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The Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in May 2021

The 'Presidential Elections' That
Took Place under Threat and
Terror Challenge the Syrian
Regime's Legitimacy in Syria
and International Forums

Sunday 6 June 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.

Content

I. Introduction and Methodology.....	2
II. Summary of the Most Notable Events in May.....	3
III. The Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in May.....	15
IV. Attachments.....	21
V. Conclusions and Recommendations.....	21

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 May 2021, 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 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 May:

In regard to bombardment and military operations:

May saw a reduction in the rate of artillery and missile bombardment by Syrian regime forces and their allies on the cities and towns of the southern suburbs of Idlib, the western suburbs of Hama, and the eastern suburbs of Aleppo close to the front lines, while al Fattira town, the outskirts of al Bara town, Beneen village, and the outskirts of Sarja village in Jabal al Zaweya in the southern suburbs of Idlib saw artillery and missile bombardment by Syrian regime forces, causing material damage, with no injuries or casualties recorded. The shelling of the areas near the contact lines by Syrian regime forces [caused fires in agricultural land](#) in Jabal al Zaweya area of the southern suburbs of Idlib and wheat fields in the Sahl al Ghab area of the western suburbs of Hama, causing significant material damage for the farmers.

The contact lines between Syrian regime forces on one side and the Armed Opposition factions and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham on the other saw intermittent clashes on the fronts of Jabal al Zaweya in the southern suburbs of Idlib and Iffes in Saraqeb countryside in the northeastern suburbs of Idlib.

On May 21, [a report](#) from RIA Novosti news agency quoted Sergei Shoigu, the Russian Defense Minister, as stating that more than 300 types of weapons had been tested in Syria, dozens of which had subsequently been completely removed from service with production stopped, because they had proven ineffective.

On May 25, the Russian Ministry of Defense [announced](#) that it had brought a new type of giant Tu-22M3 bomber to its airbase in Hmeimim, in Latakia suburbs, which it said would participate in flight training in new regions. The ministry stated that development of the second runway in Hmeimim airbase had equipped the airbase to receive and serve additional aircraft of various types.

On May 25, TASS news agency [reported](#) statements by Russian President Vladimir Putin at the opening of a defense conference in the city of Sochi in which he revealed that more than 85% of the commanders of formations and regiments had obtained combat experience in Syria, further confirming our previous references to Syria being turned into a military training and testing ground for Russia.

In May, clashes continued between Syrian National Army forces and Syrian Democratic Forces in the villages of Ein Eisa in the northern suburbs of Raqqqa, which are under the control of Syrian Democratic Forces, resulting in deaths on both sides without any change in the distribution of zones of control. We note that this area has witnessed intermittent clashes between the two parties since 2019.

Also in May, we recorded civilian casualties at the hands of the US-led Coalition forces after a hiatus of nearly six months. On Tuesday, May 4, a drone which we believe was from the US-led Coalition forces fired a missile targeting a [civilian's car](#) in the Badiya (desert area) of al Shannan village in the eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate, resulting in his death.

Bombings continued in all regions in Syria throughout May, especially in northern and eastern Syria. These bombings were concentrated in the areas of al Bab, Jarablos and Afrin in the suburbs of Aleppo, and Ras al Ein city in the northwestern suburbs of Hasaka, causing casualties and material losses in these areas.

We also recorded a number of assassinations throughout Syria, [concentrated in eastern Syria](#) (the governorates of Deir Ez-Zour, Hasaka, and Raqqqa) and in the south in Daraa governorate, in addition to eastern Aleppo governorate.

Mines also continue to claim large number of civilian lives across Syria. In May, we documented the deaths of nine civilians, including four children, bringing the civilian death toll caused by landmines since the beginning of 2021 to 105, including 39 children; SNHR has recorded many landmine explosions that resulted in civilian casualties in several areas currently under the control of various different forces. This indicates that none of the controlling forces have made any significant efforts towards clearing landmines, or trying to determine their locations and fence them off, or to warn the local populations about them.

In regard to arrests and enforced disappearances:

Syrian regime forces continued in May to persecute and arrest individuals who had concluded settlements of their security status with the Syrian regime in areas that had previously concluded settlement agreements with the regime; these arrests have been concentrated in Damascus Suburbs and Daraa governorates, with most occurring during campaigns of mass raids and arrests and at checkpoints.

We documented random arrests against citizens in Hama governorate, most of which occurred during campaigns of mass raids and arrests, which we believe were based on malicious security reports issued due to the targeted individuals' opposition to the Syrian regime. We also documented arrests of civilians in Damascus governorate, in connection with chanting anti-regime phrases, and tearing up pictures of the Syrian regime president, Bashar al Assad.

We also recorded in May that Syrian regime forces released 54 detainees, including three children and one woman, mostly from the governorates of Damascus Suburbs and Daraa, who were released from regime detention centers in Damascus governorate after the end of their arbitrarily imposed sentences, with their release not being linked to Amnesty Decree No. 13 of 2021.

Meanwhile, Syrian Democratic Forces continued enforcing the group's policies of arbitrary detention and enforced disappearance in May, with the number increasing this month as SDF continue carrying out campaigns of mass raids and arrests, and targeting civilians, including children, on the supposed pretext of fighting ISIS cells, with some of these campaigns backed by US-led coalition helicopters. We also documented arrests targeting members of the Kurdistan Democratic Party's Area Committee, with these arrests concentrated in Hasaka governorate.

