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Grave Massacre Claims Lives of 20 People Mostly Children in Kafr Battikh, Idlib Countryside

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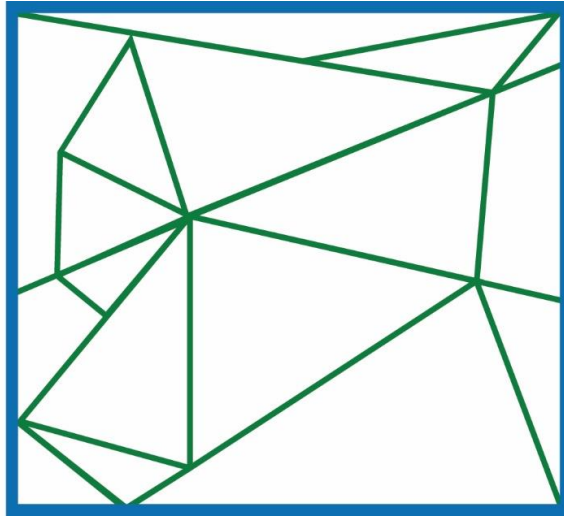


About Syrians for Truth and Justice

[Syrians for Truth and Justice \(STJ\)](#) is an independent, nongovernmental organization whose members include Syrian human rights defenders, advocates and academics of different backgrounds and nationalities. The initiative strives for SYRIA, where all Syrian citizens (males and females) have dignity, equality, justice and equal human rights.

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Introduction

At least 20 civilians¹, mostly children and women, were killed after an attack on a shelter crowded with civilians in [Kafr Battikh](#)² town, Idlib countryside, on March 21, 2018. According to several residents and eyewitnesses, warplanes believed to be Russian, carried out several airstrikes on the town, two of them targeted a shelter with highly explosive rockets, killing 16 children, and the majority of them were schoolchildren under 10 years old who had sought refuge in that shelter immediately after the town was subjected to several airstrikes.

According to the field researcher of [STJ](#), the affected shelter was an underground cave dug by people by manual means in order to protect them from bombardment, noting that the violent attack on the shelter on March 21, 2018, caused a crater of (4) meters deep, and destroyed and demolished it over the heads of the people inside. That made many of the townspeople feel very frightened and terrified, forcing them to flee to safer areas on the border.

The attack comes in the context of the military campaign launched by the Syrian regular forces and their allies throughout the cities and towns of Idlib province as of October 2017, which began with attempts to control villages and towns in the northern countryside of Hama³ and then other villages and towns in the eastern countryside of Idlib. The campaign has left a number of massacres committed against civilians. STJ have prepared earlier, a report entitled "[Military Escalation during March- Idlib Province](#)", documenting attacks on educational facilities in Idlib city and a massacre in Kafr Sijnah, Idlib countryside. STJ had prepared a further report entitled "[Two Massacres in Ma'arat Nu'man and Haas Following Sochi Congress for National dialogue](#)", a report documenting dozens of casualties in warplanes bombarding the residential neighbourhoods in Idlib southern countryside.

Details of the Incident

At 10 a.m. on March 21, 2018, Kafr Battikh was exposed to several violent air raids; two of them targeted a shelter. Abdelmone'im Qassom, one of the villagers who mourned the death of 11 members of his family in the attack, including his father, wife and three of his children, confirmed that to STJ and said:

¹ According to the field researcher of STJ, the toll of dead victims due to the massacre is 20 civilians, but considering that two pregnant women were among the dead, so the toll is 22 civilians.

² Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS)/ formerly al-Nusra Front controls Kafr Battikh town.

³ This escalation comes from the Syrian regular forces, following the HTS control of the village of Abu Dali in the northeast countryside of Hama province on October 9, 2017. However, the Syrian regular forces, supported by warplanes affiliated to the Russian Air Force, were able to restore this village, as well as other villages in the northern countryside of Hama, on December 29, 2017. Furthermore, the Syrian regular forces and their allies could advance towards the southeast countryside of Idlib, and took control of several villages such as Atshan, Khwein, and Sinjar, on January 7, 2018, with the aim of arriving at the Abu Duhur military airbase in the southeastern countryside of Idlib. According to STJ's researchers, the military operations led the Syrian government forces and allied militias to control the airbase on January 27, 2018.

