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Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in September 2023

**No Fewer than 50 Attacks on Vital Civilian Facilities
in September by the Syrian Regime and the SDF**

Wednesday 04 October 2023

The Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR), founded in June 2011, is a non-governmental, independent group that is considered a primary source for the OHCHR on all death toll-related analyses in Syria.

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I. Introduction and Methodology

Syria has seen an unprecedented number of violations since the start of the popular uprising for democracy in March 2011. Extrajudicial killings, arrests, torture, and enforced disappearances are at the forefront of the violations which the Syrian people have endured for over a decade. While the Syrian regime and its affiliated militias were the sole perpetrators of these violations for approximately the first seven months of the uprising, other parties subsequently joined in, perpetrating their own share of human rights violations against Syrians. The Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) has been documenting human rights violations to the best of our abilities since the earliest days of the uprising in 2011. In 2012 and 2013, as the numbers of human rights violations rose sharply, our team was confronted by the need to issue periodic monthly reports, in order to highlight the continued suffering of the Syrian people. At that stage, we began releasing eight reports each month, and, in tandem with this, created a large and still growing database which now houses the details of hundreds of thousands of incidents sorted into the various categories of violations that have emerged during our documentation work.

By the end of 2018, however, the level of violence had fallen to some degree, which prompted another change in our reporting strategy. At this point, we opted for releasing one monthly report summarizing the most notable human rights violations in Syria that we were able to document in the previous month. As such, this latest report focuses on the human rights situation in Syria in September 2023. In this report, we summarize the civilian deaths we have documented in this period at the hands of the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces, as well as providing details of the numbers of arrests and enforced disappearances. The report also sheds light on the attacks on civilian objects documented by SNHR's team during last month. For a detailed explanation of our [methodology](#), please visit the following link.

This report only represents the bare minimum of the actual severity and magnitude of the violations that occurred. Also, it doesn't include any analysis of the profound social, economic, and psychological ramifications of these events.

II. Brief Summary of September's Most Notable Developments

Bombings and military operations

In September, Syrian regime forces continued to target northwestern Syria with a sharply increased numbers of ground attacks as they've done since August. We recorded intensified attacks on the villages and towns of Jabal al-Zawiya in southern Idlib, eastern rural Idlib, western rural Aleppo, western rural Hama, and northern rural Latakia, all of which are in close proximity to the dividing lines. The attacks also targeted [eastern](#) and western rural Aleppo, as well as southern, northern, and eastern rural Idlib, which are all far from the dividing lines. These attacks resulted in the deaths of many civilians, including women and children, and [damaged many civilian facilities](#). On September 1, for instance, five children were killed [in a regime artillery attack](#) targeting al-Mahsanli village to the northwest of Manbij city in eastern rural Aleppo, while [a baby boy was killed](#) and three other civilians injured in another attack the same day targeting Sarmin city in eastern Idlib. On September 4, [one young girl was killed and her sister was injured](#) when one of the rockets fired from a rocket launcher by regime forces landed in front of the tent where the two girls were living with their family after fleeing the recent attacks on Afis village in eastern Idlib. [In another rocket launcher attack the next day](#), September 5, regime forces targeted al-Mozara village in Jabal al-Zawiya in southern Idlib, hitting the Banat al-Mozara school and the Grand 'al-Kabir' Mosque, partially damaging both buildings, as well as hitting the village's cemetery. It should be

noted that [September 5 also saw an escalation](#) of Syrian regime ground attacks, in tandem with aerial attacks by the regime's Russian ally on the villages and towns in the western sector of Jabal al-Zawiya, as the regime attempted to recapture a number of points that armed opposition factions and Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) successfully took control of at the end of August. Meanwhile, [two civilians, including a woman, were killed](#) in a regime rocket attack on a camp for internally displaced persons (IDPs) on the western outskirts of Sarmin city in eastern Idlib.



👁 Remnants of a rocket fired by Syrian regime forces at al-Mozara town in Jabal al-Zawiya in southern rural Idlib - September 5, 2023 ©SNHR

Meanwhile, clashes continued in the rural areas of Manbij in eastern Aleppo governorate, as Arab tribes are still trying to take over those areas currently under the control of Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). These clashes involved indiscriminate bombardment of civilians and artillery attacks by the SDF. On September 6, for instance, SDF artillery forces bombed [the Omar bin al-Khattab Mosque](#) in Oulahsalli village to the northwest of Manbij city in eastern rural Aleppo, partially destroying the mosque building and injuring three media workers who were taking shelter in the mosque from the bombardment. The next day, September 7, SDF artillery forces targeted a camp housing Bedouin tribes on the eastern outskirts of Bershaya village, administratively affiliated with al-Bab area in eastern Aleppo, [killing one civilian](#). On September 22, an SDF sniper stationed in al-Shuyoukh area [shot a civilian dead](#) as he was fishing on the bank of the Euphrates River adjacent to Jarablos city.

From September 20-27, infighting erupted between two sub-factions within Ahrar al-Sham's Eastern Branch. The two groups engaged in hostilities when one of them announced its intention to join the Syrian National Army's (SNA) 2nd division, in opposition to the pro-HTS faction. The clashes extended across multiple areas in eastern Aleppo, including the villages of al-Nu'man, Ihteimlat, and Souran Izaz, as well as the outskirts of al-Bab city. The root of the infighting was a dispute over the control of al-Hamran Crossing¹ that connects SNA-controlled areas and areas under the control of the SDF. Both sides suffered fatalities and injuries in the fighting, while three civilians were wounded. The infighting also caused an additional displacement wave, with dozens of families fleeing the areas close to the frontlines.

1. The checkpoint is set up on the road where fuel tankers that transfer fuel from SDF-held areas to SNA-held areas are located.

Elsewhere, the civilian peaceful demonstrations in regime-held areas continued in September for the second consecutive month, mostly in the two governorates of Suwayda and Daraa. The protestors blamed Bashar Assad for the dire state of the country, and called for ousting the regime. These protests come at a time of multiple, unprecedented and increasingly dire economic, living, and human rights crises in Syria. For instance, a Syrian state employee currently earns an average monthly salary of no more than approximately \$10, which is a natural outcome of the Syrian regime's oppressive policies since March 2011. The protestors also called for releasing those who were arrested for taking part or supporting the demonstrations. On September 13, Syrian regime forces broke up a demonstration in front of the Baath Party's headquarters in Suwayda city using live bullets, which injured no fewer than five civilians to varying degrees.

