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Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in January 2023

**The OPCW Proves the Syrian Regime's Responsibility for the
April 2018 Chemical Attack on Douma City**

Saturday 04 February 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 the first seven months or so of the uprising, other parties subsequently joined in, perpetrating their 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 in 2011. In 2012 and 2013, as the numbers of human rights violations rose sharply, our team was confronted with the need to release periodic monthly reports, in order to highlight the continued suffering of the Syrian people. We started releasing eight reports each month, and, in tandem with this, created a large database containing hundreds of thousands of incidents sorted into the various categories of violations that emerged during our documentation work.

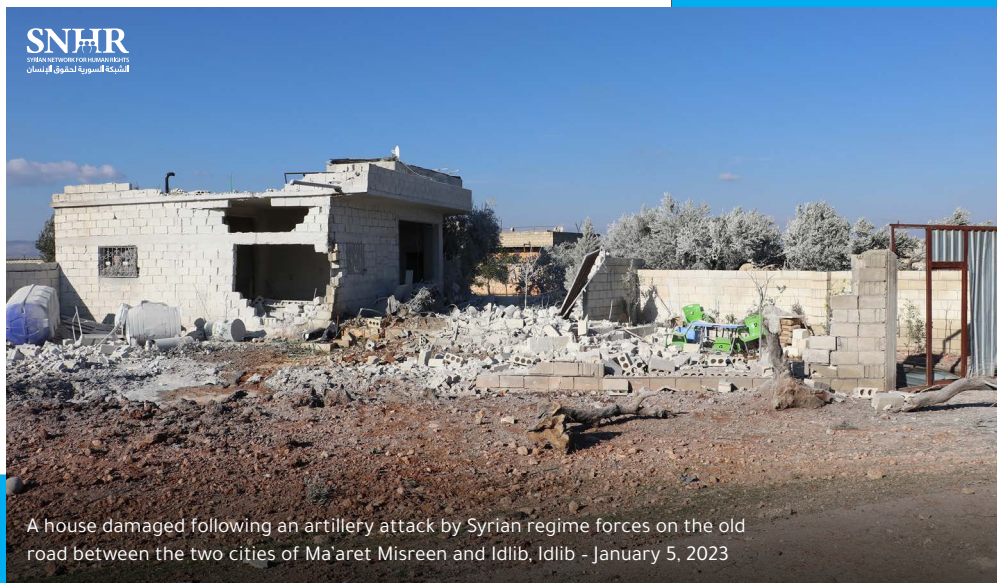
By the end of 2018, however, the level of violence had fallen to some degree, which prompted another change in our reporting strategy. At this point, we opted for releasing one monthly report containing the most notable human rights violations in Syria that we were able to document in the previous month. As such, this report focuses on the human rights situation in Syria for January 2023. In this report, we summarize the civilian deaths we've documented in the past month at the hands of the parties to the conflict and the controlling parties, as well as providing details of the numbers of arrests and enforced disappearances. The report also sheds light on the attacks on vital facilities which our team was able to document this 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 on January's Most Notable Developments

Bombings and military operations

In January, we documented an increase in the frequency of artillery attacks by Syrian regime forces on the Idlib region in northwestern Syria compared to last December. We recorded sporadic instances of bombardment concentrated on the villages and towns of the Jabal al-Zawiya region in the southern suburbs of Idlib, as well as in the western suburbs of Aleppo, Sahl al-Ghab in the western suburbs of Hama, and the northern suburbs of Latakia, which are close to the dividing lines with the armed opposition. The attacks by Syrian regime forces also targeted the villages and towns of the northern suburbs of Idlib and the western suburbs of Aleppo, which are distant from the dividing lines. On January 12, for instance, Syrian regime artillery forces targeted [Kafr Ta'aal town](#) in western Aleppo, with one of the shells hitting the Omar bin al-Khattab mosque in the town center, partially destroying the mosque building. Another artillery attack by Syrian regime forces on January 18, targeting a public road in the center of al-Bara village in southern Idlib, resulted in the death of [one civilian and injured five others](#), who were mostly members of the same family, three of them children. The next day, January 19, Syrian regime artillery forces stationed in the Jourien Camp in western suburbs of Hama fired shells at Qastoun town, also in western Hama. Furthermore, on January 22, an [internally displaced woman was killed](#) in another artillery attack by the same forces when they targeted an apartment building in the western neighborhood of Kafr Nouran village in western Aleppo.



Meanwhile, the siege imposed by Syrian regime forces on al-Ashrafiya and al-Sheikh Maqsoud neighborhoods in Aleppo city and the al-Shahba area in northern Aleppo entered its second month. Those areas, which are under the control of Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), were denied the entry of food supplies and fuel, while fees were imposed on civilians. Moreover, sums of money were confiscated from civilians and merchants over disputes related to the transfer of fuel from the SDF's territories to those controlled by the Syrian regime.

Clashes also took place between Syrian regime forces and Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) in southern Idlib and northern Latakia, with the two sides also targeting each other in shelling operations.

Regarding the Russian military presence in Syria, on January 10, the Russian news agency [Sputnik](#) quoted a statement by Sergei Shoigu, Russia's defense minister, who said that training plans should be set in place and equipment should be supplied to the Russian Armed Forces based on the expertise gained in Syria and Ukraine. On January 24, the [Russia Today](#) news agency cited a statement by the Russian Ministry of Defense revealing that Russian forces and Syrian regime forces had jointly restored the al-Jarrah Military Airbase eastern Aleppo. "[Russian and Syrian servicemen restore Jirah airfield destroyed during operations.](#)" the statement reads. "[Joint deployment of Russian and Syrian aircraft at the Jirah airfield allows to protect the State border, and ensures safety of civilians in the northern and north-eastern areas of the Syrian Arab Republic.](#)" The same agency published [a video](#) from the ceremony showing Russian warplanes flying overhead and paratroopers bearing the flags of the Syrian regime, Russia, and the flags of the Russian Ministry of Defense and the Syrian regime's Ministry of Defense carrying out parachute landings.

On January 25, [the Syrian Arab News Agency \(SANA\)](#), the Syrian regime's official mouthpiece, reported on a statement by the Russian Ministry of Defense which claimed that the "extremist Islamic groups" scattered across the de-escalation zone in Idlib governorate were preparing to attack regime army sites and locations where Russian servicemen were present in the north of the country. The article quoted Oleg Yegorov, the Deputy Head of the Russian Coordination Center in Hmeimim, as saying that the "terrorists" were planning to publish videos on social media after carrying out attacks showing the destruction of the civilian infrastructure in order to falsely accuse the armed Russian forces and Syrian regime forces of carrying out indiscriminate attacks on the areas controlled by the "terrorists."

