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## SNHR's 13<sup>th</sup> Annual Report on Enforced Disappearance in Syria on the International Day of the Disappeared:

No End in Sight for the Crime of Enforced  
Disappearance in Syria

At least  
**113,218** of the People  
Arrested by the Parties to the  
Conflict in Syria Since March 2011,  
Including 3,129 Children and 6,712  
Women, Are Still Forcibly  
Disappeared

Friday 30 August 2024

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. No End in Sight for the Crime of Enforced Disappearance that's been Going on for Over 13 Years

The Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) releases [its extensive annual report on enforced disappearance](#)<sup>1</sup> on August 30 of every year, to mark the International Day of the Disappeared. In Syria's case, enforced disappearance has become a remarkably pressing and critical issue, so much so that it can be called a phenomenon, given the breadth of its scope and the way in which it's proliferated since the start of the popular uprising for democracy in Syria in March 2011. In the years since then, rates of enforced disappearances have only compounded in what is one of the most disheartening human tragedies that has haunted and devastated the lives and hearts of the Syrian people for over 13 years to date, with numerous lives, including those of both the forcibly disappeared persons and their loved ones, being upended and destroyed as a result of this horrendous crime.

The Syrian regime has used enforced disappearance as a strategic instrument to consolidate control and crush its opponents. To achieve this objective, the regime has utilized this strategy in a deliberate and direct manner against all those who participated in, and emerged as activists in the popular uprising for democracy, particularly in its early years that saw the highest rates of forcibly disappeared persons, in order to crush and undermine the anti-regime protests. Subsequently, these practices grew in scale and targeted specific populations based on their regional or sectarian identity, as the protests spread across the country. Similarly, these practices have been an attempt to terrorize and collectively punish society. By no means were these barbaric practices isolated or random occurrences. Rather, they were part of a fully-fledged security establishment, where enforced disappearance practices have been carried out in an organized and calculated manner, involving the highest echelons of power in the state and the security apparatus, meaning that all the various levels of the military and security establishment have been implicated in these crimes, along with the judiciary that has failed to uphold its role in protecting the rights of forcibly disappeared persons. On the contrary, the judiciary itself has served as another instrument used to facilitate and cover up enforced disappearance crimes. Besides the Syrian regime, which is responsible for over 85 percent of all enforced disappearance cases in Syria, other parties to the conflict and controlling forces have also adopted similar policies and have been involved in the commissioning of enforced disappearance practices in their areas, or during their attacks on territories under their opponents' control. Even more, while the use of enforced disappearance by the other parties to the conflict may differ in scale and scope, the other parties have exhibited a similar approach to the regime's in adopting the same mechanisms.

1. To clarify what constitutes an enforced disappearance in this context, this report adopts the definition proposed by the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, which is underpinned by the Declaration on the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance adopted by the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in its resolution 47/133 on December 18, 1992. According to the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, enforced disappearance is the "arrest, detention, abduction or any other form of deprivation of liberty by agents of the State or by persons or groups of persons acting with the authorization, support or acquiescence of the State, followed by a refusal to acknowledge the deprivation of liberty or by concealment of the fate or whereabouts of the disappeared person, which place such a person outside the protection of the law." In SNHR's methodology, we classify a person as forcibly disappeared once 20 or more days have passed since their arrest without their family being able to obtain information from the official authorities about their arrest or whereabouts, and with the authorities responsible for the arrest refusing to acknowledge the person's being in their custody.

See:

Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Office (OHCHR), International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-convention-protection-all-persons-enforced>



The crime of enforced disappearance is made up of a series of interconnected violations that start with arbitrary arrest/unlawful detention of people, which is closer in nature to an abduction than to a legitimate arrest. This means that detainees instantly become forcibly disappeared persons in most cases, since they are denied any opportunity to contact the outside world. Furthermore, detainees are subjected to various forms of psychological, physical, and sexual torture, which usually start from the very first moment of their arrest, with the most intensive and brutal torture taking place during interrogation. Torture goes on ceaselessly throughout the detention period, with detainees also subjected to cruel, inhumane detention conditions, in addition to referring them to exceptional, secret, and inhumane trials.

These systematic practices have taken place in a widespread manner, both in terms of communities and geographies, with a complete and utter absence of any legal protection or control. This means that forcibly disappeared persons have been deliberately deprived of their basic rights in detention centers. Meanwhile, families are not only denied access to any legal or official recourse to discover the fate of their missing loved ones, but are even denied the chance to obtain any information at all about their status or whereabouts, adding further layers of unimaginable stress, and compounded psychological, material, and legal trauma to their suffering. In fact, the Syrian regime has ensured that hundreds of thousands of forcibly disappeared persons are deliberately left in a precarious state of limbo, given the uncertainty of enforced disappearance, simply to increase their own and their families' suffering for many years. Hundreds of formerly forcibly disappeared persons have told us in interviews that their struggles to deliver any news about themselves to their families were as agonizing, if not more so, as the physical and psychological suffering they endured in detention.

Since March 2011, SNHR has been engaged in investigating and documenting enforced disappearance cases, building a central database for this purpose that contains information and items of evidence regarding the victims of arbitrary arrest and enforced disappearance in Syria. We have been able to collect tens of thousands of items of data and documents that support the processes of investigation and analysis carried out by SNHR, by UN and international bodies on enforced disappearance, or as part of the litigation processes taking place under universal jurisdiction. In all of this, our objective has been to actualize a comprehensive and thorough path to ensuring reparation for victims and their families and holding the perpetrators to account. The constantly increasing number of enforced disappearance cases in Syria since 2011 is, after all, a direct result of the impunity that has shielded the main perpetrators for too long, and which, shamefully, still continues to do so.

