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On International Women's Day: Nearly 9,264 Women Still Arrested/ Forcibly Disappeared, and Women Targeted Due to Their Work

At Least 67 Incidents of Women Targeted Due
to Their Work in Northwest and Northeast of
Syria Between March 2020 and March 2021

Monday 8 March 2021

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.

SNHR
SYRIAN NETWORK FOR HUMAN RIGHTS
الشبكة السورية لحقوق الإنسان

Content

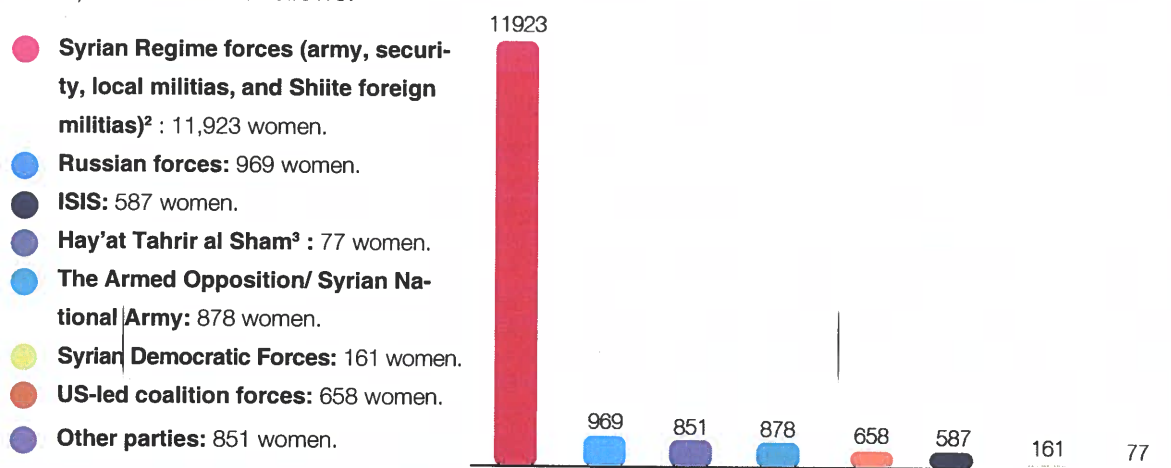
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I. Ten Years of Continuous Egregious Violations against Syrian Women, and Violations of Women's Right to Work:

Over the past 10 years in Syria, since the beginning of the popular uprising in March 2011 and subsequently, after this developed into an internal armed conflict from July 2012¹, violations against women in Syria have received insufficient attention from the UN and international community, particularly bearing in mind the horrific extent, the intensity and the vast range of different types of violations in this category, including grave violations, some of which have amounted to crimes against humanity. While it's true that the whole of Syrian society has suffered from the terrible effects of the violations perpetrated against its members, and that, in most cases, men constitute the largest proportion of these victims, some types of violations inflicted on Syrian women have a grave impact on women and their position in society; these effects are further exacerbated by women also being severely affected by the vast extent of the violations perpetrated against men, including killing, arrest and enforced disappearance. We have noticed a radical change in the roles of women who have come to assume the roles of male and female caregiver in their families, with women themselves being subjected to terrible violations. The following is the record of the most notable violations perpetrated against women according to the Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) database.

A. Extrajudicial killing:

According to the SNHR database (Readers can view the methodology used in our documentation work via [the link](#)), we documented the deaths of at least 16,104 women (adult female) at the hands of the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in Syria between March 2011 and March 2021, distributed as follows:



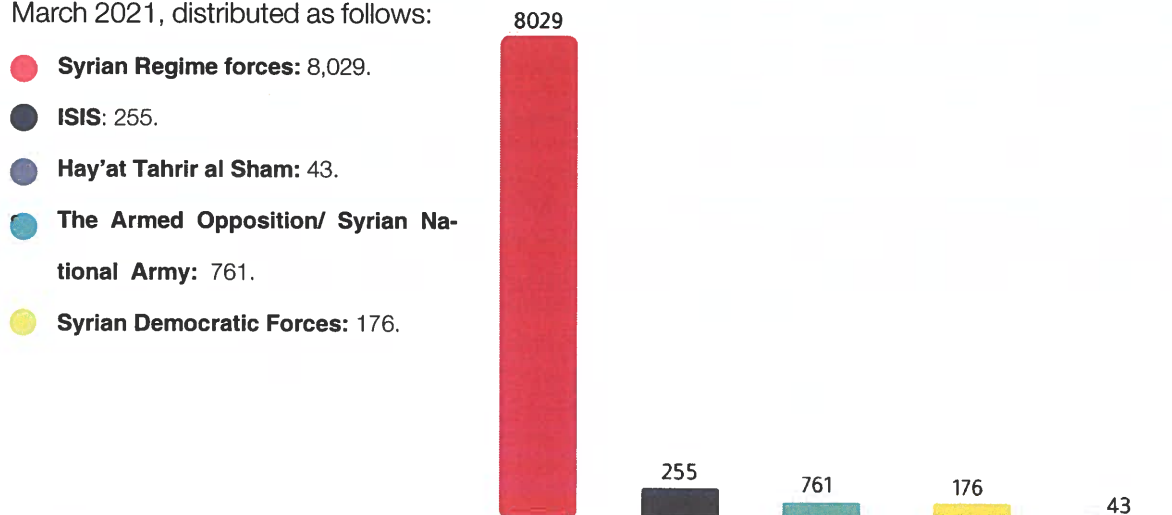
¹ International Committee of the Red Cross, Operational Update, Syria: ICRC and Syrian Arab Red Crescent maintain aid effort amid increased fighting, <https://www.icrc.org/en/doc/resources/documents/update/2012/syria-update-2012-07-17.htm>