Also in January, the SDF continued their attacks on civilian-populated areas in the northern and eastern suburbs of Aleppo. On January 16, an SDF sniper [shot dead a woman](#) dead in Hzawan village in eastern Aleppo. Furthermore, on January 20, SDF personnel used a rocket launcher to bomb residential neighborhoods in Izaz city in northern Aleppo [wounding seven civilians](#); including a child, a woman, and four civilian police officers, as well as causing damage to some houses in the city.

Meanwhile, Turkish forces and armed opposition factions/Syrian National Army (SNA) continued to carry out ground-based attacks, targeting SDF-held areas in the northern suburbs of Aleppo, as well as the areas of Manbej and Ein al-Arab in the eastern suburbs of Aleppo, the villages that are administratively part of the Nahiyat Ein Eissa in the northern suburbs of Raqqqa, and the area around Tal Tamr in the northern suburbs of Hasaka.

January saw more bombings whose source we have so far been unable to identify, as well as more explosions of live munitions left over from previous bombardment. These took place in the governorates of Aleppo, Idlib, and Deir Ez-Zour. In one of these incidents, on January 14, an explosion of unidentified source in Dubai village, eastern Hasaka resulted in [a massacre](#) of five civilians - three children and their parents.

January also saw [more civilian deaths from landmine explosions](#) across Syria, with those incidents being concentrated in the governorates of Hama, Daraa, and Aleppo this month, with a total of seven civilians, including six children, killed by landmines.

[Assassinations of civilians](#) at the hands of as-yet unidentified gunmen also continued across Syria in January. These were concentrated in the governorates of Daraa, Deir Ez-Zour and Hasaka. On January 18, we documented the discovery of [a girl's body](#) bearing signs of torture inside an abandoned house in al-Masaken neighborhood of al-Boukamal city in eastern Deir Ez-Zour.

On January 2, [SANA](#) reported that the Israeli Air Force had targeted the Damascus International Airport and the surrounding area with missiles, killing two Syrian regime servicemen and injuring two others, as well as causing some material damage, which put the airport out of commission. On the same day, Oleg Egorov, Deputy Head of the Russian Reconciliation Center for Syria, claimed, as reported by [Russia Today](#), that the attack had killed six servicemen from Syrian regime forces and injured three others. On January 24, Lebanon's [al-Nahar Newspaper](#) cited a report from the Israeli Public Broadcasting Corporation, known as Kan, which stated that the Israeli Army had carried out a new incursion into Syrian territory in order to deliver a message and thwart Iran's attempts to consolidate its presence on Israel's northern borders. In the attack, the Israeli forces reportedly crossed the fences separating Israeli and Syrian territory and conducted ambushes beyond these fences involving infantry forces, tanks, and combat vehicles which continued for 48 hours.

Living and Security Conditions

In January, the economic, living, service, and security conditions in Syrian regime-controlled areas continued to deteriorate. Residents in those areas are still grappling with scarcity and rising prices of heating materials, in tandem with increasingly cold weather conditions that exacerbate the need for heating resources. Furthermore, January saw yet more fuel price rises. On January 3, [SANA](#) reported that the Syrian regime's Ministry of Internal Trade and Consumer Protection announced a new price for one liter of fuel (octane 95) at 5,750 S.P., marking the second fuel price increase in two months, after it had been set at 5,300 S.P. per liter in December.

With regard to services, more specifically the power crisis, the Syrian regime continued to pursue its rationing policies in most of its territories, while introducing new rationing policies regarding drinking water. [Public life in regime-held areas has now come to an almost complete halt](#) on account of the scarcity of both drinking water and fuel, with dozens of factories put out of commission by the lack of fuel and raw production materials. Pharmaceutical manufacturing plants have been worst affected, leading to a shortage of certain types of medications at pharmacies, further exacerbating the suffering of those suffering from disease or illness, especially cancer patients. According to Hassan Dwieran, the head of the Pharmacists Union in Damascus in a statement to the pro-regime al-Watan Newspaper published on January 15, the medications available only cover 50 percent of the needs of the market, which could lead to a 50-100 percent increase in [medicine prices](#) in the upcoming period according to the same newspaper. On January 17, [SANA](#) reported that the Directorate of Pharmaceutical Affairs at the Syrian regime's Ministry of Health had announced a new price list including most locally produced medicines, which saw a 50 percent increase for some medicines, while other prices were increased by as much as 80 percent according to a report published by [al-Watan Newspaper](#) the same day. [Baby milk](#) formula was completely unavailable on the markets and in pharmacies, with this scarcity making baby milk formula prohibitively expensive.

Meanwhile, the Syrian regime government issued a decision to more than double [the cost of an express passport from](#) 500,000 S.P.) to 1,005,000 S.P. according to a January 2 article in al-Watan newspaper. Even with this steep price increase, the regime-held areas are seeing increasing emigration rates, through both legitimate and illegitimate channels. SNHR has stressed, in numerous reports, that the Syrian regime is exploiting the needs of Syrian citizens for passports to make more money to spend on its war against its dissidents, constituting another violation of basic human rights. Even though the Syrian passport is the world's second least powerful passport according to the [2023's Passport Index](#), it is simultaneously the most expensive. We released [a detailed report](#) on this issue January 2019.

Additionally, most of the regime-held territories are living in a state of chronic insecurity, with murders and thefts running rampant in light of the lack of any accountability mechanisms for criminals. In January, we recorded that multiple schools in Homs city were robbed by unknown thieves, while in Suwayda, the center of the Virtual University and the Syrian IT Association's Center in Suwayda were also both robbed. On January 12, [al-Watan Newspaper](#) quoted Mohammad Hassan al-Najjar, the head of the Syrian IT Association, who said that the objects stolen in the robbery are worth more than 300 million S.P.

In Suwayda city, popular protests also continued in January, with the protesters condemning the poor services and economic conditions, and demanding the ousting of the Syrian regime and the release of detainees from its prisons.

