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Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in July 2023

Suspending UN Cross-Border Humanitarian Assistance Puts the Lives of Millions of Syrians in Northwestern Syria in Jeopardy

Friday 04 August 2023

The Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR), founded in June 2011, is a non-governmental, independent group that is considered a primary source for the OHCHR on all death toll-related analyses in Syria.

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I. Introduction and Methodology

Syria has seen an unprecedented number of violations since the start of the popular uprising for democracy in March 2011. Extrajudicial killings, arrests, torture, and enforced disappearances are at the forefront of the violations which the Syrian people have endured for over a decade. While the Syrian regime and its affiliated militias were the sole perpetrators of these violations for approximately the first seven months of the uprising, other parties subsequently joined in, perpetrating their own share of human rights violations against Syrians. The Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) has been documenting human rights violations to the best of our abilities since the earliest days of the uprising in 2011. In 2012 and 2013, as the numbers of human rights violations rose sharply, our team was confronted by the need to issue periodic monthly reports, in order to highlight the continued suffering of the Syrian people. At that stage, we began releasing eight reports each month, and, in tandem with this, created a large and still growing database which now houses the details of hundreds of thousands of incidents sorted into the various categories of violations that have emerged during our documentation work.

By the end of 2018, however, the level of violence had fallen to some degree, which prompted another change in our reporting strategy. At this point, we opted for releasing one monthly report summarizing the most notable human rights violations in Syria that we were able to document in the previous month. As such, this report focuses on the human rights situation in Syria in July 2023. In this report, we summarize the civilian deaths we've documented in this period at the hands of the parties to the conflict and the controlling parties, as well as providing details of the numbers of arrests and enforced disappearances. The report also sheds light on the attacks on civilian objects documented by SNHR's team during last month. For a detailed explanation of our [methodology](#), please visit the following link.

This report only represents the bare minimum of the actual severity and magnitude of the violations that occurred. Also, it doesn't include any analysis of the profound social, economic, and psychological ramifications of these events.

II. Brief on July's Most Notable Developments

Bombings and military operations

July saw Syrian regime forces continuing to launch artillery attacks against northwestern Syria, with SNHR documenting separate attacks targeting the villages and towns of Jabal al-Zawiya in southern rural Idlib, and western rural Aleppo, as well as Sahl al-Ghab in western rural Hama; all of these areas are close to the dividing lines with armed opposition factions. In addition, regime artillery shelling targeted the villages and towns of western rural Aleppo and southern rural Idlib that are far from the dividing lines. [On July 4, Syrian regime artillery forces targeted Darat Izza city in western Aleppo](#), injuring four children from the same family. In another incident of artillery bombardment the same day, regime forces targeted al-Bara town in Jabal al-Zawiya in southern Idlib, [killing a woman](#). Syrian regime forces again targeted al-Bara town a few days later [on July 9](#), injuring three children from the same family to varying degrees. On July 11, Syrian regime forces used an anti-armour rocket to target a Civil Defense (White Helmets) vehicle affiliated with al-Atareb center on the road connecting al-Atareb city and Kafr Nouran town in western Aleppo, [killing one civil defense rescue worker](#) who was on his way to examine a site targeted in an earlier artillery attack by regime forces. On July 26, [two civilians](#) were killed by another anti-armour rocket fired by regime artillery forces at a gathering of shepherds while they were herding sheep in an agricultural area adjacent to Kafr Nouran town in western Aleppo.

On July 5, the Russian and Syrian regime air forces conducted joint aerial military exercises that went on for six days, as reported by the [Russian News Agency RIA Novosti](#). According to the agency, “the exercises focused on joint aerial operations, aerial defense strategy, and the use of cyberwarfare in deterring aerial attacks”.

On July 5, [three civilians](#), including two children, were killed when they were caught in crossfire between the Syrian National Army (SNA)’s ‘al-Sultan Murad’ brigade and personnel from the SNA’s civilian police force at an SNA police checkpoint in Ras al-Ein city in rural Hasaka governorate.

Meanwhile, July, as with June, saw a decrease in [the number of civilians killed by landmines](#), with SNHR documenting new fatalities as a result of landmine explosions every month so far in 2023. In July, only five civilians, including one child and one woman, were killed by the explosion of landmines in rural Hasaka, Deir Ez-Zour, and Aleppo, bringing the total number of victims killed by landmines since the beginning of 2023 to 91, all civilians, including 20 children and eight women.

July also witnessed different bombings using improvised explosive devices (IEDs), as well as explosions of live remnants from earlier shelling across Syria. On July 9, a car bomb of unidentified source blew up in front of a car repair workshop in Shawa village in al-Ra’ie area in eastern Aleppo, [causing a massacre](#) in which five civilians, including one child, were killed while three others, also including a child, were wounded.



Photo showing the destruction left by a car bomb of unidentified source that exploded outside a car repair workshop in Shawa village in eastern rural Aleppo, resulting in a massacre - July 9, 2023

On July 27, a motorbike of unidentified source exploded near a SAIPA-model taxi in al-Sayyidah Zaynab in Rural Damascus (Rif Dimshaq), killing eight civilians, including four children and one woman, according to the information that SNHR has been able to document.

July also saw more [assassinations of civilians at the hands of unidentified gunmen](#) across Syria, mostly in the governorates of Daraa and Deir Ez-Zour.

On July 2, the Israeli Air Force carried out coordinated attacks targeting multiple locations in the vicinity of Homs city, causing material damage as reported by the Syrian regime's [Syrian Arab News Agency \(SANA\)](#). On July 19, SANA reported further Israeli Air Force attacks, targeting multiple points [in the vicinity of Damascus city](#), injuring two Syrian regime military personnel and causing material damages.

