

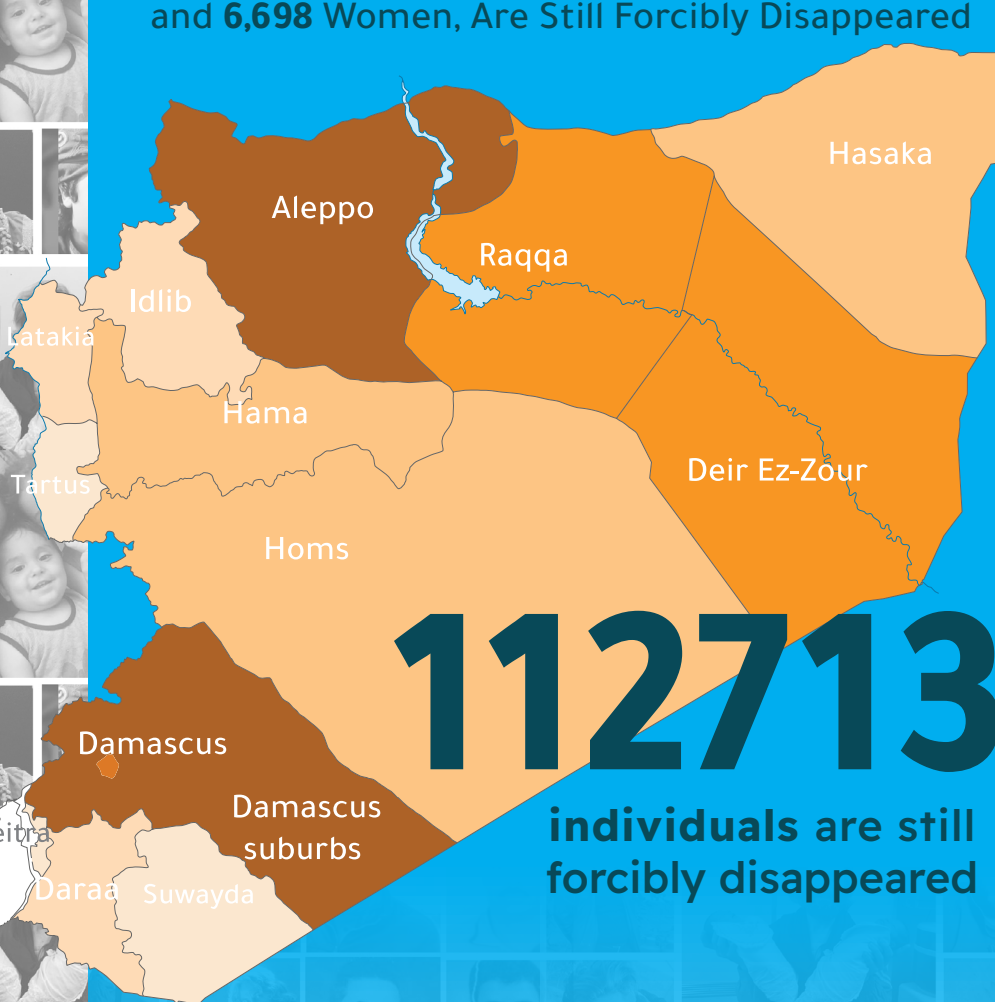
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SNHR's 12th Annual Report

on Enforced Disappearance in Syria on the International Day of the Disappeared: Enforced Disappearance is an Ongoing Crime in Syria

No fewer than **112,713** of the People Arrested in
Syria Since March 2011, Including **3,105** Children
and **6,698** Women, Are Still Forcibly Disappeared



Wednesday 30 August 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. Enforced Disappearance is an Ever-Growing Pit in Syria, We Continue to Work With UN Organs to Investigate & Hold Those Responsible Accountable

The ongoing incidence of enforced disappearances in Syria, perpetrated by the various parties to the conflict and controlling forces in the country, is one of the most complex and monstrous violations that has haunted the nation for the past 12 years. This is because the phenomenon of enforced disappearance in Syria involves a sequential string of gross violations, from arbitrary arrest to unlawful detention and deprivation of personal freedom, as well as torture in its various psychological, mental, and sexual forms, and exceptional trials involving summary and secretive procedures. Enforced disappearance, by its very nature, usually takes place hidden from view, with forcibly disappeared persons lacking all and any forms of protection and legal and human rights monitoring. That is to say that their most fundamental rights are deliberately denied in detention centers, where they are additionally subjected to agonizing and severe torture and absolute medical negligence. We have stressed and reiterated in [several previous reports](#) that there is no certain time limit at which torture against forcibly disappeared persons/detainees ends in detention centers. The same applies to enforced disappearance, which also has no time limit at which it stops.

The data and cases of enforced disappearance in Syria show that all parties to the conflict have resorted to use of enforced disappearance as means to intimidate society, spread fear, and consolidate control. The Syrian regime, however, uses enforced disappearance in a widespread and systematic manner, viewing it as an extremely effective instrument with which to subjugate and crush any aspirations to change, freedom, and democracy. Through its ruthless use of enforced disappearance, the Syrian regime has massively surpassed all other parties to the conflict by inflicting and perpetuating use of this terrible strategy against all groups in Syrian society, whether men, women or children, the very old and very young, without showing the slightest shred of human decency or consideration and without making any exception for the most vulnerable victims.

The effects of enforced disappearance extend far beyond the victim himself or herself, with this dreadful state of limbo taking a horrendous legal, economic, emotional, psychological, and social toll on the forcibly disappeared persons' families, who live in a constant, unrelenting state of anxiety and uncertainty that often drives them to attempt desperate and impossible searches in the faintest of hopes to find accurate information about their missing loved ones. This is because there is no official or transparent information source anyone can consult to find out the whereabouts or conditions of the forcibly disappeared persons' detention, or their legal status. Under these circumstances, forcibly disappeared individuals' desperately worried families often feel they have no choice but to pay vast sums of money simply to obtain information about their loved ones, which routinely turns out to be false and provided by frauds or cruel hoaxers; this is in addition to the heavy social, psychological, and financial burden borne by the families of having to provide for themselves after the disappearance of the main breadwinner.

All of these aspects, on which this report will shed some light, accentuate just how horrific the experience of enforced disappearance and its wide-reaching, tragic effects truly are. In this, enforced disappearance is an undeniable, inescapable, and ever-growing nightmare of suffering that devours both the forcibly disappeared persons and their families on one hand, and necessitates the imperative need to act decisively and swiftly to alleviate and fight the effects of this human tragedy on the other.

International law prohibits enforced disappearance under all circumstances. This means that times of emergency, such as conflicts and wars, cannot be used as a justification to resort to enforced disappearance. Many international instruments and norms have addressed the crime of enforced disappearance, including the [Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court \(ICC\)](#) which, in Article VII, describes enforced disappearance as a crime against humanity “when committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack directed against any civilian population, with knowledge of the attack”. Article 5 of the [International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance](#) further confirms this, as does Article 7 of the [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#), which states, “No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.” Article 14 of the same Covenant criminalizes forcing anyone to confess against themselves or confess guilt. Moreover, enforced disappearance violates a range of rights named in the same Covenant, such as one’s right to be recognized as a person before the law, and one’s right to liberty and security. Enforced disappearance also violates fundamental rights guaranteed by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

For the past 12 years, the Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) has been working continuously to monitor and document cases of arbitrary arrest, of which the majority go on to become cases of enforced disappearance. We have always strived to constantly develop our methodology and update our database, with these efforts reflected in our release of dozens of reports on the status of arrests and forced disappearances in Syria. [These annual and detailed reports](#) are part of our continuing work to protect and preserve the rights of the victims and their families. As such, this report includes a comprehensive analysis of our verified data, while also shedding light on some individual cases and including accounts by victims that we have collected in the course of our investigations and monitoring.

Since the beginning of 2023, SNHR has recorded no fewer than **1,244** cases of arbitrary arrest/detention, with the victims including **54** children and **40** women (adult women). Of these, a total of **1,036** cases have been subsequently classified as cases of enforced disappearance, confirming that enforced disappearance is still extensively practiced in Syria, and is one more reason why the country remains wholly unsafe for the return of refugees. The **1,244** cases documented so far this year are distributed according to the parties to the conflict in Syria as follows:

- **Syrian regime forces:** 595 individuals, including 12 children and 19 women. Of these, 72 have been released, while the remaining 523 have subsequently been categorized as forcibly disappeared.
- **Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS):** 156 individuals, including two children and three women. Of these, 34 have been released, while the remaining 122 have subsequently been categorized as forcibly disappeared.
- **All Armed opposition factions/SNA:** 182 individuals, including five children and 14 women. Of these, 52 have been released, while the remaining 130 have subsequently been categorized as forcibly disappeared.
- **Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF):** 311 individuals, including 35 children and four women. Of these, 50 have been released, while the remaining 261 have subsequently been categorized as forcibly disappeared.

It should be noted that the first half of 2023 saw an increase in the number of cases of arbitrary arrest, which is explained by the Syrian regime targeting refugees forcibly repatriated from Lebanon. These arrests followed widespread campaigns of raids and arrests by the Lebanese army targeting Syrian refugees in Lebanon, who were then forcibly transferred to the Syrian-Lebanese border area. Many other arbitrary arrests resulted from Syrian regime forces targeting civilians on the grounds of the [Counter-Cybercrime Law](#).

Fadel Abdul Ghany, SNHR Executive Director, says:

“Enforced disappearance is one of the most prominent reasons why millions of IDPs and refugees refuse to return to their homes. In today’s Syria, forcibly disappeared persons account for approximately five percent of the total Syrian population numbered at roughly 24 million. Five percent is an extremely and alarmingly high percentage, and is the worst in the world. This is without mentioning the other agonies that forcibly disappeared persons suffer, such as torture, seizure of properties and lands, and family disintegration.”

II. Report Methodology

SNHR is releasing this report in observance of the International Day of the Disappeared that falls on August 30 of every year. The report sheds light on the enforced disappearance cases for which the main parties to the conflict were responsible, and includes an updated summary of enforced disappearance figures in Syria between the beginning of the popular uprising in March 2011 and August 2023. This report focuses mainly, however, on the violations documented during the past year, from August 30, 2022, until August 30, 2023, (since we released [last year's report](#)), including a brief summary of the new incidents and information that we have documented since last year.

Conceptually, we use the definition proposed by the Declaration for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in its [resolution 47/133 on December 18, 1992](#) as a set of principles for all states. According to that declaration, enforced disappearance occurs when "persons are arrested, detained or abducted against their will or otherwise deprived of their liberty by officials of different branches or levels of Government, or by organized groups or private individuals acting on behalf of, or with the support, direct or indirect, consent or acquiescence of the Government, followed by a refusal to disclose the fate or whereabouts of the persons concerned or a refusal to acknowledge the deprivation of their liberty, which places such persons outside the protection of the law." In our methodology, we classify a person as forcibly disappeared if 20 days have passed since their arrest without their family being able to obtain information from the official authorities about their arrest or whereabouts, with the authorities making the arrest refusing to acknowledge the person's being in their custody.

The cases we document are not limited to the Syrian regime which rules the Syrian state. Rather, we also record cases involving non-state actors in line with Rome Statue, in which Article 7-2-I defines enforced disappearance as "arrest, detention or abduction of persons by, or with the authorization, support or acquiescence of, a State or a political organization, followed by a refusal to acknowledge that deprivation of freedom or to give information on the fate or whereabouts of those persons, with the intention of removing them from the protection of the law for a prolonged period of time."

In the same context of addressing the enforced disappearance issue, SNHR also releases [a monthly report](#) documenting arbitrary arrests, enforced disappearances, and the new incidents and cases recorded each month. This work has been possible thanks to the strong network of relations SNHR has been able to build over the past 12 years with local activists, victims' families, survivors, and eyewitnesses in Syria and abroad. We have also worked to make ourselves accessible via all available means, such as e-mail, designated phone numbers for documentation, and forms that can be found on our website. All of this has enabled a continued and accumulated documentation process in line with [our methodology](#) which is founded on the rules of international laws and the body of principles on arbitrary arrest and enforced disappearance.

This report draws upon interviews we have conducted with victims' families and enforced disappearance survivors who were held in the detention centers of the various parties to the conflict. We have conducted those interviews with the utmost consideration for the safety and security of the victims. We used different means to conduct these interviews, including phone calls, different types of communication software, and visiting the interviewees in their places of residence in Syria and abroad. This report includes 18 accounts that we have obtained directly, with none taken from second-hand sources. In some of these interviews, we used aliases for the interviewees to protect their safety and confidentiality and to prevent the possibility of their being identified and persecuted or pursued by security authorities. None of the interviewees received any financial compensation for the interviews or any promises of that kind. We informed all the interviewees we met with of the goals of this report, and they gave us permission to use the information they provided in the service of the goals of this report and our documentation processes. All of these procedures are in line with SNHR's internal protocols that we abide by and strive constantly to improve through our experience so as to maintain the highest standards of psychological care for the victims.

The figures included in this report are the results of the accumulated monitoring and documentation of incidents of arbitrary arrest and enforced disappearance carried out daily by our team since 2011, with SNHR updating our database accordingly every month. It should be noted that the data included in this report reflects a wide variety of information for each case, which is to be expected considering the Syrian context and the massive challenges we encounter in our work. However, we ensure that the documentation of each case includes basic information, such as name, date, place, conditions of arrest, the party responsible for the arrest, enforced disappearance, or torture, when and where the person was last seen, and any relevant documents, among other details. Our IT team has designed special software allowing us to maintain a separate database for each party involved in the conflict, which also enables us to categorize victims by governorate, sex, social status, educational status, age group, and place of arrest. All data is entered automatically.

As mentioned above, SNHR's database allows us to categorize cases by the governorate where the incident took place, or the victim's governorate of origin. In this report, the cases are distributed according to the governorate where the arrest took place, rather than victims' governorates of origin. We made this decision because, in the overwhelming majority of cases, the governorate where the arrest took place is the victim's governorate of origin. However, sometimes we opt for distributing cases according to the victims' governorate of origin, in order to demonstrate the magnitude of violence and loss that a certain governorate has suffered in comparison to other governorates, indicating this when we do so. We store the data securely on SNHR's database, and retain multiple backup copies in multiple locations.

