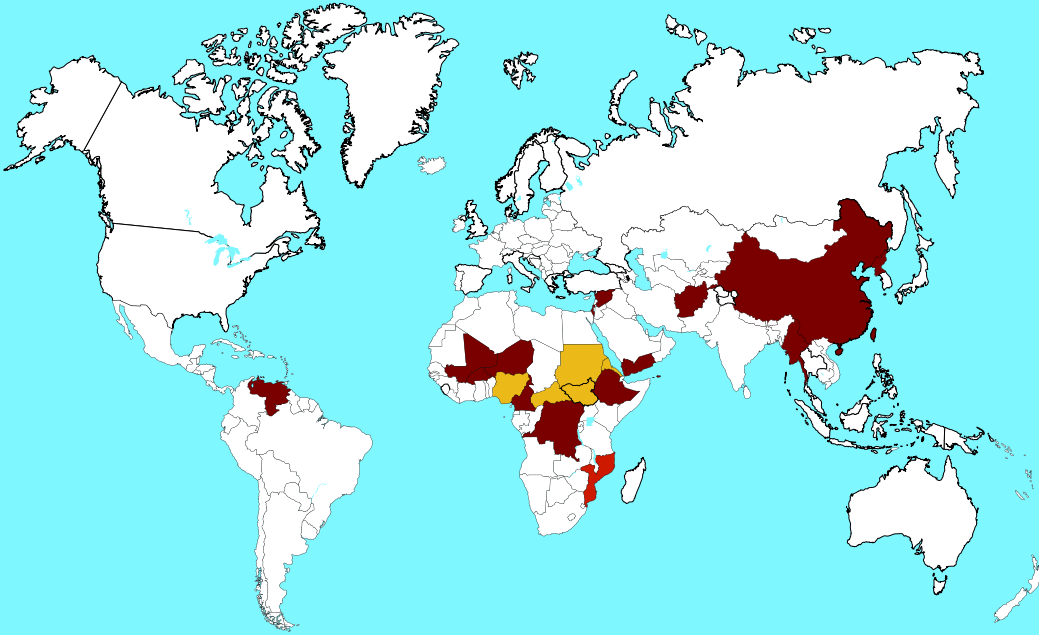


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Responsibility to Protect

The **Responsibility to Protect** (R2P) is a global norm, unanimously adopted by heads of state and government at the 2005 UN World Summit, aimed at preventing and halting Genocide, War Crimes, Ethnic Cleansing and Crimes Against Humanity. R2P stipulates that:

- » Every State has the Responsibility to Protect its populations from the four mass atrocity crimes (Pillar I).
- » The wider international community has the responsibility to encourage and assist individual States in meeting that responsibility (Pillar II).
- » If a State is manifestly failing to protect its populations, the international community must be prepared to take appropriate collective action, in a timely and decisive manner and in accordance with the UN Charter (Pillar III).

R2P Monitor applies an atrocity prevention lens to the following situations of concern:

CURRENT CRISIS

Mass atrocity crimes are occurring and urgent action is needed.

IMMINENT RISK

The situation is reaching a critical threshold and the risk of mass atrocity crimes occurring in the immediate future is very high if effective preventive action is not taken.

SERIOUS CONCERN

There is a significant risk of occurrence, or recurrence, of mass atrocity crimes within the foreseeable future if effective action is not taken.

R2P Monitor:

- » Provides *background* on populations at risk of mass atrocity crimes, with particular emphasis on key events and actors and their connection to the threat, or commission, of genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity.
- » Offers *analysis* of the country's past history in relation to mass atrocity crimes; the factors that have enabled their possible commission, or that prevent their resolution; and the receptivity of the situation to positive influences that would assist in preventing further crimes.
- » Tracks the *international response* to the situation with a particular emphasis upon the actions of the United Nations, key regional actors and the International Criminal Court.
- » Suggests *necessary action* to prevent or halt the commission of mass atrocity crimes.

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*Updates for DPRK and Eritrea are available on our website.

globalr2p.org



13 million people
still displaced

16 UNSC vetoes
blocking action
and accountability

SYRIA

Populations continue to face war crimes and crimes against humanity committed by various state forces and non-state armed groups.

BACKGROUND

Since the armed conflict between the government and opposition groups in Syria began in 2011 at least 580,000 people have been killed. The HRC-mandated Col on Syria has reported more than 130,000 arbitrary detentions, abductions or disappearances since 2011, with the majority attributable to the Syrian government. Nearly 13 million people have been displaced – the largest number displaced by any conflict in the world – including 6.7 million Syrian refugees. An estimated 13.4 million Syrians remain in need of humanitarian assistance.

Various parties to the conflict continue to perpetrate serious violations and abuses of international law, but over the past year the conflict has shifted away from large-scale military hostilities along major front lines to localized clashes between armed groups and government forces.

In northern Syria the Syrian National Army (SNA) and other Turkish-backed armed groups have perpetrated torture, sexual violence, systematic looting and arbitrary detention. Clashes in Ain Issa between the SNA and the Kurdish Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) escalated during December, causing 10,000 civilians to flee. A further 20,000 were forced to flee in April 2021 when clashes between armed groups erupted in Qamishli.

Meanwhile, indiscriminate shelling and airstrikes in Aleppo and across northern Syria have hit civilian objects, including densely populated neighborhoods, hospitals and displacement camps, resulting in dozens of civilian casualties. Clashes between non-state armed groups and Syrian government and Russian forces also continue in Idlib, where civilians and humanitarian workers still face arbitrary detention and extrajudicial killings by Hayat

Tahrir al-Sham and other armed groups. Northern Syria has also seen an increase in the use of IEDs, resulting in over 600 civilians killed or injured during 2020.