² We generally use the term 'the Syrian regime' rather than 'the Syrian government', because the nature of the ruling power in Syria is a totalitarian dictatorship based on ruling the nation in an authoritarian fashion through a very limited group of individuals, primarily the President of the Republic and his selected leaders of the security services, while 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, without any decision-making power or active role; this means that the government's role is wholly subordinate and limited to serving the regime, with all the main powers being concentrated in the hands of the President of the Republic and the security services. Governance in Syria is wholly decided by the autocratic authority of the ruling family and there is no independent decision-making structure. Rather, the government is an empty façade there for show; the Minister of Interior receives orders from the security branches over which he nominally presides which are in turn under the command of the President, while the Minister of Justice cannot summon a civilian-level security agent other than the head of a security branch; the security branches, along with the president, are the true power and the governing regime in Syria. Although we acknowledge that the United Nations and its agencies use the term 'the Syrian government' in general, we believe that this is a completely inaccurate and misleading term in the Syrian context.

³ The United Nations has designated it as a terrorist organization

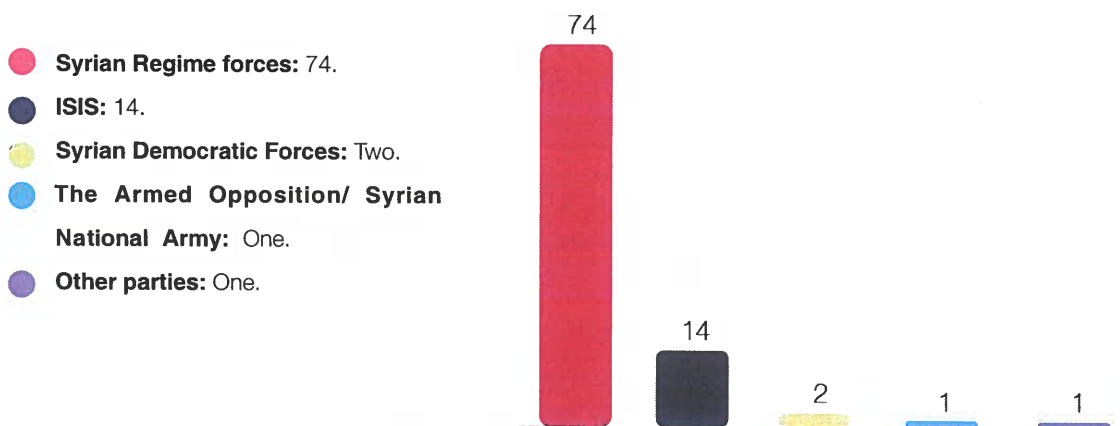
B. Arbitrary arrest and enforced disappearance

According to the SNHR database, at least 9,264 women are still arrested or forcibly disappeared at the hands of the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in Syria between March 2011 and March 2021, distributed as follows:



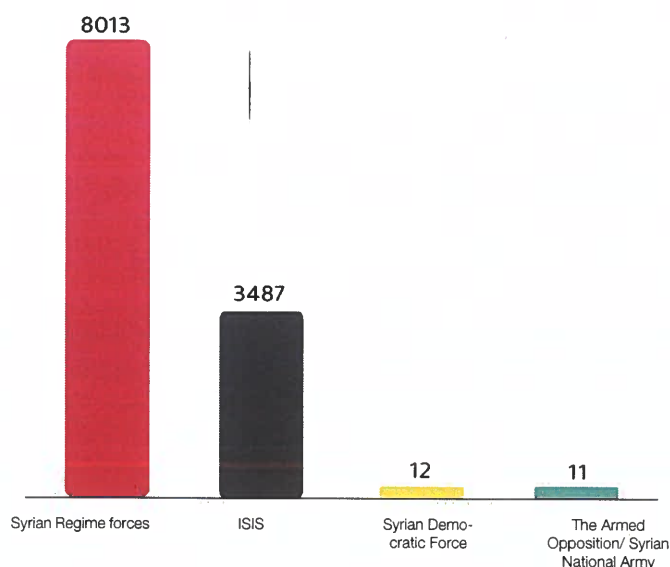
C. Torture

The SNHR team documented the deaths of at least 92 women due to torture at the hands of the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in Syria between March 2011 and March 2021, distributed as follows:



D. Sexual violence

The SNHR has documented at least 11,523 incidents of sexual violence; of these the Syrian regime committed 8,013, including 879 incidents in detention centers, and ISIS committed 3,487 incidents of sexual violence, while 12 incidents of sexual violence were committed by factions of the Armed Opposition, and 12 others by Syrian Democratic Forces.



