

Should the U.N. Consider the White Helmets as a Politically Neutral Organization, and Its Allegations as Credible Sources by U.N. Investigative Panels on Syria?

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What is, and what is not, our main focus in analysing the White Helmets

Although we have published clinical findings on White Helmets materials -which I will later summarise in this presentation- the main interest of SWEDHR on this thematic goes beyond the pure commenting on isolated life-rescuing or lifesaving procedures done by the White Helmets.

According to SWEDHR ultimate task -the endeavour for stopping wars and averting risks for new world conflagrations- we think that the most relevant issue about the White Helmets is to analyse the political behaviour of the organization as such, the international positions adopted by its leadership in the issue of peace or war in Syria, and not to focus on single disgraceful episodes of its members -unless a widespread repetitions of those would constitute a behaviour characterizing the organization.

We have acknowledged since time ago, that individuals in that organization, as in any other of the kind, might have different motivations for their participation. For instance, in an article from 2016 in The Indicter, I wrote, "Undoubtedly, there are in that organization, like in any other of that kind, true volunteer-individuals trying to make a humanitarian contribution." [2] I repeated the same thing the year after, in an interview with Sputnik Radio. [3]

So, the point for us has not been to demonise the individual participation of some well-minded volunteers deploying natural solidarity with civilians, which in a given moment are -tragically as in all wars- victims of a collateral damage. Neither is the case to criticise the humanitarian rescue-activity per se, in those cases in which that activity has been real.

Instead, our analyses on the White Helmets materials aim to focus on two mayor issues pertaining the White Helmets as institution: a) The geopolitical significance of the White Helmets as an international construction in the propaganda war, and b) The using of this organization as a main source of information by UN investigative commissions.

The propaganda strategy in a geopolitical perspective

From a geopolitical perspective, the White Helmets model can also be viewed as a constructed instrument to be used in the war propaganda against regimes which Western powers consider hostile to their interests.

We find a clear example in the relatively recent establishment of the White Helmets in Venezuela, where these formations, distributed in different main cities, would also perform as first responders 'assisting victims'. And again, those victims are solely those within the ranks of the oppositional forces –in this case opposition to the Maduro government. Then we have as well White Helmets in Malaysia and Philippines, etc. We can anticipate that other similar organisations of first responders will pop up in the future, associated with regime change strategies.

Generally, the White Helmets propaganda has been mainly analysed in reference to 1) The imagery and uploading of videos representing victims of war –in several cases having consisted in faked materials distributed by mainstream media, and which have been exposed afterwards. 2) A vast production of self-promoting materials, videos, etc. in which White Helmets operators are portrayed as heroes. A classical item has been the carrying of a crying girl in the arms of a White Helmets operator, a pictorial theme that together with the same girl used as model, recurrently appears in different stage settings.

To the above should be added the propaganda about the White Helmets, such as the debated documentary film that won a Hollywood Oscar award.

A main "propaganda trick" of the White Helmets

A recurrent White Helmets propaganda method have consisted in randomly repeat in mainstream media or social media 'life-saving' related episodes (see items 1 and 2 above), which give the public the notion of 'permanent bombardment on civil areas', independent of whether those raids are actually happening at the moment of the published propaganda material. Overwhelmingly, that 'propaganda trick' has been used on occasions when air strikes *have not* taken place.

On the other hand, reports of air operations on military targets are frequently omitted in the White Helmets propaganda.

The propaganda routine described above, mixed with the allegations of gas attacks –also a routine in itself (see my report "From Timisoara to Khan Shaykhun")– [4] serve as backbone of the ultimate aim in the White Helmets strategic propaganda: the petition routine for an intensification of the military operations in Syria. This has been concretely implemented mainly through the repeated pledge for a No-Fly Zone. [5] [6] [7]

The White Helmets as source in UN investigative panels

The other important issue considered in SWEDHR analyses, is the use done by UN Commissions investigating allegations on chemical attacks in Syria of the White Helmets allegations and testimonies. The information provided by the White Helmets and associated actors are used as a main source for the investigated allegations, and subsequently to 'legitimate' conclusions.