May also saw Hay'at Tahrir al Sham detaining civilians, with the targets of these arrests, which were concentrated in Idlib governorate, including media activists and politicians; most of these arrests occurred due to the detainees expressing opinions critical of the HTS's management of areas under its control. These detentions were carried out arbitrarily in the form of raids in which HTS members stormed their victims' homes, often breaking down the doors, by kidnapping their victims while they were traveling or passing through temporary checkpoints. We also recorded summonses being issued by the Media Directorate of the Salvation Government against media activists, after they published posts on their personal Facebook pages on the occasion of World Press Freedom Day.

The Armed Opposition/ Syrian National Army also continued carrying out arbitrary detentions and kidnappings in May, most of which were carried out on a mass scale, targeting individuals coming from areas controlled by the Syrian regime. In addition, we documented detentions carried out under an ethnic pretext, with these incidents being concentrated in areas under the Armed Opposition/ Syrian National Army's 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.

In regard to the COVID-19 pandemic:

May saw a significant increase in the number of infection cases with the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic compared to previous months in all Syrian regions. Despite that, we noticed many instances of [overcrowding in the month of Ramadan and Eid al Fitr](#), with the absence of precautionary measures in all areas controlled by Syrian regime forces, in addition to the mandatory celebrations and demonstrations held in conjunction with the 'presidential elections'.

On May 5, SANA news agency [published](#) a statement by Hassan Ghabbash, the Syrian regime's Minister of Health, in which he said: "The ministry has launched a platform to register for vaccination against the COVID-19 virus on the ministry's website with the aim of equitably distributing the vaccine to those who deserve it, which explains that priority is given to doctors, nurses, technicians and workers in Hospitals".

The Syrian regime's Ministry of Health in May officially announced 1,762 cases of COVID-19 infection and 178 deaths in May, bringing the official total announced to [24,495 cases of infection with 1,770 deaths, as of May 31](#).

In northwestern Syria, more infections and deaths due to coronavirus were recorded in May, with the Early Warning Alert and Response Network (EWARN) announcing the documentation of 1,558 infections and 17 deaths related to COVID-19 for the month; this brought the total number of infections and deaths [announced](#) by EWARN as of May 31, to 23,541 cases of infection and 670 deaths, the highest monthly record announced since the beginning of 2021.

On May 4, Stéphane Dujarric, Spokesman for the United Nations Secretary-General, said at [a press conference](#) from the UN's permanent headquarters in New York, "We are particularly concerned about the rising cases of the COVID-19 virus across Syria, including in the camps." According to Dujarric, 39 cases of infection have been discovered to date, and six deaths have been reported at al Hawl Camp.

As of May 31, a total of 17,857 coronavirus infection cases, including 729 deaths, had been announced by [the Health Authority in the Self-Management Authority of Northern and Eastern Syria](#). We note that 2,024 cases of infection and 151 deaths were recorded in May.

Regarding living conditions:

The areas under the control of Syrian regime forces saw a relative improvement in May compared to April in terms of services provided by the state concerning the availability of fuel, electricity and bread, with the value of the Syrian pound witnessing a slight increase. All these measures resulted from steps taken by the Syrian regime government before the 'presidential elections' which aimed to promote the re-election of the regime's president.

Several decisions were also taken in this field, including [a decision issued](#) by the Syrian regime's Council of Ministers during its weekly session on May 4, to grant the wounded among the Popular Defense Forces, who have a disability of between 40 and 65 percent, a monthly compensation of 50,000 Syrian pounds for a period of ten years.

On May 8, Bashar al Assad, President of the Syrian regime, issued Legislative [Decree No. 14](#), which provides for the disbursement of a one-time grant with a lump sum of 50,000 Syrian pounds (approximately \$20) to all state workers, both civilians and military, with this grant including a lump sum of 40,000 Syrian pounds (approximately \$16) for civil and military pension holders.

In northwestern Syria, the price of fuel rose in May due to its being linked to the exchange rate of the Turkish lira; the depreciation of the Turkish lira approved for use in trading and the accompanying rise in the prices of basic materials continue to have a clear impact on the lives of citizens there already suffering greatly from the spread of unemployment, with the most important reasons for the spread of this phenomenon being the lack of security and stability, and the fear of renewed military campaigns, which leads to reluctance among employers to implement large-scale investment in projects that would absorb a large proportion of the workforce.

On May 17, the Syrian Democratic Forces' Self-Management Authority of Northern and Eastern Syria issued [Decision No. 119](#), which stipulates increasing fuel prices in areas under its control by between 100% and 350%. As a result of this decision, most areas in the governorates of Hasaka and Deir Ez-Zour saw [dozens](#) of [demonstrations and protests](#) the following day, calling for the decision to be rescinded, with protesters cutting off roads and participating in strike action that affected shops in some cities and towns in Hasaka, such as al Malekiya and Amouda in the suburbs of Hasaka. Syrian Democratic Forces personnel confronted these peaceful demonstrations with live bullets and arrests, with [SNHR documenting the deaths](#) of [six civilians](#), including [one child](#), in addition to the injury of five others, in this gunfire, and the arrest of five civilians in al Shaddadi city and surrounding villages in the southern suburbs of Hasaka.

On May 18, Syrian Democratic Forces' Internal Security Forces issued [a statement](#) accusing unidentified parties who it called "stalkers and mischief-makers" of shooting at the demonstrators. On the following day, as the demonstrations continued, Syrian Democratic Forces' Self-Management Authority issued [Decision No. 123](#), rescinding Decision 119.