Living and Security Conditions

In July, economic, living, services, and security conditions continued to decline across all sectors in areas under Syrian regime control, with a particularly sharp deterioration seen in the services sector. Regarding the power crisis specifically, the regime government is still implementing a rationing policy, with the number of hours designated for official power cuts increasing in July. In some regime areas, the number of hours without any electricity was as high [as 11 per day](#), further exacerbating the suffering of the residents there. Also related to the power crisis, the power rationing policy exacerbated the [water shortages crisis](#) in regime-controlled areas, as the number of hours per day with an electricity supply is insufficient to pump water from water stations, which causes frequent cuts in the water supply.

In addition to these problems, residents in regime-held areas are also still grappling with rising prices for virtually all goods, most crucially food supplies. For instance, on July 20, [the pro-regime al-Watan Online](#) news website reported that prices of goods, especially food supplies, have risen by 30 or 40 percent, including prices for sugar, rice, oil, and ghee, amid a complete lack of price regulation by the Syrian regime government. Al-Watan newspaper also reported that the prices of some goods [have risen by 100 percent](#), with many basic supplies completely absent from market shelves.

The rising fuel prices are also causing a transport crisis in regime-held areas. On July 24, the pro-regime Tishreen Newspaper published [pictures of large groups of people](#) waiting at bus stops under the searing summer heat.

July also saw an unprecedented fall in the exchange value of the Syrian Pound (SYP). In the first third of July, one US dollar equaled 10,000 SYP, which is historically unprecedented. By the last of week of July, the Syrian pound had plummeted further, reaching 12,000 S.P. for one US dollar, according to [sp-today](#), website that monitors the Syrian currency's exchange value. Naturally, this led to more price rises and more goods becoming unavailable in markets.

The rampant state of insecurity is another issue plaguing regime-controlled areas, with thefts continuing to rise in multiple areas, some of which have even targeted public service institutions. On July 2, the pro-regime [al-Watan Newspaper](#) reported that the power grid of al-Salamiya city "is being repeatedly targeted by thieves". SNHR stresses that the rampant state of insecurity only makes civilians more vulnerable to theft and mugging, while the targeting of service institutions makes civilians' lives more difficult and further denies them their most basic civil rights. All of this is living proof of the Syrian regime's failure to address the living crises that exacerbates the suffering plaguing citizens' lives.

In northwestern Syria, meanwhile, civilians' already severe suffering continues to worsen under deteriorating economic and living conditions in parallel with rising prices for food and grocery supplies, all intensified by the decline of the Turkish Lira's value which has plummeted to exchange rates as low as 27 TRY for 1 USD, deepening civilians' suffering and causing continuous price rises, which are further worsened by the people's waning purchasing power due to widespread unemployment and poverty, especially in those areas housing internally displaced persons (IDPs) camps, with wages for those in work in the area also continuing to decline.

The rising summer heat has caused several fires in agricultural and forested areas in rural Idlib, Aleppo, and Latakia, leading to massive losses for farmers and woodland resources. Moreover, a number of citizens died by drowning in northwestern Syria, where people are trying to ease the effects of the extreme, searing heat by visiting lakes, rivers and other bodies of water.

The situation in northeastern Syria remains similarly dire, with worsening living and security conditions. Prices of food, fuel and other essential commodities in the region continue to rise due to the controlling forces' failure to regulate the market, not to mention the state of rampant insecurity in the area that has continued for a few months.

In light of the rising heat, residents in multiple neighborhoods in Hasaka city continue to struggle with the water outages for the second consecutive month, as Allouk Water Station stopped pumping water due to a power outage, depriving almost one million people in the region of water, with this suffering worsened by the rising prices of drinking water. If the situation continues as it is at present, the area is rapidly heading for a humanitarian catastrophe requiring the urgent intervention of the international community which must put pressure on the de facto ruling authority to maintain power at the water station.

Forced displacement

In July, the suffering of IDPs in northwestern Syria continued in relation to both living conditions and the ongoing humanitarian crisis, with the ever-increasing prices, especially of food supplies, on one hand, and the widespread unemployment and virtually non-existent purchasing power among residents in the area on the other combining to create further deprivation, during a period characterized by severe shortages of humanitarian relief, meaning that humanitarian needs are reaching unprecedented levels.

We also documented more fires in IDP camps in northwestern Syria in July. On July 14, 2023, a malfunction in a battery-operated lighting source [caused a fire](#) in al-Mashfa Camp for IDPs in the village of Ein al-Beyda on the Syrian-Turkish border in western rural Idlib governorate. Two tents and their contents were completely destroyed in the blaze, which also caused damage to some nearby tents. Another fire on July 23, also caused by a malfunction in a battery-operated lighting source, broke out in [Salah al-Din Camp for IDPs](#) near Kafr Daryan town in northern rural Idlib governorate, completely destroying one tent and its contents.

In al-Rukban Camp on the Syrian-Jordanian border in rural Homs governorate, we recorded on July 18 the [death of a humanitarian activist](#) who was the camp's school principal, due to the lack of healthcare there and to his inability to leave and receive the necessary treatment elsewhere due to the regime siege, leading eventually to his premature death. SNHR condemns the persecution of civilians living in the camp and calls on the international community to urgently intervene and save them.

In the camps in northeastern Syria, on the subject of foreign states repatriating their nationals, [France's Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs](#) revealed in an official statement issued on July 4 that France has repatriated 25 minors and 10 women from the camps in northeastern Syria.

