

## Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung confirms: Houla massacre committed by Syrian “rebels”

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On June 13 journalist Rainer Hermann confirmed his earlier report in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* refuting the official version of the Houla massacre in Syria.

The media have almost unanimously described the May 5 events in Houla as an atrocity committed by the Syrian government, relying almost exclusively on reports from the so-called rebels. Western powers have used the massacre as a pretext to whip up pro-war sentiment and intensify their pressure on the Assad regime. The US and UK reacted to the massacre by withdrawing diplomats from Syria.

In his June 7 report, Hermann asserted that the victims of the massacre in Taldou, a village in the Houla region, were members of the Alawite and Shi'ite minorities and that the killers were not troops loyal to the Assad regime, but forces aligned with the Sunni-based, sectarian Free Syrian Army (FSA).

Although the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* is one of the most prominent German-language newspapers and Hermann a well-known journalist, the report has largely been ignored by the German and international media and criticized in a few reports.

In his new article June 13 Hermann defends his reporting and adds further details about the massacre. This report has also been met largely with silence.

The Houla plains region, Hermann writes, “is burdened by a long history of sectarian tensions. ... Of the names of the civilians killed, 84 are known. These are the fathers, mothers and 49 children of the Al Sayyid family and two branches of the Abdarrazzaq family. ... Additionally killed in Taldou were relatives of the ... member of parliament Abdalmuti Mashlab.”

Hermann goes on to describe what happened: “The family members were targeted and killed with only one exception. No neighbour was injured. One had to have knowledge of the place to carry out these well-planned executions”.

Hermann then quotes 11-year-old Ali, the only member of the Al Sayyid family to survive the bloodbath: “Those responsible had shaved heads and long beards”. In Hermann’s opinion, this points to “fanatical jihadists” and not the “Shabiha militia”.

The version of the event advanced in the global media, in particularly lurid fashion by Britain’s *Observer* and *Der Spiegel*, the German news magazine, blames the Shabiha

militias, regarded as assault detachments of the Assad regime. These articles rely on the testimony of a Major Jihad Raslan said to have first served in Assad's army, who then deserted because he was so appalled by the "events in Houla". Hermann's article in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* exposes these reports as a bunch of lies.

Hermann reconstructs the sequence of events as follows: "After the Friday prayers on May 25 more than 700 armed people led by Abdurrazzaq Tlass and Yahya Yusuf, forming three groups from Rastan, Kafr Laha and Akriba, attacked three army checkpoints around Taldou. The numerically superior rebels and the (mostly also Sunni) soldiers fought bloody battles in which two dozen soldiers, mostly conscripts, were killed. During and after the fighting the rebels, supported by residents of Taldou, wiped out the Al Sayyid and Abdarrazzaq families. They had refused to join the opposition".

In his article, Hermann refers to earlier reports by other journalists and nuns from the Jacob Monastery in Qara. Nuns had described to Dutch journalist Martin Janssen how the rebels piled the bodies of dead soldiers and civilians in front of the mosque and told UN observers their version of the alleged massacre in front of cameras from rebel-friendly television channels.

The nun Agnès-Maryam had already described the escalation of sectarian violence around Homs in an open letter toward the end of April. She warned of a step-by-step liquidation of all minorities by the Sunni rebels and described the displacement of Christians and Alawites from their homes and the rape of young girls who had been given to the rebels as spoils of war.

Herman also refers to Russian journalist Marat Musin who works for the Anna news agency and was in Houla on May 25 and 26, thus becoming an eyewitness of the events as well as a reporter. So far Musin seems to have given the most detailed description of what took place. His version coincides with Hermann's and that of the nuns on all decisive points.

These reports and the latest article in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* confirm that Syria is being ravaged by a civil war deliberately promoted by Western powers to destabilize the country and prepare it for regime change. The rebels do not speak for the majority of the population. They are made up of former members of the regime, soldiers, mercenaries, terrorists and secret agents pursuing a reactionary political agenda, many of them using the support by the West to settle old scores and carry out sectarian conflicts.

International news media are supporting the war preparations of US imperialism and its allies in an unprecedented campaign of agitation and propaganda. That is why Hermann's article and the well-documented reports of other journalists and eyewitnesses are mostly being hushed up.

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