The areas controlled by Syrian Democratic Forces, in particular the suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour, witnesses a crisis in the availability of bread due to the high prices of sacks of flour, the lack of operational bakeries and the high production costs. On the medical level, hospitals and pharmacies have been suffering from a shortage of oxygen cylinders due to the high rate of infection with the coronavirus, which led to a crisis.

On May 31, Manbej city and its suburbs east of Aleppo governorate saw a comprehensive strike of markets and shops, and popular demonstrations in several areas to protest against the Syrian Democratic Forces' practices, including their imposition of forced conscription, arrests and rising prices. We have recorded that Syrian Democratic Forces killed [one civilian](#) in al Hadhoud village, which is administratively a part of Manbej city, when they shot at the demonstrators, in addition to injuring many other civilians.

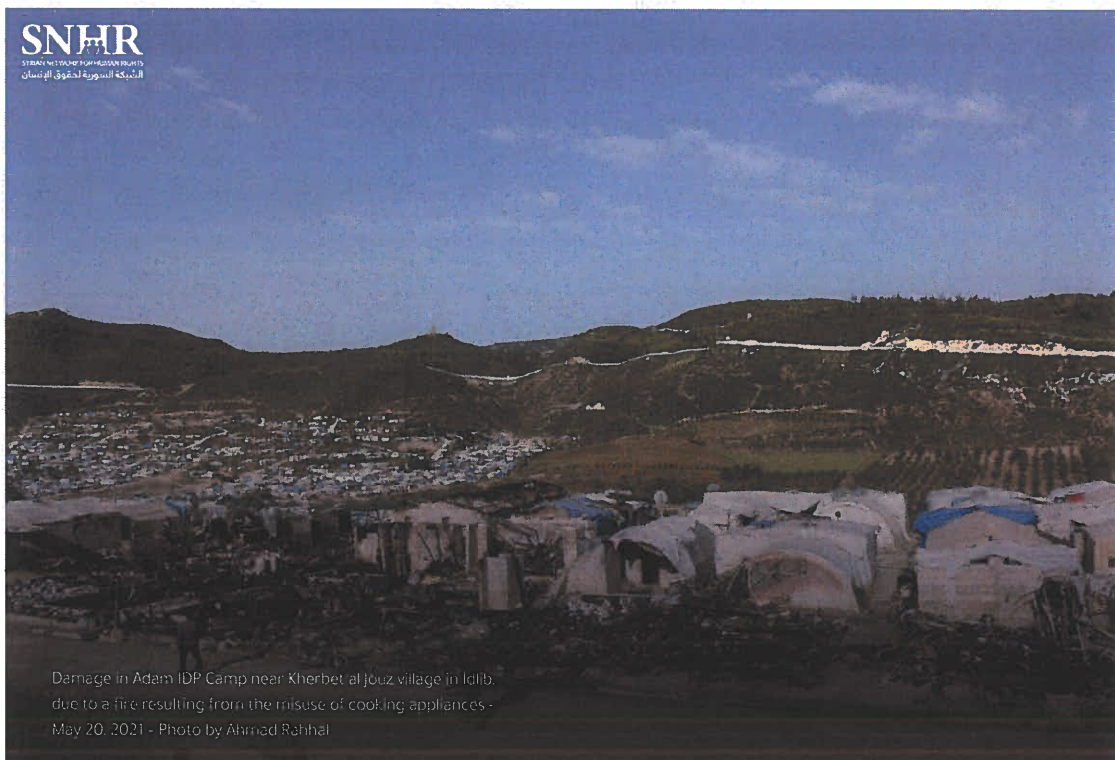
In regard to asylum, displacement and forced displacement:

On May 1, [Syrian regime forces arrested](#) 30 civilians, including three children, from Kanaker village, southwest of Damascus Suburbs governorate, in Tartus city on the Syrian coast, from where they had been trying to emigrate illegally to Cyprus; we documented that 10 of those detained were released on May 19, 2021, and 18 others on May 26, 2021. The number of Syrian citizens who were arrested in May in Tartus governorate, in connection with their attempts to emigrate illegally to Cyprus from the Syrian coast, reached 62 in total.

On May 20, 30 families of former fighters in the ranks of the Armed Opposition who refused to make a settlement with the Syrian regime left Om Batenah village in the suburbs of Quneitra heading towards northwest Syria, following a forced displacement agreement under Russian sponsorship. The agreement was reached following an attack by unknown gunmen on Syrian regime checkpoints in the vicinity of the village at the end of April 2021, as a result of which Syrian regime forces besieged the village and shelled it with mortars on May 1, demanding that the fighters leave in exchange for not restricting the villagers and releasing two of the villagers. Upon the arrival of the displaced to Abu al Zandin crossing east of Aleppo, they were prevented from entering the areas controlled by the Syrian National Army until the evening of the following day, May 21, when they were allowed to cross to the northern suburbs of Idlib through al Ghazawiya crossing, passing through the northern suburbs of Aleppo, arriving the next day at shelters designated for IDPs in Deir Hassan area.



The suffering of IDPs, particularly camp residents, in northern and eastern Syria continues without respite; despite the high temperatures meaning that residents can dispense with the use of heaters, [fires continue](#) to [break out](#) in [some camps](#) in [the suburbs of Idlib](#) and Hama due to the improper use of fuel used for cooking. We documented the outbreak of a fire in al Hawl Camp in May, causing material damage.



Al Hawl Camp¹ continues to witness casualties at the hands of unknown persons. In May, we documented [the deaths](#) of [five civilians](#), including three women.

