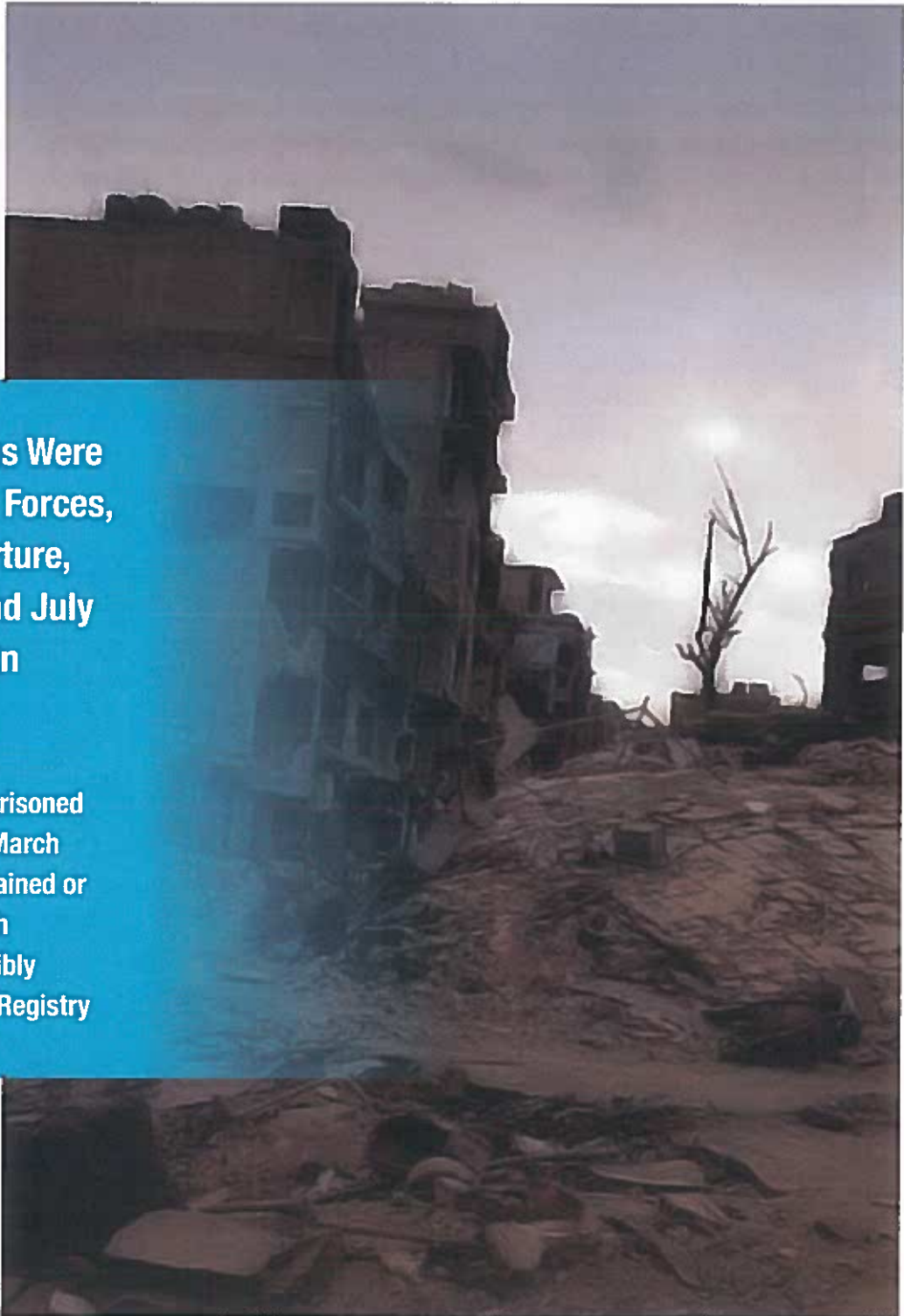


Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	1335
Land:	Syrien
Kilde:	Syrian Network for Human Rights
Titel:	3,196 Syrian Palestinians Were Killed by Syrian Regime Forces, including 491 Due to Torture, Between March 2011 and July 2020, and 49 Appeared in Caesar Photos
Udgivet:	29. juli 2020
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	25. august 2020



3,196 Syrian Palestinians Were Killed by Syrian Regime Forces, including 491 Due to Torture, Between March 2011 and July 2020, and 49 Appeared in Caesar Photos

2,663 of Syrian Palestinians Imprisoned by the Syrian Regime Between March 2011 and July 2020 Are Still Detained or Forcibly Disappeared, with Death Certificates for 37 of Those Forcibly Disappeared Issued by the Civil Registry

Wednesday 29 July 2020

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

SNHR
SYRIAN NETWORK FOR HUMAN RIGHTS
الشبكة السورية لحقوق الإنسان

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I. The Background and Work Methodology of the Report

Syria has been one of the primary destinations for those forcibly displaced from Palestine since 1948 and in the subsequent waves of asylum, due to the embrace and welcome they received from Syrian society, which contributed to their inclusion within this society of which they are considered an integral part. The Syrian state has classified them as being on an equal footing with Syrian citizens in all fields, except for the right to vote and to run for the Syrian People's Assembly and for Local Administration (governorate and city councils) positions, while preserving Palestinian citizenship, in order to preserve the right of return, under the umbrella of a set of effective Syrian legislations issued in this context; the most prominent of these is Decree No. 260, which was approved by former Syrian President Shukri al Quwatli in July 1956, and Decree No. 1311 issued in October 1963. The latest statistics issued by [the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East](#) (UNRWA) indicate that it is currently providing health, education, relief and social services to approximately 552,000 registered refugees in Syria. The estimate of the actual number of these refugees, however, is far greater than that, and we at the Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) believe that it would have been better to grant these refugees Syrian citizenship, given their long-term residence on Syrian soil, which would not prevent them from also retaining dual Palestinian citizenship.

The Palestine Arab Refugee Institution, now called [the General Authority for Palestinian Arab Refugees](#), was established by Decree No. 450 in January 1949. It was entrusted with the task of organizing and assisting the affairs of Palestinian refugees. [The number of Palestinian refugees registered](#) by the Authority as of May 12, 2020, is 552,974 persons. Over 70 years, this body worked to receive and process all donations and grants allocated to the Palestinians in Syria from any source, whether these resources were in-kind or cash, and distribute them according to the body's wishes.

The majority of Palestinian refugees in Syria are distributed in seven governorates, with the largest group in Damascus. The UNRWA provides services to Palestinians in 12 Palestinian refugee camps across the country, nine of which are official camps, namely: al Nayrab Camp in Aleppo city, Hama Camp in Hama city, Homs Camp in Homs city, the camps of Khan al Sheeh, Khan Dannoun, Sbeina, and Qabr al Sett (al Sayyida Zainab), and Jaramana in Damascus Suburbs governorate, and the Daraa Camp in Daraa city, along with three unofficial camps, namely: al Yarmouk Camp south of Damascus city, which was classified before 2012 as the largest gathering of Palestinians in all the countries of diaspora, al Raml Camp in Latakia governorate, and Ein al Tal Camp in Aleppo city.

