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Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in August 2023

**The Syrian Regime Responds to Protests Against
Worsening Living Conditions That Have Spread
Across Syria With An Iron Fist**

Tuesday 05 September 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.

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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 are at the forefront of the violations which the Syrian people have endured 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 August 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. The report also sheds light on the 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 August's Most Notable Developments

Bombings and military operations

August saw a significant escalation by the Syrian regime in terms of artillery attacks on northwestern Syria, with SNHR documenting separate attacks targeting the villages and towns of Jabal al-Zawiya in southern rural Idlib, and western rural Aleppo, as well as Sahl al-Ghab in western rural Hama; all of these areas are close to the dividing lines between regime-controlled areas and areas controlled by armed opposition factions. In addition, regime artillery shelling targeted the villages and towns of western rural Aleppo and southern rural Idlib which are far from the dividing lines. [On August 1, for instance, an artillery attack by Syrian regime forces](#) on Ma'ar Ballit village, located in Jabal al-Zawiya in southern Idlib, killed one child. [Another regime ground attack on August 4, using an anti-armor rocket](#), targeted a crane being operated by two civilians who were trying to move the wreckage of a car that had been wrecked in another attack a few hours earlier. That earlier attack injured seven civilians who were in the vehicle, which was hit while it was travelling between the villages of Fafertein and Barjaka Suleiman, near rural Afrin in northwestern Aleppo. Another artillery attack, on August 5, in Jisr al-Shoghour city in western Idlib injured three sibling children, while on August 10 Syrian regime forces fired multiple shells at al-Jina town in western Aleppo, one of which exploded in [the schoolyard of al-Jina Girls School](#), partially destroying it. On August 26,

regime forces carried out an artillery attack targeting Kansafra village in southern Idlib, with one of the shells fired in that attack hitting a house, [killing two sibling children](#) and injuring five others, as well as partially destroying multiple other houses in the village.

On August 14, [a civilian](#) was shot dead by Syrian regime forces during a raid on his house in a northern neighborhood of the city of Ma'aret al-Nu'man in southern rural Idlib governorate. The raid came after the civilian in question voiced criticism of the poor services provided by the regime and of its mistreatment of residents who returned to their homes. On August 25, [a child died](#) of wounds sustained four days earlier, on August 21, when an officer from the Syrian regime's Military Security Directorate shot him following an argument between the officer and the child at a checkpoint in Buqrus town in eastern Deir Ez-Zour.

On August 21, the Syrian regime government's [Ministry of Defense](#) claimed that it had shot down three aerial unmanned vehicles (UAVs), commonly known as drones, which it claimed belonged to "terrorist groups in rural Idlib and rural Homs." The Ministry of Defense also claimed that the drones "[were carrying explosive ammunition and were attempting an attack on safe nearby villages and towns.](#)"

The recent Russian military escalation also continued in August. On August 5, [three civilians, including a woman, were killed](#), and others injured in airstrikes by fixed-wing warplanes believed to be Russian, which launched four consecutive air raids in which they fired eight missiles in total, targeting a farm on the western outskirts of Idlib city. Another air raid by the same forces on August 22 targeted a shelter for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Sahl al-Rouj in western Idlib, [killing two civilians](#), one of them a child, and injuring five others. The airstrikes also caused moderate destruction to the building, as well as killing a number of sheep and other livestock owned by the IDPs.

Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) also targeted northwestern Syria this month. On August 22, the SDF used a rocket launcher to fire rockets that hit a house in al-Ghazzawiya town near rural Afrin city in northwestern Aleppo, [injuring a civilian who died a few days later](#) of the wounds sustained in the attack.

On August 25, Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) used a rocket launcher to attack the two towns of Jourin and Qal'et Merza in western rural Hama governorate. The attack wounded a child and a woman who both later died of their wounds, and injured dozens of other civilians.

In August, many peaceful civilian protests were held in regime-controlled areas of Syria, with the protestors holding the Syrian regime responsible for the worsening economic, social, and political situation in the country. On August 17, the scope of these protests grew significantly, with thousands joining demonstrations in the governorates of Daraa and Suwayda which have continued to grow since then, with other protests taking place in Damascus, Rural Damascus (Rif Dimshaq), Latakia, Tartus, and Aleppo. The message was largely the same in all the locations, namely that Bashar Assad is responsible for the dire state of the Syrian nation, with the protesters calling for ousting the Syrian regime. These protests come at a time of multiple, unprecedented and increasingly dire economic, living, and human rights crises in Syria. For instance, a Syrian state employee currently earns an average monthly salary of no more than approximately \$10, which is a natural outcome of the Syrian regime's oppressive policies since March 2011. The Syrian regime responded to the protests, as it's done since Day One in 2011, by

carrying out multiple violent raids and inspections targeting many of those who were involved in or voiced their demands in the protests. On August 26, SNHR released [a statement](#) condemning the Syrian regime's response to these protests, emphasizing the brutal nature of the regime's actions, and providing a brief summary of the most notable violations committed.