In a recent analysis of the report by UN Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM) on the Khan

Shaykhun incident of April 2017 [8] I pointed out that absence, or non-professional verifying, of the reliability of such *partisan* information and ad-hoc testimonies provided by the White Helmets, conveys the risk that the UN-Investigative panel's report condemning the Assad government result "inaccurate, politically biased". [9] Those methodologically biased conclusions do not only represent unfairness against the governments signalled as "guilty" without a juridical requirement of evidence *beyond reasonable doubt*, but also end fuelling the risk for catastrophic geopolitical consequences. Therefore, it is utmost important to analyse the credibility of the information-providers, and this is *sine qua non* factor in securing the reliability of those UN investigative reports.

"Other humanitarian actors" directly associated with the White Helmets

A further methodological problem is presented by the using of "separate" information provided by "other humanitarian actors" in the field, but which are directly associated with the White Helmets. These "different" sources that are in use by the current UN investigative commissions may be referred as to different names, for instance medical-related (such as the "Syrian American Medical Association" (SAM), "field hospitals in Idlib", etc.), or individuals' Twitter accounts listed by the COI as its trusted open sources, [10] in sum, all of which the investigative panels nominally separate from the "White Helmets".

However, these entities are intrinsically not politically separated from each other. They share the same ideology, some times the same financing sources, and the same strategy for the continuation and even the intensification of the military escalation of Western powers in Syria.

Vice News reportage, "Horrorful Videos Shown at UN Display Carnage of Suspected Chlorine Attacks in Syria", [11] gives a clear illustration on the above. It referred a footage uploaded by the White Helmets in You Tube on 16 March 2015.

"At the meeting, the doctors showed council members footage taken by a field hospital in Sarmin, in Idlib Province, on the night of March 16. The video, which was provided to VICE News, depicted frenetic efforts to resuscitate three young children exhibiting symptoms of chemical exposure."

"If there was a dry eye in the room, I didn't see it," US Ambassador Samantha Power, whose mission organized the closed-door session, told reporters afterward. "Those people responsible for these attacks have to be held accountable."

"Dr. Mohamed Tennari, the director of the field hospital where the victims of the March 16 attack were treated, told reporters on Thursday that residents in Sarmin heard helicopters that night and then noticed "bleach-like odors."

That meeting at the UNSC was followed by a broadcast in CNN [*Editor's Note*: published by CNN in YouTube on April 20, 2015], where the president of the SAM was also interviewed and appeared together with the said doctor from the rebel-occupied area of Idlib. The main point publicized in the CNN broadcasting was their renewed pledge for a No-Fly Zone in Syria. Which corresponds exactly to the core of the White Helmets strategic propaganda.

But for the White Helmets, the above-mentioned doctors, Ms Samantha Powers, Vice News, CNN, etc. -for all those participating in the reproduction of the White Helmets footage showed at the UN Security Council in April 2015-

the problem is, however, that footage series correspond to staged or definitely non-medical lifesaving procedures. The audio (which translation was not shown in the video) indicates that some scenes are directly instructed by the cameraman. Furthermore, no verifiable evidence has ever been produced regarding the “gas attack” that allegedly would have led to the “lifesaving” manoeuvres on seemingly dead children. In sum, dead children have been used in a macabre propaganda coup aimed to back a petition for a No-Fly Zone in Syria at the UN.

See further below in this text details on the professional analysis done by several Swedish doctors, and the subsequent exposure that SWEDHR did on those deceptive video materials.

Issues to consider in analysing the credibility of the White Helmets as reliable source of information

I will here list some issues directly associated with the credibility of the White Helmets in their capacity of *sources* of information. This observation is about the role of the White Helmets as *source* being used in UN-investigations, or any other inquire that is supposed to meet research requirements of impartiality and objectiveness; it is not to be confounded or interpreted as a criticism of actual rescue activities that the White Helmets said to perform.

