

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	1387
Land:	Syrien
Kilde:	Syrian Network for Human Rights
Titel:	The Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in September 2020 - The Worst Month in Terms of Citizens Infected with the Coronavirus, with the Syrian Regime Harnessing the State's Capabilities for More Military Operations in Northwest Syria and to Launch Arbitrary Arrest Campaigns
Udgivet:	3. oktober 2020
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	22. december 2020

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Saturday 3 October 2020

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 the violations most frequently perpetrated against Syrian citizens. While the Syrian regime and its affiliated militias were the sole perpetrators of these violations for the first seven months or so of the uprising, other parties subsequently joined in, also violating the rights of Syrian citizens. The Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) has continued to document every incident that its team members are able to verify, with these violations escalating very dramatically in 2012 and 2013, prompting us to expand our publication of periodic monthly reports recording and highlighting the continued suffering of the Syrian people, which subsequently grew to eight reports on different issues issued at the beginning of each month. In the course of our work, SNHR has compiled a massive database cataloguing hundreds of thousands of incidents, each of which involves a pattern of violations that we have been able to document.

By the end of 2018, with a reduction in the level of violence compared to previous years, we changed our previous strategy and now compile our reports into a single monthly report featuring the most prominent violations in Syria which we have been able to document in the preceding month.

This month's report focuses on the human rights situation in Syria in September 2020, and catalogues the death toll of civilian victims whom we documented killed by the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces during this period, as well as the record of cases of arrests and enforced disappearance. The report also highlights indiscriminate attacks and attacks on civilian objects, which SNHR's team was able to document during this period. To find out more about our working [methodology](#) in documenting and archiving data, please visit the following link that explains this in detail.

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.

II. Summary of the Most Notable Events in September

In the context of bombardment and military attacks, [Syrian Regime forces continued with artillery and missile bombardment](#) of the areas at the lines of contact with regime forces, as well as adjacent areas, in the southern suburbs of Idlib, such as the cities and towns of Kafranbel, al Bara, al Fattira, al Mozara and Beneen, with the SNHR documenting the deaths of two civilians in Ariha city as a result of a ground attack by Syrian Regime forces on the city on September 7.

During September 2020, Russian warplanes launched several raids on the headquarters and military camps of Hay'at Tahrir al Sham in the Sheikh Bahr Ahrash area in the northwestern suburbs of Idlib, which resulted in civilian casualties.

Bombings with car bombs and improvised explosive devices (IEDs) continued in several areas of the eastern and northern suburbs of Aleppo, and in Ras al Ein area in the northwestern suburbs of Hasaka, as well as in Tal Abyad in the northern suburbs of Raqqa, with SNHR documenting the deaths of civilian victims and damage to several vital facilities resulting from these attacks. The most prominent of these incidents was the massacre that resulted from the explosion of a car bomb in a vehicle driven by a suicide bomber in Afrin city in the northern suburbs of Aleppo, which caused the deaths of 13 civilians, including one child, on September 14.

In September 2020, we recorded the continuing death of victims among Syrian citizens killed by landmines in various governorates and regions in Syria, particularly in the governorates of Aleppo and Idlib, where we recorded several incidents, most notably on agricultural land, which resulted in the deaths of farmers engaged in harvesting crops.

Meanwhile, insecurity continues to be the most prominent problematic issue in most areas of Syria, with SNHR documenting the deaths of many civilians as a result of gunfire by unknown persons in the governorates of Daraa and Idlib in particular, while in the areas controlled by the Syrian regime, we monitored an increase in the rate of homicides and theft. We also monitored several suicides of individuals of different age groups in most regions of Syria, most of which were due to poor living conditions and extreme poverty. Zahir Hajo, Director General of the Syrian regime's General Authority of Forensic Medicine, [told](#) al Watan newspaper on September 6 that 116 suicides have been documented since the beginning of this year.

We also documented Syrian Regime forces and militias continuing their looting of civilian property and [seizing control of vital civilian facilities](#) which they transformed into military headquarters in the areas they had taken control of in the Idlib region in northwestern Syria.

On September 13, pro-Syrian regime accounts circulated [photos of the opening of the 'Martyr Najeeb al Arnous' school](#) in al Tah village in the southern suburbs of Idlib, in the presence of military figures. The photos showed that the restoration included only part of the school building, while the remainder is still destroyed due to the military campaign of the Syrian-Russian alliance forces on the village; we further note that this is not the first time that the Syrian regime has tried to polish its image by talking about rehabilitating the areas that it had controlled and resettling its people.

Meanwhile, at the level of arrests and enforced disappearances, Syrian Regime forces in September detained Syrian citizens solely because they criticized the deteriorating living and economic conditions in the regime-controlled areas; among those arrested during this period have been

lawyers and teachers who were detained by Syrian Regime forces in raids on their homes and workplaces. Syrian Regime forces also arrested and prosecuted citizens, including university students, in connection with their participation in anti-Syrian regime protests and activities in Suwayda governorate previously, with most of these arrests taking place while they were passing through regime checkpoints in Damascus and Suwayda cities. we also recorded that Syrian Regime forces imposed a security cordon around Kanaker town in Damascus Suburbs governorate, targeting a number of residents for arrest upon entering or leaving the town. The regime forces also launched campaigns of mass arrests at checkpoints in Damascus Suburbs governorate, with those detained including children and women.

