

Rebels Committed War Crimes in Syria

Oct. 19—Rebel groups in Syria have committed war crimes and crimes against humanity in Latakia province, according to a 105-page [Human Rights Watch report](#) released Oct. 11. The armed opposition groups killed at least 190 civilians and seized more than 200 hostages during attacks that began Aug. 4. The terrorist groups, supported with foreign funding and manned with foreign personnel, executed at least 67 of those killed in the operation around pro-government Alawite villages.

The majority of the hostages seized by the rebels were women and children. “These abuses were not the actions of rogue fighters,” said Joe Stork, acting Middle East director at Human Rights Watch. “This operation was a coordinated, planned attack on the civilian population.”

HRW concluded from its on-site investigation that five opposition groups—Ahrar al-Sham, Islamic State of Iraq and Sham, Jabhat al-Nusra, Jaish al-Muhajireen wal-Ansar, and Suqor al-Izz—were the key fundraisers, organizers, and executors of the attacks.

“All concerned governments with influence over these armed opposition groups should press them to end deliberate, indiscriminate, and disproportionate attacks on civilians,” HRW said. “In addition, all governments, companies, and individuals should immediately stop selling or supplying weapons, ammunition, materiel, and funds to these groups, given the compelling evidence that they have committed war crimes and crimes against humanity.”



This Human rights Watch report documents the role of at least five rebel groups, in the mass-murderous attacks in Latakia province, beginning Aug. 4.

Money from Gulf States

Human Rights Watch singles out Turkey as responsible, for the obvious reason that much of the weapons, fighters, and money flowing to Syria goes through the country. “The UN Security Council and Turkey’s allies should call on Turkey in particular to do more to verify that no arms are passing through Turkey to abusive groups,” the HRW said. The western Syrian province of Latakia abuts the Mediterranean Sea and shares its northern border with Turkey.

The report identifies several Kuwaitis who were named in Twitter and YouTube postings by themselves or by rebel groups, who received hundreds of thousands of euros in donations; but the report also indicates that funding came from Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the U.A.E. Continued support of the five principal groups involved in the slaughter of unarmed civilians “may make these individuals [the funders—ed.] complicit in war crimes or crimes against humanity if these groups continue to commit abuses.”

Fighters from Europe, Africa, Elsewhere

HRW’s description of the five principal groups belies any notion that they are the product of an internal uprising, since they are dominated by foreign leaders and fighters as well as foreign funds. The five groups are as follows.

- The Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS), led by an Iraqi by the name of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, who aligned his group with al-Qaeda leader Zayman al-Zawahiri earlier this year. Among the ISIS fighters who died during the assault whom Human Rights Watch names (again from Twitter, YouTube and other social network postings) are a Tunisian and a Chechen.

- Jabhat al-Nusra is also aligned with al-Qaeda, although there have been reports of clashes between al-Nusra and ISIS. At least three al-Nusra fighters were killed during the assault—two Moroccans and a Libyan.

- Ahrar al-Sham, also an Islamist group, lost three fighters during the assault, all Moroccans.

- Jaish al-Muhajireen wal-Ansar “is led by Omar al-Shishani, a Chechen, and is made up of several nationalities, including Chechens, Turks, Tajiks, Pakistanis, French, Egyptians, and Moroccans.” This group is affiliated with ISIS, but the degree of control that ISIS has over wal-Ansar is not clear. Two Libyans from wal-Ansar died in the fighting; and social networks identified another as Chechen wal-Ansar commander.

- Suqor al-Izz is led by Sheikh Saqr al-Jihad from Saudi Arabia. Not only was he personally involved in leading the assault, he was also identified as one of the chief fundraisers for the operation, personally appealing to the funders from Persian Gulf countries and organizing the fundraising center in Syria that conduited the monies to the rebel groups doing the fighting. Several fighters from Suqor al-Izz are named as casualties in the operation, including two Tunisians.

All five of these groups were implicated in war crimes, including the executions of civilians and the taking of civilians as hostages, by evidence uncovered by HRW’s investigators and presented in graphic detail in the report. No elements of the Free Syrian Army apparently took part in the initial assault on Aug. 4, but did appear in areas taken over by the above-named groups in the days afterwards, including FSA commander Gen. Salim Idriss, who is seen in several videos posted on YouTube praising the “liberation” of Latakia province.