After the start of the popular uprising calling for freedom and democracy in March 2011, a majority of the Palestinian refugees in Syria sided with the just demands, with some of these playing a prominent role in the popular uprising; since they are part of Syrian society, they were exposed to the same grave violations at the hands of the Syrian regime as other members of Syrian society who demanded political change and freedom, with these violations reaching the level of crimes against humanity and war crimes. In addition to these considerations, the Palestinian refugees in Syria in general are a vulnerable group in society given their status as already displaced refugees who were forced to leave or whose forebears were forced to leave their homes, jobs and settled lives when they were displaced from their cities and towns in Palestine, so the impact of these new violations on them is often more severe.

In this report, we outline the record of the most notable violations suffered by Palestinian refugees in Syria, specifically at the hands of the Syrian regime; we will outline their suffering at the hands of other parties to the conflict at a later date, but it should be emphasized that the Syrian regime is by far the main and most prolific perpetrator of violations against Palestinian refugees in Syria compared to the rest of the parties, being responsible for approximately 87 percent of all the violations inflicted, while the rest of the parties to the conflict are collectively responsible for less than 13 percent of this total, according to the SNHR's exhaustive database, since the beginning of the popular uprising in Syria up until July 2020. Readers are welcome to read in detail how we document and archive violations by reading our work [methodology](#). This report also includes the events we documented in al Yarmouk Camp, which is the largest Palestinian refugee camp in Syria.

We reiterate that the details included in this report represent the bare minimum of violations which occurred, including only those that our team was able to properly document within the criteria set out in our work methodology, but the reality and the true magnitude of crimes is far greater than those officially documented; one of the most notable difficulties that we have faced over the past nine years in documenting violations against Palestinian refugees in Syria has been our inability to distinguish between Syrian citizens and Palestinian refugees in Syria, due to the great degree of integration between them.

This report aims to shed light on a small part of the extent of what Palestinian refugees have endured in Syria since March 2011 in an effort to preserve their rights, to accurately and chronologically catalogue their frequent displacement, to expose the most prominent perpetrators of the violations of their rights, and to work to hold all these figures accountable.

Fadel Abdul Ghany, Chairman of the Syrian Network for Human Rights, says:

“Palestinian refugees in Syria, including women and children, particularly those forcibly disappeared and displaced by the indiscriminate attacks of the Syrian regime and its Iranian ally, are considered one of the most vulnerable groups in Syrian society.

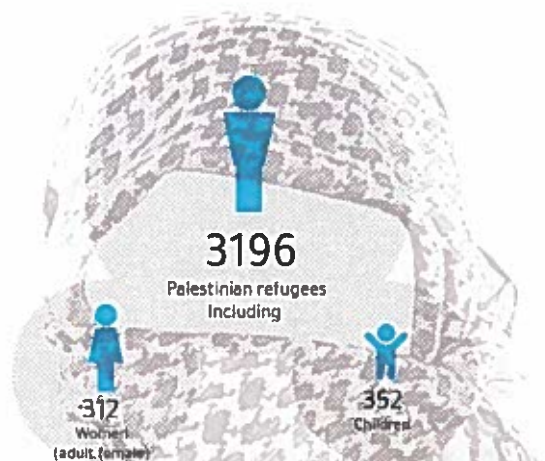
We are placing this report in the hands of the Palestine Liberation Organization, the Arab League, and the international community to seek their support in holding the Syrian regime accountable for all of the massive number of violations it committed against Palestinians in the Syrian territories, where it is assumed that the regime has the primary responsibility for protecting them.”

II. The Most Notable Violations against Palestinian Refugees in Syria by Syrian Regime Forces and Allies Since March 2011, According to the Syrian Network for Human Rights Database

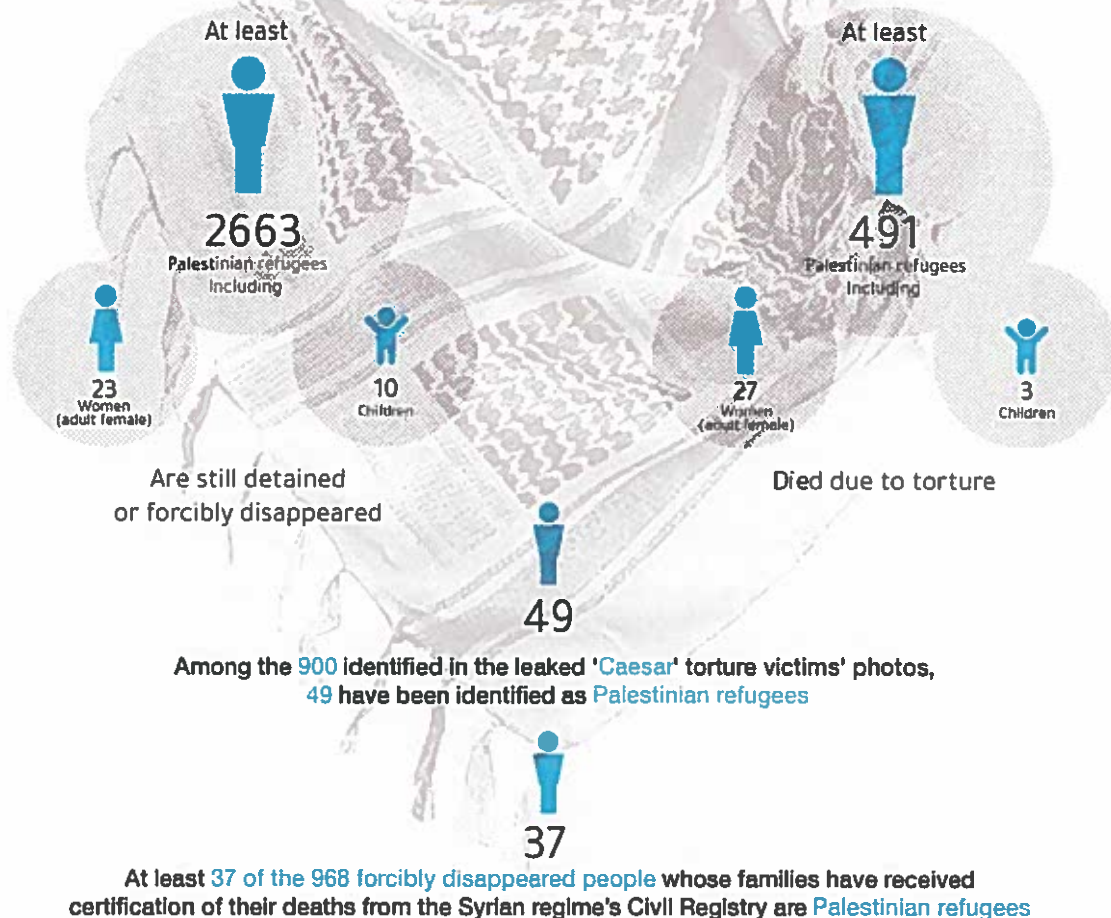
The situation of the Palestinian refugees in Syria was the same as that of the rest of Syrian society, in which everyone who supported the popular uprising, demanding a political change in the dictatorial hereditary regime which has ruled Syria for fifty years and a transition towards a pluralistic democratic rule, was subjected to the worst types of violations, including killing, torture, enforced disappearance, siege, starvation, forced displacement, and looting of property, and other types of violations, some of which have reached the level of crimes against humanity and war crimes. Among the Palestinian refugees in Syria who supported the popular uprising were prominent activists, including artists, politicians, media and medical personnel. The following are the most notable statistics that show some of the violations against Palestinian refugees in Syria, according to the SNHR's database:

Infographic showing the most notable violations against Palestinian refugees in Syria at the hands of Syrian Regime forces between March 2011 and July 2020

Extrajudicial Killing



Arbitrary Arrests, Enforce Disappearances and Torture



A: Extrajudicial killing:

The SNHR documented the deaths of 3,196 Palestinian refugees at the hands of Syrian Regime forces in Syrian territories between March 2011 and July 2020, including 352 children and 312 women (adult female); among the victims, 491 refugees died due to torture in the Syrian regime's prisons, and its other official and unofficial detention centers.

The following are the most notable extrajudicial killings:

Wisam Amin al Ghoul, from Daraa Camp, the first Palestinian-Syrian victim in the popular uprising to be documented on the SNHR's database, died on March 23, 2011, after being shot by Syrian Regime forces while he was helping injured protesters.

Mahmoud al Shehabi, a college student from al Aydeen Camp in Homs city, was shot dead by Syrian Regime forces near the New Clock Square in the center of Homs city on December 27, 2011.

Hiba Hilal, 23, was killed along with her unborn baby as a result of a ground attack by Syrian Regime forces on Douma city in Damascus Suburbs governorate on August 28, 2012.

The female child, Raw'a Abu Hamdan, from al Yarmouk Camp south of Damascus, died on March 13, 2017, due to lack of food and medical supplies as a result of the siege imposed on the camp by Syrian Regime forces, which prevented her parents from taking her out of the camp for treatment.

B: Arrest, enforced disappearance, and torture:

According to the SNHR's database, at least 2,663 Palestinian refugees, including 10 children and 23 women (adult female), are still detained or forcibly disappeared in the Syrian regime's detention centers between March 2011 and July 2020.

The SNHR has also documented the deaths of at least 491 Palestinian refugees, including three children and 27 women (adult female), who died due to torture in the Syrian regime's prisons, official and unofficial detention centers.

The following are the most notable arrests or enforced disappearances:

Mohannad Muhammad Omar, a journalist from al Yarmouk Palestinian Refugee Camp south of Damascus city, born in 1985, was arrested by Syrian Regime forces on Wednesday, February 29, 2012, in al Alam Channel's office in Damascus city. His fate remains unknown.



Ali Saeed al Shehabi, born in 1955, is a Palestinian thinker and historian, an English teacher from al Yarmouk Palestinian Refugee Camp south of Damascus city. Ali was imprisoned on political grounds from 1982 until the end of 1991. Syrian Regime forces rearrested him on Monday, December 17, 2012, while he was passing through one of the regime's checkpoints at the northern entrance to al Yarmouk Camp. His fate remains unknown.



[Alaa al Din Yousef](#), a doctor specializing in neurological surgery, is from al Yarmouk Palestinian Refugee Camp south of Damascus city, was aged 60 at the time of his arrest. Syrian Regime forces arrested him on Tuesday, December 25, 2012, while he was passing through one of the regime's checkpoints at the northern entrance to al Yarmouk Camp. His fate remains unknown.



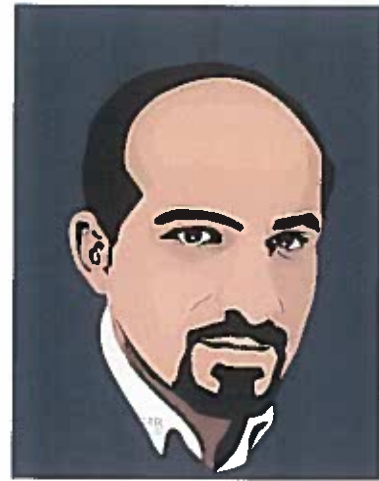
Salma Abdul Razzaq, born in 1990, a university student at the Faculty of Architecture at the University of Damascus, is from al Yarmouk Palestinian Refugee Camp south of Damascus city. Syrian Regime forces arrested her on Sunday, December 30, 2012, while she was passing through one of the regime's checkpoints at the entrance to al Yarmouk Camp. Her fate remains unknown.



[The child, Abdul Rahman Samir Idris](#), born in 1997, was a 15-year-old student in the ninth grade of basic education at the time of his arrest in 2012. Abdul Rahman, who is from Douma city in the Eastern Ghouta in Damascus Suburbs governorate, was a resident of al Yarmouk Camp south of Damascus city. He was arrested by Syrian Regime forces on Friday, September 21, 2012, in an area near the reserve automatic bakery in al Zahera neighborhood in Damascus city. Regime personnel insulted and beat his mother when she tried to prevent them from arresting him. On February 2013, his family received information about their son from a released detainee who said that he had seen Abdul Rahman at the end of September 2012 at the State [Security Branch](#) in Najha village south of Damascus Suburbs governorate. His fate remains unknown

The following are the most notable cases of death due to torture:

Basel Khartabil, a computer engineer and information expert from Damascus city, who specialized in developing open source software, was born in 1981. He was arrested by Syrian Regime forces on Thursday, March 15, 2012, in al Mazza neighborhood, west of Damascus city. He spent the period of his detention in Seydnaya Military Prison and Adra Central Prison in Damascus Suburbs governorate. On Tuesday, August 1, 2017, SNHR received information that Syrian Regime forces executed Basel after he was sentenced to death by al Midan Military Court in Damascus on Monday, October 5, 2015.



Ahmad Hussein al Sliebi, from al Sbeina Camp in Damascus Suburbs governorate, was arrested by Syrian Regime forces on December 25, 2014, while he was passing through one of the regime's checkpoints on the road between al Sbeina town and Housh al Rihaniya area south of Damascus Suburbs governorate, and almost since that date he had been classified as forcibly disappeared, given the Syrian regime's denial of his detention and refusal to allow anyone, even if a lawyer, to visit him. On June 18, 2020, SNHR received information indicating that he had died in regime custody. The information we have obtained from our 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 detention center. We can confirm that Syrian Regime forces failed to hand over his body to his family.

