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Statement

On the International Day of Innocent Children Victims of Aggression: 30,034 Children Have Been Documented as Killed in Syria Since March 2011, Including 198 Who Died Due to Torture

Restoring Relations With the Syrian Regime Only
Protracts the Conflict Without Providing a Political
Solution, as More & More Children Victims Will Face
More Aggression



Sunday, June 4, 2023

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

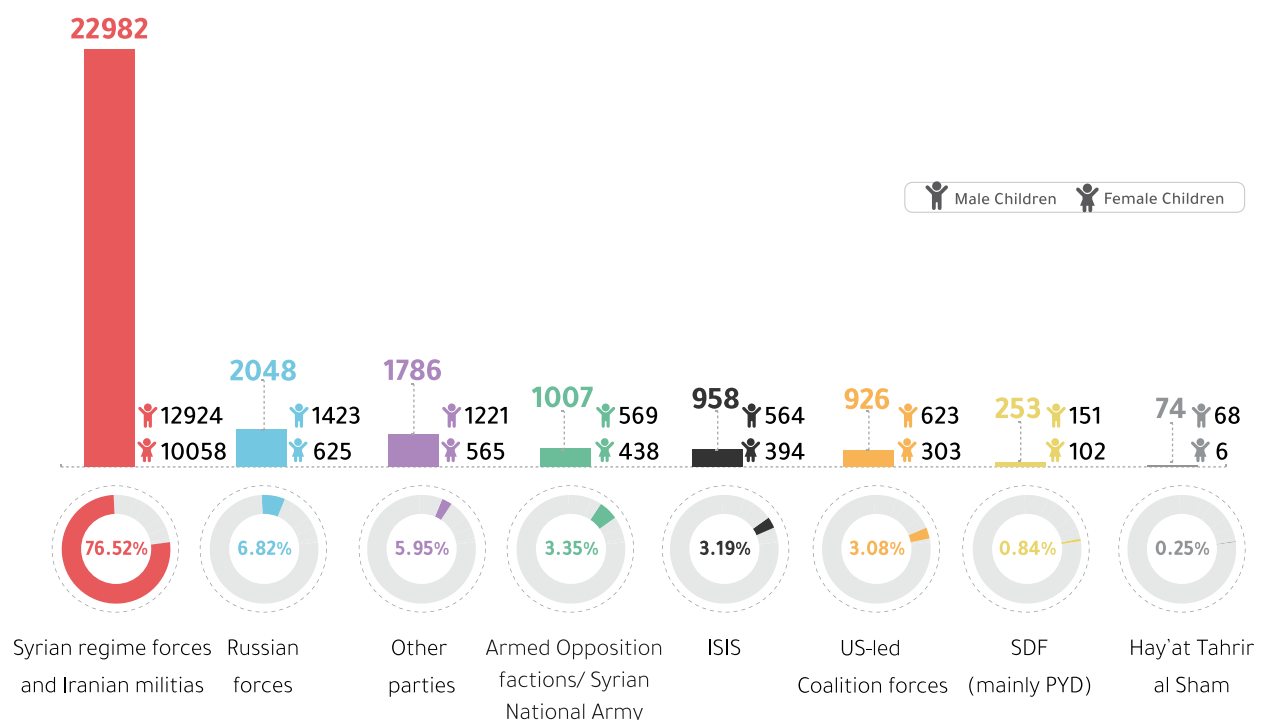
Today, June 4, marks the [International Day of Innocent Children Victims of Aggression](#) which was declared by the UN General Assembly in accordance with resolution ES-7/8, adopted on August 19, 1982.