In northwestern Syria, meanwhile, civilians are also grappling with the deterioration of already harsh economic and living conditions, while also facing rising prices for all foodstuffs and essential supplies, with these conditions all worsened by their waning purchasing power due to rampant unemployment and poverty, especially in areas housing IDPs. In addition to these factors, wages are in decline, while the service and health sectors are suffering a funding crisis in light of a sharp rise of humanitarian needs. This situation has only been made more difficult by the freezing weather conditions, with the prices of fuel and heating supplies also rising.

The cities and towns of the northern and eastern suburbs of Aleppo saw [popular protests](#) at the beginning of the second week of January over the decision of the Turkish energy company AK ENERGY, the regional energy supplier, to increase electricity costs in the area. At present, one kilowatt of household electricity costs 3.85 Turkish Lira (T.L.), an increase on the previous price of 3.85 T.L., in light of additional rationing policies for the hours during which electricity is available in those areas.

Some SNA factions continued in January to persecute the owners of land (particularly olive groves) in areas under their control, most of whom are of Kurdish ethnicity, imposing fees on olive-growing, as well as on olive harvests at olive presses.

In northeastern Syria the living situation is also worsening. As with other Syrian regions, civilians in northeast Syria are grappling with price hikes for foodstuffs and essential supplies, with local authorities failing to regulate the market. Despite the cholera outbreak, there has been no tangible efforts by the authorities in the region to improve the dangerously unsanitary drinking water supply, with civilians forced to drink untreated water which is pumped directly from the Euphrates River without going through any purification process. Meanwhile, the northeastern region is still enduring a state of insecurity, with murders and thefts taking place across the region. On January 4, for instance, we recorded that a school in al-Keshkhya town was burgled by unknown thieves who stole the school's heaters and heating supplies, forcing it to suspend teaching activities. Raqqa city also saw popular protests condemning a murder in the city on January 16, in which a woman and her daughter were killed. In response, the SDF arrested a number of protestors on January 23.

Cholera outbreak

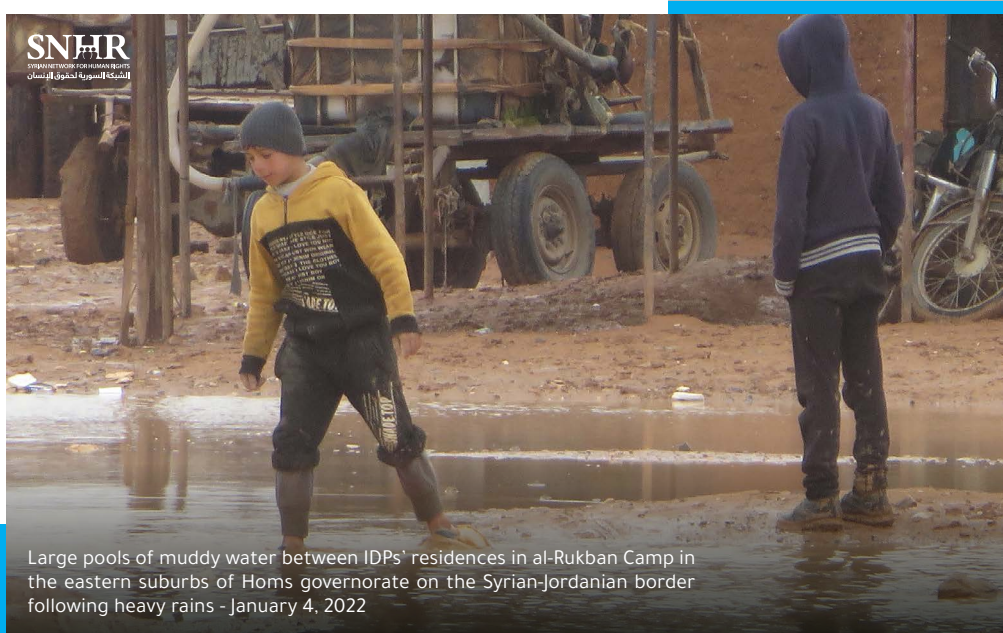
On January 16, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) issued [a situation report](#) on the cholera outbreak in Syria. According to the report, a total of 77,651 suspected cholera cases were reported in Syria between August 25, 2022, and January 7, 2023, with the report adding that 6,561 suspected cholera cases were reported in IDPs camps in northeastern and northwestern Syria.

The latest [figures](#) revealed by the Syrian regime on the overall cholera cases and deaths in Syria show 1,652 cholera cases and 49 deaths. On January 21, SANA reported that cases were distributed across the country as follows: "Aleppo: 1,004, Deir Ez-Zour: 235, Hasaka: 96, Latakia: 98, Raqqa: 54, Hama: 52, Suwayda: 26, Homs: 31, Damascus: 20, Damascus suburbs: 17, Tartus: 10, Daraa: 5, and Quneitra: 4."

Forced displacement

The suffering of IDPs in northwestern Syria continued in January, both in relation to the humanitarian situation and living conditions, especially in light of the worsening economic conditions and mounting aid needs that have reached unprecedented levels, as the amount of aid from relief organizations has steadily shrunk. Further exacerbating this crisis, there has been an almost complete lack of job opportunities and waning purchasing power especially among IDPs living in camps. We also documented multiple fires in the IDP camps in northwestern Syria. In one of these incidents, on January 5, [a fire](#) caused by an electrical malfunction in an IDP camp in northern Izaz city, northern Aleppo, burnt three tents, with the smoke from the blaze causing one resident to suffer the effects of suffocation. On the same day, Syrian regime forces used rocket launchers [to fire](#) multiple rockets near IDPs' housing and tents near al-Furusiya Camp in southwestern al-Fou'a town in northern Idlib, injuring four children and their mother, in addition to causing material damage to IDPs housings and tents.

In al-Rukban IDP Camp on the Syrian-Jordanian borders in eastern Homs governorate, which houses around 7,500 IDPs, the residents are still grappling with extremely difficult living conditions amid a severe shortage of food and medical supplies, which was only made worse by [the rainstorm](#) that hit the area on January 4, damaging the furnishing and the supplies, as water entered into the residents' meager homes. The lack of drainage networks further exacerbated the situation, with pools of mud and water submerging roads. On January 13, we recorded the [death of a three-month-old infant](#) at the camp due to lack of nutrition and healthcare. Also on January 21, Syrian regime forces further tightened their siege on the area, denying the entry of flour, which put the camp's main bakery out of commission.