- A number of Palestinian refugee victims have been identified from the Caesar photographs and by death certificates issued through the Civil Registry Departments:

The SNHR issued two [extensive reports](#) on the analysis of the 'Caesar' photos of torture victims killed in regime prisons in order to identify the largest possible number of victims shown in these photos, and have been able to identify approximately 900 individuals shown in these photos, as part of our work on this issue since the end of 2014 to date; among these victims, 49 were of Palestinian nationality residing on Syrian territory.

We also released [three reports on the issue of the Syrian regime's handing over death certificates to families for their forcibly disappeared family members](#), through the Civil Registry Departments. The number of cases in which we have documented victims' families receiving death certificates for their family members since April 2018 to date has reached at least 968 cases in total, including nine children and two women; of this total, were 37 Palestinian refugees.

The following are the most notable cases:

Muhammad Nizar Abu Omar, Syrian-Palestinian, a university student at the Faculty of Arts, Department of Arabic Language, Tishreen University, Latakia city, and a resident of al Raml al Janoubi area in Latakia city. Muhammad, born in 1985, was arrested on Thursday, August 2, 2012, by Syrian Regime forces in a raid on his workplace in al Raml al Janoubi area. On Saturday, February 1, 2014, Muhammad's mother visited the Military Police Branch in al Qaboun neighborhood, northeast of Damascus city, where she was given a [death certificate](#) stating that



Muhammad died at the Tishreen Military Hospital in Damascus city on July 13, 2013, as a result of a heart attack. In 2016, his family identified his body [in one of the torture victim photos leaked by Caesar](#); in the photo, a piece of paper on which two numbers were written had been placed on his body – these were respectively 1620 and 215, which we believe refer to his prisoner number in the jail and the number identifying the detention center in which he was killed, with '215' referring to the infamous Branch 215, known as the Raids Branch, which is affiliated with the Military Security Force in Damascus city.

[Saleh Mansour Saleh Shakoush](#), Syrian-Palestinian, from Khan al Sheeh Palestinian Refugee Camp in the west of the Damascus Suburbs governorate, was arrested by Syrian Regime forces on Tuesday, May 19, 2015. On Sunday, April 21, 2019, his family learned that he had been registered at the Civil Registry Department as having died on March 9, 2016. SNHR believes that he probably died due to torture in a Syrian regime's detention center in Damascus city.

C: Forced displacement:

Similar to the reasons that led nearly six and a half million Syrians to forced displacement, Palestinian refugees in Syria have been displaced from their places of residence due to the arrests, torture, bombardment, siege, and destruction of most Palestinian camps in areas outside the control of the Syrian regime, due to indiscriminate shelling, such as the camps of al Yarmouk, Daraa, Handarat, and Khan al Sheeh.



Some of the Palestinian refugees in Syria resorted to fleeing and seeking refuge outside Syria, whether to neighboring countries, particularly Lebanon, or to European countries through irregular migration across the sea, which led to dozens of them being fatally drowned. Others took refuge in shelters belonging to UNRWA, the Syrian regime, or the Palestine Liberation Organization, all of which were located in areas under the control of Syrian Regime forces, while other displaced Palestinians chose to move to areas outside the control of the Syrian regime and to live in camps in northwest Syria, with their presence concentrating in Deir Ballut and Mahmoudiya camps; we released [a report](#) previously on the suffering of the Deir Ballut camp residents.

[UNRWA statistics](#) indicate that approximately 400,000 Palestinian refugees registered in Syria have been displaced at least once inside Syria - with some displaced several times - and reveal there are currently as many as 280,000 Palestine refugees from Syria who have been displaced inside Syria, while approximately 120,000 others have sought refuge in neighboring countries.

Forcibly internally displaced persons are considered the poorest group within society, and, in addition to their other grave problems, they are currently under serious threat of being infected with the COVID-19 pandemic due to the poor medical examination capabilities available and the high population density in the camps.

III. Some of the Palestinian Refugees in Syria Were Involved, Alongside the Syrian Regime, in Committing Violations Amounting to Crimes against Humanity and War Crimes

Some of the Palestinian refugees in Syria stood by the Syrian regime financially and morally, supporting its brutal repression and justifying the violations that it has committed under fictitious demagogic arguments that do not deserve to be detailed here because, under no pretext, can they justify the egregious violations of human rights, some which amount to the level of crimes against humanity. Some of these Palestinian regime loyalists were unsatisfied with just providing political, media and technical support for the Syrian regime, with some Palestinian armed factions participating at the military level, alongside Syrian Regime forces, in the indiscriminate shelling and storming of areas, carrying out all the orders given them by Syrian Regime forces, and accordingly being involved and became partners in and contributors to perpetrating hundreds of violations against Syrian society and against fellow Palestinian refugees in Syria, who demanded a process of political change, with many of these violations amounting to crimes against humanity and war crimes; among the most notable of those factions involved in crimes against humanity and war crimes in Syria are:

- The 'Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine - General Command' headed by Ahmad Jibril, which was founded on April 24, 1968.
- The 'Fatah – Intifada' movement and the 'Thunderbolt' forces - the military wing of the Palestinian Baath Party.
- The 'Free Palestine movement', which posted on its Facebook account [photos](#) of [its combatants](#) on the Idlib fronts, and mourned many of them.
- The 'Palestinian Popular Struggle Front'
- The 'Galilee Forces'
- The Palestinian 'Liwa al Quds' (al Quds Brigade)
- The 'Palestinian Liberation Army', whose forces fought alongside Syrian Regime forces on several fronts, with hundreds of them being killed.

These Palestinian residents of Syria denied what Syrian society had provided them with for decades and turned into an additional instrument of repression used by the Syrian regime, through which it perpetrates more violations and crimes.

IV. The Syrian Regime Repeats the Scenario of Eastern Aleppo and Eastern Ghouta in al Yarmouk Camp, South of Damascus

Al Yarmouk Camp is the largest gathering of Palestinian refugees in Syria, and is one of the three unofficial camps in Syria. The camp, which was established in 1957, is located around eight kilometers to the south Damascus city center, and is bordered to the east by al Tadamun neighborhood and to the south by al Hajar al Aswad neighborhood and Yalda area, which is administratively a part of Damascus Suburbs governorate. Prior to the beginning of the popular uprising in March 2011, [approximately 160,000](#) Palestinian refugees lived in the camp.

