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Brief Report



On World Refugee Day: Ongoing Atrocious Violations in Syria Are the Main Reason for Generating More Refugees

Refugees and IDPs, Who Now Comprise Half the Syrian Population, Will Be Unable to Safely Return to Syria Until It Achieves a Political Transition Towards Democracy

Monday 20 June 2022

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

SNHR
SYRIAN NETWORK FOR HUMAN RIGHTS
الشبكة السورية لحقوق الإنسان

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I. The Ongoing Atrocious Violations Are the Reason Behind the Displacement of Nearly Half the Syrian Population

June 20 of each year marks [World Refugee Day](#), with the Syrian people amongst those worst affected globally by forced displacement as a percentage of the population, with approximately 13 million Syrian citizens currently classified as either internally displaced people (IDPs) or refugees, constituting nearly half of the Syrian population living in Syria when the popular uprising began in March 2011; the atrocious violations committed against the Syrian people have forced them to seek asylum and to flee internally within Syria to escape persecution, killing, torture, and other types of violations.

Since the beginning of the popular uprising, the Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) has documented a vast range of violations, so we have a full and detailed awareness of the reality of the atrocities and suffering that the Syrian people have been subjected to and are still being subjected to up to the current day. Accordingly, we continue to stress that seeking asylum is a right for Syrians, and all the countries worldwide in which Syrians have sought refuge must grant them this right.

Many of the violations committed by the Syrian regime against the Syrian people amount to crimes against humanity and war crimes, while the other parties to the conflict have also practiced various violations against the Syrian people, some of which amount to crimes against humanity.

The following are the most prominent of those violations as documented in the SNHR's database, with the percentages of their distribution given according to the perpetrators of violations, which are the primary and obvious driving force behind Syrians' quest for asylum:

A. Extrajudicial killing: The deaths of 228,893 civilians, including 29,791 children and 16,252 women, documented:

The SNHR has documented the deaths of 228,893 civilians, including 29,791 children and 16,252 women (adult female) in Syria at the hands of the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces, between March 2011 and June 2022, distributed as follows:

- Syrian regime forces (army, security, local militias, and Shiite foreign militias):¹ 200,391, including 22,947 children and 11,953 women.
- Russian forces: 6,928, including 2,042 children and 977 women.

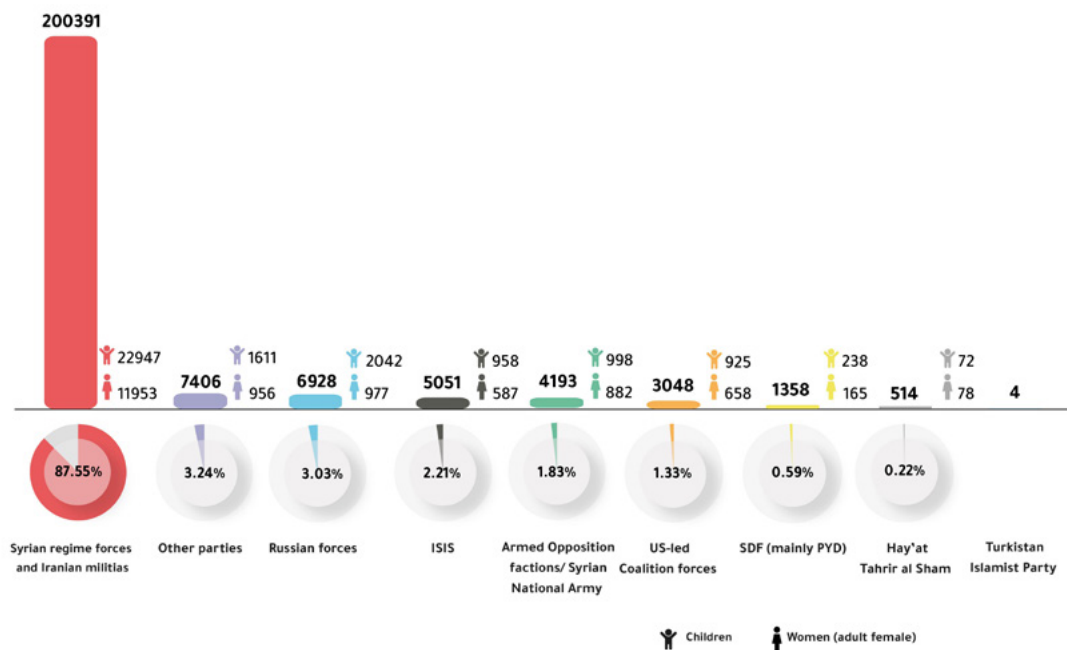
¹ We generally use the term 'the Syrian regime' rather than 'the Syrian government', because the nature of the ruling power in Syria is that of a totalitarian dictatorship based on ruling the nation in an authoritarian fashion through a very limited group of individuals, primarily the President of the Republic and his selected leaders of the security services, while 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, without any decision-making power or active role; this means that the government's role is wholly subordinate and limited to serving the regime, with all the main powers being concentrated in the hands of the President of the Republic and the security services. Governance in Syria is wholly decided by the autocratic authority of the ruling family and there is no independent decision-making structure. Rather, the government is an empty façade there for show: the Minister of Interior receives orders from the security branches over which he nominally presides which are in turn under the command of the President, while the Minister of Justice cannot summon a civilian-level security agent other than the head of a security branch; the security branches, along with the president, are the true power and the governing regime in Syria.