With regard to Syrian refugees and asylum seekers, Lebanese officials revealed further details about changes to the country's policy regarding refugees. On July 1, [Russia's Sputnik news agency](#) reported a statement by Issam Sharaf al-Din, the Caretaker Minister of the Displaced Affairs, who said that [the Syrian state is prepared to receive 180,000 refugees as a first stage, followed by batches of 15,000 refugees every month](#). In this context, [Human Rights Watch \(HRW\)](#) said on July 5 that the Lebanese army had summarily deported thousands of Syrian citizens, including unaccompanied children, back to Syria in April and May of this year. The statement reads, "[Syrians in Lebanon are living in constant fear that they could be picked up and sent back to nightmarish conditions, regardless of their refugee status.](#)" Relatedly, [the European Parliament](#) released a statement on July 11, saying that the conditions for a voluntary and dignified return of refugees to conflict-prone areas in Syria have not yet been met. The statement also stresses "the need to provide adequate, predictable and multi-layered funding to agencies working with refugees in order to ensure the full provision of essential services to refugee communities [in Lebanon]" while also emphasizing that the return of refugees "should be voluntary, dignified, and safe according to international criteria."

In Jordan, the [UN World Food Programme \(WFP\)](#) revealed on July 18 that further reductions of food assistance intended for refugees in Jordan have become unavoidable due to lack of funds. In the statement, the WFP revealed that monthly assistance will be reduced by a third for the 119,000 refugees living in al-Zaatari and Azraq Camps. As of August, the statement further detailed, Syrian refugees in camps will receive a reduced cash stipend of \$21 (15 JOD) per person per month, a sharp reduction from the previous monthly stipend of \$32 (23 JOD) per person. Commenting on the reduction, Dominik Bartsch, [the UN Refugees Agency \(UNHCR\) Representative in Jordan](#), warned in a statement released on the same day that refugees will be forced to face dire consequences if the funding crisis is not addressed. SNHR stresses that reducing food assistance to refugees in Jordan makes families more vulnerable to hunger, and undermines the task of providing a proper healthcare and protection environment for Syrian child refugees in Jordan. As such, humanitarian assistance must be preserved and increased, so that refugees can enjoy access to food and medication.

Political and human rights situation

On July 3, [Russia's TASS News Agency](#) reported a statement by Sergey Naryshkin, the director of the Russian Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR), who claimed that the US is doing all it can to sabotage the Arab world's normalization of relations with the Syrian regime in order "to discredit the Syrian leadership." He added that "toward this end, false flag attacks are being prepared, including with the use of chemical warfare agents", claiming that these attacks were to be carried out in Idlib city in collaboration with Hurras al-Din, which Naryshkin referred to as the "local CIA-controlled branch of al-Qaeda." It should be noted that this is not the first time Russia has promoted implausible claims about military attacks by other parties to serve its own political agenda.

On July 3, Alena Douhan, the UN Special Rapporteur on the negative impact of the unilateral coercive measures on the enjoyment of human rights, released [her report](#) on her visit to Syria that took place between October 30, 2022, and November 10, 2022. The report is set to be submitted and included on the agenda of the 54th session of the UN Human Rights Council. In the report, Ms. Douhan described the sanctions against the Syrian regime as unilateral measures imposed without the authorization of the Security Council that prevent the much-needed rebuilding and reconstruction of the country. On July 29, SNHR released [a statement](#) stressing that the UN Special Rapporteur should have called on the Syrian regime to end all forms of violations, which is the only way to ensure sanctions are lifted.

On July 4, the [French Senate](#) passed an amendment with majority support from the National Assembly removing the requirement for 'dual incrimination' in cases of war crimes and crimes against humanity, expanding the jurisdiction of the French judiciary so as to allow it to prosecute war criminals in Syria without the two former requirements of the prosecuted being a "habitual resident" of France, and the act in question being also criminalized in the Syrian Penal Code. SNHR welcomes this decision that supports the path of justice for victims and creates an opportunity to file lawsuits in French courts against individuals who committed human rights violations in Syria.

On July 4, the [Commission for International Justice and Accountability \(CIJA\)](#) released a report containing documents that, according to the investigators, show how "the highest levels of the Syrian Regime planned, organized, instigated and deployed paramilitary groups [i.e., 'shabiha'] in order to assist the state's crackdown on the opposition" since the beginning of the popular uprising in Syria in 2011. The report refers to nine massacres perpetrated by these militias and details the connection between them and the 'Central Crisis Management Cell' that was founded by the head of the Syrian regime Bashar Assad, and which has regularly submitted reports to him. Since the very first years of the popular uprising, SNHR has shed light on the issue of local militias founded and supported by the Syrian regime, issuing numerous reports detailing the [most notable massacres](#) perpetrated by them, many of which have exhibited a sectarian character.

On July 5, [SNHR](#) released a statement in which it noted that the most recent report by Germany's Federal Foreign Office (AA) on the situation in Syria reiterates that Syria is an unsafe country. The statement by SNHR notes that the latest AA report primarily draws upon the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (COI), and secondly on SNHR's data. This year's report sheds light on many of the forms of violations seen in Syria, while also underlining the worsening economic and humanitarian situation in the wake of the February 6 Earthquake. SNHR's statement commended the findings of the report and welcomed the German government's position in refusing to restore relations with the Syrian regime which continues to commit crimes against humanity and war crimes against the Syrian people.

On July 5, Haidar Ali Ahmad, the Syrian regime's permanent representative to the UN, stressed the Syrian regime's [refusal](#) to recognize the mandate of the COI. Speaking during the UN Human Rights Council's 53rd Round, in an oral update as part of the interactive dialogue of the COI, Mr. Ahmad justified this position by citing the COI's supposed "consistent failure [...] which involved ignoring or even justifying the illegal and immoral policies of the countries that occupy parts of the Syrian territories, attack Syria's sovereignty, and provide aid to terrorist and separatist organizations." The regime official also said that Syria was not involved in the founding of the UN body that was established to work on the missing persons issue in accordance with a resolution by the UN General Assembly on June 29, and as such, he added, Syria will not participate in its work because it was created without the request, approval, or support of the state in question. SNHR must stress that the Syrian regime's rejection is a blatant attempt on the regime's part to conceal its involvement in war crimes and crimes against humanity that have been well-documented by the wholly legitimate COI. The UN must ensure that the COI's work continues without harassment or restrictions. Meanwhile, the UN Security Council must take into account the COI's reports on Syria and reflect its findings in the resolutions it passes on the country.

