with breathing, with lungs. I still suffer from dizziness, because something is wrong with my blood.

Elderly people from our village died in that prison - three women and two men. They were 70-80 years old, and they died of poor food and diseases.

My mother's uncle, his name was Valy Shkeir, 80 years old. They killed him, because he was sick. They didn't give him any medical care, they simply threw him down from the mountain. He was very weak and old.

This is a terrible pain to remember. I don't want to remember that period. That was a pain and torture. To spend 3 years and several months at that prison with the militants."



Ali Abdelkarim Shaifun, Idlib Governorate, Shtabraq, 47 years old, disabled: *"I spent 3 years in prison. I was released on May 1, 2018. During these 3 years I was held in different prisons and other locations occupied by the militants - Zainab, Jabal An-Nusr, Chusma, Vaidy, Basuto... The militants were from Ansar Ad-Din. Among the militants were people from Morocco, Arab countries, Dagestan, Egypt. Later on they joined Jabhat An-Nusra*

In prison they bullied and tortured me - they beat me with metal rods, tortured with electricity. Once they brought me to the basement, it was dark there, no sounds coming out of there. First they wanted to cut off my head, then another militant said, "Wait, I have another torture device, let's try it." They took a glass bottle and put it in my anus. They opened my mouth and put a stone in it. They put me inside a metal cabinet, which looked like a coffin. They locked me there, inside, and let me out only when I had to go to the toilet, or for prayer. I was locked inside this cabinet for a week. And I was also kept in a solitary confinement cell, in the basement, where I spent 2 months.

Food was very poor - a piece of bread and grey water. They made me eat stones and sand.

Several times they hung me with both of my hands above the head, on the hook in the ceiling, and put their foot on my head. They beat me with metal rods and wire. One can still see my bones through the wounds on my body.

Another case was when the militant put a stone in my mouth and kicked my face, he broke my mouth and my teeth.

Once they threw our flag on the ground and told me: "Come on, step on your flag." I refused. To punish me, one of the militants beat me with a metal rod, he stroke me on my knee, so now I'm not able to walk without crutches. My nephew had to carry me for six months to help me to get to the toilet. Since that time I cannot step on this leg.



Ayman Aziz Fakhru, Idlib Governorate, Shtabraq: "We were attacked by terrorists, at first we resisted, and then we wanted to escape from there, we went away in different directions, I ran away to Ikfir, where I was arrested and taken to Zampakri – a village away from Ikfir, then I was transferred to the Harem prison. There we spent 2 months, after that they brought us to Morika. In total, the militants captured about 600 persons, there were civilians and military people among them. The militants killed all militaries and threw their bodies in the river, next to us. Those who were wearing military uniforms were killed, others who put it off and pretended to be civilians survived. I think there were over 1,000 persons held in Harem prison. I spent 2 months and 10 days in Morika prison. There 55 persons were held underground.

I spent 4 months in that prison. The militants tortured us. The scar on my forehead left after one of the militants hit me on the head with his boot. They also beat us with sticks.

Food was very poor - just to prevent us dying of hunger. Sometimes they gave us 1-2 flatbreads, a little rice and burgot. We didn't have enough water to drink.

Wounded people lived together with us, in the prison. Those with minor injuries were given some kind of treatment, and those who were seriously injured were taken and we never saw them again. I'm talking about the people I saw around me."



Nermin Muayad Al-Hayek, Idlib Governorate, Shtabraq, 26 years old, housewife: "I spent over 3 years in the militant prison. Half of my family was also there - me and my child, my mother-in-law, my husband and his brothers with their wives. There were 85 persons in total. Life was very hard, we were starving, didn't get any medical care, they didn't even give me any hygienic napkins for my little son. Every 15 days they gave us a bucket of water, to wash ourselves.

My son was 1.5 years old. They didn't give me any children's nutrition. No milk, nothing. They gave us rice and burgot. Sometimes they gave us a glass of oil and olives, for 3-4 people.

When I was taken to prison, I was six months pregnant. After 3 months I gave a birth to my son. I was transferred to some other room for childbirth. This was not a maternity hospital, but just a room. A medical woman was with us, she helped me to give birth, and there was another woman, a guard with a gun standing next to us, she was a militant. She was just standing nearby and threatened, scaring us. After I gave birth, they brought me back to prison.

At first I breastfed the baby, and then I had no milk in my breast, because of poor nutrition. I was asking to give me milk for my baby, I knocked at the door. One of the militants said: "If you keep on knocking, I'll break your arm." I had to put my baby in the box, it was a bed for him, I was afraid that in the crowded cell someone would step on him - there were very many women in the jail, very many. I showed my baby sleeping this way to the militants. One of them came up, kicked the baby, grasped him and put him up in the air, though the baby was only 2 months old. After that my baby fell ill, he was nauseous, had diarrhea, he was losing weight. He was 2 months old, for 2 months he was sick, every day, he felt worse and worse. He became very thin, his skin was dry, and he looked like an old man. I begged them to call a doctor, but they didn't do anything. Then some commission visited us to see

the living conditions in prison. I asked them for help and they said my son would get medical care. Next day they took us to Dargush, to the hospital, there they made some injection to my son and took us back to prison.