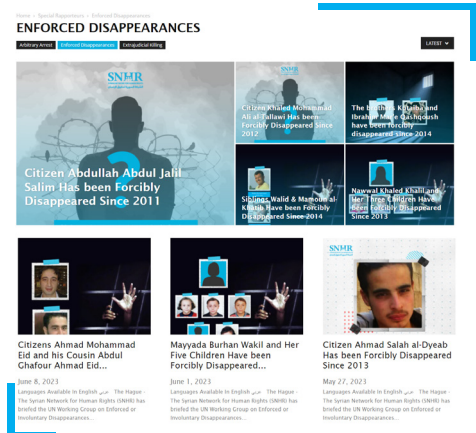
In light of the exceptional difficulties and massive scale of the violations, this report only reflects the bare minimum of information which we have been able to document, as the actual figures for enforced disappearances are far higher. This report also does not include any documentation of the psychological effects that enforced disappearance survivors and their families suffer. For more details, please refer to our work methodology.

III. Effective and Continued Collaboration With the Different UN Organs, Including the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances

For some years, SNHR has identified different stages in the process of documenting and recording victims in detention centers, relying on the great wealth of experience which we have accrued by following and studying the context, nature, and mechanisms of committing violations. A second consideration in this process was the data, evidence, and information available on enforced disappearance cases. SNHR has worked continuously with the UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances through regular correspondence based on certain parameters that primarily requires having open lines of communication with the victims and their families, in order to build comprehensive files on every victim. As such, we consistently ask families to collaborate and coordinate with us, so that we can send as many cases as possible, since the Special Rapporteur contacts the Syrian regime regarding some of the cases that they have been able to verify, and also includes this information in a special annex to each of the reports released by the UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances. Since March 2011, we have been able to brief the UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances on no fewer than 593 cases, including those of dozens of women, children, and whole families. We are still documenting and processing hundreds of cases in accordance with our rigorous methodology in preparation for briefing the UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances on them. It should also be noted that there are dozens of cases on which we brief the UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances, but which we don't report on our official channels in compliance with the request of the victims' families due to their well-justified fear of persecution and out of consideration for their social, psychological, and security situation.

SNHR also briefs 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 these cases.

Moreover, on our website we provide [a form](#) that families can automatically fill in and submit to our detainees team who in turn follow up these submissions and contact the families to complete the process of documenting these cases. We regularly receive documents from the UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances regarding a number of cases submitted by SNHR, about which the Working Group contacted the Syrian regime in order to reveal and report these individuals' fate. We also try to make our teams accessible by various means of communication via our website, designated phone numbers, our official accounts, and through our team members who are scattered across Syria.



Many reports released¹ by the UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances note that the Working Group has submitted a request to visit Syria multiple times, receiving no response to these requests from the Syrian Arab Republic. The reports also note that cooperation between the two sides is limited to generic, standard official responses by the Syrian state which denies all allegations completely. The Working Group has also repeatedly called on the UN Security Council to consider referring the case in Syria to the ICC.

SNHR works closely with various international and UN bodies that work to address the phenomenon of enforced disappearance in Syria, including the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (COI), the UN International, Impartial, Independent Mechanism (IIIM), and the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHA). Thanks to these partnerships, data and information on enforced disappearance cases and other related violations are collected and analyzed and collated into accurate information and reports which are submitted to the international community. SNHR's reports are an important source of information for many institutions we work with in the context of enforced disappearance. Through these partnerships and collaborative efforts, we aim to support international efforts to investigate these violations with the objective of holding those responsible accountable. SNHR plays an integral role in reporting and elucidating the true magnitude of the catastrophe of enforced disappearance and in the mission of combating enforced disappearance, exposing those responsible, and protecting human rights in Syria.

On June 29, 2023, UNGA Member States approved [draft resolution A/77/L.79](#) which provided for the establishment of a UN body tasked with working on the missing persons issue in Syria. The resolution was approved with 83 states voting in favor, 11 voting against, and 62 states abstaining. SNHR [welcomed](#) the outcome of this resolution, and, as with all previous UN mechanisms, reiterated our commitment to working with the newly formed UN Independent Institution on Missing Persons in Syria. SNHR has supported all the COI's demands since [its very first report](#) on November 23, 2011, with regard to establishing a UN mechanism focused solely on addressing the missing persons issue, including forcibly disappeared persons. Under the recommendations section, the report reads: **"Establish a mechanism to investigate cases of disappearances by allowing relatives of disappeared persons to report the details of their cases, and to ensure appropriate investigation;"**. The same demand was repeated in its report, ['Out of Sight, Out of Mind: Deaths in Detention in the Syrian Arab Republic'](#) released on February 8, 2016. In that report, the COI recommended that the international community should **"Support, as a matter of urgency and to build confidence on a local level, the creation of a mechanism to register cases of missing persons, investigate their whereabouts, and identify human remains, including those found in mass graves;"**

SNHR has taken part in many advocacy efforts, consultative meetings, and bilateral meetings with the OHCHR, and has articulated its vision for the proposed body to the OHCHR in a detailed report. Currently, SNHR is still working to formulate the details of its vision for this mechanism through bilateral consultations and a second report that we are currently preparing for submission to the OHCHR.

1. For an example, see:

Human Rights Council, UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances, July 30, 2019 <https://undocs.org/A/HRC/42/40>

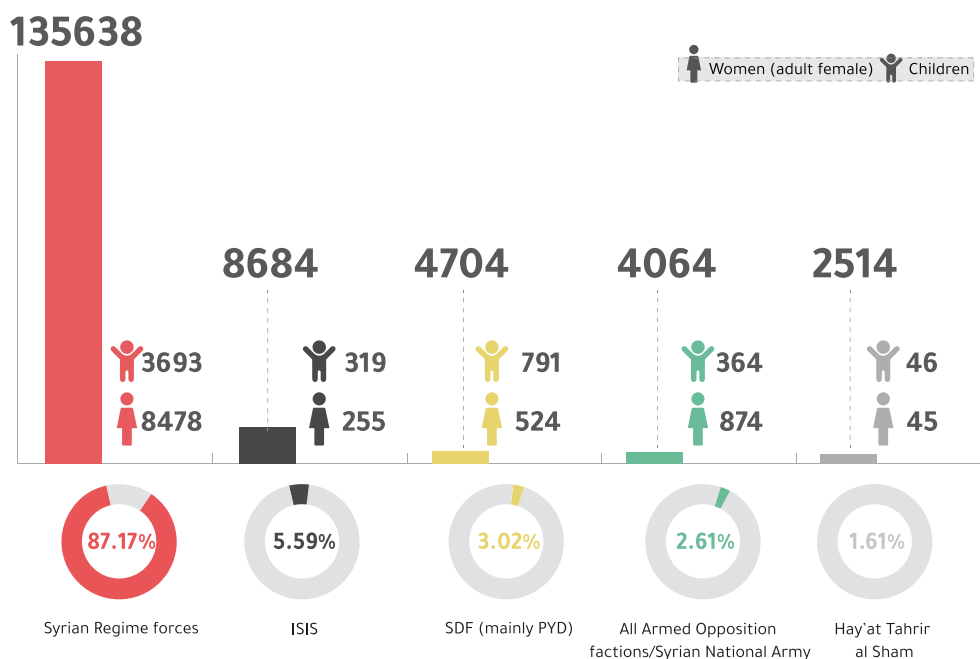
SNHR has warned, however, of raising unrealistic public expectations of the new institution's capabilities, given the potential damaging effects which doing so could have on the families of the missing and forcibly disappeared persons. One must bear in mind what such a body cannot do, as much as what it can do, rather than focusing solely on the latter.

The newly formed institution will undoubtedly galvanize efforts at the Syrian and international levels in support for resolving the missing persons issue, and perhaps lead to the creation of a central database with a platform to enable tens of thousands of families to safely contact it. However, its role will not be to release those who have been arbitrarily arrested. While we welcome the establishment of a UN mechanism on the missing persons in Syria, there are, nonetheless, a number of concerns regarding this new body that need to be addressed:

1. In its current development stage, the new body does not have a clearly defined role in ensuring the release of arbitrarily arrested detainees: Despite the many roles this institution can play, it should be noted that it will not play any role in meditating for arbitrarily arrested detainees' release or putting pressure on their captors to release them.
2. There is no explicit text referring to holding those responsible for perpetrating violations in Syria accountable: When talking about a UN mechanism to address the issue of missing persons in Syria, it is essential, by this mechanism's very nature, that it explicitly identify those responsible for the violations and hold them to account. The Syrian regime's widespread and systematic practice of enforced disappearance is a crime against humanity that is taking place to this day, even before we mention the violations by the other parties to the conflict.
3. The lack of cooperation by the parties to the conflict: We, at SNHR, believe that the Syrian regime and other parties to the conflict will refuse to cooperate with the newly established body, which will complicate its mandate to reveal the fate of the missing persons. Even if this lack of cooperation leads to condemning the parties to the conflict, there is no explicit text that refers to a serious and genuine accountability process, as mentioned earlier.

IV. Updated Summary of the Toll of Arbitrary Arrest/ Detention and Enforced Disappearance Victims Since March 2011 & Their Distribution Across Syria

As SNHR's database confirms, no fewer than 155,604 of the people arrested in Syria between March 2011 and August 2023, including 5,213 children and 10,176 women (adult female), are still under arrest and/or forcibly disappeared by the parties to the conflict and controlling forces. They are distributed as follows:



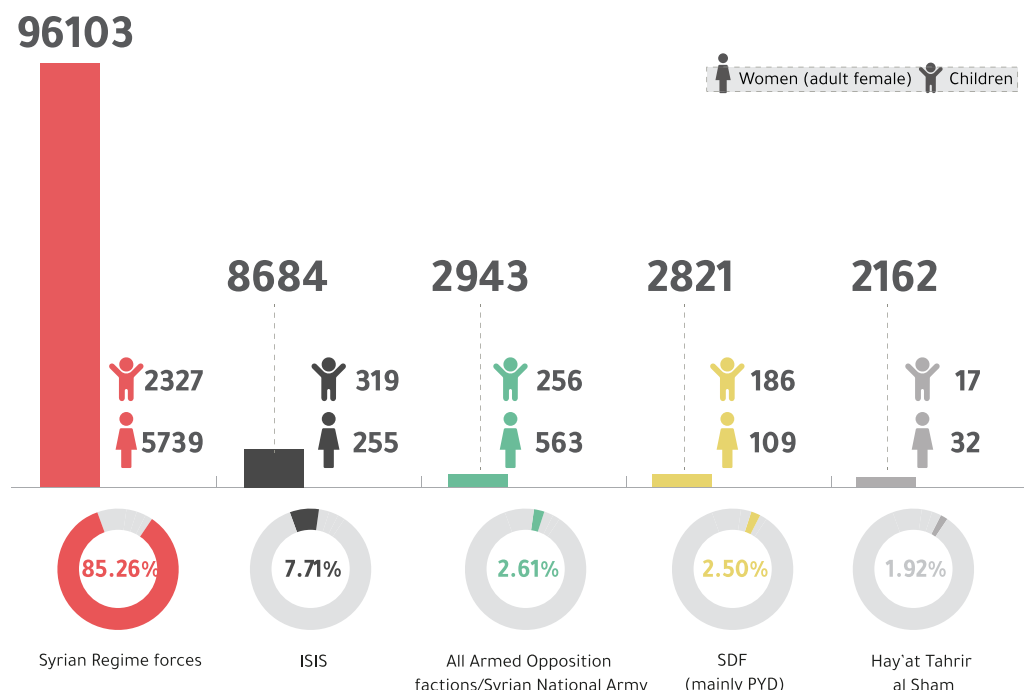
- **Syrian regime forces (army, security, local militias, Shiite foreign militias):**² 135,638 individuals, including 3,693 children and 8,478 women (adult female).
- **ISIS (self-proclaimed the Islamic State):** 8,684 individuals, including 319 children and 255 women (adult female).
- **Hay'at Tahri al-Sham (an alliance of Fateh al-Sham Front and a number of armed opposition factions):**³ 2,514 individuals, including 46 children and 45 women (adult female)/
- **All armed opposition factions/Syrian National Army (SNA):**⁴ 4,604 individuals, including 364 children and 874 women (adult female).
- **Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) (Mainly the Democratic Union Party 'PYD'):** 4,704 individuals, including 791 children and 524 women (adult female).

2. 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.

3. Designated as a terror group by the UN.

4. The various armed opposition/SNA factions founded since 2011 (both active and defunct) in all of the areas currently and previously under their control.

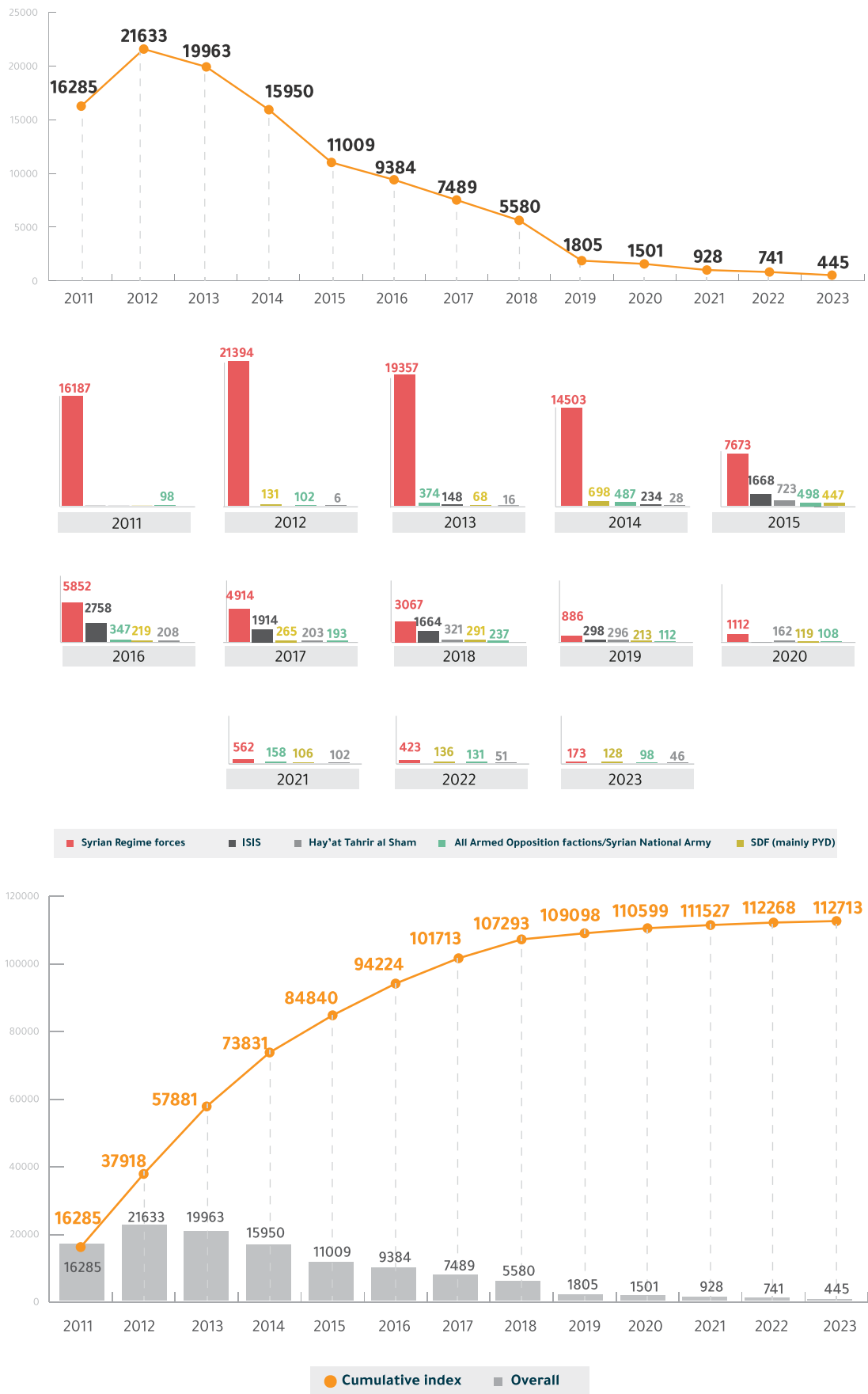
As SNHR's database confirms, no fewer than 112,713 of the individuals arrested between March 2011 and August 2023, including 3,105 children and 6,698 women (adult female), are still forcibly disappeared by the parties to the conflict and controlling forces in Syria. Those are distributed as follows:



- **Syrian regime forces (army, security, local militias, Shiite foreign militias):** 96,103 individuals, including 2,327 children and 5,739 women (adult female).
- **ISIS (self-proclaimed the Islamic State):** 8,684 individuals, including 319 children and 255 women (adult female).
- **Hay'at Tahri al-Sham (an alliance of Fateh al-Sham Front and a number of armed opposition factions):** 2,162 individuals, including 17 children and 32 women (adult female)/
- **All armed opposition factions/Syrian National Army (SNA):** 2,943 individuals, including 256 children and 563 women (adult female).
- **Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) (Mainly the Democratic Union Party "PYD"):** 2,821 individuals, including 186 children and 109 women (adult female).

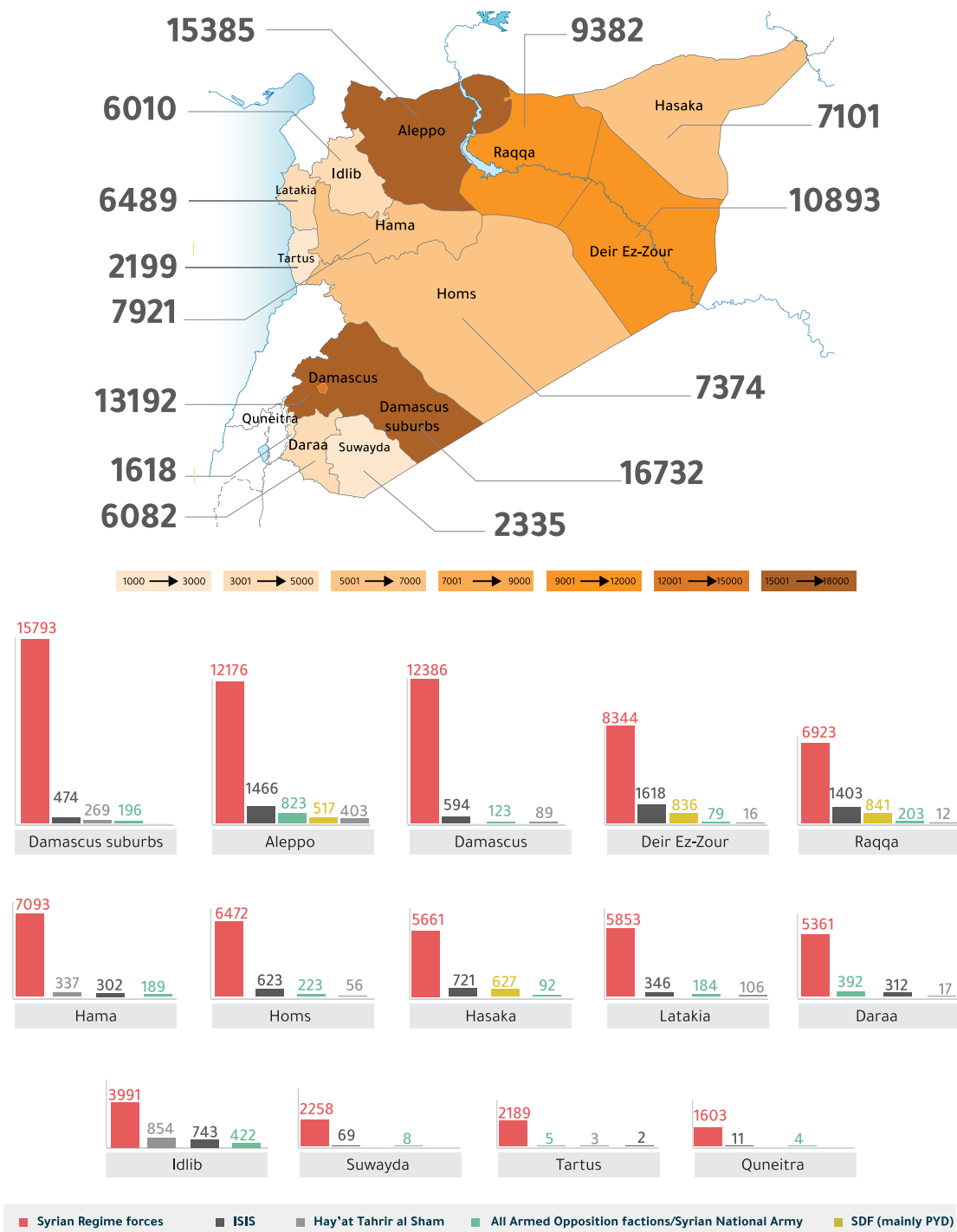
Those figures, which draw upon SNHR's data, show that the Syrian regime has arrested and 'disappeared' by far the largest proportion of Syrian citizens in these categories. A detainee is usually subsequently classified as a forcibly disappeared person immediately after or a few days after their arrest, which is reflected in the massive number of forcibly disappeared persons, the largest proportion of whom have also been forcibly disappeared by Syrian regime forces. This massive number of enforced disappearance victims confirms that this is a systematic, repeated practice carried out in a widespread manner against tens of thousands of detainees. As such, it constitutes a crime against humanity.

A chart showing the distribution of people forcibly disappeared in Syria since 2011 by year and the party responsible for the enforced disappearance, and the accumulative count of the toll of enforced disappearance:



The chart above shows that 2012 was the worst year to date in terms of enforced disappearance, followed by 2013, then 2011, and then 2014. In other words, the first four years of the popular uprising for freedom saw the highest waves of enforced disappearance, which were carried out in an effort to break, crush, and kill the spirit of the popular movement.

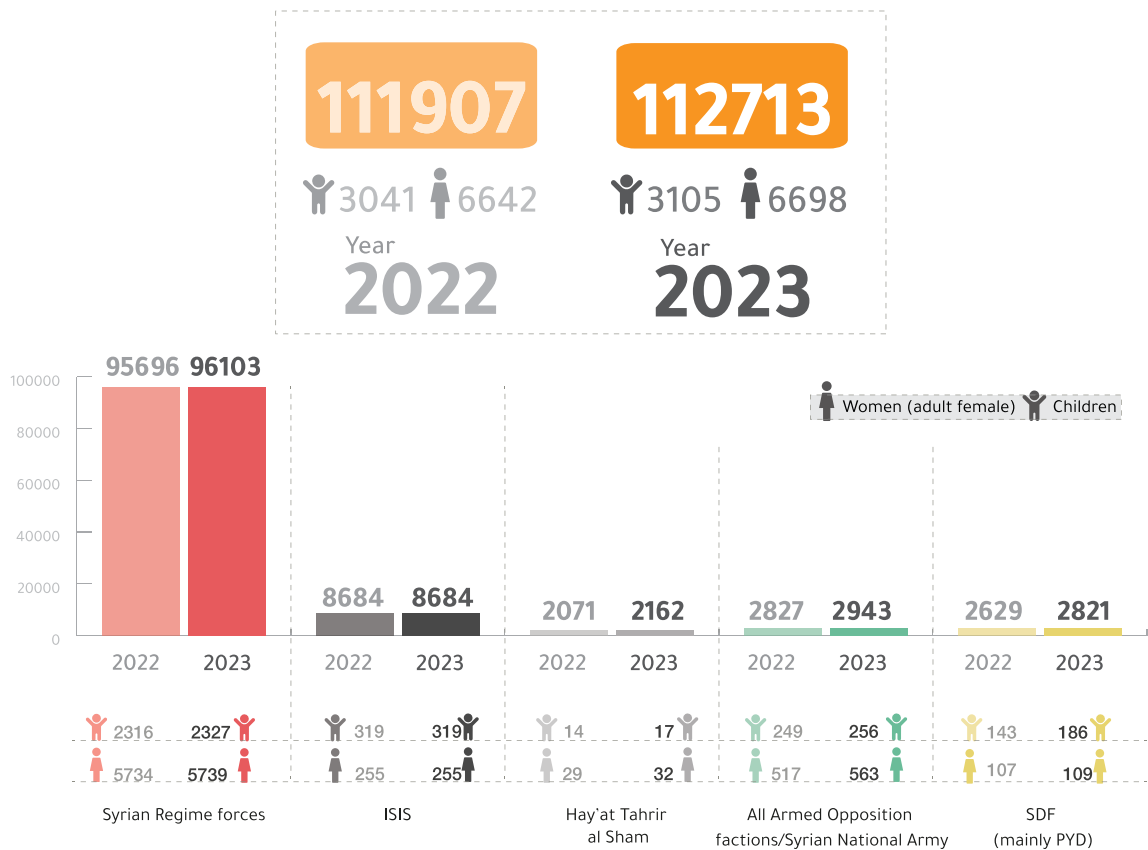
A map showing the distribution of enforced disappearances by the parties to the conflict and controlling forces in Syria distributed according to governorate:



The map above shows that Rural Damascus (Rif Dimshaq) governorate exceeds all other governorates in the number of enforced disappearances, followed by Aleppo, then Damascus, and then Deir Ez-Zour.

Enforced disappearance has been practiced as part of a widespread and systematic attack against all groups of civilian residents. The Syrian regime is the primary perpetrator of enforced disappearance crimes in Syria, far exceeding all other parties to the conflict in numbers of enforced disappearances by such a vast margin that it is unfeasible to even compare the numbers of forced disappearances carried out by Syrian regime forces with those by other parties to the conflict. The Syrian regime's systematic practice of enforced disappearance practices qualify as crimes against humanity according to [Article 7 of the ICC's Rome Statute](#). As such, it does not fall under the statute of limitations. The same article guarantees the right for reparation for the victims' families, as well as the right to know the fate of the forcibly disappeared persons. Enforced disappearance is also a war crime according to Article 8 of the Rome Statute since it was committed "as part of a plan or policy" by the Syrian regime, primarily in its response to the popular uprising for freedom.

A comparison between the numbers of people forcibly disappeared at the hands of the parties to the conflict and controlling forces in Syria since March 2011 up until the International Day of the Disappeared in August 2022 and up to the International Day of the Disappeared in August 2023.



The comparison above shows an increase in the number of forcibly disappeared persons over the past year, with most 'disappeared' in regime detention centers, where more detainees have been subsequently gone on to become forcibly disappeared persons.

V. An Outline of the Reality & Contexts of Enforced Disappearance by the Different Parties to the Conflict and Controlling Forces in Syria

A. Enforced Disappearance by Syrian regime forces (army, security, local and foreign militias)

1. No fewer than 96,103 persons have been forcibly disappeared in regime detention centers for over a decade

Enforced disappearance has been one of the most effective instruments through which the Syrian regime's security machine has crushed the Syrian people into submission. In fact, the Syrian regime has resorted to enforced disappearance ever since the very first days of the popular uprising for freedom in March 2011 with the objective of suppressing protests and crushing the opposition. Enforced disappearance has also been part of the Syrian regime's strategy in asserting or regaining control over territories. Upon analyzing the available data, one can pinpoint a number of characteristics and common practices within the enforced disappearance strategy implemented by the Syrian regime. The most notable are:

- **The Syrian regime has disappeared thousands of arrested people even before they arrived at detention centers:** SNHR's database contains thousands of cases of people; including dozens of families, women, and children, who have been forcibly disappeared immediately after their arrest. The families of those detainees have not received any information about their missing loved ones since the very first moments of their arrest, even in the most basic sense. This was not due to lack of effort on the families' part, however, with many families of individuals in this category telling SNHR that they went through every available official and unofficial channel attempting to learn the fate or whereabouts of their loved ones, but to no avail. This was further confirmed in our own efforts to track transfer processes for detainees/forcibly disappeared persons, which involves interviewing hundreds of survivors and eyewitnesses and asking them if they'd seen these missing people in any of the regime detention centers where they have been held. Under such circumstances, there are legitimate concerns that those missing have been summarily executed in the vicinity of the regime checkpoints where the initial arrest took place. In other words, they never made it to any detention center.

The best-known example of these practices can be seen in an [investigative report](#) published by Newlines Magazine in late-April 2022 which proved that Amjad Yousef, a Syrian regime's security officer (specifically working at Branch 227 of the Military Intelligence Directorate) was responsible for arresting/abducting dozens of Syrians in al-Tadamun neighborhood in Damascus, then taking at least 41 of these arrested people and throwing them into a pit specially dug for the purpose, shooting them dead just before or after they'd been thrown in. The investigation contains Amjad's confession to this horrifying crime.

