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The 11th Annual Report on Enforced Disappearance in Syria on the International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances; the Number of Victims Is Rising

Nearly 111,000 Syrian Citizens Forcibly Disappeared Since March 2011, Mostly by the Syrian Regime, Constituting a Crime against Humanity

Tuesday 30 August 2022

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

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I. Background and Methodology

Over the past eleven years, Syrian society has suffered from the practice of enforced disappearance, which is considered to be one of the most severe and horrific violations inflicted on Syrians by all the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces. Enforced disappearance is organically linked to arbitrary arrest, torture, and secret exceptional trials, with its effects not only limited to the forcibly disappeared person, who, in the event of their survival, is subjected to one of the most heinous methods of psychological torture, due to not knowing any information about his/her family or friends, and being in a state of constant suspense, daily contemplating and waiting to find out his/her fate. At the same time, enforced disappearance is also a cruel form of torture for the family and friends of the forcibly disappeared person. Syrian society lives in a constant state of uncertainty about the fate of tens of thousands of citizens 'disappeared' over the past decade, causing immense trauma.

Although all parties to the conflict have practiced enforced disappearance, the Syrian regime does so on a systematic basis. Through its security services, the regime has launched campaigns of arrests within the framework of widespread attacks against the Syrian people. Most of the detainees have gone on to be classified as forcibly disappeared, with enforced disappearance becoming a tool of intimidation and a weapon of war, not only used against those peacefully demonstrating against the regime but also to intimidate all components of Syrian society without exception, with the aim of fragmenting society and tearing families apart, since a strong and cohesive society will continue to demand democracy, justice, and freedom, and stand as a strong obstacle to the dictatorial regime. To avert such unity and sow fear and mistrust, the Syrian regime has deliberately disappeared tens of thousands of Syrians, and very deliberately withheld any details of their fate, with all UN and international bodies' attempts to reveal the fate of these people, as well as to secure their release, having failed.

We at the Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) have made exhaustive efforts in the documentation and monitoring of cases involving victims of arbitrary detention and enforced disappearance over the past eleven years. This expanded annual report, which is issued [periodically](#), is published in the context of our ongoing struggle to preserve the rights of victims of enforced disappearance and their families. This report provides a comprehensive analysis of the data we have documented, providing details of some of the most notable cases, and presenting the victim accounts we obtained during our investigations and follow-up processes.

International law prohibits the use of enforced disappearance under any circumstances, clearly stating that emergency conditions such as conflicts and wars may not be invoked to allow its practice. There are numerous international norms and instruments related to the crime of enforced disappearance, such as [the Rome Statute](#), Article 7 of which describes enforced disappearance as a crime against humanity “when committed as part of a widespread and systematic attack”, with Article 5 of [the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance](#) also stressing the same point. Similarly, Article VII of the [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#) states that no one shall be subjected to torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, and Article 14 of the same Covenant criminalizes the coercion of any person to testify against himself or admit to an offense he has not committed. In addition, enforced disappearance violates the set of rights included in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, such as the right to recognition of legal personality and to the freedom and security of the person, to access to judicial guarantees and to a fair trial, as well as the right of victims’ families to know the truth about the fate of the disappeared and the circumstances of their disappearance. In addition, enforced disappearance violates the fundamental rights guaranteed by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

On June 17, 2022, the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (COI) issued a report entitled “[Syria’s Missing and Disappeared: Is There a Way Forward?](#)”, in which it referred to the tens of thousands of Syrian victims subjected to enforced disappearance by the Syrian regime and other parties, as well as the torture and appalling conditions they are subjected to, and the suffering of the families in not knowing the fate of their loved ones after more than a decade of the Syrian conflict. In its report, the COI recommended the establishment of an international mechanism to investigate cases of enforced disappearance, reveal their fate, and allow their families to know their condition. This falls within the framework of the United Nations General Assembly’s request to study the possibility of strengthening efforts to reveal the fate of the missing persons.

Enforced disappearance is an extended dilemma, and Syria is an unsafe country for the return of refugees, according to UN and international reports, the most prominent of which since August 30, 2021, are:

On November 10, 2021, Physicians for Human Rights (PHR) [issued](#) a report on health care workers, concerning the patterns of detention, enforced disappearance, and torture which they were subjected to by the Syrian regime. In that report, the organization called on the international community to pressure all parties to the conflict to negotiate for the release of detainees and to demand transparency from the Syrian regime about the status of those who have died in detention. The SNHR was one of the main sources cited in the PHR’s report, having signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with PHR, providing for the establishment of a coordination and cooperation mechanism to share information and data documented by SNHR on human rights violations against detained/disappeared medical personnel.

On April 12, 2022, the US Department of State's Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor [released](#) its annual report for 2021 on the human rights situation in various countries worldwide, with the Syria section of the report reaching 79 pages, and including documentation of multiple patterns of violations of international law, mainly enforced disappearance and torture in the detention centers of Syrian regime forces and other parties.

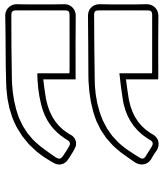
In June 2022, the Netherlands' Ministry of Foreign Affairs [released](#) its latest general report on the situation in Syria. The report emphasized the lack of security stability in the areas controlled by the parties to the conflict, noting that civilians in areas controlled by Syrian regime forces, as well as those returning to those areas, including the capital, Damascus, are at risk of arbitrary detention and enforced disappearance at the hands of Syrian regime forces.

On June 29, 2022, the COI Chairperson issued a [statement](#) at the 50th session of the United Nations Human Rights Council, in which he addressed the various violations committed in Syria, including the risks faced by returning refugees of arbitrary detention, torture, enforced disappearance, and the security clearances imposed by the security services on civilians engaging in official procedures at state institutions. The COI also [documented](#) cases of arrest, disappearance, and extortion of Syrians upon their return to areas under the control of the Syrian regime. A [similar statement was issued](#) by the COI Chairperson on March 18, 2022, at the 49th session of the UN Human Rights Council.

On July 8, 2022, [the UN Human Rights Council adopted Resolution No. 50/19](#) on the situation of human rights in Syria, in which it condemned all acts of sexual and gender-based violence committed by the parties to the conflict in Syria since 2011, primarily by the Syrian regime, which has practiced rape and sexual and gender-based violence against detainees in detention centers, including children. The resolution stressed that acts of sexual and gender-based violence, when committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack directed against any civilian population, can constitute crimes against humanity, and that acts of sexual and gender-based violence in situations of armed conflict can constitute war crimes. The resolution also stressed the need to put an end to impunity for perpetrators of such crimes.

The resolution also condemned the continued practices of arbitrary detention, enforced disappearance, and summary executions, and called for the immediate cessation of arbitrary detention and torture. The SNHR welcomes the council's decision and thanks all the countries that voted in favor of the rights of the Syrian people, and condemns those countries which expressed their support for the Syrian regime's violations by voting against a resolution in favor of the Syrian people.

Fadel Abdul Ghany, SNHR's Director, says:



More than eleven years have passed, and we are still documenting the disappearance of Syrian citizens in Syrian territory, mainly by the Syrian regime, though also by the other parties to the conflict, with the new cases added to the many thousands of previous ones. The catastrophe is escalating, and there is no prospect for revealing the fate of tens of thousands of missing persons any time soon. Without achieving a political solution that ends the domination of the security services, there will be no release for any detainees, or even any disclosures about the fate of any of the forcibly disappeared persons, with the international community bearing the responsibility for prolonging the armed conflict for nearly twelve years.

Methodology:

Every year on the International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances, which falls annually on August 30, SNHR publishes an annual report documenting violations related to enforced disappearances by all perpetrator parties in Syria. In this report, we document the record of enforced disappearance at the hands of the main perpetrator parties since the beginning of the popular uprising in Syria in March 2011 up to August 2022. This report also focuses mainly on the violations that we've documented since [the last annual report](#), between August 30, 2021, and August 30, 2022, as well as outlining incidents that we documented previously about which we've obtained additional information, which we had not included in our previous reports.

Within the context of our work on the enforced disappearance file, we also issue [a monthly report](#) documenting arbitrary arrests and enforced disappearances, and monitoring the incidents and cases documented each month. We have been able to build a strong network of contacts in recent years with local activists and families of victims, as well as survivors and witnesses, both inside and outside Syria, and we have provided all means of communication to facilitate access and documentation such as e-mail, dedicated telephone numbers for documentation and forms on our website. All of this has helped us in the continuous accumulative documentation process in accordance with [our methodology](#) based on the provisions of international laws and the set of principles relating to arbitrary detention and enforced disappearance.

Enforced disappearance is defined in accordance with the Declaration on the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance adopted by the UN General Assembly in [its resolution 47/133 of December 18, 1992](#), as a set of principles applicable to all States; this declaration states that enforced disappearance occurs “in the sense that persons are arrested, detained or abducted against their will or otherwise deprived of their liberty by officials of different branches or levels of Government, or by organized groups or private individuals acting on behalf of, or with the support, direct or indirect, consent or acquiescence of the Government, followed by a refusal to disclose the fate or whereabouts of the persons concerned or a refusal to acknowledge the deprivation of their liberty, which places such persons outside the protection of the law.”. In our methodology, we classify an individual as being within the enforced disappearance category after they have been detained for 20 days with their family unable to obtain any information about their detention or whereabouts from the official authorities and when the authorities which arrested him or her refuse to acknowledge that detention.

The cases we document are not limited to incidents committed by the Syrian regime that controls the Syrian state, but also extend to actors outside the scope of the state, based on what is stated in the Statute of the International Criminal Court, in which Article 7(2) (i) defines enforced disappearance as “the arrest, detention or abduction of persons by, or with the authorization, support or acquiescence of, a State or a political organization, followed by a refusal to acknowledge that deprivation of freedom or to give information on the fate or whereabouts of those persons, with the intention of removing them from the protection of the law for a prolonged period of time.”

This report relies mainly on SNHR’s archive of detainees and forcibly disappeared persons, resulting from the daily monitoring and documentation that we have carried out continuously since 2011 up to the current moment concerning incidents of arbitrary arrest and enforced disappearance. We also constantly update these records, with all statistics included being registered according to each detainee’s name, date, place, and conditions of detention, the party responsible for the arrest and enforced disappearance, the latest observations and documents, and other details. SNHR’s Information Technology department has built a dedicated program within the database for each party to the conflict, providing information on detainees’ original governorate, gender, marital and academic status, age group, and place of arrest, with all data being entered automatically. Using the SNHR database, we can distribute the cases of arrests and enforced disappearances according to the governorate in which the incident took place, and the governorate which the detainee comes from. In this report, we distribute the cases of arrests according to the place where the arrest took place, rather than the governorate which the detainee comes from because, in most cases, the governorate where the incident took place is the same one that the detainee is from. We further note that we sometimes distribute cases of arrests according to the governorate which the detainee comes from in order to show the extent of the loss and violence suffered by the people of that governorate compared to other governorates, and that we refer to this in the report when doing so. The data added to the SNHR’s database is retained securely, and we store several backup copies in different locations.

Given the exceptional difficulties and the magnitude of the violations, we emphasize that the cases mentioned in this report represent the bare minimum of violations which we have been able to document, and we confirm that the real figures are far higher.

The report's methodology is also based on the interviews we conducted with families of victims who were forcibly disappeared from different Syrian governorates, with SNHR carrying out these interviews either by telephone, via various online communication programs or by visiting the family members in their homes in and outside Syria. In this report, we provide 18 accounts, as a qualitative sample, which we obtained directly rather than from open sources. In some cases, we've used aliases to protect witnesses' privacy and to prevent them from being harassed or persecuted by security services. The interviewees 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 of this is in accordance with our internal protocols, with which we have ensured compliance for years, and we always strive to develop these to keep pace with the best levels of psychological care for victims.

II. Continuous Cooperation with the UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances and a Number of the Special Rapporteurs

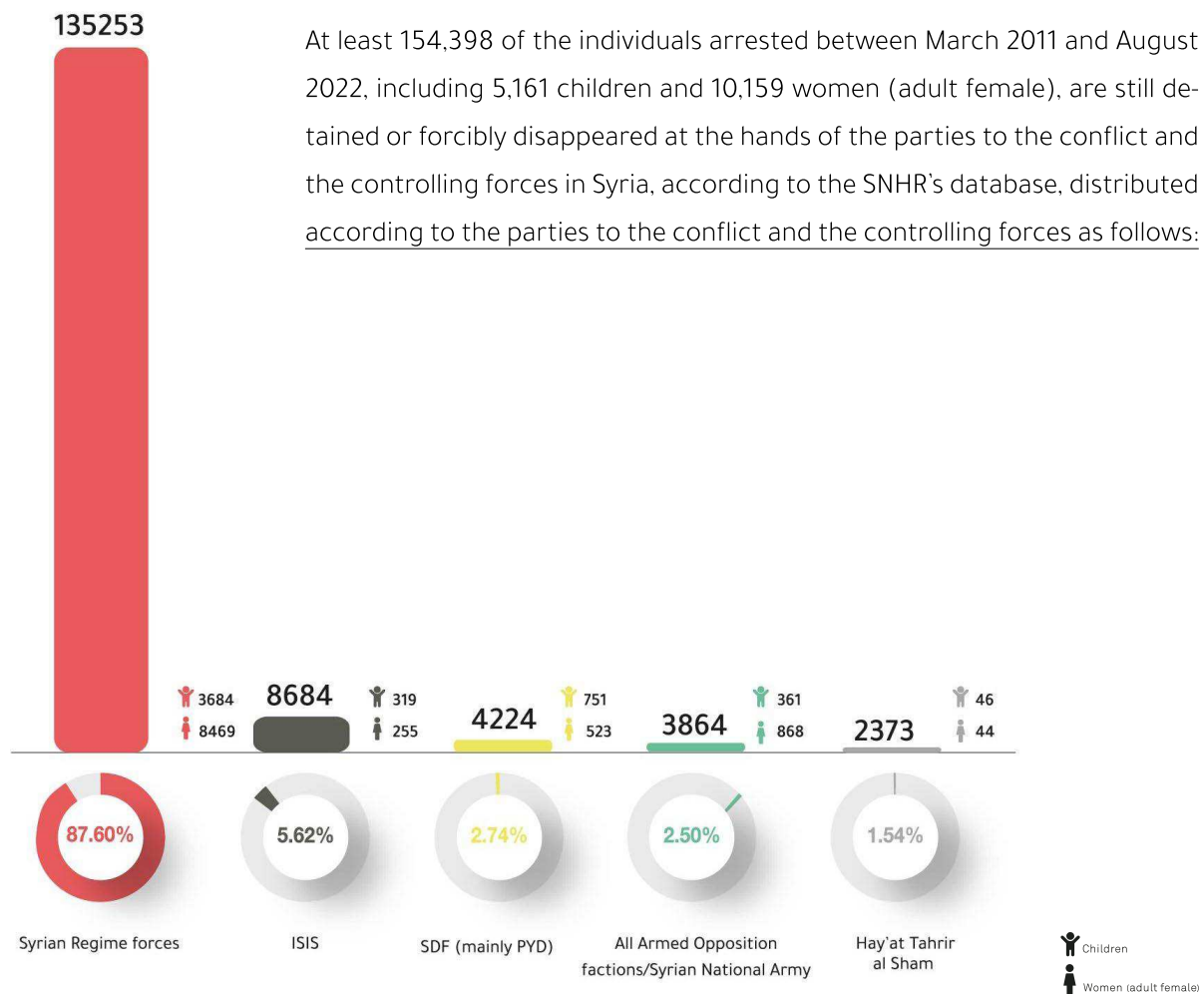
The SNHR team conducts regular [periodic correspondence](#) with the UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances (WGEID) and we have received many official responses about the cases we have submitted to them, via letters showing the cases sent by the WGEID to the Syrian regime from among the cases we shared with the WGEID, which are listed in the special annex on the report prepared by the WGEID in Syria. Since March 2011, we have been able to provide the WGEID with details on at least 568 cases of disappearance, including dozens of women, children, and families, and we still have hundreds of cases whose data we have yet to register and process using our methodology, which will then be submitted to the WGEID. We note that we publish no details of the dozens of cases that we submit to the WGEID on our official pages and social media accounts at the request of the victims' families for the sake of confidentiality and fear of security persecution and taking into account their social and psychological conditions and security concerns.