On August 27, clashes broke out between the SDF and Arab tribes affiliated with the Military Council in Deir Ez-Zour. The clashes followed the SDF's arrest of the head of the Military Council, Ahmad al-Kbeil, and other senior council heads in Hasaka city. The clashes, which have primarily been taking place in the villages and towns of eastern rural Deir Ez-Zour, have resulted in the deaths of dozens of civilians and fighters.

August also saw more civilians [killed by landmines](#), with SNHR documenting new fatalities as a result of landmine explosions every month so far in 2023. In August, five civilians, including four children, were killed by landmine explosions. This brings the total number of victims killed by landmines since the beginning of 2023 to 96 civilians, including 24 children and eight women. On August 25, [four children](#) were killed by the explosion of landmines of unidentified source while they were harvesting shafiah (caper berries) near their home village of Qart Weran located to the northwest of Manbij city in eastern rural Aleppo governorate.

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

On August 7, the Israeli Air Force carried out an attack on a number of targets in the vicinity of Syrian regime military facilities, killing four regime troops, and inflicting some material damage, according to the Syrian regime's [Syrian Arab News Agency \(SANA\)](#). On August 19, Israeli Air Force planes carried out another attack using [rockets against a number of targets around Damascus city](#), injuring a Syrian regime serviceman and causing material damage according to the same state news agency. A third attack by the same forces, apparently originating from the Mediterranean Sea off the coast of Latakia governorate, was carried out at dawn on August 23, targeting Aleppo International Airport, damaging its runways and rendering it out of commission.

Living and Security Conditions

In August, economic, living, services, and security conditions continued to decline across all sectors in areas under Syrian regime control, with a particularly sharp deterioration seen in the services sector. Regarding the power crisis specifically, the regime government is still implementing a rationing policy. Meanwhile, the Syrian regime's government raised the prices of drinking water on the basis of water consumption levels. [The pro-regime al-Watan Newspaper](#) reported on August 24 that the decision was taken to "rationalize the consumption of drinking water, in order to limit waste and [stop the public] from taking drinking water for granted because of its low prices" according to an unnamed Ministry of Water Resources source in the regime government.

In addition to these crises, residents in regime-held areas are also still grappling with rising prices for virtually all goods, [most crucially food supplies, including vegetables](#). Fuel also saw another price rise in August, with SANA reporting on August 15 that the regime government's [Ministry of Internal Trade and Consumer Protection](#) had increased the price of one subsidized liter of 95 octane fuel to 13,500 S.P., while a liter of subsidized 90 octane fuel now costs 8,000 S.P. Similarly, the price of diesel "for the industrial sector and other sectors" was increased to 11,550 S.P. per liter, while Industrial diesel "~~for non-subsidized agriculture, agricultural industries, private hospitals, and drug factories~~" rose to 8,000 S.P. per liter. On August 27, [the same ministry](#) announced that the prices for 95 Octane fuel, free diesel, fuel, and liquified gas "for the industrial sector and other sectors" would also increase. According to the statement, reported by SANA, the price rises mean 95 octane fuel will cost 14,700 S.P. per liter, free diesel will cost 12,800 S.P. per liter, fuel will cost 8,532,400 S.P. per ton, and liquified gas will cost 10,040,000 S.P. per ton. Naturally, these decisions led to a sharp increase in [the price of all goods as manufacturing and transportation costs went up](#), further crippling public life in regime-held areas. On August 23, the [pro-regime al-Watan Newspaper](#) reported that many employees at regime institutions are considering quitting their jobs to ease transportation costs that are far higher than they can afford, while others have submitted requests for sick leave and administrative leave to escape the rising transportation costs.

In northwestern Syria, meanwhile, civilians' already severe suffering continues to worsen under 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. In regard to services, many areas suffered water outages amid searing summer heat, as the fragile mains water network was affected by the rising temperatures and frequent power outages.

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, not to mention the state of rampant insecurity in the area that has continued for a few months. Civilians also had to cope with the poor quality of bread being sold at public bakeries, while the rising price of 'free' bread put it beyond the reach of most civilians.