Large pools of muddy water between IDPs' residences in al-Rukban Camp in the eastern suburbs of Homs governorate on the Syrian-Jordanian border following heavy rains - January 4, 2022

In the camps of northeastern Syria, specifically on the subject of foreign countries repatriating their nationals from Syria, the Foreign Relations Committee of the Self-Administration of northeastern Syria issued [a statement](#) on January 9, in which it revealed that it had handed over “a woman and two children from ISIS fighters’ families” to a delegation from Barbados.

On January 10, the [Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, European Union and Cooperation](#) published a statement on its official website, revealing that Spanish authorities had repatriated two Spanish women and 13 Spanish minors from IDP camps in Syria. This came after the Committee of Foreign Relations of the Self-Administration of Northeastern Syria released [a statement](#) the previous day prior, in which it announced that it had handed over “two women and 13 children from ISIS fighters’ families” to an official Spanish delegation.

On January 24, France’s Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs revealed, in [an official statement](#), that French authorities had repatriated 32 French children and 15 French women from ISIS fighters’ families, from camps in northeastern Syria.

In Lebanon, Lebanese officials continued making hostile statements against the presence of Syrian refugees in Lebanon. On January 15, the Lebanese website [IMLebanon](#) quoted Mustafa Bayram, Lebanon’s Minister of Labour, alleging “**complacency among international organizations**” in relation to the issue of Syrian refugees, with the minister adding that “**those organizations are threatening the Lebanese government**” in case the government decided to return refugees to their countries.

On January 18, the [Associated Press](#) news agency published an investigative report about a boat carrying 230, mostly Syrian asylum seekers, which had capsized and began sinking after setting off from Lebanon’s northern coast on New Year’s Eve. One Syrian woman and one Syrian child had drowned, the report said, while the Lebanese army had transferred around 200 Syrian survivors in trucks and ejected them on the Syrian side of the border via a non-official border crossing in the Wadi Khaled area. As soon as they reached the Syrian side of the border, the report reveals, they were stopped by men wearing Syrian regime military uniforms. Subsequently, the asylum seekers were detained until their families were able to pay sums of ransom money to secure their freedom, after which they returned to Lebanon with the help of smugglers. Commenting on the investigation, [Amnesty International](#) released a statement on the same day saying that “Lebanon should respect its obligations under international law and stop deporting refugees to Syria where they face credible risks of arrest, torture, and other abuse.”

Political and human rights situation

On January 2, [the Institute for Economic and Peace \(IEP\)](#) released its 'Global Peace Index 2022' (GPI), on which Syria was ranked as 161, out of 163 nations worldwide.¹

On January 3, Ned Price, the spokesperson for the US Department of State, said in [a press briefing](#), "We do not support countries upgrading their relations or expressing support to rehabilitate the brutal dictator Bashar al-Assad." Price also noted that the US's position is still firm on supporting a Syrian-led political resolution in line with Security Council resolution 2254.

On January 3, the [OCHA](#) released a situation report on Syria's northwestern region. The report noted that December saw the killing of at least six civilians in the region, including three children. It further noted that shelling, airstrikes, and clashes were reported in Idlib on November 6, causing fires and the destruction of several housing units in three camps. At least nine civilians were killed and 75 others were injured, the report noted.

On January 4, [SANA](#) reported that Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan, UAE's Minister of Foreign Affairs, had met with the head of the Syrian regime, Bashar Assad, in Damascus. Talks during the visit touched upon a number of subjects, SANA added, including "ways to develop economic and trading relationships." On a related note, [SANA](#) reported on January 5 that Lana Zaki, UAE's Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the UN, said in a Security Council meeting regarding the file of chemical weapons in Syria that this file remains one of the most politicized files in the Security Council. Zaki called on all parties to work in line with the principles upon which the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons was founded in its technical sense, which include consensus and abstinence from politicizing issues, SANA said. In this context, SNHR must note that normalizing relationships with the Syrian regime is a shame and disgrace to any state making such a decision, in addition to showing absolute contempt for the millions of Syrian victims of the regime, especially those who were killed in a range of horrific ways. Any such normalization is also a flagrant violation of international law, since it constitutes support for a regime that has committed and is still committing crimes against humanity against tis people.

On January 5, Adedeji Ebo, Deputy to the UN High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, said in [a briefing](#) to the Security Council that the OPCW had not received the information it requested from the regime on 20 outstanding issues. As such, the senior official said, the Syrian regime's declaration on its chemical weapon program cannot be considered "accurate and complete in accordance with the Chemical Weapons Convention." Ebo also stressed that any use of chemical weapons in Syria is unacceptable, and that it is imperative to hold anyone responsible accountable for their actions.

1. The Global Peace Index covers 99.7 percent of the world's population. It is calculated using 23 indicators that vary between quantitative and qualitative in nature. The Index focuses on three domains: 1. Level of societal safety and security; 2. Extent of ongoing domestic and international conflict, and 3. Degree of militarization.

On January 5, Amnesty International, together with the France-based La CIMADE,² and Recivire released [a joint statement](#) noting that, even though diplomatic relations between France and the Syrian regime have officially been severed since March 2012, and despite the armed conflict and oppression still going on in Syria, the authorities in two French prefectures had attempted to deport two Syrian people to Syria in October 2022. These attempts were through talks between the two prefectures and the Syrian regime's embassy in France. The statement condemned these attempts that violate international law, and called on the French government to clarify its position by reminding the authorities of French prefectures of France's international obligations.

On January 8, the OCHA revealed in [a tweet](#) that the tenth cross-line convoy has been deployed from the Syrian regime-held territories in Aleppo to Syria's northwestern region as part of the cross-line aid delivery mechanism in line with Security Council resolutions 2585 and 2642 on cross-border and cross-line aid delivery. The convoy, which was composed of 18 trucks carrying food baskets, medications, special supplies, food supplies for children, educational equipment, and health supplies, was the fifth one to enter northwestern Syria after Security Council resolution 2642 was adopted in July 2022



On January 11, Germany's Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF) said [in a report](#) that a total of 244,132 asylum applications were submitted to German authorities in the year 2022. The Office adds that most of the asylum seekers this year were from Syria and Afghanistan. A total of 70,976 Syrian filed an initial asylum applications in 2022, a 29.3 percent increase over the previous year.