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

- ISIS (the self-proclaimed 'Islamic State'):² 5,051, including 958 children and 587 women.
- Hay'at Tahrir al Sham:² 514, including 72 children and 78 women.
- Turkistan Islamic Party: Four.
- All Armed Opposition factions/Syrian National Army:³ 4,193, including 998 children and 882 women.
- Syrian Democratic Forces: 1,358, including 238 children and 165 women.
- US-led Coalition forces: 3,048, including 925 children and 658 women.
- Other parties: 7,406, including 1,611 children and 956 women.



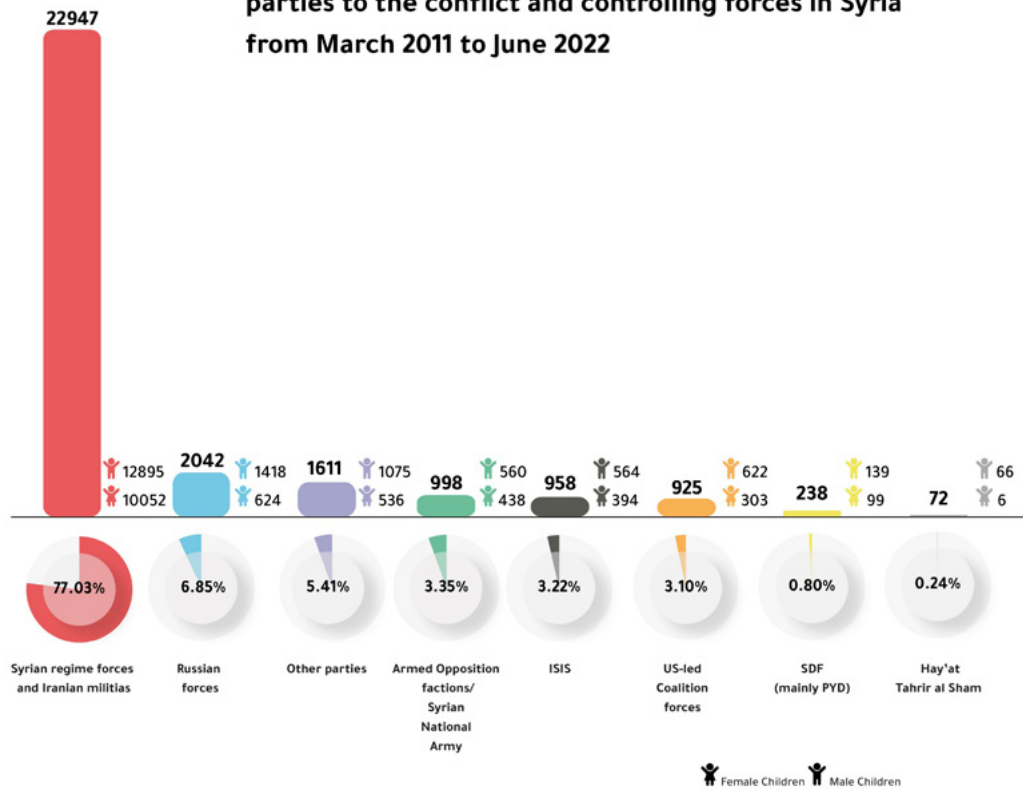
**228,893 civilians were killed at the hands of the main
parties and controlling forces in Syria
from March 2011 to June 2022**