Forced displacement

The suffering of IDPs in northwestern Syria also continued in August in relation to both living conditions and the ongoing humanitarian crisis, with already dire conditions made even more unbearable by the lack of any humanitarian assistance entering the region via the Bab al-Hawa border crossing since July 10. As such, the humanitarian needs of millions of internally displaced people have reached unprecedented levels, with the crisis further intensified by the ever-increasing prices, especially of food supplies, on one hand, and the widespread unemployment and virtually non-existent purchasing power among residents of the area on the other. Civilians' suffering was also exacerbated by the searing summer temperatures rising to unprecedented levels, which caused more fires in August. On August 18, for instance, a fire, caused by a battery exploding due to the extreme heat, broke out in a tent in [al-Zohour2 IDPs Camp](#) on the outskirts of Izaz city in northern Aleppo, completely destroying that tent and four others along with their contents. Another fire of unidentified cause broke out on August 21 in [al-Nour IDPs Camp](#) in Shmarin town in northern rural Aleppo governorate, which completely destroyed one tent and its contents. A third fire broke out in [al-Sakan al-Shababi Camp](#) in Idlib city on the same day, completely destroying another two tents and their contents.

In al-Rukban Camp on the Syrian-Jordanian border in rural Homs governorate, we documented on July 24 the [death of a two-day-old baby boy](#) from malnutrition and a lack of essential post-natal care. The already weak baby suddenly developed a fever which led to convulsions, ultimately leading to his tragic death; his parents had been unable to take their infant son outside the camp to receive medical treatment that could have saved his life. The camp's medical personnel were unable to identify the cause amid an extremely dire healthcare situation there, with no medical equipment or medicine available to treat many of the cases. Most residents suffering illness or injury amid the dire conditions there also suffer from a lack of healthcare, as the camp only has one rudimentary clinic whose personnel lack the necessary training, experience, equipment or medicine to properly examine and treat patients. SNHR condemns the siege and persecution imposed on the camp and its residents by the Syrian regime, and calls on the international community to act urgently to save the residents.

With regard to the delivery of UN cross-border humanitarian assistance to northwestern Syria, [the International Rescue Committee \(IRC\)](#) released a statement on August 6 calling on the UN and the international community to take immediate measures to secure the long-term, safe, and sustainable delivery of humanitarian assistance, including through a Security Council resolution. The statement adds, "There can be no justification for restricting or conditioning aid, particularly at a time when humanitarian needs are at an all-time high."

On August 7, the Syrian regime and Martin Griffith, the UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, announced that they had reached an understanding that would allow the UN and its partners to continue to deliver cross-border humanitarian assistance "at the necessary scale and in a principled manner that allows engagement with all parties for the purposes of seeking humanitarian access and that safeguards the UN's operational independence."

A day after this, on August 8, António Guterres, [the UN-Secretary General](#), welcomed this development that allows the UN to continue to use the Bab al-Hawa Border Crossing for the next six months to deliver humanitarian assistance to northwestern Syria. "The Secretary-General also welcomes Syria's extension of its authorization for the United Nations to use the Bab al-Salam and Al-Ra'ee border crossings for an additional three months, as well as its consent to cross the lines within Syria at Sarmada and Saraqib for the delivery of assistance for the next six months," the UN statement reads.

On August 8, [Doctors Without Borders \(MSF\)](#) described the UN Security Council's failure to renew its resolution allowing the delivery of cross-border humanitarian assistance, which ensured the delivery of vital relief aid to northwestern Syria, as "inexcusable". The statement adds: "People living in this area lost a vital way to receive aid in an impartial and effective manner." The MSF statement further urged the Security Council Member States to find an urgent solution that ensures the delivery of humanitarian assistance in a way that is impartial, sustainable, and not politicized, stressing that "abandoning northwest Syria to itself would be unconscionable."

In late-August, bread ran out in the camps of northwestern Syria, further intensifying the suffering caused by continuing water shortages and price rises for most food supplies as the delivery of UN humanitarian assistance via the Bab al-Hawa Crossing had been halted for seven weeks. On August 28, SNHR [released a statement](#) warning of an impending humanitarian catastrophe if the delivery of humanitarian assistance remains halted. The group also reiterated its legal position first stated three years ago, that the delivery of UN relief aid does not require permission from the Security Council. The statement also emphasized that a coordination mechanism must be established among the donor states to avoid, whenever and however possible, the Syrian regime's abuse of control and theft of relief aid.