The day after the injection, my son swelled, his body turned blue, his hands swelled and his eyes closed gradually. I knocked at the door and shouted my guards: "My son is dying, help me!" They refused. After that I knocked once again, some man came to see what was wrong with my baby, then we were again taken to hospital in Bab Al-Hava. I was waiting long for the doctors to check up my baby, his breathing became weak. I was afraid that he was going to die on my hands. When they saw that he was really dying, I was sent to some room in the hospital. There was one woman there, look, she says your son has dryness, you see complete dryness, dehydration. He says, unfortunately, your son has died. They didn't help him and when she watched it, it was already very late.

The prison informed her husband that his son had died. The husband was given the opportunity to dig a grave only 10 cm deep from ground level. He asked permission to dig a deeper grave so that the animals would not get to the body, but they told him that it was enough.

When the next commission arrived, my husband complained that his child had died because he had not received medical care. After that, he was severely beaten and put in solitary confinement for three days.

Some women who were punished for asking for help were not fed. That was punishment, to stop them from asking for help. Usually they were deprived of food for 2 days. Once they punished me, put in a solitary confinement, separated with my son. It was a usual punishment for women, they were put in a solitary confinement and isolated from their children.

We didn't get any medicines, although sometimes some humanitarian missions arrived that distributed medicines or humanitarian aid. Humanitarian organizations came every 4-5 months, but we received help from them only once in three years."



Pictured: Linda Muhyadin Duba, 43, housewife, Kamar Zaher Zhrad, 20 years old, a student, victims of militant actions, Idlib Governorate, Shtabraq

Linda Muhyadin Duba, 43, housewife, Idlib Governorate, Shtabraq: *"My family and I spent about 3 years in Kharima prison.*

There were 35 of us. I, my daughters, my brother's wives, all with children, and we all were in prison. All of my 4 daughters were with me. The youngest one, Nur, was only 3 years old. Then goes Jamama, 7 years old, Dala - 14 years old and Kamar, 15. My husband got his head cut off, as he was one of the militia.

Food was very poor and bad. And there was not enough of it. They gave us rice, sometimes pasta, bread - in the morning and in the evening. We didn't have enough water, sometimes the water we smelled of petrol.



Kamar Zaher Zhrad, 20 years old, student, Idlib Governorate, Shtabraq: "From time to time people would come, we didn't know if they were doctors or not, they just gave us medications and left. I had pain in my lever, they took me to the hospital in Haleb for treatment. They brought a wounded militant to the hospital, one doctor told me – you see, your guys wounded our militants, I'll give you an injection now and your life will end. I was crying, as I was afraid of dying. They made me some injections, I don't know what is was, but it didn't help me.



Hana Kasim Masri, Idlib Governorate, Shtabraq, 39 years old, housewife: "From April 25, 2015 till May 1, 2018 my family and I were held hostages by the militants. In prison there were 15 of us - my mother, an old woman, my sister, my brother's wife. I had 4 children - 2 sons, and 2 daughters. My two sons and one daughter were killed when the militants attacked our village, only one daughter survived.

When we were escaping from Shtabraq, on our way the militants shot at us. I was wounded, my daughter was wounded, and the rest of my children died in this attack. My daughter had severe injuries on her legs and her arm.



Pictured: Shuruk Hassan Fakhro, Idlib Governorate, Shtabraq, a student, 20 years old, who was injured as a result of shelling by militants

Hana Kasim Masri, Idlib Governorate, Shtabraq, housewife, 39 years old: *Jasmin was also wounded - in her head. She was an eight-grader. One of the militants stepped with his boots on her head, on her face and called her bad names, cursed her. She was an eight-grader. He was saying that she is bad, she was supporting the Bashar's regime...*



In the photo, Shuruk Hassan Fakhro, Idlib Governorate, Shtabraq, a student, 23 years old, who was injured as a result of shelling by militants



Hana Kasim Masri, Idlib Governorate, Shtabraq, housewife, 39 years old: *“After that the militants captured us. They were from Ansar ad-Din. First they brought us to Khayus - it is located above Shtabraq, then they took us to Keitsema, Wadi Basur, Zaini, Harima. Militants from Morocco treated women better, than other militants, but they often beat men. They used to say that our men were mulhids and they should be killed.*

Due to poor food and lack of medical care 4 women and one man died when being in captivity. They were elderly people and had heart problems. They didn't have enough food, and no medical care.

My mother is also an elderly person, but thanks God, she survived, we managed to get her out of there before she would die.

They gave us food quite seldom - spaghetti, rice, sometimes potatoes and rotten bread. We could have 0.5 liters of water - a bottle like this only. It was intended for drinking, for washing hands before the prayer, and for washing body. Only one bottle. One bottle for anything.”