The SNHR also briefs 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 the UN Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, in regard to these cases.

We have devoted [a form](#) on our official website to register 'disappeared' persons that families can fill out, with the completed forms then sent automatically to the team at the Detainees and Forcibly Disappeared Persons Department, which follows up on each case and communicates with the families to complete the documentation and registration process. We periodically receive documents from the WGEID on a number of cases provided by the SNHR, with the Syrian regime asked to disclose and report on their fate.

In this regard, the SNHR is requesting further cooperation from the families of the forcibly disappeared in order to submit as many cases as possible to the UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances. Our team works constantly to build broad relations with the families of the forcibly disappeared, to obtain as much data as possible which is stored within our database of enforced disappearances. We have also made available every possible safe method of communication via communication applications and have allocated special phone numbers for our team's work to facilitate access for victims' families.

III. Updating the Record of Victims of Arbitrary Arrest/Detention and Enforced Disappearance and Its Distribution in Syria Since March 2011



A. Syrian regime forces (army, security, local militias, and Shiite foreign militias):¹ 135,253 individuals, including 3,684 children and 8,469 women (adult female).

B. ISIS (the self-proclaimed 'Islamic State'): 8,684 individuals, including 319 children and 225 women (adult female).

C. Hay'at Tahrir al Sham (an alliance composed of Fateh al Sham Front and a number of factions of the Armed Opposition):² 2,373 individuals, including 46 children and 44 women (adult female).

D. All Armed Opposition factions/Syrian National Army:³ 3,864 individuals, including 361 children and 868 women (adult female).

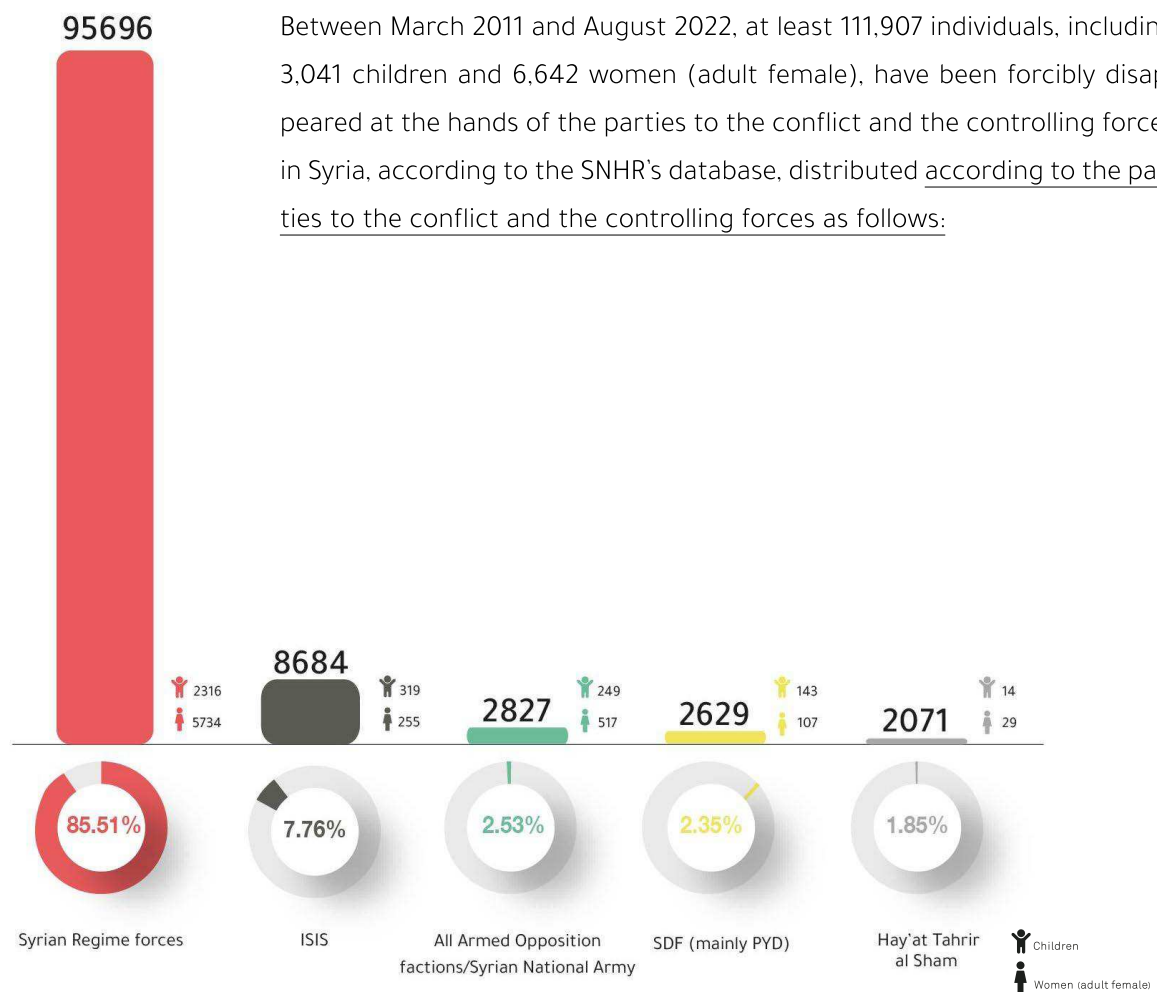
E. Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (the Democratic Union Party): 4,224 individuals, including 751 children and 523 women (adult female).

¹ We generally use the term 'the Syrian regime' rather than 'the Syrian government', because the nature of the ruling power in Syria is that of a totalitarian dictatorship 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, with the security branches, along with the president who rules over them, being 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.

² The United Nations has designated it as a terrorist organization.

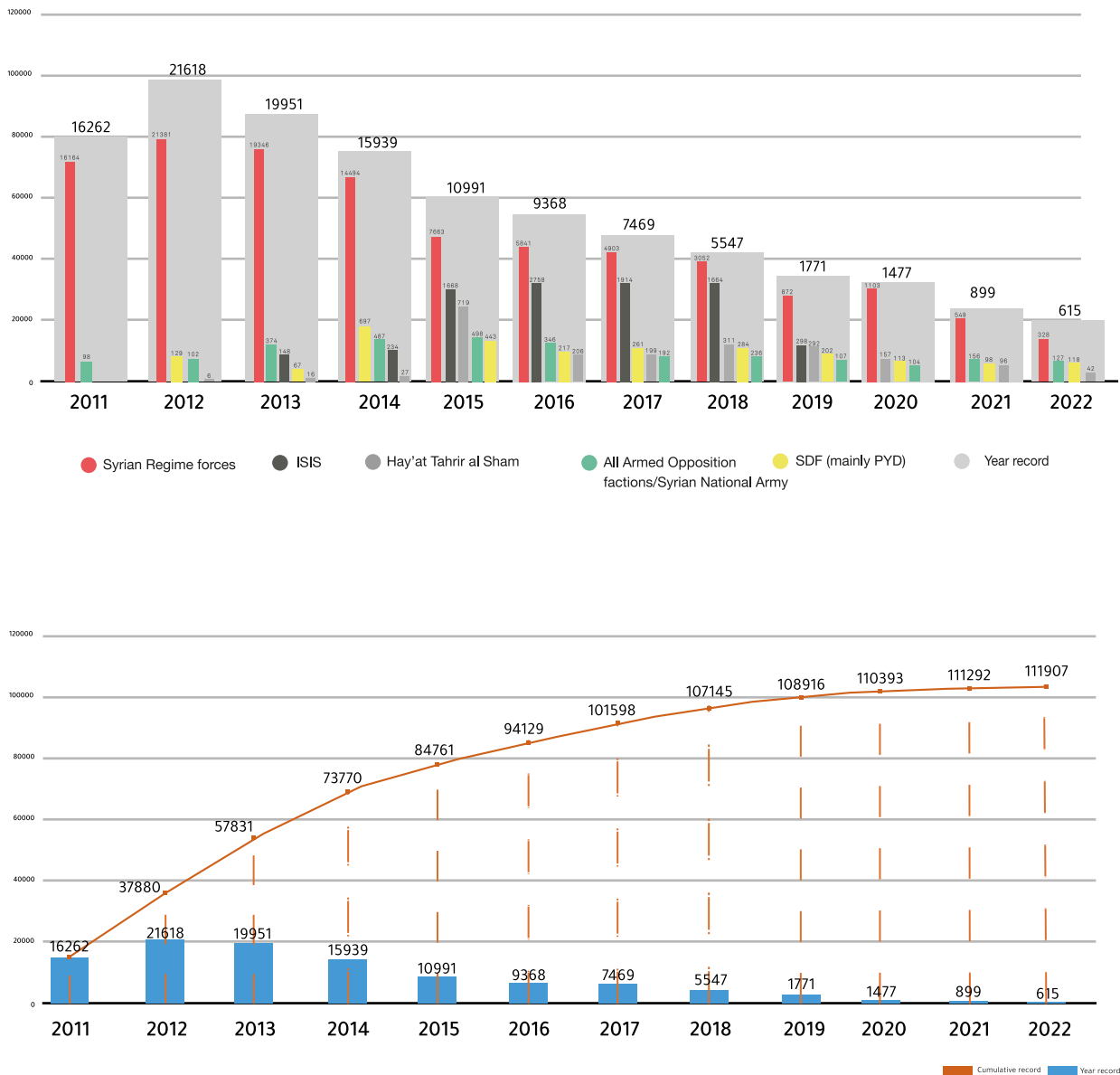
³ Various Armed Opposition factions/Syrian National Army that emerged since 2011 to date in all areas that came under their control.



- A. Syrian regime forces (army, security, local militias, and Shiite foreign militias):** 95,696 individuals, including 2,316 children and 5,734 women (adult female).
- B. ISIS (the self-proclaimed 'Islamic State'):** 8,684 individuals, including 319 children and 225 women (adult female).
- C. Hay'at Tahrir al Sham (an alliance composed of Fateh al Sham Front and a number of factions of the Armed Opposition):** 2,071 individuals, including 14 children and 29 women (adult female).
- D. The Armed Opposition/Syrian National Army:** 2,827 individuals, including 249 children and 517 women (adult female).
- E. Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (the Democratic Union Party):** 2,629 individuals, including 143 children and 107 women (adult female).

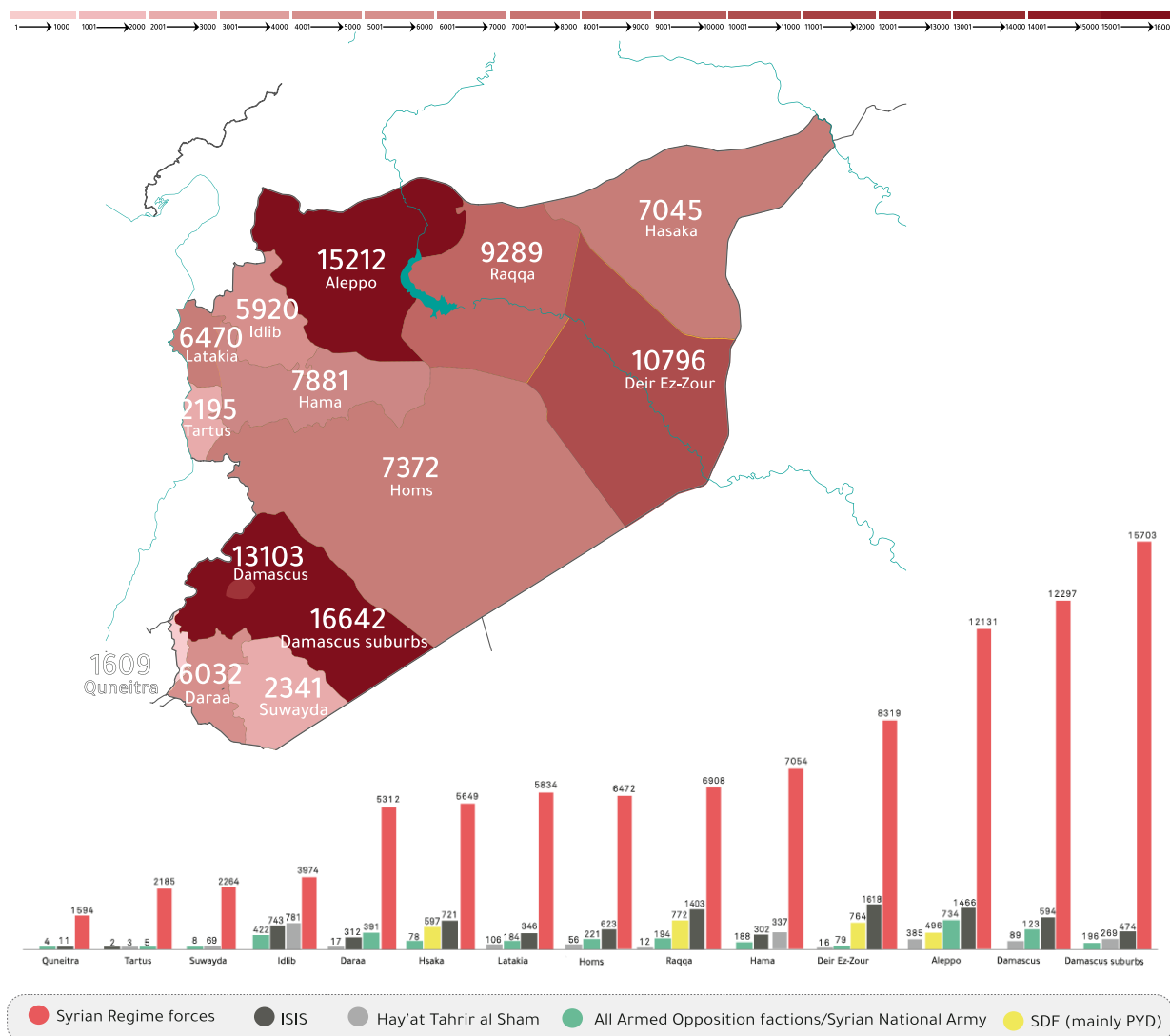
Statistics based on the SNHR's data show that the Syrian regime is responsible for the arrest of by far the largest number of Syrian citizens arrested by all the parties involved in Syria, with detainees classified as forcibly disappeared a few days, or immediately, after their arrest; this is reflected in the record of the forcibly disappeared, with the Syrian regime again being responsible for by far the greatest number of these cases. This huge number of enforced disappearance-related victims demonstrates that this is not abnormal or unusual behavior for the regime but is in fact a systematic and regular practice committed on a vast nationwide scale against tens of thousands of detainees, thereby constituting crimes against humanity.

Chart showing the distribution of the record of the forcibly disappeared in Syria since 2011 by year, the parties responsible for enforced disappearance, and the cumulative linear graph of that record:



The previous chart shows that 2012 was the worst year to date in terms of the number of people forcibly disappeared, followed by 2013 and 2011, then 2014, meaning that the first four years of the popular uprising for democracy saw the largest waves of enforced disappearances, with the aim of breaking, destroying and ending the mass uprising.

