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The Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in July 2020

COVID-19 Threatens the Lives of Millions of Syrians, with the Syrian Regime and Its Allies Amassing Forces to Bomb More Areas in and around Idlib

Tuesday 4 August 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.

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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 the violations most frequently perpetrated against Syrian citizens. 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, also violating the rights of Syrian citizens. The Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) has continued to document every incident that its team members are able to verify, with these violations escalating very dramatically in 2012 and 2013, prompting us to expand our publication of periodic monthly reports recording and highlighting the continued suffering of the Syrian people, which subsequently grew to eight reports on different issues issued at the beginning of each month. In the course of our work, SNHR has compiled a massive database cataloguing hundreds of thousands of incidents, each of which involves a pattern of violations that we have been able to document.

By the end of 2018, with a reduction in the level of violence compared to previous years, we changed our previous strategy and now compile our reports into a single monthly report featuring the most prominent violations in Syria which we have been able to document in the preceding month.

This month's report focuses on the human rights situation in Syria in July 2020, and catalogues the death toll of civilian victims whom we documented killed by the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces during this period, as well as the record of cases of arrests and enforced disappearance. The report also highlights indiscriminate attacks and the use of outlawed weapons (cluster munitions, chemical weapons, barrel bombs, incendiary weapons) and attacks on civilian objects, which SNHR's team was able to document during this period.

The report also includes documentation of violations distributed according to the perpetrator parties responsible for each one. Accurately ascribing responsibility sometimes requires more time and investigation than usual, especially in the case of joint attacks. On some occasions, when we are unable to definitively assign responsibility for specific attacks to one particular party, as in the case of air strikes by Syrian or Russian warplanes, Syrian-Iranian attacks, or attacks by Syrian Democratic Forces and the US-led coalition, we indicate that responsibility for these attacks is held jointly by the parties in question until we are able to likely establish which one of the parties was likely responsible, or it's proved that the attack was a joint initiative carried out in coordination between the two parties.

This report draws upon the ongoing daily monitoring of news and developments by SNHR's team, and on information from our extensive network of relations with various sources that have been built up over the course of our work since 2011. When we receive information or learn some news about violations via the internet or media outlets, our team works to follow up these reports and attempts to verify information and collect evidence and data. In some cases, researchers are able to visit the incident location promptly, although this is a rarity in light of the incredibly high security risks involved, and given the frequency of daily incidents and the scarcity of human and material resources to carry out this work. Therefore, the opportunities available to access evidence vary between one case and another, and consequently the level of certainty in classification of each incident varies. SNHR's customary policy in such cases is to rely on accounts from survivors who experienced the violation firsthand, in addition to analyzing available materials from open sources such as the Internet and media outlets. We also talk with medical personnel who treated the injured in these incidents and examined the deceased victims' bodies and identified the cause of death. SNHR also analyzes videos and photographs that our team has documented, or which were posted online, or submitted by local activists via e-mail, Skype, or social media platforms. These videos and photos show, amongst other things, sites of attacks, and the bodies of the deceased victims and the injured, the scale of destruction, and the remnants of the incendiary and cluster munitions and other munitions used, whilst other photos may show victims killed under torture, and victims amongst medical and media personnel who died in attacks carried out by parties to the conflict and the controlling forces. We also retain copies of all the videos and photographs included in these reports, which are also reviewed in this report, in a confidential electronic database, as well as keeping hard disk backup copies, and we ensure always that all these data are stored with their original source. We do not claim, however, that we have documented all cases, given the severe prohibitions, restrictions and persecution by the Syrian Regime forces and some other armed groups. Readers are welcome to find out more about our methodology¹.

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.

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

II. The Syrian Regime Bears Primary Responsibility for the Spread of COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has swept across most of the world, and caused massive numbers of infections and deaths, with most of the world's stable countries worldwide dealing with it seriously and taking exceptional measures to protect the population; many countries have announced their desire to attract and employ more medical personnel, and some governments have released large numbers of imprisoned people and detainees as a precautionary measure to stop the disease from spreading.

By contrast, since the beginning of the global pandemic outbreak, the Syrian regime has dealt with it with callous, total and extreme disregard and total negligence, with several countries announcing the arrival of infected cases from Syria since the beginning of March 2020. Despite this, the Syrian regime continued to deny the existence of any infections in Syria until March 22.

