

Almost five years on, Syria is a country destroyed with civilians paying the biggest price

UN Commission of Inquiry

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As the conflict in Syria is poised to enter its sixth year, civilians bear the brunt of intensifying hostilities conducted by an ever-increasing number of warring parties. As their country is reduced to ruins around them, Syrian men, women and children – often the objects of deliberate attack – are fleeing their homes in an uncertain and often perilous search for safe haven.

In its latest report, the Commission of Inquiry on Syria details the catastrophic destruction of civilian infrastructure caused by five years of war, including medical care and educational facilities, public spaces, electricity and water installations. Cultural heritage sites of importance not only to Syria, but also to the world, are being destroyed and damaged through deliberate and incidental attacks. The report further explores the rending of Syria's social fabric. Under attack, under siege, and increasingly divided, trust between communities has been eroded.

“We are seeing an overwhelming yet consistent intensification of external military involvement in Syria by all parties, with devastating consequences for civilians and various communities. With the intensification of airstrikes, there are few safe places for civilians. They are exposed more than ever to violence,” said Commission Chair Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro. “Relevant Security Council resolutions remain largely unheeded and unimplemented.”

Aerial bombardments by pro-Government forces of areas not controlled by the Government have caused hundreds of civilian casualties, mass displacements, and destruction of vital civilian infrastructure. All warring parties – pro-Government forces, anti-Government armed groups, and the terrorist groups ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra – carry out indiscriminate attacks by firing shells onto civilian-inhabited areas under control of the opposition. ISIS continues to kill, maim, and spread terror amongst the civilian population, with its use of suicide bombs and improved explosive devices. Attacks on schools and hospitals have killed healthcare staff and teachers, as well as patients and students. Through these attacks, the warring parties effectively deny the civilian population medical care and education.

The report, the Commission's eleventh to the Human Rights Council, draws on 415 interviews with victims and eyewitnesses in and outside the country, collected between July 2015 and January 2016. It finds that crimes against humanity continue to be committed by Government forces and by the terrorist group ISIS. The commission of war crimes by belligerents is rampant.

“The damage wrought on Syria by this war cannot be measured solely by loss of life and the physical destruction of the country,” said Commissioner Vitit Muntarbhorn. “The war has also devastated the nation of Syria, ripping asunder the ties that bind its communities and cultures together.”

Civilians have been deliberately targeted for attacks – including ground and air assaults, as

well as sieges - where belligerents conflated a community's ethnic and/or religious background and its perceived political loyalties. In some cases, there has been intentional targeting of communities, notably by ISIS. In some cases, external intervention has exacerbated ethno-sectarian tensions.

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Read the full press release and report [here](#) .