- **Enforced disappearance started as a widespread offensive targeting all civilian groups:** In regard to enforced disappearances, the Syrian regime leapt immediately to using excessive violence in response to protests, rather than taking a gradual approach. As such, enforced disappearance has been extensively practiced in a targeted manner against activists and basically against anyone who participated in the popular uprising for democracy, most intensively in the first years, which saw the highest rates of enforced disappearance cases documented, in an effort to end and crush the anti-regime protests. As protests grew, the Syrian regime further expanded its use of enforced disappearance on both regional and sectarian pretexts, with the goal of terrorizing and collectively punishing the Syrian people.
- **Enforced disappearance is a systematic and calculated policy in which the regime's various security and military agencies have been involved:** Enforced disappearance has by no means been a haphazard or random practice, nor is it carried out on an individual level. Rather, enforced disappearance has been adopted by the Syrian regime as a calculated and deliberate policy with the objective of oppression and control, with the planning behind this policy involving the highest echelons of power within the state and the security apparatus, which is to say that all of the regime's security and military agencies have been implicated in practicing enforced disappearance according to a comprehensive methodology implemented based on a deliberate decision taken by those at the very top of the power hierarchy, starting with the President of the Republic, who directly commands the ministries of interior and defense, and the National Security Bureau and their various security agencies.
- **The judiciary is a tool in service of enforced disappearance:** The judiciary, which is affiliated with the Ministry of Justice or the Ministry of Defense, has been involved in enforced disappearance practices in harmony with the executive apparatus through its failure to take any action to protect the rights of forcibly disappeared persons in regime detention centers, which should include monitoring the conditions of their detention, and of arrest, and trial procedures, as well as examining the evidence and charges those detainees face as part of due process. Instead, the judiciary has completely abandoned the missing, leaving their fate in the hands of the regime's security apparatus, and complied with its policies with complete subservience. The Public Prosecution service has played a nominal role in some stages of this process by issuing retroactive arrest warrants that rely on a lack of any scrutiny, and which were issued simply to better organize the security branches' records. In other words, these arrest warrants were issued by the judiciary at the request of the security branches and not vice versa. Moreover, the judiciary has failed to take the proper measures with regard to the detainees referred to it from central/civilian prisons who have been forcibly disappeared by the regime's security apparatus. This is particularly true in the case of the [Counterterrorism Court in Damascus](#).

A related issue is the regime's use of the judiciary as a key instrument and useful façade in legitimizing enforced disappearance through the issuance of secret sentences, including capital punishment, by Field Military Courts against thousands of forcibly disappeared persons.

- **Enforced disappearance starts immediately after an arbitrary arrest takes place:** Syrian regime forces do not abide by the arrest parameters specified in the Syrian constitution and the Syrian laws⁵. Arrests are carried out with no legal basis or clear justification, being in reality far closer to abduction than to any legitimate arrest procedure. This means that a detainee instantly becomes a forcibly disappeared person in most cases. These detainees are transferred to one of the many detention centers operated by the regime's security apparatus and denied any opportunity to contact their loved ones, a lawyer, or anyone in the outside world.
- **Enforced disappearance is related to torture and exceptional trials:** Enforced disappearance and the use of torture usually go hand-in-hand. Both usually begin from the very first moment of arrest, with the most intensive and brutal torture generally taking place during interrogation at detention centers that are mainly located inside the security branches which each report to one of the regime's four main security directorates. Torture of all forms does not stop for one second during the entire duration of the detention period, with all detainees subjected to cruel and inhumane conditions, and referred to secret exceptional courts whose 'legal procedures' are similar to interrogation at security branches. These courts issue inhumane sentences, including the death penalty. In a previous, detailed report, we documented the most notable methods of torture used by Syrian regime forces in their detention centers and military hospitals. In that report, we counted [72 different methods](#) of physical, psychological, and sexual torture that are all practiced in a deliberate and widespread way in all detention centers, with no exceptions made for women, children, elderly people, invalids, the mentally or physically disabled, or anyone else.
- **Prolonging enforced disappearance with no time limit:** As mentioned earlier, enforced disappearance starts from the moment an arbitrary arrest takes place and continues with no tangible limit. The Syrian regime deliberately established this prolonged state of uncertainty to intensify and extend the suffering of forcibly disappeared persons and their families for long years. As of August 2023, no fewer than 96,103 people, including 2,327 children and 5,739 women (adult female) remain forcibly disappeared at the hands of Syrian regime forces according to SNHR's database. Most of these forcibly disappeared persons have been disappeared for no fewer than 10 years.
- **No effective or official channels exist to help in searching for forcibly disappeared persons:** The Syrian regime has also very deliberately failed to provide any clearly defined legal ways and means for the families of forcibly disappeared persons to search for their loved ones or find out their status. One aspect of this is the fact that Syrian laws do not distinguish between forcibly disappeared persons and missing persons. To this day, the Syrian regime has not addressed or acknowledged the existence of forcibly disappeared persons in its detention centers, except for Articles 202 and 203 of the Personal Status law which detail the rules regarding missing persons. These laws are mostly related to the official procedures for certifying deaths and in no way address how to search for forcibly disappeared persons in detention centers. SNHR has addressed those laws at some length in [a previous report](#).

5. For a detailed outline of the arrest parameters specified in the Syrian law, please see our [monthly reports](#) on arrests and detention in Syria:

However, some families with forcibly disappeared family members go through an obtuse, convoluted, and largely ineffective legal process, which is also costly, to search for their missing loved ones. This process begins with filing a missing person report at a police station, then submitting a request to the public prosecution or military public prosecution service in Damascus. This process requires a first-degree relative of the missing person to submit a family statement, a copy of the missing person's ID, as well as a copy of the ID of the person submitting the request, and a form that can be purchased from the military judiciary. These documents are then given to the diwan (a senior executive department in some Arab states) of the public prosecution which refers it to the military police. In theory, the family should expect a response within three months of the request being received. In reality, however, the response is usually a flat denial from regime authorities of having detained the missing person, or sometimes receipt of an official notice of death with insufficient or false information about the cause of death. In the latter case, families are then referred to Tishreen Military Hospital where they can obtain a death certificate. Many families have told us that they pay large sums of money to expedite this process, even though such procedures should be completely free for Syrian nationals. Another legal process that some families go through is submitting inquiries to the Counterterrorism Court in Damascus to find out if their loved ones have been tried by the Court.

■ **Failing to reveal the fate of the forcibly disappeared:** The Syrian regime has failed to take any serious steps to establish any genuine process for revealing the fate of forcibly disappeared persons, or for ensuring the return of the bodies of detainees who died in its detention centers to their families, launching investigations into their deaths, issuing autopsy reports, revealing the locations of their burial location, or holding those responsible for their deaths accountable. The only action taken by the regime in this regard is belatedly registering the deaths of a limited number of forcibly disappeared persons in the civil registry records or issuing death certificates that do not mention the real cause of death. All of those procedures or omissions constitute compounded violations in the context of enforced disappearance, since each involves tampering with the records of the forcibly disappeared persons and inflicting further devastation on their already traumatized families, and none can be described as 'revealing the person's fate' in any proper sense. We believe that the Syrian regime will never take any such action in an honest way, so long as it operates with the same monstrous, security-centered mindset.

■ **Enforced disappearance is a means to extort material gains for those involved:** The Syrian regime has harnessed all the aspects of enforced disappearance to inflict maximum emotional and psychological trauma on and extract every possible form of material gain from forcibly disappeared persons and their families. This is true regarding every step that can be taken by a family or spouse attempting to find out any information about a missing loved one, and involves officials, or intermediaries selling information, that can be true or false, or asking for ransoms to release a detainee. Moreover, regime officials have confiscated the properties and possessions of forcibly disappeared persons. Today, there are networks operating within the regime's security and judicial system that have become wealthy and blatantly and shamefully skilled at fraud, swindling, and extorting the families of forcibly disappeared persons.

2. No fewer than 4,365 returning refugees/IDPs arrested, including 1,464 who went on to become forcibly disappeared persons

Arbitrary arrests and enforced disappearances are two of the most serious risks facing internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees returning to regime-held areas, even for those who have never been involved in any dissident activism. The dire economic conditions, psychological suffering, families being torn apart, and continuous harassment have all been factors in forcing IDPs/refugees to return to regime areas. In addition to these pressures, Syria's neighboring countries have violated the binding principle of non-refoulement and forcibly repatriated hundreds of refugees, many of whom have been subjected to the grim fate of enforced disappearance and death due to torture inside regime detention centers.

Moreover, the Syrian regime has failed to take any action to facilitate the return of IDPs and refugees. The regime forced most returning IDPs/refugees to agree to security settlement as a requirement for accepting their return. Those settlements are signed either at the regime's embassies and consulates, by security committees, or through local intermediaries, while at the same time the regime maintains active lists of hundreds of thousands of names who are still wanted by authorities with no legal foundation, despite the security settlements. The majority of returning IDPs who we talked with told us that they are not convinced of the sincerity of the assurances given to them by intermediaries, and have in fact faced continuous harassment by security agencies since their return through being summoned and ordered to visit security branches to have their security situation assessed.

Since the beginning of 2014,⁶ up until August 2023, SNHR has documented no fewer than 3,376 arrests, including of 246 children and 212 women (adult female), targeting refugees who returned from their countries of asylum or residence to their original areas of residence in Syria. All of these 3,376 detainees were arrested by Syrian regime forces. A total of 2,094 of the detainees were released, while 926 of the remaining 1,282 detainees, mostly returning from Lebanon, Türkiye, and Jordan, have gone on to be classified as forcibly disappeared.

In the same period, we've documented the arrest of no fewer than 989 IDPs who returned to regime-held areas, including of 22 children and 19 women. The Syrian regime released 246 of these IDPs, while of the remaining 743, a total of 538 have gone on to become forcibly disappeared persons. We have also documented that the Syrian regime re-arrested some of the 246 released detainees in order to forcibly conscript them into the military. We have indicated [in many of our periodic reports](#) on arrest how returnees are being arrested in a targeted way.

All the reports released by the COI have confirmed that Syria is wholly unsafe for refugees' return. Furthermore, the COI has reiterated that any refoulment of Syrian regime to a Syria under the rule of the current Syrian regime with its current leadership and barbaric security system constitutes a violation of the customary law that is binding to all world's states including those that have not ratified the 1951 Refugee Convention. SNHR has also reiterated, in numerous reports and statements, that Syria remains a completely unsafe country, and that many types of violations are still being committed - most crucially and notably arbitrary arrest and enforced disappearance. Moreover, approximately half of the entire Syrian population who were displaced either as IDPs or refugees will not be able to safely return without a political change. The governments which have carried out these unlawful forced deportations bear legal responsibility for any torture, killing, enforced disappearance, and other violations potentially perpetrated by the Syrian regime against forced returnees, in addition, of course, to the Syrian regime's direct responsibility for those violations.

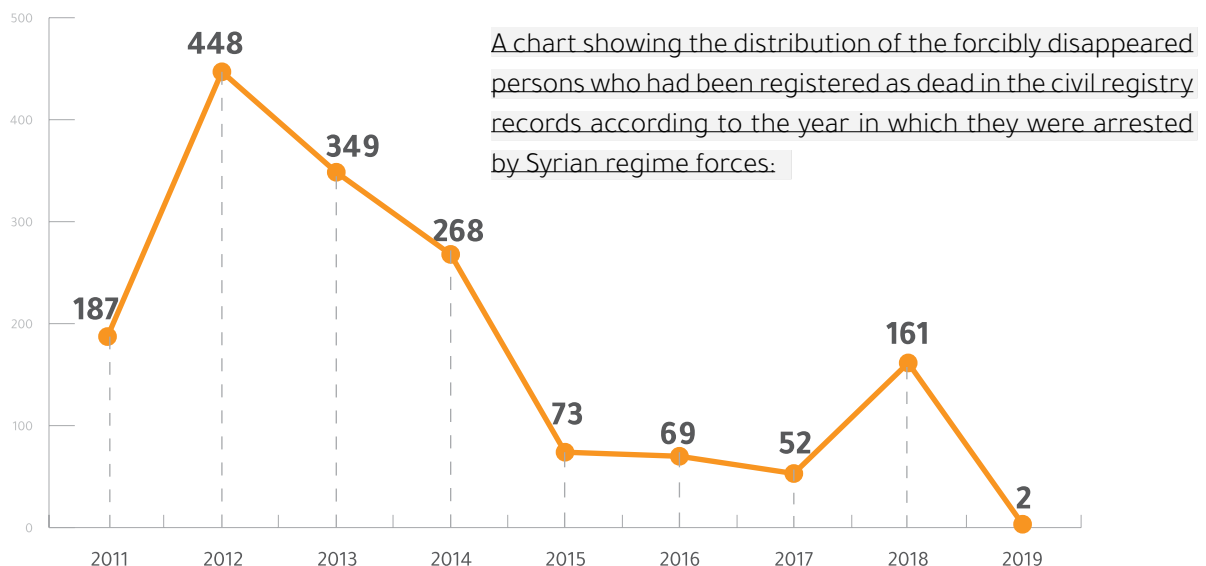
6. By monitoring the violations against returnees, we've determined that 2014 was the first year that saw some IDPs/refugees begin returning to regime-held areas and be targeted for arrest and enforced disappearance.