On Syrian refugees and asylum seekers, on August 11, [Associated Press \(AP\)](#) reported that Cyprus has repatriated 109 Syrian asylum seekers to Lebanon who previously arrived in Cyprus between July 29 and August 2. The asylum seekers were returned in a boat escorted by Cyprus police officers. Responding to this incident, the AP reported, the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) office in Cyprus noted that deportations between states "without legal and procedural safeguards for persons who may be in need of international protection" violate international and European law. The UNHCR also told the AP that such transfers could lead to people being returned to a country where "they may face the risk of persecution, torture, cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment and other irreparable harm." SNHR condemns these practices that violate customary humanitarian law.

Political and human rights situation

In August, [the Netherlands' Ministry of Foreign Affairs](#) released a 'general country' report focusing on Syria, mainly in relation to the assessment of asylum requests for people coming from Syria, identifying which course of action should be taken with regard to returning Syrians whose asylum requests were rejected. While the report touches upon a number of subjects, it deals primarily with analysis of the human rights situation in Syria and the political and security developments in the country in the period from June 2022 to July 2023. The report talks about the political and security situation in Syria, with a particular focus on IDPs, and refugees returning to the country. In this context, the report confirms that many refugees who have returned to Syria have suffered numerous violations by Syrian regime forces, even if they have agreed to security settlements with the regime. SNHR was the most-cited source in the report with 48 citations. On August 10, we issued [a statement](#) commenting on the report.

On August 3, the [UN Population Fund \(UNFPA\)](#) noted that over 1.3 million women in northwestern Syria are in need of urgent access to reproductive health services in an area where health facilities are stretched beyond capacity. The statement stresses that the earthquake that hit Türkiye and Syria in last February has reduced large parts of the vital infrastructure, including hospitals, UNFPA-supported health facilities, and women and girls' safe spaces, to rubble.

On August 8, Adedeji Ebo, Deputy to the High Representative of the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs, [noted](#) in a briefing to the Security Council that the efforts made by the Technical Secretariat of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons' (OPCW) to arrange the next round of consultations with the Syrian regime "continue to be unsuccessful". Mr. Ebo added that "the declaration submitted by Syria still cannot be considered accurate and complete" since the OPCW's Technical Secretariat has yet to receive any of the documents and technical info requested from the Syrian regime.

On August 8, the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) and the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, the graduate school of international affairs of Tufts University in Massachusetts, USA, jointly released [a report](#) entitled, 'Children on the Margins', in which it noted that over 1.7 million children are living in northwestern Syria, most of them forcibly displaced. The report adds that, with the war and ongoing hostilities going into their 13th year, many of those children are suffering a plight that has not received its due attention, namely the denial of access to their right of nationality and legal identity, which "results in children experiencing a slew of deprivations of their basic rights and entitlements, including not being able to access healthcare, humanitarian aid, education, and travel outside the area, even to reunite with their family."

On August 9, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) issued [a report](#) in which it noted that the movement of approximately 7,300 IDPs has been documented across Syria since May of this year, a 37 percent increase over April. The report adds that, "as in preceding months, most IDP movements were concentrated in northwest Syria, with 86 per cent occurring within Idlib governorate." The report notes that these movements were driven by access to services and livelihoods.

On August 9, SNHR released [a joint statement](#) with a number of Syrian and international civil society organization applauding the Netherlands' and Canada's instituting legal proceedings at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) against the Syrian regime based on the application of the Convention against Torture (CAT). The joint statement stresses that the "initiation of proceedings against the Syrian regime on State Responsibility for acts of torture complements continuing accountability efforts under Universal Jurisdiction. It also paves the way for further recognition of the Syrian regime's state policy of torture." The statement expressed surprise and concern, however, at the three-month postponement of the public hearings on provisional measures, given the urgent need to address ongoing violations of the CAT.

On August 13, the General Command of the Jordanian Armed Forces revealed in [a statement published](#) on its official website that it had thwarted an attempt to smuggle narcotics from Syria via an unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV), commonly known as a drone. On August 16, the Jordanian Armed Forces [revealed](#) that it had shot down another drone coming from Syria, with this one carrying explosives. A similar incident occurred on August 27, when Jordanian Armed Forces shot down another drone coming from Syria, the third in August, as [a statement](#) published on August 28 revealed.