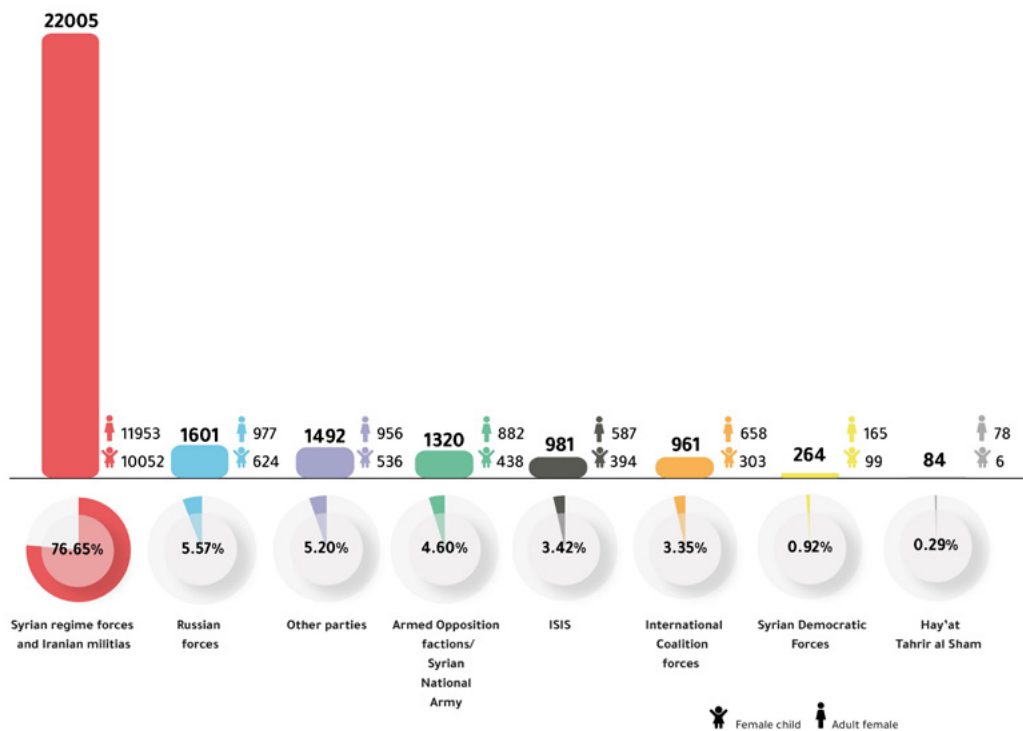
³ Various Armed Opposition factions/Syrian National Army that emerged since 2011 to date in all areas that came under their control.

² The United Nations has designated it as a terrorist organization.

**29,791 children were killed at the hands of the main
parties to the conflict and controlling forces in Syria
from March 2011 to June 2022**



**28,708 females were killed by the parties to the
conflict and the controlling forces in Syria
between March 2011 and June 2022**



It is noteworthy that the Syrian regime is by far the most prolific killer of civilians in Syria, accounting for nearly 88% of the total death toll, followed by Russian forces who are responsible for nearly 3%, meaning that the Syrian regime and affiliated Iranian militias, together with the Russian regime, are jointly responsible for the deaths of nearly 91% of the civilians killed since the start of the popular uprising in March 2011.