On September 20, infighting erupted between the pro-regime National Defense militias and Syrian regime forces inside what is commonly known as the 'security square'² in Hasaka city. The clashes lasted for days, and ended with Syrian regime forces taking over the house where the commander of the National Defense militias in the city had been hiding. The clashes led to the displacement of many families who lived in the security square, who fled to other SDF-held neighborhoods in the same city. Furthermore, schools and other government departments in the security square suspended operations until further notice. [On September 21](#), a mortar shell fired by Syrian regime forces hit a house in al-Nasra neighborhood in Hasaka city center, killing an IDP child from Deir Ez-Zour.

Meanwhile, clashes between Deir Ez-Zour Military Council and the SDF in Deir Ez-Zour also further intensified. Since breaking out on August 27, the clashes have now spread from northern to eastern Deir Ez-Zour governorate, leading to more civilian casualties. Both sides have been responsible for indiscriminate attacks that resulted in civilian fatalities. On September 2, an artillery attack by the SDF in Hajin city in eastern Deir Ez-Zour governorate [killed two women and injured 20 others](#). On September 9, a child was shot dead by SDF personnel while returning to his original hometown of Theyban from al-Mayadeen via a river crossing. The SDF has also been using unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), commonly known as drones in its attacks on villages in rural Deir Ez-Zour. One such attack was carried out on September 4, when a shell fired by an SDF-operated drone killed a civilian. Another drone attack took place on September 25, when an SDF drone targeted the river crossing connecting the two towns of Theyban and Mahkan in eastern Deir Ez-Zour, [killing a woman and her granddaughter](#) who were trying to flee to Theyban. [The SDF has also seized control of dozens of civilian facilities](#), mostly schools and medical facilities, in the course of those clashes, and repurposed them as military enclaves. Naturally, the civilians in the area have been forced to endure the loss of the crucial services previously provided by the commandeered facilities.

On September 14, Volker Türk, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, released [a statement](#) warning of the consequences of the recent clashes in northeastern Syria and the security concerns that may lead to further exacerbation of the already-dire humanitarian situation in the region. The statement further revealed that 23 at least had been killed there in the preceding weeks, according to the UN Human Rights Office (OHCHR). The statement adds that ["dozens have been arrested by the SDF for their alleged involvement in the hostilities. As a result, thousands of civilians have fled their homes."](#)

2. This is an area under the control of Syrian regime forces containing a number of neighborhoods and interconnected streets in Hasaka city center, where many regime security branches and headquarters buildings are located.

September also saw more civilians [killed by landmines](#), with SNHR documenting new fatalities as a result of landmine explosions every month so far in 2023. In September, three civilians were killed by landmine explosions. This brings the total number of victims killed by landmines since the beginning of 2023 to 99 civilians, including 24 children and eight women. On September 26, [one civilian was killed](#) by the explosion of a landmine whose source we have not been able to identify while harvesting crops on his agricultural land in the vicinity of Kherbt Ghazala town in eastern rural Daraa governorate.

September also saw more [assassinations of civilians](#) at the hands of unidentified assailants across Syria, mostly in the governorates of Aleppo, Daraa and Deir Ez-Zour. On September 3, [a civilian](#) was killed by the explosion of an improvised explosive device (IED) whose source we have not been able to identify in eastern Daraa governorate.

On September 13, Israeli forces carried out a ground attack originating from the direction of the Mediterranean Sea that targeted locations of the Syrian regime's Air Defense in Tartus governorate. [According to the Syrian regime's Sana Arab News Agency \(SANA\)](#), two regime troops were killed in the attack that also caused material damages. The agency also reported that the Israeli Air Force carried out an attack on the same evening on some sites in Hama governorate. On September 21, [the Russia Today website](#) reported an attack by an Israeli drone in western Rural Damascus 'Rif Dimshaq' governorate, which killed two Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) members.

Living and Security Conditions

In September, economic, living, services, and security conditions continued to decline across all sectors in areas under Syrian regime control, with a particularly sharp deterioration seen in the services sector. Regarding the power crisis specifically, the regime government is still implementing a rationing policy. [Drinking water](#) is still scarce [in many regime areas](#) due to the power rationing policy adopted by the Syrian regime which affects the process of pumping water, all while drinking water brought by water suppliers is also seeing a price hike, further exacerbating civilians' suffering.

Regime-held areas also had to deal with security issues in September, with many attacks and thefts from regime security institutions. On September 15, for instance, the [al-Watan Newspaper](#) reported that medium-voltage cables feeding Abu al-Fedaa subdistrict in western Hama city were stolen and wrecked for the second time in a week. The theft also caused a fire and material damage, according to the newspaper.

In addition to these crises, residents in regime-held areas are also still grappling with rising prices for virtually all goods, most crucially food supplies, including vegetables. Fuel also saw another price rise in September. [On September 17](#), the Syrian regime's Ministry of Internal Trade and Consumer Protection published a price gazette that put the price of one liter of premium octane 95 fuel at 14,660 S.P., free diesel at 13,000 S.P., fuel at 8,864,200 S.P. per ton, liquified gas 'dukma' at 10,451,400 S.P. per ton. Naturally, these decisions led to a sharp increase in the price of all other goods as manufacturing and transportation costs again increased, further crippling public life in regime-held areas.

September also saw an unprecedented fall in the exchange value of the Syrian Pound (SYP). In the last week of September, one US dollar equaled 13,300 SYP, according to [sp-today](#), a website that monitors the Syrian currency's exchange rate. Naturally, this led to more price rises and to more goods becoming unavailable in markets.

In northwestern Syria, meanwhile, civilians' already severe suffering continues to worsen under deteriorating economic and living conditions in parallel with rising prices for food and grocery supplies, all intensified by the people's waning purchasing power due to widespread unemployment and poverty, especially in those areas housing internally displaced persons (IDPs) camps, with wages for those in work in these areas also continuing to decline. Further exacerbating the dire living situation was the declining value of the Turkish Lira, which has plummeted to a rate of 27 TRY to 1 USD. Regarding services, many areas suffered water outages, as the fragile mains water network was affected by frequent power outages.

The situation in northeastern Syria remains similarly dire, with worsening living and security conditions. Prices of food, fuel and other essential commodities in the region continue to rise due to the controlling forces' failure to regulate the market. The situation further deteriorated in September with clashes breaking out in the governorates of Deir Ez-Zour and Hasaka, which made it even more difficult for civilians in those areas to secure water and day-to-day needs such as food and medication.

