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The Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in May 2022

UN Aid Is Essential for Millions of Syrians Displaced by Russia and the Syrian Regime, and the Russian Veto Banning Aid Is Arbitrary and Illegal

Tuesday 07 June 2022

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

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I. Introduction and Methodology

Syria has seen an unprecedented number of violations since the start of the popular uprising for democracy in March 2011. Extrajudicial killings, arrests, torture, and enforced disappearances are the violations most frequently perpetrated against Syrian citizens. While the Syrian regime and its affiliated militias were the sole perpetrators of these violations for the first seven months or so of the uprising, other parties subsequently joined in, also violating the rights of Syrian citizens. The Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) has continued to document every incident that its team members are able to verify, with these violations escalating very dramatically in 2012 and 2013, prompting us to expand our publication of periodic monthly reports recording and highlighting the continued suffering of the Syrian people, which subsequently grew to eight reports on different issues issued at the beginning of each month. In the course of our work, SNHR has compiled a massive database cataloguing hundreds of thousands of incidents, each of which involves a pattern of violations that we have been able to document.

By the end of 2018, with a reduction in the level of violence compared to previous years, we changed our previous strategy and now compile our reports into a single monthly report featuring the most prominent violations in Syria which we have been able to document in the preceding month.

This month's report focuses on the human rights situation in Syria, which SNHR documented in May 2022, and catalogues the death toll of civilian victims whom we documented killed by the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in Syria during this period, as well as the record of cases of arrests and enforced disappearance. The report also highlights attacks on civilian objects, which SNHR's team was able to document during this period. To find out more about our working [methodology](#) in documenting and archiving data, please visit the following link that explains this in detail.

This report only represents the bare minimum of the actual severity and magnitude of the violations that occurred. Also, it doesn't include any analysis of the profound social, economic, and psychological ramifications.

II. Summary of the Most Notable Events in May:

In regard to bombardment and military operations:

In May, SNHR documented a continuation of Syrian regime forces' ground attacks and artillery shelling on northwest Syria, though at a lower rate than previous months this year. This shelling was concentrated particularly on the villages and towns in the Jabal al Zaweya area close to the line of contact with Armed Opposition factions in the southern suburbs of Idlib. Elsewhere, regime artillery shelling also targeted the towns of the western suburbs of Aleppo and the western suburbs of Hama, where the Syrian regime forces' shelling with heavy machine guns on farmlands near al Sermaniya village [in Sahl al Ghab in Hama governorate western suburbs](#) on May 21, 2022, led to fires breaking out in the wheat and barley crops, inflicting material damages that caused further suffering to the owners of the lands and properties.

On May 28, armed individuals, [accompanied by](#) members of the Syrian regime's military intelligence service, broke into a public swimming pool in al Mqwas neighborhood east of Suwaida city, claiming that the raid was being carried out in search of individuals accused of drug smuggling. The gunmen opened fire on several civilians as they tried to flee, killing two, with the same forces later killing another civilian near the pool as they were retreating. As a result of the raid, widespread protests broke out in al Mqwas neighborhood, leading to a shootout between Syrian regime forces and local gunmen, which resulted in the death of another civilian, and the wounding of five more, including two women. We have so far been unable to determine the party responsible for the deaths. On the night of the same day, meanwhile, regime military vehicles and troops spread out in the neighborhood and the surrounding area, later firing mortar shells and damaging buildings in the area, which led to the displacement of residents who feared further bombardment.

May saw an increase in the frequency of Russian overflights and air attacks on northwest Syria compared to previous months this year, especially in the first half of the month. The attacks were concentrated on villages and towns in the vicinity of Ariha city, south of Idlib, and villages in the western suburbs of Aleppo. [One of the Russian air attacks, on May 12, targeted](#) a poultry farm near Mantaf village south of Ariha city in Idlib governorate's southern suburbs, injuring one civilian, and causing some damage to the poultry farm building, as well as killing dozens of poultry birds. We also monitored several Russian overflights in the Idlib region in May, during which the Russian aircraft fired air-to-air missiles, whose loud explosions were heard across the region.

On May 26, RT agency quoted Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov as saying that "there are practically no military objectives left [for the Russian forces in Syria]," stressing that the number of Russian military personnel on the ground is determined by specific tasks, and on the basis of the principle of interest. He added that the ["terrorist threat"](#) in Idlib has not gone anywhere.

On May 27, the [Russian Sputnik news](#) agency reported that new Russian military reinforcements had arrived in al Qameshli city in northeast Syria, adding that these included "military war equipment in addition to a squadron of six helicopters and two warplanes."