On January 12, Human Rights Watch (HRW) released its '[World Report 2023](#)'. [On Syria](#), the report notes that civilians in Syria "faced another year of grave abuses and severe hardship, perpetuated by the Syrian government and other parties to the conflict..." The report cites SNHR in noting that around 111,111 are still disappeared, most of them at the hands of Syrian regime. "Although Syria remains unsafe, refugee hosting countries like Turkey and Lebanon began advocating for large-scale returns of Syrian refugees in 2022," the report adds. Furthermore, the report laments that the peace process led by the UN, including the constitutional committee, made no progress in 2022.

2. La CIMADE is a French NGO that was founded in 1939 for the purpose of defending the rights of immigrants, refugee, and asylum seekers regardless of their origins, views, or political beliefs.

On January 17, [Jordan's Anti-Narcotics Department](#) revealed that Jordanian authorities had thwarted an attempt to smuggle large quantities of narcotics from Syria. The Department added that a total of 8,873 kaf of cannabis and 11,070,000 captagon pills and 4,409 kaf of cannabis had been seized in the operation, as well as large quantities of ammunitions.

On January 18, the [US](#) and [Turkey](#) issued a joint statement following the Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu's visit to Washington, during which the two sides affirmed their commitment to a Syrian-led political process in line with Security Council resolution 2254.

On January 18, SNHR released its 12th annual [report](#) following the breakout of the popular uprising in March 2011. Entitled, '**Normalizing Relationships with the Syrian Regime is a Blatant Violation of the Rights of Millions of Syrians**', the report goes over the most prominent violations of human rights at the hands of the parties to the conflict and controlling forces in Syria for the year 2022. The report notes that the political solutions reaching a deadlock in Geneva have led to the emergence of new attempts, some of which involved reviving relations with the Syrian regime with no regard for the fact that the regime has been involved in crimes against humanity and war crimes against the Syrian people and the Syrian state.

On January 19, the [UN](#) said that Lebanon's first Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) Acute Food Insecurity Analysis showed that around two million people in Lebanon, including 700,000 Syrian refugees, are currently facing some form of food insecurity.

On January 24, [Amnesty International](#) published a press released stressing that the Syrian regime force "must lift a brutal blockade on civilians in predominantly Kurdish areas in the northern Aleppo region..." Since the siege was first imposed, the statement notes, on the neighborhoods of al-Sheikh Maqsoud and al-Ashrafiya, as well as over 50 villages in the Shahba region back in August 2022, tens of thousands of civilians, including IDPs, have been facing "severe shortages of fuel and aid. Medical supplies are now all but exhausted and people are burning household items and plastic to try and keep warm in freezing temperatures."

On January 27, David Beasley, Executive Director of the [World Food Programme \(WFP\)](#), stressed that hunger has reached its highest levels in Syria since the start of the conflict in 2011. These statements came on the heels of a visit to the Syrian regime-held areas at the end of December. Beasley added that 12 million people in Syria are facing food insecurity, while 2.9 million others are "at risk of sliding into hunger", meaning that 70 percent of Syria's population will not be able soon to provide food for their families.

On the subject of cross-border relief aid delivery

On January 2, the OCHA released [a joint statement](#) with several UN and humanitarian bodies,³ in which it called on the Security Council to keep the lifeline alive, in the form of the mechanism for cross-border aid delivery in northwestern Syria, which would be through extending the mechanism with no delay. The statement stressed that without the UN cross-border operations, millions of people, especially IDPS, will not have access to food and shelter. The statement also stressed that the cross-line aid delivery cannot cover the same scope and volume covered by cross- border operations.

On January 4, the UN Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) released [a statement](#) by a group of UN human rights experts, in which they called on the Security Council to extend the mandate of UN cross-border relief aid delivery. The statement adds that extending the mandate is the bare minimum response for the mounting needs for millions of civilians in northwestern Syria, where 4.1 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance, with no alternative for them but the cross-border relief aid delivery mechanism.

On January 6, [the International Rescue Committee](#) made an urgent plea to extend UN cross-border aid delivery to Syria. The statement stressed that “this resolution [to extend cross-border aid delivery] is a key lifeline that will ensure people can survive. Needs across Syria are on the rise and have reached extremely alarming levels in a number of areas in northwest Syria.”



3. Those are the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), the World Food Programme (WFP), the World Health Organization (WHO), and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA).

On January 9, Amnesty International said, [in a statement](#), that, with the Syrian regime obstructing the delivery of aids to areas out of its control, “the survival of at least four million people in opposition-held north-west Syria depends on the delivery of aid across the border from Türkiye through the UN cross-border mechanism...Not renewing the cross-border aid mechanism will result in nothing short of a humanitarian catastrophe.”

On January 9, SNHR released [a report](#) entitled, ‘**Russia’s Veto Blocking UN Cross-Border Relief Aid is Unlawful and its Only Aim is to Seize UN Relief Aid**’ in which it noted that it is imperative to end Russia’s extortion of UN aid. The report stressed that Syria houses the world’s largest IDP population of 6.8 million people, with a projected 15.3 million people expected to be in need of humanitarian assistance in 2023, the highest figure recorded since the conflict began. Those include 2.1 million IDPs living in camps, the report added, in addition to stressing that UN cross-border relief aid delivery to Syria does not need a permission from the Security Council, as this matter is actually within the mandate of the UN General Assembly and the OCHA.

On January 9, UN-Secretary General António Guterres issued [a statement](#) on the extension of the mechanism for UN cross-border relief aid delivery to Syria. The statement stressed that UN cross-border aid operations are still an indispensable lifeline for 4.1 million people in northwestern Syria, with humanitarian needs reaching their highest levels since the conflict start in 2011, amid the harsh winter and the cholera outbreak.

Also on January 9, the [Security Council](#) unanimously adopted Security Council resolution [2672 \(2023\)](#) on the mechanism for cross-border aid operations into northwestern Syria. The resolution provides for renewing the mechanism for humanitarian assistance delivery via the Bab al-Hawa Crossing with Turkey into northwestern Syria for additional six months, ending on July 10. Moreover, the Security Council requested that the UN-Secretary General submits a special report on humanitarian needs in Syria by no later than June 10, 2023.

On January 25, Geir Pedersen, UN Special Envoy to Syria, said in [a briefing](#) to the Security Council on the situation on Syria that “As we move into 2023, the Syrian people remain trapped in a profound humanitarian, political, military, security, economic and human rights crisis of great complexity and almost unimaginable scale.” He adds that the level of needs in Syria is at its worst level since the conflict started with poverty and food insecurity reaching record levels amid a collapse of basic services and increasingly worsening economic crisis. Pedersen stressed that the needs in IDPs camps are the most pressing.