On May 11, Syrian Democratic Forces [allowed](#) the fifteenth group² of IDPs, consisting of approximately 267 people from Deir Ez-Zour, to leave al Hawl Camp and return to their villages and towns in Deir Ez-Zour suburbs.

On May 25, Syrian Democratic Forces [allowed](#) the first group of Iraqi refugees to leave al Hawl Camp and return to Iraq; this group consisted of approximately 381 people, who were transported by bus, in coordination between the Iraqi government and Syrian Democratic Forces' Self-Management Authority.

On May 26, Mark Lowcock, the UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, [stated](#) during a Security Council session, "[The Security Council authorization for UN cross-border assistance into the north-west expires in just over six weeks,](#)" adding that "[A failure to extend it would immediately end direct cross-border deliveries by the UN,](#)" warning that nearly 1.4 million people will be deprived of aid if the Bab al Hawa border crossing is closed.

In Greece, on April 23, [the Greek judiciary](#) issued a verdict on Syrian refugee K.S. who was sentenced to 52 years in prison for "illegal entry" and "facilitating illegal entry," after more than a year of detention. The court also imposed a fine of 242,000 Euros. Human rights bodies confirmed that K.S. was subjected to slanderous statements by the court and the jury; the accused had fled with his family from Syria to Turkey, where he was arrested, which prompted him to emigrate again with his family (his wife and three children); upon their arrival at the Greek island of Chios in early March 2020, they were denied asylum for a month, since Greece illegally suspended the granting of asylum as part of a political dispute between Turkey and the European Union, systematically bringing criminal charges of "illegal entry" against migrants seeking protection in Europe. We at the Syrian Network for Human Rights believe that this sentence contravenes the [Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees](#)³, which requires "Ensuring that genuine refugees are granted asylum and that they are not forced to return to countries where it is feared that their lives will be in danger."

In Lebanon, the Information Division of the Lebanese Internal Security Forces [said](#) that on May 4, in the context of combating the smuggling of foreign persons out of Lebanese territory, it was able to arrest 51 persons of Syrian nationality, including 39 men, five women and seven children, who were heading to Cyprus by sea.

¹ A camp located east of Hasaka city, near the Iraqi-Syrian border, which houses nearly 60,000 people

² Following the decision 146 issued by Syrian Democratic Forces' Self-Management Authority on October 10, 2020, allowing Syrians in the camp to leave after completing the necessary procedures

³ It was approved by the United Nations General Assembly on July 25, 1951

On May 4, in Germany, [the Administrative Court](#) in Munich obliged the country's authorities to take back a Syrian refugee who had previously been deported to Greece based on the Seehofer-Deal⁴. The Federal Police had arrested him without him having identity papers on a train on the German-Austrian border in August 2020, while he was on his way from the town of Kiversfelden on the border with Austria to Munich; the court said that the Federal Police should have informed the responsible Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF) of the asylum application that the refugee declared at the time of his arrest and in his case the Dublin Convention on Migration had to be applied, so the deportation of the refugee is illegal.

On the political and human rights level:

In preparation for his candidacy for the elections, and from our viewpoint, as part of his efforts to mobilize local public opinion, Bashar al Assad adopted a package of measures, the most prominent of which were: On May 2, [legislative decree No. 13](#) was issued, which included a general amnesty for perpetrators of offenses, misdemeanors and felonies prior to the date of its issuance. Like previous decrees, this one applied only to a specific group that has no connection with the popular uprising. Under this decree, we documented the release of at least 76 detainees held by the Syrian regime, 17 of them women, including civilians, government employees, media workers, university students and politicians, who had criticized corruption and the poor living conditions in areas controlled by the Syrian regime, with the period of detention for most ranging between two and six months; most of those released are known for their support of the Syrian regime, especially the media workers among them. Bashar al Assad, in his capacity as the Commander-in-Chief of the Syrian Army and Armed Forces, also issued an [administrative order](#) on May 10 terminating the retention and recall of reserve officers, non-commissioned officers and member reservists, as of June 1, 2021, affecting those who have completed their non-compulsory reserve service of two years for officers and seven-and-a-half year for non-commissioned officers and individuals.

On May 5, the Foreign and Development Ministers of the Group of Seven (G7), namely Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America, at the conclusion of their meeting in the UK capital, London, issued [a statement](#) condemning "the Assad regime and its backers' ongoing atrocities against the Syrian people and attempts to disrupt regular and sustained humanitarian access into and within Syria, and the politicisation of aid access and delivery." The statement also called for the full, unhindered humanitarian access into Syria.

⁴ An agreement between Germany and other European Union countries in which the Federal Minister of the Interior agreed with Spain and Greece that the two countries must take back within 48 hours the refugees who were arrested at the German border. The agreement entered into force with Spain on August 11, 2018, and with Greece in 18 of the same month.

On May 6, current and former EU Members of the UN Security Council, namely Estonia, France, Ireland, Belgium and Germany, issued [a statement](#) on Syria's chemical weapons in which they welcomed the suspension of certain rights and privileges for the Syrian Arab Republic in the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, and stressed that any use of chemical weapons must be investigated, and impunity for their use must not and will not be tolerated.

On May 6, the White House [issued](#) a notice on the continuation of national emergency status with respect to the actions of Syria, given the threat that the actions of the Syrian regime supporting terrorism pose to its national security, foreign policy, and the economy of the United States of America.

On May 18, the International Partnership Against Impunity for the Use of Chemical Weapons issued [a statement](#) confirming its welcoming of the second report of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons on Syria and strongly condemning the use of chemical weapons by Syrian regime forces.

