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Monday 1 February 2021

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

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I. Background and Methodology:

The documentation process to register victims killed in Syria is one of the most important roles performed by the Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) since March 2011. This is all the more crucial since murder is the most prevalent of all the violations perpetrated, and the one which most profoundly affects the Syrian people, with countless families suffering incalculable and irreparable trauma through the loss of fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, friends, etc.

These violations have become so widespread primarily through Syrian regime forces' and affiliated militias' systematic killing of civilians, with these forces being almost the sole perpetrators of killings from the aforementioned date up to the beginning of 2012. The regime began by using tanks and artillery, then proceeded to also use warplanes and helicopter gunships which have deployed barrel bombs, in addition to Scud missiles and chemical weapons.

The entry of several other parties into the Syrian conflict has further increased the importance and complexity of documenting the victims killed in Syria.

Since the beginning of 2021, we documented continuing deaths as a result of landmine explosions, with this issue having occurred for several months now without receiving the local and international attention it deserves; during January 2021 alone, we documented the deaths of 18 victims, including 16 children, caused by landmines in different governorates and regions in Syria. This indicates that none of the controlling forces have made any significant efforts in the process of clearing landmines, or trying to determine their locations and fence them off, or warn the local population about them.

The SNHR, as a [member](#) of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines - Cluster Munition Coalition ([ICBL-CMC](#)), affirms its endeavor within this international coalition to implement a comprehensive ban on the use of landmines and cluster munitions, and to ensure that this becomes a customary law, with this objective now very close to realization; the number of states parties to the Mine Ban Treaty (Ottawa Treaty) now includes 164 member states, with International Humanitarian Law greatly restricting the use of landmines, which are considered to be among the most lethal indiscriminate weapons. The vast majority of landmine victims are civilians, with the threat from the use of landmines affecting local communities for years.

Methodology:

This report records the death toll of victims whose deaths were documented by SNHR as taking place at the hands of the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in Syria January 2021, particularly focusing on those victims killed under torture, and victims amongst media, medical and Civil Defense personnel, paying particular attention to those massacres committed by the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces which the SNHR was able to document in this period.

We should note that in this context we use the term “massacre” to refer to any attack that resulted in the deaths of five or more peaceful individuals in the same incident.

The report also includes an outline of the most notable incidents during this period. Finally, we maintain the full details of every incident on the SNHR database.

The report catalogues the death toll of victims according to the perpetrator parties in the Syrian conflict. Accurately ascribing responsibility sometimes requires more time and investigation than usual, especially in the case of joint attacks.

In addition, in cases where we are unable to definitively assign responsibility for a particular killing to one of two possible parties because of the area's proximity to the lines of engagement, the use of similar weapons, or other reasons, the incident is categorized among 'other parties' until we have sufficient evidence to conclusively assign responsibility for the violation to one of the two parties.

The parties to the conflict who this report documents as committing extrajudicial killings are:

A. The main parties:

- Syrian Regime forces (army, security, local militias, and Shiite foreign militias)
- Hay'at Tahrir al Sham
- Syrian Democratic Forces (the Democratic Union Party)

B. Other parties

Through use of SNHR's extensive database, we can catalogue the victims according to the governorate where they were killed, and also by the governorate from which they originally came. This report catalogues the death toll of victims according to the governorate in which they were killed, rather than by the governorate they originally came from.

In this report, we record only the death toll of civilians, whose deaths we were able to document during the last month. SNHR does not document the deaths of fighters and militants killed during the conflict, while some of the victims documented may have been killed months or even years ago, as in some cases of death due to torture; in these cases, where the deaths have only recently been confirmed, we include two dates, the date when we were able to document the victim's death, and the date on which we think the death occurred.

The methodology adopted by the Syrian Network for Human Rights in documenting the victims can be seen at this link¹.

This report draws upon the ongoing daily monitoring of news and developments by SNHR's team, and on information from our extensive network of various sources that has been built up over the course of our work since 2011. Our team follows up on incidents and related reports in a variety of ways in the effort to verify information and collect as much relevant evidence and data as possible. In some cases, researchers are able to visit the incident location immediately. However, this is a rarity in light of the incredibly high security risks, and given the frequency of daily violation incidents. SNHR's customary policy in such cases is to rely on accounts from survivors who experienced the violation firsthand, as we try to reach them promptly, and secondarily on the accounts of those who witnessed or photographed the violation in question, in addition to analyzing available materials from open sources such as the Internet and media outlets; third, by talking with medical personnel who treated the individuals injured in these incidents, examined the deceased victims' bodies, and identified the cause of death. The SNHR also provides [a special form](#) that can be completed by victims' relatives with victims' names and personal information so that the Victims Documentation Department can follow up on the information provided, verify its accuracy and then include it in the database.