On January 27, the OPCW's Investigation and Identification Team (IIT) released [its third report](#) that focused on the chemical weapons attack on Douma city, Damascus suburbs governorate on April 7, 2018. The report concludes that there are "reasonable grounds" to believe that at least one Mi-8/17 helicopter dropped two cylinders that hit two apartment buildings in an area in the middle of Douma city, Damascus suburbs governorate, between 19:10 and 19:40 on the evening of April 7, 2018, as part of a military attack by Syrian regime forces. The report notes that the helicopter left from al-Dumayr Airbase, and that the helicopter is part of the Russia-backed Tiger Forces. As the IIT's report revealed, the attack killed 43 individuals, including 19 children and 17 women, who died as a result of inhaling high concentrations of chlorine gas for prolonged periods of time, with dozens of others also affected. On January 28, [SNHR released a statement](#) welcoming the report, noting that we contributed to it through providing data and facilitating contact with eyewitnesses. Furthermore, SNHR's statement called for urgently referring the case to the Security Council which should intervene under Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter, since a Member State used a weapon of mass destruction, which surely threatens international peace and security, and should implement the relevant UN resolutions.

Several foreign ministries have also addressed the OPCW report:

On January 27, the US Department of State issued [a joint statement](#) with the UK Foreign & Commonwealth Office, France's Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, and Germany's Federal Foreign Office, in which the four governments condemned the Syrian regime's repeated use of chemical weapons in the strongest possible terms. The statement also calls on Russia to stop shielding the Syrian regime from facing accountability for its use of chemical weapons, and further emphasizes the four states' commitment to hold accountable all perpetrators of chemical weapons attack in Syria and beyond.

On January 27, Switzerland's Federal Department of Foreign Affairs issued [a statement](#) stressing that all those responsible for crimes against international law in Syria must be held accountable. In the statement, Switzerland said it supports all international efforts that aim to document such crimes and to hold their perpetrators accountable, including the efforts being made by UN bodies such as the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism for Syria (IIIM), as well as Syrian NGOs.

On January 28, the EU issued [a statement](#) strongly condemning the Syrian regime's use of chemical weapons. The statement added that the report's findings confirm that the Syrian regime has systematically failed to comply with its obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) and Security Council resolution 2118. The statement further noted that the professional reporting by the OPCW's IIT is an "important contribution to efforts to end impunity for the use of chemical weapons."

On January 28, [the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs](#) issued a statement noting that Turkey will continue to support the efforts towards ensuring accountability in Syria, especially those by the UN and the OPCW.

On January 28, Qatar's Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued [a statement](#) in which it said that the State of Qatar expresses its full support for the international efforts that aim to hold the Syrian regime accountable for its horrifying crimes against the Syrian people, and to ensure that war criminals in Syria are brought to international justice. The statement added that any political resolution in Syria will not yield successful and sustainable outcomes unless those who are involved in committing such horrific crimes are held accountable.

Meanwhile, [the Syrian regime's Ministry of Foreign Affairs](#) and Expatriates released a statement on January 28 saying that it rejects the report completely, and adding that the report “[lacks any scientific and objective evidence.](#)”

On January 30, [the Syrian Commission for Family Affairs and Population](#), a body affiliated with the Syrian regime's government, released its report on the population status in Syria for the year 2020 under the title, '[Return and Stability](#)'. The report, prepared in collaboration with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), is the fourth national report on population status in Syria. The report estimated the population of Syria in 2020 at 22,515,000 according to the Central Bureau for Statistics, with the number of immigrants estimated at three million according to data from a number of international bodies, in the report's words, despite the fact that the figures released by the UN refugee agency (UNHCR) puts the number of Syrian refugees at approximately 6.6 million. SNHR notes that the Syrian regime's Central Bureau for Statistics, the source of the figures included in the report, has regularly released contradicting figures over the years with no clarification of the mechanism used to calculate the figures issued, especially considering that there are areas outside the regime's control.

On January 31, Transparency International released its [Corruption Perception Index \(CPI\)](#)⁴ for the year 2022. Syria was ranked in last place among the MENA states and the second-to-last globally.

Accountability and advocacy

On January 11, the Austrian newspaper [Kronen Zeitung](#) reported that the court of Graz, in Graz city, southeastern Austria, had sentence a Palestinian former member of the Syrian regime-affiliated Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine to 15 years in prison over charges of premeditated murder for shooting protestors in Damascus in 2011.

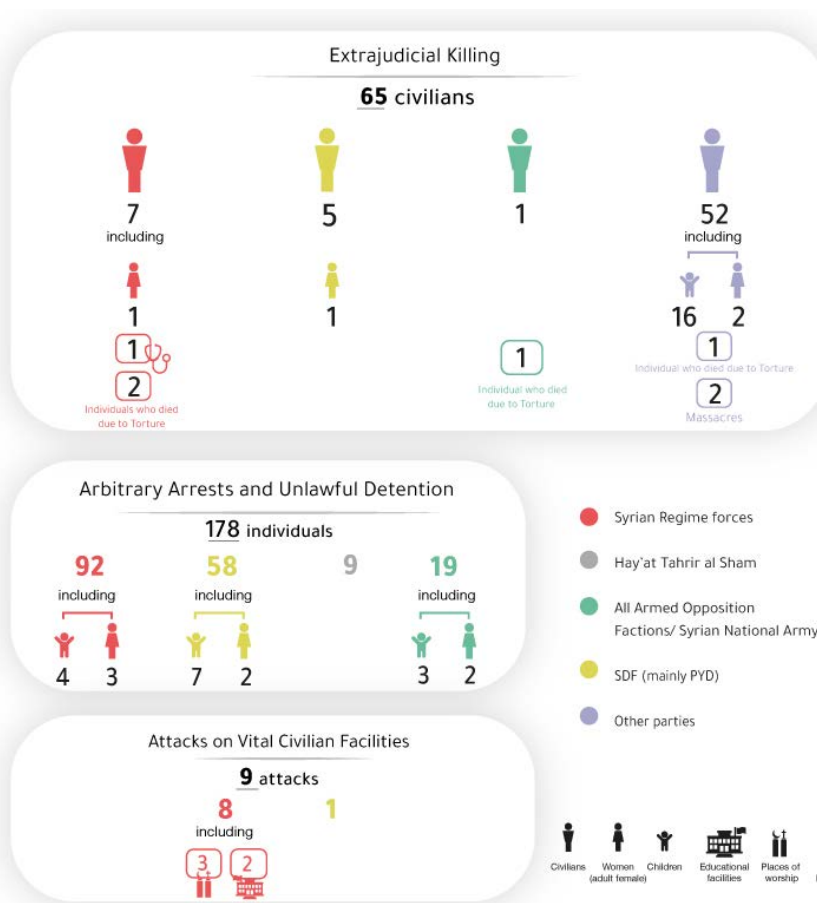
On January 13, SNHR released [a statement](#) on its nomination of Dr. Rania al-Abbasi, who has been forcibly disappeared in Syrian regime detention centers, along with her family, since 2013, for the [#WithoutJustCausePoliticalPrisonersCampaign](#) launched by the US Department of State's Office for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor (DRL). SNHR has provided the DRL with information about and details of the arrest incident and the ensuing forced disappearance of the family by Syrian regime forces, as well as nominating many other prominent forcibly disappeared persons. The statement stresses SNHR's belief in the importance of working and intensifying efforts at all levels to secure the release of approximately 136,000 detainees and forcibly disappeared persons currently held by the Syrian regime.