In addition, Syrian Regime forces in September continued to prosecute and arrest individuals who have concluded settlements of their security status with the Syrian regime in areas that previously concluded settlement agreements with the regime; these arrests have been concentrated in Daraa governorate, with most occurring during campaigns of mass raids and arrests.

we have also recorded arrests targeting some refugees who illicitly returned from Lebanon by illegal methods, who have been charged with a wide range of offences and false charges related to terrorism. In this context, we always recommend that refugees or IDPs should not return to Syrian regime-controlled areas because there are no real guarantees that the regime will not subject them to arrest, torture, enforced disappearance, or compulsory military conscription there.

Lastly, we have recorded arrests of Syrian citizens by Syrian Regime forces while they were traveling from areas under the Syrian regime's control to other areas, as well as that some arrests have been documented against workers involved in the field of currency exchange; the aim of these detentions is to extort ransom money from the detainees' families, with these victims being released in exchange for huge sums of money

In the context of cases in which individuals have been released, we recorded in September that Syrian Regime forces released 14 detainees from various Syrian governorates, all of whom were released from regime detention centers in Damascus governorate. Most of these individuals were released after the end of their arbitrary sentences, with the duration of their detention ranging from four to eight years.

Meanwhile, Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces continued enforcing the group's policies of arbitrary detention and enforced disappearance throughout the month of September, targeting activists and members of civil society groups who oppose their policies, or civilians who have kinship relationships with individuals in the Armed Opposition/ the Syrian National Army. Syrian Democratic Forces also carried out campaigns of mass raids and arrests, targeting many civilians, including

children, on the pretext of fighting ISIS cells. These arrests were concentrated in Deir Ez-Zour governorate. Also in September, SNHR documented Syrian Democratic Forces carrying out arrests/detention targeting several families, as well as targeting several members of the same families, including elderly people, without providing clear charges, taking these detained to an undisclosed location.

In the context of cases in which individuals have been released, we documented in September that Syrian Democratic Forces released 18 civilians from SDF detention centers. The duration of arbitrary detention for those released ranged from eight months to two years, with most being released as a result of tribal mediation.

September also saw Hay'at Tahrir al Sham arresting civilians, with arrests concentrating in IDP camps, including activists working with civil society groups, media workers and lawyers, with most of these arrests occurring due to expressing their opinions criticizing the HTS's management of areas under its control, or in connection with their participation in protests against Hay'at Tahrir al Sham. These arrests were carried out arbitrarily in the form of raids in which HTS members stormed their victims' homes, often breaking down the doors, or by kidnapping their victims while they were travelling or passing through temporary checkpoints. We also recorded detentions carried out by Hay'at Tahrir al Sham against civilians, who were charged with 'insulting the Divine'.

The Armed Opposition/ the Syrian National Army also carried out arrests and kidnappings in September, most of which occurred on a mass scale, in many cases targeting several members of the same families, including elderly people; we also recorded detentions carried out under an ethnic pretext, with these incidents being concentrated in areas under their control in Aleppo governorate. Most of these arrests occurred without judicial authorization and without the participation of the police force, which is the legitimate administrative authority responsible for arrests and detentions through the judiciary, as well as being carried out without presenting any clear charges against those being detained.

September witnessed [the outbreak of fires](#) that devoured large areas of forest in the mountainous Syrian coastal areas since September 2, with the Syrian regime treating these with great negligence, contributing to the fires spreading across a far larger area, and causing great damage to the wealth of flora and fauna in the Cedar and Fir Reserve; the fires also spread to areas controlled by the Armed Opposition, with the Syrian Civil Defense working to successfully extinguish them there.

As for the COVID-19 pandemic, the month of September was the worst ever to date in all regions of Syria. In areas under the control of Syrian Regime forces, the Ministry of Health officially announced [on September 30, that the total number of infections had reached 4,200 cases with 200 deaths](#). We note that 1,435 infections - 35% of the total number of infections - and 88 deaths - 44% of the total death toll to date - occurred in the month of September alone. We at the SNHR believe that the officially reported figures represent only what the Syrian regime wishes to disclose. On September 15, Imperial College London published [a study](#) stating that the official statistics issued by the Syrian regime represent only 1.25% of deaths due to the Coronavirus in Damascus, with the actual number of deaths only in Damascus city estimated at approximately 4,380 cases as of September 2. The Imperial College study relied on official mortality data and obituary certificates provided by the community.

We note that pro-Syrian regime accounts on 'Facebook' social networking sites posted obituaries of dozens of clergymen, university teachers and doctors in September 2020. On September 2, Human Rights Watch issued [a report](#) confirming that the Syrian government had effectively abandoned health sector workers fighting the COVID-19 pandemic, neglecting its responsibility to take the necessary steps to save lives, with Human Rights Watch managing to verify the deaths of 33 doctors due to their infection with the virus. The Syrian Network for Human Rights also issued [a report](#) on September 17, which outlines the most notable violations committed against the medical sector in Syria since March 2011 and their impact on addressing the COVID-19 pandemic.

Despite the spread of the pandemic, the Syrian regime opened the school year for this year on the 13th of this month, and we have monitored the absence of precautionary measures in schools that are overcrowded with students who do not wear masks. The Syrian regime's Ministry of Education [announced](#) on September 30 that the number of 'confirmed' infections with Coronavirus among students and educational and administrative personnel working in schools had reached 41 cases.