SNHR has analyzed videos and photographs documented by our team, which were posted online, or submitted by local activists. We also retain copies of all the videos and photographs included in these reports, which are also outlined in this report, in a confidential electronic database and in hard disk backup copies, and we ensure always that all these data are stored with their original source.

We do not claim, however, that we have documented all cases, given the severe prohibitions, restrictions and persecution by the Syrian Regime forces and some other armed groups.

The death toll of victims detailed on SNHR's database includes extrajudicial killings by the controlling forces which occurred as a violation of either international human rights law or international humanitarian law or both, but does not include cases of natural deaths or those which occurred because of disputes between members of society or other such issues.

Our investigations confirm that all of the attacks included in this report that were carried out by the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in Syria targeted civilian areas where we documented no military presence or armories before or during the attacks, and in which the perpetrators failed to issue any warnings to civilians prior to any of the attacks as required by international humanitarian law.

¹ "Syrian Network for Human Rights Methodology", Syrian Network for Human Rights, <http://sn4hr.org/public_html/wp-content/pdf/english/SNHR_Methodology_en.pdf>

The type and level of evidence available varies between one case and another. In light of the aforementioned challenges, the legal qualification of many of the incidents documented may be subject to change based on any new evidence or leads which emerge after the report is released. We automatically update our data archive with any such items of evidence and leads as soon as they become available. Meanwhile, although many incidents don't technically constitute a violation of international humanitarian law under the terms of such legislation, they involved collateral damage, so we have recorded and archived these incidents to document what happened historically and to preserve these as part of the national record, although we don't qualify these specific incidents as crimes.

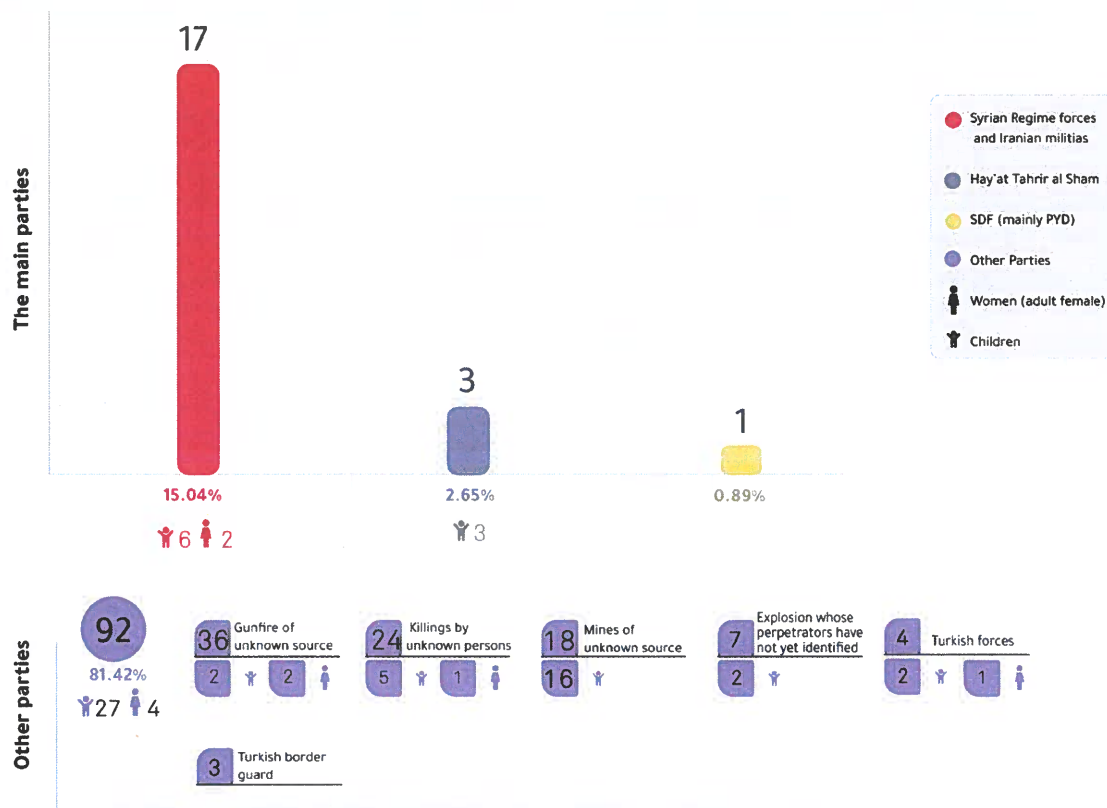
Also, there is great difficulty in determining which party was responsible for planting landmines, due to the multiplicity of forces controlling the areas in which these explosions occurred, and therefore we do not attribute the vast majority of deaths caused by landmines to a specific party. None of the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in Syria have revealed maps of the places where they planted landmines. We have recorded continuing deaths due to landmines despite repeated appeals by the Syrian Network for Human Rights, and urgent requests for the essential intervention of international teams to help uncover the locations where landmines are deployed and to put pressure on the controlling forces in Syria to determine their locations of deployment in order to reduce the number of casualties among civilians resulting from them.