In January, SNHR briefed the UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances, the UN Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, the UN Special Rapporteur on Promotion and Protection of Human Rights while Countering Terrorism- Specific work on victims of terrorism, and the UN Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, on four cases of enforced disappearance, one of which is for a woman.

4. Introduced in 1995, the CPI is a prominent index that measures corruption in the public sector. The index includes 180 states and territories around the world using data from 13 external source, including the World Bank, the World Economic Forum, and private consultancy firms, risk assessments, think tanks, and others.

III. Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in January

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 the SNHR in January.



A. Extrajudicial killing

In January, SNHR documented the death of 65 civilians, including 16 children and four women (adult female), most of whom were killed at the hands of other parties. We also documented the death of one medical worker, and four individuals who died due to torture. Furthermore, we documented no fewer than two massacres in January. We issued a report on the first of this month detailing the civilian victims documented killed at the hands of the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in Syria.

The death toll of civilian victims was distributed according to the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in Syria as follows:

A. The main parties:

- **Syrian regime forces (army, security, local militias, and Shiite foreign militias):**⁵ Seven civilians, including one woman.
- **All armed opposition factions/SNA:** one civilian.
- **Kurdish-led SDF (Democratic Union Party):** five civilians, including one woman.

B. Other parties:

We documented the deaths of 52 civilians, including 16 children and two women, at the hands of other parties, distributed as follows:

- **Landmines whose source we have been unable to identify:** seven civilians, including six children.
- **Gunfire whose source we have been unable to identify:** 11 civilians.
- **Bombings whose perpetrators we have been unable to identify:** eight civilians, including six children and one woman.
- **Killings by parties we have been unable to identify:** 21 civilians, including four children and one woman..
- **Turkish Border Guard:** five civilains.

B. Arbitrary arrest and enforced disappearance

In November 2022, SNHR documented at least 178 cases of arbitrary arrest, including four children and seven 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 Damascus suburbs, then Damascus, and then Daraa. We issued a report on the second of this month detailing the cases of arbitrary arrest and enforced disappearances which we documented in November at the hands of the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in Syria.

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

- **Syrian regime forces:** 92 civilians, including four children and three women.
- **HTS:**⁶ nine civilians.
- **All Armed Opposition factions/SNA:** 19 civilians, including seven children and two women.
- **SDF:** 58 civilians, including seven children and two women.

C. Attacks on vital civilian facilities

In November 2022, SNHR documented at least nine attacks on vital civilian facilities, eight of them at the hands of Syrian regime forces, most of which took place in in Idlib governorate.

Among these attacks, we documented two on educational facilities and three on places of worship.

5. 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 a personalist/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. The Minister of Justice cannot even summon a low-ranking security office, let alone a security branch head. Syria is ruled by the heads of the security branches with the president.

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.

6. Was designated as a terrorist group by the UN.

These attacks were distributed according to the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces as follows:

A. The main parties:

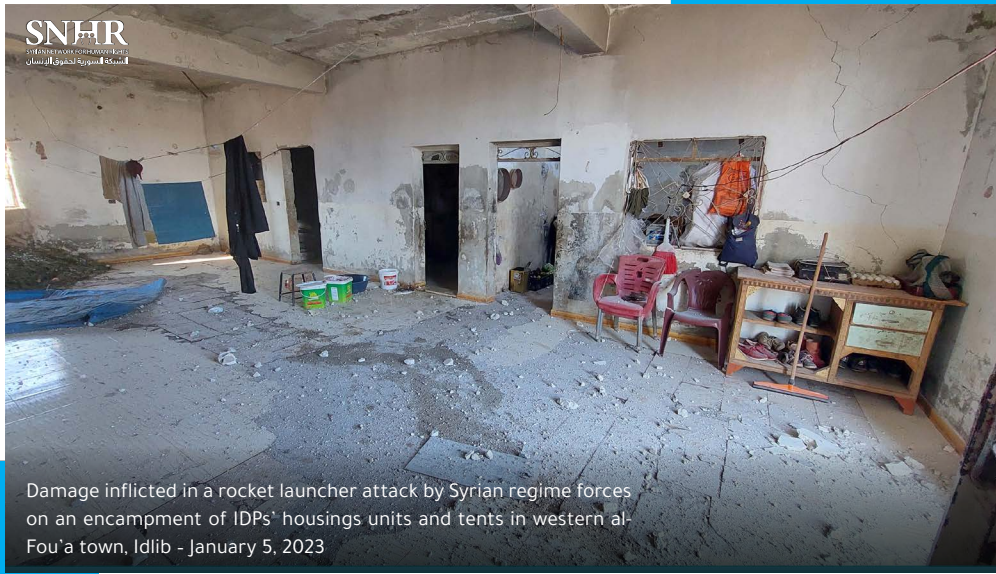
- **Syrian regime forces:** eight attacks.
- **SDF:** one attack.