Forced displacement

The suffering of IDPs **in northwestern Syria** also continued to worsen in September in relation to both living conditions and the ongoing humanitarian crisis, with the humanitarian needs of millions of IDPs reaching unprecedented levels. The crisis is further intensified by the ever-increasing prices, especially of food supplies, on one hand, and widespread unemployment and virtually non-existent purchasing power among residents of the area on the other. Moreover, we recorded more fires in September. One such fire took place on [September 21](#), on the outskirts of Izaz city in northern Aleppo, which completely destroyed one tent and its contents.

September also saw new displacement movements in northwestern Syria, [with dozens of families fleeing the areas of Jabal al-Zawiya in southern Idlib](#), and to a lesser extent from eastern rural Idlib, as civilians headed for safer areas in northern Idlib in the wake of recent ground attacks by Syrian regime forces.

Similarly, dozens of families fled the villages and towns of eastern rural Aleppo, after they were targeted in artillery attacks originating from points where SDF and Syrian regime forces are stationed in tandem with clashes between the SDF and Arab tribes.



👁 Families fleeing Jabal al-Zawiya in southern rural Idlib for safer areas in northern rural Idlib in the wake of the intensified regime bombardment - September 4, 2023 ©SNHR

On September 19, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) [revealed](#) on its X (formerly Twitter) account that humanitarian assistance delivery to northwestern Syria via Bab al-Hawa Border Crossing had been resumed. On the same day, [a statement](#) was published on the UN website by Stéphane Dujarric, Spokesman for the Secretary-General, noting that the “Secretary-General welcomes the resumption of United Nations life-saving humanitarian deliveries from Türkiye into north-west Syria through the Bab al-Hawa crossing today.” It is worth noting that this convoy, which was composed of 17 trucks carrying basic and medical supplies, was the first to enter the region since July 10 after the Security Council had failed to renew the mandate of the resolution on delivering cross-border humanitarian assistance to northwestern Syria. On September 22, the OCHA [noted](#) that relief convoys will continue to cross into Syria via the Bab al-Hawa Crossing, revealing that five trucks had entered Syria that day, increasing the total number of relief trucks to enter Syria since Tuesday, September 19, to 49 (as of September 22).

In northeastern Syria, a number of families [fled the areas](#) of al-Sabha, al-Tayyana, al-Zer, al-Shahul, and Theyban in eastern Deir Ez-Zour in September in the wake of inspections and raids carried out by the SDF, in addition to the bombardment by the SDF and the ongoing clashes between Deir Ez-Zour Military council and the SDF.

On September 11, the OCHA [noted](#) that the ongoing hostilities, including bombardment, had led to the displacement of over 26,500 individuals between September 1-9. Meanwhile, clashes in northeastern Aleppo led to the displacement of nearly 4,600 families. Elsewhere in Deir Ez-Zour, the clashes that have been going on in Deir Ez-Zour since August 27 have led to the displacement of over 6,700 families.

In al-Hawl Camp in eastern rural Hasaka governorate, a group set off on September 13 that included 150 Iraqi families who are set to return from the camp to Iraq. The return was organized in coordination with the Iraqi government.

In regard to al-Rukban IDPs Camp on the Syrian-Jordanian border in eastern rural Homs, on September 25, the Syrian Emergency Task Force (SETF) announced that a new relief aid package had been delivered to the camp as part of the SETF’s Operation Syrian Oasis. The package included seeds, fertilizers, irrigation tools, school supplies for children, and basic food supplies.

On refugees and asylum seekers, on September 7, [Lebanese security forces demolished 17 residences for Syrian refugees in Qeb Ilyas Camp](#) in al-Beqaa governorate, displacing over 200 refugees. On September 19, [the website of the Lebanese TV Channel LBC](#) reported that the Lebanese army had carried out widespread raids in Brital town in al-Beqaa area that targeted wanted persons' houses and Syrian refugee camps.

Political and human rights situation

On September 3, the Syrian regime issued [Legislative Decree No. 32 of 2023](#) that repealed Legislative Decree No. 109 of August 17, 1968, and its amendments, effectively dissolving Military Field Courts. Decree No. 32 also provided for referring all cases being handled by Military Field Courts to the military judiciary which will handle those cases in accordance with the Penal Code and the Military Procedural Law adopted through Legislative Decree No. 61 of 1950 and its amendments. We, at SNHR, believe this dissolution was part of a range of policies and procedures adopted by the Syrian regime in its efforts to sweep the enforced disappearance issue under the rug, with this move coming after the regime issued its ostensible amnesty decrees and registered forcibly disappeared persons as dead in the civil registry records, and may well presage other similar regime decisions in the future. On September 12, we released a report entitled, '[An Instrument of Death and Disappearance: How the Syrian Regime Uses Military Field Courts Against Activists and Dissidents](#)', in which we noted that, between March 2011 and August 2023, the Syrian regime had executed 7,872 individuals, including 114 children and 26 women, out of no fewer than 14,843 detainees who received a death sentence at the Military Field Court. The report further reveals that no fewer than 24,047 forcibly disappeared persons, including 98 children and 39 women, had been referred to the Military Field Court in the same period, and their fate remains unknown.

On September 3, the [US Embassy in Syria](#) revealed on its X (formerly Twitter) account that Ethan Goldrich, Deputy Assistant Secretary at the US Department of State's Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs (NEA), and Major General Joel B. Vowell, Operation Inherent Resolve (OIR) Commander, had met with the SDF, the Syrian Democratic Council (SDC) and tribal leaders in Deir Ez-Zour. According to the brief statement, all sides agreed on the importance of de-escalation as soon as possible and of addressing the grievances of Deir Ez-Zour residents, as well as avoiding civilian deaths and injuries.

On September 4, the General Command of the Jordanian Armed Forces revealed on [its official website](#) that it has shot down a drone carrying narcotics that was coming from Syria, specifically from the area dubbed the 'Eastern Military Zone'. On September 24, [the Jordanian Anti-Narcotics Department](#) reported that the Jordanian Border Guard had shot down two drones carrying narcotics that were coming from Syria.

On September 4, [Amnesty International](#) stressed that the Syrian regime must ensure the right to housing is protected for the residents of earthquake-affected buildings in Aleppo amid concerns of potential unlawful demolitions of buildings deemed unsafe in the wake of the February 6 Earthquakes, as well as reports of there being bureaucratic obstacles placed in the way of those trying to repair their homes. The statement released by the group added that “We are concerned that the manner in which building-safety measures are being carried out may be adding to the difficulties faced by thousands of earthquake survivors,” noting that “Even before the earthquakes, Aleppo had suffered widespread damage due to the Syrian and Russian forces’ unlawful bombing campaign between 2012 and 2016.”