The COVID-19 does not distinguish between one person or another or between one region and another, and all the regions of Syria, particularly Idlib and surrounding areas, that have witnessed bombings, destruction and forced displacement are suffering from further challenges in addition to the usual ones, which cannot be compared to those in any other location; at the forefront of these challenges are the nearly 1.1 million Syrian citizens displaced between mid-December 2019 and the beginning of March 2020, with exceptional humanitarian aid efforts required to focus particularly on these people in the areas to which they were displaced. There are a number of factors which make them more vulnerable than others to infection with COVID-19, most notably:

- The Idlib region and the northwestern suburbs of Aleppo and its environs are already experiencing massive overcrowding due to the earlier displacement of tens of thousands of Syrians to these places from several areas such as the Eastern Ghouta, the northern suburbs of Homs, southern Syria, and recently the suburbs of Idlib and Hama, which has caused a drastic increase in the existing overcrowding, making the process of social physical distancing virtually impossible.
- Most of these people live in hastily constructed camps or structures which are wholly inadequate and unsuitable for housing (such as schools, shops, unfinished apartments, demolished buildings, caves, etc.), which lack the most basic sanitary infrastructure such as toilets, functioning sewage networks, or clean water, which makes the available water allocations necessary for periodic personal hygiene for each person far less than would be available in normal conditions or in other areas in Syria. The IDPs are struggling to obtain enough tents, and are sometimes forced to live in a tent collectively, which particularly negatively affects women due to their special needs.

- The healthcare system in and around Idlib continues to suffer from the repercussions of violent and focused targeting by the Syrian and Russian regimes' forces, which has contributed to a large number of health centers being put out of service. According to estimates from a number of local relief and humanitarian organizations, the number of doctors in the region ranges between 500 to 600, while the number of beds in medical centers ranges between 2,500 to 3,000, with the number of beds in intensive care units numbering 201 in total; in addition, only 95 ventilators are available for adults, with all of these being in use. The tremendous disparity between these figures and the population levels in northwest Syria shows the immensity of the grave deficit.

On April 14, [Médecins Sans Frontières](#) warned that the health system in Idlib, which is currently overstretched and low on supplies, will be overrun if COVID-19 spreads there.

The Syrian Jazira region (Deir Ez-Zour, Hasaka, Raqqqa), which is controlled by the Kurdish-majority Syrian Democratic Forces, suffers from a similar situation, and also includes large numbers of IDPs living in camps. Russia's use of its United Nations veto has caused the cancellation of three of the four crossings, with al Ya'rubiya crossing with Iraq being one of the crossings canceled; this caused the region to be denied direct UN aid, which is now provided exclusively through the Syrian regime that deliberately creates obstacles to aid provision and systematically carries out large-scale extortion, which we addressed extensively in our report: [Sanctions Are Linked to the Syrian Regime's Continuing Violations and Don't Include Medical Supplies and Food, Which Shouldn't Be Delivered Through the Regime](#), with the United Nations Secretary-General speaking about this in his report issued on February 21, 2020. [Human Rights Watch](#) also issued a report on the crisis facing the medical sector in that region and the complex difficulties it faces due to the closure of al Ya'rubiya crossing.

As for the areas under the control of the Syrian regime, whilst these are better off than the Idlib region, its environs, and the Syrian Jazira region, they suffer mainly from the exodus of medical personnel, and from the massive corruption in all the regime's organs, as well as from the depletion of the Syrian state's monetary reserves, which are spent on bombings, military operations, and security services at the expense of supporting the medical sector and services. SNHR has also demanded that Russia, a massively wealthy country, help its ally, the Syrian regime, given the circumstances of the spread of the COVID-19, as this would be far better and less costly than air strikes on medical facilities, cities and towns in and around Idlib.

In short, the whole of Syrian society suffers from mismanagement of the coronavirus crisis, in all areas of control:

One: In the areas under the control of the Syrian regime, these shortcomings are summarized in the following main points:

1. The Syrian regime denied the existence of any cases of COVID-19 in areas under its control until March 22; it should be borne in mind that when the regime finally admitted the existence of a case of infection, it was in a girl coming from outside the country. Another problematic factor is the complete lack of any transparency in the announcement of cases of infection and deaths, which are certainly far greater than those officially announced, due particularly to the constant contact with Shiite religious groups, individuals and militias coming from Iran and Iraq (most notably the al Nujaba Movement, the Imam Ali Brigade, the Fatemiyoun Brigade, the Quds Corps Brigade, the Abu al Fadl al Abbas Brigade and the Haideriyoun Brigade) via the al Boukamal land crossing, with the Syrian regime failing to close the al Sayyidah Zaynab area, which is known to be very crowded with Iranians and Iraqi Shiites, until April 2.
2. The Syrian authorities have not taken any effective measures to limit air traffic from other countries, with Damascus International Airport still witnessing multiple flights to and from many countries, including Iran.
3. Quarantine centers are not equipped and lack the minimum levels of hygiene, in addition to lacking the most basic conditions for healthcare and medical protection and the facilities to provide the medical procedures and services related to COVID-19, which are supposedly intended to contribute to curbing the spread of the disease if discovered. [Press websites](#) and social media platforms have published photos and [videos showing the dire situation of the Quarantine Center in al Dwair area](#), where people were placed after arriving on a trip from Iran
4. The Syrian regime has not taken any serious measures to prevent overcrowding of citizens in front of ATMs (such as, for example, increasing the number of ATMs available), in front of [retail outlets](#), [bakeries](#) or in commercial markets. The regime also failed to take any measures to prevent overcrowding in electoral centers on the day of the [People's Assembly elections](#) on July 19, facts which we have mentioned in a wide range of news reports in recent months.