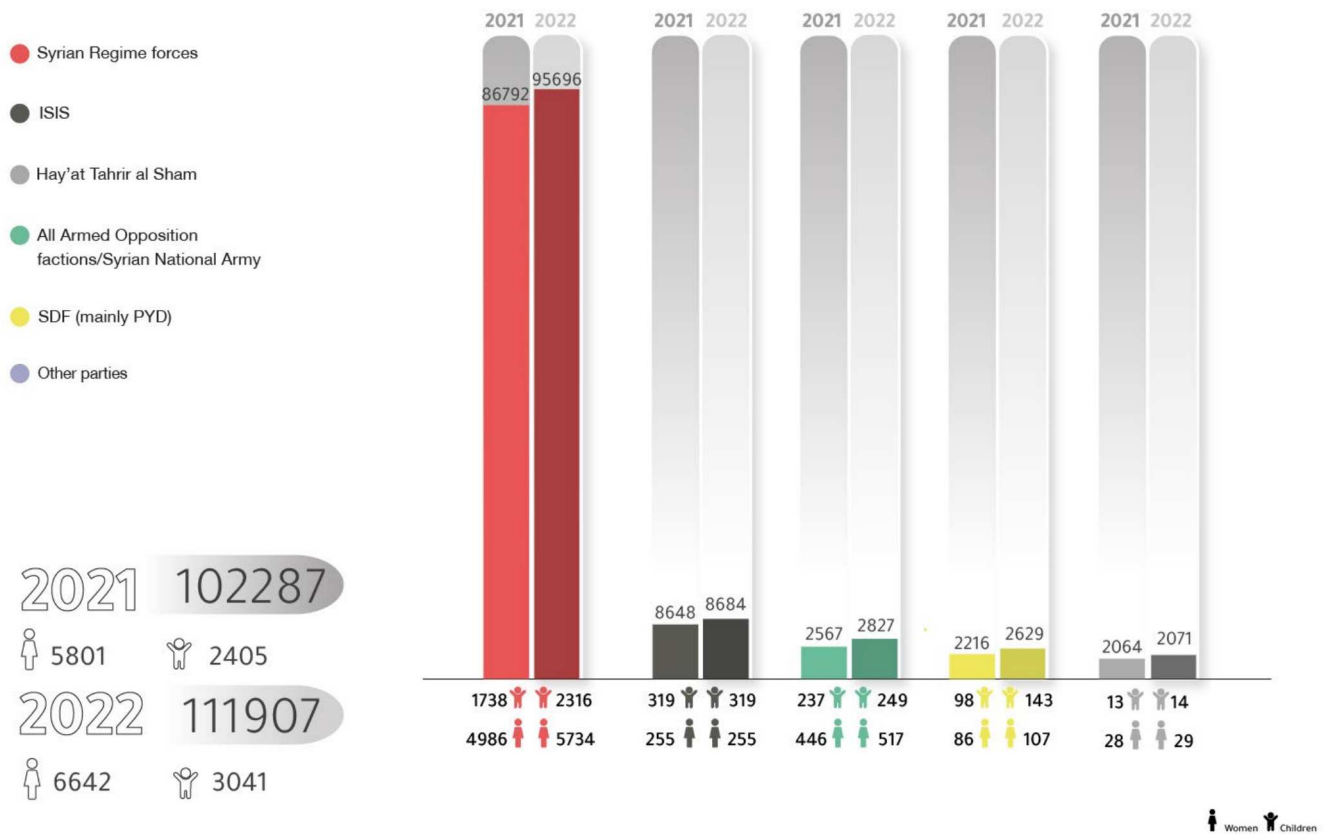
Map showing the distribution of the record of the forcibly disappeared by the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in Syria according to the Syrian governorates:



The map above shows that Damascus Suburbs governorate saw the largest number of enforced disappearances, followed by Aleppo, Damascus, then Deir Ez-Zour.

Enforced disappearances have been carried out in the context of a widespread attack against all civilian population groups in Syria since 2011. The Syrian regime was the first party to perpetrate the violation of enforced disappearances, and remains by far the most prolific perpetrator of this crime, with other parties left far behind in terms of the number of enforced disappearances, to such a degree that there is no serious comparison on this issue between the regime and any of the other parties engaged in the conflict. Enforced disappearance, more especially at the level committed by the Syrian regime, amounts to a crime against humanity under Article 7 of [the Rome Statute](#) of the International Criminal Court. This crime is, therefore, not subject to the statute of limitations, with the same article giving the victims' families the right to reparation and to know the fate of their disappeared loved ones. It is also considered a war crime under Article 8 of the Rome Statute itself due to its being practiced as part of a systematic and public policy in the effort to crush the popular uprising for democracy, overwhelmingly by the Syrian regime.

A comparison between the records of the forcibly disappeared by the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in Syria between March 2011 and the International Day of Victims of Enforced Disappearance of August 2021, as well as the International Day of Victims of Enforced Disappearance of August 2022



The comparison shows an increase in the record of the forcibly disappeared, mainly in Syrian regime detention centers, due to more detainees being classified as forcibly disappeared, and also shows that thousands of cases that we had not register previously were submitted by the victims' families after the issuance of Amnesty Decree No. 7 of 2022 by the Syrian regime, as many families informed us about their disappeared loved ones, hoping to search for and find them among the few detainees released by the Syrian regime.

IV. The SNHR Supports the Establishment of an Independent Mechanism for Missing Persons and Is Ready to Cooperate with It

The COI was the first body to call for the establishment of an independent mechanism with an international mandate to coordinate and consolidate claims regarding missing persons, including persons subjected to enforced disappearance. This is an old demand, first proposed in COI's [first report](#) issued on November 23, 2011: **“Establish a mechanism to investigate cases of disappearances by allowing relatives of disappeared persons to report the details of their cases, and to ensure appropriate investigation.”** The COI reiterated the demand in its report, [“Out of Sight, Out of Mind: Deaths in Detention in the Syrian Arab Republic”](#), issued on February 8, 2016, recommending that the international community **“Support, as a matter of urgency and to build confidence on a local level, the creation of a mechanism to register cases of missing persons, investigate their whereabouts, and identify human remains, including those found in mass graves.”**

In December 2021, the United Nations General Assembly adopted [Resolution No. 76/228](#), in which it requested that the UN Secretary-General conduct a study on how to bolster efforts, including those made through existing measures and mechanisms, to clarify the fate and whereabouts of missing people, identify human remains and provide support to their families, in consultation with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and based on the recommendations of the COI.

On June 17, 2022, the COI issued a paper entitled [“Syria’s Missing and Disappeared: Is There a Way Forward?”](#) in which it made recommendations to the Secretary-General of the United Nations regarding the establishment of an independent international mechanism to clarify the fate and whereabouts of the missing people in Syria, including persons subjected to enforced disappearance. The paper states, “The evidence shows that the Government is aware of and meticulously registers information about those it has detained. However, rather than investigate the crimes committed in its detention facilities, it continues to withhold information from family members...” The paper added that incommunicado detention and disappearances still occur routinely, indicative of the absence of political will among the parties to the conflict to address the situation. The paper recommended the establishment of a mechanism with an international mandate, defining its precise terms of reference, working methods, and strategies... according to the mandate granted to it and with the participation of the families of the missing persons in Syria.

The SNHR has supported all the demands of the COI for the essential establishment of an international mechanism whose mission is limited to the issue of the missing persons, including persons subjected to enforced disappearance, given the large number of those affected in Syria; as the previous paragraph showed, the immense number of the forcibly disappeared makes the need for such a mechanism an urgent and imperative necessity for all missing victims and their families. We have submitted a report to the OHCHR about our vision for this mechanism, and we have stressed that we will cooperate with it if it is established, and are ready to provide it with all the necessary information and data that we have documented on our database for eleven years to date.

V. Enforced Disappearance by the Main Parties and the Controlling Forces in Syria

A. Syrian regime forces (army, security, local militias, and Shiite foreign militias):

The Syrian regime has systematically used enforced disappearance as one of its most infamous tools of repression and terrorism aimed at crushing and destroying political opponents simply for expressing their opinion and participating in political demonstrations. The regime has also harnessed the capabilities of the security services, which have tens of thousands of personnel, to persecute, arrest, torture, and forcibly disappear those who participated in the popular uprising since its earliest days in March 2011.

The first years of the mass uprising saw the highest percentage of enforced disappearances because the demonstrations were taking place intensively, and within areas under the control of the Syrian regime, which aimed to end these protests and liquidate as many participants as possible with the objective of reducing or ending the incidence of the popular uprising, even if doing so took years. This practice expanded to target people on the basis of their affiliation with specific areas/sects/families or as part of random arrest campaigns. Most of the detainees - approximately 72 percent of all those arrested - were subsequently classified as forcibly disappeared persons, with enforced disappearance often beginning immediately after the arrest and lasting for many years, as Syrian regime forces deny carrying out any arrests or imprisoning the detainee/disappeared person, who is held in isolation from the outside world and deprived of the protection of the law and of the most minimal health care requirements, with most being tortured and many killed by torture; many are also subjected to unjust trials in grossly unjust secret courts.

Enforced Disappearance Also Violates the Constitution Set by the Syrian Regime in 2012 and Other National Laws

Although Syrian law specifies the period for which prisoners may be detained before they are brought before the courts, under the provisions of the Code of Criminal Procedure, no person is arrested except by order of the judiciary⁴; pursuant to Article 104 of this law, in the event of the arrest of a person by the judicial police (police, security services), the detainee must be brought before the judge within 24 hours, and if it is not possible for him/her to be questioned by the judge, the public prosecutor will order his/her immediate release⁵. Likewise, pursuant to Article 105 of the same law, if the defendant was arrested under a subpoena and remained in custody for more than twenty-four hours without being interrogated or presented before the Public Prosecutor as stated in the previous article, his/her arrest would constitute an arbitrary act, the perpetrator of which could be prosecuted for unlawful restriction of personal liberty⁶. Article 72 of the Code of Procedure stipulates that the investigative judge alone may decide to prevent communication with the arrested person, and that this prohibition can continue for a period of ten days only, while this does not include the arrested person's lawyer⁷.

There is an exception to the legal provisions mentioned, and in conjunction with the lifting of the state of emergency that was lifted at the end of April 2011 under Decree 161 of 2011, Legislative Decree No. 55 of April 21, 2011, was issued, which allowed the judicial police in crimes against state security to arrest the suspect for a period of seven days, renewable by the Public Prosecutor, provided that this period does not exceed sixty days⁸.

Despite this legislation, however, the Syrian regime has violated the constitution that it established in 2012, as well as these laws, with the security services failing to comply with any of them. To this day, there are still thousands of forcibly disappeared persons held since 2011, 2012, 2013, or 2014, for whom many years have passed since their arrest and disappearance, without any lawyer being able to reach them. Meanwhile, most arrests take place without an arrest warrant and without the approval of the Public Prosecutor, which the security services can obtain after a Syrian citizen's arrest (though kidnapping would be a more accurate term in this context); the Public Prosecutor does not dare to refuse any request from the security services.

The Syrian regime has not provided any real official procedures that the families of the disappeared can follow to obtain information about their family members or to discover their fate in the regime's detention centers, with the exception of a few complex, pro forma, and wholly useless methods. We referred to the most prominent of these in detail in our tenth annual report on enforced disappearances in Syria.

⁴ Syrian Arab Republic, People's Assembly, Law 112 of 1950 (Criminal Procedure Code), Articles 106 and 107, <http://www.parliament.gov.sy/arabic/index.php?node=201&nid=11810&ref=tree&>

⁵ Syrian Arab Republic, People's Assembly, Law 112 of 1950 (Criminal Procedure Code), Article 104, <http://www.parliament.gov.sy/arabic/index.php?node=201&nid=11810&ref=tree&>

⁶ Syrian Arab Republic, People's Assembly, Law 112 of 1950 (Criminal Procedure Code), Article 105, <http://www.parliament.gov.sy/arabic/index.php?node=201&nid=11810&ref=tree&>

⁷ Syrian Arab Republic, People's Assembly, Law 112 of 1950 (Criminal Procedure Code), Article 72, <http://www.parliament.gov.sy/arabic/index.php?node=201&nid=11810&ref=tree&>

⁸ Syrian Arab Republic, People's Assembly, Legislative Decree No. 55 of 2011, Article 1, <http://www.parliament.gov.sy/arabic/index.php?node=201&nid=4443&RID=1&Last=61&First=0&Current-Page=0&Vid=1&Mode=1&Service=1&Loc1=0&Key1=&SDate=&EDate=&Year=1&Country=&Num=55&Dep=1&>

As detailed on the SNHR's database, at least 135,253 of the individuals detained by Syrian regime forces since March 2011, including 3,684 children and 8,469 women (adult female), are still arbitrarily detained as of August 2022. Of this total, at least 95,696 individuals, including 2,316 children and 5,734 women (adult female), have been classified as forcibly disappeared persons. The Syrian regime is responsible for 84.85% of the total number of all documented enforced disappearance cases.

Fake Amnesty Decrees, Arrests, and Enforced Disappearances Have Been Ongoing for Nearly 12 Years

The huge number of detainees and forcibly disappeared persons held by the Syrian regime clearly confirms that all 20 of the amnesty decrees issued by the Syrian regime since 2011 did not lead to the release of even a small percentage of the tens of thousands of detainees and persons forcibly disappeared by the regime. We have detailed this in [previous reports on some of the amnesty decrees the regime issued](#), in which we noted that many of these decrees are similar to one another and focus on securing the release of perpetrators of crimes, felonies, and offences while including only a very small number of detainees referred to exceptional courts such as the Counter-Terrorism Court and the military field courts, and excluding the largest proportion of detainees who were not subjected to any trial during the years of their detention, who have been classified as forcibly disappeared.

On April 30, 2022, the Syrian regime issued Legislative Decree No. 7 of 2022 granting a general amnesty for 'terrorist' crimes committed by Syrians before the date of April 30, 2022, except for those crimes which caused death to a human being, as stipulated in the Counter-Terrorism Law No. 19 of 2012 and the Penal Law. issued by Legislative Decree No. 148 of 1949 and its amendments⁹. These are the two main laws under which detainees, imprisoned in connection with expressing an opinion and in connection with the conflict, are tried in the exceptional courts - the Counter-Terrorism Court and the Military Field Court. We stress that it is not possible to understand the implementation of any amnesty decree or amendment of penal laws in isolation from the unlimited powers of the President of the Republic and the regime security branches subordinate to him, which enjoy absolute legal immunity, since the President of the Republic controls the judicial, legislative, and executive authorities, while the courts to which detainees are referred do not meet any internationally accepted description of a court since they do not take into account any of the principles and procedures of fair trials or justice, but are, rather, exceptional and irregular courts serving the regime. We have addressed all of these issues in [previous reports](#).