The agency added that other Russian military reinforcements arrived a few days earlier at the Russian base in the vicinity of Ein Eisa city in the suburbs of Raqqa, "which included dozens of military armored vehicles and combat equipment, where earthen berms and fortifications were raised."

In the areas of the northwestern and eastern suburbs of Aleppo, we documented Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) continuing to carry out ground attacks in May. One of these attacks, [targeting al Bab city on May 12](#), caused partial destruction and varying incidents of material damage to residential buildings and shops within the targeted neighborhood.

On May 13, Hay'at Tahrir al Sham artillery forces bombed Nubl town in the western suburbs of Aleppo governorate, which is under the control of Syrian regime forces, [killing one child and wounding another](#).

In terms of bombings, in May, we monitored the explosion of improvised explosive devices in the governorates of Daraa, Aleppo, Raqqa, and Hasaka. The explosion of an improvised explosive device planted in a car [in Jarablus city in the east of Aleppo on May 1 resulted in the death of a university professor](#).

May also saw continuing civilian deaths due to explosions caused by landmines [in various governorates and regions of Syria, with these incidents being concentrated especially in the governorates of Hama, Daraa, and Raqqa](#), and with most of the landmine victims this month being children. SNHR documented the deaths of nine civilians, including six children and one woman, resulting from landmine explosions in May, bringing the total death toll caused by these munitions since the beginning of 2022 to 60 civilians, including 30 children and five women.

May also saw killing of civilians, including women, in various governorates, mostly in Daraa and Idlib governorates, by gunmen whom SNHR has been unable to identify. [One of the most prominent of these killings in May](#) was the fatal shooting of a university student in Tal Shehab town in the Daraa suburbs on May 20. We also monitored the continuation of killings by shooting in al Hawl Camp, where we documented [the killing of a refugee from Iraq](#). We also documented the discovery of [the bodies](#) of [two women in the camp](#) bearing gunshot wounds.

On May 11, the Syrian regime's '[Syrian Arab News Agency](#)' (SANA) reported that Israeli forces had launched a missile attack on the vicinity of Hadar town in the northern suburbs of Quneitra governorate, causing material damage. On May 13, SANA reported that [the Israeli Air Force](#) had launched several raids targeting locations in Syria's central region, killing five people, including a civilian, and wounding seven others, including a child, in addition to causing material damage and igniting several fires in the forests in the area of Misyaf city suburbs, west of Hama governorate. In the same context, [the Time of Israel newspaper reported on May 15](#) that, according to satellite images, the attack on May 13 had targeted and completely destroyed an underground facility. The newspaper report added that the targeted site was linked to the Syrian regime's Center for Scientific Studies and Research. On May 20, Israeli forces also launched an attack with surface-to-surface missiles targeting some locations south of Damascus, [according to SANA](#), which added that the attack led to the death of three people, in addition to causing material damage.

In regard to arrests and enforced disappearances:

Syrian regime forces continued in May to persecute and arrest individuals who had concluded settlements of their security status with the Syrian regime in areas that had previously concluded settlement agreements with the regime; these arrests have been concentrated in Damascus Suburbs and Daraa governorates, with most occurring during campaigns of mass raids and arrests and at checkpoints. We documented random arrests of Syrian citizens in Damascus Suburbs governorate, which we believe were based on malicious security reports issued due to the targeted individuals' opposition to the Syrian regime.

We also documented separate arrests in connection with civilians receiving money transfers from their relatives outside Syria. We also documented arrests carried out by the regime's security services against civilians who had been released earlier from regime detention centers aimed at materially extorting their families. We documented arrests carried out by Syrian regime forces against civilians from the same families, most of which occurred during campaigns of mass raids and arrests. These arrests were concentrated in Daraa governorate. We documented random arrests of Syrian citizens in the governorates of Damascus Suburbs, Aleppo, Hama, and Homs, under the pretext that those arrested had failed to perform their reserve military service. In addition, we documented the re-arrest of one woman who had been released under Amnesty Decree No. 7 of 2022.

In terms of releases, SNHR's monitoring and documentation operations continued regarding those released under the Amnesty Law included in Legislative Decree 7/2022 issued by the Syrian regime on April 30, 2022; in May, we documented that the Syrian regime released about 527 people from various regime civil and military prisons and security branches in a number of Syrian governorates, including 59 women and 16 people who were children at the time of their arrest. On May 16, we issued a [report](#) in which we presented an analysis of the text of the decree and the releases of detainees resulting from it. Then, on the 27th of May, we issued a [statement](#) that included an update of the record of the release cases that we were able to document.