Two: In and around opposition-held areas in Idlib:

1. The areas under opposition control suffer from an absence of a central authority to issue unified instructions, a shortcoming largely reflected in the disparity seen in the individuals' approach to prevention and medical treatment of the COVID-19.
2. Reduced degree of medical and religious awareness of the dangers of overcrowding and gathering. We have noted that dozens of worshipers have been gathering in some mosques to perform the prayers for Jum'ah (Friday Prayer) and Eid, as well as in some markets, in addition to attending [sporting events](#), without the controlling authorities imposing any restrictions on them, with a situation of indifference prevailing among many people, primarily caused by what they have been subjected to, including the bombings, displacement and torture by Syrian regime's forces and allies.

Based on all the above facts, there is no doubt that the negligence shown by the Syrian regime and its disastrous mismanagement of the Syrian state in recent years are further clear indications of the regime's indifference to citizens' wellbeing, showing once again that the only Syrians which it cares about protecting are the ruling family, the regime's inner circle and its wealthy elite; this indifference to the Syrian public may well lead to massive additional numbers of deaths among Syrian citizens. It should always be remembered that, the Syrian regime and its Russian ally have been primary accused of the targeting, bombing and destruction of most medical facilities in Syria, and the killing of hundreds of medical personnel, as documented on the SNHR's database, with dozens of these lifesaving medics still classified as having been forcibly disappeared at the regime's hands.

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

III. July Outline

At the level of bombardment and military attacks, since the beginning of July 2020, there has been continuous artillery and missile shelling by Syrian Regime forces on the areas of Jabal al Zaweya in the southern suburbs of Idlib almost daily. Regime shelling has also targeted the towns of Beneen, al Bara and Kansafra, and later expanded, in the middle of the month, reaching Ariha city and resulting in casualties in 14 July, after which it subsequently extended to towns and cities further from the contact line, reaching Ein Larouz and Arnaba at the end of the month, causing the displacement of dozens more families to the far north of Syria.

In July, we monitored the continuation of the Russian-Turkish patrols on the 'M4' International Road, according to the ceasefire agreement between Turkey and Russia, which came into effect on March 6. On July 22, these patrols completed their full scheduled route, from Saraqeb city in Idlib suburbs to Ein al Hour village in Latakia suburbs, for the first time since the first patrol on March 15. One of the joint Russian-Turkish military patrols was attacked with a car bomb on July 14, targeting a Russian military vehicle, which resulted in casualties among the Russian soldiers. As a result, Russian forces launched air strikes on several areas in the suburbs of Idlib governorate, including the towns of Beneen and Kafr Aweed, and on July 15, [Russian warplanes launched two air raids on al Bab city](#) in the northern suburbs of Aleppo, resulting in civilian injuries.

On July 17, [Syrian Democratic Forces announced](#) the start of the second phase of their operation codenamed 'Deterring Terrorism' in several cities and towns in the eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour, namely al Bseira, al Zir, Jdeed Ekidat and al Sh-hail, in search of ISIS cells; according to statements by Syrian Democratic Forces, this came at the request of clan dignitaries of Deir Ez-Zour suburbs who met with Mazloum Abdi, commander-in-chief of Syrian Democratic Forces, [on July 14](#). [The operation continued until July 20](#).

During this campaign, Syrian Democratic Forces imposed a curfew, closed all shops, bakeries, hospitals, and pharmacies, disrupted all services in the area, installed dozens of checkpoints, and carried out a campaign of arrests, looting, and theft of homes.

The bombings continued using car bombs and improvised explosive devices (IEDs) in several areas of the eastern and northern suburbs of Aleppo, and resulted in civilian casualties, as well as in the area of Ras al Ein in the northwestern suburbs of Hasaka and in the area of Tal Abyad in the northern suburbs of Raqqa.

