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Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in December 2023

**No Fewer than 206 Attacks on Vital Civilian Facilities
in 2023, 69 Percent of Which Were Carried Out by
Syrian Regime Forces**

Friday 04 January 2024

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 analyzes in Syria.

Contents

I. Introduction and Methodology.....	1
II. Brief Summary of December’s Most Notable Developments	2
III. Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in December	18
IV. Attachments.....	23
V. Conclusions and Recommendations.....	24
Acknowledgment.....	27

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

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

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



II. Brief Summary of December's Most Notable Developments

Bombings and military operations

December saw the continuation of the Syrian regime's ground attacks on **northwestern Syria**. We recorded sporadic incidents of bombardment that were concentrated in southern and eastern rural Idlib, western rural Aleppo, and Sahl al-Ghab in western rural Hama, all areas close to the dividing lines between regime and other forces. Regime attacks also targeted Idlib city and western rural Aleppo and southern rural Idlib, which are all far from the dividing lines. Notably, some of these attacks targeted vital civilian facilities, killing and injuring dozens of civilians, as well as damaging many service facilities. On December 2, a Syrian regime artillery detachment [bombed](#) a school in Afis village in eastern Idlib during school hours, injuring three students and a female teacher, and damaging the schoolyard. In another attack on December 9, Syrian regime forces used a rocket launcher to fire multiple rockets at [Darat Ezza city](#) in western Aleppo. One of the rockets hit a house, and injured two children, as well as partially destroying the house. Another regime attack on the same day on [Idlib city](#) and [Sarmin city](#) killed a total of nine civilians, including two children and women, and injured another 27, in addition to damaging several vital facilities. On December 17, a regime ground attack that targeted [multiple neighborhoods in Darat Ezza city](#) killed five civilians, including a pregnant woman. On December 25, Syrian regime forces used a rocket launcher to target Sarmin city, [killing one civilian and injuring five others](#), in addition to damaging a number of vital facilities.



↑ Destruction caused by a ground attack by Syrian regime forces on the al-Sena'iya [industrial] area in eastern Idlib city - December 9, 2023 ©SNHR

Meanwhile, Russian forces continued carrying out aerial attacks in northwestern Syria, which were concentrating in the areas close to the dividing lines between areas controlled by regime and other forces in Idlib governorate. [On December 19](#), a child was wounded in an aerial attack by fixed-wing warplanes believed to be Russian in the vicinity of al-Quneitra village in western Idlib. Another attack took place on December 25, in which warplanes believed to be Russian carried out a missile strike on the hilly Mazarea Alana area near Armanaz town in western Idlib, which resulted in civilian casualties.

On December 9, Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham used a rocket launcher to [bombard](#) the towns of Nebbel and al-Zahra in western Aleppo, killing two women and a child, and injuring 22 others.

On December 18, a group of lawyers held a demonstration in front of the Justice Palace in al-Ra'ie city in northern Aleppo, a city under the control of the Syrian National Army (SNA). The demonstrators called for discharging the interim government and ending corruption in the judiciary. In response, personnel from the Civilian Police, which is affiliated with the SNA's General Staff, beat a number of protestors and [media workers](#), breaking a number of cameras and other items of filming equipment. Additionally, four media workers were arrested and released the same day.

On December 25, we documented a number of rocket attacks carried out by unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), commonly known as drones, which we suspect were operated by Turkish forces. The attacks targeted Ein al-Arab (Koubani) city, with most being directed at military sites belonging to the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), who control the city, although some caused damage to civilian facilities in the vicinity of these military sites. We are still investigating these attacks as of this writing.

Elsewhere, peaceful civilian demonstrations continued in regime-controlled areas of **southern Syria** in December for the fifth consecutive month, mostly in the governorate of Suwayda. The protestors continued to condemn Bashar Assad for the dire state of the country, and to call for a regime change. These protests are continuing at a time of multiple, unprecedented and increasingly dire economic, living, and human rights crises in Syria.

On December 16, Jasim city in northern Daraa saw an escalation in tensions between Syrian regime forces and local residents. The situation began with regime forces enclosing the city and emptying the Jasim Police Station, in addition to putting plans in place to withdraw the regime's Military Security Intelligence personnel who were stationed in the Cultural Center. These deployments alarmed the residents who feared a potential security crackdown on the city. To avoid this outcome, the residents surrounded the Cultural Center, preventing the Military Security personnel from leaving. The regime then brought in reinforcements, blocking all the entrance roads to the city, erecting checkpoints, and preventing anyone from entering or leaving the city, except for university students. Subsequently, a number of meetings between regime forces and a delegation from Jasim city yielded an understanding under which the roads in and out of the city were opened on December 19, and the regime troops deployed in its vicinity withdrew in exchange for an agreement from the delegation that regime forces would be able to inspect agricultural areas surrounding the city.

[On December 18](#), a number of areas in rural Suwayda governorate that are close to the Jordanian borders were targeted with airstrikes, one of which struck a farm near Thebien village, killing two children and one woman. Another of the airstrikes targeted a house in Salkhad city in southern Suwayda which is located near a drug dealer's home in the same city, killing one civilian. On December 19, [Reuters](#) reported that Jordanian forces had carried out airstrikes the day before, December 18, targeting what it said were hideouts for "Iranian-backed drug smugglers in retaliation against a large-scale smuggling operation"; this followed an operation by Jordanian forces who used medium weapons and explosives to thwart attempts by smugglers linked to Iranian militias to cross the Jordanian border.

In northeastern Syria, regime forces and the SDF continued to engage in skirmishes. While regime forces have been targeting areas in eastern Deir Ez-Zour governorate on the east bank of the Euphrates River where the SDF are stationed, the latter have been also bombing regime-held areas on the river's western bank. Although these skirmishes, which also involved sporadic clashes between the two sides, caused damage to residential buildings and public facilities, no casualties were recorded.

Nonetheless, SNHR recorded a number of civilian deaths at the hands of SDF personnel in its territories in northeastern Syria. On December 3, for instance, SDF personnel shot at a boy and a woman riding a motorbike in Abu Hamam town in eastern Deir Ez-Zour, [killing the woman and injuring the boy](#).

Meanwhile, clashes also continued between the Deir Ez-Zour Military Council's forces and the SDF in Deir Ez-Zour in December, with the fighting, which began on August 27, entering its fourth month. As in November, however, these clashes were more sporadic than previously and were geographically limited to eastern Deir Ez-Zour.

Also in December, we recorded shells striking military bases housing US-led International Coalition forces, with this shelling originating from sites where Iranian militias are stationed within regime-controlled territories. In retaliation, the US-led International Coalition has carried out rocket attacks on those militias' sites in eastern Deir Ez-Zour. We also documented drone attacks targeting both coalition bases and Iranian militias' enclaves in eastern rural Deir Ez-Zour. However, we have not yet been able to conclusively identify the parties responsible for these attacks as of this writing.

In the last week of December, we documented intensified drone attacks which we suspect were carried out by Turkish forces on SDF military sites and their vicinity in Hasaka governorate. Some of those attacks resulted in casualties, as well as causing damage to civilian service facilities where SDF personnel were stationed. We are still investigating these attacks as of this writing.

Furthermore, December saw 10 civilians, including one child and two women (adult female), [killed by landmine explosions](#). This brings the total number of victims documented as being killed by landmines in Syria in 2023 to 114, including 26 children and 11 women. On December 11, a landmine whose source we have not yet been able to identify exploded under a tractor trailer that civilians were travelling in, on their way to harvest olives near their home village of al-Yalni, northwest of Manbij city, in eastern rural Aleppo governorate, [killing three civilians, including two women](#), and injuring 16 others.