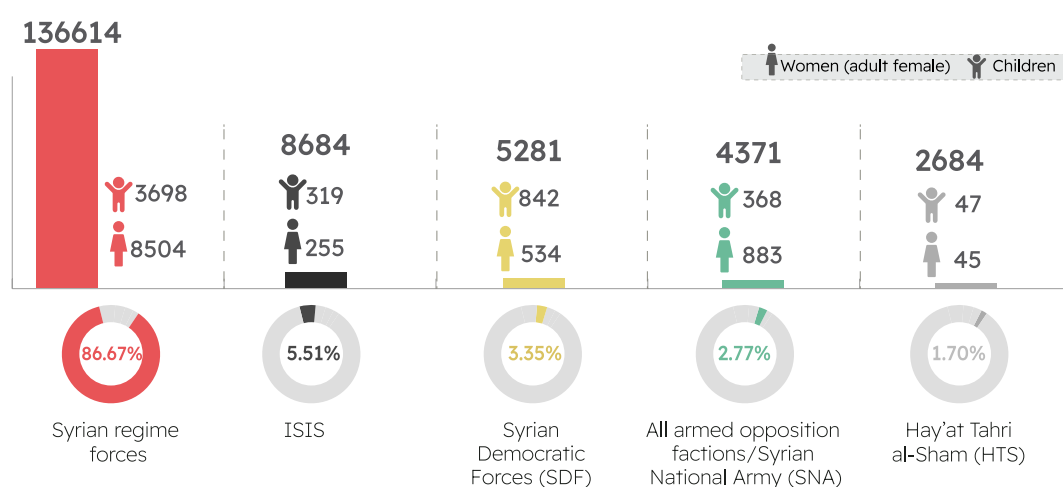
International law prohibits enforced disappearance under all circumstances. This means that periods of emergency, such as conflicts and wars, cannot be used as a justification to resort to enforced disappearance. Many international conventions and treaties have addressed the crime of enforced disappearance, including the [Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court \(ICC\)](#) which, in Article VII, describes enforced disappearance as a crime against humanity “when committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack directed against any civilian population, with knowledge of the attack”. Article 5 of the [International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance](#) further confirms this, as does Article 7 of the [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights \(ICCPR\)](#), which states, “No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.” Article 14 of the same Covenant criminalizes forcing anyone

to testify against themselves or to confess guilt. Moreover, enforced disappearance violates a range of rights named in the same covenant, such as the forcibly disappeared individual's rights to be recognized as a person before the law, to liberty and security, and to judicial guarantees and a fair trial, as well as the right of victims' families to know the fate and conditions of the disappeared person. Enforced disappearance also violates fundamental rights guaranteed by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Since the [International Court of Justice \(ICJ\) issued its order on November 16, 2023](#), on the request of provisional measures in the case brought by Canada and the Netherlands against the Syrian regime before the ICJ on the Application of the UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, SNHR has been conducting close daily monitoring of violations of international human rights law in regime detention centers, and of any arrests/detentions carried out by regime forces. SNHR has also been following the enactment, repeal, or amendment of any articles of legislation relevant to this issue, as well as of any changes to the regime's security apparatus, with these bodies being the entities primarily responsible for committing violations against civilians in Syria. We use this information in compiling our periodic reports assessing the regime's compliance with the ICJ order, and in analyzing our data and findings on cases of non-compliance. On August 15, [we released our third periodic report](#), in which we determined that the data collected confirms that the Syrian regime continues to blatantly violate the ICJ order with regard to the legal obligations it imposed on the regime. That is to say, the regime has failed to take any real steps to end torture in its detention centers. On the contrary, SNHR has recorded a perceptible tendency whereby the regime is targeting both residents of the areas under its control and refugees and individuals returning to those areas, which is further damning evidence of the regime's dismissive contempt for the ICJ order, as it continues to flagrantly commit crimes and violations against detainees and forcibly disappeared persons. The Syrian regime has consistently demonstrated utter disregard for the ICJ's order and for the demands of most of the mandates of the UN Human Rights Council's (HRC) special procedures, as well as for the resolutions adopted by the UN Security Council and the UN General Assembly, especially on the issue of detention and torture.

## II. Updated Summary of the Toll of Arbitrary Arrest/ Detention and Enforced Disappearance Victims Since March 2011 & Their Distribution Across Syria

As SNHR's database confirms, at least **157,634** of the people arrested by the parties to the conflict and controlling forces in Syria since March 2011 up until August 2024, including 5,274 children and 10,221 women (adult female), are still under arrest and/or forcibly disappeared. These are distributed as follows:



- **A. Syrian regime forces (army, security, local militias, Shiite foreign militias):**<sup>2</sup> 136,614 individuals, including 3,698 children and 8,504 women (adult female).
- **B. ISIS (the self-proclaimed 'Islamic State'):** 8,684 individuals, including 319 children and 255 women (adult female).
- **C. Hay'at Tahri al-Sham (an alliance of the Fateh al-Sham Front and a number of armed opposition factions):**<sup>3</sup> 2,684 individuals, including 47 children and 45 women (adult female).
- **D. All armed opposition factions/Syrian National Army (SNA):**<sup>4</sup> 4,371 individuals, including 368 children and 883 women (adult female).
- **E. Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF):** 5,281 individuals, including 842 children and 534 women (adult female).

2. We generally use the term 'the Syrian regime' rather than 'the Syrian government', because the nature of the ruling power in Syria is that of 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 regime's security apparatus. As a result, 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 autocratic/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 officer, let alone a security branch head. Syria is ruled by the president assisted by the heads of the security branches.

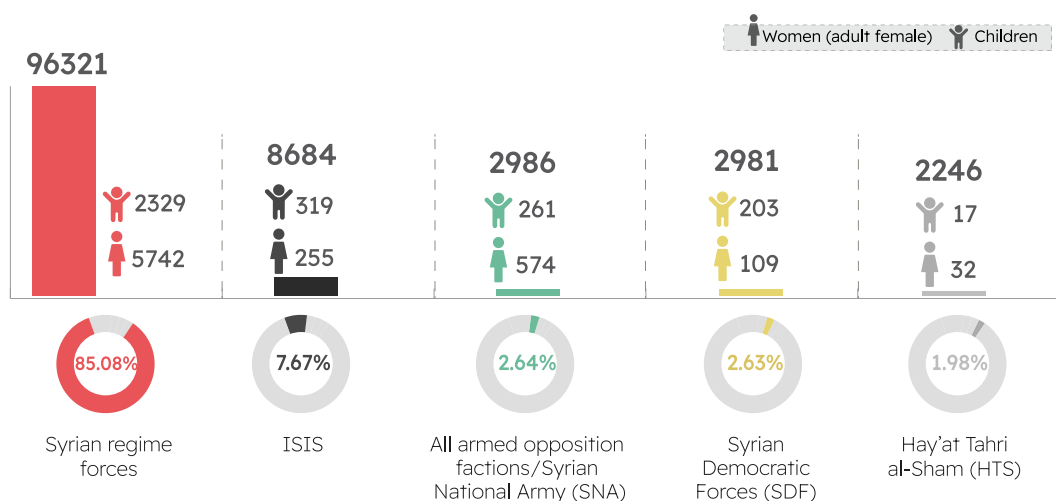
While we are aware that the United Nations and its agencies use the term 'the Syrian government', we believe that this is a completely inaccurate and misleading term in the Syrian context.

3. Designated as a terror group by the UN.

4. The various armed opposition/SNA factions founded since 2011 (both active and defunct) in all the areas currently and previously under their control.