Al Yarmouk Camp went through the same stages as other areas of Syria that demanded a political transition, starting with peaceful protests, then, as the popular uprising turned into the stage of armed conflict, being subjected to siege, collective starvation and bombardment for years, followed by forced reconciliation leading to forced displacement; these stages which were suffered by the vast majority of the areas that broke free of the control of the Syrian regime, indicate the international community's persistent neglect and failure of the Syrian people, with the transition between each stage taking several months during which the international community did nothing, paving the way for the Syrian regime to move to the next stage. If the international community had exerted any real pressure since the first stage, that is, the stage of peaceful popular demonstrations, it would have saved hundreds of thousands of victims and prevented the displacement of millions more people, and due to this indifference, the Syrian regime never felt that it needed to make any real political change. The following is a documented timeline of the most notable events experienced by al Yarmouk Camp and the policy that the Syrian regime followed, which is contrary to international humanitarian law and international human rights law:

Peaceful protests began and continued in al Yarmouk camp from the beginnings of the popular uprising until December 2012 when some members from armed factions opposing the Syrian regime began to emerge; despite this, however, the popular protests persisted.

On July 10, 2012, Syrian Regime forces imposed a partial siege on the camp by blocking all its entrances except the northern entrance, and on July 17, 2013, this northern entrance to the camp was also closed, leaving civilians under a complete, sealed-off siege that included preventing the entry of any food or humanitarian aid for nearly 18,000 Palestinians inside the camp, according to UNRWA statistics. The camp's water and electricity supplies were also deliberately cut off as an additional means of pressurizing the people. At that time, we issued [a report](#) on the Syrian regime's use of water as a weapon of war in al Yarmouk camp.

After long, cruel months of siege, in January 2014, the Syrian regime allowed UNRWA to enter and distribute aid to civilians and continued its work in parallel with the continued siege by the Syrian regime on the camp, preventing its civilian residents from leaving from or reentering it.

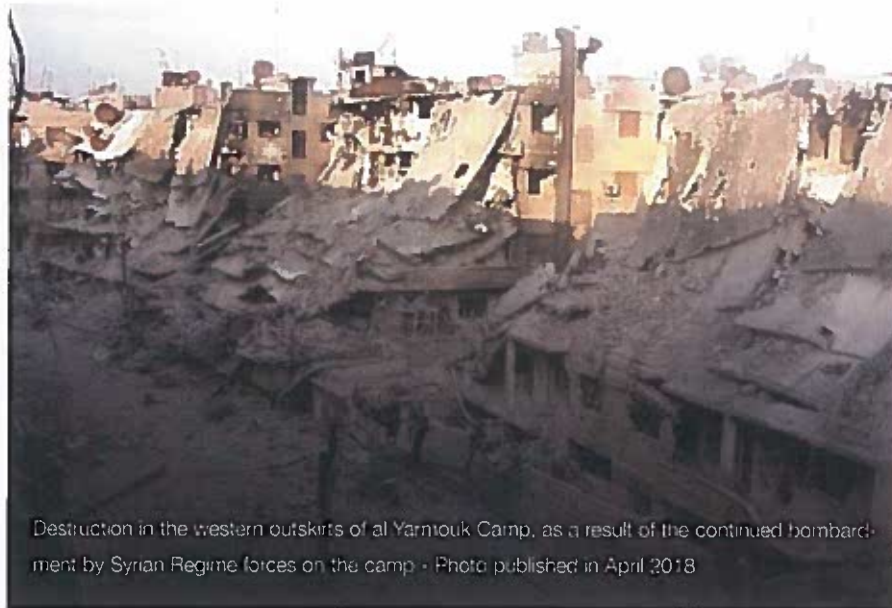
At the end of 2014, ISIS-affiliated members began to appear in the camp, and in April 2015 the group managed to tighten its control over approximately 75 percent of the camp area, before going on to implement its policy of brutally suppressing the population as in other areas where it imposed control on.

In April 2015, UNRWA announced the suspension of its work in the camp due to the deterioration of the security situation in the area; this coincided with several relief agencies closing their offices in the camp as a result of being subjected to several types of violations by the elements of ISIS, and to the high risks that threatened workers due to clashes between ISIS and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham and opposition fighters on the one hand, and the Syrian regime's shells and barrel bombs on the other, in addition to the repercussions of the complete siege that was still ongoing in the area. We issued [a report](#) on the humanitarian situation in the camp at that time.

In mid-2015, the siege was partially lifted from the camp from the Yalda town side, which is adjacent to the camp on its southeastern flank, following the announcement of a settlement agreement between the Armed Opposition factions controlling the town and Syrian Regime forces; under this agreement, control of the town remained in the hands of factions of the Armed Opposition, which in turn allowed the entry of materials and goods, and the entry and exit of residents to and from the camp across the town; this arrangement remained in force until October 2017.

In October 2017, the opposition factions controlling Yalda closed this entrance and helped the Syrian regime to impose a complete siege on al Yarmouk Camp and al Hajar al Aswad areas, under the supposed pretext of fighting ISIS.

In April 2018, the Syrian regime with its Russian ally launched a massive military campaign against the camp, using various types of weapons. Under the weight of the Syrian-Russian alliance air strikes, the siege imposed on the people, and ISIS control from the inside, the people were forced to submit to a settlement agreement, which was concluded after negotiations held under Russian supervision in Yalda town between representatives of the camp's residents and of the Syrian regime; this agreement stipulated that all civilians, who were estimated to number approximately 4,000 from the camp, should depart to go wherever they want, with settlement status provided for those who wanted to move to the areas controlled by the Syrian regime and those who did not want to go to northern Syria. The process of displacement and emptying the camp of its residents began in early May 2018.



On May 21, 2018, the Syrian regime announced its control of al Yarmouk Camp after an agreement with ISIS, after which the organization's members were transferred to the suburbs of Suwayda governorate, while the Syrian regime entered the camp where no civilians remained.

Seizing lands and property, and large-scale looting by Syrian Regime forces that feed into demographic change in al Yarmouk Camp:

The Syrian regime practiced the same stages and tactics against al Yarmouk Camp that it practiced in other areas, including the eastern neighborhoods of Aleppo, Eastern Ghouta, and others. These stages include, after bombing, besieging and then displacing the areas peoples, the stage of controlling their lands and properties and looting their contents. These medieval tactics are used by the regime as retaliation in order to discipline the residents of the area and serve as a stark warning for future generations, and to carry out the largest possible process of demographic change and disruption of society. For al Yarmouk camp, however, this was even more intense, with the camp distinguished from other areas by its status as the main incubator of Palestinian refugees in Syria, holding a symbolism and status in the conscience and consciousness of all Syrians towards the displaced Palestinians.