Meanwhile, at the level of arrests and enforced disappearances, in July, Syrian Regime forces continued to pursue and arrest individuals who had settled their security situation in areas that have signed settlement agreements with the regime; these arrests have been concentrated in the governorates of Damascus Suburbs and Daraa, with most occurring in campaigns of mass raids and arrests. We also recorded Syrian Regime forces hunting for and arresting a number of civilians, including college students, in connection with their expressing opinions and support for the demonstrations and protests in Suwayda governorate. We also recorded arrests targeting those who illegally returned from Lebanon to their cities, who have been charged with terrorism, in addition to documenting arrests of civilians, including children, women, and elderly people, by Syrian Regime forces as they were passing through regime checkpoints whilst moving between or traveling to areas outside the Syrian regime's control.

In July, we recorded that Syrian Regime forces released 19 detainees, including three children and one woman, most of whom are from Daraa governorate, who had been released from detention centers of the Syrian regime in the governorates of Damascus and Daraa, under Russian mediation and through an amnesty decree issued in June 2020. Some of those released were former members of the Armed Opposition factions who had previously made a settlement of their security status prior to their arrest. The periods of detention for those released ranged from three months to two years. Among those released were several people who faced criminal charges rather than being arrested in connection with activism or their participation in the popular uprising towards democracy.

Meanwhile, Syrian Democratic Forces continued enforcing the group's policies of arbitrary arrest and enforced disappearance throughout the month of July, targeting activists and members of civil society groups who oppose their policies, or civilians who have kinship relationships with individuals in the Armed Opposition/ the Syrian National Army. Syrian Democratic Forces also carried out campaigns of mass raids and arrests, targeting many civilians, including children and people with special needs, on the pretext of fighting ISIS cells. These arrests were concentrated in the governorates of Deir Ez-Zour and Raqqa. Also in July, we documented Syrian Democratic Forces carrying out arrests targeting children, with the aim of forced conscription. Syrian Democratic Forces also targeted several families for arrest, as well as targeting several members of the same families, including elderly people, without providing clear charges, taking these detained to an undisclosed location.

In addition to these incidents, July also saw Hay'at Tahrir al Sham arresting activists working with civil society groups, as well as other civilians and professors, with most of these arrests occurring due to the publication of posts on social media accounts criticizing the HTS's management of areas under its control. These arrests were carried out arbitrarily in the form of raids in which HTS members stormed their victims' homes, often breaking down the doors, or by kidnapping their victims while they were travelling or passing through temporary checkpoints.

The Armed Opposition/ the Syrian National Army also carried out arrests and kidnappings in July, most of which occurred on a mass scale, targeting displaced and forcibly displaced persons, in many cases targeting several members of the same families, including elderly people; we also recorded arrests carried out within an ethnic context, with these incidents being concentrated in areas under their control in Aleppo governorate. Most of these arrests occurred without judicial authorization and without the participation of the police force, which is the legitimate administrative authority responsible for arrests and detentions through the judiciary, as well as being carried out without presenting any clear charges against those being detained.

As for the COVID-19 pandemic, the month of July was the worst ever in all regions of Syria. In areas under the control of Syrian Regime forces, 478 cases of infection were officially announced by the Ministry of Health, and 34 deaths during this month, making the total record announced on July 31, 757 cases of infection and 43 deaths. We at the SNHR believe that the figures announced represent only what the Syrian regime wishes to disclose, and that the regime is depending on the implementation of a 'herd immunity' policy on Syrian society, although most Syrians now suffer from poverty and weak immunity, portending a humanitarian catastrophe.

We confirm, as we mentioned previously, that the Syrian regime is mishandling the coronavirus crisis, with our reasons for this assessment being several, including:

1. The [Jordanian Ministry of Health](#) has announced the confirmation of cases of infection coming from Syria almost daily, including 44 cases recorded on July 21 alone, which indicates the presence of a large number of infections in Syria.
2. Firas Ibrahim, Director of the Office of Burial Services in the Damascus governorate, told [a media outlet](#) on July 24 that the number of deaths had increased since July 10 due to the coronavirus or deaths caused by virus-like symptoms that had not been confirmed (suspicion of infection).
3. Local media outlets and Syrian citizens' accounts have reported the deaths of people infected with the coronavirus, some of whom were high-level individuals, such as doctors, engineers, and others whose numbers exceed the official numbers of fatalities being declared. Through our monitoring of open source reports, we know that many are complaining about the medical authorities' failure to provide them with death certificates that mention the actual cause of death, and about the failure to take adequate precautionary measures inside the medical facilities, including by the medical staff, which makes these facilities sources of disease transmission rather than treatment.
4. Many families assured us that the country's analysis laboratories - even private ones - refuse to conduct PCR analysis tests, despite these tests being potentially lucrative. (5) The Syrian regime's [Ministry of Health](#) announced in a statement issued on July 30, that "the infections recorded in Syria are for cases that have tested positive under PCR laboratory testing only, while there are cases that are asymptomatic for which the ministry does not have the capabilities to conduct general swabs in the governorates, in light of the unfair economic blockade imposed on the country, which has affected the health sector with all its components."
5. This brief statement is an implicit recognition of the existence of undiscovered infections, with the Syrian regime manipulating the coronavirus crisis in order to have the economic sanctions imposed on it lifted.
6. On July 22, the Syrian regime [imposed](#) a condition on Syrian citizens leaving Syria to undergo a PCR testing at one of its four laboratories in Damascus city, in exchange for payment of the equivalent of \$ 100.