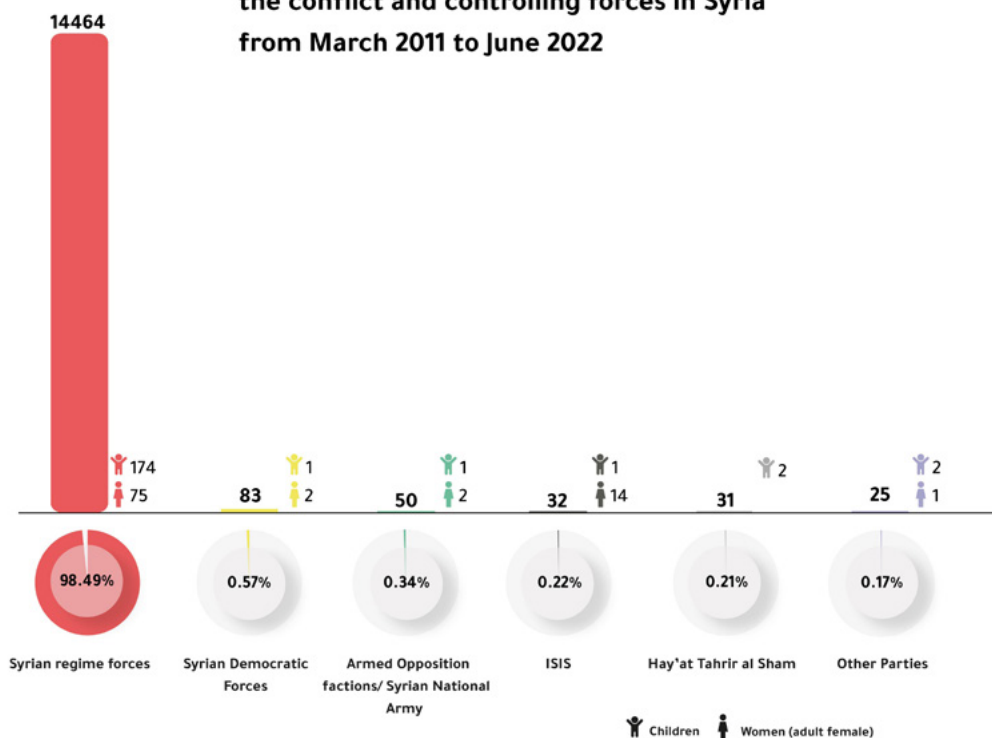
B. Death due to torture: At least 14,685 individuals documented killed due to torture, including 181 children and 94 women:

The SNHR has documented the deaths due to torture of at least 14,685 individuals, including 181 children and 94 women (adult female), at the hands of the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in Syria, between March 2011 and June 2022, distributed as follows:

- **Syrian regime forces:** 14,464, including 174 children and 75 women.
- **ISIS:** 32, including one child and 14 women.
- **Hay'at Tahrir al Sham:** 31, including two children.
- **All Armed Opposition factions/Syrian National Army:** 50, including one child and two women.
- **Syrian Democratic Forces:** 83, including one child and two women.
- **Other parties:** 25, including two children and one woman.



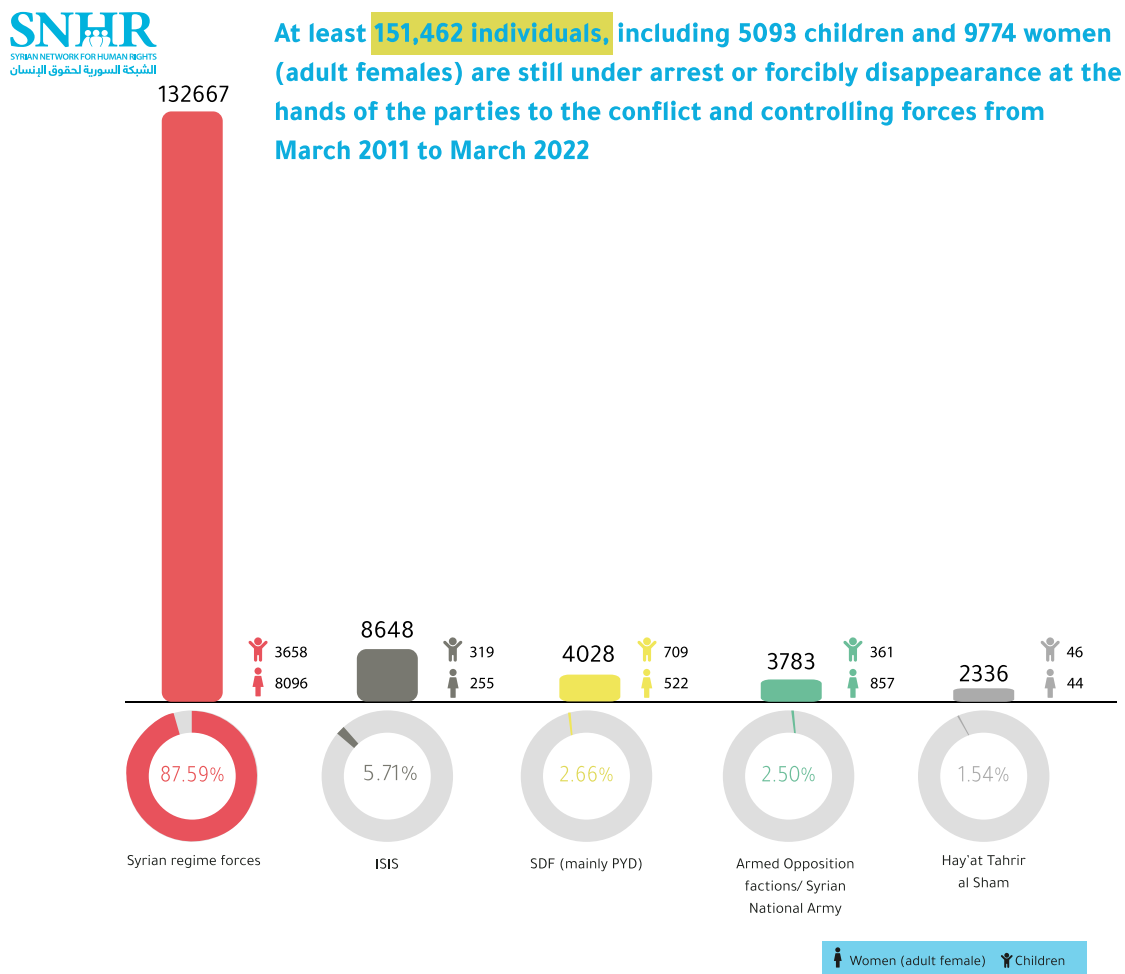
**14,685 individuals, including 181 children and 94 women,
have died due to torture at the hands of the parties to
the conflict and controlling forces in Syria
from March 2011 to June 2022**