⁹ Syrian Arab Republic, People's Assembly, Legislative Decree No. 7 of 2022, Article 1, <http://www.parliament.gov.sy/arabic/index.php?node=201&nid=22968&RID=-1&Last=134&First=0&CurrentPage=0&Vid=-1&Mode=-1&Service=-1&Loc1=0&Key1=&SDate=&EDate=&Year=-1&Country=-&Num=7&Dep=-1&>

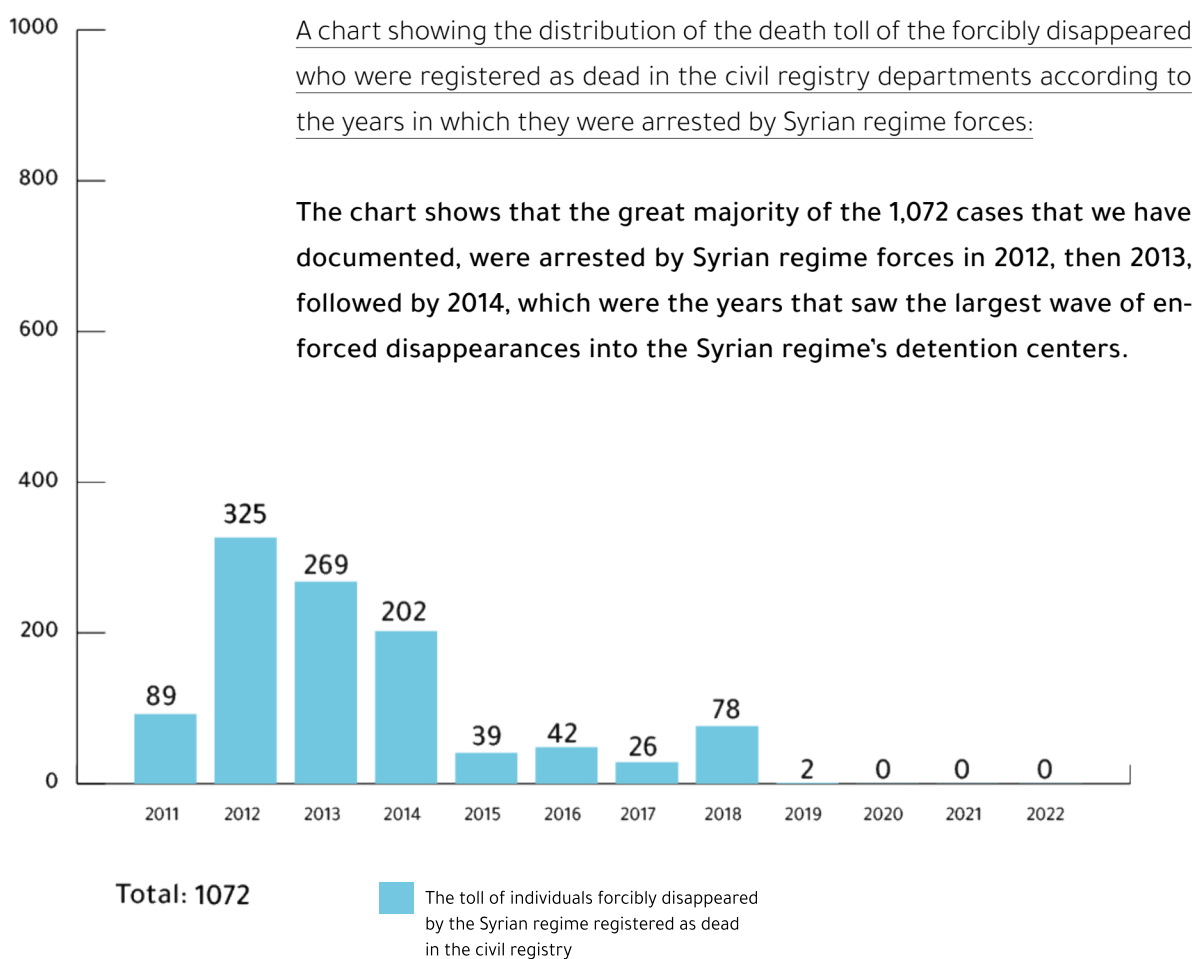
The SNHR Detainees' team has monitored the releases from central and military prisons under Decree No. 7 of 2022. On May 16, 2022, we issued a report entitled, ["The Syrian Regime Has Released 476 People Under Amnesty Decree 7/2022 and Is Still Detaining Some 132,000 of Those Arrested Since March 2011,"](#) in which we provided an analysis of the text of the decree, and the releases of detainees resulting from it, which SNHR's team has been able to document since the decree's issuance. [We also published several statements that provided an update on the releases of detainees under the decree.](#)

Between May 1, 2022, and August 30, 2022, we documented that the Syrian regime had released about 569 people under Decree No. 7 of 2022 from various regime civil and military prisons and security branches in a number of Syrian governorates, including 63 women and 17 people who were children at the time of their arrest. At least 162 of the 568 released people had settled their security status with the regime prior to their arrest and been given a supposed guarantee according to the terms of these settlements assuring them that they would not be persecuted by regime security authorities; 28 of those released, including four women, had been refugees or otherwise living outside Syria and were arrested on their return to the country.

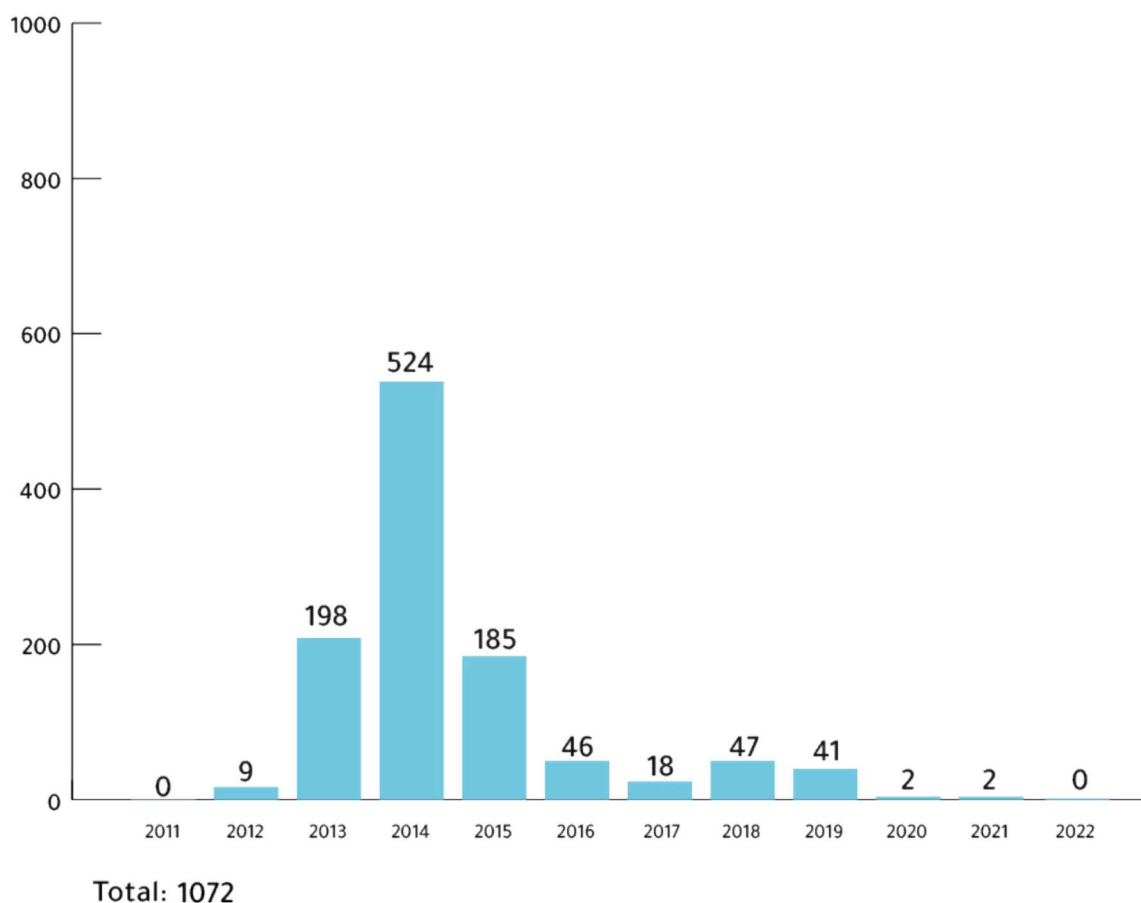
We have noted that the Syrian regime has deliberately inflicted psychological, emotional, and material harm on the already traumatized families of detainees, and compromised the dignity of the released detainees through the random method it followed in the releases, as the Syrian regime deliberately released small numbers of detainees in several groups from detention centers, dropping them off in public squares without handing them over to their families or even contacting their families to notify them of their loved ones' release. This caused a state of panic among the released and among the families of detained and forcibly disappeared people, leading thousands of distraught family members of detainees and forcibly disappeared people to gather in these locations to search frantically for their disappeared loved ones among the small numbers of released people, carrying photos of their loved ones in order to inquire about them. Despite the passage of many years, the Syrian regime has never provided any real mechanism to enable families of detainees and forcibly disappeared people to find out the fate of their loved ones. In addition, the Syrian judiciary has never announced the names of those covered by these amnesties, which is the main reason behind the families of detainees and the forcibly disappeared being exposed to cruel and extortionately expensive fraud at the hands of networks of regime officials involving judges, lawyers, officers, and influential figures who take advantage of the families' desperation to hold out hope that they can ensure that their detained or forcibly disappeared loved ones are included in the amnesty decree in exchange for huge sums of money.

The Syrian Regime Acknowledged the Deaths of at Least 1,072 Forcibly Disappeared Persons Through the Civil Registry Departments, and We Believe That All Were Killed Under Torture

Since the start of 2018, hundreds of families of detainees forcibly disappeared by the Syrian regime have received notifications via the state civil registry departments informing them that their loved ones had died in custody, often some years before. In many of our previous [extensive reports](#), we have discussed this practice and the callous strategy adopted by the regime in registering the forcibly disappeared as dead via the civil registry departments, which continues to the present day, as we are still receiving numerous reports from victims' families stating that they have obtained death statements for their disappeared loved ones. This humiliating practice has caused immense shock and additional trauma to the forcibly disappeared persons' families, some of whom continue to visit the civil registry departments frequently in the hopes of discovering the fate of their loved ones. We have been able to document instances of at least 1,072 people among the forcibly disappeared persons, including nine children, two women, and nine medical personnel, as having been registered as dead in the civil registry departments' records, between the beginning of 2018 and August 2022, with the cause of death not given - we believe that all these deaths were caused by torture, with the victims' bodies not handed over to their families by the regime, and the deaths not being announced at the time of their occurrence. Among the victims are four cases that were identified through leaked photos from the Syrian regime's military hospitals.



A chart showing the distribution of the death toll among the forcibly disappeared who were registered as dead in the civil registry departments according to the year of death recorded in the death certificate issued by Syrian regime forces:



This chart shows that the highest number among the 1,072 cases whose deaths were recorded was seen in 2014, according to the death notifications issued by the civil registry departments, followed by 2013, then 2015.

At Least 3,997 Arrests Targeted Returning Refugees/Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), of Which 1,401 Were Classified as Enforced Disappearances

The harsh conditions in some countries of asylum and areas of displacement forced many refugees and IDPs to return to their original areas of residence under the control of Syrian regime forces. We have stressed in many reports that Syria is still an unsafe country and that various types of violations are still being perpetrated, especially arbitrary arrests, torture, and enforced disappearances.

Between the beginning of 2014¹⁰ and August 2022, SNHR documented at least 3,083 cases of arbitrary arrest, including 244 children and 207 women (adult female), against refugees who returned from asylum or residence countries to their areas of residence in Syria. All of those were arbitrarily arrested by Syrian regime forces. The Syrian regime released 1,887 detainees, while 1,196 of those arrested remained in detention, with 864 of them going on to be classified as forcibly disappeared.

During the same period, we recorded the arrest of at least 914 IDPs who returned to areas controlled by the Syrian regime, including 22 children and 19 women. Of these, the Syrian regime released 132 of the detainees, while 782 others remained in detention, with 537 of these being forcibly disappeared. We also recorded that the Syrian regime, after releasing 132 cases, re-detained a number of them, forcing them into military conscription. We have referred to the issue of targeting returnees for arrest in several periodic [SNHR reports on detention](#).

Displacement, extreme poverty, and disruption of livelihoods have forced many families to return. The majority of IDPs who have returned and contacted us told us that they were not fully convinced of the guarantees granted by mediators to them, but preferred to take risks and return due to their poor economic conditions, since when they have been constantly exposed to security restrictions through summons, requesting them to visit the security branches to conduct security studies on them on an ongoing basis.

¹⁰ Through our monitoring of the violations that returnees are subjected to, the beginning of 2014 was the beginning of the return of many refugees/IDPs to areas under the control of Syrian regime forces, and then targeted of arrests and enforced disappearances.

The Fate of the Disappeared Persons in al Tadamun Neighborhood in Damascus Is a Stark Example of the Killing and Execution That May Have Been the Fate of Thousands of Disappeared Persons by Syrian Regime Forces before They Were Taken to Detention Centers

At the end of April 2022, New Lines magazine published an [investigation](#) that proved that Amjad Yousef, an officer in the Syrian regime's security forces, specifically the '227 Region Branch' of the Military Intelligence Division, was among those responsible for the arrest/kidnapping of dozens of Syrians in al Tadamun neighborhood in Damascus, 41 of whom were taken to a pit dug for the purpose of serving as a mass grave, where they were thrown in and shot dead before their bodies were set alight. The investigators managed to persuade Amjad Yousef into confessing to this terrible crime. In early May 2022, the SNHR received information that the Syrian regime had detained Amjad Yousef, and we published a [statement](#) on this issue, stressing that the Syrian regime would not have detained Amjad Yousef if regime bodies had not been involved in this atrocity at the highest levels, since Amjad Yousef remained at large for years after committing these brutal atrocities, along with thousands of other personnel in the regime army and security services involved in committing similar atrocious violations, but the Syrian regime did not arrest any of them, nor did it hold anyone accountable.

The SNHR database contains thousands of cases of forcibly disappeared persons, including dozens of families, women, and children who were subjected to enforced disappearance immediately after their arrest, and their families were unable to obtain even the smallest amount of information about them since the first moment of their arrest. Many of the families of these disappeared persons have told us that they have tried, through various official and unofficial means, to find out the fate of their loved ones or the place of their detention but to no avail. We were also unable, by tracking the transfers of detainees/disappeared between detention centers through our interviews with hundreds of survivors and witnesses, to obtain any reported sightings of them within the detention centers of Syrian regime forces. This reinforces our fears that they have been subjected to killing or execution by the Syrian regime forces manning checkpoints who were responsible for their arrest and that they had not even been transferred permanently to any detention center before being killed.

¹⁰ Through our monitoring of the violations that returnees are subjected to, the beginning of 2014 was the beginning of the return of many refugees/IDPs to areas under the control of Syrian regime forces, and then targeted of arrests and enforced disappearances.

The Syrian Regime, Through Its Security Services and State Institutions, Controls the Registration of the Deaths of Victims Killed/'Disappeared' in the Armed Conflict Since March 2011

The Syrian regime brutally controls the issuance of death certificates, which are not made available to any of the families of its victims, whether they were killed at the hands of the Syrian regime or by other parties, or to the families of the missing and forcibly disappeared. The Syrian regime only allows death certificates to be issued for those who meet the narrow criteria set by the regime and its security services. In many previous reports, we have discussed the phenomenon of the Syrian regime's forcing victims' families to make false statements, blackmailing them into signing reports prepared by the security services stating that 'armed terrorist gangs', rather than the Syrian regime, killed their loved ones by withholding death certificates until they sign these false statements. The Syrian regime has not only failed to launch any judicial investigations into the causes of death for hundreds of thousands of Syrians but has also failed to hold even one member of its security or military forces to account for their involvement in these killings. We note that the vast majority of victims' families are unable to obtain death certificates from the Syrian regime, for fear of linking their own names to that of a person who was detained by the regime and killed under torture, meaning that he or she was a dissident who opposed the Syrian regime, or of their loved one being registered as a 'terrorist' if s/he is wanted by the security services; additionally, many victims' families have been forcibly displaced outside the areas controlled by the Syrian regime.