3. The Syrian regime has tacitly acknowledged the death of no fewer than 1,609 forcibly disappeared people by registering their deaths in the civil registry records; we believe these individuals died due to torture

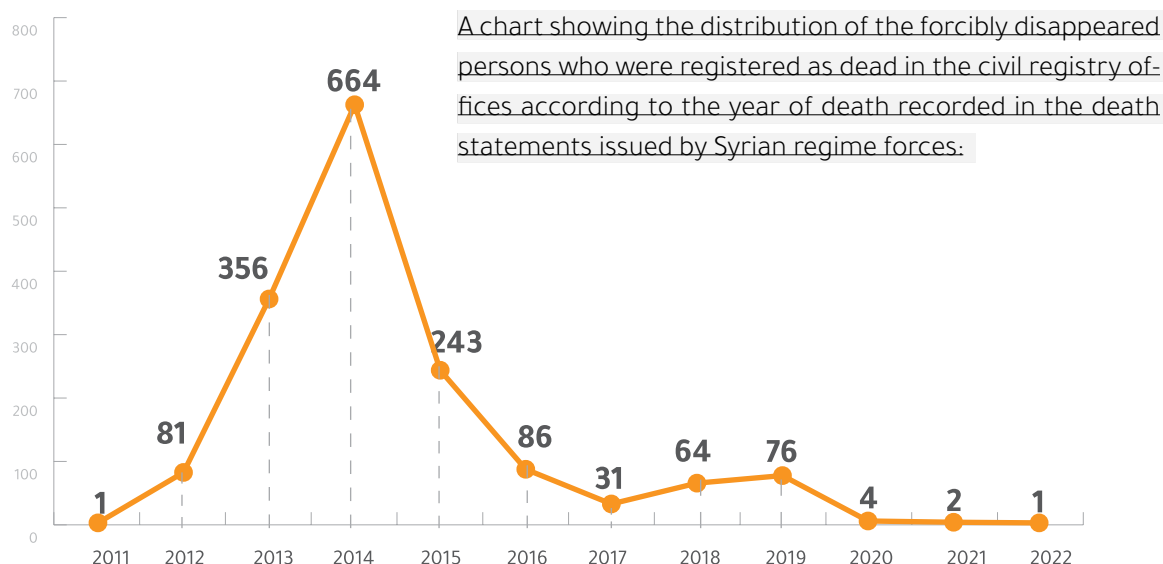
In 2018, SNHR started to monitor a practice by the Syrian regime, by which forcibly disappeared persons are registered as dead in the civil registry records. Since then, we have been closely monitoring the stages of this horrifying phenomenon, from the mechanism by which families learn that their loved ones have died to the procedures followed by the regime to tamper with victims' civil records and the institutions involved in these practices, in addition to analyzing the death certificates issued for the victims. We have [released many reports](#) about these practices and their psychological and legal effects on the victims' families. While SNHR has received copies of hundreds of death certificates issued by the regime from the victims' families, the beginning of 2022 saw a notable development in this regard, when SNHR was able to obtain recently issued death certificates for individuals whose deaths had not yet been registered. We included copies of these documents [in our extensive report](#) released on December 20, 2022, in which we revealed that we obtained hundreds of death certificates for people forcibly disappeared by the Syrian regime, whose families had not been informed of their death, with some of those deaths not made public by the civil registry offices. Some of those death certificates were for children, women, and prominent activists in the popular uprising against the Syrian regime. To this day, we continue to receive more death certificates for forcibly disappeared people through the extensive network of contacts we have been able to build throughout the years. Our team has also gained a great deal of experience in examining, verifying, and assessing the credibility of these documents.

The Syrian regime's practice of recording forcibly disappeared people as dead without notifying their families once again lays bare the unimaginably callous, fascistic nature of this regime, which treats Syrian citizens in such a barbaric way that goes against all norms and laws. Such practices are deliberately designed to crush the spirit of the already traumatized families of forcibly disappeared people, a continuation of the punitive policies adopted by the regime against everyone involved in the popular uprising for democracy since March 2011. As increasing numbers of forcibly disappeared persons are registered as dead, we are seriously concerned for the fates of the tens of thousands of other forcibly disappeared persons inside the regime's detention centers.

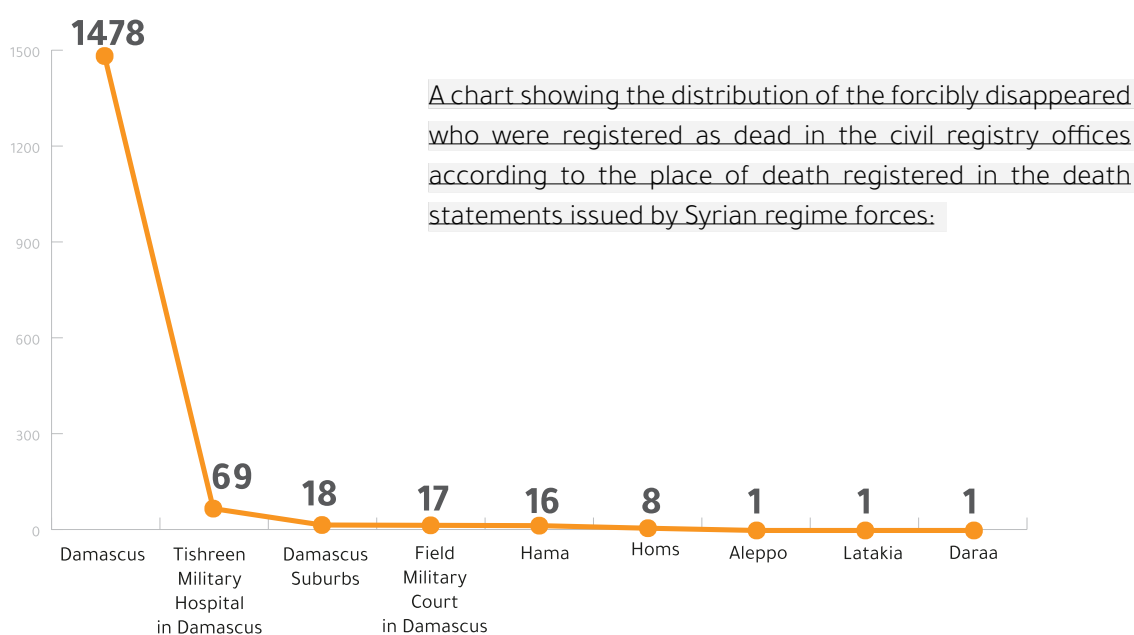
SNHR has documented that no fewer than 1,609 individuals, including 24 children, 21 women, and 16 medical personnel, have been registered as dead in the civil registry records since the beginning of 2018 up until August 2023. The causes of these victims' deaths were not provided in these records, their bodies have not been returned to their families, and their deaths were not announced when they took place. Among these cases are four individuals who have been positively identified from the pictures leaked from the Syrian regime's military hospitals, also known as the Caesar photos.



As shown on the graph, the largest proportion of the 1,609 cases we recorded were arrested by Syrian regime forces in 2012, followed by 2013, and then 2014, which were also the same years that saw the highest levels to date of enforced disappearance in regime detention centers.

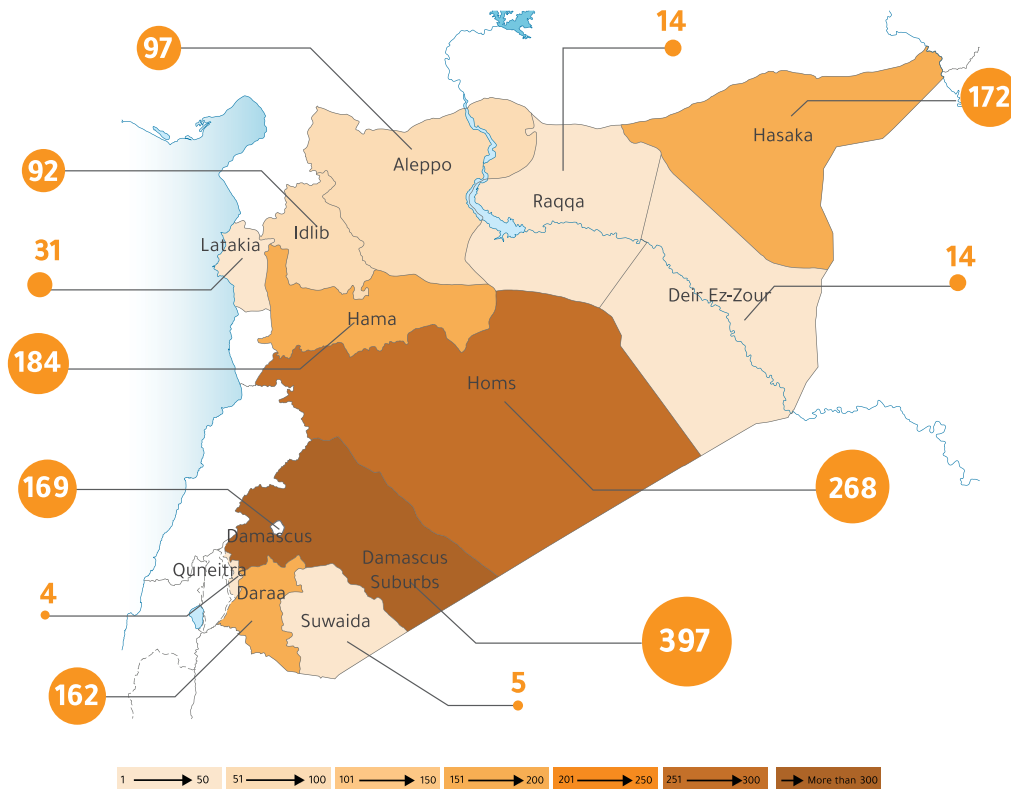


As shown on the graph above, the largest proportion of the 1,609 cases we documented were recorded as having died in 2014, according to the death certificates issued by the civil registry offices, followed by 2013 and then 2015.



As shown on the graph above, the largest proportion of the 1,609 cases we documented were recorded as having died in Damascus city, according to the death certificates issued by the civil registry offices, followed by Tishreen Military Hospital in Damascus city and then Rural Damascus governorate.

A map showing the distribution of the forcibly disappeared who were registered as dead in the civil registry offices according to their governorate of origin:



As the map shows, the largest proportion of the 1,609 victims whose deaths were recorded came from Rural Damascus governorate, followed by Homs, then Hama, then Hasaka. According to SNHR's database, Rural Damascus governorate tops all other governorates both in terms of enforced disappearance victims and torture victims.

4. All 22 amnesty decrees issued by the Syrian regime have been failures in terms of enabling the release of forcibly disappeared persons and of stopping the increase in levels of enforced disappearances

Following the promulgation of every amnesty decree by the Syrian regime, SNHR places a particular focus on monitoring the application of the related procedures and of the executive directives adopted by the Syrian regime's 'security and judicial' apparatuses in relation to the implementation of those amnesty decrees. It is not enough to simply analyze the contents and structure of these decrees, and the violations and legal and constitutional loopholes contained therein. SNHR's team closely monitors the releases from regime detention centers and examines their context and whether or not these releases are connected in any way to the amnesty decrees; indeed, we have released numerous detailed special reports on each decree and on the findings of our monitoring and analysis. [In a report scrutinizing all the amnesty decrees issued by the Syrian regime between March 2011 and October 2022](#), we explained how all such amnesty decrees are similar in many of their aspects, focusing primarily on granting amnesty to

those charged with criminal offences, misdemeanors and violations. Most importantly, they have included only a very limited number of the detainees referred to exceptional courts such as the Counterterrorism Court and the Field Military Courts, and have excluded the majority of detainees who've never been tried despite having been detained for years, who've gone on to become forcibly disappeared.

No fewer than 7,351 individuals (6,086 civilians and 1,265 military servicemen) have been released from the Syrian regime's various civilian and military prisons and detention centers across Syria in relation to the 22 amnesty decrees issued by the regime between March 2011 and October 2022. Of the 6,086 civilians, 349 were women and 159 were children at the time of their arrest. We have recorded no releases in relation to the most recent amnesty decree issued by the Syrian regime on December 21, 2022, also known as Legislative Decree No. 24 of 2022.

As SNHR's database attests, there is a vast chasm between the figures for persons forcibly disappeared in regime detention centers and the numbers of those released in relation to the amnesty decrees issued by the Syrian regime, which underlines how these amnesty decrees have totally failed to secure the release of detainees and forcibly disappeared persons. These decrees have had no real effect or led to any transparency, or to any mechanisms that might ensure the release of all detainees and forcibly disappeared persons or compensate them. Put plainly, these decrees are a cruel political deception used to promote the appearance of the Syrian regime's taking action in order to alleviate international pressure on one hand while in reality further exploiting and extorting the families of detainees and forcibly disappeared persons on the other.

5. Names of the most prominent figures in the regime's security and military agencies that have been involved in the crime of forcibly disappearing tens of thousands of Syrians

Hundreds of figures holding leadership positions in the Syrian regime's security agencies, military divisions, and military and security committees are or have been involved in the violations committed against the Syrian people and the Syrian state since 2011. SNHR maintains a constantly updated database containing thousands of items of detailed information on individuals involved in violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law, providing particulars of the positions they hold and have held, and the most notable violations we've documented their involvement in. We have shed light on many of these criminal figures in various [reports](#) and statements over the past 12 years.

As SNHR's database shows when it comes to the regime's history of arbitrary arrest/detention, enforced disappearance, and the other violations involved in those practices such as arrest and torture, these violations have been committed primarily by the four main security directorates - the Military Security Intelligence Directorate, Air Force Intelligence Directorate, General Intelligence Directorate, and Political Security Directorate, being carried out in their various detention centers, as well as in a number of military and civilian prisons. The documents and data we have obtained indicate that the staff of at least 62 branches of these directorates are responsible for arbitrary arrest and enforced disappearance crimes, either through direct involvement or by monitoring activists and dissidents and writing security reports on individuals involved in the popular uprising or even those believed to show any inclination for such activism. Besides these agencies, there are the security branches focusing on monitoring military servicemen which have also involved in arresting them from their military stations.

Enforced disappearance has been practiced in a systematic and widespread way under the direct supervision of the Syrian regime's entire leadership hierarchy, starting with the President of the Republic, who directly controls the ministries of interior and defense, the National Security Bureau, and their various security agencies and security and military committees. In this context, it should be noted that decisions on appointments, promotions, and transfers of officials heading security agencies are taken through the orders and decrees issued exclusively by the President of the Republic. The appointment of heads of security agencies is such a sensitive and complex process that is carried out in absolute secrecy. As such, we rely on cross-checking our database of archived documents on those involved in human rights violations, and on the accumulation of information we obtain from detention survivors and defected officers.

We believe that disclosing the names of those involved in violations is a form of exposure and accountability before the public opinion, first on a local level, and secondly on the international level. We also believe that it is important that the families of the forcibly disappeared know their enemies before the courts and legal bodies that we hope will eventually be established as an essential part of the transitional justice process. Moreover, we do this in the hope that exposing these figures' names may deter them from repeating their violations, and so that others know that anyone who commits crimes against the Syrian people may be exposed before Syrian society, including their own families and communities, as well as being exposed by the media, and subsequently before local and international courts. We will also spare no effort to achieve the goal of ensuring that as many of those criminal figures as possible are included on the terrorism and economic sanctions lists.

In previous annual reports on enforced disappearance in Syria, we have provided details on some of the most notable figures heading the regime's security agencies and their various security branches over the previous year according to the period of time covered by each report. These individuals are directly responsible for the crimes of arrest, torture, and enforced disappearance taking place during their tenure. In this report, we will focus more on officers and other senior figures within the different security and military bodies which have been involved in arbitrary arrests and enforced disappearance.

Nader Saed al-Din

Born in 1971 in Homs governorate, Nader Saad al-Din is a Brigadier General (Amid Rukn) who worked with the Republican Guard's Fourth Division (Ferqa Rabe'a). He was one of the commanders who supervised the brutal regime raids on towns and villages in Rural Damascus governorate which successfully restored the regime's control over the governorate. We have documented his responsibility for numerous violations against the residents of Rural Damascus, including killing, arrest, and enforced disappearance.