1. Credibility issue, “Civil defence”

The organisation White Helmets makes a fundamental point of its “civil defence” character. We have of course the issue of who is legally the Civil Defence of Syria. On this point I shall only refer to a published report by independent journalist Vanessa Beeley, who obtained a testimony from the Geneva-based (UN affiliated) International Civil Defence Organisation, that keeps register of the Civil Defence institutions in the world. The author reports that the real Syria Civil Defence, established in Syria in 1953, is the one and only officially recognised as such. [12]

Yet, my query is on whether a *real* “civil defence” character there exists in all the rescue-operations reported by the White Helmets.

For instance, Professor Jan Oberg, Eva Bartlett, Vanessa Beeley and other investigative journalists or independent investigators have reported, on the base of their on-site visits, a number of episodes, or witnesses testimonies, indicating that the White Helmets rescue operations have rather been not directed to civilians, but to combatants in the rebel fractions they would be in cooperation with.

One issue that we have discussed internally at SWEDHR, is whether those episodes may or not represent the standard in the priorities of the White helmets operations. Such an investigation would require access to the records of all rescue operations, data which is not available. Meanwhile, the thesis of Vanessa Beeley appears to derive support from the correlation between a) the amount of testimonies referred to different episodes, and b) the similarity of the testimonies content.

2. Credibility issue, “White Helmets political neutrality”. Does it really exist?

Author’s Note: The logo in the image below (screenshot from a YouTube video) correspond

to the same jihadist formation which, simultaneously with the White Helmets, uploaded in YouTube on 16 March 2015 the staged “lifesaving” scenes commented above, and also in further section “3. Credibility issue on “Rescuing and lifesaving” – Real or staged?”



This issue is twofold:

One item refers to the double militancy of White Helmets *individuals* which appear one moment posing in White Helmets operations...and in the next moment they are seen sporting their White Helmets uniforms while celebrating military operations together with armed “moderate extremists”...waving a black jihadist flag with the belligerent *shahada* inscription.

In one footage or image which was not shown in the film here at today’s conference, two White Helmets are captured by the lens doing the “V” sign while standing on top of rests of demised soldiers being transported in a pick-up truck. This scene would indicate that either a) the WH are participating as ad-hoc services in the actual combat zone, or b) the bodies of the Syrian soldiers correspond to executed prisoners whose corpses are disposed with the services of the White Helmets. Corroborating this hypothesis, the film earlier seen in this conference showed the sequence of the execution of a young individual, immediately followed by White Helmets operatives lifting the body for further transport. It emerges that the White Helmets would have been already prepared, and that they were at the execution scene.



Images above: Screenshot from video uploaded in YouTube

Mainstream media would dismiss that this would represent an official, regular White Helmets collaboration with the combatant forces. But on the other hand it is difficult to see those footage as only a result of White Helmets “individual’s” collaboration. That because in those scenes captured in the videos, the participation of White Helmets vehicles, gear, and several of White Helmets operators, is also visible.

Another fact which contradicts the political neutrality principle adduced by the White Helmets, is the participation of its top representatives in political meetings advocating for political strategies in favour of the opposition forces in the Syrian conflict. Even when the White Helmets director explains why he would not participate in a political meeting –like the one in Saudi Arabia last week– he does that by uttering statements referred to political stances taken by the White Helmets as organization.

3. Credibility issue on “Rescuing and lifesaving” – Real or staged?

As to the episodes of flawed rescuing or staged life saving, there are a number of these allegations spread in social media and particularly in YouTube. For our part, we did an analysis of a video series uploaded by the White Helmets on March 2015, depicting life-saving scenes of children purported filmed in the aftermath of an alleged gas attack in Sarmine, Idlib.

As we mentioned above, a most serious problem about the Sarmine videos, is that a Dr associated with the White Helmets field work, and the White Helmets associates at the SAM, were invited to show those videos in a session ad hoc to the Security Council in New York, in April 2015. However the veracity-content of those video materials were not controlled. Or if it was, the materials were shown anyway. All that to support the argument of an intensification of the military campaign against the Syrian government, specifically pledges for the establishment of a no-fly zone.