On September 6, [the French Newspaper Le Monde](#) reported that, despite the attempts made by Arab states to normalize diplomatic relations with the Syrian regime, 80 percent of Syrians are still living under the poverty line. The newspaper added that three months after the Syrian regime had been granted readmission into the Arab League, protests against the regime broke out in southern Syria. The newspaper also criticized the Syrian regime’s readmission into the Arab League for lacking any initiative to revive a comprehensive political process, pointing out that this only protracts the suffering of Syrians, as the regime’s political maneuvering has failed to conceal its inability to maintain any form of a true internal stability.

On September 7, [Izumi Nakamitsu](#), the UN Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, said in a briefing to the Security Council that, despite the fact that the Syrian regime has received a list of pending declaration, the Technical Secretary of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) has yet to receive any of the documents requested. Ms. Nakamitsu stressed in her briefing that “Considering the identified gaps, inconsistencies and discrepancies that remain unresolved, the Technical Secretariat assesses that Syria’s declaration still cannot be considered accurate and complete...”

On September 12, the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (COI) [released its latest report](#) on the human rights situation in Syria. The report, which covers the period from January 1, 2023, until June 30, 2023, notes that severe human rights violations were still taking place in the first half of 2023, while the humanitarian and economic situation has continued to worsen for over 15 million Syrians in need of humanitarian assistance. The report also highlighted that “Insecurity prevailed in [the] southern Syrian Arab Republic, notably relating to reports of ongoing drug trafficking,” and that “unrest affecting civilians continued in Dar’a governorate. Airstrikes were carried out by the Syrian Arab Air Force in western Dar’a on 27 June - the first in five years - followed by military raids on Tafas and Nawa.” With regard to northwestern Syria, the report noted that Syrian regime forces had carried out repeated bombardment of the villages and towns in the area. Meanwhile, the report also shed light on the continued arbitrary arrests and detentions at the hands of Syrian regime forces, and noted that the COI had documented deaths during detention in regime detention centers.

On September 12, COI member Hanny Megally said [in an interview with Syria TV](#) that Syria is unsafe for the return of refugees, with violations continuing. Mr. Megally underscored the significant increase in the number of people fleeing the country, noting at the same time that Syrians wishing to return are concerned about suffering violations and conscriptions.

On September 19, the US Department of State released [a joint statement](#) with the member states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), in which the states asserted their commitment to bringing about a comprehensive resolution in Syria in line with Security Council resolution 2254. The statement also stressed “the need to create secure conditions for the safe, dignified, and voluntary return of refugees and internally displaced persons consistent with UN standards.”

On September 20, Ethan Goldrich, NEA Deputy Assistant Secretary, stressed, [in an interview with Syria TV](#), that it is important for the popular protests against Bashar Assad in Suwayda city to continue until the protesters’ demands are met. Mr. Goldrich also reiterated that US sanctions will continue to be imposed on the Syrian regime, and that the US will not normalize relations with Bashar Assad. He also underlined that a political resolution is the only path forward to end the suffering of the Syrian people.

On September 21, the Syrian regime’s state news agency, [SANA](#), reported that regime head Bashar Assad had begun an official visit to the Republic of China accompanied by his wife. The visit, which was the Assads’ first since 2004, went on until September 26. It should be noted that China was one of the first countries to offer support for the Syrian regime and its violations against the Syrian people after the outbreak of the popular uprising in March 2011. China has consistently supported the Syrian regime on the international stage. We have also documented that China has abused its veto powers to shield the Syrian regime at the Security Council on 11 occasions in order to protect its impunity. China has also voted 35 times against all resolutions condemning the violations of the Syrian regime at the UN Human Rights Council (HRC). In other words, in every session in which China was a representative at the HRC, it chose to vote against the Syrian people and in favor of the Syrian regime that has committed numerous violations that amount to crimes against humanity and war crimes.

On September 21, Michael McCaul, Chairman of the US House Committee on Foreign Affairs, [condemned](#) China’s welcome of Bashar Assad whom Mr. McCaul describes as a **“brutal war criminal who has murdered thousands of Syrians with backing from Russia and Iran”**, stressing that this visit underscores the threat posed by China and its friends in Russia, Iran, and Syria.

On September 22, [Paulo Pinheiro](#), Chair of the COI, noted in his address at the 54th Session of the UNHRC that the war in Syria has not ended yet, and that the country is still unsafe for the return of refugees. Mr. Pinheiro reiterated that “Nearly twelve years in, the parties to this conflict continue to perpetrate war crimes and to violate basic human rights.” He also noted that normalizing relations with the Syrian regime in the absence of clear and tangible benchmarks is no way to break the deadlock, and might even doom Syrians to more suffering, destruction, and bloodshed.

On September 24, the [Jordanian Ammon News Agency](#) reported on a statement by Ayman al-Safadi, Jordan's Minister of Foreign Affairs, who said that out of every three attempts to smuggle narcotics from Syria to Jordan, one succeeds. Mr. Safadi stressed that drug smuggling has risen on the ground following the dialogue with the Syrian regime, which, he added, is not only a threat to Jordan but also to the Gulf countries and other states.

On September 27, [Geir O. Pedersen](#), the UN Special Envoy to Syria, said in his monthly briefing to the Security Council that a comprehensive resolution to the Syrian conflict is still "elusive", citing the gaps in political will, the distance between the fundamental positions of the parties to the conflict, the deep lack of trust, and the international climate as reasons for this deadlock. However, Mr. Pedersen stressed that "We cannot simply accept the status quo, because it will get worse and worse, it could well unravel, and this will lead to new challenges." He added that, instead of creating the conditions for a safe, dignified, and voluntary return for IDPs and refugees, civilians are still being killed and wounded by the violence, with tens of thousands displaced in the previous month. Moreover, the UN Special Envoy viewed the anti-regime protests in Suwayda governorate which had already continued for over a month at the time, in which the protestors expressed economic, social, and political grievances, as new signs of "popular frustrations" in Syria.