II. At Least 67 Incidents Documented of Women Being Targeted Due to Their Work in Areas Outside the Syrian Regime's Control:

In addition to the earlier grave violations, women have suffered from many other types of violations; in this report, we try to shed light on a specific aspect of the violations and harassment faced by women working in public affairs, marking International Women's Day, which falls on March 8th each year. Here we're focusing on the gender-based persecution and derision targeting some women involved in public affairs and working in political, media and relief activities who are forced by harassment into giving up their work, (we've documented severe gender-based abuse and harassment of some female politicians and political activists, and women working in the police and media, and in the field of documenting violations). In addition to facing this harassment, the harsh economic and social conditions have forced many women to work in unsuitable fields and working environments, through which many have been subjected to many harassment, sex discrimination, escalating in some occasions to death threats and even execution, in addition to imposing severe restrictions on their freedom of movement and clothing.

The intimidation that women have been subjected to includes receiving messages threatening to kill, kidnap, or assault them while they were working; threatening to attack their work places or their families; filling false charges against them to justify summoning them to appear before the judiciary or to harass them; pressuring their families to force them to give up their jobs; dismissing them from jobs or from local organizations in which they obtained membership, and using social media to defame and slander the reputation of women in the local community. We have also recorded some cases of women being forced to sign a pledge after they were summoned to appear before the judiciary vowing to stop their activities and work and promising not to reveal what they were subjected to during interrogation. Finally, and most seriously, we have recorded cases of women being murdered due to their work.

In most cases, women have been subjected to threats by more than one party throughout the period of their activities, and during their movement between areas controlled by different parties, in particular between the areas controlled by the Syrian National Army forces/ Armed Opposition factions and those controlled by Hay'at Tahrir al Sham. These violations have resulted in women being killed in a number of these cases, with many others subjected to various types of violations, either being forced to reduce and limit their activities or to give up their jobs and end their activities completely, and often being forced to flee to other areas as a result of threats, leading to further displacement.

The SNHR team has been able to document 67 such violations and incidents in each of the governorates of Idlib, Aleppo, Raqqa, Hasaka and Deir Ez-Zour, in areas outside the control of the Syrian regime, in areas under the control of each of the following forces: The Syrian National Army forces/ Armed Opposition factions, Syrian Democratic Forces, and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham, during the period from March 2020 to March 2021. We believe that there are many incidents of this nature that we have not been able to document due to the difficulty, sensitivity and seriousness of this issue for

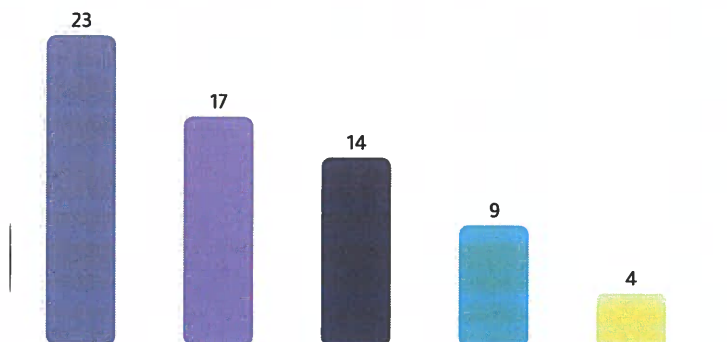
women, their families, and the risks for their source of livelihood. It should be noted that the violations and practices in this category perpetrated in areas under the control of the Syrian regime are not included in this report.

The report relies on the accounts and interviews SNHR conducted with a number of women activists and workers in different fields who were exposed to one or more of the violations covered in the report, either by visiting them directly or via communication platforms. In this report, we provide 11 accounts, which we obtained directly through speaking with the witnesses rather than from open sources. In most cases, we used aliases and concealed any relevant information that could pose a security risk to those providing their testimonies, such as where they work or the areas where they live, at their request, and to prevent them from being subjected to harassment or security persecution. Witnesses received no financial compensation or promises in exchange for interviews. We explained the purpose of the report beforehand to all the interviewees we spoke with, and obtained their consent to use the information they provided to serve the purposes of the report and the documentation processes. All these procedures are carried out in accordance with our internal protocols, which we have worked on for years.