Our conclusions were published in two articles, 1) "White Helmets Video: Swedish Doctors for Human Rights Denounce Medical Malpractice and 'Misuse' of Children for Propaganda Aims", [13] and 2) "Updated Evidence From Swedish Doctors Confirm Fake 'Lifesaving' and Malpractices on Children". [14]

I have to point out that the videos uploaded by the White Helmets correspond exactly to the materials uploaded the very same day, at nearly the same opportunity, by "Coordinating Sarmin" (تنسيقية سرمين), an organization bearing a logo with the jihadist Shahada flag used by Al-Qaeda.

These were the SWEDHR conclusions:

Quoted from article 1, above:

Dr Leif Elinder, a known Swedish medical doctor profile, author and specialist in paediatrics, summarised the following in his reply:

"After examination of the video material, I found that the measures inflicted upon those children, some of them lifeless, are bizarre, non-medical, non-lifesaving, and even counterproductive in terms of life-saving purposes of children".

Further, I received a detailed clinical statement from Dr Lena Oske, a Swedish medical doctor and general practitioner. In her statement, Dr Oske referred to the presumed, adrenaline injection, performed in the White Helmet video (excerpt in the photo above). Her specialist opinion dismisses the procedure conducted in the White Helmet video, as unqualified and incorrect. Furthermore, she describes the earlier assessment of the procedure by a colleague who had exclaimed:

"If not already dead, this injection would have killed the child!"

Excerpts from Dr Lena Oske's statement to SWEDHR:

"Intracutaneous injection with adrenalin may be used if any other resuscitation measure does not succeed. Especially under precarious circumstances - such as in field emergency settings- where safer ways for the administration of medication (i.e. endotracheal, intravenous, or intraosseus) might be difficult or unavailable. But not in the way shown in the video".

"In order to perform the injection, CPR (cardiopulmonary resuscitation) has to be interrupted, and then the CPR resumed immediately after. Which is not done in the procedures shown in the video."

And referring to a correct medical procedure, the Swedish specialist MD adds:

"The technique is simple. Long needle, syringe with 1 mg adrenaline, find the 4th or 5th intercostal space and insert the needle just adjacent to the sternum,

left side, deposit the medication after checking you are in the right position (aspiration of blood and no resistance), take out the needle and immediately resume CPR! So, the doctor who wrote the comment, 'If not already dead, this injection would have killed the child' was right! What a macabre scene; and how sad."

Dr Martin Gelin, specialist in dental surgery, designer of various medical and surgical items, wrote:

"The laryngoscope displayed in the video, positioned on the child's left wrist/hand, is in my view an instrument for grown up patients. Of course this is only an estimation supported by the instrument size in comparison with the size/length of the child's arm/hand. BUT, the blade is curved! Laryngoscopes for small children have a flat (or less curved) and smaller blade."

In a later communication, Dr Martin Gelin added:

"There are no traces of blood visible around the "cardiac" syringe when initially penetrating the skin of the child's chest. No blood either around the needle during, the wild and uncoordinated in and out movements when trying to "reach" the child's heart! (As far as ascertainable in the video clip). We have long maintained, this would again indicate that the child "operated" on most likely is dead, no blood circulating anymore or that the blood already is coagulating or has coagulated."

For my part, I had made the following observation [see frame sequence bellow], which motivated the further consultation to colleagues at SWEDHR:

"No substance (e.g. adrenaline) was injected into the child while the 'medic' or doctor introduced the syringe-needle in a simulated intracardiac-injection manoeuvre."

Here below, successive still frames indicating that the piston in the syringe appears remaining in the same position, at the beginning as well as in the middle and at the end of the "intracardiac-injection procedure".