On July 7, [Denmark's Ministry of Immigration and Integration](#), released a report on military service in Syria, which touches upon military recruitment procedures in Syria, including those concerning naturalized foreigners. To that end, the report notes that recruitment, both for conscripts and reserve combatants, continues in regime-held areas, with the same conscription procedures followed in all areas under the regime's control. The report also noted that conscripts might be required to be actively involved in hostilities that may constitute violations of international law. The report primarily draws upon data provided by SNHR. On July 20, we released [a statement](#) addressing the release of the report.

On July 7, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) issued [a press release](#) revealing that public hearings would be held on Wednesday-Thursday, July 19-20 regarding the case against the regime submitted by Canada and the Netherlands concerning the application of the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. On July 15, however, the ICJ announced that the public hearing would be [postponed](#) for three months. In response, the Netherlands and Canada issued [a joint statement](#) on July 20, expressing their regret at the ICJ's decision. Meanwhile, on July 26, [SANA](#) cited an official source within the Syrian regime's Foreign Ministry who described Canada's and the Netherlands' objection as "unsurprising", claiming that these two states find any action that does

not suit their wishes and policies to warrant criticism, and cannot withstand any 'slap' because it might undermine the endeavor they are currently engaged in. SNHR calls on the ICJ to accept the appeal filed by Canada and the Netherlands in light of the existence of massive quantities of conclusive evidence proving that the Syrian regime has committed multiple violations against the Syrian people. We must reiterate that a trial procedure is the proper legal path towards fulfilling justice for the Syrian people and holding the Syrian regime to account. We also call on the other democracies of the world to file similar lawsuits in line with their obligations to compliance with human rights conventions.

On July 8, the Syrian regime's Ministry of Media [announced](#) that it would be cancelling the BBC's media accreditation due to what it called a "misleading report" by [the BBC](#). According to the BBC, this decision followed the network's publication of a report entitled, 'From Within the Drug States' on June 27. SNHR stresses that this is not the first time the Syrian regime has taken similar action against foreign and independent media outlets. Such action further demonstrates the Syrian regime's policy of restricting freedom of opinion and expression, which we have noted [in many reports](#).

On July 10, the British [Guardian](#) newspaper published an investigative report on the July 14 incident of the migrant boat sinking near the Greek coast. The report found that the Greek Coast Guard's attempts to tow the boat may have caused it to sink. [SNHR](#) documented that no fewer than 48 Syrians, including two children and seven women, mostly from Daraa governorate died by drowning in that incident.

On July 11, [Russia used its veto powers](#) in the UN Security Council to block a draft resolution to extend the cross-border mechanism to deliver humanitarian assistance to northwestern Syria by nine months, which had been proposed by the Switzerland and Brazil. Meanwhile, the Russian draft resolution for a six-month extension did not receive enough votes for it to pass. On July 14, the Syrian regime sent [a letter](#) to the UN Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council informing them of its decision to grant permission to the UN and its agencies to use Bab al-Hawa Crossing to deliver humanitarian assistance with full collaboration and coordination for a period of six months starting on July 13. However, it should be stressed that, as of this writing, no humanitarian relief aid had been delivered via Bab al-Hawa since July 10, further exacerbating the suffering of the residents of northwestern Syria. The Syrian regime's having control of the delivery of humanitarian assistance will deny millions of IDPs access to this crucial aid. On July 9, we issued [a statement](#) reiterating our legal position first stated three years ago, that the delivery of UN humanitarian assistance does not require the UN Security Council's permission. Meanwhile, [Amnesty International](#) and [Doctors Without Borders \(MSF\)](#) called on the Security Council on July 5 to renew the cross-border mechanism to deliver humanitarian assistance to northwestern Syria.



On July 11, Pedro Arrojo-Agudo, the UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation, [announced](#) that he had cancelled his visit to Syria, which was scheduled to take place on July 9, because of the Syrian regime's lack of full cooperation. SNHR welcomes the decision to cancel the visit, as we reiterate that the Syrian regime has not the slightest inclination to provide secure infrastructure and basic essential services to the citizens.

On July 12, the COI released its latest report, entitled '[No End in Sight](#)'. The report, which covers the period between January 1, 2020, and April 30, 2023, focuses on the issue of torture and ill-treatment in Syria. It sheds light on the fact that numerous types of torture, and cruel, inhumane, and degrading treatment continue to be perpetrated in a systematic and widespread manner in the Syrian Arab Republic, including the practice of enforced disappearance in detention facilities. The report reiterates that arbitrary arrest and ill-treatment continue to be major issues threatening the lives of individuals living in areas under the Syrian regime's control, including those areas over which the regime regained control in recent years, as well as threatening the lives of Syrian citizens returning to the country. The report underlines this crucial fact amid mounting pressures on Syrian refugees and asylum seekers to return to Syria from their host countries. On July 26, SNHR released [a statement](#) welcoming the findings and recommendations of the COI's report, and reiterating our continuing support for the COI's work based on our belief in the vital importance of its mandate as gross violations continue to be perpetrated in Syria, especially and particularly at the hands of the Syrian regime.