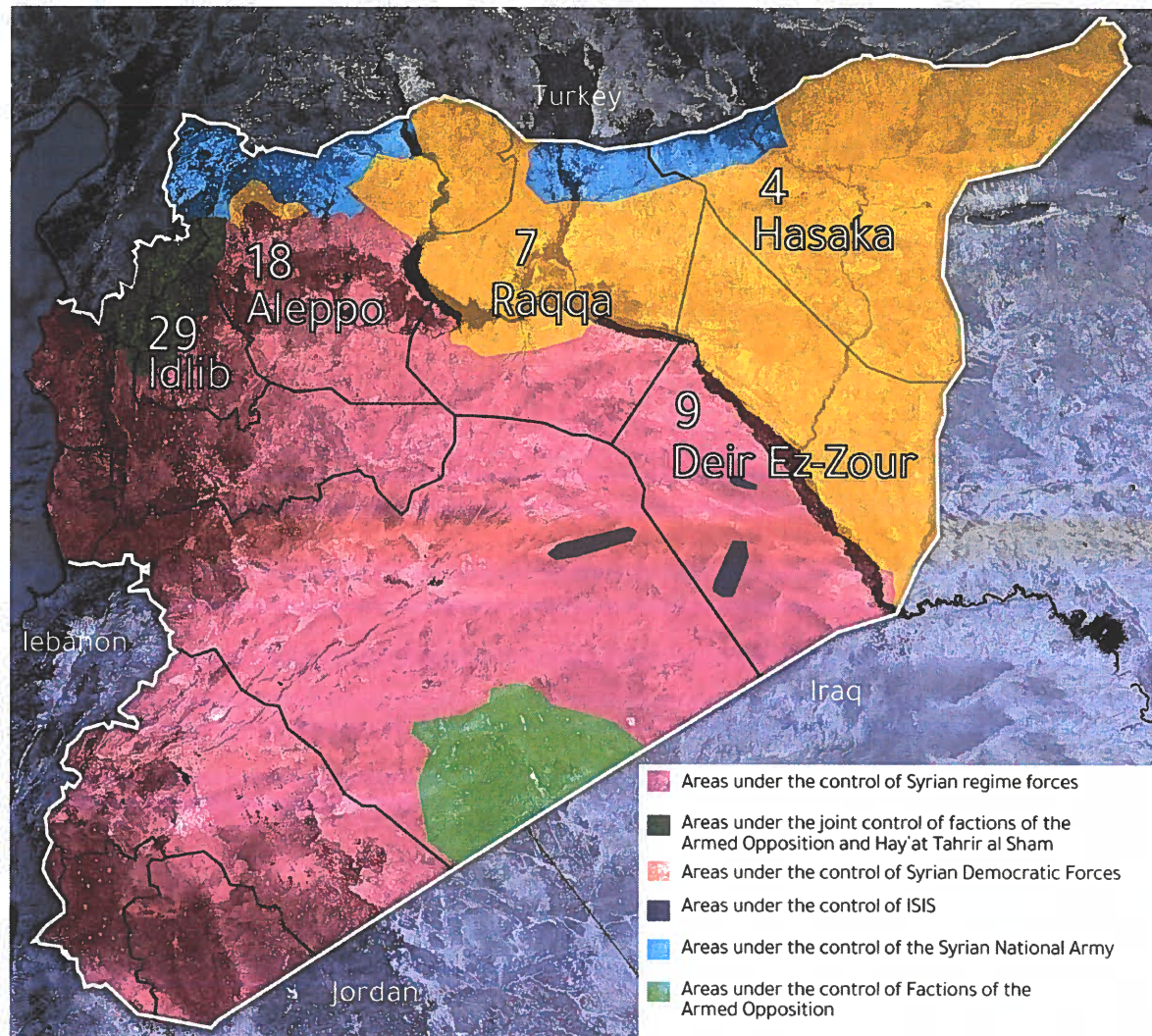
The violations detailed in this report represent the bare minimum that we have been able to document in terms of the magnitude and severity of the violations that have occurred. In addition, the report doesn't include any analysis of the profound social, economic, and psychological ramifications.

The Syrian Network for Human Rights team recorded at least 67 incidents of assault and intimidation against women activists and workers, or against centers for women in connection with their activities, between March 2020 and March 2021, distributed according to the party responsible for them as follows:

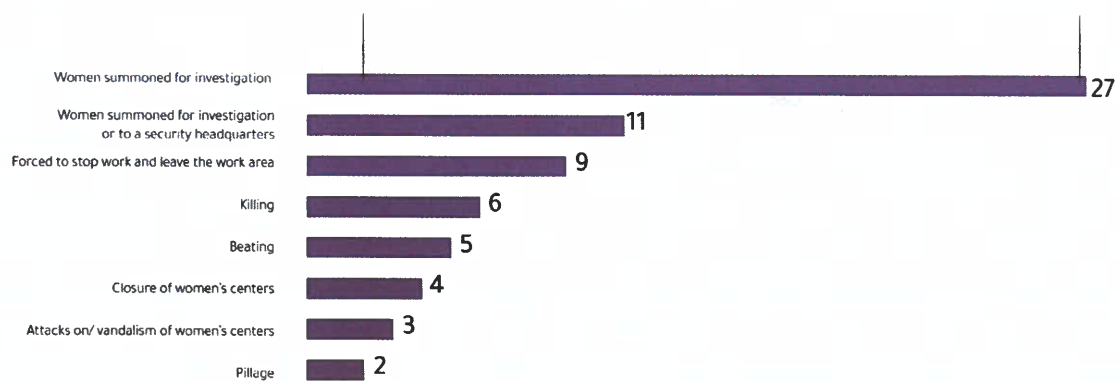
- Hay'at Tahrir al Sham: 23
- Unidentified parties: 17
- Extremist cells (we believe these belong to ISIS): 14
- The Syrian National Army Forces/ Armed Opposition factions: 9
- Syrian Democratic Forces: 4



This record was distributed across the governorates in which the incidents occurred as follows:



The record was also distributed according to the type of incident to:



III. Hay'at Tahrir al Sham, Syrian Democratic Forces, Syrian National Army and ISIS-Affiliated Cells Have Targeted Women in a Discriminatory Manner Due to Their Work:

A. Hay'at Tahrir al Sham:

Hay'at Tahrir al Sham has established many entities through which it seeks to restrict and monitor society, and persecute those wanted by HTS or accused of violating its teachings, which it imposes either through direct rulings issued by the HTS leadership or through decrees issued by the Salvation Government which it formed in the areas under its control. Hay'at Tahrir al Sham has also worked to restrict the work of women, especially the activists among them, and imposes restrictions on them through three main bodies:

The first: The al Hesba Apparatus, 'Al Falah Center, the former Sawaid al Khair Center', was established by Hay'at Tahrir al Sham as a religious apparatus specializing in monitoring civilians and restricting their public freedoms, such as imposing a strict dress code and preventing gender-mixing between males and females, especially within educational centers. Hay'at Tahrir al Sham also gave this body the powers to carry out arrests against violators and punish them with beatings, imprisonment, or fines, or transfer them to the judiciary, with this apparatus mainly pursuing women in Idlib city.