In addition, new cases of infection with coronavirus continued to appear in northwestern Syria, with the Early Warning Alert and Response Network (EWARN) [announcing](#) on September 30 that the total number of infections had reached 1,072 cases, with six of those infected dying. We note that the month of September witnessed the largest leap in terms of the number of infections and deaths, with the EWARN statistics indicating that 992 infections or 93% of the total number of infections to date, and five deaths or 84% of the total death toll, were recorded in September. According to EWARN, al Bab city in Aleppo governorate witnessed the highest number of infections, followed by Idlib city. Also, the cases of infection among medical personnel are relatively high, with the spread of disease in the camps increasing quite rapidly.

The Civil Defense Organization has announced that several individuals who are suspected to have died as a result of coronavirus have been buried, which heralded a humanitarian catastrophe. Despite these indicators, precautionary measures are still absent among civilians, according to SNHR's documentation, whether in mosques, markets and other places. We fear that the start of the school year, whether in the areas controlled by the Armed Opposition factions and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham on September 26, or in the areas controlled by the Syrian National Army forces on September 13, will be one of the factors that will contribute significantly to the further spread of the disease.

In northeastern Syria, [as of September 30](#), a total of 1,618 coronavirus infection cases had been announced by the Health Authority in the Self-Management Authority of Northern and Eastern Syria, including 64 deaths. We note that the month of September saw an unprecedented leap in the number of infections announced compared to the figures announced up to the end of August, with 1,062 cases of infection or 66% of the total number of infections – of whom 29 cases died - representing 46% of the total death toll to date. We fear that if schools open on the fourth of next month, according to the Self-Management Authority of Northern and Eastern Syria's [announcement](#), in light of the absence of precautionary measures in the region, the pandemic will spread further in those areas.

On September 12, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in Jordan [announced](#) a decision to build and equip quarantine and self-isolation areas in the Za'atari and al Azraq refugee camps for Syrian refugees in Jordan, after recording five cases of coronavirus infection in the two camps.

On the humanitarian level, Syrian citizens have continued to suffer from the repercussions of the economic collapse, with a large proportion of them being unable to secure the basic necessities of life. The areas under the control of regime forces have witnessed a crisis in securing gasoline, leading to [long queues of cars gathering in front of gas stations](#) and waiting several hours to get their allocated fuel allowance. Despite the worsening of the already poor humanitarian conditions, the Syrian regime and its officials continue to deal with the problems through irresponsible statements such as that of [Ziad Hazaa](#), Director General of Bakeries, who told Radio Ninar on September 14 about the reason for the shortage of bread, in which he stated: "The shortage of bread is mainly because it has become an essential part of citizens' sustenance; after the price hike, the demand for the material increased."

Save the Children Organization issued [a report](#) on September 29 stating that an additional 700,000 children face hunger in Syria due to the damaged economy. As a result, the total number of children suffering from food insecurity across the country has risen to more than 4.6 million in the past six months. A survey conducted by Save the Children also showed that 65% of children have not had an apple, an orange, or a banana for at least three months. In Northeast Syria, almost a quarter of children had not eaten these fruits in at least nine months.

The internally displaced persons (IDPs) in all camps are still suffering from the deteriorating humanitarian conditions, with the searing temperatures that the region witnessed in early September [causing dozens to suffer](#) heatstroke symptoms. We also monitored several cases of drowning in bodies of open water at the beginning of this month, which the people had resorted to alleviate the impact of the heatwave.

During the month of September, Syrian Democratic Forces transferred at least twenty ISIS families from al Hawl camp to Rouj camp located in Girziro village in Ma'bada district in the northern suburbs of Hasaka, after expanding the camp to relieve pressure on al Hawl camp, with the total number of families transferred from the camp since last July, reaching about 80 families. We note that there have been several killings in al Hawl camp at the hands of unknown persons, and in September we documented the deaths of three persons (one child and two women) whose bodies were discovered there on the tenth of the month.

On September 10, the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs Izumi Nakamitsu, while briefing the Security Council on the implementation of Resolution 2118 - regarding the elimination of the chemical weapons program in Syria – [stated](#) that until the outstanding issues of the Syria's initial declaration of its chemical weapons' stockpile and program are closed, the international community cannot have full confidence that Syria's chemical weapons program has been eliminated.

On September 15, the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (COI) released its [twenty-first report on violations](#) occurring outside the epicenters of large-scale hostilities during the first half of 2020. The report notes that the deepening economic crisis, the impact of sanctions and the COVID-19 pandemic have further diminished Syrians' prospects of attaining an adequate standard of living.

On September 16, Mark Lowcock, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, [briefed](#) the Security Council on the situation in Syria, speaking about the broader spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the inability to trace 90 per cent of newly confirmed cases to a known source. He also touched upon the increase in infection rates among health workers, and the supply shortages and temporary shutdowns which impose even greater pressure on the health system.