Clashes also continue in southern Syria between government forces and armed opposition groups. Government forces have regained control over much of the south and continue to commit murder, torture and sexual violence as a matter of state policy. The government is also imposing arbitrary restrictions on freedom of movement and depriving individuals of their property in areas previously held by the opposition. The Col argues this may amount to the war crime of collective punishment.

ISIL has continued to carry out attacks in Deir Ezzour, Hasakeh, Badiya Al-Sham and Resafa. At least 58,000 children of alleged ISIL fighters from 57 countries also remain trapped in squalid detention camps run by the SDF in northeast Syria.

The Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) has documented the illegal use of chemical weapons in Syria for over seven years. Its Investigation and Identification Team released reports in April 2020 and April 2021 that attribute responsibility to government forces for the use of chemical weapons, including chlorine gas and sarin. The Col has also reported on 37 instances of chemical weapons use in Syria since March 2013, including 32 attacks perpetrated by the Syrian government.

ANALYSIS

For the past decade the government of Syria, its allies and armed opposition groups have all perpetrated attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure, blatantly disregarding international law. All parties to the conflict have committed acts that may amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity and continue to perpetrate violations of IHL and IHRL.

As various armed groups attempt to consolidate their control over territory in a fragmented Syria, civilians continue to face indiscriminate attacks and systematic human rights violations. The Syrian government and other parties to the conflict continue to perpetrate detention and disappearance as a strategy to control and intimidate civilians. The fragility of current ceasefire agreements, particularly in the northwest, increases the risk of a recurrence of large-scale conflict.

The grave situation across Syria is partly a consequence of the inability of the UNSC to hold perpetrators accountable. The Syrian government has directly violated various UNSC resolutions, and Russia has systematically shielded Syria from international accountability measures.

The government of Syria has not only manifestly failed to uphold its responsibility to protect, it bears primary responsibility for the ongoing commission of war crimes and crimes against humanity.

INTERNATIONAL RESPONSE

Following the outbreak of violence during March 2011, the international community censured the Syrian government for its widespread violations of human rights. The UN Secretary-General has also repeatedly called for the situation in Syria to be referred to the ICC.

Despite this, the UNSC has failed to respond effectively. Since 2013 the Council has passed 26 resolutions on humanitarian access, peace talks and chemical weapons in Syria. Several refer to the government's responsibility to protect populations, but none have been fully implemented. Russia and China have jointly vetoed 10 draft UNSC resolutions and Russia has independently vetoed an additional 6. The HRC has also adopted 35 resolutions condemning atrocities in Syria, the majority of which demand that the Syrian authorities uphold their responsibility to protect the Syrian population.

On 21 December 2016 the UN General Assembly voted to establish an International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to assist in the investigation and prosecution of perpetrators of atrocities in Syria. A number of countries have also initiated domestic legal proceedings against suspected Syrian perpetrators under the principle of universal jurisdiction. The first conviction of a member of President Bashar al-Assad's intelligence services for complicity in crimes against humanity was delivered in Germany on 24 February 2021.

On 18 September 2020 the government of the Netherlands formally requested negotiations with the Syrian government on allegations of torture as a first step towards holding Syria accountable for violations of the UN Convention against Torture. The government of Canada issued a similar request on 4 March.

On 21 April a majority of States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention voted to suspend Syria's rights and privileges under the treaty.

NECESSARY ACTION

All parties must uphold their obligations under IHL and IHRL, including ending attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure, and establish a timetable for the release of all detainees and abductees. All parties to the conflict must facilitate unimpeded humanitarian access to civilians trapped or displaced by fighting. Parties to the conflict should uphold the ceasefire agreements in the northwest and northeast.

All returns of refugees and other displaced Syrians must be in accordance with the principle of non-refoulement.

UN member states should continue to pursue accountability for alleged perpetrators of atrocities under the principle of universal jurisdiction. Ten years since the conflict first began, the UNSC should refer the situation in Syria to the ICC and ensure that atrocity crimes do not continue with impunity.



5.5 million people have fled the country since 2014

VENEZUELA

Ongoing state-sanctioned persecution in Venezuela may amount to crimes against humanity.

BACKGROUND

Since 2014 Venezuelan security and intelligence forces have been accused of widespread torture, sexual and gender-based violence, arbitrary detention and enforced disappearances in an attempt to silence political dissent. State agents, including the Special Action Forces (FAES), have also allegedly perpetrated thousands of extrajudicial killings. According to reports by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, an estimated 8,200 individuals were killed in "security operations" between January 2018 and May 2020 alone. The HRC-mandated FFM on Venezuela has also reported that more than 200 people were killed by police between January-March 2021. Since November 2020 the government has intensified its persecution and criminalization of civil society organizations and independent media.

On 16 September 2020 the FFM warned that patterns of violations and abuses over the past six years have been ordered and authorized at the highest level of government and committed as part of a "widespread and systematic attack" against the civilian population that may amount to crimes against humanity. During December the General Secretariat of the Organization of American States released a report reaffirming the FFM's findings while noting that crimes against humanity have "increased in scale, scope and severity." The Chief Prosecutor of the ICC also presented a report in December asserting that there are reasonable grounds to believe that crimes against humanity have been committed since at least April 2017.

Since March armed confrontations between state forces and armed groups have also escalated in Apure State along the