The second: The Security Apparatus, which has two parts:

One: This part, which includes foreign extremists, is a section directly affiliated with Hay'at Tahrir al Sham and is considered its most brutal wing, with positions being assigned to foreign extremists, and mimicking the Syrian regime's security branches' work and objectives. This wing follows a policy of kidnapping in carrying out arrests, and focuses on monitoring the work of activists and workers in humanitarian organizations and persecuting them.

Two: This part, known as the 'General Security Apparatus' and formally affiliated with the Salvation Government, is considered an ancillary section of the main security apparatus; it is mainly involved in the pursuit of thieves, kidnappers and murder gangs.

The security apparatus practices arrests/ detentions without resorting to the judiciary established by Hay'at Tahrir al Sham, with most of the people it detains ultimately being categorized as forcibly disappeared. We have documented that most of the women arrested by its personnel gave up working after being released from detention, which reinforces our suspicions that they were subjected to threats.

The third: The Public Prosecution service of the Salvation Government's Ministry of Justice, which is the apparatus that sends summonses to activists on the basis of their expressing their opinion, investigates them and then forces them to sign a pledge not to criticize Hay'at

Tahrir al Sham's practices; in case of refusal, they are referred to the judiciary and imprisoned. In addition to the aforementioned instances, we have monitored many cases involving harassment, threats, or physical assaults against women, carried out by patrols/ personnel affiliated with Hay'at Tahrir al Sham, especially while the women were engaged in reporting field events within the areas controlled by HTS.

Walaa Ismail, a reporter with a local media center, from Aleppo city, is a second-year law student. On March 14, 2020, she was beaten and insulted by Hay'at Tahrir al Sham-affiliated personnel who used obscenities and insulting language against her, while she was providing media coverage of a demonstration near the Bab al Hawa crossing on the Syrian-Turkish border north of Idlib city, which is under the control of Hay'at Tahrir al Sham.

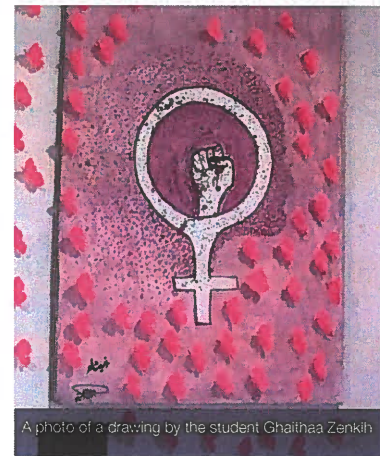
The Syrian Network for Human Rights contacted Walaa⁴, who told us: **"The demonstration took place near the Bab al Hawa crossing on the Syrian-Turkish border, in protest against the military operations launched by Russia and the regime forces on Idlib, and to demand the opening of the crossings for IDPs fleeing from the hell of bombing. During my media coverage of the demonstration, a number of Hay'at Tahrir al Sham's personnel attacked me verbally using obscene words, under the pretext that filming is forbidden, and they confiscated my personal phone and my media equipment (a camera and a camera stand), and directed offensive words at me and my husband, which were like: 'Make your wife virtuous, mixing with males is prohibited'. After dozens of demonstrators intervened and prevented them from arresting me, the HTS personnel returned my phone and equipment."**

Sidra al Abdou, a media activist from Idlib city, was summoned by the Public Prosecution service of Hay'at Tahrir al Sham's Salvation Government on July 17, 2020, in connection with filming a report with a group of women in Idlib city about the representation of women in Salvation Government institutions. Sidra⁵ told us: **"It was a surprise to me when one of my media colleagues, who has strong ties with the Salvation Government's Ministry of Justice, told me that I was wanted by the Public Prosecution in Idlib city. When I went there, I was investigated about the content of the report and my filming of women, about the party that I work for, and about my media work in general, then I signed a pledge to delete the videos I'd filmed and not to interfere in the work of the Salvation Government. in addition to that, I must inform them and obtain approval before I work on any report on the HTS."** Sidra added that she does not know who told the Public Prosecution about her work, and that since then she has not filmed any reports with women in order to avoid any problems she might face as a result, except for covering humanitarian cases needing relief support which require work to highlight them.