On August 10, 2022, the Minister of Justice in the Syrian regime government issued [Circular No. 22](#) specifying the procedures for the conduct of proceedings related to registering deaths within Sharia courts. The circular included new conditions stipulating that five items of evidence must be submitted to and approved by the relevant judges in proceedings related to registering the death. These new conditions also require that all relevant courts involved in death registration cases comply with the circular's content. We have issued a [report](#) providing our analysis of the content of this circular's text, which contains constitutional and legal violations, in addition to having grave consequences for all those affected. In this context, we at the SNHR note that the Syrian regime, in an additional move to further restrict the families of the missing, imposed a security clearance requirement on them requiring that they obtain a judicial power of attorney for the absent and the missing¹¹, with Decision /30/ issued by the Ministry of Justice on September 16, 2021, requiring that anyone who has to obtain legal power of attorney for an absent or missing person should first obtain 'security clearance'.

¹¹ According to Articles 202 and 203 of the Syrian Personal Status Law, an 'absent' individual is defined as a person known to be alive, but with no known place of residence or domicile, or a citizen with a known place of residence or domicile abroad for whom it is impossible to manage his own affairs. The missing person is defined as an individual of whom no news has been heard, whose whereabouts are unknown, and who is not confirmed as being either alive or dead, according to Article No. 202 of the law.

The procedures required to obtain this clearance are accompanied by bargaining and material extortion; women are among the first victims of the circular's ruling, since wives and mothers are invariably the family members involved in the legal procedures to prove the absence or loss of their husbands, sons or other family members, and thus need to obtain the judicial power of attorney. In cases where wives or mothers are present in government-controlled areas and want to obtain the power of attorney, the 'new security clearance' increases their risk of being subjected to violence, extortion, or material, verbal and psychological abuse. If the judicial power of attorney for the absent person is not obtained due to the difficulty of obtaining the security clearance, their interests will be severely restricted and they will not be able to carry out the transfer of inheritance, obtain identification documents or bank cards, or receive salaries and pensions on behalf of the missing and the absent, especially since some of the absentees are wanted by the security branches. This circular means that it is impossible to grant missing persons' family members and relatives the right to obtain the power of attorney to manage the money of their absent loved ones. This circular is also considered a major legal violation due to its violation of the Syrian Personal Status Law, which does not require any clearance of any kind.

The Most Prominent Syrian Regime Figures Involved in the Disappearance of Tens of Thousands of Syrian Citizens

The Syrian regime is very centralized, and we at the SNHR rely on the relevant rules of customary humanitarian law in holding commanders and other senior officials responsible for war crimes committed by their subordinates pursuant to their orders¹² accountable if they knew, or had reason to know, that these subordinates were about to commit or were committing such crimes and failed to take all necessary and reasonable measures in their power to prevent their commission, or if such crimes had been committed, to punish the persons responsible;¹³ the International Criminal Court Statute (ICC Statute) expands the elements of this responsibility to include crimes against humanity, which are committed in time of peace or war, and war crimes. This law also holds military commanders in addition to senior officials, including civilians, responsible for this.¹⁴ In addition, combatants bear responsibility for their actions, even if they were carrying out orders from their higher-ranking superiors. The SNHR has repeatedly warned, through reports and statements, of the need to refrain from carrying out any acts that lead to committing war crimes or crimes against humanity, in addition to noting that international law provides that, even duress, the perpetration of war crimes or crimes against humanity or extermination only become acceptable as a defense in extreme situations where there is no option but to kill or be killed¹⁵.

¹² ICRC, International Humanitarian Law, Rule 152, https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/customary-ihl/eng/docs/v1_rul_rule152

¹³ ICRC, International Humanitarian Law, Rule 153, https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/customary-ihl/eng/docs/v1_rul_rule153

¹⁴ International Criminal Court, Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, Article 28, <https://www.icc-cpi.int/nr/rdonlyres/add16852-ae9-4757-abe7-9cdc-7cf02886/283503/romestatuteng1.pdf>

¹⁵ The International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, Erdemovic case, IT-96-22, Para. 17, <https://www.icty.org/x/cases/erdemovic/tjug/en/erd-ts-j980305e.pdf>

The various institutions of the Syrian regime have long been involved in committing widespread and systematic violations, many of which constitute crimes against humanity¹⁶ and war crimes¹⁷, with everyone who ordered, incited, encouraged, justified, participated, provided assistance in or facilitated those crimes considered to be involved in them; at the forefront of these institutions are those of the army and the security bodies. There is a tendency among fact-finding committees and international commissions of inquiry towards revealing the names of individuals involved in perpetrating violations, with the SNHR having adopted this policy for years, and demanding that the COI should reveal the names of individuals whose involvement in committing egregious violations constituting crimes against humanity and war crimes it has verified.

Names of the Most Prominent Leaders of the Syrian Regime's Security Services Involved in the Crime of Enforced Disappearance of Tens of Thousands of Syrian Citizens

Hundreds of leaders of the Syrian regime's security services, army, military and security committees, and other state institutions have been involved in the violations that have been committed against the Syrian people and the Syrian state since 2011 to date, with SNHR maintaining a database that includes thousands of detailed reports on individuals involved in committing violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law in Syria, their positions and the most prominent violations they committed that we have documented, and working to update this database continuously whenever new details emerge. We have provided detailed information on many of these figures in [reports](#) and other materials we've issued over the past eleven years.

With regard to arbitrary arrest/detention and enforced disappearance and related violations, the four regime security services, namely the General Military Intelligence Division, Air Force Intelligence Division, General Administration Division, and Political Security Division, mainly practiced arrests, torture, and enforced disappearances in their detention centers, in addition to a number of military and civilian prisons. The documents and data that we have obtained indicate that there are at least 62 such branches at a bare minimum and most probably many more, all of which are responsible for arbitrary arrests and enforced disappearances, either directly or through monitoring the movements of activists and opponents and preparing security studies and reports on participants in the popular uprising or even those who these regime personnel felt might be inclined to participate, in addition to the security branches that specialize in the prosecution of military personnel, arresting them from their military units.

¹⁶ International Criminal Court, Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, Article 7, <https://www.icc-cpi.int/nr/rdonlyres/add16852-ae9-4757-abe7-9cdc-7cf02886/283503/romestatuteng1.pdf>

¹⁷ International Criminal Court, Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, Article 8, <https://www.icc-cpi.int/nr/rdonlyres/add16852-ae9-4757-abe7-9cdc-7cf02886/283503/romestatuteng1.pdf>

We believe that revealing the names of the perpetrators of violations is a form of exposure and accountability, firstly before local public opinion, and secondly, international public opinion, and in order to enable the families of the forcibly disappeared to identify their opponents before the courts and bodies that we aspire to see established within the transitional justice process, and to deter those individuals who we believe are involved from repeating their crimes, and in order for others to know that the fate of everyone who commits violations against the Syrian citizen will be to be subject to shame and exposure in front of his community, his family, the media, and later before local and international courts; we will strive to ensure that as many of these individuals and their ilk as possible are included on the lists of those subject to terrorism charges and economic sanctions.

In our previous, tenth, report on enforced disappearance in Syria issued in 2021, we provided the names of the most prominent commanders of the security services and the affiliated security branches over the past eleven years, who are directly responsible for the arrests, torture, and enforced disappearances that were committed during the period in which they held their positions. In this report, we focus more on the role of the heads of the security and military committees of the regions and governorates, and the lower-ranking field military commanders who report to them, and who were directly involved in arbitrary arrests and enforced disappearances, particularly in Damascus Suburbs and Southern Syria.

Oqab Saqr Abbas

A Brigadier General, who held several positions in the Syrian regime forces' General Administration/State Security Division, he headed the State Security Branch in Daraa governorate between July 2018 and March 2022, when he was transferred to the State Security Branch in al Qameshli city. During his tenure as head of the State Security Branch in Daraa governorate, we recorded his responsibility for many violations, including arrests, enforced disappearances, torture, and deaths due to torture against people from Daraa governorate.



Oqab Saqr Abbas

Khardal Ahmad Dayoub

A Colonel, Dayoub held several positions in the Syrian regime forces' General Air Intelligence/Air Security Force Division in Damascus governorate. He was appointed as head of the Air Force Intelligence Branch in Daraa governorate in August 2019. Colonel Khardal Ahmad Dayoub is considered to be the main responsible for numerous instances of torture and enforced disappearances during his service in the Air Security Force in Damascus governorate. Since he assumed his position in Daraa governorate, we documented his responsibility for many violations, including arrests and enforced disappearances, and his committing a number of killings of activists and former members of the armed opposition factions from the people of Daraa governorate who conducted settlements with Syrian regime forces in July 2018.



Khardal Ahmad Dayoub

Mufid Younes Hassan

A Major General, from Bashlama town in the suburbs of Latakia governorate, he held several positions in the Syrian regime's regular army forces, where he took command of the Fifth Division, before being appointed in June 2021 as commander of the First Corps operating in the southern governorates of Daraa, Suwayda, and Quneitra, where he was put in charge of the Military and Security Committee.



Mufid Younes Hassan

Suheil Fayyad Asaad

A Major General, from Sheen town in the northwestern suburbs of Homs governorate, he held the position of deputy commander of the Fifth Division for many years, and of commander of the Security and Military Committee in Raqqa governorate. In June 2021, he was appointed commander of the Fifth Division operating in Daraa governorate; during his service, he was a military commander in many of the military campaigns, supervising field executions, enforced disappearances, and killings carried out by the Fifth Division.



Suheil Fayyad Asaad

Assaf al Nisani

A Major General, from Nawa al Mukharram village in the eastern suburbs of Homs governorate, he held several positions in the Syrian regime's regular army forces. He participated directly in commanding many military operations carried out by Syrian regime forces against Syrian villages and cities that witnessed opposition to Syrian regime forces since March 2011. In June 2021, he was appointed commander of the Eighth Division and head of the Security and Military Committee in Hama governorate.

Ibrahim Khalifah

A Major General, he was the commander of the Tenth Division in the Syrian regime's regular army, and served as the commander of the Security and Military Committee in Hama governorate. In June 2021, he was transferred to the Fourth Division. Since 2011, he has participated directly in commanding many military operations carried out by the regime forces against Syrian villages and cities that witnessed opposition to Syrian regime forces.



Ibrahim Khalifah

Muhammad Khaled al Rahmoun

A Major General, he's the current Minister of Interior in the Syrian regime government. Born in 1957, and originally hailing from Khan Sheikhoun city in the suburbs of Idlib governorate, he headed the Air Force Intelligence Branch of the southern governorates in 2011, before being appointed head of the Political Security Division in Syria until October 2018, when he was appointed as Minister of the Interior. Al Rahmoun is considered one of the regime's most prominent security figures in planning and managing the internal security file.



Muhammad Khaled al Rahmoun

Ali Mamlouk

A Major General, born in 1946, from Damascus city, he is one of the most prominent Syrian regime officers in the security and military leadership in Syria. He served as Director of the General Intelligence Department/Division in Syria from 2005 to 2010, then took the position of head of the National Security Bureau from 2012 to 2019, which operates as the Supreme Security Council in Syria. In June 2019, he was appointed as the Syrian regime's Vice President of Security Affairs.



Ali Mamlouk

Naim Dayoub

A Colonel, who held many positions in the Syrian regime forces' Military Intelligence/Military Security Force Division, he was born in 1974, and originally hails from Jabla city in the suburbs of Latakia governorate. Col. Dayoub is in charge of checkpoints in the central sector of Eastern Ghouta in Damascus Suburbs governorate, which is affiliated with Branch 227, the Regional Branch, in Damascus city. We documented his responsibility for dozens of arrests and enforced disappearances of civilians in Damascus Suburbs governorate.

Basel Habib

A Colonel, born in 1975, originally from Latakia governorate, Habib has held many positions in the Syrian regime forces' Public Administration Division/State Security Force. He was the head of the State Security Branch in Douma city from 2018 to 2020; during this period, we recorded his responsibility for the arrest of dozens of civilians from Douma city in Damascus Suburbs governorate, and for killing a number of detainees inside the State Security Branch in Douma city. He is also responsible for the enforced disappearance of dozens of arbitrarily detained people arrested on his orders; he was arrested by Syrian regime forces in March 2020 on charges related to corruption and embezzlement.

Ahmad Nouh

A Brigadier General, born in 1973, originally from Hama governorate, he held many positions in the Syrian regime's Public Administration Division/State Security Force. He currently heads the investigation department at al Khatib Branch/State Security, in Damascus city, and has been responsible for the torture and enforced disappearance of detainees throughout his military service.

Thaer al Omar

A Brigadier General, born in 1974, from Aleppo governorate, he's held many positions in the Syrian regime forces' Public Administration Division/State Security Force. He was the head of the State Security Force's Raid and Patrol branch during 2011, and personally supervised the storming of Douma city in 2011 and the arrest, killing, and enforced disappearance of civilians in the city.

Samer al Braid

A Colonel, born in 1976, from Daraa governorate, he held many positions in the Syrian regime's Public Administration Division/State Security Force. He headed the State Security Department in the Douma area in Damascus Suburbs governorate during 2011. Al Braid is responsible for many killings/arrests of civilian protesters during Syrian regime forces' suppression of popular demonstrators in Douma city; he was subsequently promoted to become a member of the National Security Bureau, participating in a number of Geneva negotiations rounds within the delegation of the Syrian regime.



Samer al Braid

Nazih Melhem

A Brigadier General, born in 1968, from Hama governorate, he held many positions in the Syrian regime's Air Force Intelligence/Air Security Force Division. He is currently Deputy Head of the Investigation Branch of the Air Security Force in Damascus city, which is the central investigation branch to which all detainees in Air Security branches across the Syrian governorates are transferred; he's been responsible for the torture and enforced disappearance of detainees throughout the duration of his service since 2011.

Safwan Ibrahim

A Lieutenant-Colonel, born in 1972, from Tartus governorate, he is in charge of the Raid Department in Branch 227, Military Security Division, in Damascus city; during the period of his service, we've documented his responsibility for arresting thousands of Syrian civilians, with a number of these detainees dying due to torture, while others have been forcibly disappeared.

Suleiman Ghanem

A Captain, born in 1980, from Tartus governorate, he is a prison officer in Branch 227, Military Security Division, in Damascus city; we documented his responsibility for torturing a large number of Syrian detainees, forcibly disappearing them, and for deliberately maintaining them in abysmal conditions in detention in the prisons he ran.

Zafer Hazim

A Colonel, born in 1979, from Kafarna town in the suburbs of Homs governorate, he is an officer in the Syrian regime's Air Force Intelligence Division/Air Security Force in Damascus city and its suburbs; we've documented his responsibility for raids, arrests, and enforced disappearances of hundreds of civilians.

Taysir Ibrahim

A Colonel, born in 1980, from Jabla city in the suburbs of Latakia governorate, he's held many positions in the Syrian regime's Air Force Intelligence Division/Air Security Force in Damascus city and its suburbs; we've documented his responsibility for the liquidation and torture of detainees, as well as for forcibly disappearing them, and for carrying out several field executions of Syrian detainees whom he arrested.

Munir al Ahmad

A Brigadier General, born in 1976, from Jabla city in the suburbs of Latakia governorate, he's held several positions in the Syrian regime's regular army forces; we've documented his responsibility for numerous cases of enforced disappearance, arrest, and torture of civilians from Ein Tarma town in Damascus Suburbs governorate and Joubar neighborhood in Damascus city, between 2018 and the current date.