The fact that Syria ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1993,¹ as well as its two Optional Protocols, never deterred the Syrian regime from committing the most atrocious forms of aggression against children in Syria in the context of the internal armed conflict. While all other parties to the conflict are responsible for forms of aggression against children, the Syrian regime has surpassed all other parties to the conflict by far both in terms of the quantity of crimes committed by the regime and in terms of their systematic and habitual character, especially crimes related to the rights and obligations specified in Articles 6, 37, and 38, namely the inherent right of all children to life and survival, the prohibition on subjecting children to torture, or depriving any child of their liberty unlawfully or arbitrarily, and the requirement of all State Parties to “undertake [to] ensure respect for rules of international humanitarian law applicable to them in armed conflicts which are relevant to the child.”² In the Syrian regime’s case, those crimes have amounted to crimes against humanity.

In fact, almost every violation directed against the Syrian people has been perpetrated against children, as documented by the Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR). Violations against children have grown exponentially over the course of the past 12 years. In this statement, we provide an update of the toll of most notable serious violations against children in Syria between March 2011 and June 2023 as documented on the SNHR’s database (specifically crimes committed as part of the armed conflict or which constitute a violation of international human rights law).

First: Extrajudicial Killing

SNHR documented the killing of 30,034 children between March 2011 and June 2023 at the hands of the parts to the conflict and controlling forces in Syria. They are distributed as follows:



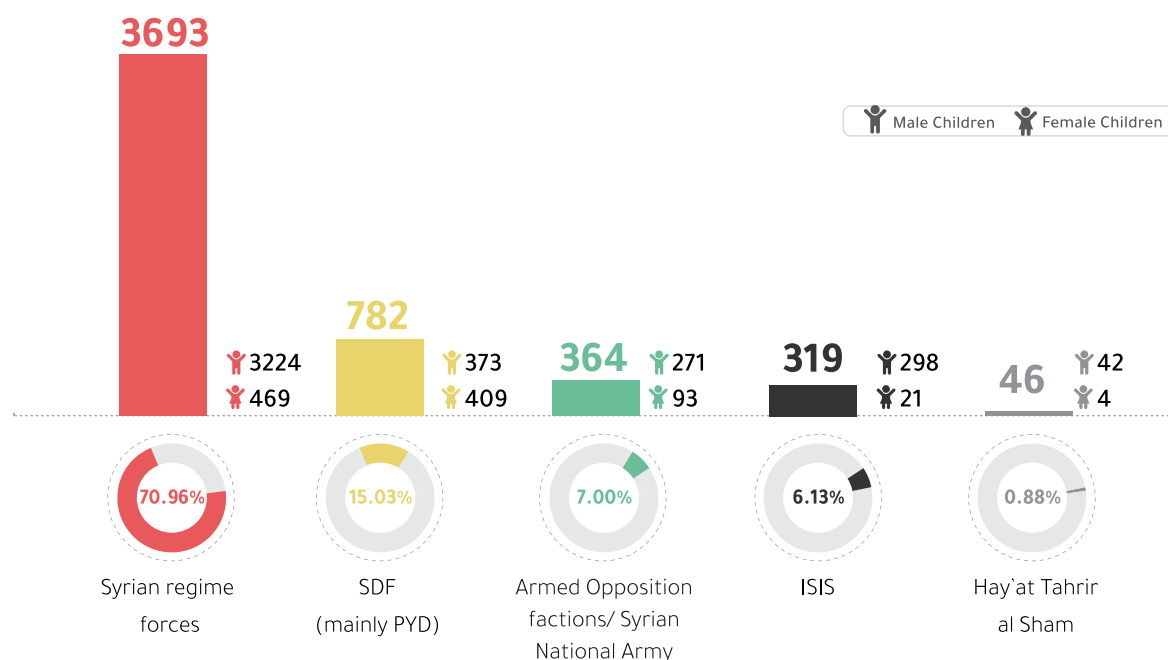
1. For a list of states which ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child, see: https://treaties.un.org/pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=IND&mtdsg_no=IV-11&chapter=4&clang=_en

2. United Nations, Convention on the Rights of the Child, Articles 6, 37, 38. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child>