**Syrian regime forces are responsible for the majority of arrests and enforced disappearances, detaining 86.7 percent of all such victims.**

As SNHR's database confirms, at least **113,218** of the people arrested by the parties to the conflict and controlling forces in Syria since March 2011 up until August 2024, including 3,129 children and 6,712 women (adult female), are still forcibly disappeared. They are distributed as follows:

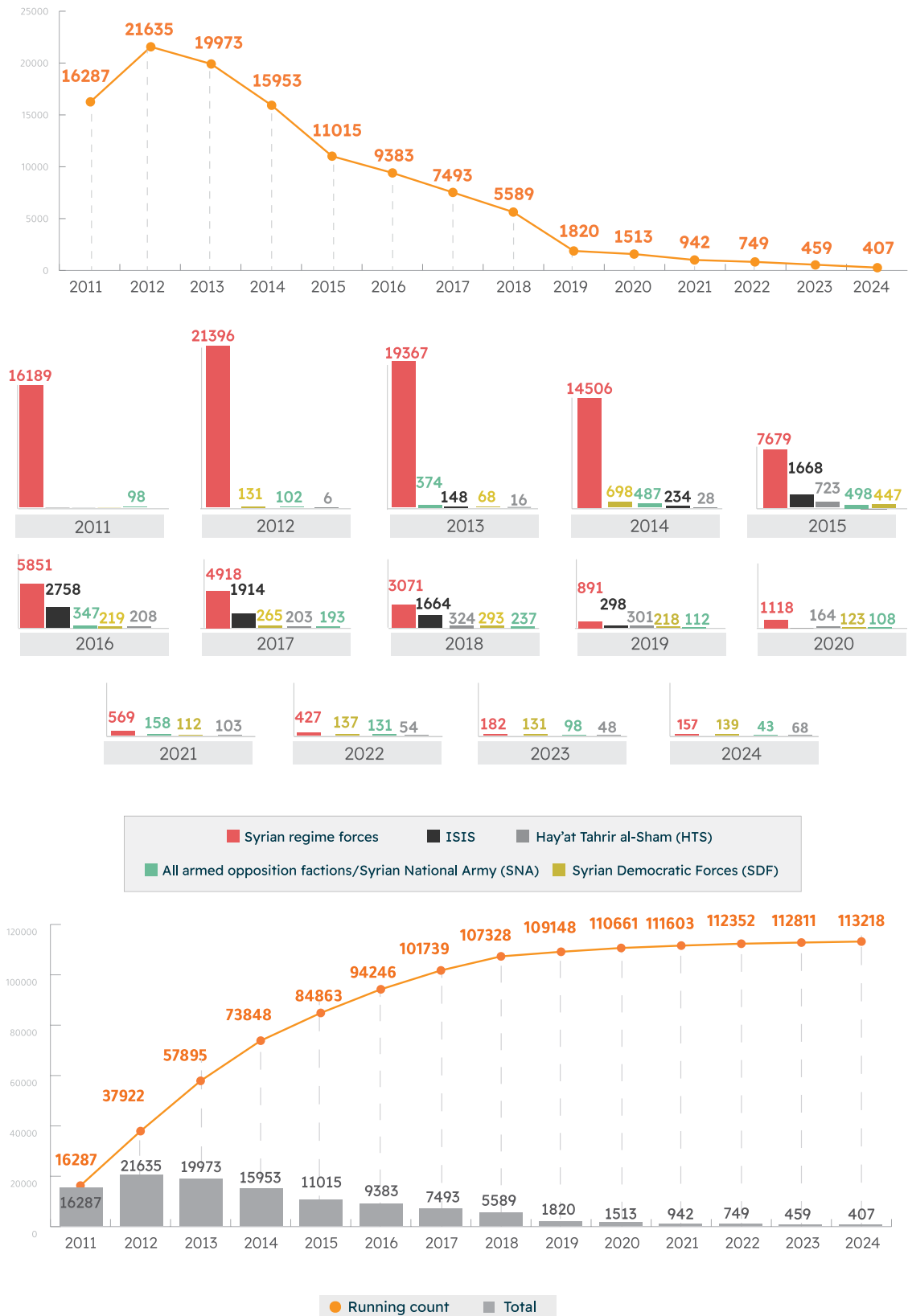


- **A. Syrian regime forces (army, security, local militias, Shiite foreign militias):** 96,321 individuals, including 2,329 children and 5,742 women (adult female).
- **B. ISIS (the self-proclaimed 'Islamic State'):** 8,684 individuals, including 319 children and 255 women (adult female).
- **C. Hay'at Tahri al-Sham (an alliance of the Fateh al-Sham Front and a number of armed opposition factions):** 2,264 individuals, including 17 children and 32 women (adult female).
- **D. All armed opposition factions/Syrian National Army (SNA):** 2,986 individuals, including 261 children and 574 women (adult female).
- **E. Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF):** 2,981 individuals, including 203 children and 109 women (adult female).

Those figures, which draw upon SNHR's data, show that the Syrian regime has arrested and 'disappeared' by far the largest proportion of Syrian citizens in these categories. A detainee usually becomes forcibly disappeared person immediately after or a few days after their arrest, which is reflected in the massive number of forcibly disappeared persons, the largest proportion of whom – approximately **85 percent** – have been forcibly disappeared by Syrian regime forces. The enormous number of enforced disappearance victims confirms that this is a systematic, routine practice carried out in a widespread manner against tens of thousands of detainees. As such, it constitutes a crime against humanity.