👁 Nader Saed al-Din

Khardal Ahmad Dyoub

Khardal Ahmad Dyoub is a Brigadier General (Amid Rukn) who's held multiple position in the Syrian regime's Air Force Intelligence Directorate. In 2019, he was appointed as head of the Air Force Intelligence branch in Daraa governorate. In 2021, he was promoted from a Colonel to a Brigadier General. We have documented his responsibility for numerous violations against residents of Daraa who agreed to security settlements with Syrian regime forces in July 2018, including deaths due to torture, arrest, and enforced disappearance.



👁 Khardal Ahmad Dyoub

Majed al-Dras

Majed al-Dras is a Brigadier General (Amid Rukn) from Hala village in the al-Qalamoun subdistrict in Rural Damascus (Rif Dimshaq), who's held several positions in the Syrian regime's Air Force Intelligence Directorate (AFID). In February 2021, he was named head of the AFID's branch in the central Syria section, and on March 28, 2022, he was appointed as head of the AFID branch in Rural Damascus.



👁 Majed al-Dras

Mohammad Kenjou Hasan

Mohammad Kenjou Hasan, born in 1974, is a Major General (Liwa) from Hama governorate who's worked with the Syrian regime's Ministry of Defense's military judiciary. In 2013, he was appointed as head of the Military Judiciary Administration and head of the Field Military Court in Damascus.



👁 Mohammad Kenjou Hasan

Ahmad Nouh

Ahmad Nouh, born in 1973, is a Brigadier General (Amid) from Hama governorate who's held several positions in the Syrian regime's State Security Intelligence Directorate including head of interrogation at al-Khatib branch in Damascus city. We documented his responsibility for numerous violations as head of the branch, including arrests, enforced disappearances, and deaths due to torture.

Abdul Salam Fajr Mahmoud

Abdul Salam Fajr Mahmoud, born in 1989, is a Brigadier General (Amid) from Hama governorate. He's held several positions in the Syrian regime's Air Force Intelligence Directorate (AFID). He was appointed as head of interrogation at the AFID branch in Damascus city, the central interrogation division to which all AFID detainees from across Syria are referred. Since the beginning of his service with the AFID, he has been responsible for numerous arrests, enforced disappearances, and deaths due to torture in various branches.

Loay Lawrence al-Affash

Loay Lawrence al-Affash, born in 1975, is a Lieutenant Colonel (Muqaddam) from Latakia governorate. He's worked with the Syrian regime's Ministry of Defense's Military Judiciary, holding the position of Fifth Military Interrogation Judge with the Military Judiciary, which has played a significant role in forcibly disappearing detainees and issuing death sentences against them.



👁 Loay Lawrence al-Affash

Jamal Mahmoud Younes

Jamal Mahmoud Younes, born in 1967, is a Major General (Liwa) from Latakia governorate. He headed the security and military committee in Homs governorate, and was the commander of the Third Legion of the Syrian regime's official military. He has been directly involved in many military operations carried out by the Syrian regime in Homs governorate which rebelled against Syrian regime forces. In September 2021, he was appointed as head of the regime's security committee in Deir Ez-Zour governorate.



👁 Jamal Mahmoud Younes

Uqab Saqr Abbas

Uqab Saqr Abbas is a Brigadier General (Amid) who's held several positions in the Syrian regime's State Security Intelligence Directorate. He was one of the heads of the State Security branch in Daraa governorate between March 2018 and March 2022, during which time we documented many violations against residents of Daraa, including deaths due to torture, arrests, and enforced disappearances. In March 2022, he was transferred to the State Security branch in al-Qameshli city in Hasaka governorate.



👁 Uqab Saqr Abbas

Accounts given by families and friends of victims forcibly disappeared by Syrian regime forces

Mustafa Mohammad Ali al-Hussein

born in 1987, from al-Daqmaq village in western rural Hama governorate, was living in Latakia city when he was arrested on Thursday, June 23, 2011, by Syrian regime forces at a checkpoint in the city. His family was last able to visit him in 2013 at the Sednaya Military Prison. He has been classified as forcibly disappeared ever since, with his fate remaining unknown to SNHR as well as to his family.



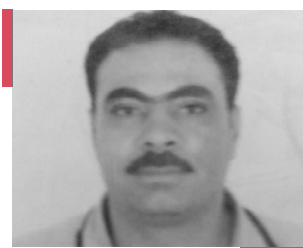
👁 Mustafa Mohammad Ali al-Hussein, a forcibly disappeared person

SNHR spoke to a friend of Mustafa's, named Ghassan al-Ali, who told us:

"Mustafa was arrested by Military Security Intelligence personnel and his car was seized. His family lost contact with him, so they went figures with influence within the Syrian regime, and paid them large sums of money. They found out he was being held in Sednaya Military Prison. His father and mother were able to visit him multiple times, with the last visit taking place at the end of 2013. Ever since then, they could not find out anything about him. They do not know if he was transferred to other prison or even if he is still alive."

Khaled Mohammad Deeb al-Qadi

born in 1975, from Ariha city in southern rural Idlib governorate, was working as a car mechanic when he was arrested on Sunday, February 5, 2012, at a checkpoint on the main bridge in the city, and taken to an undisclosed location. He has been classified as forcibly disappeared ever since, with his fate remaining unknown to his family as well as SNHR.



👁 Khaled Mohammad Deeb al-Qadi, a forcibly disappeared person

SNHR spoke with a friend of Khaled's, named Amer al-Sayyed,⁷ who told us:

"Khaled, who was working as a car mechanic, is married and has two sons and two daughters. He was arrested by regime personnel at a checkpoint, which was set up at the entrance of Ariha city, while on his way to Idlib city with his friend Anas al-Banshi. A few days after he went missing, we found his car near the checkpoint and it was completely burnt. We tried to find out anything about him, but we could not obtain any information. We even paid large sums of money, but with no result."

7. Via phone on June 23, 2023.

Brothers Ramadan and Fayez Ahmad Kajak

born in 1995 and 1996 respectively, from Andan city in northwestern rural Aleppo governorate, were arrested on Sunday, June 17, 2012, (meaning they were children at the time of their arrest) by personnel from the Syrian regime's Air Force Intelligence Directorate near the Baath Party headquarters in Saadallah Al-Jabri Square in Aleppo city. The two brothers were arrested after being pursued by Air Force Intelligence Directorate officers, who stopped their car. They were then taken to the al-Jamiliya Police Station in Aleppo city, from where they were transferred to a regime detention center in Damascus city. They have been classified as forcibly disappeared ever since, with their fate remaining unknown to SNHR as well as to their family.

SNHR spoke with a relative of Ramadan's and Fayez's, known as Maher Hamdan, who told us:

"Ramadan and Fayez were in a car with their cousins on their way to meet their aunt's wife at the domestic transportation service company in Aleppo city to replace a gas tank in their home. When they arrived at Saadallah al-Jabri Square near the Baath Party headquarters, a vehicle affiliated with the Air Force Intelligence Directorate appeared and pursued and stopped them. They were arrested and taken to the al-Jamiliya Police Station, where they were accused of making plans to detonate the gas tank they had with them. We have not received any information about them ever since until a former prisoner told us that he had been imprisoned with them for 50 days in the al-Jamiliya Police Station, but then they were transferred via a helicopter to Damascus city and then to the Palestine Branch. We could not hire a lawyer since they were facing terror charges. We paid a lot of money, up to \$12,000, to learn anything about them, to no avail. We were just exploited, and to this day we do not know anything about them."

Mohammad Radwan Sabbagh

born in 1981, from Aleppo city, was working as a furniture salesman when he was arrested on Wednesday, December 25, 2013, by Syrian regime forces in the Suleiman al-Halabi area of Aleppo city and taken to an undisclosed location. He has been classified as forcibly disappeared ever since, with his fate remaining unknown to SNHR as well as to his family.



👁 Mohammad Radwan Sabbagh, a forcibly disappeared person

SNHR spoke with a cousin of Mohammad's, named Mohammad Yahya Sabbagh,⁸ who told us:

"Mohammad is married with kids. He was arrested when he was in the Suleiman al-Halabi area in Aleppo city because he was in possession of a flash drive containing footage of anti-regime demonstrations. After the arrest, we looked for him in every prison, and asked for any information, but with no result. To this day, we do not know anything about him."

8. Via phone on May 4, 2023.

Ali Ismail al-Alloush

born in 1995, from Balyoun village in southern rural Idlib governorate, was arrested in 2013 by Syrian regime forces at Idlib city's garage and taken to an undisclosed location. He has been classified as forcibly disappeared ever since, with his fate remaining unknown to SNHR as well as to his family.



👁 Ali Ismail al-Alloush, a forcibly disappeared person

SNHR spoke with a friend of Ali's, named Hani Mohammad,⁹ who told us:

"Ali was on his way to do a high school exam. On his way back to his home in Balyoun village, he was arrested by regime personnel at Idlib city's garage. We asked about him and found out he was being held at the Political Security Intelligence Directorate's branch in Idlib city, and his family was able to visit him. After that visit, however, they lost all contact with him and could not find out any information about him. His family spared no effort to learn any information about him. They were told he was being held in Tartus City's Prison, while others told them he was being held in al-Khatib Branch in Damascus and that he had died, but they were all unconfirmed allegations. To this day, we do not know anything about his fate or whereabouts."

Hussein Ahmad Othman al-Rahmou

born in 1987, from Souran town in northern rural Aleppo governorate, was arrested on Sunday, January 12, 2014, by Syrian regime forces at a checkpoint in al-Msharqa Neighborhood in Aleppo city, and taken to an undisclosed location. He has been forcibly disappeared ever since, as his fate remains unknown to SNHR as well as his family.

SNHR spoke with a relative of Hussein's, named Maha al-Hussein, who told us:

"Hussein, who is married with two children, was arrested at a regime checkpoint in al-Msharqa neighborhood in Aleppo. According to information we received, he was mistakenly arrested over a name similarity. We tried to find out his whereabouts again and again, and we were told he is being held in Palestine Branch in Damascus, but we are unsure if that is true. That was the last time we heard anything about him."

9. Via phone on July 12, 2023.

Abdullah Ghazal al-Abdul Razzaq al-Hafal

born in 1994, from Theyban town in rural Deir Ez-Zour, was a university student studying nursing when he was arrested on Tuesday, March 25, 2014, by Syrian regime forces personnel while on his way to Deir Ez-Zour Hospital, and taken to an undisclosed location. He has been classified as forcibly disappeared ever since, with his fate remaining unknown to SNHR as well as his family.



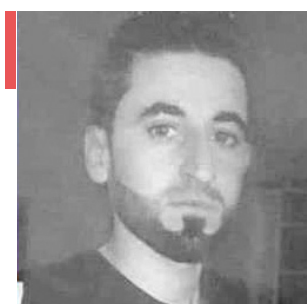
👁 Abdullah Ghazal al-Abdul Razzaq al-Hafal, a forcibly disappeared person

SNHR spoke with a sibling of Abdullah's, named "Mohammad",¹⁰ who told us:

"My brother was a nursing student in Deir Ez-Zour city. He was never involved in any revolutionary or military activism. He was living with other students in a rented house. On one day while he was on his way to university, he was arrested by regime personnel. We tried hard to find out his whereabouts, but we could not find anything. One year after he was arrested, a former prisoner told us he saw him at an Air Force Intelligence Directorate in Damascus. We asked people we know to ask about him at the branch, but they denied having him. We also asked about him in Sednaya Prison, and were faced with the same response. We even sent someone to ask about him in al-Qaboun Prison in Damascus, but again could not find any information."

Mohammad Ahmad al-Ghany

born in 1993, from Um al-Ousaj village, administratively affiliated with al- Sanamayn city, in northern rural Daraa governorate, had been living in Idlib city to which he'd been displaced when he was arrested on Tuesday, June 10, 2019, by personnel from the Syrian regime's Military Security Intelligence Directorate at a checkpoint in al-Salamiya city in eastern rural Hama governorate. His family was able to visit him once in August 2020 at Sednaya Military Prison in Damascus Suburbs (Rif Dimshaq) governorate. He has been classified as forcibly disappeared ever since, with his fate remaining unknown to SNHR as well as his family.



👁 Mohammad Ahmad al-Ghany, a forcibly disappeared person

10. Via phone on June 26, 2023.

SNHR spoke with a sibling of Abdullah's, named "Mohammad",¹¹ who told us:

"Mohammad was displaced to Idlib city in one of the green buses in 2018. In 2019, someone contacted Mohammad and offered to rectify his security situation so he could return to Daraa for \$700. Mohammad agreed and went to a checkpoint in al-Salamiya city [in Hama], as per the agreement between Mohammad and that person, and agreed to a security settlement and surrendered himself. Then, Mohammad's family were called and asked to pay the agreed sum of money, which they did. After they paid, however, Mohammad disappeared and we could not find anything about him, until the beginning of 2020, when a former prisoner told us he saw him in Palestine Branch and that he is in good health, but they'd pulled out his fingernails. His mother was able to visit him in Sednaya Prison one time, but after that we lost all contact with him. His mother tried to visit him again but could not. We hired a lawyer but he was unable to reach him or find any information about his fate."

Umran Dahboul

from al-Zabadani city in northwestern Damascus Suburbs governorate, was arrested on Friday, April 28, 2023, by Lebanon's General Security personnel in al-Beqaa governorate in Lebanon. He was then delivered, together with eight other people, to personnel from the Syrian regime's Military Security Intelligence Directorate at al-Masnaa border crossing on the Syrian-Lebanese borders. He has been classified as forcibly disappeared ever since, with his fate remaining unknown to SNHR as well as to his family.

SNHR spoke with a relative of Umran's, named Amer Salman,¹² who told us:

"Umran travelled legally to Lebanon in 2013, and was in possession of all his identification documents. He was arrested on his way back from work in al-Beqaa area at a temporary checkpoint for the Lebanese General Security forces, without any cause or due process. On the next day, he was transferred to the al-Masnaa border area and delivered with his friends to the Syrian regime's Military Security Intelligence personnel, and then they were transferred to Damascus. The seven people who were arrested with Umran were released and told us they didn't know anything about him, and that they were released so they could fulfill their mandatory military service. To this day, we are unable to reach him, and we do not know why he is under arrest or his whereabouts."

