

**Syria: War Crimes in Idlib During Peace Negotiations** Human Rights Watch 2 May 2012

Syrian government forces killed at least 95 civilians and burned or destroyed hundreds of houses during a two-week offensive in northern Idlib governorate shortly before the ceasefire, Human Rights Watch said in a report released today. The attacks happened in late March and early April, as United Nations special envoy Kofi Annan was negotiating with the Syrian government to end the fighting.

The 38-page report, “‘They Burned My Heart’: War Crimes in Northern Idlib during Peace Plan Negotiations,” documents dozens of extrajudicial executions, killings of civilians, and destruction of civilian property that qualify as war crimes, as well as arbitrary detention and torture. The report is based on a field investigation conducted by Human Rights Watch in the towns of Taftanaz, Saraqeb, Sarmeen, Kelly, and Hazano in Idlib governorate in late April.

(...)

In nine separate incidents documented by Human Rights Watch, government forces executed 35 civilians in their custody. The majority of executions took place during the attack on Taftanaz, a town of about 15,000 inhabitants northeast of Idlib city on April 3 and 4.

(...) During the military operations, the security forces also arbitrarily detained dozens of people, holding them without any legal basis. About two-thirds of the detainees remain in detention to date, despite promises by President Bashar al-Assad’s government to release political detainees. In most cases, the fate and whereabouts of the detainees remains unknown, raising fears that they had been subjected to enforced disappearances. (...) The fighting in Idlib appeared to reach the level of an armed conflict under international law, given the intensity of the fighting and the level of organization on both sides, including the armed opposition, who ordered and conducted retreats. This would mean that international humanitarian law (the law of armed conflict) would apply in addition to human rights law. Serious violations of international humanitarian law are classified as war crimes.

(...)

Human Rights Watch called on the United Nations Security Council to ensure that the UN supervisory mission deployed to Syria includes a properly staffed and equipped human rights section that is able safely and independently to interview victims of human rights abuses such as those documented in this report, while protecting them from retaliation. Human Rights Watch also called on the UN Security Council to ensure accountability for these crimes by referring the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court, and for the ongoing UN Commission of Inquiry to support this. (...)

**Read the [press release](#) . Read the report in [English](#) , or [Arabic](#) .**