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cc. H.E. Sergey V. Lavrov
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November 16, 2016

Dear Minister,

I am writing to share the results of satellite imagery analysis conducted by Human Rights Watch that shows the impact of aerial bombs in Haas, Syria, on October 26, 2016. In light of credible information that these attacks may amount to serious violations of the laws of armed conflict applicable to the Syria conflict, we request that the Ministry conduct a thorough and transparent investigation into the attacks.

In response to Human Rights Watch's November 6 press release on the bombings in Haas, Defense Ministry spokesperson Maj. Gen. Igor Konashenkov claimed that we had failed to consider Russian drone footage from October 27 that showed "an absence of any traces of the bombing of the school [complex]."

However, our November 6 press release did take that drone footage into account, and it also stated that the footage shows damage to two schoolyards in Haas that is consistent with the above-ground



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detonation of a blast or enhanced blast munition. One of the still frames even marks the site of damage resulting from an airstrike over one school compound. In the second frame, damages to a second school compound are partially obscured underneath the white crosshairs of the drone's surveillance system.

In addition to our previous research, which included witness statements and analysis of videos showing parachute-retarded bombs falling on Haas, we have now analyzed satellite imagery, taken of Haas on November 5, and compared it to the still frames that were released from the drone footage, as well as to videos filmed by local pro-opposition groups. The damage that is visible in the satellite imagery recorded on November 5 matches exactly the damage visible and marked in the drone footage of the school complex, as well as the damage visible to the school complex and other areas in Haas in multiple videos recorded at the impact locations and posted to YouTube on 26 October.

The satellite imagery shows four damage signatures consistent with airstrikes, including two impacts on adjacent schools that are part of the school complex, a third on an intersection 100 meters to the north, and the fourth on two buildings approximately 100 meters east of the schools next to an orchard. Human Rights Watch examined imagery from April 22, before the recent attack, which did not show any damage on the school complex.

The satellite imagery from November 5 shows that two sites were hit in the school complex by strikes that partially destroyed the schools' courtyard walls and several smaller buildings within the complex. In one of these two strikes, buildings across the street were also destroyed.

The damage found in the satellite imagery is consistent with multiple published videos and photographs of the attacks. A [video](#) filmed by the Kafranabel Media Center, a pro-opposition group, and published on YouTube on October 26, showed the descent and explosion of a parachute-retarded munition. Human Rights Watch determined that the munition hit the school complex in Haas by matching landmarks in the video with the satellite imagery.

It appears that the bombs were airburst, close to the ground, to maximize the damage created by the blast effect of the weapon. Bombs that are airburst in this

way do not create a crater in the ground, as is characteristic of bombs that detonate on impact.

Damage identified in the satellite imagery is further consistent with multiple other published videos including [a video](#) posted to YouTube by the Syrian Revolution Network, an opposition-affiliated group, showing significant blast damage to the courtyard wall of one of the schools, school complex buildings, and the facades of several of the buildings inside the school complex; a [video](#) published by Al Jazeera showing damage to at least two school buildings; an AFP [photograph of a damaged classroom](#); and a video by [SMART news](#) that shows extensive damage in two other locations outside the school complex.

The landscape and buildings visible in [another video](#), posted by the media office of the Revolutionary Forces of Syria, also appear to fit with satellite imagery of Haas. The video includes one segment showing an SU-24 aircraft flying at medium altitude. A second segment, filmed from the same vantage point, shows a column of smoke rising from buildings in the distance and an object falling, causing an explosion. Only the Russian and Syrian militaries conduct airstrikes in Syria using SU-24 series aircraft.

Major General Konashenkov also “reminded” Human Rights Watch that “terrorists” have been in control of Idlib for some time. Our press release of November 6 noted that armed forces opposed to Bashar al-Assad have long been in control of Haas and its surroundings, and that we have documented unlawful attacks by opposition forces, including attacks that killed at least three children in government-controlled West Aleppo on October 27. We have documented violations by opposition forces and also by ISIS throughout the conflict.

However, under international law, a school may be attacked only if, and for such time as, it is a military objective, for example, if it is being used to store weapons, launch attacks, or to house fighters, and even then the attack must not disproportionately harm civilians who may be present. The Defense Ministry has not presented any evidence that the schools complex or other locations in Haas contained any military object.

We request that you launch an investigation of the October 26 attacks on Haas and


publish information that answers the following questions:

- Were the aircraft that attacked Haas flown by the Russian military, the Syrian military, or did both militaries participate?
- What locations were the targets of the attack, and why were they considered to be military objectives?
- What type of munitions were dropped during the attack and how many were dropped?
- What steps were taken to ensure that the type of munition used in the attack would not indiscriminately or disproportionately harm civilians?

The Defense Ministry has released only two still frames from the drone footage. We request that you release the rest of the footage so that a fuller picture of what occurred in Haas can be made clear.

I can be reached through crd@hrw.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Zama Coursen-Neff". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Zama Coursen-Neff
Executive Director
Children's Rights Division