December also saw more [killings of civilians](#) at the hands of unidentified assailants across Syria, mostly in the governorates of Suwayda, Daraa, and Deir Ez-Zour.

On December 2, the Syrian regime's Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA) reported that Israeli Air Force planes carried out an attack on regime military sites in the vicinity of Damascus, resulting in material damage. SANA reported [another](#) attack on December 10, in which Israeli warplanes fired missiles at multiple sites in the vicinity of Damascus city, also resulting in material damage. SANA reported [a third attack](#) on December 17, which it said targeted multiple military sites in Rural Damascus 'Rif Dimshaq' governorate, injuring two regime servicemen and causing material damage. On December 25, [the Russia Today](#) news agency reported that the Israeli Air Force had carried out an attack on al-Sayyidah Zaynab area near Damascus, killing a commander from the pro-regime Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC). On December 29, [SANA reported](#) that the Israeli Air Force had carried out an attack at dawn that day targeting multiple points in Damascus, adding that another attack took place around 23:05 the previous night, December 28, targeting sites in the southern area. Lastly, [SANA reported](#) that Israeli Air Force carried out an attack on multiple points in southern Aleppo city on December 30, which resulted in material damages.

Living and Security Conditions

In December, economic, living, and security conditions, as well as public services, continued to deteriorate across all sectors in areas under Syrian regime control, with a particularly sharp decline seen in the services sector. Regarding the power crisis specifically, the regime government continues to implement a rationing policy. In December, residents in some regime-held areas had to grapple with [increased weekly subscription](#) costs for their Ampere-based generators, which reached 53,000 SYP in Aleppo city, marking a 20,000 SYP increase on the previous charges. To make matters worse, the increased costs came in tandem with a one-hour reduction in the time during which power is available. Similarly, the water sector saw increased costs across all tiers, with the [pro-regime Tishreen Newspaper](#) reporting on December 3 the news costs according to the Tartus Governorate Water Institution:

- **Tier Five:** 150 SYP increase for monthly consumption of 35-60 cubic meters of water.
- **Tier Six:** 400 SYP increase for monthly consumption of 51-80 cubic meters of water.
- **Tier Seven:** 1,500 SYP increase for monthly consumption of 81-120 cubic meters of water.
- **Top tier:** 3,000 SYP increase for monthly consumption of 120+ cubic meters of water.

Meanwhile, civilians in regime areas are still struggling with price increases for all types of goods, particularly for foodstuff, vegetables, red meat, and chicken. Red meat prices in particular have seen an unprecedented rise, with the Syrian regime's government allowing the export of sheep and other livestock abroad, leading to the cost of one cow being priced as high as 58 million SYP. Similarly, [olive oil prices also increased](#) steadily with the regime government allowing the export of olive oil abroad. The price of a 16-kilogram tanker of oil has reached prices as high as 1.3 million SYP. Moreover, [the cost of property rental, particularly for houses, has seen a sharp rise](#). In 'popular' neighborhoods, houses are now being leased for a monthly average rent ranging between 250,000-500,000 SYP. On December 11, meanwhile, the [Syrian regime's Minister of Internal Trade and Consumer Protection](#) published a price gazette, announcing new prices for a number of fuel types: 90 octane at 8,500 SYP per liter, 'free' diesel at 11,120 SYP per liter, fuel at 6,926,935 SYP per ton, and liquefied gas, known as 'dukma', at 10,438,450 SYP per ton. Naturally, the increase in fuel prices led to further price increases for all kinds of other goods, due to the increase in manufacturing and transportation costs.

Also in December, a report published by the regime-controlled Central Bank of Syria's [official exchange market rate gazette](#) announced that the value of one USD had increased against the Syrian Pound, standing at 12,500 SYP, while in [the official exchange rates gazette](#), one USD now equal 12,700 SYP. According to [sp-today.com](#), meanwhile, one USD was equal to 14,000 SYP as of the second half of December. Naturally, the plunging value of the Syrian Pound caused further price rises, leading to the absence of many goods from supermarket shelves.

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

Moreover, the siege imposed by regime forces on the SDF-held al-Shahba area in northern rural Aleppo and on the neighborhoods of al-Sheikh Maqsoud and al-Ashrafiya in Aleppo city continued in December. The siege, which began on November 20 with the erection of military checkpoints, continues to block the entry of food and fuel to those areas, intensifying residents' suffering in those areas, which is further compounded by the bitterly cold winter season and the related increased need for fuel.

The situation in **northeastern Syria** remains similarly dire, with worsening living and security conditions. Prices of food, fuel and other essential commodities in the region continue to rise due to the controlling forces' failure to regulate the market. The situation has further deteriorated in areas in eastern Deir Ez-Zour governorate, exacerbated by clashes which continued for the fourth consecutive month. Overall, these clashes have made it even more difficult for civilians in these areas to secure water and day-to-day essential requirements such as food and medication. On December 1, Sudipto Mukerjee, UN Resident Coordinator and Humanitarian Coordinator for Syria ad interim, [released a statement](#) on the militarization of the Ebreha Water Plant, revealing that the plant has been used as a military site since November 23 during nighttime hours, preventing workers from operating the equipment there, which in turn deprives 45,000 people in the area of their source of safe drinking water.

Forced displacement

The suffering of IDPs in **northwestern Syria** also continued to worsen in December in relation to both living conditions and the ongoing humanitarian crisis, with the humanitarian needs of millions of IDPs reaching unprecedented levels. The crisis is further intensified by the ever-increasing prices, especially of food supplies, on one hand, and by widespread unemployment and virtually non-existent purchasing power among residents of the area on the other. We also documented more fires in December. On December 7, a fire, caused by an electrical malfunction, broke out in [the Ali bin Abu Taleb IDPs Camp](#) near Sarmada city in northern Idlib, completely destroying a tent and its contents.

Throughout December as well, many IDPs camps in northwestern Syria were affected by the harsh weather conditions that severely damaged many IDPs' tents. [On December 19](#), for instance, a heavy rainstorm damaged 20 IDPs camps, with the heavy rainfall partially or completely destroying around 96 tents in these camps.

In **northeastern Syria**, IDPs' suffering also continued in December in many of the irregular camps located in western rural Deir Ez-Zour, with these IDPs still grappling with inadequate access to basic services, and lack of water and power, all further exacerbated by the winter and the harsh weather conditions.

In regard to **al-Hawl IDPs Camp**¹, about 150 Iraqi families were repatriated from the camp to Iraq.

In regard to refugees and asylum seekers, [the al-Modon online newspaper](#) reported that, on December 8, Lebanese military and security units carried out a raid and arrest campaign in the 007 Syrian refugee camps in the Gaza area in western Beqaa. About 40 individuals were arrested in total, including minors and elders, with the Lebanese forces having already deported some of them back to Syria. This crackdown came after the Lebanese caretaker government obtained Syrian refugees data from the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) following talks between the two bodies that lasted for nearly a year.

On December 13, Najib Mikati, head of Lebanon's caretaker government, [renewed his government's demands for repatriating Syrians to their country](#) at the Global Refugee Forum 2023. According to Mr. Mikati, Lebanon is no longer able to contain the Syrian refugee issue which he said has cost the country tens of billions of dollars since March 2011. Lebanon's Prime Minister also called on international organizations to stop "tempting" Syrians to stay in Lebanon, and for international focus should instead be on returning them to "stable" areas in Syria. On December 14, Konstantinos Ioannou, Cyprus's Minister of Interior made similar comments in an interview with [Reuters](#), in which he noted that his government would ask the EU to declare some parts of Syria as safe and suitable for repatriating refugees, with record number of Syrian refugees arriving on Cyprus' shores. Mr. Ioannou cited a report published last February by the European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA), which noted that the two governorates of Damascus and Tartus were assessed as having "no real risk for a civilian to be personally affected by indiscriminate violence." In this context, it should be noted that SNHR has released numerous [reports](#) and [statements](#) showing and stressing that Syria is still unsafe for the return of refugees.