11. Via Messenger on May 8, 2023.

12. Via Messenger on June 3, 2023.

B. Enforced Disappearance by ISIS (Self-proclaimed the Islamic State)

ISIS practiced enforced disappearance against wide swathes of Syrian society in every area that was once under the group's control or where it was active. In this, ISIS used enforced disappearance as a weapon to terrorize and intimidate society and as a policy to crush its opponents, including activists, local dignitaries, and influential figures in local communities, as well as in its attacks on areas under the control of other groups. The group also targeted foreigners in particular in the hopes of extracting large ransom payments, as well as journalists, aid workers, media workers, humanitarian workers, ethnic and religious minorities, and those who opposed ISIS's extremist directives and decisions, religious or otherwise. ISIS's enforced disappearance crimes also targeted fighters from opposing parties. [In a previous report](#), we have pinpointed six forms of the enforced disappearance strategies adopted by ISIS on a wide scale.

In the case of ISIS, enforced disappearance is a uniquely pending issue, since the fate of persons forcibly disappeared by the group has yet to be revealed despite the fact that ISIS has lost control of all the detention centers it once operated. In this context, SDF and international coalition forces bear civil, legal, and human rights responsibility, as the parties that took control of the areas that were previously under ISIS's control, before the local communities that are now under their control. It is also important to note that the enforced disappearance issue in the case of ISIS is one of great significance since it affects tens of thousands of families in the areas where the group was active. Although ISIS lost its last stronghold in Deir Ez-Zour back in March 2019, having lost control of its other strongholds in the governorates of Hasaka and Raqqa long before that, the forces that took over from ISIS have failed to make any serious efforts to reveal the fate of the forcibly disappeared in those areas.

SNHR has documented that no fewer than **8,684** individuals, including **319** children and **252** women (adult female) are still classified as forcibly disappeared at the hands of ISIS since the group's emergence up until August 2023. ISIS is responsible for approximately eight percent of all enforced disappearance cases in Syria.

Accounts given by families and friends of victims forcibly disappeared by ISIS

Foad Ahmad al-Mohammad,

a writer, poet, and popular uprising activist born in 1968, from Deir Ez-Zour city, had been living in Damascus city before moving to al-Hamidiya neighborhood in Deir Ez-Zour city in 2012. Foad, who holds a degree in philosophy from Damascus University, was abducted, along with other activists, on Wednesday, August 20, 2014, by ISIS personnel while working at a makeshift hospital known as 'Dar Aisha Le Tawlid' (Aisha Maternity House) in Deir Ez-Zour city. They were then taken to an undisclosed location.



👁 Foad Ahmad al-Mohammad, seen working at a makeshift hospital in Deir Ez-Zour city after a pair of twins were born at the hospital

👁 Foad Ahmad al-Mohammad, seen reading a book at the cultural center in Deir Ez-Zour city after a regime bombing that targeted the center

SNHR spoke with Foad's wife, named Insaf Nasr,¹³ who told us:

"Foad was a writer and poet and had three unpublished poetry collections. He had also worked as independent writer (in an unofficial capacity) for the Syrian regime's General Organization of Radio and TV where he wrote children's programs and other programs, as well as writing a weekly social show that aired every Friday. When the uprising started in Syria, he left his job and participated in the peaceful anti-regime protests in al-Midan area in Damascus, and in Darayya city, where we lived in Damascus city. With the security crackdown intensifying in Damascus, Foad decided on June 1, 2012, to leave for Deir Ez-Zour city and be involved there in the uprising, while we stayed in Damascus. He found a house in al-Hamidiya neighborhood in Deir Ez-Zour city and got involved in media and medical work. He also helped document the names of newborn babies and martyrs. After ISIS had taken over Deir Ez-Zour, he was abducted on August 20, 2014, from his place of work at a makeshift hospital known as 'Aisha Maternity House' in Deir Ez-Zour city along with other hospital workers. After his abduction, ISIS raided his home in al-Hamidiya neighborhood in the city and stole its contents according to some of the people there and some of his friends whom I met later. We have not heard any news about his fate ever since he was abducted."

Laith Ali al-Fayyad

born in 2001, from Aleppo governorate, was arrested in May 2014 (he was a child at the time of his arrest) by ISIS personnel in al-Bab city in rural Aleppo governorate and taken to an undisclosed location. He has been classified as forcibly disappeared ever since, with his fate remaining unknown to SNHR as well as to his family.



👁 Laith Ali al-Fayyad, a forcibly disappeared person (was a child when he was first (forcibly disappeared

Abdul Hamid Mohammad Hassan

born in 1966, from Ein Arab city in rural Aleppo governorate, was arrested on Wednesday, May 7, 2014, by ISIS personnel near Qzaqouzaq Bridge in eastern Manbij city in rural Aleppo governorate, and taken to an undisclosed location. He has been classified as forcibly disappeared ever since, with his fate remaining unknown to SNHR as well as to his family.



👁 Abdul Hamid Mohammad Hassan, a forcibly disappeared person

13. Via phone on March 18, 2023.

Adel Bouzan Baraka

born in 1995, from Ein Arab city in rural Aleppo governorate, was arrested on Wednesday, March 5, 2014, by ISIS personnel in Raqqa city and taken to an undisclosed location. He has been classified as forcibly disappeared ever since, with his fate remaining unknown to SNHR as well as to his family.



👁 Adel Bouzan Baraka

C. Enforced Disappearance by HTS (an alliance composed of Fateh al-Sham Front and a number of armed opposition factions)

HTS has practiced enforced disappearance strategies on a wide scale, and in a way that is largely similar to the Syrian regime's methods, with a noticeably brutal approach to detainees/abductees. In this, HTS has primarily targeted its opponents, whether armed opposition factions, media workers or anyone expressing dissent. HTS has implemented a security-oriented policy in its methods and its detentions, as well as in the detention centers and security apparatus it's established and operates. There are no fewer than 162 permanent and temporary checkpoints in HTS-held areas, most of which have seen enforced disappearance practices. We have published [an extensive report](#) on these detention centers, and the security and judicial apparatuses founded and used by HTS to consolidate its domination of local communities in areas under its control.

In a broad sense, HTS does not allow families or lawyers to visit detainees/disappeared persons. The group also refuses to disclose information about detainees' conditions and the reasons for detentions, and routinely denies responsibility. Many detention survivors have told us that they received no visits during the entire period of their detention by HTS, while some were allowed to receive rare and sporadic visits at an average of one visit every six month.

As SNHR's database shows, no fewer than **2,514** of the individuals detained by HTS between its foundation in early 2011 and August 2012 are still detained by the group, including 46 children and 45 women (adult female). Of these, no fewer than 2,162 individuals, including 17 children and 32 women have gone on to be classified as enforced disappearance cases.

Accounts given by families and friends of victims forcibly disappeared by HTS

Khalaf Abdul Razzaq al-Khalaf

from Morek city in northern rural Hama governorate, was living in Kafr Daryan town in northern rural Idlib governorate when he was arrested on Friday, June 10, 2022, by police officers from Kafr Daryan Police Station over expressing criticism of HTS on his Facebook page, and taken to an undisclosed location. He has been classified as forcibly disappeared ever since, with his fate remaining unknown to SNHR as well as his family.



👁 Khalaf Abdul Razzaq al-Khalaf, a forcibly disappeared person

SNHR spoke with a relative of Khalaf's, named Hanin Abdul Razzaq,¹⁴ who told us:

"Khalaf is married with six sons and two daughters. He used to work as a laborer on daily wages. His house was raided by HTS members and he was arrested, and his and his wife's phones were seized. They took him to an unknown place. We tried again and again to reach him or learn anything about him but with no results. After many attempts, we found a phone number that you can call to ask about detainees. We called the number and asked, 'Do you have Khalaf, and if so in which prison?' They simply answered 'Yes', but did not answer any of our other questions about his whereabouts or the cause of arrest. To this day, we are trying to find out in which prison he is being held and what his charges are. So far we know nothing."

Ahmad Mohammad Qelawi

born in 1973, from Hanano neighborhood in Aleppo city, was arrested on Sunday, December 18, 2022, by HTS personnel when passing through a checkpoint with his wife in al-Ghazawiya village in rural Aleppo governorate. He has been classified as forcibly disappeared ever since, with his fate remaining unknown to SNHR as well as his family.

SNHR spoke with Ahmad's wife¹⁵. She told us:

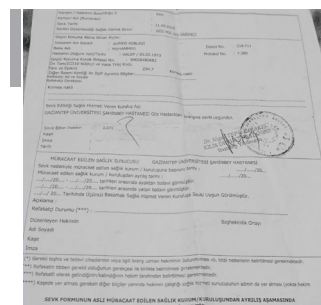
"Ahmad was shot back in 2011, and has different injuries in different parts of his body. He was taken to Türkiye for a medical procedure to install a metal plate in his head, and he also underwent an eye operation. He was deported from Türkiye in 2019, and has lived ever since in Idlib, where he worked in repairing and selling cars. In December 2022, we were stopped at al-Ghazawiya checkpoint, and I was arrested along with my husband, but they released me the next day without giving me back my phone. I do not know Ahmad's fate. They gave us a number to ask about detainees held by HTS. We received two voice recordings from Ahmad, in which he stated he is well. One of the detainees who was released from al-Maghara Prison in Idlib governorate told us he saw him there and he is in poor health. However, when we went to al-Maghara Prison to ask about him, they denied having him. I also checked with al-Qah 106 Prison and went to the [HTS's] public prosecutor, General Security, and al-Kahraba Prison, but never was able to visit him or find out where he is being held. We tried repeatedly to make them aware of Ahmad's poor health situation by showing his medical reports, but they never responded."



👁 Ahmad Mohammad Qablawi, a forcibly disappeared person



👁 Medical reports explaining Ahmad Mohammad Qablawi's injury (SNHR-Exclusive)



14. Via phone on June 20, 2023.

15. Via phone on July 1, 2023.

D. Enforced Disappearance by SDF

The SDF has used various types of enforced disappearance in its detention centers and military camps. The group has carried out raid and arrest campaigns, some of them on a mass scale, while several civilians have been targeted on the pretext of fighting ISIS/terrorism. Many of those campaigns have also been carried out with support from international coalition helicopters. Furthermore, the SDF has detained civilians as part of raid and arrest campaigns and at checkpoints for voicing criticism of the living conditions and services in SDF-held areas.

We have monitored that enforced disappearance strategies have been adopted by the SDF in a systematic way to consolidate control and punish opponents. In the SDF's enforced disappearance practices, some patterns and reoccurring scenarios emerge such as:

- Enforced disappearances that take place in secret detention centers. In these cases, enforced disappearance usually continues for many years and involves armed opposition fighters, individuals accused of being ISIS, or others who face terrorism-related charges in particular by the SDF.
- Enforced disappearances that take place in security centers. In these cases, activists and civilians voicing criticism of the SDF are targeted. Those cases usually go on for many months before the victims are referred to the local judiciary or released as a result of intermediate meditations or in exchange for sums of money.
- The enforced disappearance of conscripts into SDF military camps, which target children or women who have been abducted and taken to training and conscription camps. These victims are not allowed to contact their families, while the SDF refuses to disclose their fates.

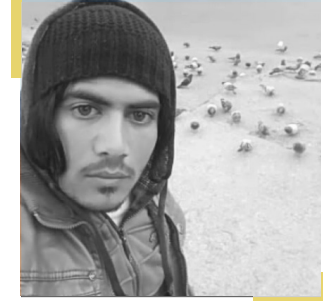
According to SNHR's database, no fewer than **4,704** of the individuals detained by the SDF between the group's establishment, originally as the Kurdish PYD's Self Administration forces, in January 2014, and August 2023 are still detained, including 791 children and 524 women (adult female). Of these, no fewer than **2,821** individuals, including 186 children and 109 women, have gone on to become enforced disappearance cases.

SDF bears responsibility for revealing the fate of forcibly disappeared persons and investigating enforced disappearance cases that took place in the areas over which it took control from ISIS. The SDF should also reveal the location of detention centers previously operated by ISIS and the mass graves found there, and collect evidence in order to inform victims' families of these findings.

Accounts given by families and friends of victims forcibly disappeared by SDF

Khaled Aref al-Hbeira

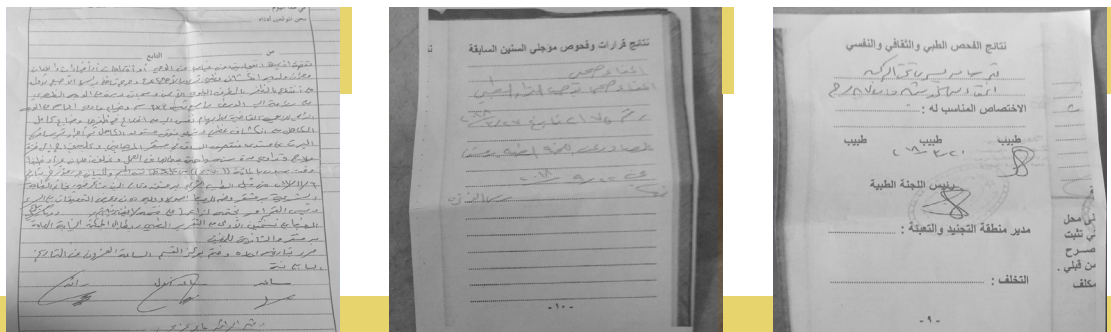
whose mother's name is Hala al-Ibeid, was born in 2000. Khaled, from Theyban town in eastern rural Deir Ez-Zour governorate, was arrested on Sunday, February 23, 2020, by SDF personnel who raided his home in the town, and took him to Ghwayran Prison in Hasaka city. He has been classified as forcibly disappeared ever since, with his fate remaining unknown to SNHR as well as to his family.



👁 Khaled Aref al-Hbeira, a forcibly disappeared person

SNHR spoke with a relative of Khaled's, named Moayed.¹⁶ He told us:

"Khaled was hit by a splinter from a mortar shell that forced him to have his right foot amputated. We have all of the medical reports on his injury. He was based in Damascus, and he returned to Theyban town in February 2020. The SDF carried out multiple arrest campaigns in Theyban town, which are still being carried out to this day. They arrested Khaled from his home at 8:00 am, and took him to al-Kamp al-Sini Prison in al-Shaddadi city. He called us from the prison without telling us why he was arrested. In 2021, he was transferred to Ghwayran Prison in Hasaka city. Then, some riots and disturbances took place in Ghwayran prison and we lost contact with him, and to this day we know nothing about him."



👁 (Medical report explaining Khaled's injury (SNHR-exclusive)

16. Via phone on July 1, 2023.

Jouma Mane' al-Hbeira

whose mother's name is Samn al-Ali, was born in 2002. Jouma, from Theyban town in eastern rural Deir Ez-Zour governorate, was arrested on Sunday, February 23, 2020, by SDF personnel, and taken to an undisclosed location. He has been classified as forcibly disappeared ever since, with his fate remaining unknown to SNHR as well as to his family.