On August 15, the Syrian regime's [SANA](#) news agency reported that Faisal Mekdad, Minister of Foreign Affairs in the regime government, participated in a meeting of the 'Arabic Communication Committee on Syria at the Ministerial Level', in the Egyptian capital Cairo. The agency reported the meeting's final statement. SNHR reiterates that restoring relations with the Syrian regime is an insult to any state that does so, and is classified, in the eyes of international law, as a form of support for the violations 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 responsibility of all the world's states as ratifiers of the Geneva Conventions.

On August 19, [Jordan's Anti-Narcotics Department](#) revealed that it had thwarted another attempt to smuggle large quantities of narcotics from Syria. The Department added that, following intensified and sweeping checks and inspections, a total of 63,000 Captagon pills were found, along with 588 'Kaf' (local measuring unit) of marijuana. SNHR stresses that since the Syrian regime continues to manufacture Captagon, any agreement signed with the Syrian regime to limit the production and smuggling of the drug, a powerful amphetamine, will be nothing more than empty words and promises, and that as such, all states must cut ties with this criminal regime.

On August 23, Geir Pedersen, the UN special envoy to Syria, noted in [a briefing](#) to the UN Security Council (UNSC) that the continued collapse of the Syrian economy underscores the massive suffering of the Syrian people. Mr. Pedersen added that prices for food, medicine, fuel and other essential goods in Syria are "spiraling out of control", with many families struggling to get enough to eat. He further stressed that taking action towards implementing UNSC resolution 2254 is the only way to begin to address the many crises plaguing Syria.

On August 30, the International Day of the Disappeared, SNHR released its [12th annual report](#) on enforced disappearance in Syria, noting that no fewer than 155,604 of the people arrested by the parties to the conflict and controlling forces in Syria between March 2011 and August 2023, including 5,213 children and 10,176 women, remain under arrest and/or enforced disappearance. The report also stresses that arbitrary arrests and enforced disappearance continue to be among the most significant risks facing IDPs and refugees returning to regime-held areas, even if they were never involved in any dissident action.

On August 30, Amnesty International released [a statement](#) stressing that the Syrian regime and armed groups involved in the conflict in Syria must reveal the fate and whereabouts of tens of thousands of people who have been forcibly disappeared or abducted since the beginning of the crisis in 2011. The statement adds that the plight of forcibly disappeared persons in Syria has been largely ignored on the international stage, even while "tens of thousands of families have been desperately trying to uncover the fate of their missing relatives."

Accountability and advocacy

On August 3, [Reuters](#) reported that German authorities had arrested a Syrian man accused of committing crimes against humanity and war crimes between 2012 and 2015. The agency further said that the accused was the leader of one of the pro-regime 'shabiha' militias. Reuter also quoted German prosecutors who said that the man was responsible for many acts of torture, brutal beating of civilians, and two incidents in 2012 and 2015 where he forced detainees to engage in hard labor while depriving them of food and water.

On August 7, SNHR released [a statement](#) condemning the Syrian regime's detention and fatal torture of an IDP who returned to an area under regime control. As the statement explained, Mohammad Abdul Rahman Majjou was an IDP from Aleppo city who had fled to and been living in al-Atareb city in western rural Aleppo governorate. In May 2023, Mohammad travelled from al-Atareb city to Aleppo city to seek a security settlement from the Syrian regime, so that he could return to his original place of residence, which is in an area under regime control. On June 15, 2023, however, personnel from the Syrian regime's Military Security Intelligence forces arrested him at his home in Aleppo city. On August 3, 2023, Mohammad's family learned that he had died in a regime detention center in Damascus city. The family learned of Mohammad's death via informal means, namely through an unofficial call by Syrian regime officers. On August 5, his family was able to recover his body in Aleppo city. SNHR condemns all arrest and torture practices by Syrian regime forces and all other parties, more especially those inflicted on returning IDPs and refugees, with the statement also calling for launching an immediate independent investigation into all incidents of arrest and torture that have taken place.

On August 8, SNHR released [a statement](#), revealing that it recently signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Forensic Anthropology Foundation of Guatemala (FAFG) which provides for creating a mechanism for coordination and cooperation, paving the way for sharing information and data and building our respective capacities. The statement notes that the [FAFG](#) is an unprecedented initiative that aims to make Guatemala a hub for active civil society organizations working in Africa, the Middle East, and Asia, in order to empower and build the capacities of such groups in relation to searching for and documenting missing persons, with a particular focus on the use of a holistic, multidisciplinary approach, incorporating forensic sciences, memorialization, and mental health support.