Most of those released had been arrested during raids or while passing through the regime's checkpoints, without receiving any explanation of the reasons for their detention and without any arrest warrants being presented, and had been detained in extremely poor conditions which included being subjected to torture, and enduring an almost complete lack of healthcare and medical care, as well as severe overcrowding. [The photos](#) we obtained of a number of those released show the clear deterioration in the health conditions of the gaunt and emaciated released prisoners.

Meanwhile, Syrian Democratic Forces continued enforcing the group's policies of arbitrary detention and enforced disappearance in May, with the number detained and forcibly disappeared increasing this month as SDF personnel continued carrying out campaigns of mass raids and detentions, targeting civilians on the pretext of fighting ISIS cells, with some of these campaigns backed by US-led coalition helicopters. We also documented detentions targeting civilians, including a media activist. These arrests were concentrated in Raqqah and Hasaka cities. We also recorded the detention of a number of civilians, including a doctor and two nurses, in a raid on their workplace in al Resala Hospital in Theyban city in the eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate, on charges of harboring gunmen in the hospital, with those arrested being taken to an undisclosed location.

We also recorded Syrian Democratic Forces kidnapping children with the aim of taking them to its training and recruitment camps and forcibly conscripting them, preventing their families from communicating with them, and failing to disclose their fate.

May also saw Hay'at Tahrir al Sham detaining civilians, including media activists and politicians, with these arrests concentrated in Idlib governorate; most of these arrests occurred due to the detainees expressing opinions critical of the HTS's management of areas under its control. These detentions were carried out arbitrarily in the form of raids in which HTS members stormed their victims' homes, often breaking down the doors, or by abducting their victims while they were traveling or passing through temporary checkpoints.

Meanwhile, all the Armed Opposition factions/Syrian National Army also continued carrying out arbitrary detentions and kidnappings in May, mostly detaining groups, particularly targeting people coming from areas controlled by the Syrian regime. In addition, we documented detentions carried out under an ethnic pretext, with these incidents being concentrated in areas under all Armed Opposition factions/Syrian National Army's control in Aleppo governorate. Most of these arrests occurred without judicial authorization and without the participation of the police force, which is the legitimate administrative authority responsible for arrests and detentions through the judiciary, with these arrests also carried out without presenting any clear charges against those being detained. In addition to these cases, we also documented raids and detentions carried out by Syrian National Army personnel, targeting civilians, including women, on charges of collaborating with Syrian Democratic Forces. These incidents were concentrated in some villages near Afrin city in the suburbs of Aleppo governorate.

Regarding living conditions:

Living and economic conditions in all regions of Syria continue to deteriorate drastically and constantly at all levels. **The areas under the control of Syrian regime forces** witnessed a continuation of the steep price increases for fuel and most food and other grocery items, amid a scarcity of services, especially in supplies of electricity and water. On May 17, [SANA](#) reported that the Syrian regime government's Ministry of Internal Trade and Consumer Protection had published a circular announcing increases in the prices of unsubsidized [gasoline](#) and [diesel fuel](#). The ministry increased the price of gasoline (octane 90) from 2,500 Syrian pounds per liter to 3,500 Syrian pounds per liter, and increased the price of gasoline (octane 95) from 3,500 to 4,000 Syrian pounds per liter. The circular also announced that price of a liter of industrial and commercial diesel would be increasing from 1,700 per liter to 2,500 Syrian pounds per liter.

On May 8, the United Nations World Food Program (WFP) published a [statement](#) in which it said that, with years of conflict in Syria, a severe economic downturn, and food prices rising relentlessly since 2020, the Ukraine crisis is exacerbating what was already an alarming food security scenario in Syria, with food prices increasing in March by 24 percent in just one month, following an 800 percent increase over the last two years, bringing food prices to their highest level since 2013. The statement added that some 12 million people in Syria - more than half the population - currently face acute food insecurity. That is 51% more than in 2019. The statement indicated that an additional 1.9 million people in Syria are at risk of sliding into hunger, adding that basic meals have become a luxury for millions in the country.