A resident of Raqqa, Raqqa Governorate, on the phone: “Today the situation is very dangerous for young girls. If they see a girl walking alone on the road, they will capture her, and it will be very difficult to find her afterwards.”

A resident of Raqqa, Raqqa Governorate, on the phone: “If a person somehow shows respect or love for the Syrian state, then this person won’t get any help or support - neither humanitarian, nor medical. This is prohibited. If the militants find out that a person has good attitude towards the legitimate Syrian authorities, or communicates with his relatives, they usually send hooligans to his home. They can kill him, beat him or destroy his house. If this person attempts to protect himself, they will take him to prison. Once I asked some people I knew - why were you cooperating with Jabhat An-Nusra and doing all these bad things? After that I was captured by the militant police, they beat and tortured me, because I said that life in legitimate Syrian state was better than now. Civilians are scared, they cannot do anything to change the situation, they are waiting for the liberation, their life is hard.”

Air strikes by the US-led coalition on Syrian civilians

The interviews with victims, their relatives and numerous witnesses conducted by the Democracy Research Foundation, cited in the report, prove that there are people suffered from the air strikes by the US-led international coalition in every age group, among all professions and income categories. This fact confirms the extensive coverage of the strikes against the civilian population in Syria, which, according to international law, is a war crime. In almost every locality that was attacked by the US-led international coalition, we could find victims of the air strikes in almost every family.

Syrian citizens tell in detail how they go injured during the coalition's rocket and bomb attacks, as well as about their relatives and friends who died: *"I was then at the river crossing site near the Euphrates, I wanted to escape to the other side of the river when the US coalition began bombing the site. There were about 16 cars, I remember, they were standing in a line, waiting for their turn. They are still standing there after the bombing," "My husband was killed in the bombing, although he had nothing to do with the warfare. Just like that, an aircraft flew up, dropped the bombs and flew away," "I am one of those who personally suffered from the bombing by the coalition. My house was completely destroyed, and my father was killed," "Lots of people died, many were injured - an entire family of 11 people was killed, there was another family of six people. All of them died, including the children."*

The victims and direct witnesses of the coalition attacks are surprised not only by the fact of the large-scale killing of civilians, but also by the fact that terrorists and militants were attacked less frequently. *"The coalition supports the militants. We managed to escape from our house before the attack. The militants' cars were parked near the building of the Sharia court They didn't even die, but my house was damaged," "As a result of the bombing, the coalition destroyed my house, but they didn't attack the school nearby. The militants were inside the school building," "Americans didn't bomb the militants. All the militants left somewhere to Maadan."*



Question: *“Did your family or friends or relatives somehow suffer from the actions of the American coalition?”*

Nasser Hamad Al-Baty, Deir ez-Zor Governorate, al-Abbas, 33 years old, peasant: *Some people from my village were among the victims of the coalition attacks, my cousin was killed. The US coalition bombed our village in 2017. There were some ISIS head quarters in the village, but no bomb hit any of them. The bombs hit only our houses. The coalition managed to destroy 6 civilian houses, but failed to destroy the militant head quarter.*

“I was then at the river crossing site near the Euphrates, I wanted to escape to the other side of the river when the US coalition began bombing the site. There were about 16 cars, I remember, they were standing in a queue waiting for their turn. They are still standing there after the bombing. About 200 people from different localities were killed as a result of those air strikes at the river crossing sites. That happened in June - July 2017. I witnessed those air strikes, me and my friends were standing behind the earth fill, we also wanted to escape to the other side of the river and we were only 500 meters away from the air strike. There were only civilian cars with people seeking to cross the Euphrates, to escape. The burnt cars are still there.”



Pictured: the place of the air strike by the US coalition at the river crossing site near Kata, in front of Hajin, Deir ez-Zor Governorate, 2017. According to eyewitnesses, about 200 civilians were killed as a result of the airstrike.



Pictured: Nasser Hamad Al-Baty, Deir ez-Zor Governorate, S. Al-Abbas, 33, a peasant is telling about the air strike by the US coalition to civilians who wanted to cross the Euphrates:

Nasser Hamad Al-Baty, Deir ez-Zor Governorate, al-Abbas, 33 years old, peasant: *“In 2017, because the US coalition were bombing my village - al-Abbas, all people were forced to seek escaping to the other side of the river, at the river crossing site located opposite the city of Hajin. As there were a lot of cars queuing there, the US coalition attacked them. 15-16 cars are still there, they were burnt as a result of that air strike. Together with my relatives, we were hiding behind those trees. We all gathered there as we wanted to get to the other side of the river. That river crossing had ferries that could transport even cars with people. So people gathered and were waiting for their turn to get to the other side of the river.*

At that time, there were high precision air strikes, even if the target was a single car spotted in a field. There were many cars waiting for the ferry – ordinary civilians, peasants with their tractors, women, children. They were not only from the neighboring villages. Residents of Mayadin also came here, they lived here as refugees, since everything started there and only then spread to here. They wanted to cross this river, but, unfortunately, not everyone managed to do this.”