Ali al Ali

A Lieutenant-Colonel, born in 1982, from Jabla city in the suburbs of Latakia governorate, he is in charge of al Mleiha town detachment and the Southern Sector detachments affiliated with the Air Force Intelligence Division in Damascus Suburbs governorate; we've documented his responsibility for the arrest, torture, and enforced disappearance of Syrian civilians from Damascus Suburbs governorate.

Jamal Mahmoud Younes

A Major General, born in 1967, from Latakia governorate, he's held several positions in the Syrian regime's regular army forces. He was commander of the Third Corps in the Syrian army, leading the Syrian army's military operations in parts of Homs governorate in his capacity as head of the security committee in the governorate; in September 2021, and was appointed as head of the Security Committee in the Eastern region of Syria.



Jamal Mahmoud Younes

Testimonies of victims' families and cases of persons forcibly disappeared by Syrian regime forces:

Ali Jumah al Hesrum, born in 1961, was working as a driver of a public transport vehicle at the time of his arrest. Ali, from Ma'ar Shamarin village of Ma'aret al Numan district in the southern suburbs of Idlib governorate, was arrested by personnel from the Syrian regime's Military Security Force on May 25, 2012, at a temporary regime checkpoint in al Nabk city in the north of Damascus Suburbs governorate on the Damascus International Road, while he was heading to Idlib governorate, and was taken, with his vehicle, to the Military Security Branch in al Nabk city, then immediately transferred to the State Security Branch (Al Khatib Branch) in Damascus city. Since that date, he has been forcibly disappeared.

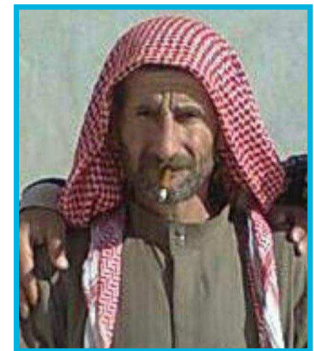


Ali Jumah al Hesrum

SNHR spoke with Mr. Hasan¹⁸, Ali's son, who told us: **"While my father was passing by the Military Security detachment in al Nabk city as he was returning to Idlib, [staff at] a temporary checkpoint run by the detachment personnel stopped him, arrested him, and confiscated his car. When we lost contact with him, we went to the road that my father took and saw his car (a white KIA) being held by the detachment, and we started trying to find out his place of detention by asking about him and mediating with several parties until we found out that he'd been transferred immediately after his arrest to al Khatib Branch on Baghdad Street in Damascus. We received no information about him after that, until July 2020, when one of the former detainees from Flaita in al Qalamoun confirmed to us that he had seen him [my father] before the man was released from Seydnaya Military Prison."** Hasan told us that this was the only information the family's been able to obtain about his father despite a lengthy search.

Abdul Qader Omar Raslan

Abdul Qader Omar Raslan, born in 1963, was working as a concierge in al Furqan neighborhood in Aleppo city at the time of his arrest. Abdul Qader, from al Sheikh Eisa village in the Tal Ref'at district in the northern suburbs of Aleppo governorate, was arrested by personnel from the Syrian regime's Military Security Force in December 2012 from his workplace in al Furqan neighborhood, and taken to an undisclosed location.



Abdul Qader Omar Raslan

SNHR spoke with Mr. Muhammad Jaber¹⁹, Abdul Qader's son, who told us: **"While my father was doing his job guarding an apartment building in al Furqan neighborhood in Aleppo city, Military Security Force personnel came and arrested him in front of the building, along with another young man. The owner of the building tried to mediate to prevent them from arresting him, telling them that he [my father] was doing his job, but the personnel asked him to remain silent or he would be arrested along with my father. Since then, we have obtained no information about my father; although I submitted several requests to the security branches of the Lawyers' Office in the Judicial Palace Building in Damascus city to inquire about his place of detention, the last of which was in 2015, I did not get any result. In addition, I was able to communicate with the father of the young man [arrested along with Abdul Qader], who told me that his son was detained in al Mazza Military Prison in Damascus city. I tried to ask about my father there, but they denied detaining him there."**

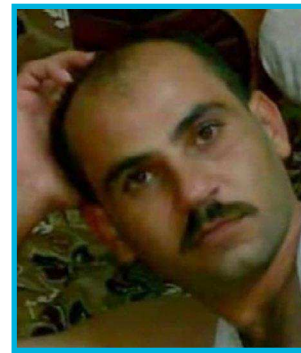
¹⁸ We contacted him via phone in June 2022.

¹⁹ We contacted him via phone in June 2022.

Two brothers detained together, Khalil and Ahmad Mahmoud Awad, who were born in 1979 and 1991 respectively, came from Harasta city in Eastern Ghouta in Damascus Suburbs governorate. Khalil was working as a truck driver at the time of his arrest, while Ahmad was working in the flooring trade. They were arrested by Syrian regime forces in 2012, during a campaign in al Dawwar neighborhood next to the Ammar bin Yasser Mosque, west of the highway area of Harasta city in Eastern Ghouta in the Damascus Suburbs, with the regime personnel raiding their house and taking them to an undisclosed location. Since that date, both brothers have been forcibly disappeared. Their fate remains unknown to the SNHR, as well as to their family.



Ahmad Mahmoud Awad



Khalil Mahmoud Awad

SNHR spoke with Mr. Hasan²⁰, brother of Khalil and Ahmad, who told us: “In 2012, the Syrian regime forces launched a raid campaign in the area west of the highway in Harasta and arrested many residents of the area, including women and my brothers Khalil and Ahmad, although Ahmad was then injured due to gunshots in the ankle and thigh, in addition to being injured during his arrest with a gunshot wound to the chest. At that time, there were clashes between the Free Army and the regime forces, which at that time used the detainees as human shields. After that, many negotiations took place (between members of the Free Army and the people with a regime officer) to release the detainees taken in that campaign, whether through paying money or otherwise, and they were all released except for my brothers and three others from the same family, including two women. Then, further negotiations took place, which lasted for four months, during which they were being held in Jabal al Ward area in Damascus Suburbs. The women and all the other detainees were released except for my brothers. Since that time, we have heard no information about them.”

²⁰ We contacted him via phone in August 2022.

Nawal Khaled Khalil, born in 1977, and her three children, Ahmad, Abdullah and Ibrahim Muhammad Kanjou, all born in 2005, all from Jisr al Shoghour city in the western suburbs of Idlib governorate, were living in al Sfira city in the southeastern suburbs of Aleppo governorate when they were arrested by Syrian regime forces on Sunday, April 7, 2013, as they were passing through one of the regime's checkpoints in Homs city, while on their way back from Lebanon, and taken to an undisclosed location.



Children Ahmad, Abdullah and Ibrahim Muhammad Kanjou

SNHR spoke with Mr. Muhammad Kanjou²¹, Nawal's husband and the father of their children, who told us: **"My wife and children were returning from Lebanon to Syria, where they were on a visit, and I was in contact with them all the way to check on them. While they were passing through Homs city, at two p.m. in the afternoon, they reached a checkpoint run by Syrian regime forces in the city, where I lost contact with them. I tried by various means to reach their place of detention and mediated with military figures, but I was unable to. All these years, I have been searching for the passengers who were with them on the same bus, as it turned out that they were also arrested with my family, and to this moment, I have not been able to find out where my family is being detained or what is their fate."**

Khaled Ibrahim Abu Ghalioun, born in 1953, a civil engineer, was arrested along with his twin sons Amjad and Amir, born in 1994, who were university students at the Faculty of Human Medicine at the Private University of Qalamoun in Deir Atteya city in Damascus Suburbs governorate at the time and were living near the university. The father and his sons, all from Deir B'alba neighborhood of Homs city, were arrested by Syrian regime forces on Sunday, November 3, 2013, near the Private University of Qalamoun, and were taken to an undisclosed location.



Khaled Ibrahim Abu Ghalioun

SNHR spoke with Ms. Hanan²², Khaled's sister, and Amjad and Amir's aunt. She told us: **"After my brother Khaled and his two sons left the Qalamoun University building in Damascus Suburbs in preparation for heading to Homs, a shooting took place between Syrian regime forces and unknown gunmen in the area, then we learned of their arrest by the Syrian regime forces. Since then, we have not heard anything about them, and we have also received reports, though not confirmed, that they are detained in Adra Central Prison in Damascus Suburbs governorate. We periodically extract a family register statement for them from the Personal Status department building in Homs city, and every time it appears to us that they did register them as dead, as they did with thousands of other detainees and disappeared persons."**

²¹ We contacted him via phone in May 2022.

²² We contacted him via phone.

Nawwar Salim Shatouri, born in 1985, from Jisr al Shoghour city in the southwest of Idlib governorate, was arrested by Syrian regime forces in December 2013, while he was passing through one of the regime checkpoints near the General Water Corporation in Jisr al Shoghour city, and was taken to an undisclosed location.



Nawwar Salim Shatouri

SNHR spoke with Mr. Yaman al Qassoum²³, a relative of the family, who told us: **“Nawar is a father of three children, and he was working on a mini truck to deliver goods. While he was passing through a checkpoint run by the regime forces near the General Water Corporation in Jisr al Shoghour city, the regime forces arrested him with his car. The family asked about him by various means, but they did not receive any information about his place of detention or his fate.”**

Munir Muhammad Khair al Shalah, born in 1981, from Hweiz Fwqani village in al Madiq district in the western suburbs of Hama governorate, was arrested by Syrian regime forces on Saturday, February 15, 2014, while he was passing through one of the regime checkpoints on the outskirts of al Shari'a town on the road between the villages of al Krayem and Bab al Taqa in Sahl al Ghab area in the western suburbs of Hama governorate, and was taken to an undisclosed location.



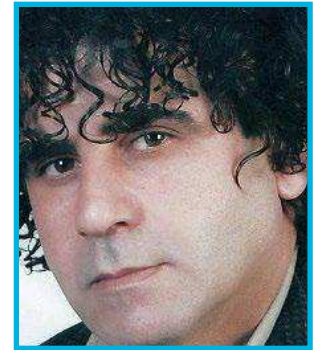
Munir Muhammad
Khair al Shalah

SNHR spoke with Mr. Nasir²⁴, a relative of Munir, who told us: **“Munir was a construction worker in Sour city in southern Lebanon and lived there. In February 2014, Munir visited his family in Syria for a week and then decided to return to Lebanon. While on his way there, and as the bus he was taking was passing through one of the regime checkpoints on the outskirts of al Shari'a town in the western suburbs of Hama governorate on the road between the villages of al Krayem and Bab al Taqa in Sahl al Ghab area, Munir was arrested, along with one of our relatives and two other people. Since that time, we have not been able to find out where he is being held or his fate. In 2019, his family visited the Military Police Branch in al Qaboun neighborhood in Damascus city, where they were handed Munir's ID card and military service book; we didn't know whether he was still alive.”**

²³ We contacted him via phone in July 2022.

²⁴ We contacted him via phone in July 2022.

Nasser Saber Bondek, born in 1967, was working as a government employee (in the Arab Advertising Agency of the Syrian Ministry of Information) at the time of his arrest. Naser, from Rima Hazem village in the western suburbs of Suwayda governorate, who was living in al Tayaran neighborhood in Sehnaya town, Western Ghouta, in Damascus Suburbs governorate at the time of his disappearance, was arrested by personnel from the Syrian regime's Military Security Force on Monday, February 17, 2014, in a raid on his home in al Tayaran neighborhood, and taken to the Military Security Branch (227) in Damascus city. Since that date, he has been forcibly disappeared.



Nasser Saber Bondek

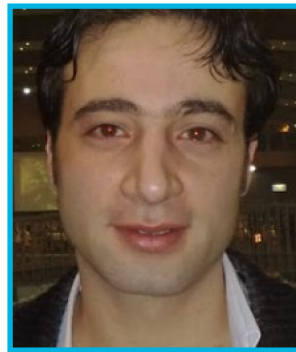
SNHR spoke with Ms. Farizah Jahjah Bondek²⁵, Nasser's wife, who told us: **"In addition to his work as an employee in the Arab Advertising Agency, Nasser was a poet and a human rights activist in the peaceful popular uprising in Damascus and its countryside, as well as in Suwayda, in addition to being a relief activist. On the afternoon of Monday, February 17, 2014, personnel from the Military Security Force belonging to 'Branch 227' raided a number of houses in al Tayaran neighborhood in the town where we lived. At that time, the house of a lawyer Khalil Ma'touq, who had been detained before that, was raided and they arrested his daughter, Ranim, and also raided the house of another lawyer Jehan Amin, who was also arrested, before they stormed our house in Sehnaya town and arrested Nasser and then raided the house of Marwan al Hasbani, a relief and humanitarian activist, and they arrested him, then took Nasser to the Military Security Branch (227) in Damascus city, where he was last seen by former detainees. We were unable to find out any information about his place of detention or his fate ever since."**

Saeed Abdul Qader Qarboun, born in 1996, from Deir Ez-Zour, a student in the Faculty of Electrical Engineering and Electronic Systems at Tishreen University in Latakia city, was arrested by members of the Syrian regime's National Defense militia in September 2014, while he was passing through one of the regime's checkpoints in Latakia city. His family has been able to visit him only once since then, on Monday, January 25, 2016, in Seydnaya Military Prison in Damascus Suburbs governorate.

²⁵ We contacted him via phone in June 2022.

SNHR spoke with Mr. Emad²⁶, Saeed's friend, who told us: **"Saeed was pursuing his university studies and working at the same time in a restaurant in Latakia city. After he was arrested by Syrian regime forces at a checkpoint, we did not receive any news about him. A lawyer was appointed by his family to reach his detention place, where he was detained in Seydnaya Military Prison in Damascus Suburbs governorate, where his father was able to visit him, before any news about him was cut off again. When his father asked about him via people, he was informed that he had died, but we were not sure if this was true. In 2021, a former detainee from Khan Sheikhoun city in the suburbs of Idlib told us that Saeed was detained with him in the seventh dormitory in Seydnaya Military Prison. After his father visited him, Saeed fell ill and contracted tuberculosis and was transferred to Tishreen Military Hospital, and no one saw him again."**

Ahmad Muhammad Eid and his cousin Abdul Ghafour Ahmad Eid, were born in 1980 and 1994 respectively. Ahmad, who was working at an electronic repair shop at the time of his arrest, and Abdul Ghafour, who was a salesman with his father at a store, both from Aleppo city, were arrested by personnel from the Syrian regime's Military Security Force on Wednesday, November 16, 2016, in a raid on one of their relative's homes in al Ashrafiya neighborhood in Aleppo city, and taken to the Military Security Branch in Aleppo city. Since that date, both have been forcibly disappeared.



Ahmad Muhammad Eid



Abdul Ghafour Ahmad Eid

SNHR spoke with Mr. Ahmad²⁷, Abdul Ghafour's father and Ahmad Eid's uncle, who told us: **"My son Abdul Ghafour was working with me in a shop selling plastic bags, while my nephew Ahmad was working on the maintenance of electronic devices. After we left the areas besieged by Syrian regime forces in Aleppo city heading to the areas under the control of the latter on Tuesday, November 15, 2016, personnel from a Military Security Force patrol raided my sister's house where we were, the next day, and arrested my nephew Ahmad, my son Abdul Ghafour, and my other son Muhammad, without knowing the reason for the arrest, although I asked the patrol personnel. A week later, my son Muhammad was released from the Military Security Branch in Aleppo city, which was the last time that Abdul Ghafour and Ahmad were seen. We have been unable to find out their whereabouts or their fate ever since."**

B. ISIS (Self-proclaimed 'Islamic State'):

Following the announcement of its establishment in April 2013, ISIS used a strategy of kidnappings and enforced disappearances against all categories in society and in every area it controlled or was present in, launching many military attacks that were accompanied by mass kidnappings of civilians, especially during its attacks on areas with an ethnic or religious minority, targeting anyone opposing its presence, including activists, and singling out foreign workers and media workers, as well as targeting civilians in raids and at checkpoints on multiple pretexts. Those forcibly disappeared by the group also included fighters from groups opposing ISIS, which had also previously established at least 54 main detention centers in areas under its control in northeastern Syria, in addition to dozens of secret detention centers. In a previous report, entitled [The Black Bottom](#), we talked about the 19 most notable ISIS detention centers. ISIS has used enforced disappearance as a weapon of terror against the residents of the areas that came under its control or those that it attacked, and gave the families of the kidnapped/disappeared no opportunity to search for or ask about their family members, but rather persecuted and terrorized the families for asking about their loved ones in many cases. Through our continuous monitoring process, we have documented six main variants of the enforced disappearance strategy used by ISIS, that have been practiced in a widespread manner, which we presented and analyzed in a detailed report entitled 'The Most Notable ISIS Violations against Syrian Society and ISIS' Contribution to Distorting the Popular Uprising Calling for Freedom and Dignity' issued earlier this year, 2022.