My finding, which has also been confirmed in second-opinions issued by European MD specialists outside membership of Swedish Doctors for Human Rights (SWEDHR) in a meeting in Holland in August 2017 -including an specialist head of the intensive care department of a high reputed hospital in Germany- would indicate that a) the main highlighted 'life-saving' procedure on the infant (intracardiac-injection manoeuvre) shown in the White Helmets video was faked, and b) the hypothesis mentioned by SWEDHR doctors in the first report, [13] referring that the child in question, "if not already dead, might have died because the injection procedure" (Dr Lena Oske) has a factual ground.

Have our findings on the anti-medical, non-lifesaving procedures showed in the White Helmets been questioned. The answer is no.

In the last article in the series mentioned above, [14] I wrote a special Note asking doctors and readers for replication, rebuttal, or comments on our conclusions. No refutations from any doctor did ever come. This despite the two explanatory videos we posted in *The Indicter Channel* at YouTube have been viewed altogether over a quarter million times (N= 283,308 views). [15] [16]

The only critical article against SWEDHR on this issue was produced by the anti-Russia propaganda publication “CODA Story” (May 2017). However, the CODA Story article had to acknowledge that our conclusions about medical malpractice were accurate. In the CODA article that is referred as to “poorly executed procedure”, “not a usual resuscitation method”, or “did not appear to be carrying out a resuscitation attempt according to accepted guidelines”. [17] The article only contended whether the White Helmets footage would have correspond to an intentional staged scene.

I have served in two consecutive periods as alternate scientific member of the Swedish Ethical Review Committee in Uppsala, appointed by two different governments. I can affirm that any medical ethic review panel would call that, as we did in SWEDHR, medical malpractice.

Regarding whether scenes in the footage are staged or not, those we have referred *are* staged, beyond doubt. For instance, the CODA article omits to refer the instructions giving by the cameraman shooting the footage to the doctor or paramedics, which it hears clearly in the soundtrack of the video. While filming, the cameraman instructs that children’s bodies should be piled on top of the corps of a deceased woman, depicted in the video as the mother. This is what he says, according to the translation I received, provided by Vanesa Beeley:

“The mother should be underneath and the children on top of her, hey! Make sure the mother is underneath.”

Not to mention the episode of the simulated intracardial injection on one of the children, presumably already dead.

All the above can be observed by anyone at the videos indicated in references [15] and [16].

Conclusion

The aspects reviewed above, referred to a) the partially questioned “civil defence” character of the rescue endeavours, b) the empirical negation of the “political neutrality” principle, both via individual behaviours on the field and by public political activities of the organisation representatives, and c) the production of life-saving scenes reportedly staged, and with war propaganda ends -all together considered, should naturally pose questions about the *credibility* of the White Helmets and its associates in terms of *first-reporters* of alleged events, and further as *corroborating witnesses* of the events they are the original sources.

Judging from published reports [8] [10], the UN appointed commissions investigating the allegations of chemical attacks in Syria have not properly addressed this issue.



Finally, on behalf of SWEDHR, I wish to make clear that our organization neither negate nor support any thesis which would emphatically conclude, in absence of verifiable evidence, who is responsible for the alleged chemical attacks referred here. As scientists, we have solely demand, and we still do, for “beyond reasonable doubt” evidence.

“Swedish Doctors for Human Rights therefore suggest the establishment of an international, independent and multidisciplinary expert-panel of scientists aimed to review the methodology and procedures comprised in the JIM investigation; to assess whether methodological or other bias are behind evidence-deprived conclusions of the report. The suggested professional team shall be a true objective panel not only concerned with the flawed report on the Khan Shaykhun incident, but also reviewing similar faulty allegations done in recent years, which together form a pattern of an aggressive geopolitical behaviour, and a contributing menace to world peace.” [9]

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Notes

[1] “SWEDHR Foundation Manifest”, <http://swedhr.org/swedhr-manifest/>; “SWEDHR, about us”, <http://swedhr.org/about-us/>

[2] M Ferrada de Noli, “Why Is Sweden Giving the “Alternative Nobel Prize” to Syria’s ‘White Helmets’?”. The Indicter Magazine, 25 November 2016.