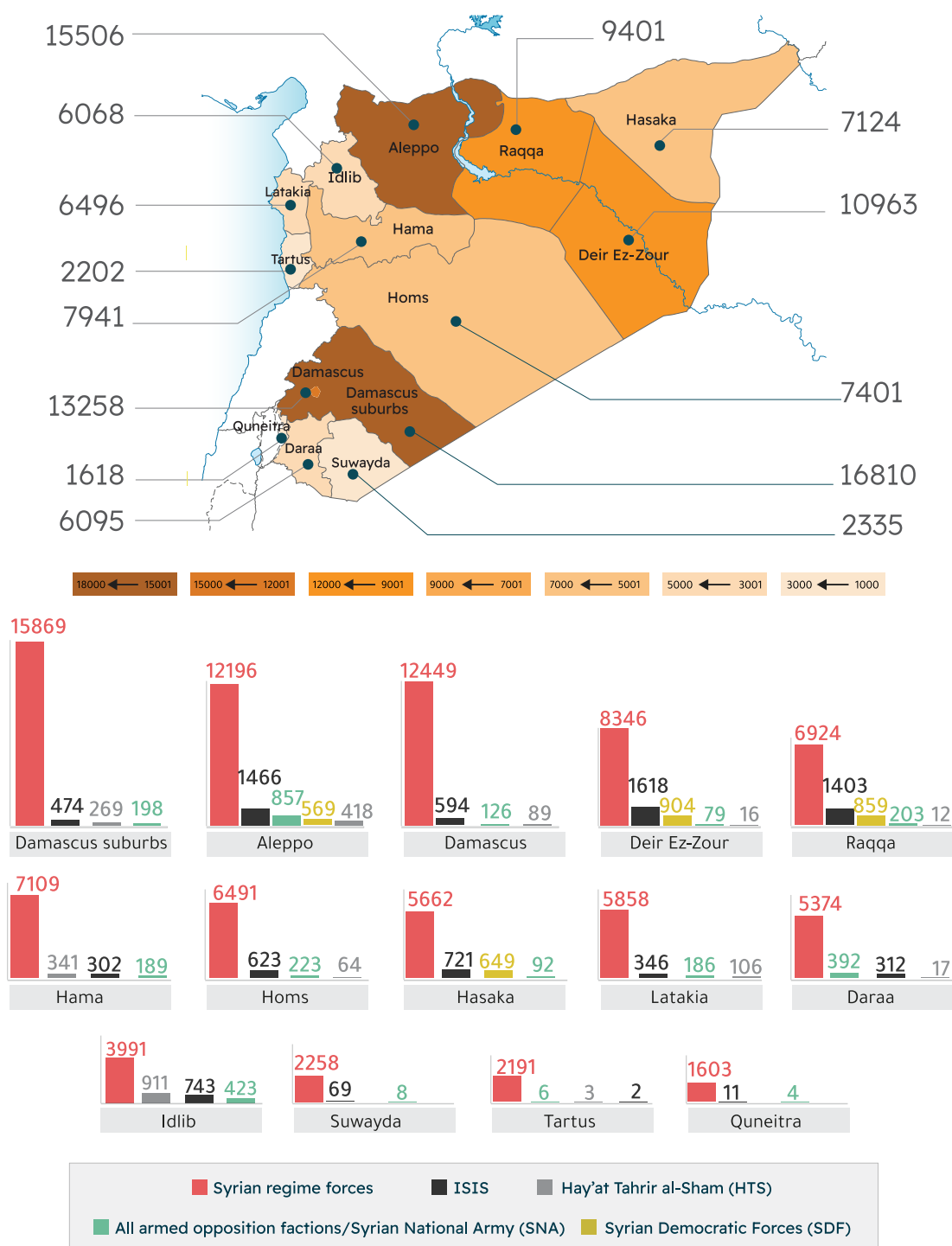


Distribution of people forcibly disappeared in Syria since 2011 by year and the party responsible for their enforced disappearance, and the running count of enforced disappearance cases:



The chart above shows that 2012 was the worst year to date in terms of the number of enforced disappearances, followed by 2013, then 2011, and then 2014. In other words, the first four years of the popular uprising for democracy saw the largest waves of enforced disappearance, which were carried out in an effort to crush and kill the spirit of the popular movement.

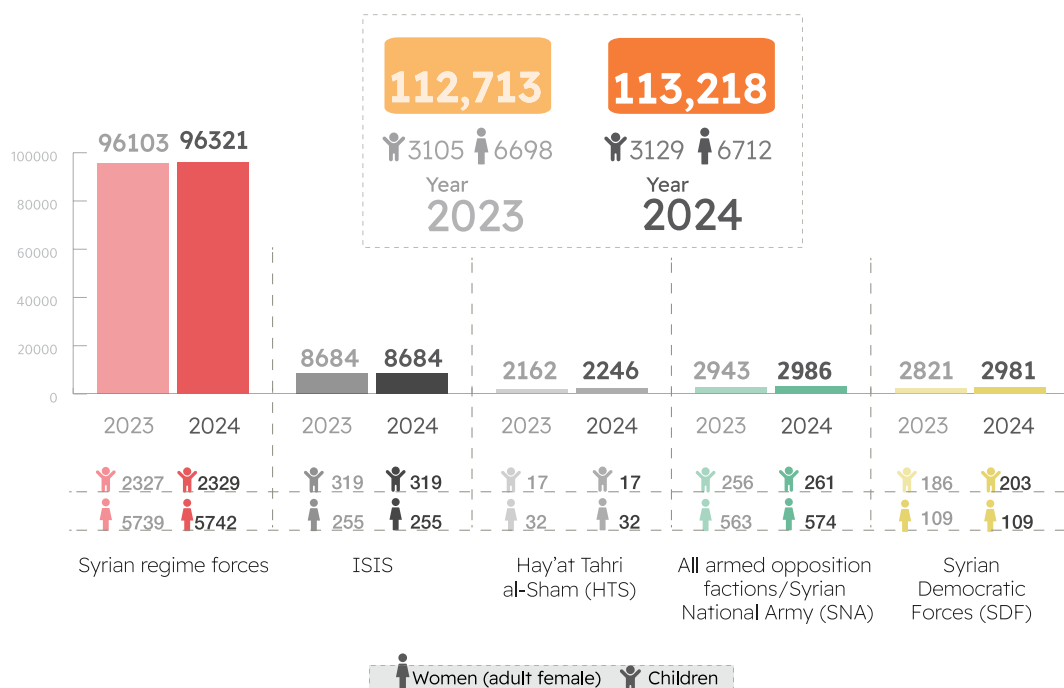
Distribution of enforced disappearances according to the parties to the conflict and controlling forces in Syria across Syrian governorates



The map above shows that Rural Damascus (Rif Dimshaq) governorate exceeds all other governorates in the number of enforced disappearances witnessed there, followed by Aleppo, then Damascus, and then Deir Ez-Zour.