👁 Jouma Mane' al-Hbeira

SNHR spoke with a relative of Jouma's, named Ahmad,¹⁷ who told us:

"Joumaa left school to work as a farmer. In February 2020, his house was raided by SDF personnel who arrested Joumaa along with a number of young men and children older than 10 years of age in Theyban town. They took them to al-Kamp al-Sini Prison. However, none of the prisoners who were arrested with Joumaa and were released later told us they saw Joumaa. We did not learn anything about him despite asking about him repeatedly."

Nawwaf Khaled al-Ibeid al-Hbeira

born in 2004, from Theyban town in eastern rural Deir Ez-Zour governorate, was arrested on Monday, June 22, 2020 (he was a child at the time of his arrest), and taken to an undisclosed location. He has been classified as forcibly disappeared ever since, with his fate remaining unknown to SNHR as well as to his family.



👁 Nawwaf Khaled al-Ibeid al-Hbeira, a forcibly disappeared person (was a child when he was first forcibly disappeared)

SNHR spoke with Nawwaf's father¹⁸ who told us:

"Nawwaf had to leave school in the sixth grade, and started working as a daily laborer to help us provide for the household. On the day of his arrest, he left the house at 9:00 pm, and there was an SDF patrol that arrested him, even though they knew he is a local and he is not involved in any anti-SDF activism. We checked with all of the prisons and detention centers affiliated with the SDF but they denied having him. A prisoner who was released told us he is in al-Kamp al-Sini Prison. We tried to get some tribal intermediaries involved, and paid money in order to find out Nawwaf's fate, yet we never found out his fate, we never saw him, or got to know what he is charged with."

17. Via phone on August 9, 2023.

18. Via phone on June 26, 2023.

Farhad Rashid Shikhou

born in 1983, from Hsayya village, administratively a part of Ma'batli subdistrict in northern rural Aleppo governorate, was living in Aleppo city when he was arrested on Monday, July 11, 2022, by SDF personnel who raided his home in al-Sheikh Maqsoud neighborhood in Aleppo city and took him to an undisclosed location. He has been classified as forcibly disappeared ever since, with his fate remaining unknown to SNHR as well as to his family.



👁 Farhad Rashid Shikhou, a forcibly disappeared person

SNHR spoke with Farhad's brother.¹⁹ He told us:

"Farhad is married with four children. He used to work at a poultry store in Aleppo city. That store was frequented by SDF personnel who were trying to convince him to join the group, but his answer was always a 'no'. He was arrested from his home along with his sister Nazliya Rashid Shikhou, who works as an Arabic language teacher. She was released in October 2022, but she never saw him or knew any information about him throughout his detention. His wife tried to reach him or find out his whereabouts, but she was always treated in a very degrading way. She was kicked out and told that Farhad had died, but they did not return his dead body. She suspects they told her that so she'd stop looking and asking about him."

Fadel Alaa al-Abdullah

born in 1989, from al-Sour town in northern rural Deir Ez-Zour governorate, was arrested on Saturday, January 14, 2023, by SDF personnel at a checkpoint while he was on his way to the market to sell sheep in Marjada city in southern rural Hasaka governorate. He was taken to the SDF's General Security Center in al-Shaddadi city in southern Hasaka governorate. He has been classified as forcibly disappeared ever since, with his fate remaining unknown to SNHR as well as to his family.



👁 Fadel Alaa al-Abdullah, a forcibly disappeared person

SNHR spoke with a friend of Fadel's, named Ahmad,²⁰ who told us:

"Fadel is a former military serviceman who defected from Syrian regime forces in 2012. He is married with nine children, two of whom have disabilities. Since his defection, he has been working in selling meat and chicken in al-Sour. He was arrested along with his cousin at Marjada checkpoint while on his way to the sheep market in the same city. They took his car and a sum of money he had as he was planning to buy sheep. He was beaten at the checkpoint and a thick stick that was used to beat him was broken from all the severe beating. His cousin was released the next day, while Fadel was transferred to al-Shaddadi Prison. We were told by a released prisoner that one of his feet was in a very bad condition from the severe torture, and that he needed surgery, and that we had to pay \$15,000 to set him free. However, we have been unable to contact him or verify his fate."

19. Via phone on June 27, 2023.

20. Via phone on May 12, 2023.

E. Enforced Disappearance by all armed opposition factions/SNA

Armed opposition factions/SNA used enforced disappearance against activists and those who criticize its practices. In this, enforced disappearance takes place mainly in the detention centers operated by these groups, and against civilians detained/abducted on a mass scale in attacks on areas with ethnic or sectarian minorities, with the victims including women and children. Subsequently, the armed opposition expanded levels of enforced disappearances in the areas under their control, with these violations driven by various motives - most notably retaliation against victims or their families due to their activism, and soliciting ransom money in exchange for releasing the victims. Detentions have also been carried out on the pretext of a person joining the Self-Administration or being a former member of the SDF, with this pretext used in order to conceal the detention being carried out on the basis of the victim's ethnicity, with some of those cases being classified subsequently as enforced disappearances. Moreover, the armed opposition has also practiced enforced disappearance against civilians, including children and women, to force them to agree to demands by armed opposition personnel, such as using or seizing their properties. These practices have been concentrated mainly in the Afrin area in northern rural Aleppo governorate. In the case of the armed opposition, enforced disappearances continue for years without any trial, with the detainees' fate being simply tied to the decision of the faction making the arrest with no referral to the judiciary.

Armed opposition factions/SNA often resort to abductions and arrests either as part of raids or at periodically erected temporary checkpoints. Following their arrest, detainees are taken to detention centers without appearing before a court. Armed opposition factions also forbid families or lawyers to visit detainees, and fail to specify any clear charges, since there is no actual judicial authority authorized to carry out detentions and investigations. In the case of armed opposition factions, enforced disappearance takes place inside their security headquarters and secret detention centers.

According to SNHR's database, no fewer than **3,864** of the individuals arrested by various armed opposition factions/SNA in areas previously or currently under their control between 2011 and August 2023 are still detained, including 361 children and 868 women (adult female). Of these, no fewer than **2,827** individuals, including 249 children and 517 women, have gone on to become enforced disappearance cases.

Armed opposition factions/the SNA bear responsibility for revealing the fate of forcibly disappeared persons and investigating enforced disappearance cases that took place in the areas over which they took control from other parties to the conflict. Armed opposition factions/the SNA should also reveal the location of detention centers previously operated by the other parties and of the mass graves found in these areas, and collect evidence, informing victims' families of these findings.

Accounts given by families and friends of victims forcibly disappeared by the armed opposition/SNA

Abdul Aziz and Mahmoud al-Mustafa

twin brothers born in 1992 from Ma'dan city in eastern rural Raqqa governorate, were arrested by SNA personnel on Thursday, June 2, 2022, from al-Lail Alley in Tal Abyad city along with eight others. They were taken to an SNA detention center in Tal Abyad city. Mustafa's wife was able to visit him multiple times, until she was denied visits in October 2022. The brothers have been classified as forcibly disappeared ever since, with their fates remaining unknown to SNHR as well as to their families



👁 Abdul Aziz Mahmoud al-Mustafa, a forcibly disappeared person

👁 Mustafa Mahmoud al-Mustafa, a forcibly disappeared person

SNHR spoke with a relative of Abdul Aziz's and Mustafa's, named Muna,²¹ who told us:

"Abdul Aziz is married with three children, while Mustafa is married and has three sons and one daughter. They worked as daily laborers. They were arrested by SNA members in Tal Abyad city from their home along with eight of their friends. This happened only one day after someone asked Abdul Aziz to safekeep an item for him. We found out later that this item was a gun. They were accused by the SNA of arms dealing. If that was the case, they would not have to work every day to provide for their families! Mustafa's wife was able to visit him regularly, and he had clear signs of torture on him, to the point that he was unable to move his hand during the last visit from all the torture, especially using the ghosting method [hanging someone from the roof]. She was denied visits after that. Meanwhile, we never found out Abdul Aziz's whereabouts, and no one was able to visit him. We were told later by a released prisoner that he spent three days with Abdul Aziz in a cell, and he was in very poor health from all the torture. He was then transferred to unknown place."

21. Via phone on June 10, 2023.

V. Conclusions and Recommendations

Legal conclusions

SNHR believes that the Syrian regime has failed to uphold any of its obligations dictated by the international conventions and instruments it has ratified, in particular the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Furthermore, the Syrian regime has violated multiple articles in the Syrian Constitution written and adopted by the very same regime. In this, the Syrian regime continues to detain hundreds of thousands of detainees who have been held for many years with no arrest warrant or charges. These detainees are also denied any opportunity to appoint a lawyer or receive visits from their families. Approximately, 68.25 percent of all detainees have gone on to become forcibly disappeared. These detainees' families have not been informed of their whereabouts. If the desperately worried families try to inquire about the fate or whereabouts of their loved ones, security branches deny any knowledge of them, and the family members are themselves at risk of persecution for asking.

Enforced disappearance is prohibited under customary international humanitarian law, with Rule 98 stating that enforced disappearance is prohibited in international and non-international armed conflicts.

Moreover, Rule 117 states, "Each party to the conflict must take all feasible measures to account for persons reported missing as a result of armed conflict and must provide their family members with any information it has on their fate."

Enforced disappearance is also prohibited under international criminal law. According to the Rome Statute, the systematic practice of enforced disappearance constitutes a crime against humanity,²² which applies in the Syrian regime's case.

Additionally, other parties to the conflict have practiced enforced disappearance, albeit not with the same standardized character and prevalence as that of the Syrian regime. There is also a difference in terms of the quantity and distribution of cases. However, the cases of HTS and ISIS bear a similarity to the Syrian regime's in terms of the wide distribution and systematic nature of cases, judging from the data we have collected.

Recommendations

UN Security Council and UN

- Protect tens of thousands of detainees and persons forcibly disappeared by the Syrian regime from the certain risk of dying due to torture, and save those who are still alive.
- Russia should stop blocking the referral of the case in Syria to the ICC.
- All UN aid bodies should work on identifying and contacting the families in Syria which have lost their main breadwinner or a family member, and ensure that humanitarian assistance is being delivered to those who are truly in need. Action should be also taken to launch rehabilitation efforts for those affected.

22. See Article 7-1-i.

- Impose UN sanctions on the individuals and bodies involved in arbitrary arrest and enforced disappearance crimes in Syria.
- Work to reveal the fate of forcibly disappeared persons in tandem with, or before launching further rounds of any political process, and establish a strict timetable to reveal their fate.
- Find ways and mechanism to stop the Syrian regime from tampering with the living and the dead, which poses a huge threat to the security and stability of the Syrian state.
- Invoke Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations to protect detainees from dying in detention centers, and put an end to the plague of enforced disappearance in Syria, which is a major threat to the safety and stability of the whole of Syrian society.
- The UN Security Council should follow up on the implementation of the resolutions it has adopted in relation to Syria, such as resolutions 2024 and 2139, obligate all parties to those resolutions to comply with them, and follow its words with the appropriate actions.
- Place more focus on the issue of forcibly disappeared persons in Syria in light of the harrowing magnitude of this phenomenon and the fact that it constitutes a crime against humanity. Urgent action must be taken to address this crucial issue.
- Detainees should be immediately allowed to contact their families, lawyers, and doctors. Binding assurances must be put in place in order to prevent the repeated occurrence of deaths due to torture in detention centers.
- Compel the Syrian regime to give access to its detention centers to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and all UN committees.

Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (COI)

- Stop normalizing relations with the Syrian regime. In case Arab states feel they have no choice but to readmit the Syrian regime to the Arab League, they should require that the regime immediately release approximately 136,000 political prisoners, including 96,000 forcibly disappeared persons, disclose the names of the victims of torture and execution killed in its detention centers and reveal the location of their burials.
- Arab states should also request an independent accountability process for all those involved in crimes of killing and torture against the Syrian people regardless of the seniority of their security and military ranks and positions.

Syrian regime

- Respect the principles of international human rights law, and stop using the Syrian state's resources of the Syrian state to support security branches and those involved in enforced disappearance.
- Launch investigations and public trials for all officers, officials, and figures involved in arrest, torture, and enforced disappearance.
- Criminalize enforced disappearance and introduce clear laws that assert and guarantee the rights of forcibly disappeared persons and their families.
- Immediately give access to the COI, the ICRC, and all objective human rights organizations.
- Immediately grant all arbitrarily arrested detainees, especially children and women, their unrestricted, unconditional freedom, and disclose the fates of tens of thousands of forcibly disappeared persons.
- Work with the newly established committee to reveal the fate of missing persons in Syria.

Other parties to the conflict (SDF, armed opposition factions, and the HTS)

- Respect the rules of international human rights law, end arbitrary arrests and enforced disappearances against political or military opponents, and launch investigations into, and hold to account those involved in those crimes.
- Immediately give access to detention centers to the ICRC and human rights organizations with no prior coordination.
- Disclose the names of all detainees and make public lists of their names, and disclose the locations of all secret detention centers and allow families and human rights organizations to visit them.

Allies of the Syrian regime Russia and Iran

- End support for a regime involved in the enforced disappearance of over 96,000 Syrians. This support is a form of complicity in crimes against humanity.

UN Human Rights Council (HRC)

- Follow up on the issue of detainees and forcibly disappeared persons in Syria, and shed more light on this crucial issue during the periodic annual meetings, and hold a special session to address this horrific threat.

Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR)

- Prepare a special and extensive report shedding light on this catastrophe and all its psychological, social, and economic effects, and support active local human rights groups in Syria.

UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances

- Increase the levels of manpower working on the forcibly disappeared persons issue at the office of the Special Rapporteur on cases of enforced disappearance in Syria in light of the magnitude and massive level of enforced disappearance in the country.

Newly formed UN body on the issue of missing persons in Syria

- Identify those responsible for enforced disappearances in Syria and provide all forms of support and protection for the deceased victims' families and for survivors and their families.
- Look into all the cases included in this report and other reports issued on this issue by SNHR. We are willing to provide more details and further data.

Arabic and international human rights groups

- Advocate for the issue of forcibly disappeared persons in Syria, condemn the Syrian regime and its draconian practices, and continue calling for the disclosure of the fate of all forcibly disappeared persons.

Acknowledgment and Solidarity

We stand in solidarity with all victims and their families. We wish to thank the families and local activists for their invaluable contributions to this report.



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No justice without accountability

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