Despite the defeat of ISIS since March 2019 from its last stronghold in Deir Ez-Zour, and many months before that from the governorates of Raqqqa and Hasaka, and its loss of control over all the detention centers that it previously ran, the parties that subsequently took over control of the areas formerly under ISIS' control, namely the Syrian Democratic Forces, made little effort to discover or reveal the fate of the forcibly disappeared, nor did they cooperate sufficiently with the families of the abductees, who tried by various means to investigate the fate of their loved ones.

The processes involved in tracing the fate of the people forcibly disappeared by ISIS are extremely difficult and complex, but the controlling forces, primarily Syrian Democratic Forces, which continue to detain thousands of ISIS leaders and members, bear the responsibility for conducting an actual investigation to reveal the fate of these forcibly disappeared people, and must allow local and international human rights organizations to work freely in their quest to reveal the fate of the forcibly disappeared.

Since the announcement of the establishment of ISIS up until August 2022, the SNHR team has documented the cases of at least 8,684 individuals, including 319 children and 225 women (adult female), who are still forcibly disappeared by ISIS, meaning it is responsible for 8% of the total documented number of the forcibly disappeared in Syria.

Neglecting this issue and prolonging the period of individuals' enforced disappearance will further increase related complications and societal tensions as the vast majority of the families of the forcibly disappeared who we spoke with assign the responsibility for resolving this matter to the SDF. The SNHR database shows that around 35% of the 8,684 forcibly disappeared persons have now been classified as disappeared for nearly five years.

Testimonies of victims' families and cases of persons forcibly disappeared by ISIS:

Muhammad Nour Ammouri

Muhammad, a media activist and director of Izaz Media City Center, from Izaz city in the northern suburbs of Aleppo suburbs, was arrested on Wednesday, September 18, 2013, by gunmen affiliated with ISIS in Izaz city, and was taken to an undisclosed location.



Muhammad Nour Ammouri

Hussein Ali Khalil

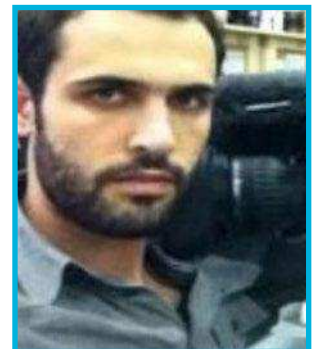
Hussein, born in 1967, from al Tabaqa city in the western suburbs of Raqqqa suburbs, was arrested by ISIS members in October 2013 in al Tabaqa city. His fate remains unknown.



Hussein Ali Khalil

Samir Kassab

Samir, a Lebanese television cameraman and a member of a Sky News team, was arrested by gunmen affiliated with ISIS on Tuesday, October 15, 2013, while he was covering field events in Aleppo governorate, and was taken to an undisclosed location.



Samir Kassab

Moayad Salloum

Moayad, a media activist and correspondent for Orient News TV, from Anadan city in the northern suburbs of Aleppo governorate, was arrested by ISIS members in November 2013, while he was passing through one of the regime checkpoints on the Castello Road north of Aleppo city, as he was on his way from Aleppo city to Anadan city, and was taken to an undisclosed location.



Moayad Salloum

Mustafa Khashman al Ahmad

Mustafa, born in 1966, from Ein al Arab city in the eastern suburbs of Aleppo governorate, was kidnapped by gunmen affiliated with ISIS on Thursday, June 12, 2014, in Manbij city in the eastern suburbs of Aleppo governorate, and was taken to an undisclosed location.



Mustafa Khashman
al Ahmad

Nour Ibrahim Haj Ahmad

Nour, born in 1995, from Aleppo city, was kidnapped by ISIS members in 2014 in Aleppo city, and was taken to an undisclosed location.



Nour Ibrahim Haj Ahmad

²⁸ We contacted him via phone in July 2022.

Naser Muhammad Kamel Hanfish

Naser, born in 1995, from Raqqa city, a fighter within the armed opposition factions, was kidnapped by ISIS members on Monday, May 12, 2014, in Zanouba village in the suburbs of Tal Abyad city, north of Raqqa governorate, and was taken to an undisclosed location.

SNHR spoke with Mr. Rafiq²⁸, a relative of Naser, who told us: **“Naser was a fighter in the ranks of the Free Army when ISIS carried out a night infiltration into Zanouba village, which was then under the control of the Free Army. The organization stormed the village and kidnapped him. We have not received any information about him ever since.”**

Ammar Muhammad Batayhi

Ammar, born in 1974, from al Abzemou town in al Atareb district, western Aleppo governorate, the commander of the ‘Saqr Quraish’ group, one of the armed opposition factions, was fighting on the fronts facing the Syrian regime forces’ 93rd Brigade at the time of his abduction, in the vicinity of Ein Eisa town in the northern suburbs of Raqqa governorate. ISIS members kidnapped him in 2014 during an ambush carried out by the organization on the road to Ein Eisa town and took him to an undisclosed location.



Ammar Muhammad Batayhi

SNHR spoke with Mr. Ref’at²⁹, a relative of Ammar, who told us: **“Ammar is married and has three daughters. He worked in a firefighting group in Aleppo before joining the Free Army, where he was the commander of the ‘Saqr Quraish’ Brigade. He was kidnapped with a number of the faction members during an ambush carried out by the organization [ISIS] on the road to Ein Eisa town in the northern suburbs of Raqqa governorate, after which the organization released the detained members, while Ammar remained in detention. We have not received any information about him ever since.”**

²⁸ We contacted him via phone in July 2022.

²⁹ We contacted him via phone in July 2022.

C. Hay'at Tahrir al Sham (an alliance composed of Fateh al Sham Front and a number of factions of the Armed Opposition):

Hay'at Tahrir al Sham (HTS) has practiced enforced disappearances against its opponents, including activists and civilians, as well as against its military adversaries, in a widespread manner in the areas that were previously under its control and the areas currently under its control in the governorates of Aleppo and Idlib. We have documented [hundreds of cases of persecution and detention](#) over criticism of or opposition to HTS' practices or policies, no matter how minor or limited this criticism was, [such as publishing a post or tweet on social media networks such as Facebook and Twitter](#), or participating in a demonstration, with HTS even persecuting victims' families or relatives for communicating with SNHR or other human rights groups to report violations against their families. As a result, many of these complainants or would-be complainants now refrain from communicating with us for fear of threats and intimidation, as detainees are subjected to humiliating security investigations and torture and some have been forcibly disappeared,³⁰ with the periods of detention and the extent of torture varying according to the accusation. Through such authoritarian practices, HTS has been able to extend its dominance over the population in areas under its control and to put an end to most protests against the group, and even to enlist individuals in the community to work with HTS for fear of being subjected to its repressive practices in retaliation for any refusal to do so. In some cases, HTS has moved towards using even more horrific practices, through assassinating, killing or exiling its opponents,³¹ as well as persecuting and threatening families simply for inquiring about the fate of their relatives. All of these policies are similar to the methods used by other repressive dictatorial powers, such as the Syrian regime. HTS was also similar to the Syrian regime, even in its mechanism for issuing and implementing amnesty decrees; on April 2, 2022, the Presidency of the Council of Ministers in the HTS' Salvation Government issued [amnesty decree No. 1](#) for many perpetrators of criminal offenses, but upon implementation, it excluded detainees held by HTS, meaning that it released only those detainees held by the Salvation Government.

Arrests/detentions, enforced disappearances, and torture are implemented through HTS' security apparatus and the general security apparatus that emerged from the group in June 2020³². To carry out its various operations, HTS has established many detention centers, both publicly known and secret facilities. Despite the claims of the senior Sharia official with HTS' security division, Ahmad Abdul Mu'ti³³, that the security body acts only according to an arrest warrant or a subpoena from the public prosecutor, both the party that issues the warrant and the public prosecutor are affiliated with HTS rather than being independent from the group, making these steps nothing more than empty formalities which exist solely for the sake of appearance. In addition, the courts to which accused individuals are referred, and the judges trying them, are not independent of HTS' authority, which undermines the supposed legitimacy of the whole process and devalues the Sharia official's claims.

³⁰ Human Rights Watch, "Syria: Arrests, Torture by Armed Group," <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/01/28/syria-arrests-torture-armed-group>

³¹ SNHR, "Hay'at Tahrir al Sham Was Most Likely Behind the Assassination of Raed Fares and Hamoud Jneid in Kafranbel City," <https://sn4hr.org/blog/2018/11/29/52887/>

HTS continues to detain hundreds of forcibly disappeared persons, with SNHR documenting the appearance of many of these detainees in clearly coerced 'confession' videos filmed in HTS detention centers, in which they supposedly confess to their dealings with the US-led coalition to eliminate ISIS or to plotting against HTS. All the individuals who appeared in these videos were subsequently disappeared again. Many families of those forcibly disappeared in HTS detention centers have been subjected to fraud by networks connected to HTS, which have blackmailed them financially in exchange for the release of the disappeared or for obtaining information about their loved ones' fate. In many cases, [HTS has carried out extrajudicial executions](#) without informing most of the victims' families of their loved ones' fate or handing over their bodies in order to avoid further public hostility towards the group. In addition to subjecting the families to more grief and constant worry about their missing loved ones.

To accommodate the huge number of current and prospective detainees, HTS has established numerous detention centers in many areas under its control. It is extremely difficult to find out the names and locations of all these detention centers since HTS ensures their location is kept secret and prevents anyone from talking about them. Through extensive efforts lasting for several months, the SNHR team managed to identify at least 46 permanent detention centers affiliated with HTS located in Idlib governorate, the western suburbs of Aleppo governorate, and Latakia suburbs in northwest Syria. At the beginning of 2022, we issued an [extensive report](#) that detailed HTS' practices with regard to its detainees.

We believe that these detention centers currently hold approximately 2,327 detainees either imprisoned or forcibly disappeared by HTS. Our database shows that dozens of individuals have spent long periods of up to five years in detention, with the vast majority of them categorized as forcibly disappeared, and almost all also being subjected to some form of torture.

HTS generally prevents family members or lawyers from visiting detainees, and many survivors told us that they had not received any visits for the entire duration of their detention. Some other detainees, meanwhile, reported receiving visits, but noted that these were very few and far between, with an average of one visit every six months.

According to the SNHR's database, at least 2,373 individuals, including 46 children and 44 women (adult female), detained by HTS, since the announcement of the establishment of Hay'at Tahrir al Sham in early 2012, are still being held as of August 2022. At least 2,071 of these individuals, including 14 children and 29 women, have been forcibly disappeared.

Testimonies of victims' families and cases of persons forcibly disappeared by HTS:

Tareq Muhammad Batayhi

Tareq, born in 1986, from al Abzemou town in al Atareb district, western Aleppo governorate, who was a commander in the ranks of the armed opposition factions, living in Kafr Amma town in the western suburbs of Aleppo governorate, when he was arrested by gunmen affiliated with HTS (formerly Jabhat al Nusra) in 2015, in Reef al Muhanesin area in the western suburbs of Aleppo governorate, and was taken to an undisclosed location.



Tareq Muhammad Batayhi

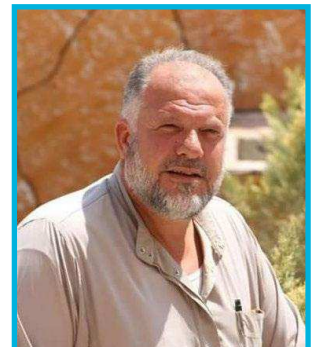
SNHR spoke with Mr. Ref'at³⁴, a relative of Tareq, who told us: **"Tareq is married and has three daughters. He took command of the 'Saqr Quraish' Brigade after his brother Ammar, who was kidnapped by ISIS. Since Jabhat al Nusra kidnapped him, we have not received any information about him. Although his family asked Jabhat al Nusra about him, they denied detaining him."**

Jumah Omar Hammadi

Jumah, born in 1989, a media activist who's nicknamed Jumah al Omari, from Kafr Hamra village in the western suburbs of Aleppo governorate, was a law student whose studies had been suspended in 2011. He was arrested by gunmen affiliated with HTS on Monday, October 29, 2018, along with his uncle Muhammad Jumah Hammadi, while they were in Termanein village in the northern suburbs of Idlib governorate. Their fate remains unknown to the SNHR, as well as to their families.



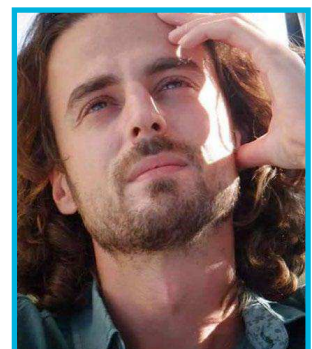
Media activist Jumah Omar Hammadi



Muhammad Jumah Hammadi

Qusai al Salloum

Qusai, a media activist and member of the Jisr al Shoghour Coordination, from Jisr al Shoghour city in the northern suburbs of Idlib, is married with two young daughters. He was arrested by gunmen affiliated with HTS on Thursday, June 25, 2015, in al Jdaida village in the southern suburbs of Idlib. His fate remains unknown.



Qusai al Salloum

Razzouq Abdul Hamid Aboud

Razzouq, a 63-year-old man from Sarmin city in the northern suburbs of Idlib governorate, was arrested by HTS personnel on Thursday, April 21, 2022, in a raid on his home in Sarmin city after he criticized HTS' policies. His fate remains unknown.

D. Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (the Democratic Union Party):

Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) have practiced the policies of kidnapping and detention in the areas under their control, either through campaigns of raids, or through arrests at temporary checkpoints that they establish periodically. The SDF has also established official and secret detention centers in the areas it controls in Aleppo, Deir Ez-Zour, and Raqqa. Following in the footsteps of the Syrian regime, the SDF imprisons those they arrest in detention centers without putting them on trial and prevent their families from visiting or communicating with them or appointing lawyers. Despite this, no clear charges have been brought against these detainees, with the SDF targeting activists, humanitarian workers, and political opponents who criticize their policies, as well as detaining civilians under different pretexts, such as having kinship relationships with individuals in the Armed Opposition/Syrian National Army or accusing them of having links with ISIS. In many of their detentions and enforced disappearances, SDF personnel have targeted individuals on the basis of their ethnic background, with victims often remaining under enforced disappearance for many years, during which time the disappeared individuals spend several months in solitary confinement. We have noted that the SDF has released a number of those detained after concluding agreements with dignitaries and Sheikhs of the tribes in the areas from which the detainees come.

The SDF have sought to introduce legislation legitimizing all their operations of repression, detention, enforced disappearance, and kidnapping under two main pretexts, namely forced conscription and fighting terrorism.