In northwestern Syria, civilians continued to suffer from the high prices of consumer goods, in light of

the almost total lack of purchasing power of those living in the region, due to the spread of unemployment and high poverty rates. The region witnessed a new rise in fuel prices in May, as the [Watad Fuel Company announced a new price list on May 19](#) that included increases in the prices of gasoline, diesel and domestic gas, with the price of a liter of “premium imported” gasoline increased from the US\$ 1.162 per liter set at the end of April to a new price of \$1.181 per liter; the price of a domestic gas cylinder, meanwhile, was increased from \$13.08 per liter to \$13.13; and the price of an ‘improved’ type of diesel rose from \$0.710 , the price announced by the Watad company in its last price bullet at the end of April, to \$0.740 per liter. With regard to the bread crisis, meanwhile, the Bakery Administration in Hay’at Tahrir al Sham’s Salvation Government, without any official declaration, reduced the weight per bundle of bread in areas under its control, bringing each bundle’s weight to approximately 475 g instead of 525 g, and reducing the number of loaves in each bag from seven to five, as well as increasing the price per bag to 5 Turkish liras per bundle.

On May 18, al Bab in the eastern suburbs of Aleppo witnessed popular protests in front of the staff headquarters of the Syrian National Army’s military police in connection with their release of a former member of the Syrian regime forces involved in murder and rape, demanding that he be re-arrested and that those responsible for his release be held accountable. Protests continued until the dismissal of the head of the Military Police branch on May 23.

As for northeastern Syria, the economic situation in this region is no different to the other Syrian regions, with these areas still suffering from the bread supply crisis due to the scarcity and poor quality of flour reaching local bakeries. The region also witnessed a dust storm at the end of the second week of May, causing hundreds of suffocation cases, in light of the almost complete collapse of the already suffering health sector. On May 16, [the German Press Agency](#) reported that 10 people, including three children, had died, most of them in Deir Ez-Zour governorate, due to the dust storm in the governorates of Raqqa, Deir Ez-Zour, and Hasaka. The storm also caused great material damage, especially in the electricity sector, as the electricity supply to Hasaka governorate was suspended due to strong winds that led to putting the al Tabqa-Al-Abwab 230 kV Tension Line out of service, which is the main line feeding the cities and rural areas of the governorate.

On May 25, Ras al Ein city in the suburbs of Hasaka witnessed clan fighting (between the al Akidat and al Mawali clans), which left four gunmen from both sides killed. This incident is another of the consequences of the security chaos in the region.

In regard to asylum, displacement and forced displacement:

The massive suffering of IDPs in **northwest Syria** has continued, especially in light of the deteriorating economic conditions and the increase of the level of needs, which has reaching record amounts with the reduction in external support required to cover those needs, including the health sector.

Amnesty International [said](#) on May 5, “Dwindling international aid to north-west Syria this past year has

left approximately 3.1 million people, including 2.8 million internally displaced people, facing a health crisis as hospitals and other medical facilities struggle to operate on low resources.” The organization added that due to the overall reduction of international assistance to Syria, international aid to the health sector fell by more than 40%. The organization quoted four hospital directors in the northwest region Syria said that their facilities face imminent closure if the necessary funding is not urgently secured.

In al Hawl Camp in the Hasaka suburbs, the camp residents are still suffering from the deteriorating living and security conditions.

On May 11, Fuad Hussein, the Iraqi Minister of Foreign Affairs, said that the Iraqi authorities had returned 500 Iraqi families from al Hawl Camp in northeastern Syria, according to a statement published on [the website of the Iraqi Ministry of Foreign Affairs](#), which did not specify the date on which these families were returned.

On May 23, Peter Maurer, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), told [The National](#) newspaper that the children – numbering about 22,000 – in al Hawl Camp in northeast Syria are being deprived of a normal childhood while humanitarian efforts are focused on the bare essentials of life rather than providing them with a stable and healthy environment. He added that al Hawl Camp is one of the biggest child protection crises in the world today, and pointed out that about 10,000 of al Hawl Camp’s population are non-Arab foreigners and the rest are mostly from Syria and Iraq.

In the same context, the [Associated Press](#) reported on May 27, quoting an official in the Self-Management Authority of Northeast Syria, that the Albanian authorities repatriated 9 children and 4 women of Albanian nationality, from former ISIS families, from a camp in northeastern Syria. The agency added that a total of 25 Albanian women and children have been brought back home by the Albanian authorities in three previous missions, the last one in July 2021.

In al Rukban camp on the Syrian-Jordanian border, the Syrian regime continues to practice a policy of siege on the camp and prevents food supplies from reaching it, with Syrian regime forces preventing the entry of vegetables in addition to other foodstuffs, which led to a severe shortage of these goods inside the camp. The prices of those limited food supplies that are available have also skyrocketed, exacerbating the camp residents’ suffering.

