

Report: Rebels Responsible for Houla Massacre

Armed rebels murdered “entire Alawi families” in village of Taldo in Houla

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It was, in the words of U.N. special envoy Kofi Annan, the “tipping point” in the Syria conflict: a savage massacre of over 90 people, predominantly women and children, for which the Syrian regime of Bashar al-Assad was immediately blamed by virtually the entirety of the Western media. Within days of the first reports of the Houla massacre, the U.S., France, Great Britain, Germany, and several other Western countries announced that they were expelling Syria’s ambassadors in protest.

But according to [a new report](#) in Germany’s leading daily, the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (FAZ), the Houla massacre was in fact committed by anti-Assad Sunni militants, and the bulk of the victims were member of the Alawi and Shia minorities, which have been largely supportive of Assad. For its account of the massacre, the report cites opponents of Assad, who, however, declined to have their names appear in print out of fear of reprisals from armed opposition groups.

According to the article’s sources, the massacre occurred after rebel forces attacked three army-controlled roadblocks outside of Houla. The roadblocks had been set up to protect nearby Alawi majority villages from attacks by Sunni militias. The rebel attacks provoked a call for reinforcements by the besieged army units. Syrian army and rebel forces are reported to have engaged in battle for some 90 minutes, during which time “dozens of soldiers and rebels” were killed.

“According to eyewitness accounts,” the FAZ report continues,

the massacre occurred during this time. Those killed were almost exclusively from families belonging to Houla’s Alawi and Shia minorities. Over 90% of Houla’s population are Sunnis. Several dozen members of a family were slaughtered, which had converted from Sunni to Shia Islam. Members of the Shomaliya, an Alawi family, were also killed, as was the family of a Sunni member of the Syrian parliament who is regarded as a collaborator. Immediately following the massacre, the perpetrators are supposed to have filmed their victims and then presented them as Sunni victims in videos posted on the internet.

The FAZ report echoes eyewitness accounts collected from refugees from the Houla region by members of the Monastery of St. James in Qara, Syria. According to monastery sources [cited by the Dutch Middle East expert Martin Janssen](#), armed rebels murdered “entire Alawi

families” in the village of Taldo in the Houla region.

Already at the beginning of April, Mother Agnès-Mariam de la Croix of the St. James Monastery warned of rebel atrocities’ being repackaged in both Arab and Western media accounts as regime atrocities. She cited the case of a massacre in the Khalidiya neighborhood in Homs. According to [an account](#) published in French on the monastery’s website, rebels gathered Christian and Alawi hostages in a building in Khalidiya and blew up the building with dynamite. They then attributed the crime to the regular Syrian army. “Even though this act has been attributed to regular army forces . . . the evidence and testimony are irrefutable: It was an operation undertaken by armed groups affiliated with the opposition,” Mother Agnès-Mariam wrote.

John Rosenthal writes on European politics and transatlantic security issues. You can follow his work at www.trans-int.com or [on Facebook](#).

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