On May 19, the UN Secretary-General submitted his [third report](#) to the UN Security Council on children and the armed conflict in Syria. The killing, maiming, conscription and use of children were among the most widely verified violations. The report indicated that the actual number of grave violations against children exceeds the number verified in the report, amounting to 4,724 within the period covered by the report from the beginning of July 2018 until the end of June 2020.

On May 24, the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP) published a report in which it [said](#) that in 2012 the Syrian regime imposed a tax to finance 'reconstruction' on citizens and formed a committee to contribute to the reconstruction. The committee has raised an estimated 386 billion Syrian pounds, according to an analysis by the OCCRP and other partners, which was not spent on helping civilians, and there is evidence that most of these funds were allocated to ministries and government institutions, where they went towards paying for military facilities and housing for individuals in Syrian regime forces.

On May 26, UNICEF [published a report](#) on the humanitarian situation in Syria, in which it indicated that 13.4 million people need some form of humanitarian and protection assistance since January 2021, including 6.08 million children. This is a 25% increase compared to 2020.

On May 26, Geir O. Pedersen, the UN Special Envoy for Syria, [stressed](#) the importance of implementing Security Council resolution 2254, which [provides](#) for a political process including elections under a new constitution.

On May 28, the World Health Organization (WHO), at its [seventy-fourth session](#), elected Syria to the membership of the WHO's Executive Board⁵, representing the Eastern Mediterranean Region, for a three-year term. We at the Syrian Network for Human Rights condemn the Syrian regime's election for membership in this board, which is intended to monitor the implementation of the policies of the World Health Organization, despite the regime's lack of commitment to these policies, and despite what the organization itself has acknowledged in several statements, namely that the Syrian regime is accused by UN committees and independent human rights organizations of destroying medical facilities and killing medical personnel, some of them under torture, and demand the regime's immediate expulsion; the countries that did not object to the regime's candidacy bear direct responsibility for this shameful appointment.

The 'presidential elections' proved that the Syrian regime is illegitimate and has won by the power of its security services:

The Syrian 'elections' were widely rejected by most countries worldwide, which deemed them illegitimate and noted that they did not reflect the will of the Syrian people. On May 25, the Secretary of State of the United States of America, the Foreign Secretary of the United Kingdom, and the Foreign Ministers of France, Germany, and Italy issued [a statement](#) denouncing the Assad regime's decision to hold these elections outside the framework described by UN Security Council Resolution 2254; on the same day, Global Affairs Canada issued [a statement](#) stating that free and fair elections will not be possible until an inclusive constitution is drafted that can form the basis of a credible pathway towards a political settlement or transition, in accordance with UN Security Council Resolution 2254 .

We at the Syrian Network for Human Rights documented that regime security forces carried out operations in universities, schools, and [state institutions](#) depriving staff and students of their liberty in order to force them to vote. Every university student who refused to comply with the orders [was threatened](#) with administrative penalties with the possibility of being summoned for interrogation within the security branches, forcing the vast majority of students to vote for Bashar al Assad. Many of them told us that after they finished voting, they were taken, along with state employees, in groups supervised by the university guards or other students with influence with the state security authorities, who are themselves an extension of the security services, to participate in rallies in support of Bashar al Assad.

⁵ This is the executive body whose competencies include ensuring the implementation of the decisions and policies of the World Health Assembly, providing advice and recommending draft resolutions to the Assembly for approval, in addition to providing the organization's secretariat with instructions and directions

We issued a statement condemning the security services' forcing citizens to vote for Bashar al Assad. These staged polls cannot be described as elections, rather they are an act of coercion under threat and terror.

In addition, the SNHR team documented at least 34 incidents of arrest/ detention that targeted civilians over their non-participation in the sham election or failure to vote for Bashar al Assad; these incidents occurred either through interrogation of civilians at regime checkpoints, especially those checkpoints located in areas that have undergone settlements and reconciliations, or through raids on many areas and neighborhoods, where citizens, some from the same families, were detained based on intelligence reports about their criticism of the sham elections or mockery of their predetermined results. These raids were accompanied by regime forces destroying the contents of homes, encircling neighborhoods/areas, and directing curses and insults at detainees and civilians residing in these area generally. We have not documented the releases of any of the detainees in this category up until issuing this report.

The results of the 'presidential elections' conducted unilaterally by the Syrian regime were as expected. On May 27, [the Speaker](#) of the People's Assembly, Hammouda Sabbagh, announced the victory of Bashar al Assad as President of the Syrian Arab Republic, by virtue of his obtaining an absolute majority of the voters' votes by 95.1 percent of the number of valid votes. The total number of voters who cast their votes, according to Sabbagh, at home and abroad, reached 14,239,140, or 78.64 percent of those entitled to vote. The results of the vote were farcical, indicating a vastly inflated population of nearly 40 million people in Syria, and are added to the series of violations witnessed in previous elections, a subject on which we will issue a report soon.

Following the release of the official [results of the elections](#), some areas celebrated this result with random gunfire, causing dozens of injuries. We documented the deaths of two civilians, one of whom was an infant, as a result of this random gunfire by members of Syrian regime forces and militias in Aleppo city.

On May 25, the Syrian Network for Human Rights [participated](#) in a forum entitled 'Why Are the Syrian Presidential Elections Illegitimate?' held by the Harmoon Center for Contemporary Studies via the Zoom platform.