⁴ Via phone on March 22, 2020

⁵ Via phone on January 21, 2021

Ghaithaa Zenkih, is an activist and graduate of the Midwifery Health Institute in Idlib city. On August 11, 2020, Ghaithaa participated in an artistic event held at the Midwifery Health Institute, at which various artworks were displayed with the aim of conveying a message to the world about the humanitarian situation in Idlib, with the event shedding light on the value and importance of medical staff and humanitarian work, in addition to clarifying the status of Syrian women and their importance in society. Hay'at Tahrir al Sham's al Falah Center complained that the exhibition included 'Masonic' drawings. As a result, on Tuesday, August 18, 2020, Hay'at Tahrir al Sham's personnel arrested the pharmacist Mustafa al Jazi, the director of the Midwifery Health Institute, after he was summoned by HTS' al Falah Center (al Hesba) for interrogation about the background of the event, before being released on Saturday, August 22, 2020.



A photo of a drawing by the student Ghaithaa Zenkih

The activist Ghaithaa Zenkih was summoned for interrogation the day after Mustafa al Jazi on August 19, 2020, with SNHR documenting that she was released on the same day.

B. Extremist cells (we believe these belong to ISIS):

After the defeat of ISIS – which is designated as a terrorist organization by the United Nations – and its expulsion from the vast majority of the lands it controlled, some believers in the organization's fundamentalist ideology infiltrated the ranks of society as sleeper cells, some of which appeared to work in coordination together, with their activities including terrorizing and threatening female workers in the areas formerly controlled by the organization; this harassment of women formed part of the work of these terrorist cells, with many women sending us pictures of the threatening messages that they received, and some of them being killed.

Among the groups of women who have been threatened are some involved in working to rehabilitate and educate the families of ISIS fighters who were killed or arrested, with the organization believing that this work falls into the category of heretical denunciation of its extremist beliefs as it attempts to make a comeback in the area.

On September 7, 2020, we recorded that five women workers in one of the local organizations operating in each of the cities of al Bab and Jarablos in the eastern suburbs of Aleppo governorate were threatened through messages received from cellphones believed to belong to individuals affiliated with ISIS, as a result of the women's work to reintegrate women and children from ISIS families into society.

Two women among those harassed told us that their husbands' cars had been attacked and their windows had been broken on October 17 and 19, 2020; all five women continued to be threatened

through phone calls from unknown individuals who threatened to kill them, and warned that ISIS would return and take revenge on them. These violent threats forced the women to abandon their work which was also their main source of livelihood, fearing for their lives and the lives of their family members, with two of the women adding that they had felt compelled to leave their homes and go to live in other villages.

We contacted Ms. Huda al Jasem⁶, an activist in the field of psychological support, one of the women threatened and forced to leave their work, who told us: **“During my work with the organization, we were conducting awareness and psychological sessions and meetings with former wives of ISIS members and with their children, and it seems that news of this work has been leaked and reached the cells of the organization in the area; me and my colleagues working on the same project began to receive dozens of threatening messages, threatening to reach and kill us whenever they wanted to, and saying that they have all our information and home addresses. There is no one to protect us in such circumstances, so we suspended our work and became confined to the house with fear haunting us, while some of my colleagues left their homes and moved to live in other areas that might be safer.”** Huda added that despite giving up her work, she still receives threatening messages.

We also spoke with Ms. Zahrah al Omar⁷, a 27-year-old photographer from al Zghair village in the western suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate, who was robbed, threatened with a gun, and verbally assaulted by masked individuals believed to be affiliated with ISIS, while she was filming a report in Abriha village. Zahra says, **“I have been working as a freelance media activist/ photographer for nearly a year-and-a-half; at the beginning of February 2021, I was with a group of media workers to film a report on the Khabur River, and during our work, we were attacked by four masked people riding motorcycles; they asked us what we were doing, and who we work for and other questions, then they asked us to leave directly; when we asked them why, someone pointed a gun at me, ordered us to leave without asking questions, and they took the camera that I was filming with, then we had to leave in panic; these people often belong to ISIS.”** Zahrah added that this situation had led to her living in constant terror and forced her to film only in a limited number of places, which she said would affect her work.

Ms. Saedah Faisal al Hermas was co-chair of the Tal al Jayar town's Council of Syrian Democratic Forces, and Ms. Hend Latif al Khdeir was the vice co-chair of the Tal al Jayar town's Council. On Friday, January 22, 2021, gunmen believed to be affiliated with ISIS carried out raids on their homes in Tal al Jayar village, which is administratively a part of al Dshaisha district in the southern suburbs of Hasaka, and took both of them to an undisclosed location; their bodies were found about 6 km from the village with bullet wounds to the head, a few hours after their abduction. The area was

⁶ Via phone on February 8, 2021

⁷ Via phone on February 20, 2021

under the control of Syrian Democratic Forces at the time of the incident. Syrian Democratic Forces had broadcast [a video](#) on February 20, 2021, in which it included confessions from one of the perpetrators involved in the killing of the two women, stating that they belong to an ISIS cell.

We contacted Ms. Rehab al Hermas⁸, a relative of the victim Saedah al Hermas, who told us about the presence of many ISIS cells in their area: **“On the day Saedah was killed, three masked men broke into her house and she was asleep, and asked her to go with them, threatening her mother and siblings with death. Then they took her, and we found her body two hours later shot in the head near the town with her friend Hind. Saedah had worked to secure her needs and the needs of her daughter.”** Rehab added that the work of women in their area, especially within any service institution, puts them at risk, as the area still contains the remnants of ISIS due to its desert nature and its proximity to the Iraqi borders.