On July 9, the Early Warning Alert and Response Network (EWARN) [declared](#) the first positive test of [COVID-19 in northwest Syria](#), which was for a medical worker, with the number of reported infections with the virus on July 31 reached 31 cases, distributed in the governorates of Idlib and Aleppo, without recording any cases of death to date. With the announcement of the pandemic's emergence in northwest Syria, the Bab al Hawa crossing was closed to civilians and medical personnel, with this closure affecting the critical health conditions of hundreds of patients who have difficulty accessing treatment inside Syria, particularly for cancer patients.

In north-eastern Syria, as of July 31, infections with the [coronavirus amounted](#) to 25 cases, according to what was announced by the Health Authority in the Self-Management of Northern and Eastern Syria.

July also saw the Russian regime and its Chinese ally using their UN veto twice against the extension of [Resolution 2504](#), the first time on July 7 against a German-Belgian [draft resolution](#) providing for continuing delivery of humanitarian aid into Syria through the Bab al Salam and Bab al Hawa crossings for a year. As for [the second time](#), on July 10, Germany and Belgium returned to submit [a draft resolution](#) on extending the mechanism for delivering cross-border humanitarian aid for a period of six months through Bab al Salam and Bab al Hawa crossings on the Turkish-Syrian border. In [a report](#) we issued on July 6, we called for lifting the hand of the Security Council from the process of delivering humanitarian aid and allowing its flow without the need for a resolution from it. We also issued [a report](#) on the arbitrary use of veto by Russia and China 16 times.

We note that on July 9, Russia failed to pass a Security Council [resolution](#) aimed at reducing cross-border humanitarian aid to Syria through only one crossing and for a period of six months due to the opposition of Germany, France, the United Kingdom, the United States of America, Estonia and Belgium. On July 10, the Security Council was able to pass [Resolution No. 2533](#) providing for the delivery of humanitarian aid into Syria through only one crossing, the Bab al Hawa crossing, for a year. The closure of al Ya'rubiya crossing, in light of the emergence of the coronavirus pandemic, will contribute greatly to further deterioration of the humanitarian situation in northeast Syria.

In July, the region was exposed to a severe heat wave, which exacerbated the humanitarian disaster in Syria in general and in the camps in particular, due to the scarcity of electricity and water; this heatwave caused dozens of cases of food poisoning among IDPs in the camps. We also recorded several incidents of [fires breaking out in IDP camps in northwest Syria](#), due to misuse of cookers.

In al Hawl Camp in the eastern suburbs of Hasaka, which is under the control of Syrian Democratic Forces, in July, we recorded the departure of at least 100 families for their areas, on bail paid by the clan elders and notables of the eastern region.

On July 7, the International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (COI) issued [a report](#) focusing on 52 of the most prominent attacks by all parties in Syria, which took place from November 2019 to June 2020 that resulted in civilian casualties or damage to civilian infrastructure. These include 17 attacks impacting hospitals and medical facilities; 14 attacks impacting schools; nine attacks impacting markets; and 12 other attacks impacting homes.

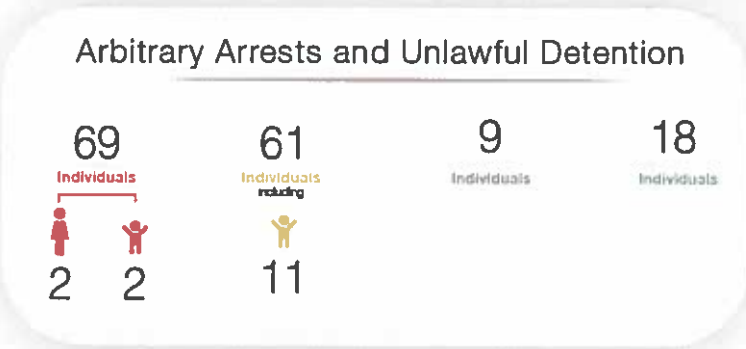
The states parties to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons [met](#) on July 7 to discuss the report issued by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons' (OPCW) Investigation and Identification Team, which conclusively found the Syrian regime to be unquestionably responsible for using chemical weapons three times against Latamena city in the suburbs of Hama governorate in March 2017, with two of these attacks involving the use of sarin gas. The meeting concluded by giving the Syrian regime 90 days to redress the situation, requesting that the Syrian regime declare the procedures by which chemical weapons were developed and produced, declare all the weapons it possesses, and resolve all of the outstanding issues. We issued [a statement](#) on the outcome of the meeting.