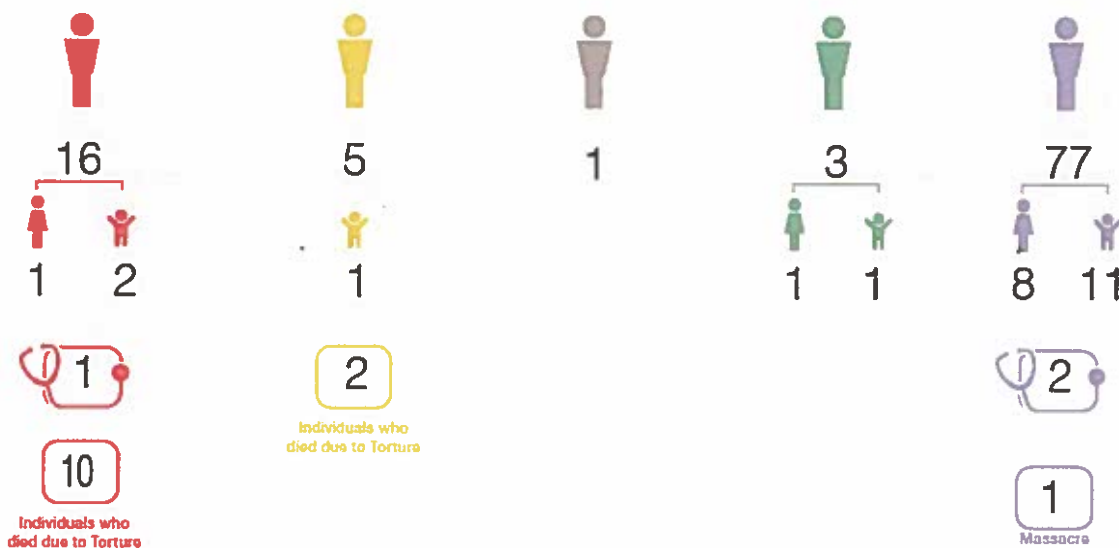
On September 18, the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs [announced](#) in a statement its decision to hold the Syrian regime responsible under international law for gross human rights violations and torture in particular, adding that it had informed the regime of this decision by means of a diplomatic note. We at the Syrian Network for Human Rights support this step and welcome further similar steps by other countries in regard to agreements that the Syrian regime has ratified and subsequently violated in a terrible manner, for which it must be held accountable.

Lebanese President Michel Aoun [called](#), on September 21, during the high-level meeting to celebrate the seventy-fifth anniversary of the founding of the United Nations, called on the world to help secure the safe return of displaced Syrians to their homes; the Syrian Network for Human Rights had noted in [a report](#) it issued on September 9 that the Syrian regime is preventing hundreds of Syrian citizens from returning from Lebanon to their homeland, noting that 62 cases of arrest/ enforced disappearance have been documented among returnees from Lebanon since the beginning of 2020.

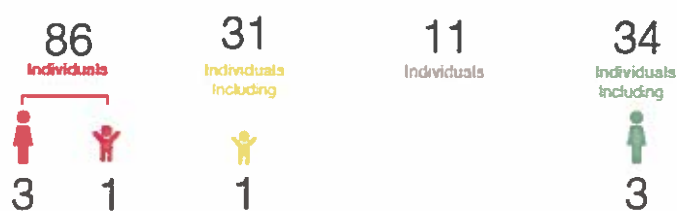
III. The Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in September

This report outlines the most notable human rights violations that were documented by the SNHR in September 2020 at the hands of the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in Syria.

Extrajudicial Killing



Arbitrary Arrests and Unlawful Detention



- Syrian Regime forces
- SDF (mainly PYD)
- Hay'at Tahrir al Sham
- The Armed Opposition/ The Syrian National Army
- Other parties

Attacks on Vital Civilian Facilities



- Civilians
- Women (incl. female)
- Children
- Medical Personnel
- Schools

A. Extrajudicial killing:

In September 2020, SNHR documented the deaths of 102 civilians, including 15 children and 10 women (adult female), the largest percentage of whom were killed at the hands of other parties; among the victims were three medical personnel and 12 individuals who died due to torture. We also recorded at least one massacre. We issued a report on the first of this month detailing the civilian victims documented killed in September at the hands of the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in Syria.

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

A. The main parties:

- **Syrian Regime forces (army, security, local militias, and Shiite foreign militias):** 16 civilians, including two children and one woman.
- **Hay'at Tahrir al Sham (an alliance composed of Fateh al Sham Front and a number of factions of the Armed Opposition):** One civilian.
- **The Armed Opposition/ The Syrian National Army:** Three civilians, including one child and one woman.
- **Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (the Democratic Union Party):** Five civilians, including one child.

B. Other parties:

We documented the deaths of 77 civilians, including 11 children and eight women, at the hands of other parties, distributed as follows:

- Landmines of unknown origin: Seven civilians, including two children.
- Fires of unknown source: 32 civilians, including one child and three women.
- Bombings whose perpetrators have not yet been identified: 28 civilians, including five children and three women.
- Killings by unknown persons: Seven civilians, including one child and two women.
- Turkish border guards: One civilian.
- Shelling from unknown source: One child.
- Messing around with weapons: One child.

B. Arbitrary arrest and enforced disappearance:

In September 2020, SNHR documented at least 162 cases of arbitrary arrests, including two children and six women, at the hands of the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in Syria. The largest number of arrests was carried out by Syrian Regime forces in the governorates of Damascus Suburbs then Daraa. We issued a report on the second of this month detailing the record of cases of arrests and enforced disappearances which we documented in September 2020 at the hands of the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in Syria.

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

Syrian Regime forces: 86, including one female child and three women.

Hay'at Tahrir al Sham: 11.

The Armed Opposition/ The Syrian National Army: 34, including three women.

Syrian Democratic Forces: 31, including one child.

C. Attacks on vital civilian facilities:

In September 2020, SNHR documented at least five incidents of attacks on vital civilian facilities, four of which were perpetrated by other parties.