With regard to Syrian refugees in Lebanon, a report by [the Human Rights Council](#) on May 11 said that Syrian refugees in Lebanon are facing a somber reality, where the treatment of Syrian refugees by host communities in Lebanon is manifested in “discrimination, harassment, violence and remarks akin to hate speech.” The report added that Syrian refugees have been denied access to shops selling subsidized items, are subject to forced evictions, violence and assaults, and have had their homes burnt down. Some municipalities have gone so far as to introduce discriminatory curfews and wage limits for Syrians. The report added that 57% of Syrian refugees live in dangerous, substandard or overcrowded housing. In the same context, the [Access Center for Human Rights \(ACHR\)](#)¹ published a statement on May 18 in which it documented six individual cases of forced eviction, and more than three cases of mass forced evictions of Syrian refugees in Lebanon. The statement indicated that these cases constitute a clear violation of Lebanese law.

Regarding Syrian refugees in Iraq, the WFP and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) issued a [joint statement](#) on May 17 stating that Syrian refugees in Iraq will lose access to basic food supplies unless urgent funding is provided. The statement added that “Syrian families living in refugee camps in Iraq are facing new and alarming levels of food insecurity,” indicating that there are nearly 260,000 Syrian refugees in Iraq, the vast majority of whom are based in the Kurdistan Region in the north of the country, including 95,745 people who live in camps.

On May 24, [Agence France-Presse \(AFP\)](#) reported that the Libyan border guards managed to retrieve the bodies of four migrants, including three women, and rescued 13 others, most of them Syrians, while three remain missing, after a boat carrying migrants capsized off the coast of the coastal town of Melita, 100 km west of the capital, Tripoli.

On the political and human rights level:

On May 3, [Reporters Without Borders \(RSF\)](#) released the annual World Press Freedom Index, [in which Syria came near the bottom once again, listed among the 10 worst nations around the world](#) in terms of press freedom, ranking 171 out of 180 countries. The organization said that the media scene in Syria is dominated by arrests, abductions, torture, and killings. The organization further noted that the Syrian regime’s 2021 “cybercrime law”, amended in 2022, allows the regime to prosecute journalists on a charge of “spreading false news online that damages the prestige of the nation”.

On May 4, [the Norwegian Refugee Council \(NRC\) issued a report](#) on the impact of Syria’s economic crisis on the living conditions of civilians, in which it stated that the majority of Syrians interviewed had to ration food, while over a quarter had to give up essential medication because of unaffordable costs. A harsh winter season has found people burning old clothes and plastic bags to stay warm as fuel prices jumped further, according to the NRC’s report.

¹ Access Center for Human Rights (ACHR) is a non-profit and non-governmental human rights organization based in Beirut and Paris, founded in 2017, and includes a group of activists with experience in law, as well as local and international advocacy. ACHR launched its activities in Lebanon, due to its belief in supporting refugee rights, at a time of a rise in serious violations against them.

On May 4, the [Middle East Eye](#) news outlet warned in a report that the severance of humanitarian aid to Syria and the outbreak of war in Ukraine had led to the continued deterioration of the situation of 6.6 million Syrian refugees, threatening to turn the Syrian refugee issue into a forgotten one. The report added that, of all the European Union countries, the United Kingdom was one of the worst offenders in the context of reducing support to Syria, with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Commonwealth and Development Office's cutting the Syria budget by 67 percent.

On May 6, Paulo Pinheiro, Chair of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (COI), [said that](#) detention in Syria is equivalent to disappearance, and added that the futures of tens of thousands of Syrian civilians are unknown, most of whom have been in the Syrian regime's prisons for ten years. He explained that predictions indicate that most detainees have been executed and buried in mass graves, and others subjected to torture and ill-treatment.

On May 7, [SANA](#) reported that the Syrian regime government's Ministry of Justice had announced "the cancellation of all reports and procedures for broadcasting search, arrest and review based on the crimes stipulated in the Counter-Terrorism Law against all citizens at home and abroad." SANA added that this cancellation was issued in implementation of ["Legislative Decree No. 7 of 2022"](#) issued by the Syrian regime's President, Bashar al Assad, on April 30, 2022.

On May 7, the [RT agency](#) quoted a statement by the Russian Foreign Ministry, commenting on the Brussels conference on Syria, saying that the Americans and the Europeans "impede the implementation of the projects for the early stage of the reconstruction in Syria by putting forward political preconditions," including the extension of the mechanism for transferring aid across the border, "which undermines Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity."

On May 8, Adele Khodr, [UNICEF Regional Director for the Middle East and North Africa](#), said in a statement issued by UNICEF that "More than 6.5 million children in Syria are in need of assistance, the highest number recorded since the beginning of the crisis, more than 11 years ago." The statement added that in the first three months of 2022, 213 children were killed or injured in Syria, while since 2011, over 13,000 children have been confirmed killed or injured. The statement indicated that in Syria's neighbouring countries, strained by political instability and fragility, nearly 5.8 million children depend on assistance, their lives riddled with poverty and hardship.