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

II. Death Toll of Civilian Victims:

Extrajudicial killings continued with the beginning of 2021, as the Syrian Network for Human Rights documented the deaths of 113 civilians, including 36 children and six women (adult female), killed at the hands of the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in Syria. There is no doubt that the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, whose emergence in Syria was announced on March 22, 2020, has had a significant impact on reducing bombardment operations against civilians, and consequently decreasing the death toll, as the pandemic has contributed to weakening the capabilities of the Syrian regime's army and affiliated Iranian militias, with the Russian-Turkish ceasefire agreement that came into effect on the 6th of the same month - March 2020 – also playing a part in lowering the death toll.

The death toll we documented in January 2021 was distributed according to the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces as follows:



A. The main parties:

- Syrian Regime forces (army, security, local militias, and Shiite foreign militias):

We documented the deaths of 17 civilians at the hands of Syrian Regime forces, including six children and two women.

- Hay'at Tahrir al Sham:

We documented the deaths of three children at the hands of Hay'at Tahrir al Sham.

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

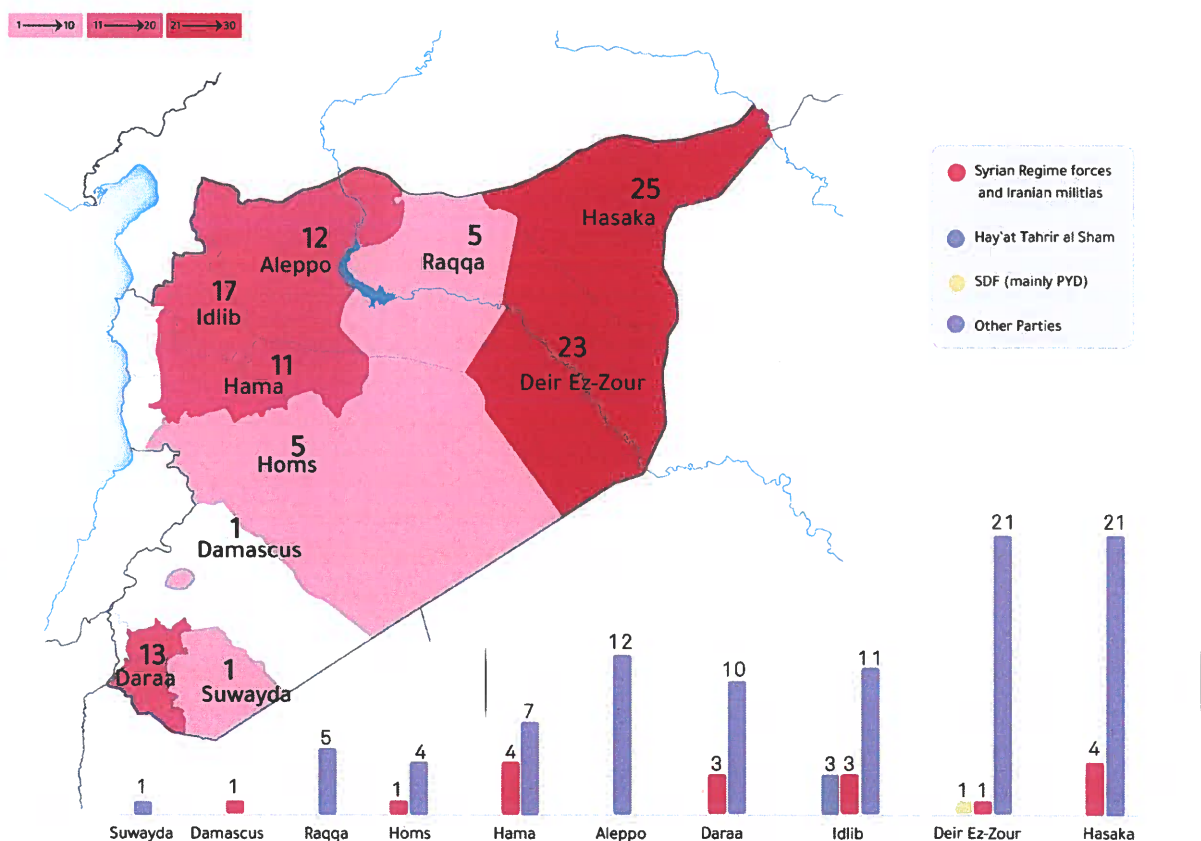
We documented the death of one civilian at the hands of the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces.