On July 23, Geir O. Pedersen, the Secretary-General's Special Envoy to Syria, [announced](#) the resumption of the work of the Constitutional Committee on August 24, 2020.

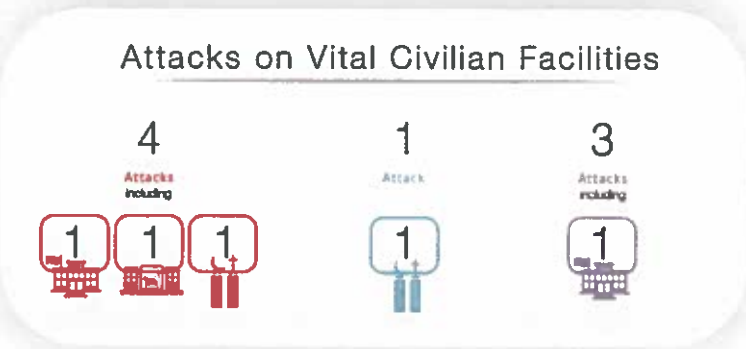
IV. The Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in July

This report outlines the most notable human rights violations that were documented by the SNHR in July 2020 at the hands of the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in Syria.

Record of the Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in July 2020



- Syrian Regime forces
- Russian forces
- Hay'at Tahrir al Sham
- The Armed Opposition\ The Syrian National Army
- SDF (mainly PYD)
- Other parties



- Civilians
- Women (adult female)
- Children
- Schools
- Medical Facilities
- Places of worship

A. Extrajudicial killing:

In July 2020, SNHR documented the deaths of 107 civilians, including 26 children and 11 women (adult female); among the victims were 13 individuals who died due to torture. We also recorded at least four massacres. We issued a report on the first of this month detailing the civilian victims documented killed in July 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):** 21 civilians, including four children.
- **Hay'at Tahrir al Sham (an alliance composed of Fateh al Sham Front and a number of factions of the Armed Opposition):** Two civilians.
- **The Armed Opposition/ The Syrian National Army:** Seven civilians, including four children and two women.
- **Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (the Democratic Union Party):** Four civilians.

B. Other parties:

We documented the deaths of 73 civilians, including 18 children and nine women, at the hands of other parties, distributed as follows:

- Landmines of unknown origin: 10 civilians, including five children and one woman.
- Fires of unknown source: 25 civilians, including three children and three women.
- Bombings whose perpetrators have not yet been identified: 29 civilians, including seven children and four women.
- Killings by unknown persons: Seven civilians, including three children and one woman.
- Shelling from unknown source: Two civilians.

B. Arbitrary arrest and enforced disappearance:

In July 2020, SNHR documented at least 157 cases of arbitrary arrests, including 13 children and two women (adult female), at the hands of the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in Syria. The largest number of arrests was carried out by Syrian Regime forces in the governorates of Damascus Suburbs then Daraa. We issued a report on the second of this month detailing the record of cases of arrests and enforced disappearances which we documented in July 2020 at the hands of the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in Syria.

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

- **Syrian Regime forces:** 69, including two children and two women.
- **Hay'at Tahrir al Sham:** Nine
- **The Armed Opposition/ The Syrian National Army:** 18.
- **Syrian Democratic Forces:** 61, including 11 children.

C. Attacks on vital civilian facilities:

In July 2020, SNHR documented at least eight incidents of attacks on vital civilian facilities, two of which we documented were carried out on schools, one on a medical facility and two others were on places of worship.

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

A. The main parties:

- **Syrian Regime forces:** Four.
- **Russian forces:** One.