The Syrian regime has implemented all 'laws' and decrees that contravene the most basic principles of international human rights law, which are decisions that violate the citizen's right, and legalize the looting and burglary of property, most notably:

Legislative Decree 63 of 2012¹ allows the confiscation of the property of "terrorists"; according to the regime's definition, anyone who demands or supports change to the dynastic dictatorial system of governance to a modern pluralistic democratic system can be classified as a terrorist. The Ministry of Finance has seized the properties of hundreds of activists who participated in or supported the political uprising under the pretext of their having "supported terrorism", transferring ownership of these properties to the state, with many of these properties then being seized by individuals and militias within the Syrian regime, especially within the security services.

Legislative Decree 66 of 2012², aimed at regulating the destroyed areas, was limited to two zones in Damascus governorate, while Law No. 10, which appeared in 2018, covered all Syria's territory. Legislative Decree 19 of 2015³, allowed local boards of directors to establish holding companies. According to this law, the Damascus Cham Holding Company, managed by the Governor of Damascus, was established in 2016.

Legislative Decree 11 of 2016⁴, aimed to stop any work in maintaining real estate ownership records closed due to the war in all Syrian territories.

Legislative Decree 12 of 2016⁵ was nominally aimed at automating the cataloguing of real estate ownership records, but demanded large numbers of ownership and identification documents to prove ownership, deliberately ignoring the fact that many of these documents had been lost due to the destruction of houses by the Syrian regime warplanes.

Legislative Decree No. 3 of 2018⁶, aimed at clearing the rubble of destroyed residential properties, making it almost impossible for the owners of these properties to prove ownership after ownership documents were ruined or destroyed by air strikes.

Law No. 10 of 2018⁷, subsequently amended by Law No. 42 of 2018⁸, aims to establish regulatory areas throughout Syria without specifying the nature of these regulatory areas, i.e. the Syrian regime can restructure any area it wants in Syria under the pretext of the existence of this law, including residential and commercial property.

Decisions related to al Yarmouk Camp in particular:

The Syrian regime was not satisfied with only the previous arbitrary laws and decrees, but went on to issue further arbitrary decisions and notices specifically for al Yarmouk camp, with the most prominent of these listed here:

¹ Syrian Arab Republic, People's Assembly, Legislative Decree 63 of 2012 <http://parliament.gov.sy/arabic/index.php?node=55763&cat=162188> (Arabic only)

² Syrian Arab Republic, People's Assembly, Legislative Decree 66 of 2012, <http://parliament.gov.sy/arabic/index.php?node=55888&cat=43008> (Arabic only)

³ Syrian Arab Republic, People's Assembly, Legislative Decree 19 of 2015, <http://www.parliament.gov.sy/arabic/index.php?node=201&id=114163&ref=tree8> (Arabic only)

⁴ Syrian Arab Republic, People's Assembly, Legislative Decree 11 of 2016, <http://www.parliament.gov.sy/arabic/index.php?node=201&id=16255&ref=tree8> (Arabic only)

⁵ Syrian Arab Republic, People's Assembly, Legislative Decree 12 of 2016, <http://www.parliament.gov.sy/arabic/index.php?node=201&id=17322&ref=tree8> (Arabic only)

⁶ Syrian Arab Republic, People's Assembly, Legislative Decree No. 3 of 2018, <https://bit.ly/309T8q9> (Arabic only)

⁷ Syrian Arab Republic, People's Assembly, Law No. 10 of 2018, <http://www.parliament.gov.sy/arabic/index.php?node=55168&cat=193138> (Arabic only)

⁸ Syrian Arab Republic, People's Assembly, Law No. 42 of 2018, <https://bit.ly/3q7Uwz6> (Arabic only)

On November 11, 2018, the Prime Ministry issued a decision mandating that Damascus governorate rehabilitate al Yarmouk Camp, south of the capital, and resolve the status of al Yarmouk municipality which will be dismantled and replaced by Damascus governorate, on the pretext of taking advantage of the governorate's capabilities to rehabilitate the camp in order to facilitate the return of the camp's residents.

On July 2, 2019, the Prime Ministry mandated the Ministry of Public Works and Housing to complete new organizational plans for the areas of Jobar, Barza, al Qaboun and al Yarmouk Camp, through which the specific characteristics of each area are taken into account in accordance with its urban, industrial, and craftsmanship components, as part of the government's plan to revitalize all the areas that it has taken control of.

On December 10, 2019, Imad Khamis, the former Syrian Prime Minister, announced that the organizational plan for al Yarmouk and al Qaboun areas would be announced on January 2, 2020, after studying the best options available, in order, he claimed, to overcome the negative impact of the war, and achieve economic and social feasibility and improve the development situation in these areas.

On June 1, 2020, Samir Jazairli, a member of the Executive Office of Damascus governorate and head of al Yarmouk camp's Service Committee, in a [press statement](#), denied rumors that citizens who wish to return to al Yarmouk Camp would need to register their names in al Wasim Mosque, and confirmed that in the event of securing the camp, a declaration would be made officially.

On June 9, 2020, Eng. Hussein Makhoul, the Minister of Local Administration, [announced](#) during a session of the People's Assembly that the Damascus Suburbs governorate would remove the rubble in al Hajar al Aswad neighborhood, south of Damascus, to enable the return of the residents to the area, adding that work is underway to allow the residents of al Yarmouk Camp to return there; he added that one of the less expensive and more fast-moving scenarios has been chosen to organize the camp in a civilized way, with procedures related to certifying its organizational plan already underway.

These arbitrary decisions, looting and theft operations constitute the biggest obstacle to any form of safe and voluntary return for the camp's residents, and for this reason we have not recorded any real return since May 21, 2018, the date of the Syrian regime's announcing its full control of the camp, up to the present date. The criminal practices of regime forces and affiliated forces there, including selling people's property, burning their homes and writing offensive sectarian graffiti on their walls, and filming videos in which regime troops use vile, inflammatory and offensive sectarian abuse about the dispossessed residents, all constitute incitement against the population who have been displaced from their lands, adding to and propagating resentment and grudges that will require many years, even after the departure of the current ruling authorities, to recover from. We released [a detailed report](#) previously outlining examples of looting carried out by the Syrian regime and its allies.

The SNHR contacted Ammar al Qudsi⁹, the head of the Palestinian Refugee Documentation Center in northern Syria, who is from al Yarmouk Camp, who told us about the situation of the camp: “The camp had experienced several incidents since the uprising began in March 2011, the most severe of which was the siege imposed on civilians by the Syrian regime on the area, coinciding with the cutting off of water, electricity, and communications, forcing the people to eat the flesh of cats and dogs in the absence of foodstuffs. Our role as media activists at the time was media mobilization to pressure the international community to lift the siege on the camp as it was a gathering of Palestinians, and we succeeded in doing so where UNRWA aid entered the camp.” Ammar added: “As a result of the forced displacement agreement that was reached with the Syrian regime under Russian sponsorship, I left the camp on May 5, 2018, heading towards the northern suburbs of Aleppo; the Syrian regime not only displaced us from the camp, but also carried out operations to plunder and loot our property, including my house, from which I was able to identify my home’s furniture, through analyzing photos posted on social media showing members of Syrian Regime forces looting them.”