On September 27, [Linda Thomas Greenfield](#), the US Ambassador to the UN, said, in a briefing to the UN Security Council on the political and humanitarian situation in Syria, that the renewed protests in the country underline the importance of reaching a Syrian-led political resolution. **"And we continue to advocate that implementing Resolution 2254 remains the only viable path to ending the conflict,"** she added, further asserting, **"And U.S. sanctions will remain in place until, at minimum, there is concrete, measurable progress toward a political solution."**

On September 29, Human Rights Watch (HRW) released a statement entitled, '[No, Syria Is Still Not Safe for Refugee Returns](#)', which was framed as a rebuttal of statements made by Constantinos Ioannou, Cyprus' Minister of Interior, on September 15, in which he lamented the fact that EU states cannot currently return asylum seekers to Syria, and called for the EU to re-assess whether or not Syria was safe for the return of refugees, so that asylum seekers can be sent back. The statement noted that "Human Rights Watch has documented how Syrian security agencies arbitrarily detained, kidnapped, tortured, and killed refugees who returned to Syria between 2017 and 2021," stressing that the absence of violence in some parts of the country does not necessarily mean that the country is safe.

Accountability and advocacy

On September 6, SNHR released [a statement](#) commenting on the 14th annual report by the International Campaign to Ban Landmines - Cluster Munition Coalition (ICBL-CMC), which monitors the use of cluster munitions worldwide. The SNHR statement provided a summary of the report, which was released on September 5, and which drew upon three main sources on Syria, including the SNHR. As a member of the CMC, SNHR provides regularly updated data collected and documented by our team on the ground. As the report noted, Syria was the worst country in the world in terms of the death toll from cluster munitions from 2012 until 2021, and the second worst, after Ukraine, in 2022. The report also documented 91 deaths and injuries (85 in cluster munitions attacks, and six by the explosion of cluster munition remnants).

On September 7, Germany's Federal Public Prosecution [revealed](#) that it had arrested two Syrian citizens Amer A. and Bassil O., who are suspected of having served as commanders of the ISIS-affiliated terror group Liwa Jund al-Rahman [the Battalion of the Soldiers of Rahman], which is accused of committing war crimes against Shiite residents of Hatla village near Deir Ez-Zour. The statement further reveals that, on September 6, "they were brought before the Investigating Judge at the Federal Court of Justice who read out the arrest warrants and decided for pre-trial detention to be put into effect."

On September 21, SNHR [held an event](#), in collaboration with the US Department of State's Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor (DRL), on the sidelines of the 78th Session of the UN General Assembly. Sponsored by the United States, France, the United Kingdom, Germany, and Qatar, the event, entitled, 'Twelve Years of Suffering: Examining Human Rights Abuses and Opportunities for Accountability in Syria' discussed the ongoing human rights violations and abuses faced by Syrians and explored how the international community can advance justice and accountability efforts for perpetrators, as well as discussing issues related to displacement, refugees, and enforced disappearance.

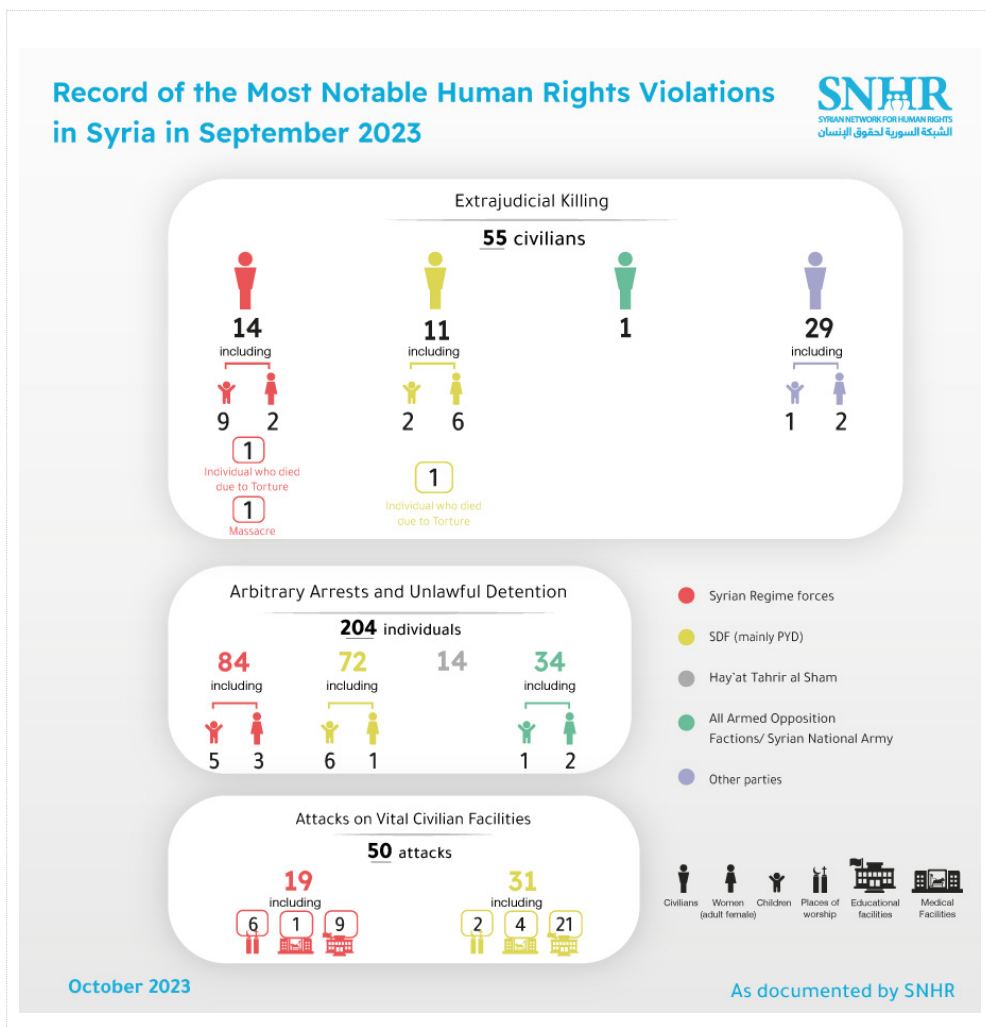
During the event, the speakers discussed the ongoing human rights violations and abuses faced by Syrians and explored how the international community can advance justice and accountability efforts for perpetrators, as well as discussing issues related to displacement, refugees, and enforced disappearance. The participant states all agreed that conditions for a safe and dignified return for refugees and IDPs are still nonexistent in Syria. On September 22, SNHR released [a statement](#) on the event.