B. Other parties:

We documented the deaths of 92 civilians, including 27 children and four women, at the hands of other parties, distributed as follows:

- Landmines of unknown source: 18 civilians, including 16 children.
- Gunfire of unknown source: 36 civilians, including two children and two women.
- Bombings whose perpetrators have not yet been identified: Seven civilians, including two children.
- Killings by unknown persons: 24 civilians, including five children and one woman.
- Turkish border guards: Three civilians.
- Turkish forces: Four civilians, including two children and one woman.

The death toll of civilian victims killed at the hands of the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces documented in January 2021 was distributed across Syrian governorates as follows:



Hasaka and Deir Ez-Zour governorates saw a noticeable increase in the death toll for this month, with both governorates accounting for nearly 43% of the total death toll we documented in this period, followed by Idlib, Daraa, then Aleppo.

III. Death Toll of Victims Who Died Due to Torture, and Victims Amongst Media, Medical and Civil Defense Personnel:

A. Death toll of victims who died due to torture

SNHR documented in January 2021 the deaths of three victims due to torture, all at the hands of Syrian regime forces.

The most notable cases are:

Ismail al Haj Dawoud, from Rhayya al Souda village, which is administratively a part of Tal Hmais area in the eastern suburbs of Hasaka governorate, was arrested by Syrian regime forces in 2013. Almost since that date, he has been classified as forcibly disappeared, with the Syrian regime denying any knowledge of his detention and preventing anyone, even a lawyer, from visiting him. On January 6, 2021, SNHR received information indicating his death in custody. Our data from numerous sources confirms that he was in good health at the time of his arrest, indicating that he most probably died due to torture in a regime detention center in Damascus city. We also confirm that Syrian regime forces failed to hand over Ismail's body to his family.

Nehad Atef al Maf'alani, from al N'eima village in the east of Daraa governorate, was 18 years old at the time of his arrest by Syrian regime forces on September 10, 2012. Almost since that date, he has been classified as forcibly disappeared, with the Syrian regime denying his detention and preventing anyone, even a lawyer, from visiting him. On January 9, 2021, SNHR received information indicating that he had died in custody. Our data from numerous sources confirms that he was in good health at the time of his arrest, indicating that he most probably died due to torture in Seydnaya Military Prison in Damascus Suburbs governorate. We also confirm that Syrian regime forces failed to hand over Ismail's body to his family.

B. Death toll of medical personnel

SNHR didn't document any deaths among medical personnel in January 2021.

C. Death toll of media workers

SNHR didn't document any deaths among media workers in January 2021.

D. Death toll of Civil Defense personnel

SNHR didn't document any deaths among Civil Defense personnel in January 2021.

IV. Record of Most Notable Massacres Documented in January:

SNHR didn't document any massacre in January 2021.