We also spoke with Izz Basheq al Tadamun¹⁰, a media activist from al Tadamun neighborhood of Damascus, who witnessed dozens of violations practiced by the perpetrator parties in al Yarmouk Camp. He told us: “The Palestinians, like other Syrians, suffered from the oppression of the Syrian regime; since al Yarmouk Camp is one of the largest gatherings, and its residents lined up alongside the Syrians in their peaceful uprising and then militarily, these forces took severe revenge against it more than the other camps, through destruction, killing and starvation. Not only did the camp’s residents suffer from the oppression of the Syrian regime and its militias, but ISIS worked to harass the people, and they arrested me because of my work.”

⁹ Via phone call on June 6, 2020

¹⁰ Via his personal Facebook account on June 9, 2020

Izz added that he continued to report on the violations taking place inside the camp and the surrounding areas on a daily basis, despite the dangers and restrictions that he faced at the hands of ISIS and armed factions, until he was forcibly displaced from the camp towards northern Syria on May 5, 2018.

In a recent step in the ongoing process of the Syrian regime's arbitrary dealings with al Yarmouk camp, on June 25, 2020, the Damascus Governorate Council unanimously approved the new organizational chart for al Yarmouk area, which divides the area into three real estate units and deals with it as a neighborhood of Damascus, stripping the area of its status as a camp. According to the plan devised at this meeting, the residents of approximately 40 percent of the area can return there, while approximately 60 percent of the camp buildings will be removed, with towers and gardens to be built in their place.

This step comes within the context of the timeline that we referred to above, and within the framework of arbitrary decrees and laws that legitimize the process of reorganization and construction in a manner that extensively violates the rights of the population; despite the fact that the Damascus Governorate's organizational plan announced on the 29th of June nominally allowed the people to submit any objections within a month of that date, the situation of the people of al Yarmouk Camp is similar to that of the people of Eastern Ghouta and similar areas, as they fear returning in light of the presence of the regime's security services who have practiced arrests and torture for nine years and are still behaving in the same way without any changes. Fearing the risks of arrest, torture and enforced disappearance to which they are likely to be subjected, a large part of the camp's residents has become refugees outside the Syrian territories, with a month's duration not giving them sufficient time or will to return in these circumstances.

On July 7, 2020, al-Iqtisadi website published the statement delivered by Muammar al Dakak, Director of Technical Studies in the Governorate of Damascus during the session of the Governorate Council held on the previous day, in which he stated that camp residents would not be given any alternative housing in accordance with the reorganization of the area according to Legislative Decree 5 of 1982, although he claimed they'll receive organizational shares. In addition to all of this, the aforementioned legislative decree allocates any compensation according to the area of the building seized or destroyed rather than according to the buildings and other structures constructed in their place, which are then distributed according to these shares among the owners, meaning that the owners lose a large percentage of their housing; this is essentially a theft process legitimized by the Syrian regime's apparatus, which blatantly contravenes the Pinheiro principles.

Finally, according to the analysis of the photos and videos that SNHR has obtained of the camp covering a period of nine years, in addition to satellite images we have obtained, SNHR's estimates indicate that the damage to 80 percent of the camp buildings ranges between almost complete and partial destruction, with the Syrian regime's vague references to organizational plans, in light of its fail-

ure to allow the return to the camp of those Palestinian refugees wishing to do so and the well-founded fears of others to return for fear of arrest, showing that there is grave concern about the fate of the property of the Palestinians of Syria, and al Yarmouk camp being completely stripped from them and the camp being transformed into construction projects whose proceeds go to the Syrian regime.

It has become certain that the Syrian authorities have established these arbitrary laws and decrees with the aim of, in addition to the objectives previously mentioned, obtaining hundreds of millions of dollars by looting lands and properties, and through funding for reconstruction operations in the event that these begin under these barbaric and wholly unjust laws. It is equally clear that, in these conditions, there will be no solution to the issue of forced displacement of millions of Syrians, or the looting of their property, which can only be achieved after implementing political change that brings democracy, human rights and accountability.



V. Conclusions and Recommendations

Over the nine years, since March 2011 to date, the Syrian regime has committed a vast range of violations against Palestinian refugees in Syria, some of which constitute crimes against humanity, in particular the crime of enforced disappearance, torture, and forced displacement, which constitute war crimes according to Statute of the International Criminal Court (Articles 8 (2) (b) (7) and 8 (2) (e) (8)). The Syrian regime and its Iranian and Russian allies have also committed the crime of forced displacement in a widespread manner, which constitutes an egregious violation of the Geneva Conventions and amounts to crimes against humanity (Article 7 (1) (d)). The Syrian regime also committed other violations amounting to war crimes, in particular: indiscriminate bombardment that targeted civilian residential civilian neighborhoods and vital facilities, and contributed to the forced displacement of the population, as well as through the crime of siege.

Seizing property through enactment of laws that violate international human rights law and violate the most basic rights of Syrian citizens to their property is an essential obstacle to the return of refugees and displaced persons, and amounts to a forced eviction and attempt to manipulate the demographic and social structure of Syria, emptying the symbolism and status of al Yarmouk Camp and other Palestinian refugee camps.

In the Emergency Appeal 2020 regarding the Syria regional crisis issued on January 31, 2020, UNRWA announced that 91 percent of the Palestinian refugee families in Syria are currently living below the poverty line, with 40 percent of these people still in a state of constant displacement as a result of conflict and the destruction of their homes.

Recommendations:

UN Security Council

- Issue a binding resolution that prevents and punishes the crime of forced displacement, compels the cessation of forced displacement, and explicitly provides for the right of forcibly displaced people to return safely to their homes, and receive reparation for what they have suffered, that is through a political transition process that guarantees dignity and stability in accordance with a strict timetable not to exceed six months.
- Compel the Syrian regime to stop its policy of settlements and population replacement, which it carries out in cities and neighborhoods whose residents have been displaced, and focus on the issue of Palestinian refugees in Syria.
- Destruction of buildings and forced displacement threaten the region and Syrian territory, destabilizing security and stability, with the establishment of peace and security for Syria being at the core of the Security Council's tasks, responsibilities and capabilities.
- The Syrian case should be referred to the International Criminal Court and all those who are responsible for the multiple and vast crimes there 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.
- Establish peace and security, implement the principle of the Responsibility to Protect civilians in order to save Syrians' lives, heritage and cultural artefacts from destruction, pillage and vandalism.
- Extend sanctions to include the Syrian, Russian and Iranian regimes who are directly implicated in war crimes and crimes against humanity against the Syrian people.