On September 27, [the American Coalition for Syria](#) revealed that the Senate has introduced the Assad Regime **Anti-Normalization Act**, which has many aims, including to extend the CAESAR Act, prohibit the recognition or normalization of any Syrian government led by Bashar al-Assad, and expand sanctions on multiple levels within the circle of the Syrian regime and its supporters.

On September 29, SNHR released [its eighth annual report](#) on the most notable violations by Russian forces since the launch of its military intervention in Syria on September 30, 2015. The report documented the killing of **6,954 civilians**, including 2,046 children, and **1,246 attacks** on vital civilian facilities, including 223 schools, 2017 medical facilities, and 61 markets, at the hands of Russian forces. Furthermore, the report revealed that Russian forces have carried out no fewer than 237 cluster munition attacks and no fewer than 125 attacks using incendiary weapons since the launch of Russia's military intervention in Syria. The report also stressed that the ferocious level of violence shown in Russia's attacks has played a major role in displacement movements in Syria, with Russian attacks, in parallel with those of the Syrian-Iranian alliance, leading to the displacement of approximately 4.8 million people, most of whom have been displaced more than once.

III. Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in September

This report summarizes the most notable human rights violations committed by the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in Syria that were documented by SNHR in September 2023.



A. Extrajudicial killing

In September, SNHR documented the death of 55 civilians, including 12 children and 10 women (adult female), most of whom were killed at the hands of other parties. Also among these victims were two individuals who died due to torture. Meanwhile, we recorded one massacre this month. On October 1, we released a report detailing the civilian victims documented killed at the hands of the parties to the conflict and controlling forces in Syria in September 2023.

Civilian deaths recorded in September were distributed according to the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in Syria as follows:

A. Main parties:

- **Syrian regime forces (army, security, local militias, and Shiite foreign militias):**³ 14 civilians, including nine children and two women
- **All armed opposition factions/SNA:** One civilian.
- **Kurdish Led Syrian Democratic Forces 'SDF' (Mainly the Democratic Union Party 'PYD'):** 11 civilians, including two children and six women.

B. Other parties:

We documented the killing of 29 civilians in September, including one child and two women, at the hands of other parties, distributed as follows:

- **Landmines whose source we have been unable to identify:** Three civilians.
- **Gunfire whose source we have been unable to identify:** 11 civilians.
- **Bombings whose perpetrators we have been unable to identify:** Five civilians, including one child and two women.
- **Killings by parties we have been unable to identify:** Nine civilians.
- **Turkish Border Guard:** One civilian.

B. Arbitrary arrest and enforced disappearance

In September 2023, SNHR documented at least 204 arbitrary arrests, with those detained including 12 children and six women (adult female), at the hands of the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in Syria. Most of these arrests were carried out by Syrian regime forces in the governorates of Rural Damascus, and then Damascus. We issued a report on October 2 detailing the arbitrary arrests and enforced disappearances which we documented in September 2023 at the hands of the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in Syria.

3. We generally use the term 'the Syrian regime' rather than 'the Syrian government', because the nature of the ruling power in Syria is a totalitarian dictatorship where power is concentrated in the hands of a small circle of individuals, namely the President of the Republic and the heads of the security apparatus. Conversely, the ministers, including the Prime Minister and the Minister of Interior, play a restricted, largely ceremonial role, which is limited to implementing precisely what the ruling regime orders, with no real decision-making power or active role of their own. Syria is under autocratic/hereditary family rule, with no independent decision-making structure. Rather, the government is an empty façade merely for show. The Minister of Interior receives orders from the security branches over which he supposedly presides, while the Minister of Justice cannot even summon a low-ranking security office, let alone a security branch head. Syria is ruled by the president assisted by the heads of the security branches.

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

4. Designated as a terror group by the UN.

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

- **Syrian regime forces:** 84 individuals, including five children and three women.
- **HTS:**⁴ 14 individuals.
- **All Armed Opposition factions/SNA:** 34 individuals, including one child and two women.
- **SDF:** 72 individuals, including six children and one woman.

C. Attacks on vital civilian facilities

SNHR documented at least 50 attacks on vital civilian facilities during September 2023, 19 of which were perpetrated by Syrian regime forces. Those attacks were concentrated in the two governorates of Idlib and Aleppo.

Of these attacks, 30 targeted educational facilities, five targeted medical facilities, and eight targeted places of worship

The attacks on vital civilian facilities recorded in September 2023 were distributed by the parties to the conflict and controlling forces in Syria as follows:

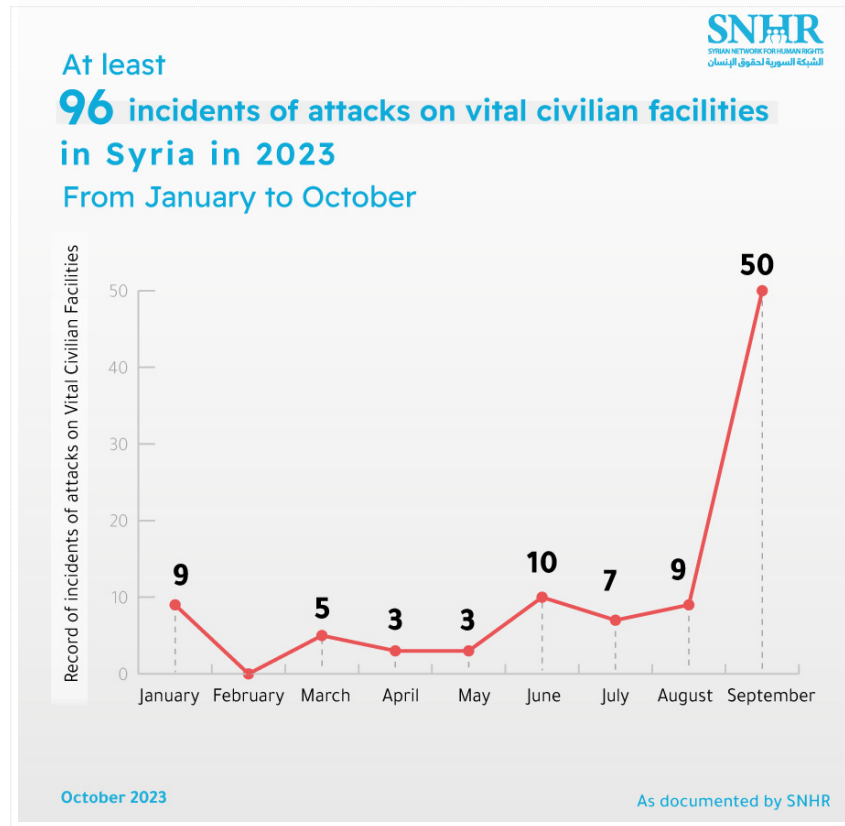
- **Syrian regime forces:** 19 attacks.
- **SDF:** 31 attacks.