Many of the children detained or abducted for forced conscription by the SDF have also been subjected to enforced disappearance, with their families prevented from obtaining any information about them, and their disappearance which, in many cases, lasts for up to two years.

According to the SNHR's database, as of August 2022, at least 4,224 individuals, including 751 children and 523 women (adult female), are still detained by SDF, having been detained at some point since the SDF's establishment - that is, since the establishment of the Kurdish Democratic Union Party's Self-Management Forces, in January 2014. At least 2,629 of these individuals, including 143 children and 107 women, have been forcibly disappeared.

Testimonies of victims' families and cases of persons forcibly disappeared by SDF:

Ahmad Othman Sidou

Ahmad, a member of the Afrin Organization of the Kurdistan Democratic Party - Syria, from al Amiriya village (Mirkan), which is administratively a part of Afrin city in the suburbs of Aleppo governorate, was 57 years old when he was arrested by the SDF on Tuesday, September 10, 2013, from his home in al Sheikh Maqsoud neighborhood in Aleppo city, and taken to an undisclosed location.



Ahmad Othman Sidou

Khader Sayel al Muhammad

Khader, born in 1943, from Hammar al Ali village in the western suburbs of Deir Ez-zour governorate, who was living in al Arba'in village in the suburbs of Ras al Ein city, north of Hasaka governorate, was arrested by the SDF on Monday, June 15, 2015, while he was in the center of the Internal Security Forces' (Asayish) center in Ras al Ein city.

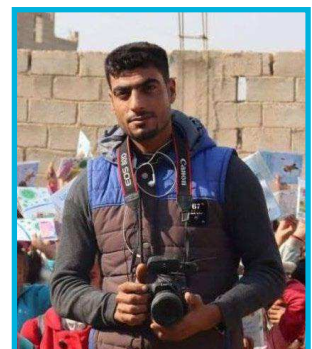


Khader Sayel al Muhammad

SNHR spoke with Mr. Abdul Aziz Ismail al Muhammad³⁵, Khader's son, who told us: **"My father was working as a farmer. On June 15, 2015, he went to the Asayish center in Ras al Ein city to obtain approval from them to harvest his crop, and they arrested him inside the center and asked the taxi driver who drove him there to leave while my father would stay there. According to the information that's been leaked to us, he had relatives affiliated with the 'Free Army', though we know that we, his children, have no relationship or participation in the ranks of the Free Army. We used various methods to find out where my father was detained and his fate, and we also resorted to many humanitarian organizations and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner, without getting any information."**

Ali Saleh al Wakaa

Ali, a media activist from Abu Hamam city, which is administrative-ly a part of al Sh'aitat area in the eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate, was arrested by the SDF on Thursday, February 4, 2021, in Hajin city's Hospital in the eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate, during a visit by a delegation of the US-led Coalition to inspect the rehabilitation operations in the hospital, and was taken to an undisclosed location.



Ali Saleh al Wakaa

Muhammad Awad al Hanif

Muhammad, known as Wisam al Ahmad, a thirty-two-year-old media activist from Homs city, who had been working as a cameraman for 'Watan Radio', was arrested by SDF personnel in a raid on his home near the State Security Circle northwest of Raqqqa city on Monday, May 16, 2022. He was taken to an undisclosed location.

Ms. Helen Ahmad al Ismail

Helen, aged 19, from Raqqqa city, was arrested by SDF personnel on Wednesday, June 15, 2022, in a raid on her father's pharmacy near al Naeem Circle in the city center. She was taken to an undisclosed location.



Ms. Helen Ahmad al Ismail

Hasan Dakhil al Khattab

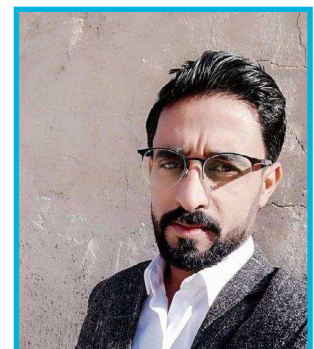
Hasan, a 45-year-old man from Dukhan village, which is administratively a part of al Jarniya district, northwest of Raqqqa governorate, was arrested by SDF personnel in a raid on his house in Dukhan village on Sunday, July 10, 2022, on charges of communicating with people living in areas under the control of the Syrian National Army in the northern suburbs of Raqqqa governorate, and was taken to the Central Prison in Raqqqa city.

Muhammad Ibrahim al Hasan

Muhammad, a 25-year-old man from al Meshairfa neighborhood in Hasaka city, was arrested by SDF personnel on Thursday, June 2, 2022, while he was passing through one of the SDF checkpoints at al Sabbagh roundabout area, north of Hasaka city, as he was on his way to work, and was taken to an undisclosed location.

Omar Wadihi al Muhammad

Omar, born in 1995, from al Tabaqa city in the western suburbs of Raqqqa governorate, was arrested by SDF personnel on Tuesday, June 14, 2022, in a raid on his home in al Thani neighborhood of al Tabaqa city, in connection with criticizing the poor services in the National Hospital in Raqqqa city, on his Facebook page, and was taken to an undisclosed location.



Omar Wadihi al Muhammad

Teacher Nazliya Rashid Sheikho, and her brother, Farhad

Nazliya and Farhad, aged 32 and 38 years old respectively, from Hasiya village of Ma'batli county in the northern suburbs of Aleppo governorate, who were living in Aleppo city, were arrested by SDF personnel on Monday, July 11, 2022, in a raid on their home in al Sheikh Maqsood neighborhood in Aleppo city, and were taken to an undisclosed location.



Farhad Rashid Sheikho, teacher
Nazliya's brother

E. The Armed Opposition/Syrian National Army:

The armed opposition forces/Syrian National Army followed a policy of detention and kidnapping in both the areas that were previously under their control and those currently under their control in the governorates of Aleppo, Raqqa, and Hasaka. Despite the establishment of a judicial body empowered to issue arrest and detention warrants, and executive bodies for the civil and military police, these remained nominal and with limited powers. Various factions practice detentions/arrests in a way more like kidnapping, while detentions are carried out in secret and unofficial detention centers affiliated with each faction separately, and most of these detentions are classified as enforced disappearances, or the victims are taken hostage and released in exchange for possession of property or payment of ransom money.

The Armed Opposition factions/Syrian National Army have used enforced disappearance against activists and those criticizing their practices, and often resort to kidnappings and arrests either through raids or through temporary checkpoints that they establish periodically, and take detainees to detention centers without subjecting them to trials, and prevent their families from visiting them or communicating with them or appointing a lawyer, while bringing no clear charges against them. The Armed Opposition factions/Syrian National Army also use the pretext of individuals having formerly joining the Self-Management Authority or SDF as a cover for the practice of detentions/arrests of an ethnic character, most of which go on to be classified as enforced disappearances, and which are mainly concentrated in the Afrin area in the northern suburbs of Aleppo governorate, with the period of enforced disappearance often lasting for years, during which the disappeared person is not subject to any trial and his/ her fate remains linked to a decision taken by the faction that carried out the arrest with no judicial involvement.

According to the SNHR's database, at least 3,864 individuals, including 361 children and 868 women (adult female), are still detained by the various Armed Opposition factions/Syrian National Army since 2011 to date, in all the areas it controlled or controls. At least 2,827 of these individuals, including 249 children and 517 women, have been forcibly disappeared.

Testimonies of victims' families and cases of persons forcibly disappeared by the Armed Opposition/Syrian National Army:

The child, Muhammad Mustafa Othman

Muhammad, from Khazyan village (Khazyana), which is administratively a part of Afrin city, north of Aleppo governorate, was 13 years old when he was arrested by Syrian National Army personnel on Sunday, March 18, 2018, in a raid on the village. On Saturday, June 25, 2022, his family received information that he was detained in al Ra'ee Prison in the northern suburbs of Aleppo governorate.



The child, Muhammad Mustafa Othman

Ms. Arin Fakhri Muslem

Arin, a 35-year-old woman from Sherkan village (Shetka), which is administratively a part of Afrin city in the northern suburbs of Aleppo governorate, was arrested by Syrian National Army personnel while she was passing through one of their checkpoints at the entrance to Afrin city on Tuesday, May 3, 2022. She was taken to an undisclosed location.



Ms. Arin Fakhri Muslem

Yousef Yaqoub Abdul Aziz

Yousef, the 67-year-old imam of the Salah al Din al Ayoubi Mosque in the old Afrin neighborhood in Afrin city north of Aleppo governorate, from Simalka village, which is administratively a part of Afrin city, was arrested by Syrian National Army personnel on Thursday, February 17, 2022, in a raid on his home in Villat Street in the city's Jam'iyet al Mu'almein neighborhood, and taken to an undisclosed location.



Yousef Yaqoub Abdul Aziz

Muhammad Yousef Houro

Muhammad, born in 1984, a university student at the University of Aleppo's Faculty of Engineering, was arrested by gunmen affiliated with an armed opposition faction on Saturday, December 28, 2013, in the Masaken Hanano neighborhood of Aleppo city, and taken to an undisclosed location.



Muhammad Yousef Houro

Jowan Hussein al Jumah

Jowan, born in 1995, from al Derbasiya city in the northern suburbs of Hasaka governorate, was arrested by Syrian National Army personnel on Saturday, October 12, 2019, while they were in control of Ras al Ein city in the northern suburbs of Hasaka governorate, and taken to an undisclosed location.



Jowan Hussein al Jumah

Ahmad Rashid

Ahmad, a 24-year-old man from al Ras al Ahmar village, which is administratively a part of Afrin city in the northern suburbs of Aleppo governorate, was arrested by Syrian National Army personnel in May 2018, while he was passing through one of their checkpoints on the road connecting Afrin city with Kafr Jana village in the northern suburbs of Aleppo governorate, and taken to an undisclosed location.



Ahmad Rashid

Kawa Rashid Ahmad Alikou

Kawa, born in 1989, from Darkreh village, which is administratively a part of Afrin city in the northern suburbs of Aleppo governorate, was arrested by gunmen affiliated with an armed opposition faction on Monday, October 8, 2018, in Afrin city, on charges of collaborating with the SDF, and taken to an undisclosed location.



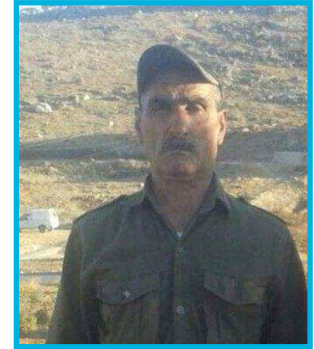
Kawa Rashid Ahmad Alikou

Masoud Yousef

Masoud, from Musikan village, which is administratively a part of Afrin city in the northern suburbs of Aleppo governorate, was 42 years old at the time of his arrest by gunmen affiliated with an armed opposition faction on Sunday, March 18, 2018, in Afrin city, after which he was taken to an undisclosed location.

Muhammad Yasher Ma'mou

Muhammad, born in 1975, from Afrin city in the suburbs of Aleppo, was arrested by Syrian National Army personnel in 2018 in Afrin city, on charges of collaborating with the SDF, and taken to an undisclosed location.



Muhammad Yasher Ma'mou

VI. Conclusions and Recommendations

Legal conclusions

The Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) believes that the Syrian regime has clearly demonstrated a lack of commitment to the international agreements and treaties it has ratified, in particular the International Covenant on Political and Civil Rights. In addition, the Syrian regime has violated a number of articles of the Syrian constitution itself, detaining hundreds of thousands of detainees for many years without issuing any arrest warrants or bringing any charges against them. The Syrian regime has also denied those detainees the right to an attorney and barred their families from visiting them. 68.25% of all detainees have gone on to be classified as forcibly disappeared, with the Syrian regime never informing their families of their whereabouts or fate. Any attempt by detainees' family members to inquire about their loved ones' whereabouts may put the families themselves at risk of being arrested.

Enforced disappearance is prohibited under customary international humanitarian law according to Rule 98 which prohibits enforced disappearance in international and non-international armed conflicts.

Rule 117 of the same law states, "Each party to the conflict must take all feasible measures to account for persons reported missing as a result of armed conflict and must provide their family members with any information it has on their fate."

Furthermore, international criminal law prohibits enforced disappearance. According to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, the systematic practice of enforced disappearances is, by its very nature, a crime against humanity (Article 7, paragraph 1-i), which applies to the actions of the Syrian regime.

The other parties involved in Syria have also practiced the crime of enforced disappearance, though without the centralized and systematic nature of the Syrian regime, which differs from them in the vast quantity and nationwide distribution of cases, although the ISIS group and HTS are similar to the Syrian regime in the widespread and systematic nature of these practices, as shown by our data.

Recommendations

UN Security Council and United Nations

- Hold an emergency meeting to discuss this critical issue that threatens the fates of nearly 111,000 individuals and terrorizes the whole of Syrian society.
- Investigate individuals involved in the crime of enforced disappearance in Syria and impose sanctions on them.
- Work to reveal the fate of the forcibly disappeared persons in parallel with or prior to the start of the upcoming rounds of the political process, and establish a strict timetable to reveal their fate.
- Establish methods and mechanisms to prevent the Syrian regime from persecuting and tampering with the living and the dead, as this poses a major threat to the security and stability of the Syrian state.
- The Security Council should act to end torture and deaths due to torture inside Syrian regime detention centers, and to save whoever is left among the detainees as quickly as possible.
- Take action under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations to protect the detainees from certain death inside detention centers, and to put an end to the epidemic of enforced disappearance that continues to plague Syria, posing a threat to the security and stability of Syrian society.
- The Security Council should continue with implementation of the resolutions it has adopted, most notably Resolution 2042 and Resolution 2139, and must hold parties responsible for compliance with them. The Security Council should follow its resolutions with action.
- Devote more attention to the issue of the forcibly disappeared in Syria, particularly given the magnitude of the numbers of disappeared and the fact that this is a crime against humanity. This issue must be addressed urgently.
- All detainees must be immediately allowed to contact their families, as well as lawyers and doctors. Binding guarantees must be established to prevent recurrence of lethal torture inside detention centers.
- Compel the Syrian regime to open all detention centers before the International Committee of the Red Cross and all United Nations committees.

The Syrian regime

- Stop treating the Syrian state as private family property.
- Stop terrorizing the Syrian people through enforced disappearances, torture, and death due to torture.
- Stop tampering with and exploiting civil records in service of the goals of the ruling family.
- Take responsibility for all legal and material costs and compensate the victims and their families from the resources of the Syrian state.

The Syrian regime's allies, Russia and Iran

- Stop supporting a regime involved in the disappearance of more than 95,000 Syrian people, since that support is considered complicity in crimes against humanity.
- Human Rights Council
- Follow up on the issue of the detainees and forcibly disappeared persons in Syria, shed light on this issue at all periodic annual meetings, and dedicate a special session to addressing this horrifying threat.

Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)

- Prepare a special and extensive report shedding light on this catastrophe, including analysis of all of its psychological, social, and economic ramifications, and support active human rights organizations in Syria.

UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances

- Increase the manpower available to work on the issue of forcibly disappeared persons at the office of the Special Rapporteur on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances in Syria in light of the massive level and extent of cases of enforced disappearance in the country.

Arab and international human rights organizations

- Advocate for the issue of the forcibly disappeared in Syria, condemn the Syrian regime and expose its brutal practices, and be resolute and constant in demanding that the fate of all the forcibly disappeared be revealed.

Solidarity

We wish to express our complete and constant solidarity with the victims and their families. We also extend our sincere thanks and appreciation to the families and to local activists, without whose efforts we could not have prepared and completed the report in such an exhaustive way.



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