On August 16, Switzerland's Federal Criminal Court (FCC) and Federal Office of Justice (FOJ) issued [an international arrest warrant](#) for Rifaat Assad in connection with his involvement in the grotesque war crimes committed in Hama city in February 1982. At the time, Rifaat Assad was Syria's Vice-President under his brother, the then-President of the Syrian regime, Hafez Assad, and headed the now-dissolved 'Saraya al-Difaa' (Defense Companies). The following day, August 17, SNHR issued [a statement](#) welcoming the FCC's decision as a positive step on the path of accountability. The statement also revealed that SNHR has cooperated with Trial International, the group that filed a criminal denunciation against Rifat Assad before the Office of the Attorney General of Switzerland (OAG) and spearheaded an extensive criminal investigation, by providing data and details on the Hama Massacre of 1982.

On August 17, the [US Department of Treasury](#) noted that it has designated the two factions of 'Fergat al-Sultan Shah' [The Sultan Shah Brigade] and Fergat al-Hamza [The Hamza Division], which are affiliated with the Syrian National Army (SNA), on its list of sanctions, as well as three of the two factions' leaders - Mohammad Hussein al-Jasim (Abu Amsha), his younger brother Walid Hussein al-Jasim, and Sayf Boulad Abu Bakr, in addition to sanctioning al-Safir Oto, a car trade company owned by Mohammad Hussein al-Jasim. The government agency noted that that the two factions have been "responsible for or complicit in, or for having directly or indirectly engaged in, the commission of serious human rights abuses against the Syrian people."

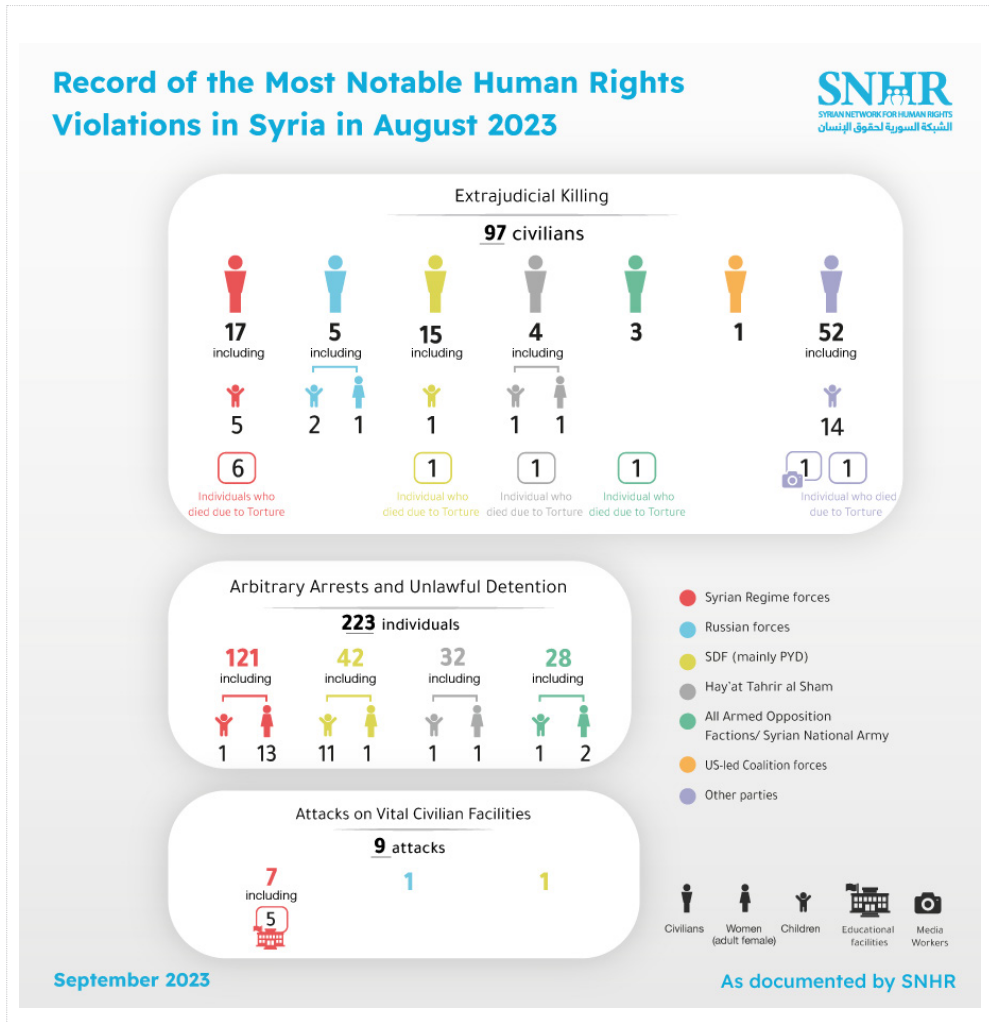
On August 20, SNHR released [a statement](#) marking the 10th anniversary of the Syrian regime's chemical attack on the two Ghoutas of Damascus. The statement stresses that, although a decade has passed since the largest chemical weapon attack in modern history, the criminal regime responsible is still protected by its impunity. The statement provided a summary of the events of August 21, 2013, noting that the details of the chemical attack on the two Ghoutas demonstrate that the Syrian regime had a premeditated and deliberate objective of killing as many residents as possible, including women and children. The statement called on the UN Security Council and the UN to impose economic, political, and military sanctions on the Syrian regime under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations, which would serve as a symbolic compensation for the families of the victims.