Attacks on vital civilian facilities during September 2023 are distributed by the perpetrator party as follows:

Perpetrator Party	Syrian Regime Forces	SDF
Attacked Facility		
Places of Worship		
Mosques	6	2
Vital Educational Facilities		
Schools	9	21
Vital Medical Facilities		
Medical Facilities	1	4
Communal Facilities		
Markets	1	
Infrastructures		
Power Stations		1
Official Service Headquarters		2
IDPs Camps/Gatherings		
Regular Camps	2	
Irregular Camps		1
Total	19	31

We have documented **96 attacks** on vital civilian facilities at the hands of the parties to the conflict and controlling forces in Syria since the beginning of 2023 up until October of the same year.

These attacks are distributed by month as follows:



As shown on the graph, September saw a sharp rise in the attacks on vital civilian facilities. September's attacks, the highest number in one month since the beginning of 2023, accounted for about 53 percent of the total number of attacks recorded this year. This sharp rise can be explained by the recent escalation by Syrian regime forces who have intensified their bombardment of northwestern Syria, and the clashes between Deir Ez-Zour Military Council, backed by Arab tribes, and the SDF in Deir Ez-Zour governorate.

Most notable attacks on vital civilian facilities documented in September:

On Saturday, September 2, 2023, Syrian regime artillery forces fired multiple shells at Balyoun village in Jabal al-Zawiya in southern rural Idlib governorate. One of the shells directly hit the perimeter fence around [the Othman bin Affan Mosque](#), partially destroying the outer fence, in addition to causing moderate damages to the mosque's furnishings. The village was under the joint control of armed opposition factions and HTS at the time of the incident.

On Saturday, September 2, 2023, SDF gunmen raided the dispensary in al-Hreija town in northern rural Deir Ez-Zour governorate, and occupied it, effectively turning it into a military enclave. On the morning of Tuesday, September 5, the gunmen retreated from the dispensary after pillaging all of its equipment. The village was under the control of the SDF at the time of the incident.

It should be noted that this incident took place amid ongoing clashes between the SDF and Deir Ez-Zour Military Council backed by Arab tribes in a number of areas in Deir Ez-Zour governorate, which broke out on August 27, 2023.

On Tuesday, September 5, Syrian regime forces used a rocket launcher to fire multiple rockets at al-Mozara village in Jabal al-Zawiya in southern rural Idlib governorate. The rockets directly hit the village's [main mosque, partially destroying its building and moderately damaging its interior furnishing](#). Other rockets hit al-Mozara Girls School, partially destroying the school building. The village was under the joint control of armed opposition factions and HTS at the time of the incident.



👁 Damage to the Grand Mosque in al-Mozara village in Idlib following a ground regime attack - September 5, 2023 ©SNHR

On Tuesday, September 5, 2023, at around 14:06 local time, Syrian regime forces used a rocket launcher to fire multiple rockets at [Sfuhun](#) village in Jabal al-Zawiya in southern rural Idlib governorate. One of the rockets directly hit the Abu Thar al-Ghafari School in the village, heavily destroying its building. The village was under the joint control of armed opposition factions and HTS at the time of the incident.

It should be noted that the school had been defunct for some time, after the village's residents fled the village which is close to the diving lines between the areas under the control of armed opposition factions and those controlled by Syrian regime forces.

On Wednesday, September 6, 2023, an SDF artillery detachment fired multiple shells at Oulshalli village to the northwest of Manbij city in eastern Aleppo governorate, with several of the shells hitting the Omar bin al-Khattab Mosque in the village, [causing massive damage and partially destroying the building](#). The village was under the control of the SNA at the time of the incident.



👁 Destruction to the Omar bin al-Khattab Mosque in Oulshalli village in Aleppo following a ground attack by the SDF - September 6, 2023 ©SNHR

From Tuesday, September 5, until Thursday, September 7, 2023, SDF personnel took control of al-Hamdan School, al-Sweyjein School, al-Haseya School, al-Shalal Hospital, and al-Amal Hospital in Theyban town in eastern Deir Ez-Zour governorate, and turned them into military enclaves. As of this writing, SNHR has been unable to verify if the SDF has left these facilities. Theyban town was under the SDF's control at the time of the incident.

It should be noted that this incident comes amid ongoing clashes between the SDF and Deir Ez-Zour Military Council backed by Arab tribes in a number of areas in Deir Ez-Zour governorate, which broke out on August 27, 2023.

On Thursday, September 7, 2023, an SDF artillery detachment fired multiple shells at a group of tents housing Bedouin IDPs, known as al-Hasou Camp, on the eastern outskirts of Bershaya village, administratively a part of al-Bab area in eastern rural Aleppo governorate. [The attack resulted in casualties, and heavily damaged a number of tents.](#) The area was under the control of the SNA at the time of the incident.

On Saturday, September 23, 2023, Syrian regime forces used a rocket launcher to carry out two attacks on al-Iskan IDP Camp on the road between the cities of Sarmin and Idlib to the western outskirts of Sarmin city in eastern rural Idlib. The first regime attack, at around 20:53 local time, killed two civilians, including one woman, and wounded two others, [as well as burning a number of tents.](#) The second attack, at 22:27, took place after many civilians, media workers, and Civil Defense (White Helmets) personnel had gathered in the camp. While no casualties were recorded in the second attack, the camp facilities were damaged. The area was under the joint control of armed opposition factions and HTS at the time of the incident.



👁 A burnt-out tent in an IDP Camp to the west of Sarmin city in Idlib following a ground regime attack - September 23, 2023 ©SNHR

On Monday, September 23, 2023, Syrian regime forces used rocket launchers to carry out two attacks on the main market in Bashar Ahmad Halli Street (formerly Zaki al-Arsouzi) in the al-Shamali neighborhood in Jisr al-Shoghour city in western rural Idlib governorate. The attack partially destroyed multiple shops and the floor of the market. The city was under the joint control of armed opposition factions and HTS at the time of the incident.