On July 13, SNHR released [a statement](#) revealing that the [Fact-Finding Mission \(FFM\)](#) of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) issued a report on June 28 disproving the Syrian regime's allegations concerning two incidents which were reported by the Syrian regime's government to the OPCW's Technical Secretariat on October 26, 2017. In its submission to the OPCW, the Syrian regime alleged that regime army personnel stationed in Kharbit Massasneh village in Hama suburbs were targeted using mortar shells loaded with a toxic gas on July 7 and August 4 of 2017. The statement stresses that findings of this report prove, yet again, that the Syrian regime has no shred of credibility, and has already lied dozens of times about the use of chemical weapons in Syria. Working closely with its allies Russia and Iran, the regime is conducting a systematic misinformation campaign to distort the well-established facts about its use of chemical weapons in Syria.

On July 13, the UN Human Rights Council, in its 53rd session held in Geneva, adopted [a resolution](#) calling on the Syrian regime to "meet its responsibility to respect and protect the human rights of all persons within its jurisdiction in a manner consistent with the applicable international law obligations of the Syrian Arab Republic."

On July 16, Mohammed Shia al-Sudani, the Iraqi Prime Minister, conducted [an official visit](#) to Damascus accompanied by a senior delegation, during which they met with the head of the Syrian regime and other Syrian officials. The two sides held a joint press conference, in which al-Sundai proclaimed, 'Iraq supports the steps taken to lift the sanctions imposed on Syria'. This was the first such visit by an Iraqi prime minister to Syria since 2010. SNHR reiterates that any attempt to restore relations with the Syrian regime is an insult to the state that attempts to do so, and more importantly it is, under international law, a form of support for the violations committed by the Syrian regime against the Syrian people, since strongly opposing egregious human rights violations that constitute crimes against humanity and war crimes is a fundamental part of the responsibility of all world's states in accordance with their ratification of the Geneva Convention.

On July 24, [SNHR](#) released a statement stressing that the UN Secretary-General's annual report on children and armed conflict shows that Syria is once again the world's worst country in terms of several types of violation. The statement notes that SNHR annually reviews the UN Secretary-General's report on children and armed conflicts, with SNHR acting as a primary source for its data on violations against children in Syria, thanks to SNHR's cooperation and partnership in the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM) at the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF).

On July 27, SNHR released [a joint statement](#) with a number of human organizations calling on the Turkish authorities to respect their obligations under customary international law which strictly prohibits refolement. The statement stressed that, it is only because of the unconscionable oppression and persecution that have been taking place since March 2011 that Syrians have found no recourse but to flee this harrowing reality, and are now seen as eligible to request asylum in the eyes of international law.

Accountability and advocacy

On July 6, SNHR participated in [a virtual panel](#) discussion entitled, 'Pathways to Safe Return: Addressing Challenges for Syrian Refugees in the Wake of Regime Normalization', which was organized by the Malcolm H. Kerr Carnegie Middle East Center, and co-hosted by the Immigration Policy Lab at Stanford University and ETH Zurich, the European Institute of Peace (EIP), and SNHR. The panelists discussed the pressing issues that must be addressed in order for the millions of Syrian refugees living in neighboring countries—mainly Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan—to be able to safely return home. SNHR released [a statement](#) on the event on July 8.

On July 11, the left-leaning, pro-Russian [German website NachDenkSeiten](#) released an article attacking SNHR. The article alleges that SNHR is used as a source by the UN and the EU because of the fact that a number of EU countries support SNHR. The article also laments that outlets such as the Guardian, CNN, and BBC cite SNHR, which it calls a source for disseminating propaganda about the reality of Syria. It should be noted that SNHR has grown used to being attacked by Syrian regime- and Russian-affiliated yellow-press outlets, with SNHR's website also targeted by a number of DDoS attacks in the past. Whatever happens, we will stay the path and remain committed to our goals, believing wholeheartedly in our mantra, 'No Justice Without Accountability'.

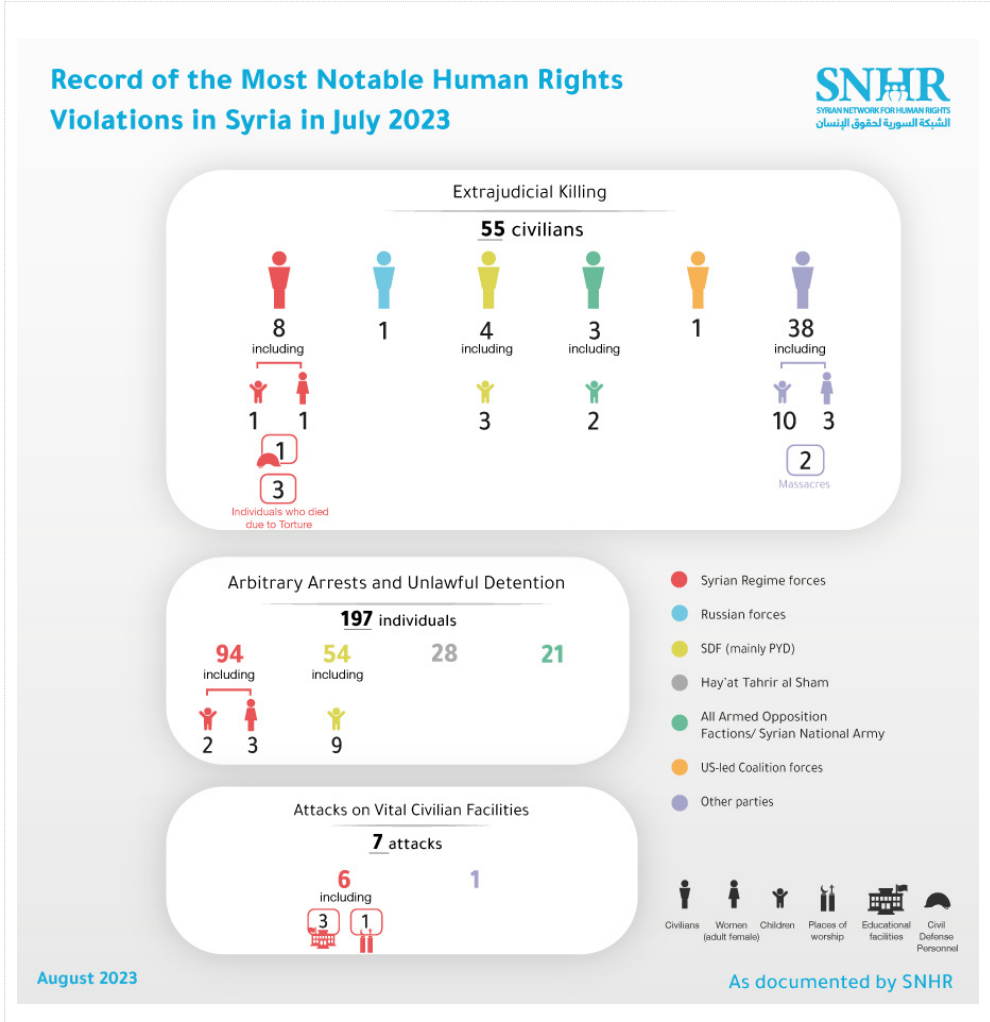
On July 18, the [US Congress](#) voted against a bill to lift US sanctions on the Syrian regime. A total of 3994 representatives voted against the bill, with only 24 voting in favor. SNHR welcomes the outcome of this vote and reiterates that economic sanctions, along with other forms of sanctions such as military, must continue until a true political democratic transition is realized in Syria.

