

UN human rights body strongly condemns recent “shocking attacks” against civilians in south-west Syria

The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) issued a strongly-worded statement on Tuesday, denouncing last week’s brutal killings and raids by members of the terrorist group ISIL, in Sweida, south-west Syria.

“We have received reports that more than 200 people were killed and injured in multiple attacks, including suicide bombings in As-Sweida City and in various villages in eastern and northeastern rural As-Sweida Governorate,” said OHCHR Spokesperson, Ravina Shamdasani.

She also cited reports of “scores of ISIL militants” raiding homes in at least eight villages in rural areas of the governorate; shooting and killing civilians inside their homes and abducting women and children.

The Government of Syria has a duty to take action to prevent violent acts that may endanger the lives and well-being of civilians – *Ravina Shamdasani (OHCHR)*

“We have received the names of at least 27 women and children who were reportedly taken hostage from Al-Shbiki village in eastern rural As-Sweida,” she noted, adding that OHCHR believes the number to actually be much higher.

According to OHCHR, photos of some of the abducted women were later tweeted out, “with threats to burn them alive if the Government did not cease military operations against ISIL in western Dara’a Governorate, and release ISIL women and men in Government custody”.

Ms. Shamdasani explained that “these ISIL militants included many who were recently evacuated and relocated from the Palestinian Yarmouk Refugee Camp, Hajar Al-Aswad, and Al-Tadamon areas of southern Damascus, as part of a Government reconciliation agreement”.

“While agreements putting an end to fighting are to be welcomed, the well-being of civilians must be paramount in any considerations,” said the OHCHR Spokesperson, as she stressed that “the transfer of armed fighters with a history of gross human rights abuses and contempt towards international law, can mean an increase in the likelihood of violent attacks against civilians like the ones carried out last week in As-Sweida”.

The UN human rights body is calling on the Government of Syria to take all necessary measures, in line with international human rights and humanitarian law, to protect civilians from attacks and to hold those responsible for

crimes and human rights violations accountable.

“The Government of Syria has a duty to take action to prevent violent acts that may endanger the lives and well-being of civilians – including by not placing armed groups such as ISIL in their proximity”, said Ms. Shamdassani.