Attacks on vital civil facilities documented in January 2023 were distributed according to the perpetrator parties as follows:

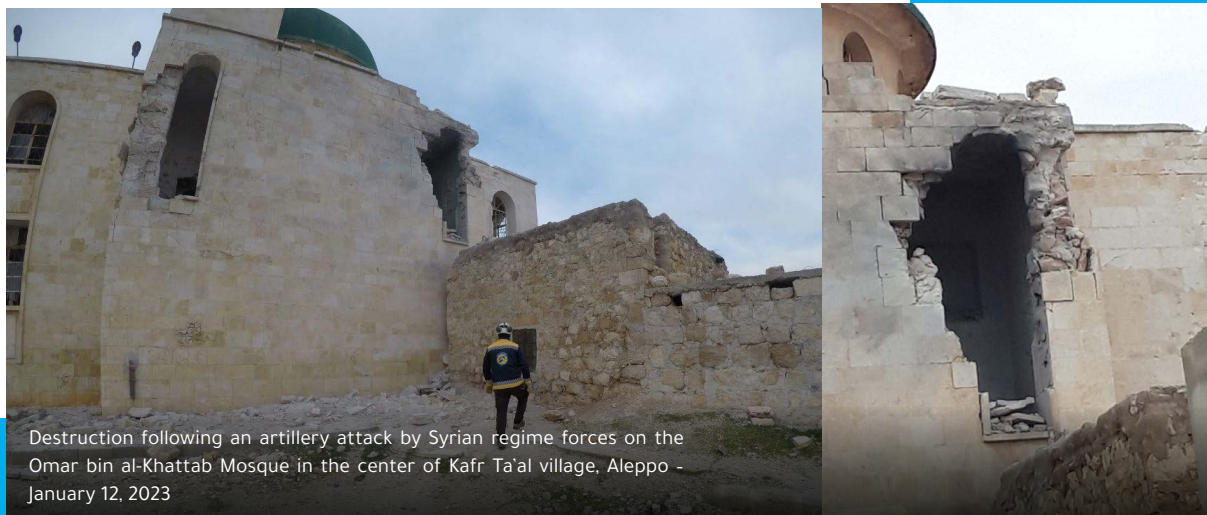
Perpetrator Party	Syrian Regime Forces	SDF
Attacked Facility		
Places of Worship		
Mosques	3	
Vital Educational Facilities		
Schools	2	
Infrastructures		
Official Service Headquarters		1
IDPs Gatherings/Camps		
Regular Camps	1	
Irregular Camps	1	
Shelters	1	
Total	8	1

Most notable attacks on vital civilian facilities documented in January:

On Thursday, January 5, 2023, around 14:00 local time, Syrian regime forces stationed in southeastern Saraqeb city in the suburbs of Idlib governorate used a rocket launcher to [bomb](#) an encampment of IDPs' housings and tents located 150 meters from al-Furursiya Camp (the area targeted is considered an appendix to the al-Furusiya Camp) to the west of al-Fou'a town in the northern suburbs of Idlib governorate. The attack injured four children and their mother, who are IDPs from Taftanaz town in eastern Idlib governorate. In addition, one IDP housing unit was [heavily damaged](#). The area was under the joint control of armed opposition factions and the HTS at the time of the attack.



On Thursday, January 15, 2023, Syrian regime artillery forces fired a shell at the Omar bin al-Khattab Mosque in the center of [Kafr Ta'al village](#) in the western suburbs of Aleppo governorate, partially destroying [the mosque building](#) and inflicting moderate damage on its furnishing. The village was under the joint control of armed opposition factions and HTS at the time of the attack.



On Friday, January 20, 2023, SDF personnel used a rocket launcher to bomb the southern neighborhood in Izaz city in the northern suburbs of Aleppo governorate. One of the rockets landed close to the Security and Civiian Police Directorate, which is affiliated with the SNA's Chiefs of Staff. Four police officers, including one woman, were wounded in the attack, although no damage was recorded to the Directorate building. The city was under the control of the SNA at the time of the incident.

On Sunday, January 22, 2023, Syrian regime artillery forces fired a shell that landed near the Iqra Private School for Elementary Education in the western neighborhood of Kafr Nuran village in the western suburbs of Aleppo governorate. The shell landed on a house located about five meters from the school, killing one woman and [completely destroying the house](#), although no damage was recorded to the school building. The village was under the joint control of armed opposition factions and HTS at the time of the attack.

D. Indiscriminate attacks and attacks using prohibited weapons

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

IV. Attachments

1. [65 Civilians, Including 16 Children, Four Women, and Four Victims Who Died due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria, in January 2023](#)
2. [At Least 178 Arbitrary Arrests/Detentions Documented in Syria in January 2023, Including 14 Children and Seven Women](#)

V. Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

- The evidence we have gathered indicates that attacks continue to be directed against civilians and civilian objects. Syrian-Russian alliance forces have committed various crimes, including extrajudicial killings, 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 government has not only violated international humanitarian law and customary law, but has also breached a number of UN Security Council resolutions, particularly resolution 2139, resolution 2042 on the release of detainees, and resolution 2254, all without any accountability.
- We could find no record of any warnings being issued by the Syrian Regime or Russian forces prior to any attack under the requirements of international humanitarian law. This has been the case since the beginning of the popular uprising for freedom, providing another blatant demonstration of these forces' total disregard for the lives of civilians in Syria.

- The magnitude and frequency of the violations, the disproportionate use of military force, the indiscriminate manner of the bombing, and the coordinated approach of these attacks lead to the inescapable conclusion that these acts are wholly deliberate and based on high-level orders, and as such constitute a part of state policy.
- The indiscriminate and disproportionate bombardment carried out by the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces is considered to be a clear violation of international humanitarian law, with indiscriminate killings amounting to war crimes.
- Hay'at Tahrir al Sham has violated international humanitarian law, causing the death of many civilians, as well as damage to vital civilian facilities.
- All Armed Opposition factions/SNA violated UN Security Council Resolution 2139 through carrying out attacks that are considered to violate customary international humanitarian law, causing civilian casualties or accidental injuries.
- All the attacks documented in this report, particularly bombings, caused massive collateral damage that involved loss of lives, injuries, or significant damage to civilian objects. There are strong indicators suggesting that this damage was excessive compared to the anticipated military benefit.
- The use of explosive arms to target densely populated areas reflects a criminal and wholly deliberate mindset, with the perpetrators clearly intending to inflict the greatest possible number of deaths, which is a clear contravention of international human rights law and a flagrant violation of the Geneva 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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