On December 17, the Lebanese army released a [statement](#) revealing that Lebanese Naval Forces had been able to rescue 51 individuals, including 49 Syrians, from the sea just off shore of Tripoli city following the sinking of a boat during what it called an illegal immigration attempt. On December 21, the [EU's Eurostat](#) revealed that 19,220 Syrians had submitted first-time applications for asylum to EU countries in September 2023, with Syrians remaining the largest single population seeking asylum as in previous months.

1. Located near al-Hawl town in eastern rural Hasaka governorate, al-Hawl IDPs Camp is under the control of the SDF.

Political and human rights situation

On November 30, 2023, the People's Assembly of Syria held the 30th sitting of its tenth regular session for the third legislative period, during which its members [approved](#) the draft law on 'Managing and Investing Transferrable and Non-Transferrable Assets That Were Seized Pursuant to an Unappealable Judicial Ruling', passing it into law. According to the new law, the Ministry of Finance is responsible for handling issues related to the management and investment of these transferrable and non-transferrable assets as detailed in the law, with the exception of areas of land located outside the regulatory zones, which are managed and invested by the Minister of Agriculture and Agrarian Reform. On December 8, SNHR released a report entitled, '[Preliminary Analysis of the Law on Managing and Investing Transferrable and Non-Transferrable Assets That Were Seized Pursuant to an Unappealable Judicial Ruling, as Promulgated by the People's Assembly of Syria](#)', in which the group noted that This legislation is the fruit of a deliberate and calculated policy which the regime has perpetuated and extended since March 2011, of seizing the transferrable and non-transferrable assets of a wide range of the Syrian people - most notably arbitrarily arrested detainees, prisoners forcibly disappeared in regime detention centers, and hundreds of thousands of dissidents classed as 'fugitives' among the forcibly displaced. In pursuit of this policy, the regime has issued large numbers of decisions authorizing the provisional and judicial seizure of property and assets, ultimately culminating in the regulation of these practices through promulgating the law.

On November 30, the US Department of State released its 'Country Reports on [Terrorism](#)' for the year 2022. On Syria, the report noted that Iran is supporting terror acts on a regional level in countries like Syria through partner groups such as the Lebanese Hezbollah.

On December 1, the Syrian regime [promulgated Legislative Decree No. 37 of 2023](#), which is an amendment to article 26 of the mandatory military service law. Following this amendment, those called for reserve service who are 40 years of age or older and have yet to join the reserve forces can pay a fee in lieu of \$4,800 or an equal amount in Syrian pounds to be excused. The law also permits those of 40 years of age or older who are still in active military service to pay this fee to relieve themselves of their duties, with \$200 (or an equal SYP amount) deducted for each month they've served in the reserve forces.

As such, this decree applies to those who fail to join the military and have reached the age of 40 or more, or those who have fulfilled part of their military service. What is significant about this decree is that it discredits the regime's claims that it does not retain any servicemen aged 40-plus or in its military ranks. Meanwhile, this decree is one of a range of administrative procedures being enacted on two levels: first, the regulatory level, on which the regime has passed a number of legislative decrees in rapid succession to release those who have served for long years while accepting voluntary contracts, and secondly financial by requiring the payment of such substantial fees for Syrian citizens whose average monthly income is now estimated at \$25.

On December 4, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) released [a humanitarian update on Syria](#), shedding light on the developments in the humanitarian and human rights situation throughout 2023. The report noted that there are currently 15.3 million people in need and four million people in extreme need in Syria.

On December 4, the UN World Food Programme (WFP), [issued a statement to the media](#), revealing that it would be ending its general food assistance programme across Syria starting in January 2024 due to what it called “funding shortfalls”. The statement, a copy of which was secured by SNHR, noted that the WFP’s aid in Syria will be limited going forward to supporting families affected by emergencies and natural disasters countrywide through “smaller, more targeted, emergency intervention” as well as through what it called a program to help children under the age of five, as well as pregnant and breastfeeding mothers, through nutrition, with the organization also continuing to provide its nutritional program in schools and education centers within the school meals program. Another program that the WFP will commit to sustain, it said, is the Livelihood Support Program for families in the category of agricultural workers, in addition to its interventions that support local food systems, such as rehabilitating irrigation systems and bakeries”. SNHR stresses that ending or reducing aid will only lead to a catastrophe for millions of people in need in Syria, especially for the residents of IDPs camps and reception centers whose suffering is already intensified at this time of year due to the winter season, low heat, and harsh weather conditions.

On December 4, in a post on her X (formerly Twitter) account, Najat Rochdi, the UN Secretary-General’s Deputy Special Envoy for Syria, [urged](#) “donors to continue to extend their support & solidarity to Syrians,” stating, “Immediate assistance is necessary to ensure for life-saving services & well-being of vulnerable populations, particularly children & elderly. We have a collective responsibility.” The UN diplomat also stressed that there are already shortages of many basic necessities, including food, with the winter conditions only exacerbating such challenges.

On December 5, Jordan’s Anti-Narcotics Department [revealed](#) that it had thwarted an attempt to smuggle large quantities of narcotics from Syria through one of its borders by the Eastern Military Zone. The Department revealed that it had applied the rules of rapid engagement in confronting the smugglers, killing three of them, recovering 233,000 Captagon pills, as well as 528 ‘kaf’ of marijuana. On December 12, [Jordan’s official news agency ‘Petra’ cited a source](#) within the Jordanian military who revealed that, at around 04:00 on Tuesday on Jordan’s northern border, “a major shootout with tens of smugglers” had taken place, in which the smugglers had opened fire at the Jordanian Border Guard during their attempt to exploit the foggy conditions at the time to smuggle large quantities of narcotics into the country. In response, the rules of rapid engagement were applied, with a number of smugglers killed, while the remainder escaped back into Syrian territory. According to the news agency, the shootout resulted in the killing of one Jordanian border guard, with two others injured.

On December 14, the Jordanian Anti-Narcotics Department [said](#) that the Jordanian Border Guard had thwarted another attempt to smuggle large quantities of narcotics from Syria, in a sting operation carried out by its personnel in the Eastern Military Zone, during which one smuggler was killed and others were injured. The department also revealed that it has seized 44,600 Captagon pills, 1,439 ‘kaf’ of marijuana, and a Kalashnikov rifle from the smugglers, as well as large quantities of ammunition, in the operation.

The next day, December 15, the department [revealed](#) that the Jordanian Border Guard had thwarted yet another attempt to smuggle large quantities of narcotics from Syria in another operation by its personnel in the Eastern Military Zone, in which 278,000 Captagon pills and 1,738 'kaf' of marijuana were seized.

Three days later, on December 18, the Jordan Armed Forces (JAF) [revealed](#) that the Jordanian Border Guard had foiled another attempt to smuggle large quantities of narcotics, automatic handguns, and rocket weapons at the country's northwestern borders following a shootout with a group of smugglers that lasted for a few hours, and ended, according to a senior military source, with the smugglers being pushed back into Syria. The same source [revealed](#) that one smuggler had been killed in the shootout and another nine had been apprehended, while the authorities seized 4,926,000 Captagon pills and 12,858 'kaf' of marijuana.