On the course of advocacy and the pursuit of accountability:

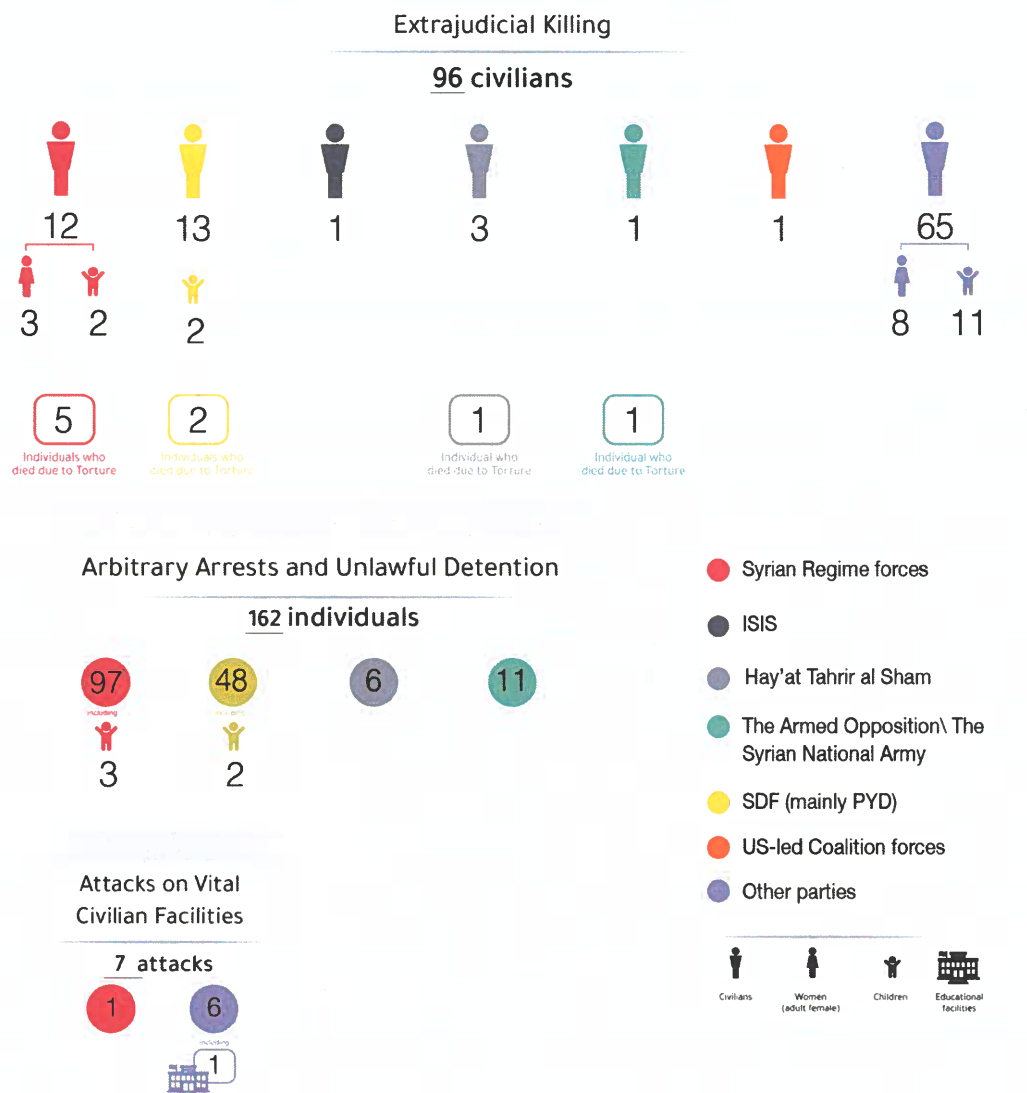
On May 5, the trial of Rifaat al Assad, the uncle of Syrian regime's President Bashar al Assad, [opened](#) before the Court of Appeal in Paris; according to the Le Figaro newspaper, the trial began in the absence of the accused under the pretext that he suffers from health issues. We note that he was prosecuted for money laundering, in an organized gang, and embezzlement of Syrian public funds between 1984 and 2016.

On May 27, the Council of the European Union [extended EU restrictive measures](#) against the Syrian regime for one additional year, until June 1, 2022. We note that these sanctions have been imposed since 2011 in response to the Syrian regime's violent repression of the civilian population, with the current sanctions list includes 283 individuals (after de-listing five of those originally declared dead) and 70 entities targeted by asset freezes and travel bans.

In May, the Syrian Network for Human Rights briefed the UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances, the UN Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, and the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism, as well as briefing the UN Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health on seven cases of enforced disappearance, two of which were of children, while also briefing the UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions and the United Nations Special Rapporteur on torture a case of extrajudicial killing.

III. The Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in May:

This report outlines the most notable human rights violations that were documented by the SNHR in May 2021 at the hands of the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in Syria.



A. Extrajudicial killing:

In May 2021, SNHR documented the deaths of 96 civilians, including 15 children and 11 women (adult female), the largest percentage of whom were killed at the hands of other parties; among the victims were nine 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 May 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)⁶:** 12 civilians, including two children and three women.
- **ISIS (the self-proclaimed 'Islamic State'):** One civilian.
- **Hay'at Tahrir al Sham⁷ :** Three civilians.
- **The Armed Opposition/ Syrian National Army:** One civilian.
- **Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (the Democratic Union Party):** 13 civilians, including two children.
- **US-led Coalition forces:** One civilian.