V. The Syrian Regime Bears Primary Responsibility for the Deaths of Syrian Citizens Due to the COVID-19 Pandemic:

This report does not include all deaths, including those caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, as we mainly document extrajudicial killings, but there is no doubt that the negligence shown by the Syrian regime and its disastrous mismanagement of the Syrian state in recent years are the primary factors behind the massive numbers of deaths from the COVID-19 pandemic and other disease outbreaks and illnesses, as seen in the regime's neglect of public healthcare and indifference towards citizens' wellbeing, with the state's only genuine protection reserved for the ruling family, its entourage and the regime elite. It should always be remembered that the Syrian regime and its Russian ally have repeatedly been documented as having targeted, bombed and destroyed most medical facilities in Syria, and killed hundreds of medical personnel, according to the SNHR's database, with dozens of these lifesaving medics still classified as having been forcibly disappeared at the regime's hands. The Syrian regime's Ministry of Health [has announced](#) the deaths of 911 cases in Syria due to the COVID-19; while this is an alarmingly high number, we believe that this statistic is inaccurate and that the number of deaths is actually far higher due to the regime's weak medical capabilities, as there is no medical examination to confirm or deny the patient's infection with COVID-19, confirming the occurrence of a large number of deaths due to COVID-19 without the cause being disclosed. Concern over a probable regime cover-up of the real COVID-19 death toll is exacerbated by the absence of any transparency in the various government ministries, and in view of the security services' control over any data issued by these ministries, as is usually the case with totalitarian regimes.

The regime's failure to release arbitrarily detained individuals, particularly the elderly and individuals detained with no charges, [most notably around 3,327 medical personnel](#), provides further clear evidence of the Syrian regime's primary responsibility for the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic in Syria. The regime, which controls and manages state institutions, has completely failed to provide even the most rudimentary protection to Syrian civilians, but has instead exploited the state institutions to protect and benefit the ruling family in order to ensure their continued rule, even if 13 million Syrian citizens are displaced from their homes to achieve this, with most of those displaced unable to return home since their homes have been ransacked and subjected to widespread looting and destruction by regime forces and affiliated militias.

VI. The Most Notable Work Carried Out by SNHR on the Extrajudicial Killing Issue:

Since 2011, the SNHR has created complex electronic programs to archive and categorize the victims' data, which the team collects and verifies, enabling us to catalogue the victims according to their gender, age, the date and place of death, method of killing used, type of weapon used, and perpetrator party, and to make comparisons between these parties. We can also distribute the death toll according to the governorate in which the incident of death occurred, and according to the governorate from which the victim originated, in order to show the extent of the loss suffered by the people of that governorate, and enables us to accurately ascertain the highest rates of violence documented in the case of each violation. SNHR's Victim Documentation Department team constantly updates its comprehensive database, with all the data added to the SNHR's database being retained securely, and several backup copies being stored in different locations.

Since 2011, we have also been exceptionally concerned about incidents involving the killing of children and women; there is hardly a statistic recorded on our database that does not include either, due to the vulnerability of these groups in the community, and because they give an indication of the rate of targeting of civilians. We later added other civilian groups which have played a key role in the popular uprising and later in the armed conflict, such as media, medical, relief and Civil Defense personnel.

For nearly nine years, we have issued [daily death toll of victims](#), as well as [daily news](#) on killing incidents. We also issue a monthly report detailing the death toll of victims, whose deaths were documented in Syria during the previous month, amongst civilians, as well as of those who died [due to torture](#), in addition to issuing a biannual report and annual report, as well as dozens of other special reports [documenting the total death toll](#) or the death toll at the hands of one of the parties to the conflict in particular, in addition to [a monthly report](#) and special and periodic reports documenting the [massacres](#) committed on Syrian soil.

Also, SNHR periodically sends a special form to the United Nations [Special Rapporteur](#) on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, submitting cases of killings on which we were able to document all of the available data, having obtained the consent of each victim's family members before submitting them.

It should be noted that the United Nations has relied on the Syrian Network for Human Rights for all the statistics it has used in its analysis of victims in the conflict, given SNHR's prominent role as one of the most credible sources. SNHR has also partnered with numerous United Nations bodies, in addition to governments of states, to provide them with statistics from our databases, in order to serve the path of justice, and ultimately to ensure the accountability and prosecution of criminals. SNHR is also used as a trustworthy source by a large number of Arab and international news agencies and many international human rights organizations.

VII. Conclusions and Recommendations:

Conclusions:

- The evidence we collected indicates that the attacks documented were directed against civilians and civilian objects. Syrian-Russian alliance forces have committed various crimes ranging from extrajudicial killings to detention, torture and enforced disappearance. Their attacks and indiscriminate bombardment have resulted in 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.
- A large proportion of Syrians were killed as a result of landmines, and none of the perpetrator forces in the Syrian conflict have revealed maps of the locations where landmines were planted.
- The Syrian government has not only violated international humanitarian law and customary law, but has also breached a number of UN Security Council resolutions, particularly resolution 2139 and resolution 2042 on the release of detainees, as well as resolution 2254, all without any accountability.
- The indiscriminate and disproportionate bombardment carried out by Syrian Democratic Forces is considered a clear violation of international humanitarian law, with the crimes of indiscriminate killing amounting to war crimes.
- Hay'at Tahrir al Sham has violated international humanitarian law, causing the deaths of many civilians.
- The use of explosive arms to target densely populated areas reflects a criminal and wholly deliberate mentality intended to inflict the greatest possible number of deaths, which is a clear contravention of international human rights law and a flagrant violation of the four Geneva Convention (articles 27, 31, 32).