On May 9, [Human Rights Watch \(HRW\)](#) said that the amnesty issued by Syrian regime's President Bashar al Assad on April 30, according to which some detainees were released, is an indication that while there were criminal charges and fair trials that resulted in convictions, the reality is completely different, as little is known about the detainees after their arrest, adding that the detention system is a "torture archipelago." The organization added that the Syrian regime's intelligence services have killed or "allowed detainees to die under torture" while many others continue to suffer in abhorrent prison conditions.

On May 9, the [International Rescue Committee \(IRC\)](#) issued a statement saying that the EU and donors from the wider international community, at the Brussels conference to support the future of Syria and the region, must ramp up their efforts to address the escalating humanitarian crisis in Syria, as humanitarian needs in Syria have reached an all-time high. The IRC added that some 14.6 million people - 70% of the country's population - need help to meet their basic survival needs, indicating that at the end of 2021, the humanitarian response for Syria remained less than half funded, the lowest levels seen in six years.

On May 9 and 10, the [Brussels VI Conference](#) on "Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region," organized by the European Union, was held in the presence of [more than seventy-five delegations from neighboring refugee-hosting countries, partner countries, European Union member states, international and local organizations, including the United Nations](#). At its conclusion, the assembled states pledged [to provide 6.4 billion euros for 2022](#) to Syria and the neighboring countries hosting Syrian refugees. It is less than the need expressed by the United Nations, which amounted to [approximately \\$10.5 billion](#). We have expressed our regret on several occasions that, while the purpose of holding the conference was to raise funds for the Syrian people, in reality it overlooked the political and human rights failures for which solutions were among the goals of the conference in its early stages, with no serious measures taken at the conference in order to achieve safety for civilians and put pressure on the actor parties in order to achieve the political transition process or to achieve steps on the path of accountability.

On May 10, [Save the Children](#) issued a statement, commenting on the results of the Brussels VI Conference on Syria, in which it said that the Brussels conference on Syria falls far short of what is required to support children in Syria and neighbouring countries. In a [statement](#) during the Brussels VI meeting to support the future of Syria and the region, Josep Borrell, High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, said, "[It is not the time to normalise relations with the Syrian regime, for which it would have to fundamentally change course and engage meaningfully in a genuine political process - which is not the case at the time being.](#)" He added that there will be no funding for the reconstruction process if the situation remains as it is today, because that funding will go to support the Syrian regime itself and not the Syrian people.

[In her remarks](#) at the Brussels VI Conference to Support the Future of Syria and the Region, UNICEF Executive Director Catherine Russell said that Syria today is one of the most dangerous places on earth to be a child and that nearly one third of all children are chronically malnourished. She indicated that nearly 13,000 children have been verified killed or injured - but the true death toll is far higher than that.

On May 12, the US Department of State published a [press release](#) in which it said that the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) allowed authorizing specific economic activities in certain non-regime-held areas of northeast and northwest Syria, as part of what it called "[a strategy to defeat ISIS by promoting economic stabilization in areas liberated from the terrorist group's control.](#)" The statement added that the US Treasury does not permit any activity with the Syrian regime's Government or other sanctioned persons.

The statement stressed that the United States' Administration will not normalize relations with the Syrian regime and does not support others normalizing relations until there is irreversible progress toward a political resolution to the conflict in line with Security Council Resolution 2254.

On May 16, the WFP announced, [via its Twitter account](#), the entry of an aid convoy to northwestern Syria, coming from Syrian regime-controlled areas in Aleppo, through the Saraqeb crossing, east of Idlib. The convoy included 14 trucks carrying foodstuffs, according to a [statement](#) by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs issued on the same day.



UN's WFP aid convoy to the northwest of Syria as it passed through Idlib-al Mastouma Road arriving from areas controlled by the Syrian regime forces through al Trenba-Saraqeb Crossing on May 16, 2022 | by: Abdul Ra'ouf Kontar

On May 17, the [Global Protection Group](#) issued a report on explosive ordnance (EO) in Syria, which concluded that one in two people in Syria at risk of death and injury from this ordnance which also impedes the delivery of crucial humanitarian assistance. The report added that between 100,000 and 300,000 articles of EO have failed to detonate in Syria, and therefore continue to pose an active threat of explosion, in addition to warning of the widespread use of IEDs and landmines. The report also added that according to a 2022 survey of 14 international humanitarian NGOs operating in Syria, six have had to move, postpone or cancel programmes in the past two years because the programme location was contaminated with EO.