"On the morning of that day, we heard through the walkie-talkie that Russian warplanes hovering over the town. Only moments, they targeted the southern outskirts of Kafr Battikh. Immediately, the schools head teachers sent the students home fearful of targeting the town again. Our house is close to the town's primary school, and in the same neighborhood, there is a shelter, which is an underground hole dug by people in a manual form. Meantime, while children and women were going down to the shelter, including my father who stood in front of the door to watch the aircraft movement in the sky, the aircraft targeted the shelter directly, killed my father on the spot, and closed the shelter's door, which was the only outlet. Everyone became under the rubble due to the rocket explosion. After that, the civil defense teams went to the strike location, but getting them out alive was a very weak hope. I have had very difficult moments waiting to get my kids out; there was nothing to do but to wait. Three hours later, the civil defense teams were able to pull out all the children and women, but all of them were dead."



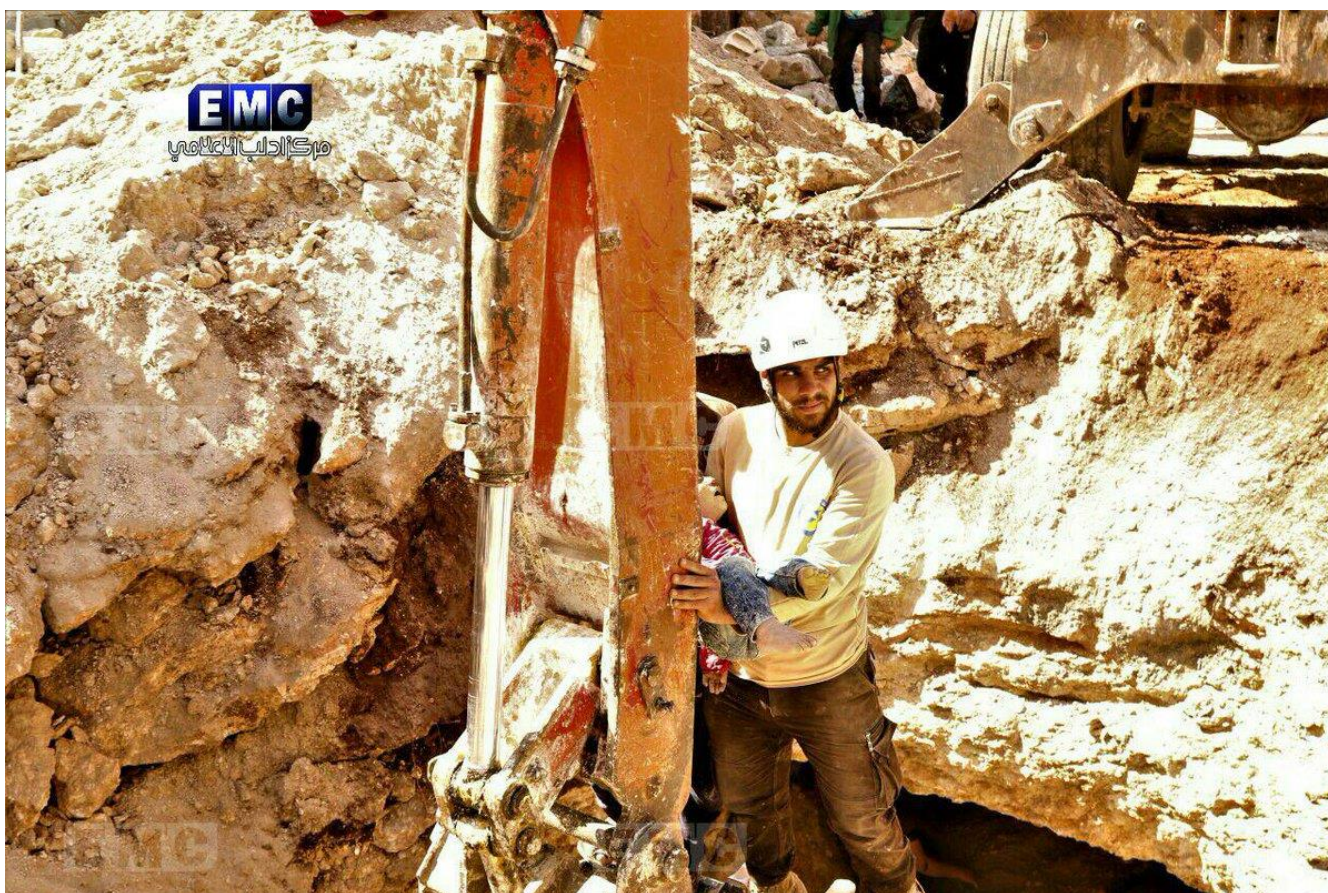
An image shows a remnant of a rocket used in bombing a shelter in Kafr Battikh town on March 21, 2008.