On July 20, the EU released [a statement](#) revealing that it had adopted new restrictive measure against six Iranian individuals for supporting the Syrian regime with air defense systems.

In July, SNHR briefed the UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances, the UN Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, the UN Special Rapporteur on Promotion and Protection of Human Rights while Countering Terrorism- Specific work on victims of terrorism, and the UN Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, on [five cases of enforced disappearance](#), namely one woman and her two children, and two siblings.

III. Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in July

This report summarizes the most notable human rights violations committed by the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in Syria that were documented by SNHR in July 2023.



A. Extrajudicial killing

In July, SNHR documented the death of 55 civilians, including 16 children and four women (adult female), most of whom were killed at the hands of other parties. Among them were also one Civil Defense (White Helmets) rescue worker and three individuals who died due to torture. Furthermore, we documented two massacres. On August 1, we released a report detailing the civilian victims documented killed at the hands of the parties to the conflict and controlling forces in Syria in July 2023.

The death toll of civilian victims in July was distributed according to the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in Syria as follows:

A. Main parties:

- **Syrian regime forces (army, security, local militias, and Shiite foreign militias):**¹ Eight civilians, including one child and one woman.
- **Russian forces:** One civilian.
- **All armed opposition factions/SNA:** Three civilians, including two children.
- **Kurdish Led Syrian Democratic Forces 'SDF' (Mainly the Democratic Union Party 'PYD'):** Four civilians, including three children.
- **International coalition forces:** One civilian.

B. Other parties:

We documented the killing of 38 civilians in July, including 10 children and three women, at the hands of other parties, distributed as follows:

- **Landmines whose source we have been unable to identify:** Five civilians, including one child and one woman.
- **Gunfire whose source we have been unable to identify:** 12 civilians, including one child.
- **Bombings whose perpetrators we have been unable to identify:** 16 civilians, including seven children and two women.
- **Killings by parties we have been unable to identify:** Five civilians, including one child.

B. Arbitrary arrest and enforced disappearance

In July 2023, SNHR documented at least 197 arbitrary arrests, including 11 children and three women (adult female), at the hands of the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in Syria. Most of these arrests were carried out by Syrian regime forces in the governorates of Rural Damascus, then Deir Ez-Zour, and then Damascus. We issued a report on August 2 detailing the arbitrary arrests and enforced disappearances which we documented in July 2023 at the hands of the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in Syria.

1. We generally use the term 'the Syrian regime' rather than 'the Syrian government', because the nature of the ruling power in Syria is a totalitarian dictatorship where power is concentrated in the hands of a small circle of individuals, namely the President of the Republic and the heads of the security apparatus. Conversely, the ministers, including the Prime Minister and the Minister of Interior, play a restricted, largely ceremonial role, which is limited to implementing precisely what the ruling regime orders, with no real decision-making power or active role of their own. Syria is under a personalist/family rule, with no independent decision-making structure. Rather, the government is an empty façade merely for show. The Minister of Interior receives orders from the security branches over which he supposedly presides. The Minister of Justice cannot even summon a low-ranking security office, let alone a security branch head. Syria is ruled by the president assisted by the heads of the security branches.

We are aware that the United Nations and its agencies use the term 'the Syrian government', however, we believe that this is a completely inaccurate and misleading term in the Syrian context.

Cases of arbitrary arrests were distributed according to the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces as follows:

- **Syrian regime forces:** 94 individuals, including two children and three women.
- **HTS²:** 28 individuals.
- **All Armed Opposition factions/SNA:** 21 individuals.
- **SDF:** 54 individuals, including nine children

C. Attacks on vital civilian facilities

SNHR documented at least seven attacks on vital civilian facilities during July 2023, six of which were perpetrated by Syrian regime forces.

Three of the attacks targeted educational facilities, while one targeted a place of worship.

The attacks on vital civilian facilities recorded in July 2023 were distributed by the parties to the conflict and controlling forces in Syria as follows:

A. Main parties

- **Syrian regime forces:** Six attacks.