B. Other parties:

We documented the deaths of 65 civilians, including 11 children and eight women, at the hands of other parties, distributed as follows:

- Landmines of unknown source: Nine civilians, including four children.
- Gunfire of unknown source: 37 civilians, including two children and five women.
- Bombings whose perpetrators have not yet been identified: 11 civilians, including four children and three women.
- Killings by unknown persons: Five civilians.
- Turkish border guards: Two civilians.
- Turkish forces: One civilian (a child).

B. Arbitrary arrest and enforced disappearance:

In May 2021, SNHR documented at least 162 cases of arbitrary arrests, including five children, 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 Tartus, Hama, then Damascus. We issued a report on the second of this month detailing the record of cases of arrests and enforced disappearances which we documented in May at the hands of the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in Syria.

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

- **Syrian Regime forces:** 97, including three children.
- **Hay'at Tahrir al Sham:** Six.
- **The Armed Opposition/ Syrian National Army:** 11.
- **Syrian Democratic Forces:** 48, including two children.

⁶ 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.

⁷ The United Nations has designated it as a terrorist organization

C. Attacks on vital civilian facilities:

In May 2021, SNHR documented at least seven incidents of attacks on vital civilian facilities, six of which were the result of bombings whose perpetrators have not yet been identified.

Among these attacks, we documented one on a school and two on markets.

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.

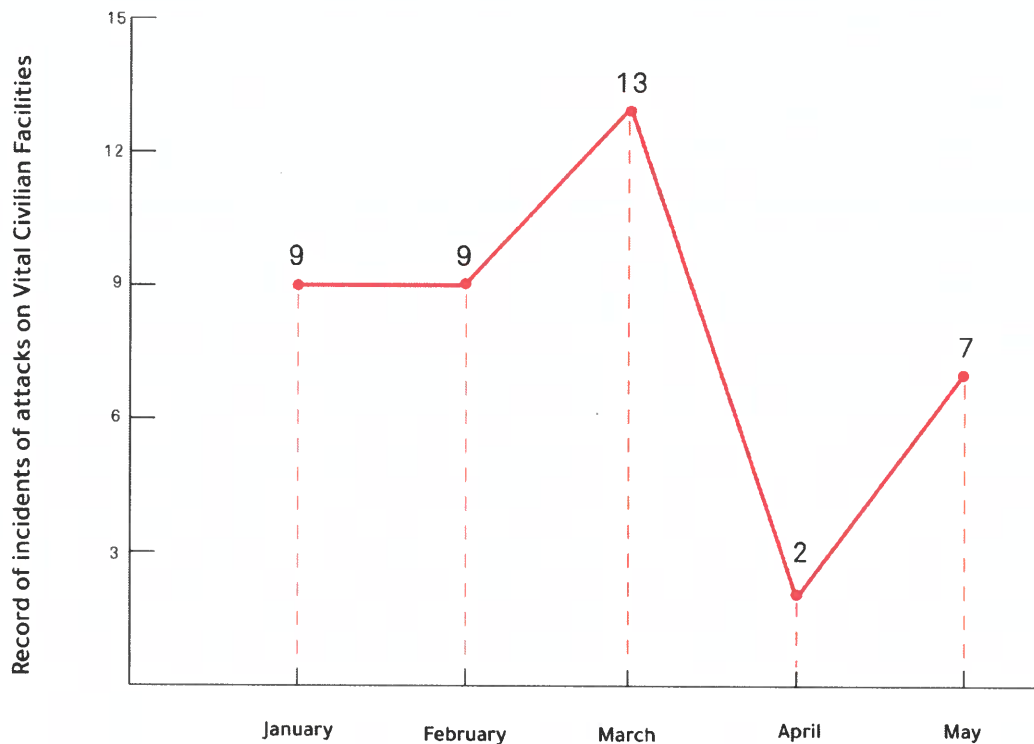
B. Other parties:

- **Bombings whose perpetrators have not yet been identified:** Six.

The record of attacks documented in May 2021 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
Vital Educational Facilities		
Schools		1
Communal Facilities		
Markets		2
Infrastructure		
Power stations and energy facilities		1
Water facilities and related resources	1	
Industrial facilities		1
IDP Camps		
IDP Camps		1
Total	1	6