Among these attacks we documented one on a school, another on a market, and one other on a vehicle belonging to the Red Crescent.

These attacks were distributed according to the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces as follows:

A. The main parties:

- **Syrian Regime forces:** One.

B. Other parties:

Other parties perpetrated four incidents, distributed as follows:

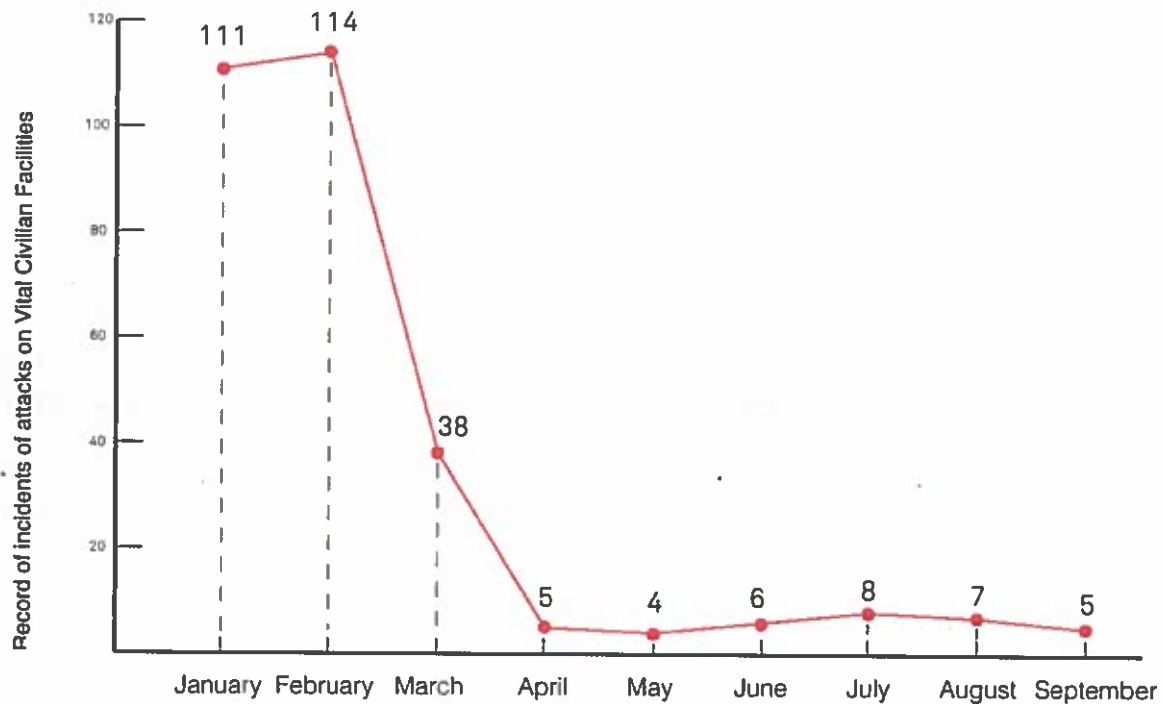
Bombings whose perpetrators have not yet been identified: Three.

Fires of unknown source: One.

The record of attacks documented in September 2020 on vital civilian facilities was distributed according to the perpetrator parties as follows:

Attacked Facility	Perpetrator Party		
	Syrian Regime forces	Other parties	
		Bombings whose perpetrators have not yet been identified	Fires of unknown source
Vital Educational Facilities			
Schools	1		
Communal Facilities			
Markets		1	
International Humanitarian Insignia			
Red Crescent			1
Infrastructure			
Official Headquarters		1	
International headquarters and organizations' offices and other assets		1	
Total	1	3	1

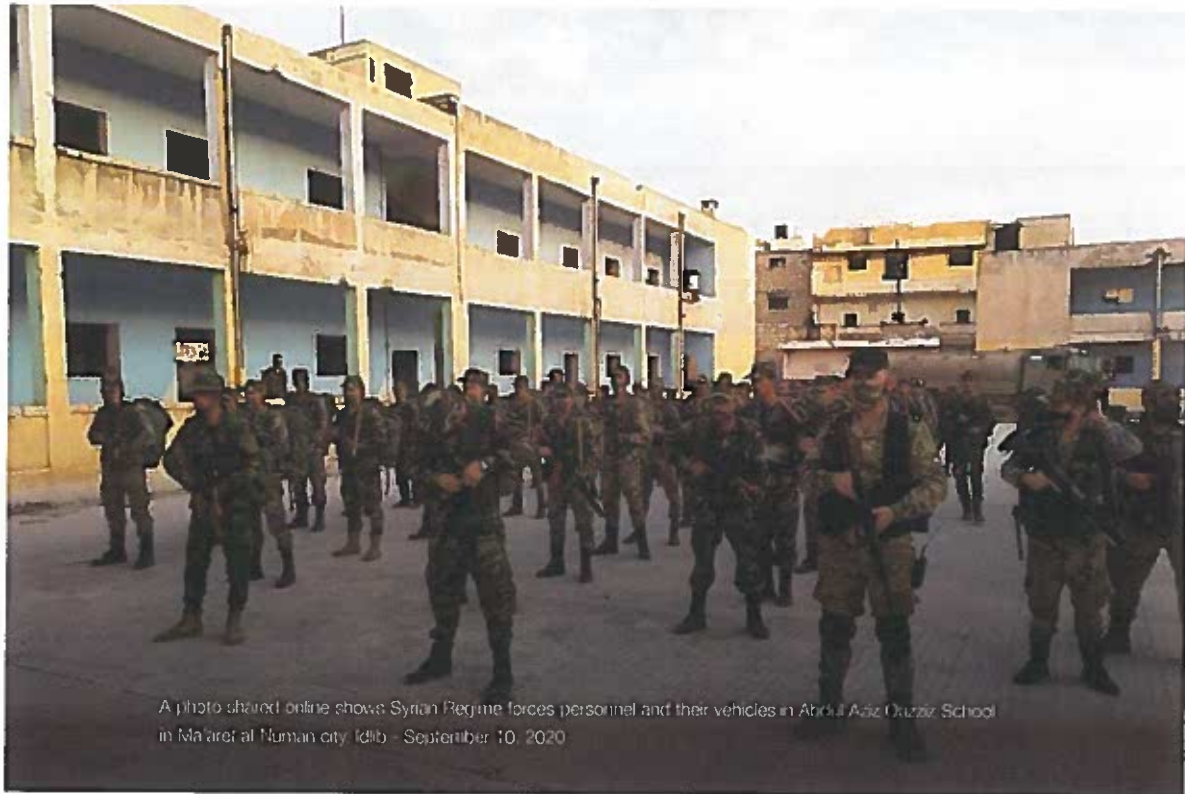
Thus, the record of attacks on vital civilian facilities documented since the start of 2020 up to the start of October of the same year at the hands of the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in Syria has now reached 298 in total, distributed monthly as follows:



The previous chart shows a continuing decline in the number of the attacks on vital civilian facilities for the sixth consecutive month, with the ceasefire agreement that entered into force on March 6 having had an effect on this, along with the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic which has affected the capabilities of the Syrian regime's army and affiliated Iranian militias.

The most notable attacks on vital civilian facilities in September:

On Thursday, September 10, 2020, a photo spread on the Internet showing Syrian Regime forces personnel and vehicles at the Abdul Aziz Qazziz School in Ma'aret al Numan city in the southern suburbs of Idlib governorate, after they seized the school and looted its contents, including clothing materials, before transferring these stolen materials to a training center for Syrian Regime forces personnel. The SNHR was unable to determine the date of the Syrian Regime forces' takeover of the school, as Ma'aret al Numan city has been under its control since January 28, 2020.



On Saturday, September 12, 2020, a motorcycle bomb of so-far unknown origin exploded in the main market in Ras al Ein city, in the northwestern suburbs of Hasaka governorate. Around ten civilians were injured in the explosion, which also caused moderate material damage to a number of shops. The Syrian Network for Human Rights is still trying to contact witnesses and survivors of that incident to obtain more details. Ras al Ein city was under the control of the Armed Opposition / the Syrian National Army at the time of the incident.

On Monday, September 14, 2020, a car bomb of unknown origin exploded in front of the Turkish Office of Humanitarian Relief, Human Rights and Freedoms (IHH) located near Dawwar Kawa in the center of Afrin city in the northern suburbs of Aleppo governorate. The explosion occurred 50 meters from the office, causing a massacre, in addition to inflicting moderate material damage to the office building and furniture. Afrin was under the control of the Armed Opposition / the Syrian National Army at the time of the incident.

D. Record of indiscriminate attacks and attacks using outlawed weapons:

The Syrian Network for Human Rights was unable to document any indiscriminate attacks or attacks using outlawed weapons in September.

IV. The Syrian Regime Bears Primary Responsibility for the Spread of COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has swept across most of the world, and caused massive numbers of infections and deaths, with most of the world's stable countries worldwide dealing with it seriously and taking exceptional measures to protect the population; many countries have announced their desire to attract and employ more medical personnel, and some governments have released large numbers of imprisoned people and detainees as a precautionary measure to stop the disease from spreading.

By contrast, since the beginning of the global pandemic outbreak, the Syrian regime has dealt with it with callous, total and extreme disregard and total negligence, with several countries announcing the arrival of infected cases from Syria since the beginning of March 2020. Despite this, the Syrian regime continued to deny the existence of any infections in Syria until March 22.

The COVID-19 does not distinguish between one person or another or between one region and another, and all the regions of Syria, particularly Idlib and surrounding areas, that have witnessed bombings, destruction and forced displacement are suffering from further challenges in addition to the usual ones, which cannot be compared to those in any other location; at the forefront of these challenges are the nearly 1.1 million Syrian citizens displaced between mid-December 2019 and the beginning of March 2020, with exceptional humanitarian aid efforts required to focus particularly on these people in the areas to which they were displaced. There are a number of factors which make them more vulnerable than others to infection with COVID-19, most notably:

- The Idlib region and the northwestern suburbs of Aleppo and its environs are already experiencing massive overcrowding due to the earlier displacement of tens of thousands of Syrians to these places from several areas such as the Eastern Ghouta, the northern suburbs of Homs, southern Syria, and recently the suburbs of Idlib and Hama, which has caused a drastic increase in the existing overcrowding, making the process of social physical distancing virtually impossible.
- Most of these people live in hastily constructed camps or structures which are wholly inadequate and unsuitable for housing (such as schools, shops, unfinished apartments, demolished buildings, caves, etc.), which lack the most basic sanitary infrastructure such as toilets, functioning sewage networks, or clean water, which makes the available water allocations necessary for periodic personal hygiene for each person far less than would be available in normal conditions or in other areas in Syria. The IDPs are struggling to obtain enough tents, and are sometimes forced to live in a tent collectively, which particularly negatively affects women due to their special needs.