Saleha Mahmoud Al-Faisal, Deir ez-Zor Governorate, Kata, 40 years old, housewife: *“My husband was killed as a result of the bombing by the US coalition, though he had nothing to do with the terrorists. An aircraft flew up, attacked us and flew away. This happened in November 2017. The militants were 1 km away from us, about 15 minutes by foot. We were at home, then my husband went outside and then there was an air strike. The bomb hit the house near us. I have 6 children - 2 boys and 4 girls. The older child is 14, the younger one is 8 They should survive. When my husband was alive, he could support out family and children. Now I don't even have food to give to them. This is the most serious problem for me.*

When the aircraft flew away, I buried my husband and escaped. We buried him right there, where he died. Our neighbors also escaped, and they still didn't get back.

It wasn't easy to cross the Euphrates. When we were at the river crossing, the aviation attacked us. They attacked the river crossing, nothing else. It is surprising that we have survived and managed to escape. When we were at the crossing, the bombs were falling next to us, and we could die any moment, they could hit us, but we survived. Many people died. Everybody was running in the same direction. You will never understand how it feels...”



Miyasar Khleif Al-Khalifa, Deir ez-Zor Governorate, Abu Kemal, 29 years old, office worker: *“On June 28, 2021 I was at work and there was an explosion. The US bomb fell next to the house, 20 meters away. Half of the house was destroyed. The roof, the water tanks and the walls. As a result, my wife Ihbal, 28 years old, and my elder daughter Neba, 9 years old, were killed, and the two remaining daughters were injured - one got severe injuries, the other one - minor injuries. They only left the hospital yesterday. The elder one, Manal, who is five years old, got a bomb splinter in the head and a leg wound, and the youngest, Yakim, who is 4 months old, had slight injuries only – her face and arm were cut by shrapnel.*

My neighbors also suffered from this air strike: their house was destroyed, the car was burnt, 3 people got minor injuries - a father, his son and daughter. My son is 8 years old, he has a fracture of the pelvic bone and a bomb splinter in his head. He is undergoing surgery now. The girl is 7 years old, I do not know which injuries she got, most likely, also a broken leg and a head injury.”

Question: *“Why do you think that was an American aircraft?”*

Miyasar Khleif Al-Khalifa, Deir ez-Zor Governorate, Abu Kemal, 29 years old, office worker: *“No, that couldn't be a Syrian aircraft. High power, high accuracy of attacks... That couldn't be a Syrian aircraft.”*



Zakaria Al-Saleh, 28 years old, general practitioner, Deir ez-Zor City Hospital: *“On June 28, 2021, I was a doctor on duty and was taking care of all the wounded people from Abu Kemal. At 2 a.m the first 3 wounded persons arrived, at 4 a.m three more were delivered and at 6 a.m they brought two dead persons to us and at 7 a.m another one. The woman Ihab Fayat Il Hussein, her daughter Neba Miyasar Al-Khalifa and the boy Khlev Saleh Suleiman - they were all dead. All the injuries were caused by shrapnel during the air strike.”*

For the first three persons, who were delivered at 2 a.m, I provided primary medical care – the necessary X-ray pictures, tests, blood type, checkup for fractures, putting arm or legs in plaster, dropping-tubes etc. Those who were delivered at 4 a.m received first aid at the Abu Kemal military hospital.

First of all, we examined a four-month-old sister, the youngest. We saw that she had a small wound, immediately sewed it up, cleaned the wound. The girl was crying, special nurses took care of her, gave her milk and did everything to calm the girl down.

The second girl, she had a hip fracture, I restored the fracture so that the leg condition would not worsen. She had a shrapnel in her head and she was immediately transferred to the neurosurgery, where doctor Obeida performed the necessary operation.

Of the other wounded, I can mention a 7-year-old child, Mkhedi,. He had his leg broken. We also examined him, of course, made all the tests, for example, as a breast scan, and a tomography of the abdomen, and everything, thanks God, was ok with him. After that, he was redirected again to neurosurgery, as after a head scan they found that he had internal bleeding.

The rest patients had ordinary wounds. Again, we did all the necessary tests and left them until the morning under the supervision of specialist doctors, and already in the morning they checked out.”



Question: *“Dr. Abdulrazak, did you operate on the girl with a wound in her head after the American coalition airstrike - her name was Manal Al-Khalifa?”*

Obeida Abdulrazak, 30 years old, neurosurgeon at Deir ez-Zor City Hospital: *“Yes. I was called at 8 a.m, they said that there was a girl in severe condition in the neurosurgery department. When I arrived at the hospital, she was in a coma, featuring low sensitivity, we did a tomogram of her head. A bomb fragment was found there, which is clearly visible in the right part of the skull. She also had a fracture of her right hip. We did an operation on her head. The operation lasted 1.5 - 2 hours. Thanks God, the operation was successful. The girl was ok after the operation. Since this is a brain injury, any psychological or nervous complications may occur in the future. Since she is still a little girl, everything may be fine in the future, everything will recover by itself. She was discharged four days later and is now at home.*

I would like to mention that girl, Manal. Her story is dramatic. I wish it didn't happen to her. As soon as she woke up, she started calling her mother and elder sister, she felt something was wrong with them. Her parents couldn't say anything. Our nurses provided her with psychological help, explained what had happened. I'll never forget that moment.