B. other parties:

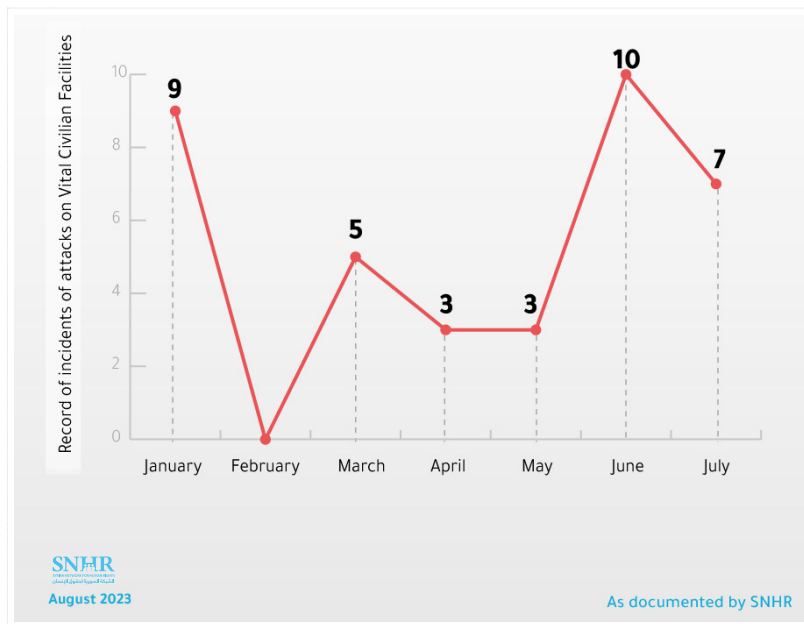
- **Turkish forces:** One attack.

Attacks on vital civilian facilities during July 2023 are distributed by the perpetrator party as follows:

Perpetrator Party	Syrian Regime Forces	Other Parties
Attacked Facility		Turkish Forces
Places of Worship		
Mosques	1	
Vital Educational Facilities		
Schools	3	
Vital Medical Facilities		
Ambulances		1
Infrastructure		
Civil Defense	1	
Official Service Headquarters	1	
Total	6	1

We have documented 37 attacks on vital civilian facilities at the hands of the parties to the conflict and controlling forces in Syria since the beginning of 2023 up until August of the same year. Those attacks are distributed by month as follows:

2. Designated as a terror group by the UN



As shown on the graph, July saw more attacks on vital civilian facilities, though fewer than the number recorded in June. As SNHR's database shows, Syrian regime forces carried out six of the seven attacks on vital civilian facilities recorded in July, consistent with the pattern seen in the previous months of 2023, with regime forces carrying out more attacks than any other party to the conflict or controlling force in Syria every month since the beginning of the year.

Most notable attacks on vital civilian facilities documented in July:

On Sunday, July 9, 2023, Syrian regime artillery forces fired a shell near al-Karim Mosque in Jisr al-Shoghour city in western rural Idlib governorate. The shell landed about 50 meters from the mosque, with some of the shrapnel hitting its walls. The city was under the joint control of armed opposition factions and HTS at the time of the incident.

On Tuesday, July 11, 2023, Syrian regime forces fired an anti-armour rocket at the vehicle being used by the rescue team from the Civil Defense's (White Helmets') Atareb center, near al-Jina crossroads on the road between al-Atareb city and Kafr Nouran town in western rural Aleppo governorate, while the team was working on examining a site that was previously targeted in an artillery shelled by the same forces. The rocket killed one Civil Defense rescue worker, with the fire caused by the explosion [completely destroying the vehicle and putting it out of commission](#). The area was under the joint control of armed opposition factions and HTS at the time of the incident.

The Civil Defense (White Helmets) posted [a tweet](#) about the incident on its official Twitter account.

D. Indiscriminate attacks and attacks using prohibited weapons

We documented no indiscriminate attacks or attacks involving the use of prohibited weapons in July.

IV. Attachments

1. [55 Civilians, Including 16 Children, Four Women, and Three Individuals Who Died due to Torture Documented Killed in July 2023 in Syria](#)
2. [At Least 197 Arbitrary Arrests/Detentions Documented in July 2023, Including 11 Children and Three Women](#)

V. Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

- SNHR notes that, for the past 12 years, the Syrian regime has been involved in the most horrific types of violations against the Syrian people, some of which amount to crimes against humanity. Since the Syrian regime continues to commit such violations up to the present day, as documented in the numerous reports we have released, any normalization of relations with the regime or efforts to rehabilitate it are acts of support for a criminal entity involved in crimes against humanity, which constitute a violation of international law.
- The evidence we have gathered indicates that attacks continue to be directed against civilians and civilian objects. Syrian-Russian alliance forces have committed various crimes, including extrajudicial killings, arrests, torture, and enforced disappearances. In addition, the indiscriminate bombardment and other attacks carried out caused the destruction of facilities and buildings. There are reasonable grounds to believe that the war crime of attacking civilians has been committed in many cases.
- The Syrian regime has not only violated international humanitarian law and customary law, but has also breached a number of UN Security Council resolutions, particularly resolution 2139, resolution 2042 on the release of detainees, and resolution 2254, all without any accountability.
- We could find no record of any warnings being issued by the Syrian regime or Russian forces prior to any attack as required under international humanitarian law. This has been the case since the beginning of the popular uprising for freedom, providing another blatant demonstration of these forces' total disregard for the lives of civilians in Syria.
- The magnitude and frequency of the violations, the disproportionate use of military force, the indiscriminate manner of the bombing, and the coordinated approach of these attacks lead to the inescapable conclusion that these acts are wholly deliberate and based on high-level orders, and as such constitute a part of state policy.
- The indiscriminate and disproportionate bombardment carried out by the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces is considered to be a clear violation of international humanitarian law, with such indiscriminate killings amounting to war crimes.