- The healthcare system in and around Idlib continues to suffer from the repercussions of violent and focused targeting by the Syrian and Russian regimes' forces, which has contributed to a large number of health centers being put out of service. According to estimates from a number of local relief and humanitarian organizations, the number of doctors in the region ranges between 500 to 600, while the number of beds in medical centers ranges between 2,500 to 3,000, with the number of beds in intensive care units numbering 201 in total; in addition, only 95 ventilators are available for adults, with all of these being in use. The tremendous disparity between these figures and the population levels in northwest Syria shows the immensity of the grave deficit.

On April 14, Médecins Sans Frontières [warned](#) that the health system in Idlib, which is currently overstretched and low on supplies, will be overrun if COVID-19 spreads there.

The Syrian Jazira region (Deir Ez-Zour, Hasaka, Raqqa), which is controlled by the Kurdish-majority Syrian Democratic Forces, suffers from a similar situation, and also includes large numbers of IDPs living in camps. Russia's use of its United Nations veto has caused the cancellation of three of the four crossings, with al Ya'rubiya crossing with Iraq being one of the crossings canceled; this caused the region to be denied direct UN aid, which is now provided exclusively through the Syrian regime that deliberately creates obstacles to aid provision and systematically carries out large-scale extortion, which we addressed extensively in our report: [Sanctions Are Linked to the Syrian Regime's Continuing Violations and Don't Include Medical Supplies and Food, Which Shouldn't Be Delivered Through the Regime](#), with the United Nations Secretary-General speaking about this in [his report issued on February 21, 2020](#). [Human Rights Watch also issued a report](#) on the crisis facing the medical sector in that region and the complex difficulties it faces due to the closure of al Ya'rubiya crossing.

As for the areas under the control of the Syrian regime, whilst these are better off than the Idlib region, its environs, and the Syrian Jazira region, they suffer mainly from the exodus of medical personnel, and from the massive corruption in all the regime's organs, as well as from the depletion of the Syrian state's monetary reserves, which are spent on bombings, military operations, and security services at the expense of supporting the medical sector and services. SNHR has also demanded that Russia, a massively wealthy country, help its ally, the Syrian regime, given the circumstances of the spread of the COVID-19, as this would be far better and less costly than air strikes on medical facilities, cities and towns in and around Idlib.

In short, the whole of Syrian society suffers from mismanagement of the coronavirus crisis, in all areas of control:

One: In the areas under the control of the Syrian regime, these shortcomings are summarized in the following main points:

1. The Syrian regime denied the existence of any cases of COVID-19 in areas under its control until March 22; it should be borne in mind that when the regime finally admitted the existence of a case of infection, it was in a girl coming from outside the country. Another problematic factor is the complete lack of any transparency in the announcement of cases of infection and deaths, which are certainly far greater than those officially announced, due particularly to the constant contact with Shiite religious groups, individuals and militias coming from Iran and Iraq (most notably the al Nujaba Movement, the Imam Ali Brigade, the Fatemiyoun Brigade, the Quds Corps Brigade, the Abu al Fadl al Abbas Brigade and the Haideriyoun Brigade) via the al Boukamal land crossing, with the Syrian regime failing to close the al Sayyidah Zaynab area, which is known to be very crowded with Iranians and Iraqi Shiites, until April 2.
2. The Syrian authorities have not taken any effective measures to limit air traffic from other countries, with Damascus International Airport still witnessing multiple flights to and from many countries, including Iran.
3. Quarantine centers are not equipped and lack the minimum levels of hygiene, in addition to lacking the most basic conditions for healthcare and medical protection and the facilities to provide the medical procedures and services related to COVID-19, which are supposedly intended to contribute to curbing the spread of the disease if discovered. [Press websites](#) and social media platforms have published photos and [videos showing the dire situation of the Quarantine Center in al Dwair area](#), where people were [placed after arriving](#) on a trip from Iran.
4. The Syrian regime has not taken any serious measures to prevent overcrowding of citizens in front of retail outlets, bakeries or in commercial markets, or in [public transportation](#). The regime has also failed to take any measures regarding the start of the new school year and the reopening of [schools](#), as we have mentioned in a wide range of [news reports](#) in recent months.

Two: In and around opposition-held areas in Idlib:

1. The areas under opposition control suffer from an absence of a central authority to issue unified instructions, a shortcoming largely reflected in the disparity seen in the individuals' approach to prevention and medical treatment of the COVID-19.
2. A low degree of medical and religious awareness of the dangers of overcrowding and gathering. We have noted that dozens of worshipers have been gathering in some [mosques](#) to perform the prayers for Jum'ah (Friday Prayer), with crowds of shoppers also seen in some [markets](#), in addition to other people [holding condolence events](#), without the controlling authorities imposing any restrictions on any of these groups, with a sense of indifference prevailing among many people, primarily caused by what they have been subjected to, including the bombings, displacement and torture by Syrian regime's forces and allies.