Pictured: a fragment from an air bomb that wounded Manal Al-Khalifa, 5 years old, Deir ez-Zor Governorate, Abu Kemal

Obeida Abdulrazak, 30 years old, neurosurgeon at Deir ez-Zor City Hospital: *“Another wounded boy - Mhedi. We didn't find any shrapnel, but we found internal bleeding in the front part of the brain, it is called the frontal part. We performed an operation on him, of course. We noticed changes in the child's behavior immediately after the boy woke up. His parents said that he had always been a calm child. At that*

moment he was crying and behaved aggressively. These are the consequences of intracranial bleeding. The operation also went well. We hope in the future, his brain will recover and the boy will be ok.



Hayat Al-Khays, 54, Head nurse of Deir ez-Zor City Hospital: *“I am the chief nurse in the department of neurosurgery. After Manal woke up, she was in a tragic situation because she realized that she had lost her mother and elder sister, she kept asking to call her mom. We were on duty, and the girl was under our supervision: we had to clean her wounds, put a new bandage. It was incredibly hard for us to watch the girl suffering, we went to another room and cried there. Every time we came up to her, talked to her, asked her to calm down, of course, the girl cried, eventually she calmed down.”*



Sari Abdullah Al-Tai, Deir ez-Zor Governorate, Abu Kemal city, 24 years old, peasant *“On June 28, 2021 we were sleeping, as it was night. We were waken up by the explosion, and I saw my cousins - they were wounded, the girl’s name was Majiba Adai and the boy’s name was Mukheddi Abdallah. They were 12. The girl was wounded in the head and her hand was burned by a fragment. The boy was also wounded in the head, he has a fracture of the pelvic bone. Now one of his eyes can’t see. After I pulled them out from under the ruins, I saw neighbors - a woman and her three daughters were injured. The woman then died, unfortunately, in the hospital, one of her daughters also died in the hospital, they didn’t have time to save her.”*

Question: *“Do you know who bombed you that night? Who is in charge of that air strike?”*

Sari Abdullah Al-Tai, Deir ez-Zor Governorate, Abu Kemal city, 24 years old, peasant *“The American coalition, they admitted it by posting a video on social networks with their aviation doing that air strike.”*

Question: *“In your opinion, why are American bombing civilians? Peasants and workers?”*

Sari Abdullah Al-Tai, Deir ez-Zor Governorate, Abu Kemal city, 24 years old, peasant *“I do not know, we are ordinary peasants, we were sleeping and waken up by the sound of this powerful explosion, we have no weapons with us, they divided*

us and did their air strike, we are ordinary poor peasants, for example, I got my car destroyed, my house is completely destroyed, we didn't do any bad things."



Nauf Taha Al-Khalaf, Deir ez-Zor Governorate, Masalaha, 25 years old, hairdresser: *"This happened in November 2017. I finished my work, and closed my shop very quickly, as I was told that the US coalition started bombing the central street in our village. I was with my friend - Khaled Ahmed Al-Husseini, we were going home by a motorbike. Then there was this air strike, lots of wounded people around us. People were going somewhere. We decided not to drive along the street. That air strike hit the house in front of us. My leg was torn off right at that very moment, the second one was wounded.*

My friend got a shrapnel in the neck – the cervical vein and some nerve were damaged. He could have remained paralyzed, but the treatment took him a year and he recovered. Now he uses some kind of a bandage on his neck, he has to take medications all the time. 10 people died as a result of this air strike, two young children and a little boy was among them.

I don't think there were any militants nearby, although they had their bases and check points in the main street. Their nearest check point was about 500 meters away from us. I consider this a terrorist act, because I'm a civilian, how can I be involved? If they want to attack the ISIS positions, neither me, nor any other civilians have nothing to do with it! What about the children who died as a result of this air strike? And among the ISIS militants there were only few injured people. Because all the injuries that occurred were mostly among civilians. In my opinion, the US coalition wanted people to leave all these areas and territories, they wanted us to run away. What they did was meant to scare us."