- **Syrian regime forces (army, security, local militias, Shiite foreign militias):**³ 22,982 children, divided into 12,924 males and 10,058 females.
- **Russian forces:** 2,048 children, divided into 1,423 males and 625 females.
- **ISIS (self-proclaimed the Islamic State):** 958 children, divided into 564 males and 394 females.
- **Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham/HTS**⁴ (an alliance composed of Fateh al-Sham Front and a number of armed opposition factions): 74 children, divided into 68 males and six females.
- **Kurdish-Led Syrian Democratic Forces/SDF** (Democratic Union Party/PYD): 253 children, divided into 151 males and 102 females.
- **All armed opposition factions/Syrian National Army (SNA):**⁵ 1,007 children, divided into 569 males and 438 females.
- **International coalition forces:** 926 children, including 623 males and 303 females.
- **Other parties:** 1,768 children, divided into 1,221 males and 565 females.

Second: Arbitrary Arrest/Detention and Enforced Disappearance

According to SNHR's database, no fewer than 5,204 children of those arrested by Syrian regime forces since March 2011 are still detained and/or forcibly disappeared at the hands of the parties to the conflict and controlling forces in Syria between March 2011 and June 2023. They are distributed as follows:



3. We generally use the term 'the Syrian regime' rather than 'the Syrian government', because the nature of the ruling power in Syria is a totalitarian dictatorship where power is concentrated in the hands of a small circle of individuals, namely the President of the Republic and the heads of the security apparatus. 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/family rule, with no independent decision-making structure. Rather, the government is an empty façade that exists 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.

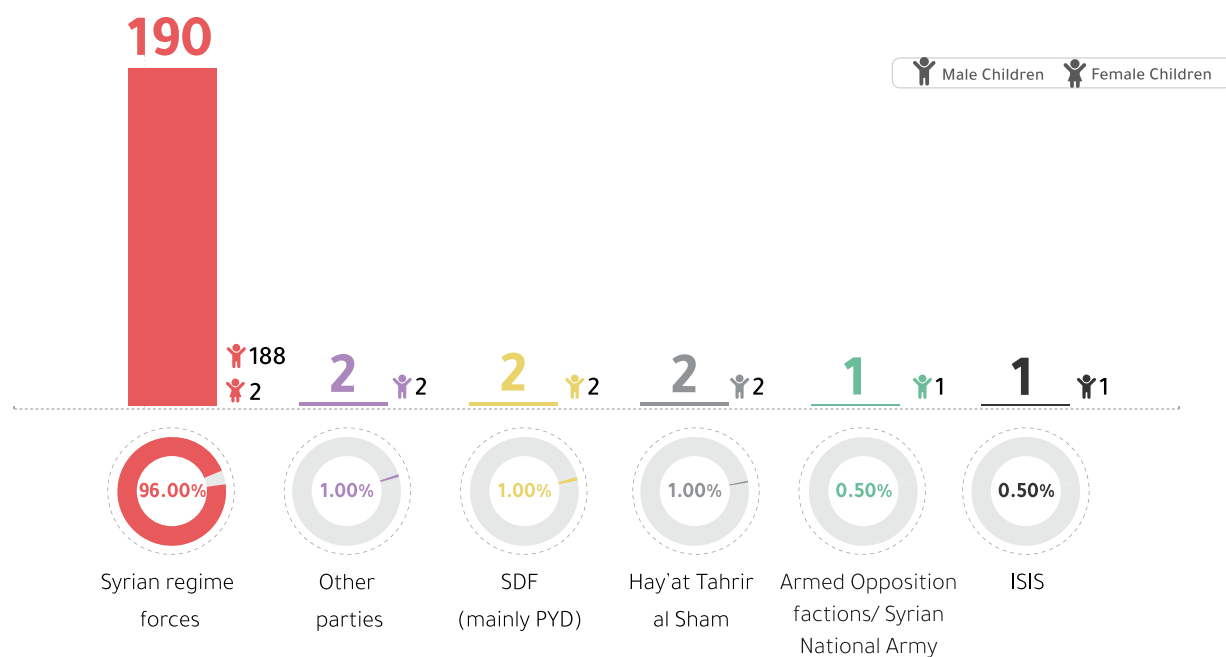
4. Designated as a terrorist group by the UN.