On August 26, SNHR revealed in a statement that it has delivered a list containing data on approximately 7,000 Syrian citizens, including approximately 2,000 children, who were killed by Russian forces in Syria since the beginning of Russia's unlawful military intervention in the country in September 2015 to the Ukrainian Prosecutor General. The data includes the victims' names, as well as the locations and dates of the killings, along with other relevant details. This took place during a meeting between Fadel Abdul Ghany, SNHR Executive Director, and the Ukrainian Prosecutor General in the [latter's office](#) in the Ukrainian capital Kyiv. This meeting between the SNHR founder and the Ukrainian Prosecutor-General was the fruit of efforts by a number of Syrian civil society organizations as part of a wider visit to Ukraine, during which meetings took place with senior Ukrainian officials, including [Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy](#), as well as other key Ukrainian players, in Kyiv, to commemorate the 10th anniversary of the chemical massacre in Syria. SNHR underscores the importance of networking and cooperation among Syrian civil society organizations, and between Syrian and Ukrainian civil society organizations.

In August, 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. SNHR also briefed the [UN Special Rapporteur on extra-judicial summary or arbitrary executions](#) on the case of the extrajudicial killing of a child.

III. Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in August

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 August 2023.



A. Extrajudicial killing

In August, SNHR documented the death of 97 civilians, including 22 children and three women (adult female), most of whom were killed at the hands of other parties. Also among these victims were one media worker and 10 individuals who died due to torture. On September 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 August 2023.

The death toll of civilian victims in August was distributed according to 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):**¹ two civilians: One civilian.
- **Russian forces:** Five civilians, including two children and one woman.
- **HTS:**² Four children, including one child and one woman.
- **All armed opposition factions/SNA:** Three civilians.
- **Kurdish Led Syrian Democratic Forces 'SDF' (Mainly the Democratic Union Party 'PYD'):** 15 civilians, including one woman.
- **International coalition forces:** One civilian.

B. Other parties:

We documented the killing of 52 civilians in August, including 14 children, at the hands of other parties, distributed as follows:

- **Landmines whose source we have been unable to identify:** Five civilians, including four children.
- **Gunfire whose source we have been unable to identify:** 15 civilians, including two children.
- **Bombings whose perpetrators we have been unable to identify:** Seven civilians, including six children.
- **Killings by parties we have been unable to identify:** Eight civilians, including one child.
- **Death by drowning:** 15 civilians, including one child.
- **Turkish Border Guard:** Two civilians.

B. Arbitrary arrest and enforced disappearance

In August 2023, SNHR documented at least 223 arbitrary arrests, with those detained including 14 children and 17 women (adult female), at the hands of the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in Syria. Most of these arrests were carried out by Syrian regime forces in the governorates of Rural Damascus, then Damascus, and then Idlib. We issued a report on September 2 detailing the arbitrary arrests and enforced disappearances which we documented in August 2023 at the hands of the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in Syria.

1. 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. Conversely, 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 family 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, while 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.

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

2. Was designated as a terrorist group by the UN.

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

- **Syrian regime forces:** 121 individuals, including one child and 13 women.
- **HTS:** 32 individuals, including one child and one woman.
- **All Armed Opposition factions/SNA:** 28 individuals, including one child and two women.
- **SDF:** 42 individuals, including 11 children and one woman.

C. Attacks on vital civilian facilities

SNHR documented at least nine attacks on vital civilian facilities during August 2023, seven of which were perpetrated by Syrian regime forces. Those attacks were concentrated in the two governorates of Idlib and Aleppo.