Photo credit: STJ

Mohammed al-Hammadi, the head of the Local Council in Kafr Battikh, testified to STJ also and said that bombarding a shelter in Kafr Battikh caused the death of 20 civilians, including 16 children who were under 10 years old, mostly school students. He added:

"That morning, a Russian warplane targeted the south-eastern district of Kafr Battikh, and then the students were sent homes for their safety, since warplanes always target civilian complexes, service and educational facilities in Idlib province. When the children entered the shelter near their school, an underground cave, warplanes bombed the shelter, returned and retargeted it few minutes later. Twenty civilians were killed, mostly women and children. We, the Local Council, appeal to all the organizations that defend children's rights to stop the massacres against our children. Up to now, the town is still experiencing deep fear and horror because of that massacre; notably that it had recently witnessed a wave of displacement by many locals towards areas on the border. It should be noted that the town does not contain any military headquarters."





Images show some moments were the deaths were being pulled from under the rubble following the March 21, 2018 attack on a shelter in Kafr Battikh. Photo credit: [Edlib Media Center](#).

[A video footage](#), released by Anadolu Agency, showed some dead children and women being pulled out following the March 21, 2018 attack on a shelter in Kafr Battikh, Idlib countryside. Another [video footage](#) published by Edlib Media Centre showed the civil defense teams pulling out bodies of the dead children following the grave massacre in Kafr Battikh town on March 21, 2018.



A satellite image illustrates the geo-location of Kafr Battikh town.





Analysis of visual evidence about the Kafr Battikh massacre on March 21, 2018.

Mohammed al-Mukhtar, an activist from Kafr Battikh, told STJ he learned through walkie-talkies that a warplane, likely Russian, had launched four air raids on Kafr Battikh in the morning of March 21, 2018. In this regard, he said:

"As soon as I heard the appeal, I went to the strike location; the civil defense teams were working to pull out the victims from under the rubble; that took four continuous hours. Overall, the bombardment was focused on residential neighborhoods in Kafr Battikh with highly explosive rockets. The shelter was subjected to two consecutive raids that completely destroyed it and demolished it over the heads of all those inside."

STJ could document names of the civilian victims; the majority of them were children and women. They are:

1. The child Mohammed Bakro Qassom, 7 years old.
2. The child Amana Abdurrahman Qassom, 7 years old.
3. The child Amal Mohammed Handoush, 9 years old.
4. The child Tomama Mahmoud Qassom, 11 years old.
5. The child Omar Mohammed Qassom, 3 years old.
6. The child Batol Mohammed Qassom, 4 years old.
7. The child Zahraa Qassom, 10 years old.
8. The child Maram Ali Hammadi, 8 years old.
9. The child Baraa Salih Aslan, 9 years old.
10. The Child Mariam Abdelmone'im Qassom, 7 years old.
11. The child Aya Ibrahim Qassom, 9 years old.
12. The child Shahad Ibrahim Qassom, 8 years old.
13. The child Naei'ma Abdelmone'im Qassom, 8 years old.
14. The child Mariam Salih Aslan, 8 years old.
15. The child Afaf Salih Aslan, 7 years old.
16. The child Ghofran Mahmoud Qassom, 2 years old.
17. Fatima Mohammed Aslan, the wife of Mohammed Qassom, 22 years old.
18. Rahaf Fawaz Qeneb, the wife of Ahmad Omar Qassom, 20 years old.
19. Bushra Abdulkarim Aslan, the wife of Mahmoud Qassom, 22 years old.
20. Omar Bakro Qassom, 58 years old.



Furthermore, a supervisor of the warplanes observatory in Kafr Battikh stated that a warplane, likely to be Russian, had taken off from Hememim military airbase in Latakia province and then carried out airstrikes on Kafr Battikh on March 21, 2018. He added:

"At 9:40 am, a Russian aircraft took off from Hememim military airbase towards the north. At 10:00 a.m., it reached the skies of Kafr Battikh after hovering over Idlib province. Initially, the aircraft targeted the southern neighborhood of the town, and then returned and launched two raids on a shelter in the village, knowing that the majority of shelters were not safe, being traditional and dug with manual equipment."