On May 17, the United States Army Forces Command published a [memorandum](#) on “civilian casualty” as a result of the [airstrike](#) launched by the US forces in the vicinity of al Baghouz town, eastern Syria, on March 18, 2019, in which it stated that “No Rules of Engagement (ROE) or Law of War (LOW) Violations Occurred.” However, it’s apparent that the U.S. Ground Force Commander (GFC) “relied on data that was not fully accurate,” as “Unbeknownst to the GFC, civilians were within the blast radius resulting in civilian casualties.” [A Human Rights Watch comment](#) on the memorandum, published on May 19, stated that it suggests preventable flaws, including lack of transparency, a lack of information from witnesses, and lack of any effort to make amends for the civilians harmed.

On May 19, the Internal Displacement Monitoring Center (IDMC) issued its [annual report](#) on the situation of internal displacement around the world; [on Syria](#), the report said that around 6.7 million people in Syria were living in internal displacement at the end of 2021, the highest figure worldwide, indicating that around 80% of displaced households have been uprooted for four or more years. The report added that 455,540 displacements were recorded in 2021 as a result of violence, with nearly 38,000 more displacements recorded in 2021, most of them women and children, as a result of the hostilities in Daraa governorate. The escalation of airstrikes and shelling in the southern areas of Idlib governorate caused the displacement of nearly 12,000 people in June 2021 alone. The report added, “Disasters triggered 79,000 displacements country-wide, most of them the result of floods, gales and snowstorms. Thousands of tents in displacement camps were destroyed, forcing IDPs to move again.”

On May 19, the World Health Organization (WHO) said in a [report](#) that 700,000 more children face hunger in Syria due to the country’s continuously deteriorating economy, especially in northeast Syria. In the last six months, the total number of food-insecure children across the country has risen to more than 4.6 million. The WHO added that “An unprecedented number of children in Syria are now battling soaring rates of malnutrition.” The WHO indicated that in 2022-2023 about 5.5 million people including mothers and children aged 0-59 months in Syria will need direct nutrition assistance; half of them live in northeast Syria.

On May 20, Martin Griffiths, the UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, said in a [briefing to the Security Council](#) on the humanitarian situation in Syria, that the funding provided by donor countries, during the Brussels Conference to support the future of Syria and the region, represents less than 50% of the total funding requirement in Syria.

On May 20, Russia’s permanent representative to the United Nations, Dmitriy Polyanskiy, said during a [Security Council meeting on Syria](#) that the cross-border mechanism “violates Syria’s sovereignty and territorial integrity.”

On May 24, the [Kazinform news agency quoted](#) Aibek Smadiyarov, the spokesperson for the Kazakh Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as announcing that his country will host the 18th round of the Astana talks on June 14-16.

On May 26, the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Syria issued a [press statement](#) warning that it would be a failure of the highest order if the UN Security Council did not extend present cross-border aid to Syria, which ends next July 10, as the UN estimates that 14.6 million Syrians are now dependent on humanitarian assistance, the highest number ever recorded. Across Syria, 12 million people face acute food insecurity - a staggering 51% increase since 2019. In northwest Syria, some 4.1 million people rely on aid to meet their basic needs, with 80% of these being women and children. Through the cross-border operations, aid reaches around 2.4 million of them every month. While some aid is delivered cross-line from within Syria, these deliveries contain far smaller, insufficient quantities and are exposed to attacks along a dangerous delivery route that crosses active front lines.

On May 30, [the eighth round](#) of meetings of the Syrian Constitutional Committee began in Geneva, within the framework of the political solution in Syria in accordance with UN Resolution 2254, under the supervision of Geir Pedersen, the UN Special Envoy for Syria.

On the course of advocacy and the pursuit of accountability:

On May 9, [the SNHR](#) issued a joint statement along with 17 Syrian organizations working in the humanitarian, human rights and civil society fields. The statement included a message to the members of the United Nations Security Council, calling for the Syrian regime to be held accountable for its massacre of at least 41 people in al Tadamon neighborhood in Damascus. The letter said, "Syrians have endured horrific crimes like the massacre in Tadamon at the hands of the Assad regime, committed with total impunity, for 11 years, and for years the world has ignored their suffering. There can be no peace in Syria without justice." The signatories to the statement demanded that the Security Council convene a meeting to address the Tadamon massacre and launch an independent probe into the killings that brings the perpetrators and those who issued them with orders to justice.