B. Other parties:

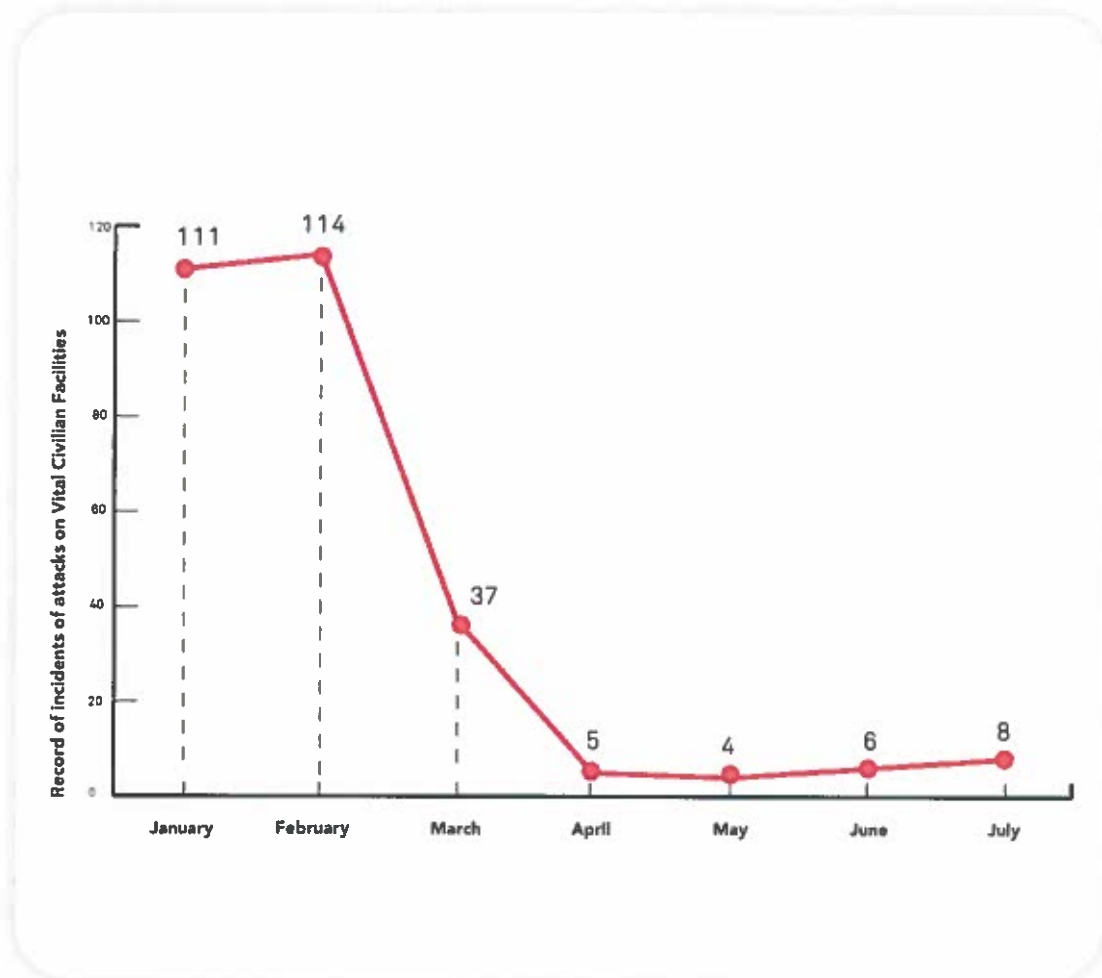
- Bombings whose perpetrators have not yet been identified: Three.

The record of attacks documented in July 2020 on vital civilian facilities was distributed according to the perpetrator parties as follows:

Attacked Facility	Perpetrator Party		
	Syrian Regime forces	Russian forces	Other parties Bombings whose perpetrators have not yet been identified
Places of Worship			
Mosques	1	1	-
Vital Educational Facilities			
Schools	1	-	1
Vital Medical Facilities			
Medical Facilities	1	-	-
Communal Facilities			
Markets	-	-	2
Infrastructure			
Water facilities and related resources	1	-	-
Total	4	1	3

Thus, the record of attacks on vital civilian facilities documented since the start of 2020 up to the start of August of the same year at the hands of the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in Syria has now reached 285 in total, distributed monthly as follows:

At least **285** incidents of attacks on vital civilian facilities in Syria in 2020
From January to August



The previous chart shows the decline in the number of the attacks on vital civilian facilities since the beginning of 2020 to date, with the ceasefire agreement that entered into force on March 6 having had an effect on this, along with the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic which has affected the capabilities of the Syrian regime's army and affiliated Iranian militias. Meanwhile, the bombings have continued, with SNHR attributing the largest percentage of attacks on vital civilian facilities documented in the past five months to these causes.

The most notable attacks on vital civilian facilities in July:

On Monday, July 13, 2020, Syrian Regime forces, stationed in Kafranbel city in the southern suburbs of Idlib governorate, used a missile launcher to fire missiles targeting [al Shamali Mosque](#) in al Mozara village in Jabal al Zaweya in the southern suburbs of Idlib governorate, [partially destroying the mosque building](#), and causing moderate material damage to its furniture. The village was under the joint control of factions of the Armed Opposition and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.