Recommendations:

Security Council

- The Security Council must take additional steps following its adoption of Resolution 2254, which clearly states that "all parties immediately cease any attacks against civilians and civilian objects as such."
- The Syrian case should be referred to the International Criminal Court and all those who are responsible 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.

- The Security Council should ensure peace and security and implement the principle of responsibility to protect civilians' lives and to save the Syrian people's heritage and historical artefacts from destruction, looting and vandalism.
- The Security Council should adopt a resolution banning the use of cluster munitions in Syria, similar to the prohibition on the use of chemical weapons, and include advice on how to safely clear 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 expose its involvement in this regard.
- The Security Council should request that all relevant United Nations agencies make greater efforts to provide food, medical and humanitarian assistance in areas where fighting has ceased, and in internally displaced persons' camps, and 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 at 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 through 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' doctrine in dozens of studies and reports and as a member of the International Coalition for the Responsibility to Protect (ICRtoP) after all political channels through the Arab League's plan and then Mr. Kofi Annan's plan proved fruitless, along with the Cessation of Hostilities statements and Astana agreements that followed. Therefore, steps should be taken under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations, while the norm of the 'Responsibility to Protect', which was established by the United Nations General Assembly, should be implemented. By failing to do so, the Security Council is still hindering the protection of civilians in Syria.
- Renew pressure on the Security Council to refer the case in Syria to the International Criminal Court.
- Work on fulfilling justice and achieving accountability in Syria through the United Nations General Assembly and the Human Rights Council and to activate the principle of universal jurisdiction.
- Work to launch projects to create maps revealing the locations of landmines and cluster munitions in all Syrian governorates. This would facilitate the process of clearing them and educating the population about their locations.

OHCHR

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

Independent International Commission of Inquiry (COI)

- Launch investigations into the cases included in this report and previous reports. SNHR is willing to cooperate and provide further evidence and data.

International, Impartial, and Independent Mechanism (IIIM)

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

The United Nations Special Envoy to Syria

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

The Syrian regime

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

The Russian regime

- Launch investigations into the incidents included in this report, make the findings of these investigations public for the Syrian people, and hold the people involved accountable.
- Compensate all the damaged centers and facilities, rebuild and rehabilitate them, and compensate all the victims' families, 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 the 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 allow the unconditional passage of humanitarian aid to besieged areas.
- Provide detailed maps of sites where Russian forces have launched cluster munition attacks, issue these to the United Nations and inform the Syrian public about them, thus facilitating the disposal of unexploded ordnance.
- Begin to achieve a breakthrough in the issue of detainees by revealing the fate of 84,000 people disappeared by the Syrian regime.

Syrian Democratic Forces:

- The states supporting the SDF should cease all forms of support until the SDF commits itself to complying with the rules of international human rights law and international humanitarian law. This is primarily the responsibility of the supporting states. Providing the SDF with weapons and support while knowing that the SDF violates the rules of international humanitarian law can be seen as a contribution to these violations.
- The SDF should form a special committee to investigate incidents of violations committed by SDF forces, disclose the details of their findings and apologize for them, hold those responsible accountable, and compensate the victims and affected.
- Provide detailed maps of the locations where the SDF planted landmines, especially civilian sites or near residential communities.

The Armed Opposition/ Syrian National Army:

- Ensure the protection of civilians in all areas under their control. These forces should also take care to distinguish between civilians and military targets and cease any indiscriminate attacks.
- Pledge to cease any arbitrary arrests and investigate incidents that have resulted in violations of international humanitarian law.
- Take punitive action against those who commit violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law.

- Provide detailed maps of the locations where the Armed Opposition/ Syrian National Army planted landmines, especially civilian sites or near residential communities.

Humanitarian organizations:

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

Acknowledgment

We thank all family members, relatives and friends of the victims, along with the eyewitnesses and local activists, whose contributions have enriched this report.



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