D. Indiscriminate attacks and attacks using prohibited weapons

We documented no indiscriminate attacks or attacks involving the use of prohibited weapons in September.

IV. Attachments

1. [55 Civilians, Including 12 Children, 10 Women, and Two Individuals Who Died due to Torture, Documented Killed in Syria in September 2023](#)
2. [At Least 204 Arbitrary Arrests/Detentions Documented in September 2023, Including 12 Children and Six Women](#)

V. Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

- SNHR notes that for 12 years to date, the Syrian regime has been involved in the most horrific types of violations against the Syrian people, some of which amount to crimes against humanity. Since the Syrian regime continues to commit such violations up to the present day, as documented in the numerous reports we have released, any normalization of relations with the regime or efforts to rehabilitate it are acts of support for a criminal entity involved in crimes against humanity, which constitute a violation of international law.
- The evidence we have gathered confirms that attacks continue to be directed against civilians and civilian objects. Syrian-Russian alliance forces have committed various crimes, including extrajudicial killings, arrests, torture, and enforced disappearances. In addition, the indiscriminate bombardment and other attacks carried out caused the destruction of facilities and buildings. There are reasonable grounds to believe that the war crime of attacking civilians has been committed in many cases.
- The Syrian regime has not only violated international humanitarian law and customary law, but has also breached a number of UN Security Council resolutions, particularly resolution 2139, resolution 2042 on the release of detainees, and resolution 2254, all without any accountability.
- We could find no record of any warnings being issued by the Syrian regime or Russian forces prior to any attack as required under international humanitarian law. This has been the case since the beginning of the popular uprising for freedom, providing another blatant demonstration of these forces' total disregard for the lives of civilians in Syria.
- The magnitude and frequency of the violations, the disproportionate use of military force, the indiscriminate manner of the bombing, and the coordinated approach of these attacks lead to the inescapable conclusion that these acts are wholly deliberate and based on high-level orders, and as such constitute a part of state policy.
- The indiscriminate and disproportionate bombardment carried out by the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces is considered to be a clear violation of international humanitarian law, with such indiscriminate killings amounting to war crimes.
- Hay'at Tahrir al Sham has violated international humanitarian law, causing the death of many civilians, as well as damage to vital civilian facilities.
- All Armed Opposition factions/SNA have violated UN Security Council Resolution 2139 through carrying out attacks that are considered to violate customary international humanitarian law, causing civilian casualties or accidental injuries.
- All the attacks documented in this report, particularly bombings, have caused massive collateral damage involving loss of lives, injuries, or significant damage to civilian objects. There are strong indicators suggesting that this damage was excessive compared to the anticipated military benefit.
- The use of explosive munitions to target densely populated areas reflects a criminal and wholly deliberate mindset, with the perpetrators clearly intending to inflict the greatest possible number of deaths, which is a clear contravention of international human rights law and a flagrant violation of the Geneva IV Convention (arts. 27, 31, 32).

Recommendations

UN Security Council

- The Security Council must take additional steps following its adoption of Resolution 2254, which clearly insists that «all parties immediately cease any attacks against civilians and civilian objects as such.»
- The Syrian issue should be referred to the International Criminal Court and all those who are responsible for violations should be held accountable, while Russia must stop using the veto, as it is a party to the Syrian conflict, and the UNSC states' veto power should be withheld when crimes against humanity and war crimes are committed.
- Ensure peace and security and implement the principle of responsibility to protect civilians' lives and to save the Syrian people's heritage and historical artifacts from destruction, looting and vandalism.
- The Security Council should adopt a resolution banning the use of cluster munitions and landmines in Syria, similar to the existing prohibition on the use of chemical weapons, and include advice on how to safely remove the remnants of such dangerous weapons.
- The four other permanent member states should put pressure on the Russian government to end its support for the Syrian regime, which uses chemical weapons, and to expose its involvement in this regard.
- Request that all relevant United Nations agencies make greater efforts to provide food, medical and humanitarian assistance in areas where fighting has ceased, and in internally displaced person camps, and to follow-up with those States that have pledged voluntary contributions.

International Community

- In light of the split within the Security Council and its utter inability to take any effective action, action should be taken on the national and regional levels to form alliances to support the Syrian people by protecting them from daily killing and by lifting sieges, as well as by increasing support for relief efforts. Additionally, the principle of universal jurisdiction should be enacted in local courts regarding these crimes in order to conduct fair trials for all those who were involved.
- SNHR has repeatedly called for the implementation of the 'Responsibility to Protect' in dozens of studies and reports and as a member of the International Coalition for the Responsibility to Protect (ICR2P) after all political channels through the Arab League's plan and then Mr. Kofi Annan's plan have proved fruitless, along with the Cessation of Hostilities statements and Astana agreements that followed. Therefore, steps should be taken under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations, while the norm of the 'Responsibility to Protect (R2P)', which was established by the United Nations General Assembly, should be implemented. The Security Council is still hindering the protection of civilians in Syria.
- Renew pressure on the Security Council to refer the case in Syria to the International Criminal Court.
- Work on fulfilling justice and achieving accountability in Syria through the United Nations General Assembly and the Human Rights Council and to activate the principle of universal jurisdiction.

UN Human Rights Office

- The OHCHR should submit a report to the Human Rights Council and other organs of the United Nations on the incidents mentioned in this report and previous reports since these attacks were perpetrated by the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces.

Independent International Commission of Inquiry (COI)

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

International, Impartial, and Independent Mechanism (IIIM)

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

The United Nations Special Envoy for Syria

- Condemn the perpetrators of crimes and massacres, and those who were primarily responsible for dooming the de-escalation agreements.
- Re-sequence the peace process so that it can resume its natural course despite Russia's attempts to divert and distort it, empowering the Constitutional Committee prior to the establishment of a transitional governing body.

Syrian regime

- Stop indiscriminate shelling and targeting of residential areas, hospitals, schools and markets, and end the use of outlawed weapons and barrel bombs.
- Ensure compliance with UN Security Council resolutions and customary humanitarian law.

Russian regime

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

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

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

All Armed Opposition factions/SNA

- The Armed Opposition/SNA must ensure the protection of civilians in all areas under their control. These forces should also take care to distinguish between civilians and military targets and cease any indiscriminate attacks.
- Take punitive action against those who commit violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law.

Humanitarian Organizations

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

Acknowledgment

Our most sincere gratitude to the victims' families and friends, and the eyewitnesses and local activists for their significant contribution to this report.



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