Five of the attacks targeted educational facilities.

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

- **Syrian regime forces:** Seven attacks.
- **Russian forces:** One attack.
- **SDF:** One attack.

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

Perpetrator Party	Syrian Regime Forces	Russian Forces	SDF
Attacked Facility			
Vital Educational Facilities			
Schools	5		
Infrastructure			
Official Service Headquarters	1		
IDPs Gatherings/Camps			
Regular Camps			1
Shelters	1	1	
Total	7	1	1

We have documented 46 attacks on vital civilian facilities at the hands of the parties to the conflict and controlling forces in Syria since the beginning of 2023 up until September of the same year.

These attacks are distributed by month as follows:



As shown on the graph, August saw one of the highest monthly tolls of attacks on vital facilities in 2023, accounting for approximately 20 percent of all attacks documented to date this year.

Most notable attacks on vital civilian facilities documented in August:

On Tuesday, August 1, 2023, Syrian regime artillery forces fired a shell at Ma'ar Ballit School for Elementary Education in Ma'ar Ballit village in Jabal al-Zawiya in southern rural Idlib governorate. The shell hit the school's perimeter fence, [partially destroying it](#). The village was under the joint control of armed opposition factions and HTS at the time of the incident.

On Wednesday, August 9, 2023, the SDF used a rocket launcher to bomb the [Kuwait al-Rahma Camp for IDPs](#), which is located in an area known as 'Harsh al-Khaldiya' near Tranda village in Jabal al-Ahlan to the southeast of Afrin city in northern rural Aleppo governorate. The bombardment resulted in casualties, as well as causing material damage and [partially destroying a number of IDPs' residences](#). The area was under the control of the SNA at the time of the incident.

It should be noted that the residences in this camp are constructed from concrete blocks. Opened on September 1, 2021, the Kuwait al-Rahma IDPs Camp houses about 250 families, and is supervised by the Sham al-Khair Association.



An IDPs residence destroyed in a ground attack by the SDF on the Kuwait al-Rahma IDPs Camp in rural Aleppo - August 9, 2023

On Tuesday, August 22, 2023, fixed-wing warplanes believed to be Russian fired missiles at an IDPs' shelter on the outskirts of Arri village to the northwest of Ein Shieb village in Sahl al-Rouj in western rural Idlib governorate. The attack, which [resulted in casualties, partially destroyed the shelter building](#), as well as killing number of sheep and other livestock animals owned by the IDPs.

It is worth noting that the building sheltering the IDPs was formerly the [Ein Shieb Water Station](#), which had been decommissioned before being repurposed as an IDPs shelter, with 15 IDPs families living there. The area was under the joint control of armed opposition factions and the HTS at the time of the incident.



Destruction resulting from Russian airstrikes on an IDPs shelter on the outskirts of Arri village in Idlib - August 22, 2023

On Saturday, August 26, 2023, Syrian regime artillery forces fired a shell at Abdul Rahman al-Nassir School for Elementary Education, [formerly Zakariya Ikta School](#), in Jisr al-Shoghour city in western rural Idlib governorate. [The schoolyard was damaged in the artillery strike](#). Jisr al-Shoghour city was under the joint control of armed opposition factions and HTS at the time of the incident.

D. Indiscriminate attacks and attacks using prohibited weapons

We documented no indiscriminate attacks or attacks involving the use of prohibited weapons in August.

IV. Attachments

1. [97 Civilians, Including 22 Children, Three Women, and 10 Individuals Who Died due to Torture Documented Killed in August 2023 in Syria](#)
2. [At Least 223 Arbitrary Arrests/Detentions Documented in August 2023, Including 14 Children and 17 Women](#)

V. Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

- SNHR notes that, for the past 12 years, 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 involved in crimes against humanity, which constitute a violation of international law.
- The evidence we have gathered indicates 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 considered to be 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 who are responsible for violations should be held accountable, while Russia must stop using the veto, as 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 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 include advice on how to safely remove the remnants of such dangerous weapons.
- The four other 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 Security Council and its utter inability to take any effective action, action should be taken on 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 who were involved.
- SNHR has repeatedly called for the implementation of the 'Responsibility to Protect' 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 have 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. The Security Council is still hindering the protection of civilians in Syria.
- Renew pressure on the Security Council to refer the case in Syria to the International Criminal Court.
- Work on fulfilling justice and achieving 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 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

- Stop 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 the wounded.
- 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 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 and towns under their control.
- Syrian Democratic Forces must immediately stop conscripting children, hold the officers 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.

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