- Hay'at Tahrir al Sham has violated international humanitarian law, causing the death of many civilians, as well as damage to vital civilian facilities.
- All Armed Opposition factions/SNA have violated UN Security Council Resolution 2139 through carrying out attacks that are considered to violate customary international humanitarian law, causing civilian casualties or accidental injuries.
- All the attacks documented in this report, particularly bombings, have caused massive collateral damage involving loss of lives, injuries, or significant damage to civilian objects. There are strong indicators suggesting that this damage was excessive compared to the anticipated military benefit.
- The use of explosive munitions to target densely populated areas reflects a criminal and wholly deliberate mindset, with the perpetrators clearly intending to inflict the greatest possible number of deaths, which is a clear contravention of international human rights law and a flagrant violation of the Geneva IV Convention (arts. 27, 31, 32).

Recommendations

UN Security Council

- The Security Council must take additional steps following its adoption of Resolution 2254, which clearly insists that «all parties immediately cease any attacks against civilians and civilian objects as such.»
- The Syrian issue should be referred to the International Criminal Court and all those who are responsible for violations should be held accountable, while Russia must stop using the veto, as it is a party to the Syrian conflict, and the UNSC states' veto power should be withheld when crimes against humanity and war crimes are committed.
- Ensure peace and security and implement the principle of responsibility to protect civilians' lives and to save the Syrian people's heritage and historical artifacts from destruction, looting and vandalism.
- The Security Council should adopt a resolution banning the use of cluster munitions and landmines in Syria, similar to the existing prohibition on the use of chemical weapons, and include advice on how to safely remove the remnants of such dangerous weapons.
- The four other permanent member states should put pressure on the Russian government to end its support for the Syrian regime, which uses chemical weapons, and to expose its involvement in this regard.
- Request that all relevant United Nations agencies make greater efforts to provide food, medical and humanitarian assistance in areas where fighting has ceased, and in internally displaced person camps, and to follow-up with those States that have pledged voluntary contributions.

International Community

- In light of the split within the Security Council and its utter inability to take any effective action, action should be taken on the national and regional levels to form alliances to support the Syrian people by protecting them from daily killing and by lifting sieges, as well as by increasing support for relief efforts. Additionally, the principle of universal jurisdiction should be enacted in local courts regarding these crimes in order to conduct fair trials for all those who were involved.
- SNHR has repeatedly called for the implementation of the 'Responsibility to Protect' in dozens of studies and reports and as a member of the International Coalition for the Responsibility to Protect (ICR2P) after all political channels through the Arab League's plan and then Mr. Kofi Annan's plan have proved fruitless, along with the Cessation of Hostilities statements and Astana agreements that followed. Therefore, steps should be taken under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations, while the norm of the 'Responsibility to Protect (R2P)', which was established by the United Nations General Assembly, should be implemented. The Security Council is still hindering the protection of civilians in Syria.
- Renew pressure on the Security Council to refer the case in Syria to the International Criminal Court.
- Work on fulfilling justice and achieving accountability in Syria through the United Nations General Assembly and the Human Rights Council and to activate the principle of universal jurisdiction.

UN Human Rights Office

- The OHCHR should submit a report to the Human Rights Council and other organs of the United Nations on the incidents mentioned in this report and previous reports since these attacks were perpetrated by the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces.

Independent International Commission of Inquiry (COI)

- Launch investigations into the cases included in this report and previous reports. SNHR is willing to cooperate and provide further evidence and data.
- Focus on the issue of landmines and cluster munitions within the next report.

International, Impartial, and Independent Mechanism (IIIM)

- Collect further evidence about the crimes documented in this report.

The United Nations Special Envoy for Syria

- Condemn the perpetrators of crimes and massacres, and those who were primarily responsible for dooming the de-escalation agreements.
- Re-sequence the peace process so that it can resume its natural course despite Russia's attempts to divert and distort it, empowering the Constitutional Committee prior to the establishment of a transitional governing body.

Syrian regime

- Stop indiscriminate shelling and targeting of residential areas, hospitals, schools and markets, and end the use of outlawed weapons and barrel bombs.
- Ensure compliance with UN Security Council resolutions and customary humanitarian law.

Russian regime

- Launch investigations into the incidents included in this report, make the findings of these investigations public for the Syrian people, and hold those responsible accountable.
- Compensate all the damaged centers and facilities, rebuild and rehabilitate them, and compensate all the families of victims who were killed by the current Russian regime, as well as all the wounded.
- Completely cease the bombing of hospitals, protected objects, and civilian areas, and respect customary international law.
- As a guarantor party in Astana talks, the Russian regime must stop thwarting de-escalation agreements, and apply pressure on the Syrian regime in order to end all indiscriminate attacks and to allow unconditional passage of humanitarian aid to besieged areas.

The Coalition (US-led coalition and Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces)

- The states supporting the SDF should apply pressure on these forces in order to compel them to cease all of their violations in all the areas and towns under their control.
- Syrian Democratic Forces must immediately stop conscripting children, hold the officers involved in such violations accountable, and pledge to return all children who have been arrested for conscription immediately.

All Armed Opposition factions/SNA

- The Armed Opposition/SNA must ensure the protection of civilians in all areas under their control. These forces should also take care to distinguish between civilians and military targets and cease any indiscriminate attacks.
- Take punitive action against those who commit violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law.

Humanitarian Organizations

- Develop urgent operational plans to secure decent shelter for internally displaced persons.
- Provide protected facilities and vehicles, such as medical facilities, schools, and ambulances, with distinctive signs that can be distinguished from long distances.

Acknowledgment

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