Three days after that, on December 21, another attempt was thwarted by the Jordanian Border Guard's Eastern Military Zone personnel, who recovered 200,000 Captagon pills and 209 'kaf' of marijuana, [according to Petra](#). The same news agency reported [on December 24](#), that another smuggling attempt had been thwarted by the Jordanian Border Guard who seized 537,000 Captagon pills and 888 'kaf' of marijuana, as well as ammunition, in the operation.

On December 5, the Supreme Council of the Gulf Cooperation Council released [a final statement](#) at the conclusion of its 44th session that was held in Doha, Qatar. On Syria, the Supreme Council reaffirmed its "steadfast positions regarding the preservation of the unity of the Syrian Arab Republic's territories, respect for its independence and sovereignty over its lands, rejection of regional interventions in its internal affairs, support for the United Nations' efforts to reach a political solution in Syria in line with Security Council Resolution 2254, support for the efforts of its Special Envoy for Syria, Geir O. Pedersen, and support for the efforts to care for Syrian refugees and displaced persons, and work towards their voluntary and safe return to Syria in accordance with international standards, and rejection of any attempts to bring about demographic changes in Syria."

On December 6, the Syrian regime's [SANA news agency reported](#) that Ayman Soussan and Maher Baddour had been sworn in before Bashar Assad, the head of the Syrian regime, ahead of their appointment as ambassadors to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and the People's Democratic Republic of Algeria respectively. SNHR reiterates once again that, according to international law, restoring relations with the Syrian regime without fulfilling any of the conditions requested, including revealing the fate of forcibly disappeared persons, is a form of support for the violations that have been, and are still being committed by the Syrian regime against the Syrian people, since fighting gross violations that constitute crimes against humanity and war crimes is a core part of the responsibilities of the world states given their ratification of the Geneva Conventions.

On December 9, which marks International Anti-Corruption Day, the US Embassy in Damascus [noted on its X account](#) that Syria continues to be ranked as one of the world's most corrupt countries (178/180)², warning against being fooled by the Syrian regime's claims. The embassy added that the ongoing economic downturn in Syria today is "predominantly due to mismanagement & corruption, for which the regime holds responsibility."

2. In this statement, where Syria is ranked at 178 out of 180 countries, the US Embassy is citing the Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index for the year 2022, which was released in early-2023. On the index, Syria was ranked at 178th globally out of 180 world countries.

On December 10, the Qatari Capital Doha hosted a session entitled, '[Considering Pathways Towards Resolving Syria's Crisis](#)'³ as part of the Doha Forum 2023. During the session, Geir O. Pederson, the UN Special Envoy to Syria, stressed that the Syrian crisis requires an urgent international intervention with the engagement of Iran, Russia, Türkiye, and the US as key players in the Syrian crisis. Meanwhile, Brigitte Curmi, France's Ambassador to Syria, called, in her speech, for devising solutions for dealing with the Syrian regime that has been ignoring any viable solution. Ana Snow, the UK's Special Representative for Syria, also tried to shed light on the negative impact of the 13-year-long Syrian conflict, stressing that about half a million people have died in the conflict so far, while over 13 million people have been displaced, in addition to the widespread destruction to Syria's infrastructure and economy.

On December 11, Martin Griffiths, the UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, [launched the UN's 2024 global appeal](#) from Doha, Qatar. In his remarks, Mr. Griffiths underscored the role played by humanitarian diplomacy in delivering UN cross-border humanitarian assistance to northwestern Syria after the Security Council authorization had lapsed. As he put it, "diplomatic outreach enabled bilateral understandings to ensure aid could continue", stressing that these understandings are still fragile and must be observed carefully. Mr. Griffiths also stressed that the renewal of [delivering humanitarian assistance] through the Bab al-Hawa Crossings remains the direct aim, without which the UN "will be operating at minimum".

On December 11, the UN OCHA released a report entitled, '[Global Humanitarian Overview 2024](#)', in which the agency issued a global appeal to cover the essential needs for people affected by conflicts and disasters. On Syria, the report noted that there are about 32.5 million people in need, both in Syria and in neighboring countries. The report also noted that the WFP had had to cut food rations for many people by half, while also being compelled to reduce the number of people receiving assistance from 5.5 million people in the first half of 2023 to 3.3 million by November 2023, adding that the "WFP estimates that every one percent cut in food assistance risks pushing more than 400,000 people towards the brink of starvation." In a [press release](#) released by the OCHA marking the release of this report, the UN agency revealed that Syria needs US \$4.4 billion, which covers both people in need and the depth of their needs.

On December 11, Fadel Abdulghany, SNHR Executive Director, [was named as the winner of the 2023 Franco-German Prize for Human Rights](#). Mr. Abdulghany received the award from Brigitte Curmi, France's Special Envoy for Syria, on behalf of the French and German governments, in recognition of Human Rights Day, which is observed annually worldwide on December 10, to celebrate the landmark adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights on that date in 1948. On December 12, SNHR released [a statement](#) on this event that shed more light on the details of the award.

3. This was an international session named 'Salwa,' which aimed to analyze the developments in the popular uprising for democracy in Syria that began in 2011 and the ensuing conflict, with focus on 2023's developments regarding some states restoring relations with the Syrian regime, while others remain committed to their position on isolating it. The session featured: Geir O. Pedersen, the UN Special Envoy for Syria; Brigitte Curmi, the French Special Envoy for Syria from France's Ministry of Foreign Affairs; and Ann Snow, the UK's Special Representative for Syria.

On December 12, US Congressman French Hill stressed in an article published by The Hill entitled [“Shining a light on Syria”](#) that, since Vladimir Putin assumed Russia’s presidency, none of the carnage he’s inflicted, including Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, has been comparable to what the Republican Congressman described as the [“systematic, targeted slaughter in Syria”](#). Congressman Hill noted that Bashar Assad, whom he describes as [“a second-generation dictator and murderer”](#), has been propped up by Putin together with Iran’s regime. He also revealed that he had travelled to Türkiye and northern Aleppo via the Bab al-Salama Crossing last August to [“see the horrifying death and destruction of Assad’s partnership with Russia and Iran for myself.”](#) Elsewhere in his article, Congressman Hill condemned the decision of some states to re-normalize relations with the Syrian regime, expressing skepticism about the argument that supporting an Assad victory would compel Assad to restore peace to Syria; ensure the return of millions of Syrian refugees in Lebanon, Türkiye, and Jordan to their original lands; reduce Iranian influence in Syria by expelling the tens of thousands of fighters brought in to “do Assad’s killing”; and end the regime’s massive network for producing and distributing drugs, most notably Captagon. In response to this argument, he said: [“I am skeptical that readmission of Assad to the Arab League will in any way move these worthy goals forward. Instead, I call on our parliamentary colleagues in democratic countries and all peace-loving countries alike to maintain an economic and military presence, reject normalization of Assad and come together with a global plan to bring a political settlement to Syria that facilitates security in the country, peaceful governance across its lands, and an end to transnational criminal drug manufacturing distribution.”](#)

On December 12, the UNICEF released [an appeal for Humanitarian Action for Children in Syria in 2024](#), in which it noted that [“13 years of crisis have upended the lives of children and their families... leaving 15.3 million people in need of humanitarian assistance, including 7 million children.”](#) The appeal also reveals that, of 6.8 million IDPs, 5.3 million are in need of humanitarian assistance. The UN agency also noted that it needs \$401.7 million in 2024 to [“provide an essential lifeline to 8.5 million people, including 5.4 million children \[in Syria\].”](#)

On December 12, the UN [warned](#) of the consequences of the most recent escalation of hostilities in northwestern Syria on civilians, commenting on regime’s December 9 attacks targeting Idlib city, Sarmin city, and the surrounding rural Idlib, which killed nine civilians, and severely damaged a market and an IDPs camp, as the UNOCHA confirmed. The UN agency also cited another attack by regime forces that took place on December 2, targeting a school in Idlib governorate during school hours, in which a number of students and teachers were injured. Furthermore, the OCHA noted that the ongoing heavy clashes in Deir Ez-Zour in eastern Syria are still leading to civilian casualties and damage to vital infrastructure facilities, including water stations and schools.