Saleh Khleif Al-Suleiman, Deir ez-Zor Governorate, Abu Kemal, 50 years old, entrepreneur: *"What happened? We were sleeping on June 28, 2021. About 1 a.m we were woken by the sound of explosion. My son was killed as a result of this air strike, he was 8, his name was Khleif Salekh Suleiman. My wife and my second son were wounded. People say there were 3 air strikes, but we didn't feel anything. The explosion was 50 meters away from my house."*



Salah Khalaf Al-Abid Al-Hazar, Deir ez-Zor Governorate, Salhiya, 70 years old, peasant *“As a result of air strikes by US coalition, my house was completely destroyed. I used to have 2 cows, not I don’t have cows any more, they were killed. My son lives next to me. The rocket hit his house, made a hole in the ceiling and exploded inside the house. Two children, their friends and uncle died, two of my cousins died. One was killed, and the second had his leg torn off at the knee, the other leg was torn off slightly lower the knee. He is in Damascus now.*

After the air strikes on the river crossing... My son went missing. We don’t know if he is alive. In was in 2017. At night. In 2017, the strikes were carried out at night, as I told you, two of my brothers were killed. There are also a lot of my uncle’s relatives, whom well... some I know... some I don’t know... Unfortunately, they also died or suffered in any way from the coalition.”

Question: *Why did you decide that the air strikes were done by the US coalition?*

Salah Khalaf Al-Abid Al-Hazar, Deir ez-Zor Governorate, Salhiya, 70 years old, peasant *The air strikes were carried out late at night, at 23.00. I was there, and all my family was there. We all got only slight injuries, except the young guys who were killed. They were my cousins, and children also, sons of my sister. Six people died as a result of one air strike. Two of my cousins, my sister’s sons - two of them and two neighbors, who are also our relatives in some way, the rest were slightly injured. One got severe wounds. He had his legs cut off... His arm was broken. The rest of us were only slightly injured - shrapnel, bruises.*

I can say, 30 people died as a result of air strikes carried out by the US coalition. Let alone other villagers killed by ISIS militants.

The nearest ISIS head quarters was 700-800 meters away from us. I can say, it was 1 km away. In fact, the militants escaped 2 days prior the air strike, as if they had known about the strikes in advance. They escaped and left all their property and belongings.”



Osman Ahmed Al-Wahid, Deir ez-Zor Governorate, 53 years old, head of Kata *“I also suffered from the bombing by the US coalition. My house was totally destroyed, my father was killed. I have lots of relatives who lived nearby and they also suffered from the bombing. And I tell you exactly - the international coalition had civilians, not the militants as the target of their attacks. ISIS militants were 100 away from my house. There was their head quarter. Everybody knew that ISIS militants are there. But they were not subjected to the*

attack. Instead, we were the target for the attack. It happened in June 2016. There is a village called al-Abbas. It was subjected to an air strike about 1 year ago, here, in this territory. Civilians also died as a result of the strike - one was killed, and one was wounded. There were no militant at that village, at all. But all the air strikes targeted Abu-Kemal. And so, for example, there was a strike from the American base back in 17 in the field and there were peasants who grazed sheep. 4 days ago, for example, there was a strike in Abu Kemal and people were also killed.”

Question: “And how many civilians in total were killed in Abu-Kemal after the air strikes by the coalition? Or not in Abu-Kemal, what about your village?”

Osman Ahmed Al-Wahid, Deir ez-Zor Governorate, 53 years old, head of Kata “15 people were killed, and this is exactly, as the aviation bombed the river crossing site. People were rushing towards the river, and then the aircraft attacked them. 15 people died immediately. It happened in 2017, in June. 15 more people were killed in Kata. In total, 30 persons were killed about over 200 houses were destroyed by the air strikes in 2016-2017.”

Question: “How many militants were killed by these air strikes in your village?”

Osman Ahmed Al-Wahid, Deir ez-Zor Governorate, 53 years old, head of Kata The escaped, crossed the river and were on the opposite side. That’s why I can tell you exactly, that maximum of 10 ISIS militants were killed.

Question: “What do you think, why was the US coalition bombed the civilians’ houses, if they knew where the militants were hiding?”

Osman Ahmed Al-Wahid, Deir ez-Zor Governorate, 53 years old, head of Kata “In my opinion, the US coalition was helping ISIS militants, instead of killing them, as they say. They helped ISIS militants, and I believe, it was Americans who brought those militants to our territory. They wanted us to leave our house, leave all our property and belongings, in order ISIS people could take and use it.

Question: Why did you decide that it was the US coalition? Couldn’t that be the Syrian Army?

Osman Ahmed Al-Wahid, Deir ez-Zor Governorate, 53 years old, head of Kata “We knew that. People already have some war experience, and they are able to identify which aircraft is approaching. For example, if an aircraft made a lot of noise, people know that it was an Egyptian aircraft. If the attack was done out of nowhere, then it was an American aircraft. Syrian aircraft fly much lower, and people are able to recognize them.