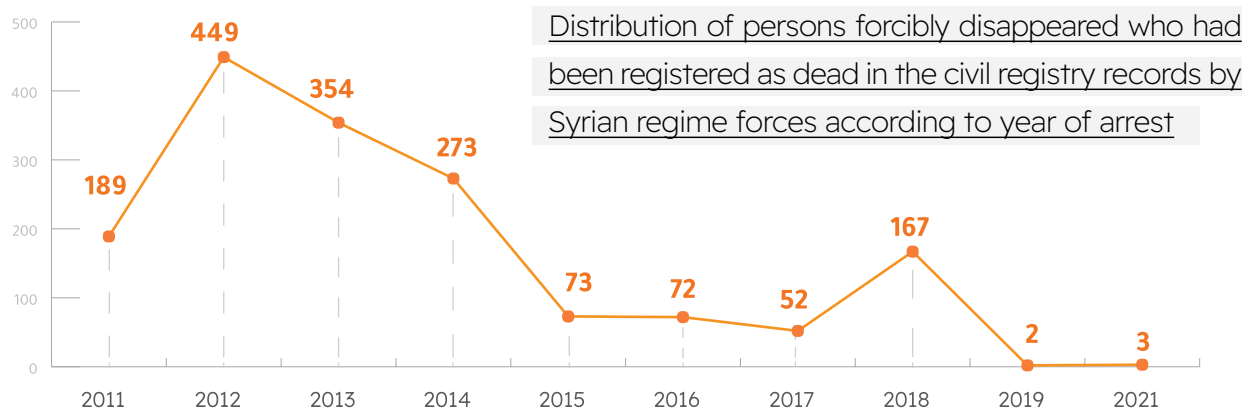
We have been able to ascertain that enforced disappearance has been practiced as part of a widespread and systematic attack against all groups of civilian residents. The Syrian regime is the primary perpetrator of enforced disappearance crimes in Syria, far exceeding all other parties to the conflict in numbers of enforced disappearances, by such a vast margin that it is unfeasible to even compare the numbers of forced disappearances carried out by Syrian regime forces with those perpetrated by other parties to the conflict. The Syrian regime's systematic practice of enforced disappearance qualifies as crimes against humanity according to [Article 7 of the ICC's Rome Statute](#). As such, it does not fall under the statute of limitations. The same article guarantees the right to reparation for the victims' families, as well as the right to know the fate of the forcibly disappeared persons. Enforced disappearance is also a war crime according to Article 8 of the Rome Statute since it is committed "as part of a plan or policy" primarily by the Syrian regime in its response to the popular uprising for freedom.

A comparison between the numbers of people forcibly disappeared at the hands of the parties to the conflict and controlling forces in Syria since March 2011 up until the International Day of the Disappeared in August 2023, and since March 2011 up to the International Day of the Disappeared in August 2024.

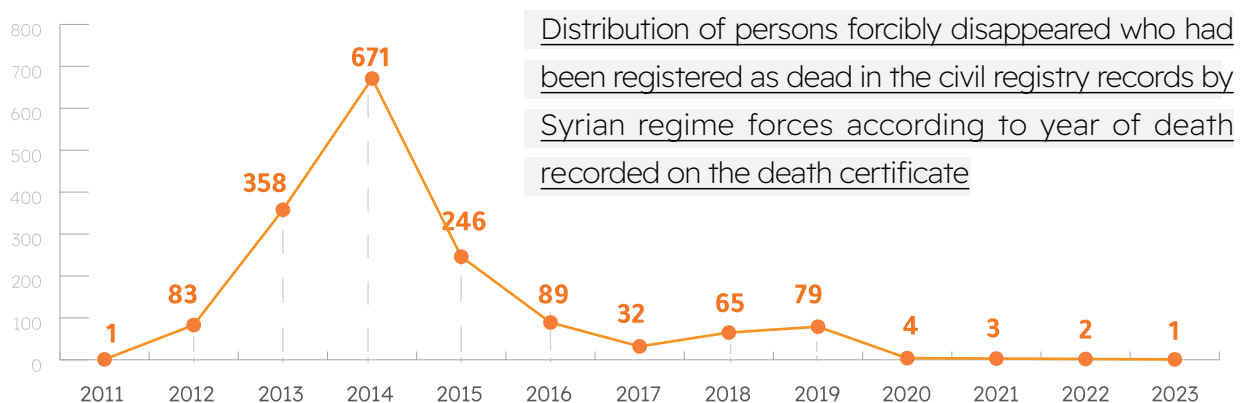


The comparison above shows a clear increase in the number of people forcibly disappeared over the past year, with most of these 'disappeared' in regime detention centers, where more detainees have subsequently gone on to become forcibly disappeared persons.

SNHR has also documented that at least **1,634** forcibly disappeared persons, including 24 children and 21 women, as well as 16 medical personnel, were registered as dead in [the civil registry records](#) by Syrian regime forces since the start of 2018 up until August 2024. In all these 1,634 cases, the cause of death was not revealed, and the regime failed to return the victims' bodies to their families or even to notify the families of their loved ones' demise at the time of death. Among these 1,634 cases were also four people who have been identified from the photos of torture victims leaked from regime military hospitals, known as the 'Caesar photos'.

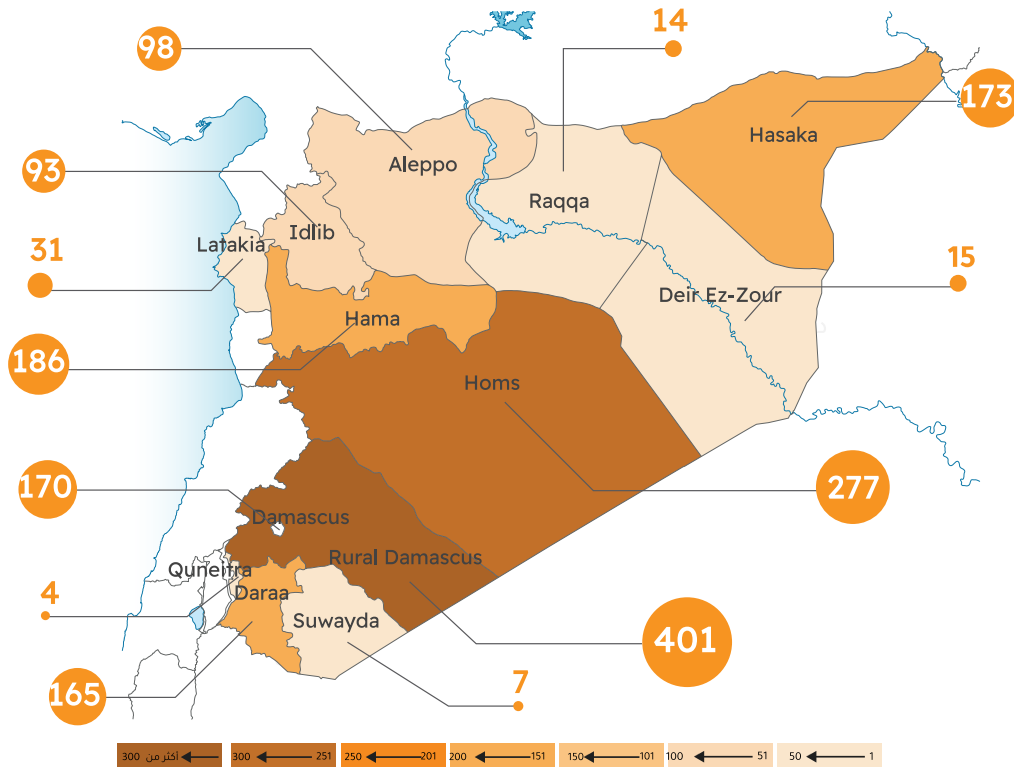


As shown on the graph, the largest proportion of the 1,634 cases registered as dead in the civil registry records had been arrested by regime forces in 2012, followed by 2013, and then 2014. This corresponds with the fact that these three years saw the largest enforced disappearance waves in regime detention centers.



