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Syrian Regime Forces Commit Two Massacres in Eastern Rural Deir Ez-Zour Governorate, Killing Multiple Children and Women



Press release: (Download the full report below)

The Hague – The Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) revealed in its latest report, released today, that 57 civilians were killed in Syria in August 2024, including 13 children and six women, as well as six individuals who died due to torture.

The 23-page report provides a summary of the civilian deaths that occurred in August 2024, shedding light particularly on victims who died due to torture, as well as documenting the massacres perpetrated by the parties to the conflict and controlling forces in Syria which the SNHR team was able to document during this period. The report also outlines the most notable incidents that took place during the month, in addition to summarizing the action taken by SNHR in regard to the issue of extrajudicial killings in Syria, as well as providing details of the attacks carried out against vital facilities during this month.

This report draws upon the constant daily monitoring of news and developments by SNHR's team, and on information supplied by our extensive network of dozens of varied sources, as well as on the analysis of a large quantity of pictures and videos.

The report emphasizes the Syrian regime's continuing absolute failure to register the deaths of any of the hundreds of thousands of citizens it has killed since March 2011 in the civil registry's official death records. It explains that the regime exerts absolute control over the issuance of death certificates, which are not made available to any of its victims' families, including those of the missing and forcibly disappeared, whether these victims were killed by the Syrian regime or by other affiliated parties. The regime only allows death certificates to be issued for those who meet the narrow criteria set by itself and its security services. The report further

reveals that the vast majority of victims' families are unable to obtain death certificates from the Syrian regime, for fear of linking their name with that of a person who was detained by the regime and killed under torture, meaning that he or she was a dissident who opposed the regime, or that their loved one might be registered as a 'terrorist' if they are wanted by the security services; additionally, many victims' families have been forcibly displaced outside the areas controlled by the regime.

The report further reveals that on August 10, 2022, the regime government's Minister of Justice issued Circular No. 22 specifying the procedures for the conduct of proceedings related to registering deaths within Sharia courts. The circular included new conditions stipulating that five items of evidence must be submitted to and approved by the relevant judges in proceedings related to registration of deaths. It also requires that all relevant courts involved in death registration cases comply with the circular's content. The circular also imposed security clearance conditions on judicial authorities to register death cases, increasing the security services' intrusion into these legal procedures.

The report documents the killing of 57 civilians, including 13 children and six women (adult female), in August 2024 at the hands of the parties to the conflict and controlling forces in Syria. Of the 57 civilians killed during this month, 21 civilians, including six children and five women, were killed by Syrian regime forces, while Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) killed one civilian. The report adds that the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) killed four civilians, including two children and one woman. Finally, 31 civilians, including five children, were killed by other parties.

As the report further reveals, Deir Ez-Zour governorate saw the highest number of civilian deaths in August, accounting for about 39 percent of the total. Of all the victims killed in Deir Ez-Zour this month, 13 were killed by regime forces. Deir Ez-Zour was followed by Daraa, which accounted for about 35 percent with 17 civilian deaths.

On the subject of deaths due to torture, the report reveals that six people were documented as dying due to torture in Syria in August 2024 at the hands of regime forces.

Moreover, the report notes that SNHR documented two massacres that were committed by regime forces in the month of August. This brings the total number of massacres documented since the start of 2024 to 11.

The report further reveals that SNHR documented at least seven attacks on vital civilian facilities in July 2024 by the parties to the conflict and controlling forces in Syria, including five attacks by regime forces, while the remaining two were carried out by all armed opposition factions/SNA.

The report additionally notes that the evidence collected by SNHR indicates that some of the attacks documented in the report were deliberately directed against civilians and civilian objects. These attacks, along with instances of indiscriminate bombardment, also resulted in the destruction of more vital facilities and other buildings. Moreover, the report notes, there are reasonable grounds to believe that the war crime of attacking civilians has been committed in many cases.

As the report also notes, the use of remote bombardment to target densely populated areas reflects a criminal mindset on the regime's part, showing that it is intent on deliberately inflicting the greatest possible number of deaths, in clear contravention of international human rights law and flagrant violation of the Geneva IV Convention, Articles 27, 31, and 32.

The report further notes that no warnings have been given by Syrian regime forces, Russian forces, or US-led International Coalition forces before carrying out any of their attacks, as required by international humanitarian law. This has been the case since the beginning of the popular uprising in Syria, which shows an utter disregard for the lives of civilians in Syria.

Moreover, it is clear from the volume of violations, their repeated nature, and the excessive level of force used, as well as the indiscriminate manner of the bombardment and the coordinated nature of the regime's attacks, that they must be the result of orders from the higher echelons of power in accordance with a state policy.

All armed opposition factions/SNA forces, meanwhile, have violated Security Council resolution 2139 through attacks that constitute violations of customary international humanitarian law, resulting in collateral civilian deaths and injuries.

The report calls on the UN Security Council to take additional steps following its adoption of Resolution 2254 and stresses the importance of referring the Syrian dossier to the International Criminal Court, adding that all those involved in perpetrating crimes against humanity and war crimes should be held accountable.

The report also urges all relevant United Nations agencies to make far greater efforts to provide food, medical, and humanitarian assistance in areas where fighting has ceased, and in internally displaced persons' camps, and to follow up on payment with those states that have pledged voluntary contributions.

The report additionally calls for the implementation of the 'Responsibility to Protect' doctrine (R2P) after all political channels have proved fruitless throughout all the agreements reached, as well as the Cessation of Hostilities statements, and Astana agreements that followed, stressing the need to resort to Chapter VII, and to implement the norm of the 'Responsibility to Protect' doctrine, which was established by the United Nations General Assembly.

The report further recommends that the international community should work to launch projects to create maps revealing the locations of landmines and cluster munitions in all Syrian governorates. This, it notes, would facilitate the process of clearing these lethal munitions, as well as educating the population about their locations.

The report additionally calls on the Independent International Commission of Inquiry (COI) to launch investigations into the cases included in this report and previous reports and confirms the SNHR's willingness to cooperate and to provide further evidence and data in any such investigations, as well as calling on the commission to focus on the issue of landmines and cluster munitions in its next report.

The report also stresses that the Syrian regime must stop the indiscriminate shelling and targeting of residential areas, hospitals, schools, and markets, as well as ending its acts of torture that have caused the deaths of thousands of Syrian citizens in detention centers and complying with UN Security Council resolutions and customary humanitarian law.

Lastly, the report reiterates SNHR's appeal to all the parties to the conflict to provide detailed maps of the locations where they have planted landmines, especially those present in civilian locations or areas near residential communities, in addition to making several other recommendations.