Question: *“How were you affected by the actions of the US-led international coalition? You or your family?”*

Nawal Hassan al-Aja, Deir ez-Zor Governorate, Sabha, 29 years old, housewife: *“All the people were affected by these actions. We lost our mother. My sister was wounded. On July 21, 2017 at 11 a.m. there was an air strike with the use of cluster munitions, the target was the camp near Sabha. It wasn't a refugee camp. These were people with camps on their land, residing there. There were no militants. All people there were injured, all relatives, who were in the camp, my grandfather's family died, only my uncle and his wife survived. About 70 people died in two camps like this. Many people were wounded, even more people were killed. There was at least one person who died in each family, and if not died, but wounded.*

I got shrapnel in my back, in my shoulder. One piece of shrapnel sits right in my heart, it is not possible to get it out of there. I was among the first people who got wounded, I didn't feel the pain, started shouting, looking for my mom. She was about 10 meters away from me, I said I was thirsty, give me some water, I said. When she gave me some water, I felt pain in my back. I started shouting and she told me to lie on my stomach, because my back was bleeding. After that there was another explosion, a heavy one, and then I saw my mother's head was thrown far away from the body.

My elder sister, Manal Khasan Al-Aja got wounded in her stomach. She was pregnant and lost her child, because the shrapnel damaged her stomach.



Question: *“Did Americans help ISIS people somehow? Did they provide them with direct assistance?”*

Abdulrazak Mustafa Al-Shihada, Raqqa Governorate, Zor Shamar, 57 years old, peasant: *“I've always known that ISIS militants were supported by the Americans. I saw it with my own eyes, when an aircraft landed on the Maadan cliff, they took several ISIS militants on board of the aircraft, 2 or 3 persons, and left, there rest were shot from helicopters. So they evacuated the leaders, the commanders and decided to kill the rest.”*



Wahid Hussein Al-Ali, Deir ez-Zor Governorate, Sabha, 60 years old, peasant: *My house is completely destroyed. All 3 floors. This happened in July 2017. The building of the Sharia court was near my house. Probably they wanted to attack the court building, but instead they destroyed my house. They destroyed my house, but the Sharia court building left intact. This happened because the militants and the coalition are together. The coalition supports the militants. We managed to escape from our house before the attack. The militants' cars were parked near the building of the Sharia court They didn't even die, and my house was destroyed.*



Pictured: a house of Wahid Hussein Al-Ali, destroyed as a result of an air strike by the American coalition, Deir ez-Zor Governorate, Sabha



Pictured: Sukut Al-Ahmed Al-Mohammed Al-Taeh, 36, housewife, Muhlef Musa al-Taeh, 42, odd-jobber, Deir ez-Zor Governorate, Jibli, whose house was destroyed as a result of an air strike by the American coalition in July 2017.

Muhlef Musa at-Takeh, Deir ez-Zor Governorate, Jibli, 42 years old, handyman: *“In July 2017, we were inside the house when the militants began to push forward and the coalition aircraft began bombing our village, hit and destroyed our house. What we saw was just that there were the coalition’s aircraft. They said they wanted to attack the militants, but they attacked us. They destroyed over 10 houses, two of them were taken to ground. We were not injured, because we were out in the field at that time, and about 20 people who were at home during the bombing were killed and wounded.*

There were no militants in the village, they started running away randomly, and the strikes continued for another ten days.”



Abdulrazak Mustafa Al-Shihada, Raqqa Governorate, Zor Shamar, 57 years old, peasant: *“In July 2017 these coalition forces destroyed all the house, mine wasn’t an exception. They destroyed anything, even the infrastructure of our country, and then they started destroying civilian houses.”*

Question: *“Were there any militants in your village?”*

Abdulrazak Mustafa Al-Shihada, Raqqa Governorate, Zor Shamar, 57 years old, peasant: *Only few of them. Very few About 15 people. They didn’t even bombed the militants, they bombed only civilian houses. No militants were killed or injured. The militants lived near my house, they were manufacturing weapons, or did something with these weapons, they didn’t become the target of bombing, but my house got destroyed.*

Question: *“How many people were affected by those bombings?”*

Abdulrazak Mustafa Al-Shihada, Raqqa Governorate, Zor Shamar, 57 years old, peasant: *Lots of people died, many were injured - one family included 11 people, they were all killed, the second family had 6 people. All of them died, including the children. There was one more family - 2 persons died there. In total, 13 children died. The youngest was 7 months old, the oldest 7 or 8 years old. Two of my relatives were wounded as a result of the air strike - they were running away, along the street and the bomb exploded.*



Sausan Ahmed Al-Jaber, Raqqa Governorate, Ghanem al-Ali, 35 years old, housewife: *As soon as I heard that Americans started bombing us, I immediately went away, and when I got back, my house, all 5 rooms, was razed to the ground. My neighbors said that was the result of the US bombing. The house of my father's brother was also destroyed. There were no militants in our village. Only sometimes they were passing through our village.*



Usman Saleh Al-Hallaj, Governorate Deir ez-Zor, Western Shrida, 49 years old, Arabic language teacher at school: *"There were no militants in our village, there were militants in the surrounding area, but not in the village itself, and the American coalition bombed my house. We were near the river when they bombed us. After the Syrian Army returned, I also got back to my house and found it completely destroyed. We heard that those were the coalition aircraft. I saw a pickup with the militant near the village, but the coalition aircraft were still bombing the village, they didn't attack that pickup. This happened on July 17, 2017*

On July 16 we all escaped from the village, because we knew that the coalition forces were going to bomb us. Six or seven thousand people lived in the village at that period.