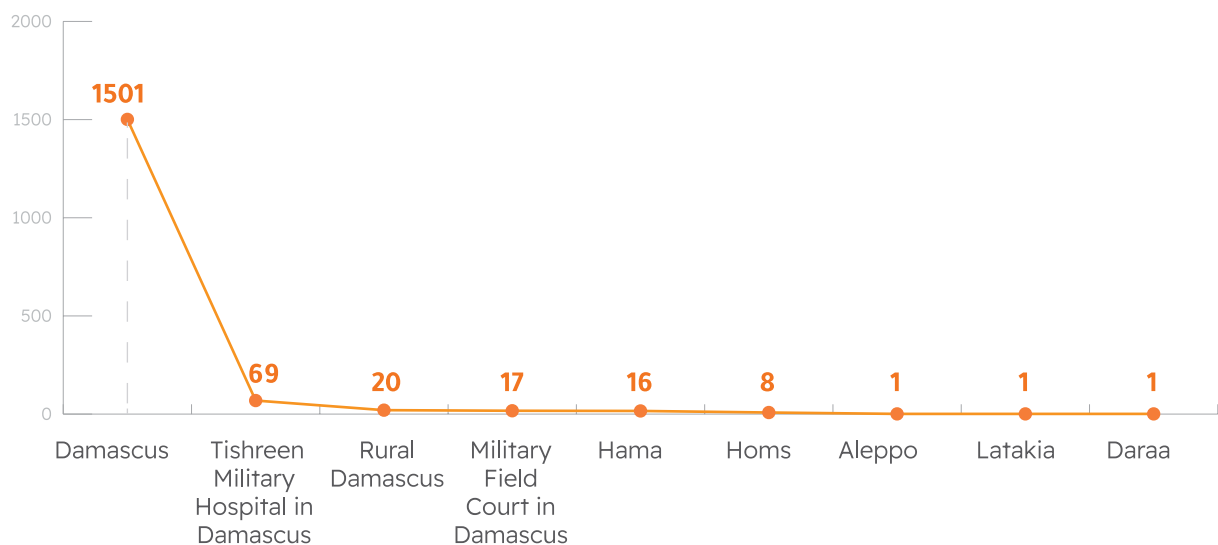
As the chart above shows, the largest proportion of the 1,634 cases recorded died in 2014 according to the death certificate, followed by 2013 and then 2015.

Distribution of persons forcibly disappeared who had been registered as dead in the civil registry records by Syrian regime forces according to governorate of origin



As the map above shows, the largest proportion of the 1,634 cases were from Rural Damas-  
cus governorate, followed by Homs, then Hama, and then Hasaka.

Distribution of persons forcibly disappeared who had been registered as dead in the civil registry records by Syrian regime forces according to place of death recorded on the death certificate





### III. Outline of Enforced Disappearance Practices by the Different Parties to the Conflict and Controlling Forces in Syria in 2024

In 2024, the parties to the conflict in Syria continued to use enforced disappearance as an instrument of oppression to consolidate control, as well as to blackmail victims and their families. As SNHR has documented, all parties to the conflict, including Syrian regime forces, the SDF, HTS, and all armed opposition factions/SNA, have been responsible for the enforced disappearance of civilians.

#### A. Syrian regime forces

SNHR has recorded that the majority of enforced disappearances carried out by regime forces since the beginning of this year targeted refugees who were forcibly deported from Lebanon by the country's General Directorate of General Security and the Lebanese army to the Syrian-Lebanese borders. Thereafter, on re-entering their home country, Syria, those forcibly deported refugees are targeted by Syrian regime forces, primarily at checkpoints operated by the regime's Military Intelligence Directorate or by militias affiliated with the regime's Fourth Division that controls much of the Syrian-Lebanese border line. Similarly, refugees returning from Jordan via the Nasib Crossing in southern Daraa governorate, as well as refugees returning via Damascus International Airport in Damascus city, have also been targeted, with those arrested usually taken to regime security and military detention centers in Homs and Damascus governorates. Since the start of 2024, SNHR has documented the Syrian regime's arrest of 156 of the refugees forcibly deported from Lebanon, including four children and three women.

Moreover, with the start of 2024, SNHR was able to obtain death certificates for newly discovered enforced disappearance cases that had not previously been publicly disclosed, leading us to believe that the Syrian regime is sending newly released information about forcibly disappeared persons to the civil registry offices to register their deaths. Since the start of 2024 up until August 2024, we have documented the registration of the deaths of no fewer than **13 forcibly disappeared** persons in the civil registry records. Among these cases are victims from the same families, political activists, and university students. In all the cases, the cause of death was not given, and the Syrian regime has not returned the victims' bodies to their families or notified the families of their loved ones' deaths at the time they took place.

## **B. Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF)**

In 2024, the SDF has continued to use enforced disappearance as an instrument to crush any form of political or social dissent, and as a means of tightening its security grip in areas under its control. To achieve these ends, the group established secret detention centers, where detainees are forbidden any contact with the outside world. Our data suggests that the SDF routinely use unproven allegations, such as “affiliation with ISIS”, “security threats”, and “terrorism”, as pretexts, in a widespread manner, to justify the detentions they carry out. US-led International Coalition forces have even been involved in some of these operations which targeted individuals including children, women, and persons with special needs under the pretext of “failing to inform the authorities”, although the actual goal of these practices is to consolidate control and spread fear in the areas under the SDF’s control. Those detained over these accusations have been forced during interrogation to confess to acts they never committed under the coercion of torture and various threats. They were also denied any opportunity to contact their lawyers either during interrogation or when they were referred to court.

On July 17, 2024, the SDF’s Autonomous Administration adopted Amnesty Act No. 10 of 2024. The Autonomous Administration and the SDF in northern Syria and eastern Syria have introduced legislative articles and laws that violate human rights. One can even argue that the SDF has emulated the Syrian regime’s policy of using amnesty decrees as a manipulative tool, in terms of the way in which they’re enacted, the scope of their inclusion and exclusion, and their implementation. Our analysis of Amnesty Act No. 10 of 2024 and the data on releases from detention centers, which we analyze in a detailed report to be released soon, clearly shows that this act lacks practical effectiveness, as well as excluding numerous detainees from pardon. Another important fact is the notable disparity in number of releases depending on the detention center in question, while this amnesty was not implemented at all in the SDF’s secret and security prisons. Based on these observations, it is safe to say that Amnesty Act No. 10 of 2024 has not achieved the desired effect of improving detainees’ humanitarian conditions, since this amnesty act seems to be more of a cosmetic formal procedure than an actual amnesty, lacking any transparent and fair implementation mechanisms. Furthermore, we have recorded the release of only two previously forcibly disappeared persons in connection with this amnesty act.