Based on all the above facts, there is no doubt that the negligence shown by the Syrian regime and its disastrous mismanagement of the Syrian state in recent years are further clear indications of the regime's indifference to citizens' wellbeing, showing once again that the only Syrians which it cares about protecting are the ruling family, the regime's inner circle and its wealthy elite; this indifference to the Syrian public may well lead to massive additional numbers of deaths among Syrian citizens. It should always be remembered that, the Syrian regime and its Russian ally have been primary accused of the targeting, bombing and destruction of most medical facilities in Syria, and the killing of hundreds of medical personnel, as documented on the SNHR's database, with dozens of these lifesaving medics still classified as having been forcibly disappeared at the regime's hands.

The regime's failure to release arbitrarily detained individuals, particularly the elderly and individuals detained with no charges, provides further clear evidence of the Syrian regime's primary responsibility for the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic in Syria, as the regime controls and manages state institutions, and has completely failed to provide even the most rudimentary protection to Syrian civilians, but has instead exploited the state institutions to protect and benefit the ruling family in order to ensure their continued rule, even if 13 million Syrian citizens are displaced from their homes to achieve this, with most of those displaced unable to return home since their homes have been ransacked and subjected to widespread looting and destruction by regime forces and affiliated militias.

V. Attachments

(1) [Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 102 Civilians, including 15 Children, 10 Women, Three Medical Personnel, and 12 Victims Due to Torture](#)

(2) [At least 162 Cases of Arbitrary Arrests/ Detention Documented in Syria in September 2020, Including Two Children and Six Women](#)

VI. Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions:

- 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, arrest, torture, and enforced disappearance. 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 government 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 in accordance with the requirements of 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 leads 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 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.
- The Armed Opposition/ the Syrian National Army 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, caused massive collateral damage that involved 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 arms 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 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 artefacts 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 persons 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 (ICRtoP) 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', 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.
- Work to launch projects to create maps revealing the locations of landmines and cluster munitions in all Syrian governorates. This would facilitate the process of removing them and educating the population about their locations.
- Based on the responsibility of all countries of the world, we welcome the step taken by the Dutch government to hold the Syrian regime accountable for its violation of the Convention against Torture, and we call on other countries to hold the Syrian regime accountable as it has violated all human rights conventions, most of which have a mechanism similar to the Convention against Torture. The Syrian regime has also violated the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Convention on the Prohibition of Racial Discrimination, the CEDAW Convention, the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use of Chemical Weapons, and others.

OHCHR

- 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 since these attacks were perpetrated by the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces.
- Train Syrian organizations to undertake clearance of mines and other unexploded ordnance, and raise local awareness of the dangers of such ordnance.
- Establish a platform that brings together a number of Syrian organizations active in documenting violations and humanitarian assistance, in order to facilitate an exchange of skills and experiences within Syrian society.
- Work on preparing a special report on the use of landmines in Syria and the risks they pose to civilians, and identify the most prominent locations where landmines were planted.

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.

International, Impartial, and Independent Mechanism (IIIM)

- Collect further evidence about the crimes documented in this report.
- Focus on the issue of landmines and cluster munitions within the next report.

The United Nations Special Envoy to 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.

The Syrian regime

- Stop indiscriminate shelling and targeting of residential areas, hospitals, schools and markets, and end the use of outlawed weapons and barrel bombs.
- End the acts of torture that have caused the deaths of thousands of Syrian citizens in detention centers.
- Reveal the fate of some 84,000 Syrian citizens arrested by the security services whose fate has been concealed to date.
- Ensure compliance with UN Security Council resolutions and customary humanitarian law.
- Provide detailed maps of the locations where the regime planted landmines, especially in civilian areas or near residential communities.

The Russian regime

- Launch investigations into the incidents included in this report, make the findings of these investigations public for the Syrian people, and hold the 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.
- Stop using incendiary weapons in populated areas, compensate the victims and their families for all human and material damage caused by the use of these weapons, and provide treatment for dozens of civilian casualties.
- Provide detailed maps of sites where Russian forces have launched cluster munition attacks, issue these to the United Nations and inform the Syrian public about them, thus facilitating the safe disposal of unexploded ordnance.
- Begin to achieve a breakthrough in the issue of detainees by revealing the fate of 83,000 people forcibly disappeared by the Syrian regime.

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

- The states of the coalition must unequivocally and sincerely acknowledge that some of their bombing operations have resulted in the deaths of innocent civilians. Rather than attempting denial, these states should take speedy steps to launch serious investigations, and immediately compensate and apologize to the victims and all those affected.
- 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.
- The states supporting the SDF should cease all forms of support until the SDF commits itself to complying with the rules of international human rights law and international humanitarian law. This is primarily the responsibility of the supporting states. Providing the SDF with weapons and support while knowing that the SDF violates the rules of international humanitarian law can be seen as a contribution to these violations.
- 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.
- Provide detailed maps of the locations where the SDF planted landmines, especially civilian sites or near residential communities.

The Armed Opposition/ the Syrian National Army

- The Armed Opposition/ the Syrian National Army 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.
- Pledge to cease any arbitrary arrests, and investigate incidents that have resulted in violations of international humanitarian law.
- Take punitive action against those who commit violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law.
- Provide detailed maps of the locations where the Armed Opposition/ Syrian National Army planted landmines, especially civilian sites or near residential communities.

Humanitarian Organizations:

- Develop urgent operational plans to secure decent shelter for internally displaced persons.
- Exert efforts in landmine clearance operations in parallel with relief operations whenever the opportunity arises.

Acknowledgments

We wish to extend our sincere thanks to all family members, relatives and friends of the victims, as well as eyewitnesses and local activists whose contributions have enriched this report.



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