There were lots of people near the river (Euphrates) who left their houses, they were approaching the river crossing site, wanted to get to the opposite bank of the river. Ordinary civilians, posing no threat. From July 17 to 27, 2017 the coalition aircraft started random bombing, attacking any available locations. Randomly. About 10 people from my village were killed as a result of those bombings. On July 24 or 25, Suleiman Humeid al-Abdullah wanted to cross the Euphrates with his brothers, most of the people had already crossed, he was hit by a fragment from an air bomb and he was killed. Later I was told that his father had also died.



Hamada Mahmoud Al-Saju, Deir ez-Zor Governorate, Western Shrida, 48 years old, housewife: *“We were sleeping at night, when the coalition aircraft started bombing us. We escaped from the village. ISIS people lived in the school next to us. As a result of the bombing, the coalition destroyed my house, but they didn’t attack the school nearby. The militants were inside the school. Nobody of the militants was injured. I heard about lots of wounded people after the coalition air strikes, I don’t know if anyone died.*



Juriya Muhammad al-Khalaf, Deir ez-Zor Governorate, Sabha, 43 years old, housewife: *I live in Sabha, here they established their Muslim Islamic State, called ISIS. On July 23, 2017 the US coalition carried out an air strike, as a result 8 people in my family were killed. We left the city and joined the Zeitun camp, it was located near the olive forest. I wanted to cook a dinner for my children, and then the bomb fell right on the camp. Three of my children died - Mukhammed Nur, 12 years old, his sister Anfal, 8 years old, and the younger sister Ilyaf, 9 years old Besides my children, 5 more children of Khasan Al-Kharman died, the oldest one was 16, and the youngest girl was 3 years old. They were all in the same tent.*



Ahmed Hussein Al-Hamid, Deir ez-Zor Governorate, Eastern Shrida, 52 years old, peasant: *The militants lived in our village, but when the air strikes started, all of them escaped. There, in the village, my 17-year-old son and his grandfather, Musal Al-Khamadi, about 70 years old, left. Two rockets hit the house. One got directly into the house from above and the second from the side. My son, Muhammed Ahmed Al-Hamid, got wounded in his leg. We couldn’t take him with because of the wound, we put a splint on the wound, then we brought him to the hospital here, and then we left for Lebanon.*

They did not care who was a civilian there, who was a militant, they started bombing us, scared all the people and children, we all ran away. Over 20 houses were destroyed. Children were wounded, and 4-5 people died as a result of that air strike. This happened at the end of July, or beginning of August 2017.



Muhammed Saer Halyaf, Deir ez-Zor Governorate, Eastern Shrida, 52 years old, peasant: *I live in the Eastern Shrida. There were no militants in our village. On July 17, 2017 we were out in the field, when an American aircraft started bombing us. We lost 50 sheep. I had two nephews, my brother's son, Abdul Salam Hamud Khalyaf, and my sister's son, Bashir Ahmed Al-Isa, both were killed. Both were 8 years old, and my wife, Camilla Ismail Al-Ibrahim (52 years old) was wounded. Eight more people, our neighbors, died. They destroyed my house, my neighbor's house and my son's house completely. It is impossible to restore the house.*

The American didn't attack the militants. All the militants left somewhere to Maadan.



Hamda Swey Al-Kidam, Deir ez-Zor Governorate, Abu Kemal, 30 years old, housewife: *It happened back in 2017, when the Americans started bombing our city. After the air strike, the wall of the house was destroyed, and I was under the ruins. I got both of my feet burnt and broken, almost torn off, held in place with just a piece of skin. The medical treatment I got was good enough to recover soon. In Hajin hospital the treatment takes time, I had to use crutches for a month to be able to walk, then I was sent to Damascus, where I was operated and Ilizarov frame was installed to help me walk.*

The militants were in the other street, 50 meters away from my house. But they didn't hit them, they hit us. Another old man was killed. I've never heard about ISIS militants killed by the Americans. My neighbors died immediately, their guts were all over the place. All the neighbors were injured after a powerful explosion, someone was hit by shrapnel, someone with a stone, and so on. Even my son got wounded in his head."



Abd Al-Halim Mizar Al-Ali Al-Darwish, Deir ez-Zor Governorate, Salhiya, 67 years old, retired: *"My brother Husan Al-Ali Al-Darwish and my father's second wife Nur Hammoud Assal died immediately as a result of the air strike. This happened in late 2017 My brother was 17, my father's second wife was 55.*

We all took our belongings and ran away. We crossed the cotton field, we simply escaped as we were scared of the air strike hitting our house. In the end, the aircraft attacked us

right in this field, out in the open, and some people were killed on the spot. The nearest militant head quarter was 500-600 meters away from us. By this time they had all crossed the river and escaped. There were no militants at all. The aircraft carried out lots of strikes, there were new strikes every two seconds, aircraft flew very low and attacked.”