The decapitated body of Ms. Wadi'ah Sarhan al Saleh, an elderly woman from al Mayadeen city in the eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate, was discovered on August 21, 2020; she had apparently been beheaded with a sharp implement. It is likely that gunmen affiliated with ISIS in al Sabha town in the eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour were responsible for the murder. The area was under the control of Syrian Democratic Forces at the time the incident was recorded.

The Syrian Network for Human Rights spoke with Mr. Sareyah, from al Sabha town, who knew Ms. Wadi'ah. He told us: **“Ms. Wadi'ah was displaced from al Mayadeen city, and she had been in our village for about a year and a half. She had no family, so the villagers used to help and provide her with health support and food, due to her old age, and some women used to visit her place of residence to be offered healing with the Ruqyah Sharia. The residents were shocked to find her decapitated body in an abandoned basement near a restaurant in the town, and we think that ISIS members were the ones who did that, because, according to their opinion, she worked with ‘witchcraft and sorcery.’”**



Hind al Khider



Saedah al Hermas

⁸ Via phone on March 1, 2021

C. Syrian National Army forces/ Armed Opposition factions:

The Syrian National Army forces/ Armed Opposition factions have carried out some practices that restrict the work of women, as well as targeting some centers and organizations which specialize in women's affairs, under the pretext of their not obtaining a work permit. We have monitored that woman activists were summoned to the judiciary in connection with their political or media criticism of some practices of the Syrian National Army forces in the areas they control, as it has also been resorted to threatening in some of those cases.

The Syrian Network for Human Rights contacted Ms. Mai al Ahmad⁹, who is from Aleppo city. In December 2012, she left Aleppo city towards al Atareb city in the western suburbs of Aleppo after being pursued by the security branches in the city due to her participation in the popular protests. After leaving her home in Aleppo, Mai was subjected to social pressure from her husband's relatives because of her activities, so she decided to return to Aleppo city on December 25 2012, after which she was beaten by the security forces when they raided her house. So she decided to return again to al Atareb city, and moved between several areas in its vicinity. At the beginning of 2013, she was pursued by ISIS, after which it was forced to travel to Turkey, then she returned in 2017 to al Atareb and established a women's center and a kindergarten, continuing until the beginning of 2019, when Hay'at Tahrir al Sham closed her center, then she was forced to leave to Afrin city in the northern suburbs of Aleppo, after she was threatened with arrest by Hay'at Tahrir al Sham personnel. In the middle of 2020, her center in Afrin city was closed and she was dismissed from work. Mai says: **"After I was pursued in al Atareb and the center was controlled by HTS, I went out towards Afrin, where I opened the 'Women's Authority', which was closed under the pretext that there was no license, with the center being raided twice by the Syrian National Army. I stayed here without work until I got a job at an organization, but I was dismissed from my job three months later because of my criticism of the practices of Syrian National Army, and now I am without any work and I cannot practice my activities as I want."**

Ms. Ola Sheikhou, a music player and teacher from Afrin city in the northern suburbs of Aleppo governorate, on August 18, 2020, personnel affiliated with the Syrian National Army forces "that Ola could not identify" attacked a training course on playing music that she set up in agricultural land owned by her father near her house, with the personnel broke the oud that Ola owned and threatened her in case she held any gathering, as she was subjected to insults by the same group. She told us¹⁰ : **"I used to hold a weekly music training session for the kids at my house. One time, we decided to go out to farmland owned by my father because of the intense heat and power outages; about half an hour after the start of the training, a car arrived and gunmen affiliated with Syrian National Army got out of it, and asked us to leave the place. When I discussed it with them, they insulted me and described me as (unveiled,**

⁹ Via phone on February 20, 2021

¹⁰ Via phone on February 20, 2021

and I teach children to sin), then the discussion intensified, and one of the personnel hit the oud with his foot until he broke it, and threatened me, if I did that again, they would imprison me.” Ola said that she often avoids going to any place where personnel affiliated with the Syrian National Army might be, because she is afraid of being attacked by them.

D. Syrian Democratic Forces:

Syrian Democratic Forces followed a security strategy with civil society organizations operating in the areas under SDF control, and tried to penetrate their ranks and learn about their various activities, and this extended to many activist women with the aim of restricting their work or threatening them and harassing them.

We spoke with Ms. Fawzah al Majni¹¹, a displaced teacher from Deir Ez-Zour city, residing in al Sh-heil city in the suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate, where she works in a clothing store. On July 16, 2020, during her work, she was subjected to harassment and verbal attacks by personnel affiliated with Syrian Democratic Forces, and was threatened against filing any complaint against them, forcing her to leave work. Ms. Fawzah said: **“I work as a teacher, but the salary didn’t make ends meet for my family, so I had to work in a store that sells women’s and men’s clothing - but I had to leave work after two weeks, because SDF gunmen used to visit the shop to disturb me and interfere with work, with their looks and movements towards me being uncomfortable; I felt scared, so I told the owner of the shop about them, and she told me that she could not file a complaint against them because they would cause problems for her and me, and the complaint would not help. Then, I decided to confront them one time. As a result, one of the personnel sabotaged the shop and threatened me, saying: ‘Go and complain, and I’ll expose you’, then I had to quit and didn’t tell my family why.”** Ms. Fawzah told us that what happened to her was a result of the ease with which women can be weakened and blackmailed with impunity, adding that it’s not easy for women to work in their area because they would be exposed to great exploitation and extortion.