On December 13, the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs released [a statement](#), revealing that Sergey Vershinin, Russia Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, met with Geir O. Pedersen, with the two officials discussing the resumption of the constitutional committee’s work in the context of supporting the process with the assistance of the UN. The statement further revealed that the two officials agreed that a need exists to provide humanitarian assistance for all Syrians in need with no discrimination, politicization, or preconditions. It should be noted in this context that Russia has used its veto powers at the Security Council against draft resolutions to deliver UN cross-border humanitarian assistance to the areas of northwestern Syria, which are outside regime control, [with its most recent such veto block taking place on July 11](#). Russia’s position remains that aid may only be delivered through, or with the approval of the Syrian regime.

On December 14, Bassam Sabbagh, the Syrian regime's Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates, delivered [a speech](#) during the Global Refugee Forum 2023,⁴ in which he claimed that "some Western countries [are] exploiting this humanitarian issue [the issue of Syrian refugees] for political purposes and continuing to issue misleading statements claiming that there is no suitable environment for the return of Syrian refugees to their country, even though these countries are the main cause preventing the return of Syrian refugees." In this context, SNHR reiterates that, in reality, the fact that Bashar Assad remains in power as the head of the Syrian regime is the primary reason why Syrians are not returning to their country, since he is the primary cause for their forced displacement and for their having to seek asylum in other countries. Between March 2011 and October 2023, [Syrian regime forces have killed at least 201,110 civilians, including 22,998 children and 11,981 women \(adult female\), while no fewer than 135,638 individuals, including 3,693 children and 8,748 women, of those arrested in the same period are still under arrest and/or forcibly disappeared in regime detention centers.](#) The massive destruction of Syria's infrastructure and urban landscape inflicted by the regime's military operations and barbaric attacks across all of Syria will require decades of reconstruction.

On December 16, the UNRWA released its ["Syria, Lebanon and Jordan Emergency Appeal 2023 Progress Report"](#), in which it confirmed that the humanitarian conditions continued to deteriorate in the first half of 2023 in light of the many interconnected crises in Syria. It is estimated that 438,000 Palestinian refugees in Syria are facing unprecedented social and economic challenges in line with other Syrians in the country, due to the conflict now entering its 13 years. The report also noted that around 420,000 of those 438,000 Palestinians are relying on emergency aid supplied by the UNRWA, especially cash and food assistance. The report further noted that the February 6 Earthquakes had created an additional humanitarian crisis for the residents of those areas, including 46,500 Palestinian refugees.

On December 17, the Syrian regime promulgated [Law No. 29 of 2023](#), which is an amendment to Article 50 of the Military Penal Code of 1950. Under the new amendment, those civilians to whom Article 50 applies shall now be tried before a regular criminal court, instead of the military judiciary, unless their alleged crimes are related to relevant military law. According to Article 1 of the Military Penal Code, "military courts handle the cases of all individuals commissioned in the army or armed forces, or in any military unit established in line with a decision by the relevant authority for a certain function during times of war, or times of a state of war, or when the army or the force in question is present in an area where an emergency has been declared provided that the crime stems from their function, as well as civilian workers at the Ministry of Defense in the event that the crime stemmed from their function and the criminal offense committed by the civilians is directed against a military individual as defined in the applicable Military Service Law."

This new decree has no bearing on the regime's practices of having civilians arrested in relation to the conflict appear before the military judiciary. This is because the regime brings baseless charges related to targeting its forces against civilians referred to the military judiciary. Even more, the regime has expanded the personal mandate of the military judiciary to include personnel affiliated with the informal regime forces fighting alongside the regime's official forces. We believe that these inclusions grant those informal forces immunity in case any civilian wishes to file a lawsuit against them, as the procedural protocol dictates that a lawsuit cannot be officially filed unless their superiors among the security branches' officers first give approval, or through a decision issued by the General Staff of the Army and Armed Forces. In the past 13 years, the Syrian regime has never put any military personnel on trial in this context.

4. Was held over three days between December 12-15. The Global Refugee Forum, which is the world's largest gathering on refugees, is held one every four years at the UNHCR's headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland. This year's event featured about 4,200 delegates from 165 states.

On December 20, an analytical paper [published by REACH](#)⁵ highlighted the rising rates of diseases related to water, sanitation, and personal hygiene (WASH) in northwestern Syria. The paper notes that the damaged water infrastructure, damaged sanitation infrastructure, the ongoing economic crisis, the disrupted health infrastructure, and the escalating power crisis affecting the functioning of service facilities, have all produced factors that contribute to the rising spread of diseases in the area, most notably cholera. The paper details how this took place and the extent to which each of these factors have affected the spread of those diseases.

On December 21, Lisa Doughten, the Director of the OCHA's Humanitarian Financing and Resource Mobilization Division, [said in a briefing to the Security Council](#) on the humanitarian situation in Syria that 2023 had proven to be another challenge-filled year for the Syrian people. The UN official revealed that the earthquakes that hit Syria affected about nine million people countrywide, while about 60 families had lost their houses as a result, in addition to causing damage to hundreds of thousands of homes, thousands of schools, and hundreds of health facilities. She also stressed that "2023 sadly saw hostilities in northern Syria return to levels not seen since 2019. Since August, the fighting in north-west and north-east Syria has killed or injured hundreds of civilians...This uptick in fighting reminds us that the conflict in Syria is far from over."

On December 21, Geir O. Pedersen, stressed, in [a briefing to the Security Council on the situation in Syria](#), an imperative need for all Syrian and non-Syrian parties to show maximum restraint, adding that "Any major escalation would have devastating consequences in a deeply fragile situation, where de facto authorities and the presence and actions of foreign armies are key features of the landscape." Mr. Pederson further noted that the challenges existing in Syria cannot be addressed in a sustainable way without a political process that brings about true progress towards a political resolution that addresses all issues mentioned in Security Council resolution 2254 on Syria.

On December 21, the OCHA released a report entitled, ["Syrian Arab Republic: 2024 Humanitarian Needs Overview"](#), in which the UN agency revealed that it is estimated that 16.7 million people, including 5.5 million IDPs, will require humanitarian assistance countrywide in 2024, with over 2 million IDPs living in what the report described as "last resort" sites. The report also noted that 2023 saw increased malnutrition and humanitarian needs, with the governorates of Rural Damascus, Idlib, Raqqqa, and Quneitra shifting from acceptable to stress levels on the Global Acute Malnutrition (GAM) scale. Moreover, the report noted that the Syrian Pound had lost about half of its value. As of November 2023 one USD equals 14,200 SYP on the parallel exchange foreign market.