## **C. Hay’at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS)**

In March 2024, HTS-held areas witnessed the outbreak of widespread protests, with thousands of demonstrators opposing the group’s policies. These protests could be described as the public expression of the people reaching the end of their tether with HTS following a series of massively unpopular security and economic policies enacted by the group, as well as the violations taking place in HTS detention centers. In all the steps taken by the HTS to contain its internal crises, or address these protests, the group has taken no steps that

could be viewed as signifying any relaxation of or change to its authoritarian policies. HTS has also failed to address the issue at the root of public anger with its practices, namely the enforced disappearance of hundreds of individuals in its detention centers. Among the protestors' main demands were the release of detainees and the imposition of far stricter restrictions on the powers of the group's General Security apparatus; instead, however, HTS tried to circumvent these demands by having the Salvation Government issue an amnesty decree on March 5, 2024. According to the findings of SNHR's monitoring, however, only detainees convicted in criminal cases, or other similar cases, have been released as a result of this amnesty, but it has not been used to pardon any of the forcibly disappeared persons initially detained over their dissenting views, or any activists, or detainees who are members of armed opposition factions who were arrested in the courses of clashes with the HTS.

Rather than taking the protestors' concerns into account, HTS instead began persecuting and arresting/detaining people who participated in the demonstrations. Rates of arrests have been increasing since mid-April 2024, with HTS personnel raiding the locations of protests, whether in houses or public places, or while they are heading for, or leaving from protests. These arrest operations involved physical assaults on detainees in front of their families. Those arrested included university students, elderly people, media workers, and others who work in the humanitarian, relief, and medical fields, as well as organizers of demonstrations. On top of that, the group arrested relatives of media workers who operate outside its areas of control as a way to apply pressure on them into stopping their anti-HTS media work. Most of these arrests were carried out by the General Security Administration, which is affiliated with the Salvation's Government's Ministry of Interior. This agency, which was formerly known as the General Security Apparatus, reports directly to HTS. Most of these detainees have not yet stood trial and they have been denied any opportunity to contact their families.

SNHR has documented that at least **92 individuals** were kept under arrest/detained in HTS detention centers between January 2024 and June 2024 over their participation in the anti-HTS protests.

#### **D. All armed opposition factions/Syrian National Army (SNA)**

Armed opposition factions/SNA have carried out arbitrary arrests/detentions, including of women. Most of these detentions were conducted on a mass scale, targeting individuals coming from areas controlled by the Syrian regime or the SDF. In addition, we documented detentions that exhibited an ethnic character, with these incidents concentrated in areas under the control of the armed opposition factions/SNA in Aleppo governorate. Most of these arrests occurred without judicial authorization and without the participation of the police force, which is the sole legitimate administrative authority responsible for arrests and detentions through the judiciary, as well as being carried out without any clear charges being

presented against those being detained. Furthermore, we documented raids and arrests by SNA personnel targeting civilians who were accused of working with the SDF, with these arrests being concentrated in some of the villages which are administratively part of Afrin city in Aleppo governorate.

We also documented arrests/detentions by the SNA's Military Police targeting internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees returning to their homes in SNA-controlled areas after having been displaced when the SNA took over Afrin in 2018. These arrests were concentrated in a number of villages that are administratively a part of Afrin city. Moreover, the SNA, with the participation of Turkish forces, has targeted a number of activists, with most of those arrested being taken to secret detention centers, where they weren't allowed to contact their families, or referred to courts that abide by clear and fair procedures.

## V. Conclusions and Recommendations

### Legal conclusions

- SNHR believes that the Syrian regime has failed to uphold any of its obligations dictated by the international conventions and instruments it has ratified, in particular the ICCPR. Furthermore, the Syrian regime has violated multiple articles in the Syrian Constitution written and adopted by the very same regime. In this, the Syrian regime continues to detain hundreds of thousands of detainees who have been held for many years with no arrest warrant or charges ever being presented. These detainees are also denied any opportunity to appoint a lawyer or receive visits from their families. Approximately, 68.25 percent of all detainees arrested by the regime have gone on to become forcibly disappeared. These detainees' families have not been informed of their whereabouts. If the desperately worried families try to inquire about the fate or whereabouts of their loved ones, security branches deny any knowledge of them, and the family members are themselves at risk of persecution and arrest simply for asking.
- Enforced disappearance is prohibited under customary international humanitarian law, with Rule 98 stating that enforced disappearance is prohibited in international and non-international armed conflicts.
- Moreover, Rule 117 states, "Each party to the conflict must take all feasible measures to account for persons reported missing as a result of armed conflict and must provide their family members with any information it has on their fate."
- Enforced disappearance is also prohibited under international criminal law. According to Article (7)(1)(i) of the Rome Statute, the systematic practice of enforced disappearance constitutes a crime against humanity, which applies in the Syrian regime's case.
- Other parties to the conflict have also practiced enforced disappearance, albeit not with the same centralized character and prevalence as that of the Syrian regime. There is also a difference in terms of the quantity and distribution of cases. However, it's clear from the data we've collected and analyzed that the enforced disappearances carried out by HTS and ISIS bear strong similarities to those perpetrated by the regime in terms of the widespread distribution and systematic nature of these cases.

- All the reports released by the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (COI) have confirmed that Syria continues to be wholly unsafe for refugees' return. Furthermore, the COI has reiterated that any refoulment of Syrian regime to a Syria under the rule of the current Syrian regime with its current leadership and barbaric security system constitutes a violation of customary law that is binding on all the world's states including those that have not ratified the 1951 Refugee Convention. SNHR has also reiterated, in numerous reports and statements, that Syria remains a completely unsafe country, and that many types of violations are still being committed - most crucially and notably arbitrary arrest and enforced disappearance. Moreover, approximately half of the entire Syrian population who were displaced either as IDPs or refugees will not be able to safely return without a complete political change in the country's leadership. The governments which have carried out these unlawful forced deportations bear legal responsibility for any torture, killing, enforced disappearance, and other violations potentially perpetrated by the Syrian regime against forced returnees, in addition, of course, to the Syrian regime's direct responsibility for those violations.
- As confirmed by our database on cases of arbitrary arrest, torture, and enforced disappearance at the hands of regime forces, there is no indication at all of any willingness on the regime's part to cease torture, or even to introduce the most minimal and basic of measures mentioned above in response to the ICJ's ruling. Furthermore, at least 136,614 people are still arbitrarily detained and/or forcibly disappeared by the regime, and enduring torture in regime detention centers. Despite being responsible for such unimaginably horrific suffering, the Syrian regime has not launched even one investigation into the disappearance or torture of any detainees by its personnel. On the contrary, the regime has enacted 'laws' shielding them from accountability.

