**Russian Warplanes Strike Medical Facilities in Syria**

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Physicians for Human Rights

http://physiciansforhumanrights.org/press/press-releases/russian-warplanes-strike-medical-facilities-in-syria.html

Physicians for Human Rights (PHR) has confirmed that Russian air strikes damaged three medical facilities in Syria in two days, exacerbating an already dire situation for civilians living in areas where the health system has been systematically attacked by the Syrian government.

“Bashar al-Assad’s forces have been relentlessly attacking Syria’s health care system for the past four years and the Russian government is now following in their footsteps,” said Widney Brown, PHR’s director of programs. “These attacks are inexcusable. Claiming that the fight is against terrorists does not give any government the right to tear up the laws of war, which specifically protect health workers and facilities. With these actions, Russia is damaging hospitals, putting patients and medical staff at risk, and depriving civilians of life-saving access to health care.”

The Russian Ministry of Defense maintains that its air strikes are conducted with precise, guided munitions, which suggests that these three attacks were targeted at the medical facilities. Russia further maintains that it is targeting the self-declared Islamic State (IS), also called ISIS or ISIL. However, the three medical facilities are all located more than 30 miles from the nearest IS-controlled territory. Regardless of location or who the medical staff treat, targeting a medical facility is a war crime.

PHR has documented 307 attacks on medical facilities and the deaths of 670 medical personnel in Syria since the start of the conflict in March 2011 through the end of August 2015. Syrian government forces have been responsible for more than 90 percent of these attacks, each of which constitutes a war crime. PHR recently also called for a full and independent investigation of an attack on a Doctors without Borders clinic in Kunduz, Afghanistan.

PHR has confirmed the following incidents by Russian air strikes in Syria over the last week:

* On October 2, a Russian warplane launched an air strike on the field hospital in Latamneh, in northern Hama governorate. The facility was damaged, and multiple medical staff members were injured. The Syrian government has previously attacked this facility with barrel bombs in June.
* Also on October 2, a Russian warplane launched an air strike on an ambulance depot and emergency response center in Benin, in rural Idlib. Part of the facility was destroyed, at least two ambulances were seriously damaged, and the depot was temporarily put out of service. Reports indicate that two planes flew over the facility and launched strikes that fell around the depot before circling back and launching another strike, which landed inside the depot. The Syrian government previously attacked this facility with barrel bombs in April.
* On October 3, a Russian warplane launched an air strike that damaged al-Burnas Hospital in northern Latakia, near the Turkish border. The hospital suffered minor material damage, but had to be evacuated. The hospital is the only one in the region with an obstetrics/gynecology unit and is now only able to provide some emergency services.

Russia has not acknowledged that their air strikes hit or damaged the medical facilities, but confirmed it was conducting air strikes in each of these locations when the attacks occurred.