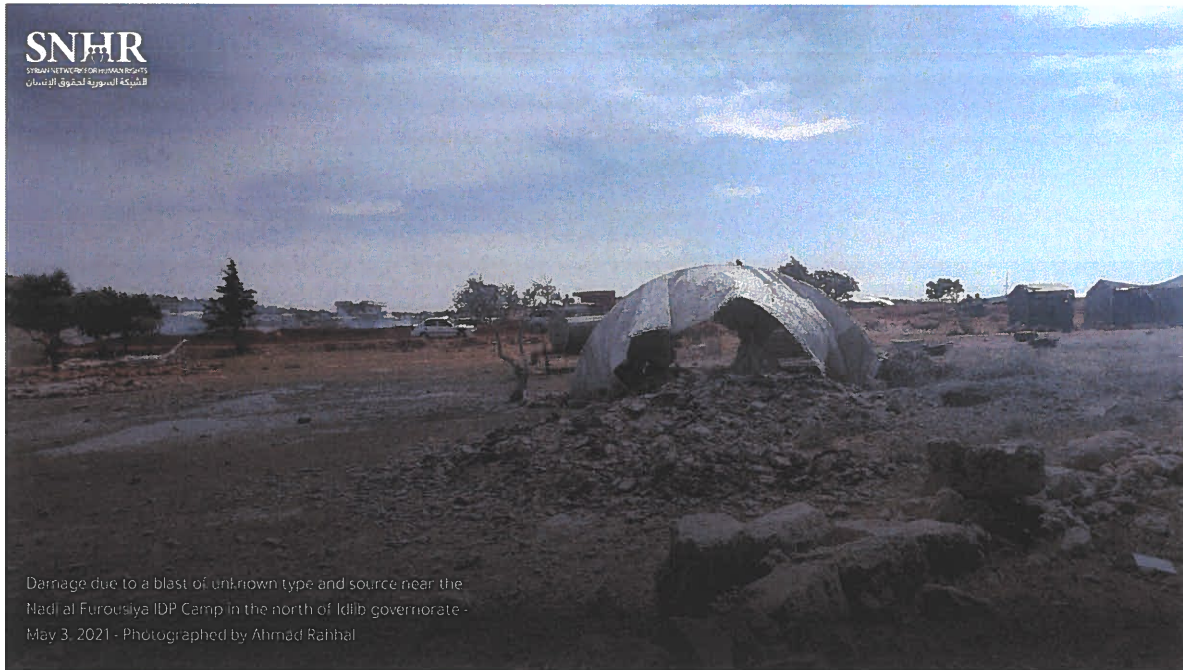
Thus, the record of attacks on vital civilian facilities documented since the start of 2021 up to June of the same year at the hands of the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in Syria has now reached 40 in total, distributed monthly as follows:



The previous chart shows a slight increase in the number of incidents of attacks on vital civilian facilities in May compared to April, most of which were the result of bombings that took place inside residential areas and near vital facilities.

The most notable attacks on vital civilian facilities documented in May:

On Monday, May 3, 2021, a huge blast of unknown type and source occurred in an old poultry farm building (the building is believed to have been used as an ammunition depot or a weapons-making workshop for one of the factions of the Armed Opposition), located near residential houses and the Nadi al Furousiya IDP Camp in south of Kafrayya town in the northern suburbs of Idlib governorate, resulting in casualties, [in addition](#) to [causing moderate material damage](#) to [a number](#) of [IDP tents](#). SNHR is still trying to contact witnesses and survivors to obtain more details of the incident. The area was under the control of factions of the Armed Opposition and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.



On Sunday, May 9, 2021, an IED of unknown source exploded in the Vegetable Market in the center of Slouk town, which is administratively a part of Tal Abyad city in the northern suburbs of Raqqa governorate, causing moderate material damage to a number of shops. SNHR is still trying to contact witnesses to obtain more details of the incident. The town was under the control of Syrian National Army forces at the time of the incident.

On Monday, May 17, 2021, unidentified gunmen used IEDs to blow up the gas pipeline linking al Jabasa station in the southern suburbs of Hasaka governorate with al Rayyan station in Homs governorate, located in the Badiya in the northern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour. As a result, the pipeline sustained significant material damage, and was put out of service. SNHR is still trying to contact witnesses and survivors to obtain more details of the incident. The area was under the control of Syrian Democratic forces at the time of the incident.

On Monday, May 24, 2021, a motorcycle bomb of unknown source exploded near al Shar'iyah Secondary School in Jarablos city in the northern suburbs of Aleppo governorate, resulting in casualties, and causing minor material damage to the school's perimeter wall. SNHR is still trying to contact witnesses and survivors to obtain more details of the incident. The city was under the control of Syrian National Army forces 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 May.

IV. Attachments:

(1) Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 96 Civilians, Including 15 Children, 11 Women, and Nine Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in May 2021

(2) 162 Cases of Arbitrary Arrest Documented and Tens of Thousands Deprived of Liberty for Hours to Force Them to Vote in May 2021

V. 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 under 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 lead to the inescapable conclusion that these acts are wholly deliberate and based on high-level orders, and as such constitute a part of state policy.
- The indiscriminate and disproportionate bombardment carried out by the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces is considered to be a clear violation of international humanitarian law, with 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/ 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 artifacts from destruction, looting and vandalism.
- The Security Council should adopt a resolution banning the use of cluster munitions and landmines in Syria, similar to the existing prohibition on the use of chemical weapons, and include advice on how to safely remove the remnants of such dangerous weapons.
- The four other permanent member states should put pressure on the Russian government to end its support for the Syrian regime, which uses chemical weapons, and to expose its involvement in this regard.
- Request that all relevant United Nations agencies make greater efforts to provide food, medical and humanitarian assistance in areas where fighting has ceased, and in internally displaced person camps, and to follow-up with those States that have pledged voluntary contributions.

International Community

- In light of the split within the Security Council and its utter inability to take any effective action, action should be taken on the national and regional levels to form alliances to support the Syrian people by protecting them from daily killing and by lifting sieges, as well as by increasing support for relief efforts. Additionally, the principle of universal jurisdiction should be enacted in local courts regarding these crimes in order to conduct fair trials for all those who were involved.
- SNHR has repeatedly called for the implementation of the ‘Responsibility to Protect’ in dozens of studies and reports and as a member of the International Coalition for the Responsibility to Protect (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.

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 and previous reports since these attacks were perpetrated by the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces.

Independent International Commission of Inquiry (COI)

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

International, Impartial, and Independent Mechanism (IIIM)

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

The United Nations Special Envoy 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.
- Ensure compliance with UN Security Council resolutions and customary humanitarian law.

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

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

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

The Armed Opposition/ 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.
- Take punitive action against those who commit violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law.

Humanitarian Organizations

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

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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