On Tuesday, July 14, 2020, Syrian Regime forces, stationed near Sareqeb city in the eastern suburbs of Idlib governorate, used a missile launcher to fire around 12 missiles at Ariha city in the southern suburbs of Idlib governorate, with a number of these falling near al Amin Medical Complex, partially destroying one of the complex' stores, and causing moderate material damage to its building and equipment. SNHR confirms that al Amin Medical Complex is headquartered in the former Carpet factory in the city. Ariha city was under the joint control of factions of the Armed Opposition and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.

On Saturday, July 26, 2020, an IED of so far unknown origin which was placed in a mobile carriage in a vegetable market, exploded, in Ras al Ein city the northern suburbs of Hasaka governorate, resulting in a massacre, and causing [severe material damage to the market's facilities](#). SNHR is still trying to contact witnesses and survivors of the incident to obtain more details. Ras al Ein city was under the control of factions of the Syrian National Army at the time of the incident.



On Monday, July 27, 2020, Syrian Regime forces used a missile launcher and artillery to fire a number of shells on Balyoun village in Jabal al Zaweya in the southern suburbs of Idlib governorate, targeting al Muhdatha School, partially destroying the school's perimeter fence. The village was under the joint control of factions of the Armed Opposition and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.



D. Record of indiscriminate attacks and attacks using outlawed weapons:

The Syrian Network for Human Rights was unable to document any indiscriminate attacks or attacks using outlawed weapons in July.

V. Attachments

(1) [107 Civilians, including 26 Children and 11 Women, Documented Killed in Syria in July 2020](#)

(2) [At least 157 Cases of Arbitrary Arrests/ Detention Documented in Syria in July 2020, including 13 Children and Two Women](#)

VI. 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, arrest, torture, and enforced disappearance. 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 in accordance with 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 leads 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 alliance of US-led coalition and Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces is considered to be a clear violation of international humanitarian law, with indiscriminate killings amounting to war crimes.
- Extremist Islamist groups have violated international humanitarian law, causing the death of many civilians, as well as damage to vital civilian facilities.
- Factions of the Armed Opposition 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 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 artefacts from destruction, looting and vandalism.
- The Security Council should adopt a resolution banning the use of cluster munitions 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 persons 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 (ICRtoP) 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', 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.

OHCHR

- The OHCHR should submit a report to the Human Rights Council and other organs of the United Nations on the incidents mentioned in this report since these attacks were perpetrated by the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces.
- Train Syrian organizations to undertake clearance of mines and other unexploded ordnance, and raise local awareness of the dangers of such ordnance.
- Establish a platform that brings together a number of Syrian organizations active in documenting violations and humanitarian assistance, in order to facilitate an exchange of skills and experiences within Syrian society.

Independent International Commission of Inquiry (COI)

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

International, Impartial, and Independent Mechanism (IIIM)

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

The United Nations Special Envoy to Syria

- Condemn the perpetrators of crimes and massacres, and those who were primarily responsible for dooming the de-escalation agreements.
- 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.

The Syrian regime

- Stop indiscriminate shelling and targeting of residential areas, hospitals, schools and markets, and end the use of outlawed weapons and barrel bombs.
- End the acts of torture that have caused the deaths of thousands of Syrian citizens in detention centers.
- Reveal the fate of some 83,000 Syrian citizens arrested by the security services whose fate has been concealed to date.
- Ensure compliance with UN Security Council resolutions and customary humanitarian law.

The Russian regime

- Launch investigations into the incidents included in this report, make the findings of these investigations public for the Syrian people, and hold the 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.
- Stop using incendiary weapons in populated areas, compensate the victims and their families for all human and material damage caused by the use of these weapons, and provide treatment for dozens of civilian casualties.
- Provide detailed maps of sites where Russian forces have launched cluster munition attacks, issue these to the United Nations and inform the Syrian public about them, thus facilitating the safe disposal of unexploded ordnance.
- Begin to achieve a breakthrough in the issue of detainees by revealing the fate of 83,000 people forcibly disappeared by the Syrian regime.

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

- The states of the coalition must unequivocally and sincerely acknowledge that some of their bombing operations have resulted in the deaths of innocent civilians. Rather than attempting denial, these states should take speedy steps to launch serious investigations, and immediately compensate and apologize to the victims and all those affected.
- 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.
- The states supporting the SDF should cease all forms of support until the SDF commits itself to complying with the rules of international human rights law and international humanitarian law. This is primarily the responsibility of the supporting states. Providing the SDF with weapons and support while knowing that the SDF violates the rules of international humanitarian law can be seen as a contribution to these violations.
- 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.

The Armed Opposition/ the Syrian National Army

- The Armed Opposition/ the Syrian National Army 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.
- Pledge to cease any arbitrary arrests, and investigate incidents that have resulted in violations of international humanitarian law.
- Take punitive action against those who commit violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law.

Humanitarian Organizations:

Develop urgent operational plans to secure decent shelter for internally displaced persons.

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