International community

- The Russian and Iranian regimes should face heavy fines and financial penalties for the destruction of buildings and vital facilities in Syria. These sums should be reflected in the compensation of the IDP and refugee victims and the restoration of the houses, shops, and other properties which these two regimes contributed to destroying.

- In light of the split within the Security Council and its utter incapability, action should be taken at the national and regional levels to form alliances to support the Syrian people that can protect them from the daily killings, and to lift the siege and increase support for relief efforts. Additionally, the principle of universal jurisdiction should be applied in local courts regarding these crimes in order to conduct fair trials for all those who were involved.
- Support the political transition process and put pressure to compel the parties to implement the political transition within a time period of no more than six months so that millions of displaced people can safely and settled return to their homes.
- There should be no cessation or lifting of sanctions against the Syrian regime. Rather, those sanctions must be extended include the regime's Iranian and Russian allies. Without such action, the sanctions will have no effect on the Syrian regime, which receives significant support from its allies and thus continues to commit horrendous violations.
- The SNHR has repeatedly called for the implementation of the 'Responsibility to Protect' principle in dozens of studies and reports and as a member of the International Coalition for the Responsibility to Protect (ICRtoP) after exhausting all political channels from the Arab League's plan, and after Mr. Kofi Annan's plan proved fruitless. Therefore, the steps recommended under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations should be adopted and the norm of the "Responsibility to Protect", which was established by the United Nations General Assembly, should be implemented. The Security Council is still hindering the protection of civilians in Syria.
- Renew pressure on the Security Council to refer the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court. The Syrian Network for Human Rights has demanded that the jurisdiction of the court be expanded to accept the inclusion of those nations and territories where crimes against humanity or extermination are committed, regardless of state ratification or referral by the Security Council.
- Work to fulfil justice and achieve accountability in Syria through the United Nations General Assembly and the Human Rights Council and on implementing the principle of the universal jurisdiction.

OHCHR

- Assist in the building of a central housing and real estate database in Syria, with the aim of achieving reparations, implementing voluntary repatriation programs and ensuring restitution of housing, land and real estate in accordance with the UN Principles on Housing and Property Restitution for Refugees and Displaced Persons - Pinheiro Principles, ensuring that these include the housing and property of Palestinian refugees in Syria.
- Prepare a special report on the destruction of buildings, shops and vital facilities in Palestinian refugee camps, and report to the Security Council on the seriousness and sensitivity of the issue of property destruction.

Independent International Commission of Inquiry (COI)

- Include a broad section on violations of property destruction and Palestinian refugees' displacement by Russian, Syrian and Iranian forces in the next report in September 2020 and do whatever is necessary to investigate the extent to which Russia and the Syrian regime intentionally destroy as many homes and other properties as possible.

UN Special Envoy to Syria

- Highlight in the forthcoming UN Security Council briefing the destruction of tens of thousands of residential buildings in Palestinian refugee camps by Russian and Syrian forces and the forced displacement of their occupants.
- Clearly condemn the perpetrators of crimes, including massacres, and the main perpetrators of clear violations of Security Council resolutions.
- Call for rapid implementation of democratic political change that restores victims' rights and embodies the principles of transitional justice.

Palestine Liberation Organization:

- Follow up on violations committed by the Syrian regime against Palestinian refugees in Syria and work to hold it accountable and condemn it in all Arab and international forums.
- Pay more attention to the issues related to Palestinian refugees in Syria, in particular the widespread looting and plunder that the Syrian regime is carrying out regarding the lands, properties and housing belonging to Palestinian refugees in Syria.

UNRWA:

- Put pressure on all parties to the conflict to protect the security and safety of Palestinian refugees in Syria.
- Ensure that humanitarian aid reaches the forcibly displaced Palestinian refugees in Syria, particularly those in the displacement camps in northwest Syria, as they suffer from the worst living conditions, in addition to facing the additional very real threat of the spread of the COVID-19 among them.

The Syrian regime:

- Stop looting and confiscating lands and property belonging to Palestinian refugees in Syria, who have been part of the Syrian society since long before the Assad family seized power.
- Compensate the Palestinian refugees in Syria for the killings, torture, enforced disappearances and destruction of their homes perpetrated against them.

The Russian regime

- Stop using the veto in the Security Council, as this is in violation of the Charter of the United Nations, because Russia is a key player in the Syrian conflict alongside the Syrian regime.
- Reconstruct and restore the residential buildings and shops destroyed by Russian military forces, and compensate victims throughout the duration of their displacement.

VI. Attachments

[Photos published](#) by Smart News Agency on April 12, 2016, show destruction in Handarat Palestinian refugee camp north of Aleppo city, caused by the continued bombardment by the Syrian regime and its allies on the camp

[Photo](#) shows the destruction in a house in Khan al Sheeh camp in the Western Ghouta, west of Damascus Suburbs governorate, caused by an air attack by the Syrian regime and its allies - August 1, 2016

Aerial footage broadcast by Nabaa Media Foundation on July 10, 2017, showing the extent of the destruction in Daraa Palestinian refugee camp in Daraa city, caused by the continued bombardment by Syrian Regime forces and its allies on the camp, which was most violent in June 2017



[Photo published](#) on the Internet in April 2018 showing the extent of destruction in one of the areas on the western outskirts of al Yarmouk Camp south of Damascus city, caused by the continuous bombardment that targeted the camp before the Syrian regime announced control of it.

[Photos published](#) on the Internet in May 2018 showing the extent of the destruction in al Taqaddum area and al Orouba Street in al Yarmouk Camp south of Damascus city, caused by the continuous bombardment that targeted the camp before the Syrian regime announced control of it.



[Photo published](#) by al Arabi al Jadeed website on May 6, 2018, showing a gathering of civilians and combatants from the areas of south Damascus - some of them from al Yarmouk Camp - in Yalda area, in preparation for their transfer to areas in northern Syria, following an agreement in April 2018 between a delegation from the camp's residents and Syrian Regime forces under the supervision of Russia.

[Photo published](#) on the Internet in May 2018, showing members of Syrian Regime forces looting houses' furniture in al Madares Street east of al Yarmouk Camp, south of Damascus city, after these forces took control of it.

[Photo published](#) on the Internet in June 2018 showing the extent of destruction in al Yarmouk Secondary School for Girls' Street along the Jalal Kawash Street in al Yarmouk Camp, south of Damascus city, caused by the continuous bombardment that targeted the camp before the Syrian regime announced control of it.

[Photo published](#) on the Internet in June 2018, showing members of Syrian Regime forces looting houses' furniture on the main street of al Yarmouk Camp, on the western outskirts of al south of Yarmouk Camp, south of Damascus city, after these forces seized control of it.

Thanks and condolences

Our sincere thanks and condolences to all the Palestinian people and activists whose contributions have greatly and effectively contributed to and enriched this report.



www.snhr.org - info@sn4hr.org