On December 21, the OCHA released [a report on the situation in northwestern Syria](#), in which it noted that about 4.5 million people living in the region are bracing for another cold winter season, with heavy rainfall, snowfall, and flooding expected, with 2023 marking the 12th winter in conflict for Syria's population. Additionally, the report notes that 800,000 IDPs are still living in tents, out of two million IDPs living in 1,500 camps across northwestern Syria. The report added, "87 per cent of IDPs live in sites that need camp management and 79 per cent live in sites with a critical level of overcrowding that puts their health at risk. 80 per cent of residents in IDP sites are women and children."

5. Founded in 2010, REACH was established as a humanitarian initiative by IMPACT Initiatives, ACTED, and the United Nations Operational Satellite Applications Programme (UNOSAT). It aims to provide accurate data and in-depth information and analysis in the contexts of crises, disasters, and displacement.

On December 21, SNHR released its report '[The Mechanisms by Which the Syrian Regime Has Used Laws to Expropriate Tens of Thousands of Homes, Properties and Areas of Land in Homs Governorate](#)', which was previously unveiled [in an event](#) held in Paris, France on October 19. The report shed light on the regime's "calculated policy of destruction" the aim of which is to seize homes, properties, and areas of lands through an unlawful quasilegal system. The report is divided into two main sections, with each section being further subdivided into a number of chapters and research questions. The first section of the report, which focuses on 'How the lives of Homs residents and their properties have been affected by them joining the uprising', aimed to briefly summarize Homs governorate's involvement in the Syrian uprising and give a sense of its historical trajectory. To that end, it was important to also give a brief summary of the Syrian regime's barbaric response to the peaceful demands of the Syrian people, as the report outlines the most notable gross violations perpetrated by the Syrian regime in the 12-plus years since the beginning of the uprising in March 2011, as well as the destruction left by the regime in Homs governorate. The second section tackles two case studies - Baba Amr neighborhood in Homs city and al-Qsair city in rural Homs. As the report tackles both cases, the most notable violations and destruction taking place in both Baba Amr and al-Qsair are examined, in an attempt to track how that affected the process of forced displacement of the residents of the governorate, which set the stage for the regime to seize real estate properties.

On December 22, Adedeji Ebo, the UN Director and Deputy to the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, noted, [in a briefing to the Security Council](#), that following a gap of over two-and-a-half years, a meeting was finally held between the Declaration Assessment Team (DAT) of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and the Syrian regime's Syrian National Authority on October 30-November 5, 2023. Following the meeting, the OPCW expert team was deployed in Damascus to conduct its analysis. "With regard to the inspections of the Barzah and Jamrayah facilities of the SSRC," the UN diplomat added. ["I have been advised that the OPCW Technical Secretariat conducted the next \(tenth\) round of inspections in December 2023. The outcome of this round of inspections will be reported on by the Technical Secretariat in due course. However, as of the date of this month's report, the Syrian Arab Republic has yet to provide sufficient technical information or explanations that would enable the OPCW Technical Secretariat to close the issue related to the detection of a Schedule 2 chemical at the Barzah facilities of the SSRC in November 2018."](#)

On the same day, the Security Council issued [a press release](#) following its session on Syria, entitled "'Gaps, Inconsistencies and Discrepancies' Persist in Syria's Dossier on Dual-Use Chemical Agents, Security Council Told in Briefing" in relation to the [elimination of the Syrian regime's chemical weapons program](#).

On December 27, the Global Camp Coordination and Camp Management (CCCM) Cluster,⁶ [noted that](#), from January-December 2023, "a total of 821 incidents were reported in 517 IDP sites, majority were in Dana, Maaret Tamsrin, Azaz and Atareb" areas. The nature of the incidents reported were divided into 510 fires (62 percent), 169 floods (21 percent), 97 gales (12 percent), 10 snowstorms (one percent), and 34 other incidents (four percent).

6. The Global Camp Coordination and Camp Management (CCCM) Cluster is, as its website explains, an Inter-Agency Standing Committee coordination mechanism that supports internally displaced persons (IDPs) to live in safe, dignified, and appropriate settings. It is jointly run by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the UNHCR, for disaster and conflict-induced IDP situations respectively. <https://www.cccmcluster.org/about-us/cccm-cluster>

On December 28, SNHR released a report entitled, '[How The Syrian Regime Uses the Humanitarian Organizations SARC and STD to Steal Humanitarian Aid](#)', which provided two case studies of the Syrian regime's Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC) and Syria Trust for Development (STD) as the two main front organizations used by the Syrian regime to receive aid funds. The report notes that, with the start of the uprising in 2011, the Syrian regime eliminated the electoral process in the SARC altogether, and began directly appointing officials. This coincided with the introduction of a policy to ensure the loyalty of SARC volunteers and employees, by enlisting more pro-regime personnel at the expense of those opposing such policies within the SARC, using the regime's well-known customary methods of intimidation and oppression, ranging from arbitrary discharge to arrest and detention, as well as directly targeting SARC ambulances and killing paramedics. Meanwhile, the report also revealed that one of the clearest manifestations of the STD's endemic corruption is the way in which it provides a murderous authoritarian regime with a civilized, humanitarian facade. Since its inception, the STD has been used to polish the regime's image, and even provide cover for its crimes. The STD has organized many pro-regime demonstrations and spearheaded numerous propaganda campaigns for the regime.

Accountability and advocacy

On December 8, the UK, the US, and Canada revealed in [a press release](#) that they were about to impose sanctions on human rights abusers in a number of countries, including Syria, in tandem with the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. To that end, the statement noted that sanctions had been imposed on eight Syrian regime ministers and military officials for their involvement in gross human rights violations against the Syrian people, as well as on individuals connected to the regime's Military Field Courts. The list includes the following: Major Mohammad Kanjou, Major General Yazan Al-Homs, Boutros al Hallaq Louai Emad El-Din al-Munajjid, Firas Hassan Qaddour, Mohsen Abdul Karim Ali, Abdel Qader Jokhadar, and Ahmed Mohammad Bustaji.

On December 8, the [Netherlands Public Prosecution Service](#) revealed that it arrested a 55-year-old Syrian man (whose name was not publicized) the same day. The man in question, who lives in the Dutch town of Druten in the province of Gelderland, was arrested based on an investigation conducted by the International Crimes Team (TIM) of the Dutch National Police, which found out that "the man is suspected of being head of the interrogation department of the [Syrian regime's] National Defence Force (NDF) in Salamiyah in Hama governorate in central Syria in 2013 and 2014. The statement further adds "from this position the man committed acts of torture and sexual violence against civilians."