On Sunday, May 10, 2020, The Information Office of the Executive Council of Syrian Democratic Forces’ Self-Management issued a statement banning the journalist Vivian Fattah, the correspondent of the Rudaw channel, the Kurdish-speaking channel, for a period of two months, from practicing any media activity, on the grounds that she used the term ‘dead’ instead of ‘martyrs’ in one of her reports. The journalist, Vivian, born in 1992, a reporter for the Kurdish-speaking Rudaw Channel, holds a BA in Psychology from the University of Homs. In April 2018, she started working with the Kurdish Rudaw channel, in addition to her work as a field reporter, a Master’s student in media psychology at Damascus University.

¹¹ Via phone on February 3, 2021



Photo of the journalist Vivian Fattah

E. Unidentified parties (we were unable to identify them):

We have monitored many cases of threatening women in retaliation against their activities and work, by parties that we have not been able to identify, and while we believe that the vast majority of these cases may involve individuals affiliated with ISIS cells or extremist Islamist groups, we have been unable to definitively ascertain this, so we've assigned them to parties that we were unable to identify. The total number of threats which we documented being sent to female activists from individuals in this category has reached about 17, with most of these targeting women activists involved in women's issues and affairs.

Ms. Huda Khayti, the head of the Women's Support and Empowerment Center in Idlib City, has been subjected to a campaign of provocation and hate speech on social media by an unknown account; this seems to be an organized and planned operation targeting the head of the center personally, with the individual responsible publishing personal information to inflict as much psychological trauma as possible, and may be a preamble to a physical assault; this campaign took place between April 19, 2020 and June 2020.

According to SNHR's violations documentation database, the Women's Support and Empowerment Center in Idlib City was targeted on February 22, 2020, with its headquarters being burnt in a fire that damaged the center's furniture and a number of rooms. Civil defense teams managed to contain the fire before it engulfed the whole center, which had also been subjected to theft of money before the apparent arson attack.

Ms. Huda¹² told us: **"Our center was set on fire, then we received a series of threatening messages on the center's Facebook account from an unknown account, and then we were exposed to Facebook posts that also incite and harm the work of the center."** She added that although she suffered from psychological trauma as a result of this incident, she will continue her work.

¹² Via phone on June 20, 2020



Ms. Huda Khayti is shown on the right in these photos, with the other photo, on the left, showing the Women's Support and Empowerment Center after it had been burned.

We also spoke with Ms. Wafaa al Abdullah¹³, a media activist in Idlib governorate, who was subjected to a threat, following which her son was kidnapped on December 7, 2020. This came after she posted a statement on her personal account on Facebook criticizing the arrests carried out by Hay'at Tahrir al Sham, likening these to the detentions carried out by the Syrian regime. Wafaa told us: **“The difficulties that haunt the work of activist women, especially while filming in the street with unusual subject matter, are endless. I was threatened by unknown persons after I posted on Facebook when I criticized HTS’s method of arresting civilians in Idlib, likening those operations to the practices of the regime. The day after the threat, my child was kidnapped for 24 hours. When we are exposed to any threats in Idlib, these threats are from unknown parties so we cannot determine who is behind them, and we cannot be sure enough to accuse a specific party if we are subjected to any issue.”** Wafaa told us that she deleted the post after her child was kidnapped and has stopped publishing any opinion related to Hay'at Tahrir al Sham for fear of being threatened again.

IV. Conclusions and Recommendations:

Conclusions:

- The forces involved in the Syrian conflict have committed many egregious violations against Syrian women, some of which amount to crimes against humanity, and the Syrian regime remains the most prolific perpetrator of these violations, and the main party responsible for them

¹³ Via phone on February 20, 2021

as the party which wields absolute control over the governmental system.

- This report has addressed only the phenomenon of harassment and threats to women on a discriminatory basis in areas outside the control of the Syrian regime (the areas of the Syrian regime and its practices in this field were not included), and stresses the dangerous situation facing women subjected to threats and harassment of women on a discriminatory basis in the areas controlled by each of Hay'at Tahrir al Sham, Syrian Democratic Forces, Syrian National Army and cells affiliated with ISIS.

Recommendations:

All parties to the conflict:

- End all types of violations against Syrian women, in particular the most flagrantly egregious crimes.
- End all forms of discrimination on the basis of sex, and open the way for women to engage in various aspects of social, political, economic and media life.
- Follow up on the information and testimonies included in this report, prosecute those involved in the violations, and work to end the harassment and threats against women. Provide various forms of psychological and security support to women and support their efforts in rehabilitation, combating extremism and violence, and building peace.

Humanitarian organizations and donor parties:

- Support organizations concerned with women's affairs, including those providing services for rehabilitation, social care, shelter, psychological support, and family counseling.
- Consider establishing more care and protection homes for battered women and those who have been ostracized by their families and communities.

International community:

- Effectively work to accelerate the political transition process towards democracy, which would contribute to promoting the basic rights of women in the Syrian society.

Thanks and solidarity

We would like to offer our sincere thanks and appreciation to the women and activists whose assistance contributed to the release of the report at this level, and all solidarity with them in order to achieve their rights.

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