[3] “‘The evidence of chemical attack in Syria is questionable’ – Marcello Ferrada de Noli”. Radio Sputnik, 10 April 2017. <https://soundcloud.com/radiosputnik/media-should-ask-white-helmets-to-provide-evidence-of-the-chemical-attack-in-syria>

[4] M. Ferrada de Noli, “From Timisoara to Khan Shaykhun. Part I: The Staged-Massacre Routine for Regime Change”. The Indicter Magazin, 24 October 2017. <http://theindicter.com/from-timisoara-to-khan-shaykhun-part-i-the-staged-massacre-routine-for-regime-change/>

[5] Interview with the author, “NATO White Helmets Denounced by Swedish Doctors”. UK Column News. Published on Mar 8, 2017. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ijcA3LCKC10>

[6] Interview with the author, “De Hvide Hjelmes propaganda er farlig”. Arbejderen, Denmark, 26 April 2017. <http://arbejderen.dk/udland/de-hvide-hjelmes-propaganda-er-farlig>

[7] Associazione di medici svedesi: “Attacco chimico in Siria è una fake news”. Oltre La Linea, Italy. <http://www.oltrelinea.news/2017/04/10/associazione-di-medici-svedesi-attacco-chimico-in-siria-e-una-fake-news/>

[8] “Seventh report of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons – United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism”. <http://static.alarabiya.net/files/PDF/2017/10/27/17021a74-d826-4752-aba6-f4083d8e7220.pdf>

[9] M Ferrada de Noli, "UN 'Joint Investigative Mechanism' report on Khan Shaykhun proven inaccurate, politically biased". The Indicter magazine, 8 November 2017. <http://theindicter.com/un-joint-investigative-mechanism-report-on-khan-shaykhun-proven-inaccurate-politically-biased/>

[10] "Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (Advance Edited Version)" <http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/ColSyria> <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/G1723418.pdf>

[11] Samuel Oakford, "Horrorifying Videos Shown at UN Display Carnage of Suspected Chlorine Attacks in Syria". Vice News, 17 April 2015. <https://news.vice.com/article/horrifying-videos-shown-at-un-display-carnage-of-suspected-chlorine-attacks-in-syria>

[12] Vanessa Beeley, "Who are Syria's White Helmets (terrorist linked)?" 21st Century Wire, 25 June 2016. <http://21stcenturywire.com/2016/06/21/who-are-the-syria-white-helmets/>

[13] M. Ferrada de Noli, "White Helmets Video: Swedish Doctors for Human Rights Denounce Medical Malpractice and 'Misuse' of Children for Propaganda Aims". The Indicter Magazine, 6 March 2017. <http://theindicter.com/white-helmets-video-swedish-doctors-for-human-rights-denounce-medical-malpractice-and-misuse-of-children-for-propaganda-aims/>

[14] M. Ferrada de Noli, "White Helmets Movie: Updated Evidence From Swedish Doctors Confirm Fake 'Lifesaving' and Malpractices on Children". The Indicter Magazine, 17 March 2017. <http://theindicter.com/white-helmets-movie-updated-evidence-from-swedish-doctors-confirm-fake-lifesaving-and-malpractices-on-children/>

[15] "The White Helmets video and How to NOT correctly perform intracardiac injection". Uploaded in YouTube by The Indicter Channel, 6 March 2017 (214,833 views). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3GXz9ww7JY4>

[16] "White Helmets video with fake life-saving procedures deceived UN sec council". Uploaded in YouTube by The Indicter Channel, 12 March 2017 [71,475 views]. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9nj6fc69qjM>

[17] "Russia Used a Two-Year-Old Video and an 'Alternative' Swedish Group to Discredit Reports of Syria Gas Attack"- CODA Story, 2 May 2017. <https://codastory.com/disinformation-crisis/armed-conflict/a-swedish-alternative-ngo-disputes-a-video-of-syrian-carnage-and-a-russian-fake-news-meme-is-born>

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