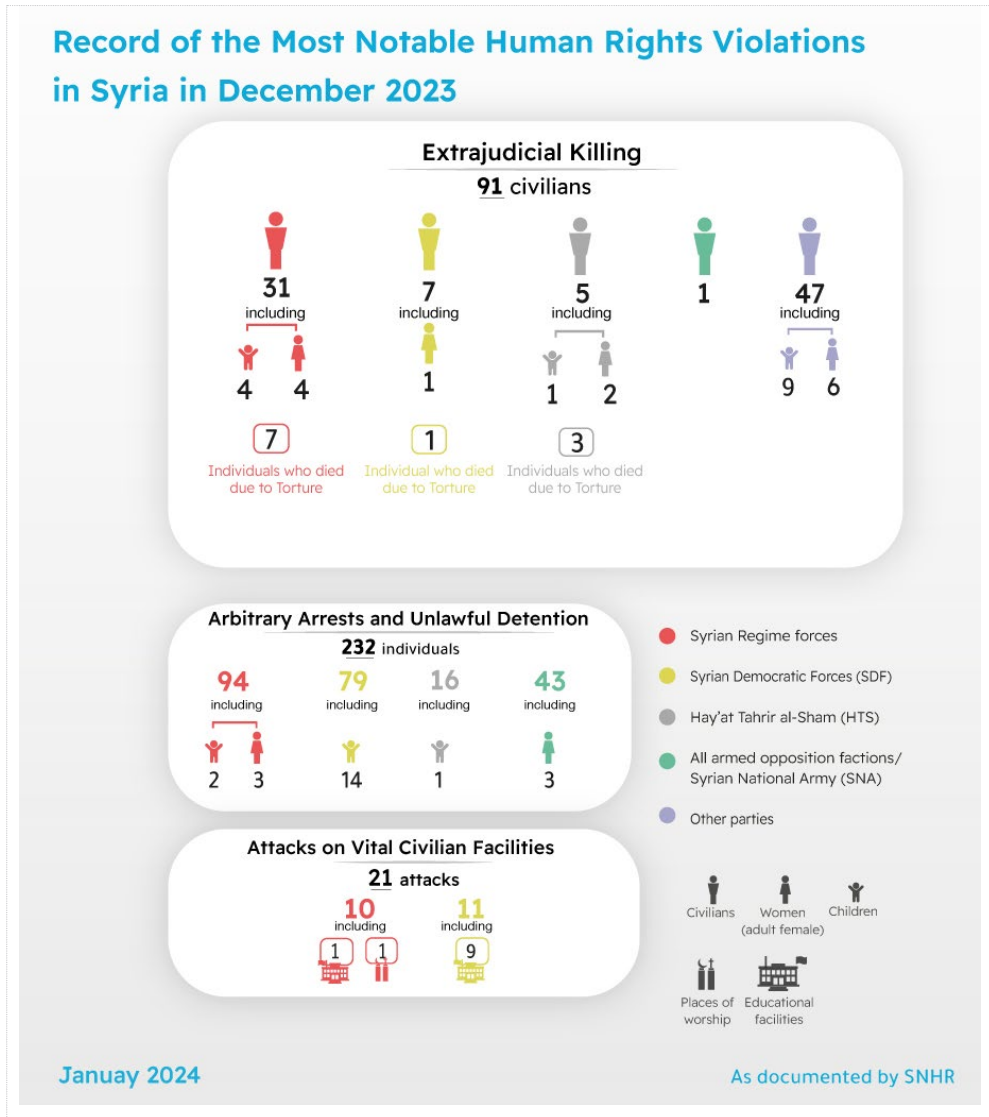
On December 12, Germany's Federal Public Prosecution arrested Ammar. A., a Syrian national, over his former affiliation with the Lebanese group Hezbollah, as well as on strong suspicion of his being involved in crimes against humanity and war crimes in Bosra al-Sham town in rural Daraa governorate in Southern Syria. Ammar was captured by officers from the Baden-Württemberg State Criminal Police Office in the Rhein-Neckar district, based on an arrest warrant from the investigating judge of the Federal Court of Justice dated November 27, 2023. The next day, the Public Prosecution issued [a statement](#) detailing the charges brought against him, which noted that the accused was to appear before the investigating judge of the Federal Court of Justice that day, meaning December 13. During that court appearance, the judge ordered the provisional detention of the accused man.

On December 22, Germany's Federal Public Prosecution issued [a statement](#) revealing that the Federal Prosecutor's Office had filed charges against two Syrian nationals, identified as Mohammad Mohammad A. and Asmael K., at the "State Security Senate of the Düsseldorf Higher Regional Court". The charges relates to war crimes committed in 2012, 2013, and 2014, with the two suspected to have been members of ISIS at the time. Mohammad is suspected to have led an ISIS group in the capture of two anti-ISIS individuals in Damascus city, who were subsequently executed in January 2014 along with 10 other captives held in ISIS detention centers. Meanwhile, Ismail is accused of taking part in the arrest of one of the victims, as well as guarding the 12 captives at the execution site, and shooting at least one of the captives.

In December, SNHR briefed the UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances, the UN Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, the UN Special Rapporteur on Promotion and Protection of Human Rights while Countering Terrorism- Specific work on victims of terrorism, and the UN Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, on [three cases of enforced disappearance](#).

III. Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in December

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



A. Extrajudicial killing

In December, SNHR documented the death of 91 civilians, including 14 children and 13 women (adult female), most of whom were killed by other parties. Also among these victims were 11 individuals who died due to torture. On January 1, we released a report detailing the civilian victims documented killed at the hands of the parties to the conflict and controlling forces in Syria in December 2023.

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

A. Main parties:

- **Syrian regime forces (army, security, local militias, and Shiite foreign militias):**⁷ 31 civilians, including four children and four women.
- **HTS:**⁸ Five civilians, including one child and two women.
- **All armed opposition factions/SNA:** One civilian.
- **SDF:** Seven civilians, including one child.

B. Other parties:

We documented the killing of 47 civilians in December, including nine children and six women, at the hands of other parties, distributed as follows:

- **Gunfire of unidentified source:** 16 civilians, including one child and two women.
- **Landmines of unidentified source:** 10 civilians, including one child and two women.
- **Killings by unidentified parties:** Five civilians, including two children and one woman.
- **Bombings whose perpetrators we have been unable to identify:** 15 civilians, including five children and one woman.
- **Lebanese forces:** One civilian.

B. Arbitrary arrest and enforced disappearance

In December 2023, SNHR documented at least 232 arbitrary arrests carried out by the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in Syria, with those detained including 17 children and six women (adult female). Most of these arrests were carried out by Syrian regime forces in the governorates of Rural Damascus, followed by Damascus, then Aleppo. We issued a report on January 2 detailing the arbitrary arrests and enforced disappearances which we documented in December 2023 by the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in Syria.

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

- **Syrian regime forces:** 94 individuals, including two children and three women.
- **HTS:** 16 individuals, including one child.
- **All Armed Opposition factions/SNA:** 43 individuals, including three women.
- **SDF:** 79 individuals, including 14 children.

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

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

8. Designated as a terror group by the UN.

C. Attacks on vital civilian facilities

1. In 2023:

SNHR documented at least 206 attacks on vital civilian facilities in 2023, including 148 attacks by Syrian-Russian alliance forces.

Of these 206 attacks, we documented 78 attacks on educational facilities (schools and kindergartens), 18 on medical facilities, and 33 on places of worship.