C. Arbitrary arrest: At least 151,462 detainees/forcibly disappeared persons:

The SNHR has documented at least 151,462 individuals, including 5,093 children and 9,774 women (adult female), who are still detained or forcibly disappeared at the hands of the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in Syria, having been arrested between March 2011 and June 2022, distributed as follows:

- **Syrian regime forces:** 132,667, including 3,658 children and 8,096 women.
- **ISIS:** 8,648, including 319 children and 255 women.
- **Hay'at Tahrir al Sham:** 2,336, including 46 children and 44 women.
- **All Armed Opposition factions/Syrian National Army:** 3,783, including 361 children and 857 women.
- **Syrian Democratic Forces:** 4,028, including 709 children and 522 women.



The daily news items we publish and the monthly reports we issue at the beginning of each month confirm that atrocious violations are still ongoing in Syria, committed by various parties to the conflict and the controlling forces. These primary violations have been the direct cause of the forced displacement of millions of Syrians. As a result of all this, [the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees \(UNHCR\)](#) estimates that nearly 13.4 million Syrians are now either IDPs or refugees, distributed as follows:

- Nearly 6.7 million IDPs, some of whom have been displaced more than once.
- Nearly 6.6 million refugees, the vast majority of whom are in neighboring countries.

The Syrian regime has been distinguished by perpetrating additional violations that affect refugees and IDPs even after they have been forcibly displaced. These are embodied by the arbitrary laws the regime issued, through which it has endeavored to legitimize its looting and theft of lands, crops, and properties belonging to refugees and IDPs. [We have provided comprehensive coverage of this issue in several detailed reports.](#)

II. Documenting 3,057 Cases of Arbitrary Arrests of Refugees Who Returned to Syria

Some of the violations committed against the people of Syria have affected a number of the returning refugees, despite the very small number of refugees returning compared to the total number of Syrian refugees now scattered around the world; although the harsh conditions in the countries of asylum, primarily the neighboring countries, have forced some Syrian refugees to return to unsafe areas under the Syrian regime's control, it is estimated that the total percentage of refugee returnees from all countries of the world does not exceed 7% of all those who have fled, with the majority returning from Lebanon, followed by Jordan.

Some of those who have returned were subjected to many types of violations, most notably arbitrary arrest and the accompanying violations which inevitably follow this, namely torture, followed by enforced disappearance, and forced conscription. Since the beginning of 2014 up to June 2022, SNHR has documented at least 3,057 cases of arbitrary arrest, including of 244 children and 203 women (adult female), of refugees who returned from countries of asylum or residence to their areas of residence in Syria (with the vast majority of these returning from Lebanon). All those detained were arbitrarily arrested by Syrian regime forces. The Syrian regime subsequently released 1,874 of these detainees, while 1,183 of those arrested remained in detention, with 813 of them classified as forcibly disappeared. We also recorded at least 72 cases of sexual violence against returning refugees during the same period.