## Recommendations

### UN Security Council and UN

- Protect tens of thousands of detainees and persons forcibly disappeared by the Syrian regime from the severe risk of dying due to torture, and save those who are still alive.
- Impose targeted sanctions against named military and security officials who have been directly involved in the crimes of enforced disappearance.
- Russia should stop blocking the referral of the case in Syria to the ICC.
- All UN aid bodies should work on identifying and contacting families in Syria who have lost their main breadwinner or a family member, and ensure that humanitarian assistance is being delivered to those who are truly in need. Action should be also taken to launch rehabilitation efforts for those affected.
- Impose UN sanctions on the individuals and bodies involved in arbitrary arrest and enforced disappearance crimes in Syria.
- Work to reveal the fate of forcibly disappeared persons in tandem with, or before launching further rounds of any political process, and establish a strict timetable to reveal their fate.



- Find ways and mechanism to stop the Syrian regime from tampering with the living and the dead and their records, which poses a huge threat to the security and stability of the Syrian state.
- Invoke Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations to protect detainees from dying in detention centers, and put an end to the plague of enforced disappearance in Syria, which is a major threat to the safety and stability of the whole of Syrian society.
- The UN Security Council should follow up on the implementation of the resolutions it has adopted in relation to Syria, such as resolutions 2024 and 2139, compel all parties to those resolutions to comply with them, and follow up its words with the appropriate actions.
- Place far greater focus on the issue of forcibly disappeared persons in Syria in light of the harrowing magnitude of this phenomenon and the fact that it constitutes a crime against humanity. Urgent action must be taken to address this crucial issue.
- Detainees should be immediately allowed to contact their families, lawyers, and doctors. Binding assurances must be put in place in order to prevent the repeated occurrence of deaths due to torture in detention centers.
- Compel the Syrian regime to give access to its detention centers to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and all UN committees.

### **International Court of Justice (ICJ)**

- The case brought against the Syrian regime before the ICJ is a genuine test of the ICJ's credibility and power. As such, the ICJ must take immediate and effective measures to address those violations and ensure the realization of justice and accountability. All possible measure must be taken against the Syrian regime, including the UN Security Council issuing a binding resolution calling for ending systematic torture, all of which constitute crimes against humanity, and unequivocally condemning the Syrian regime's breach of the ICJ Order.
- The ICJ must issue a statement assessing the Syrian regime's commitment to the provisional measures indicated by the Court, as nine months have passed since the most recent order.
- Take more decisive provisional measures against the Syrian regime in light of the abundance of evidence showing the regime's lack of commitment to the previous provisional measures.

### **International community and donor states**

- Raise more funding for psychological and social support programs designated for the families of the disappeared.
- Support the documentation and accountability processes taking place in Syria.

### **International Commission on Missing Persons (ICMP)**

- Prioritize the collection of digital evidence on enforced disappearance, including satellite imagery of detention centers, and detainees' electronic records.
- Collaborate more closely with Syrian civil society organizations to collect testimonies and documents.

### **Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (COI)**

- Investigate the cases included in this report. SNHR is willing to cooperate in this and to provide further evidence and details.

### **Independent Institution on Missing Persons in Syria (IIMP)**

- Identify responsibility for victims of enforced disappearance in Syria, and provide all forms of support and protection for the victims and their families.
- Look into and examine all the statements and reports released by SNHR. We are more than willing to provide more information and details.

### **Arab League**

- Stop normalizing relations with the Syrian regime. In case Arab states feel they have no choice but to readmit the Syrian regime to the Arab League, they should require that the regime immediately release approximately 136,000 political prisoners, including 96,000 forcibly disappeared persons, disclose the names of the victims of torture and execution killed in its detention centers, and reveal the locations of their burial.
- Arab states should also request an independent accountability process for all those involved in crimes of killing and torture against the Syrian people regardless of the seniority of their security and military ranks and positions.

### **Syrian regime**

- Respect the principles of international human rights law and stop using the Syrian state's resources to provide support to security branches and to those involved in enforced disappearance.
- Launch investigations and public trials for all officers, officials, and figures involved in arrest, torture, and enforced disappearance.
- Amend national laws to explicitly criminalize enforced disappearance, so as to make them compatible with international standards, and introduce clear laws that assert and guarantee the rights of forcibly disappeared persons and their families.
- Immediately give full access to arbitrarily arrested and forcibly disappeared detainees to the COI, the ICRC, and all objective human rights organizations.

- Immediately grant all arbitrarily arrested detainees, especially children and women, their unrestricted, unconditional freedom, and disclose the fates of tens of thousands of forcibly disappeared persons.
- Work with the IIMP to reveal the fate of missing persons in Syria.

### **Other parties to the conflict (SDF, armed opposition factions, and the HTS)**

- Respect the rules of international human rights law, end arbitrary arrests and enforced disappearances against political or military opponents, launch investigations into all those involved in these crimes, and ensure that they're held to account.
- Immediately give full access to detention centers to the ICRC and human rights organizations with no prior coordination.
- Disclose the names of all detainees, make public lists of their names, disclose the locations of all secret detention centers, and allow families and human rights organizations to visit them.
- Establish mechanisms for internal accountability, in order to investigate enforced disappearance cases and hold all those responsible for such cases accountable.

### **Allies of the Syrian regime Russia and Iran**

- End support for a regime involved in the enforced disappearance of over 96,000 Syrians, with any such support being a form of complicity in crimes against humanity.

### **UN Human Rights Council (HRC)**

- Follow up on the issue of detainees and forcibly disappeared persons in Syria, and shed more light on this crucial issue during the periodic annual meetings, and hold a special session to address this horrific threat.

### **UN Human Rights Office (OHCHR)**

- Publish a special and extensive report shedding light on this catastrophe and all its psychological, social, and economic effects, and support active local human rights groups in Syria.

### **UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances**

- Dedicate more workforce to the forcibly disappeared persons issue in Syria at the office of the Special Rapporteur in light of the magnitude and massive level of enforced disappearance in the country.

### **Arabic and international human rights groups**

- Advocate for the issue of forcibly disappeared persons in Syria, condemn the Syrian regime and its draconian practices, and call regularly and continuously for the disclosure of the fate of all forcibly disappeared persons.

## **Acknowledgment and Solidarity**

We stand in complete solidarity with all victims and their families. We wish to thank the families and local activists for their invaluable contributions to this report.



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*No justice without accountability*

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