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

A. Main parties

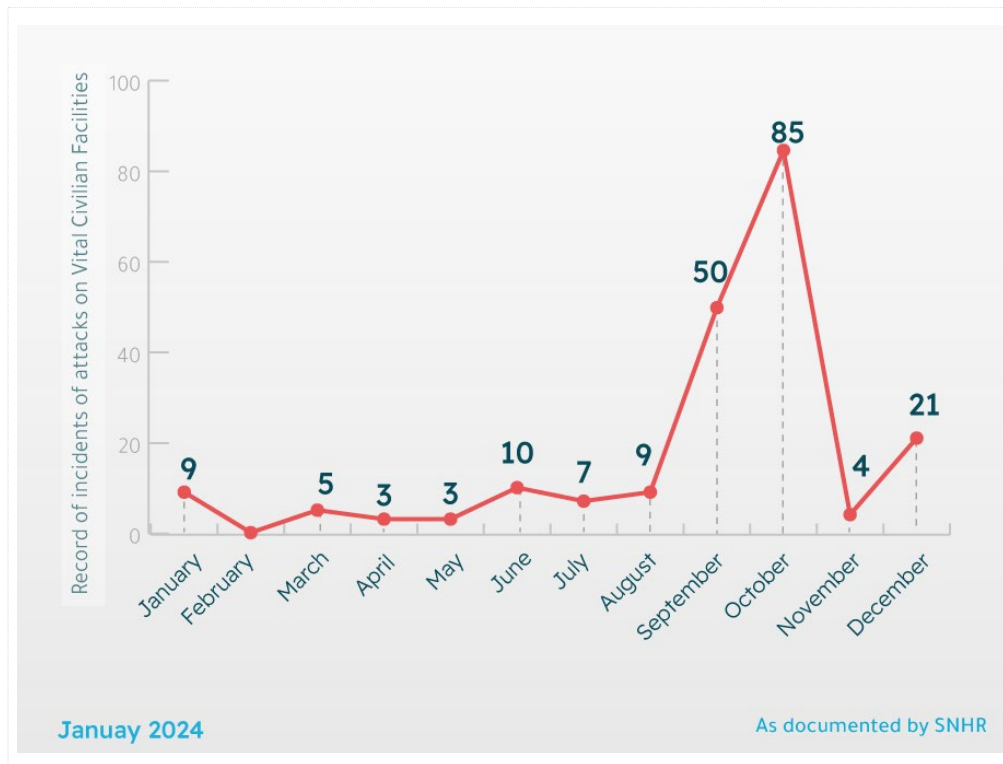
- Syrian regime forces: 142 attacks.
- Russian forces: Six attacks.
- All armed opposition factions/SNA: One attack.
- SDF: 48 attacks.

B. Other parties

- Attacks by unidentified parties: One attack.
- Turkish forces: Eight attacks.

Perpetrator Party	Main Parties				Other Parties	
Attacked Facility	Syrian regime forces	Russian Forces	All armed opposition fac-tions/Syrian National Army (SNA)	Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF)	Turkish Forces	Attacked by uniden-tified parties
Places of Worship						
Mosques	31			2		
Educational fa-cilities						
Schools	44	1	1	31		
Institutes	3					
Kindergartens	1					
Vital Medical Facilities						
Medical facilities	12	1		4	1	
Ambulances					2	
Communal Facilities						
Parks	1					
Markets	12	1				
Pitches	1					
Infrastructures						
Power stations and energy sources	1			1	3	
Civil Defense facilities and vehicles	6					
Water stations	2			3	2	
Official service headquarters	7			3		
Domesticated animal farms		1				
International organizations and headquarters						1
Industrial facili-ties	4					
IDPs Gatherings/Camps						
Regular camps	8	1		3		
Irregular camps	4			1		
Reception cen-ters	5	1				
Total	142	6	1	48	8	1

Attacks on vital civilian facilities in 2023 are distributed by month as follows:



As shown on the chart, October saw the highest number of attacks on vital civilian facilities in one month throughout 2023, accounting for approximately 42 percent of the total, followed by September with 25 percent.

2. In December 2023

SNHR documented at least 21 attacks on vital civilian facilities during December 2023, including 10 attacks by Syrian regime forces, which were concentrated in Idlib governorate.

Of these 21 attacks, we documented 10 that targeted educational facilities and one that targeted a place of worship.

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

- **Syrian regime forces:** 10 attacks
- **SDF:** 11 attacks.

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

Perpetrator Party	Syrian Regime Forces	Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF)
Attacked Facility		
Places of Worship		
Mosques	1	
Vital Educational Facilities		
Schools	1	9
Institutes	1	
Communal facilities		
Markets	1	
Pitches	1	
Infrastructure		
Water stations		2
Industrial facilities	3	
IDPs gatherings/camps		
Regular camps	2	
Total	10	11

Most notable attacks on vital civilian facilities documented in December:

On Tuesday, September 12, 2023, SDF personnel took over the [Abu Hamam Sharq Elementary School](#) in Abu Hamam town, in eastern rural Deir Ez-Zour governorate, turning it into a military outpost and stationing forces there. Through this action, the SDF denied education to 1,400 students who were enrolled at the school at the time. Additionally, SDF personnel wrecked the contents of the school. In Early-December 2023, SNHR was able to access the area and document the attack on the school at first hand. The town was under the control of the SDF at the time of the incident.

SNHR notes that this attack formed part of clashes that broke out on August 27, 2023, and which are still continuing in eastern rural Deir Ez-Zour as of this writing, albeit more sporadically, between the SDF on one hand and the Deir Ez-Zour Military Council and Arab tribes in Deir Ez-Zour governorate on the other. The school building was heavily damaged in an attack by Arab tribal fighters after the school had been taken over by the SDF.

On Saturday, December 2, 2023, at around 11:40 local time, Syrian regime artillery forces fired two shells at the [Shuhada Afis Elementary School](#) in Afis village in eastern rural Idlib governorate. The attack, which took place during school hours, resulted [in casualties](#), [and heavily damaged the schoolyard](#), [while slightly damaging the cladding materials and interior furnishing](#). The village was under the control of armed opposition factions and Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) at the time of the incident.



↑ 👁 Damage caused by a ground attack by Syrian regime forces on the Shuhada Afis School in Afis village in Idlib - December 2, 2023

On Saturday, December 9, 2023, at around 17:00 local time, Syrian regime forces used a rocket launcher, probably stationed in Saraqeb city in eastern Idlib, to fire multiple rockets at the al-Sena'iya 'industrial' district in eastern Idlib city. [The rockets hit the carpenters' market](#) in the area, resulting in casualties, as well as [partially destroying a number of shops](#). The city was under the joint control of armed opposition factions and HTS at the time of the incident.

On Saturday, December 9, 2023, at around 18:40 local time, Syrian regime forces used a rocket launcher, probably stationed in Saraqeb city in eastern Idlib, to fire three rockets at the main market in the center of Sarmin city in eastern rural Idlib governorate. The attack injured one child, as well as [partially destroying a residential building and moderately damaging the market facilities](#). The town was under the joint control of armed opposition factions and HTS at the time of the incident.

On Saturday, December 9, 2023, Syrian regime artillery forces fired a shell at [al-Zubair ben al-Awwam Mosque](#) in Afis village in eastern rural Idlib governorate, [moderately damaging the mosque's front](#) and interior furnishings. The village was under the control of armed opposition factions and Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) at the time of the incident.

D. Indiscriminate attacks and use of unlawful weapons

SNHR documented no indiscriminate attacks or attacks involving the use of unlawful weapons in December 2023.

IV. Attachments

1. [1,032 Civilian Deaths, Including 181 Children and 150 Women as well as 57 Deaths due to Torture, Documented in 2023](#)
2. [At Least 2,317 Arbitrary Arrests/Detentions Documented in 2023, Including of 129 Children and 87 Women, With 232 Documented in December Alone](#)

V. Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

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

Recommendations

UN Security Council

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

International Community

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

UN Human Rights Office

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

Independent International Commission of Inquiry (COI)

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

International, Impartial, and Independent Mechanism (IIIM)

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

The United Nations Special Envoy for Syria

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

Syrian regime

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

Russian regime

- Launch investigations into the incidents included in this report, make the findings of these investigations public for the Syrian people, and hold those responsible accountable.
- Compensate all the damaged centers and facilities, rebuild and rehabilitate them, and compensate all the families of victims who were killed by the current Russian regime, as well as all those wounded by it.
- 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 must apply pressure on the Syrian regime in order to end all indiscriminate attacks and to allow unconditional passage of humanitarian aid to besieged areas.

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

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

All Armed Opposition factions/SNA

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

Humanitarian Organizations

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

Acknowledgment

We extend our most sincere gratitude to the victims' families and friends, and to eyewitnesses and local activists for their invaluable contributions to this report.



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