5. All armed opposition and/or SNA factions formed since 2011 in all the areas that are and/or were under their control.

- **Syrian regime forces:** 3,693 children, divided into 3,224 males and 469 females.
- **ISIS:** 319 children, divided into 298 males and 21 females.
- **HTS:** 46 children, divided into 42 males and four females.
- **SDF:** 782 children, divided into 373 males and 409 females.
- **All armed opposition factions/SNA:** 364 children, divided into 271 males and 93 females.

Third: Children victims who died due to torture

We documented that no fewer than 198 children died due to torture between March 2011 and June 2023 at the hands of the parties to the conflict and controlling forces in Syria. They are distributed as follows:



- **Syrian regime forces:** 190 children.
- **ISIS:** One child.
- **HTS:** Two children.
- **SDF:** Two children.
- **All armed opposition factions/SNA:** One child.
- **Other parties:** Two children.

Moreover, children in Syria are also subjected to additional types of aggression. For instance, all parties to the conflict have adopted child conscription practices. Meanwhile, [the Russian extortion of the Security Council through the abuse of its veto powers](#), used by Russia to block the delivery of humanitarian assistance, is another explicit and blatant aggression against thousands of children who were forcibly displaced in the context of the armed conflict in northern Syria, with children making up 46 percent of all internally displaced persons (IDPs), including many who were born and raised in camps, meaning that they have been denied the most basic essentials of life, such as hygiene, privacy, bathroom access, and safe shelter, since the very first moments of their existence.

Additionally, children in Syria live in a highly dangerous environment, where all parties to the conflict have been responsible for intensively planting hundreds of thousands anti-personnel landmines (APLs), including remnants of cluster munitions over vast areas of Syrian territory. These landmines pose an ongoing threat to the lives of civilians, including children, which will continue for decades to come. To make matters worse, the shiny nature and primary colors of these submunitions potentially attract children, making them the group most endangered by landmines. We have spoken about this issue at length in two reports; the first of these was released on January 30, 2023, '[Cluster Munitions Remnants are an Open-Ended Threat to the Lives of Syria's Future Generations](#)', while the second report, entitled, '[On the International Day for Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action: Landmines Continue to Plague Large Areas of Syria and Threaten the Lives of Millions](#)', was released on April 4, 2023.

Syria remains one of the world's most dangerous countries for civilians. Violations against Syria's children are among the gravest direct and primary results of the ongoing armed conflict that has continued for 12 years due to the failure of the UN Security Council and the international community to bring about a political change towards freedom and democracy in Syria, which has been the very first and primary root of the conflict and the principal demand of the popular uprising since March 2011. Despite these facts, however, [some Arab states have decided to restore relations with the Syrian regime](#), thereby sending a message to millions of victims that there is no chance for a political resolution in accordance with Security Council resolution 2254, which means that all the forms of aggressions against children, as well as other groups of society, will continue with the usual impunity for the perpetrators.

The ongoing failure to put an end to the violations perpetrated against millions of Syrian children, first and foremost as part of the continuing murderous aggression, and secondarily due to the shamefully poor response to repeated entreaties for supporting children's rehabilitation, will have unpredictable ramifications. Therefore, it is imperative that the international community invest in civil society organizations in Syria working to rehabilitate and provide care for children, particularly the especially vulnerable orphaned and internally displaced children. This should be an urgent policy priority, with attention paid to the social, cultural, and economic facets involved, as part of a long-term relief strategy.



www.snhr.org - info@snhr.org