Although some countries that wish to return Syrian refugees are attempting to justify their position by citing the 'presidential amnesty' recently issued by the Syrian regime, the documentation process carried out by the SNHR has confirmed that only about 539 people have been released from the regime's various civil and military prisons and security branches in the Syrian governorates, including 61 women and 16 people who were children at the time of their arrest, between May 1, 2022, and June 13, 2022, all of whom were released under Amnesty Decree No. 7 of 2022. At least 158 of the 539 released people had settled their security status with the regime prior to their arrest and been given a supposed guarantee according to the terms of these settlements, assuring them that they would not be persecuted by regime security authorities; 28 of those released, including four women, had been refugees or otherwise living outside Syria and were arrested on their return to the country. The SNHR also confirms that the Syrian regime is still detaining some 132,000 other people and has launched new waves of arbitrary arrests since issuing the amnesty decree, detaining a further 57 Syrian citizens.

III. Deportations of Refugees from the United Kingdom Constitute a Violation of International Law

A number of European countries are attempting to transfer refugees from their territories to the territories of third countries; in this context comes the British government's attempt to transfer a group of refugees, including Syrian refugees, to Rwanda. Human Rights Watch (HRW) has confirmed that Rwanda is an unsafe country whose own citizens and other residents suffer from serious human rights violations, which the British government itself has criticized.

On June 14, 2022, the European Court of Human Rights [issued](#) an order preventing the deportations. On Wednesday, June 17, 2022, Ms. Siobhán Mullally, the UN Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, [said](#), **"There are serious risks that the international law principle of non-refoulement will be breached by forcibly transferring asylum seekers to Rwanda."**

IV. Conclusions and Recommendations

The SNHR reiterates that Syria is extremely unsafe, based on the documentation we have recorded regarding cases of arbitrary arrest, enforced disappearance, torture, forced conscription, and other violations committed by all parties to the conflict and the controlling forces, in particular the Syrian regime, because the regime's security services do not make records of citizens' arrests publicly available since there is, after all, no actual judicial authority in Syria. A refugee may be wanted by a security branch without him or her even knowing this; under the current regime, it is impossible for us or any party other than the staff at the security branch that ordered the individual's arrest to find out this information. Therefore, we reiterate that Syria is extremely unsafe for refugees to return to. This assessment is consistent with that of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry (COI), HRW, and Amnesty International. No government has the right to assess the situation in Syria and then, based on this assessment, take decisions to deport the Syrian refugees on its territory to Syria. The task of assessing the situation in Syria is that of the UNHCR, the COI, international human rights organizations, and local organizations competent and active in documenting violations in Syria, and all of them confirmed that Syria continues to be unsafe country.

Recommendations:

- The governments of countries sheltering Syrian refugees, especially neighboring countries that contain the largest numbers of refugees, should stop their constant threats of deportation to Syria, because these constitute an additional source of psychological anxiety, a threat to refugees' financial stability, and disrupt their social integration processes.

- The UNHCR must take clear, repeated, and public positions in responding to governments that constantly threaten and manipulate refugees in accordance with domestic political interests.
- The UNHCR should notify countries threatening Syrian refugees of the violations these refugees experienced when they returned or were forcibly returned to Syria.
- The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) should condemn the arbitrary decisions issued by the Syrian regime, which impede the return of Syrian citizens and aim to steal their money, and should expose the practices of the government and the current regime in such organized looting activities and the regime's normalization of such behavior with laws designed specifically to legitimize these crimes.
- The UN Security Council and the United Nations should make real efforts to implement the political transition laid out in resolution 2254 within a strict timetable that does not exceed 12 months at the latest, which would achieve the safe, dignified and voluntary return of Syrian refugees, ending a large part of their suffering.
- All the countries worldwide where Syrian refugees are living should not withdraw their residency permits, send them to unsafe and unstable areas, or return them to Syria, but should rather help them integrate into society, be reunited with their families, and give them all their rights in the implementation of international human rights law.
- Donor countries should increase the level of support to neighboring countries, emphasizing that the support is linked to respect for human rights, including the principle of non-refoulement, because it is a customary law binding on all countries.



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