On May 9, the US Department of the Treasury designated a "network of five Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) financial facilitators operating across Indonesia, Syria, and Turkey". The Department's [press release](#) added that these individuals "have played a key role in facilitating the travel of extremists to Syria and other areas where ISIS operates." The press release added that this network has also conducted financial transfers to support ISIS' efforts in Syria-based displaced persons camps by collecting funds in Indonesia and Turkey, some of which were used to pay for smuggling children out of the camps and delivering them to ISIS foreign fighters as potential recruits.

On May 9, the White House published a [statement](#) saying that US President Joe Biden had extended the sanctions imposed on the Syrian regime for an additional year. The statement added that the United States of America calls on the Assad regime, and its backers, to stop its violent war against the Syrian people, enact a nationwide ceasefire, facilitate the unhindered delivery of humanitarian assistance to all Syrians in need, and negotiate a political settlement in line with United Nations Security Council Resolution 2254.

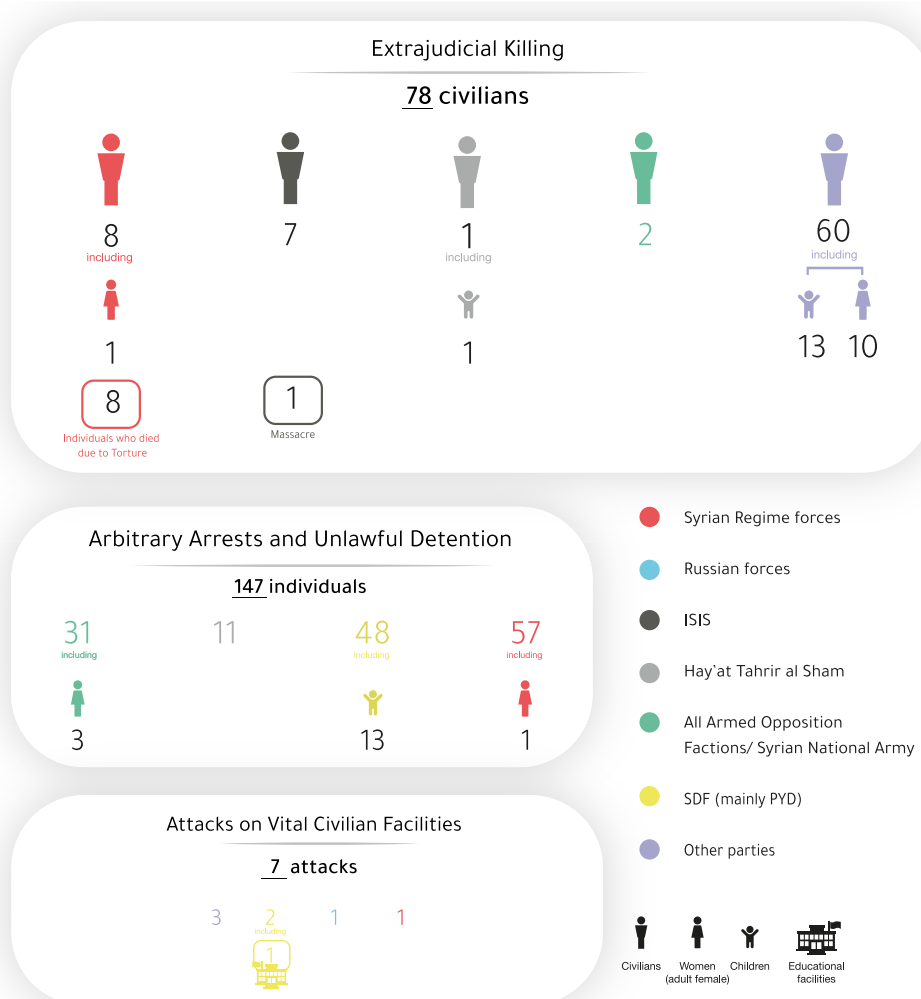
On May 18, [France 24 TV](#) website said that a French appeals court confirmed the indictment against the French cement giant Lafarge on charges of complicity in crimes against humanity in Syria, through activities suspected to have been carried out by the company in order to maintain the activity of its cement factory in Syria in 2013 and 2014. The website quoted the prosecution's statement which said that the company "financed, via its subsidiaries, Islamic State operations with several millions of euros in full awareness of its activities." The website indicated that the case against the company was launched by former Lafarge Cement Syria employees backed by NGOs in 2017.

On May 30, the European Council of the European Union website published a [press release](#) in which it announced that it would be adding one group and two individuals to the list of those subject to restrictive measures against ISIS and al Qaeda and persons, groups, undertakings and entities associated with them. The statement said that the measures target Hurras al Din, "a Syria-based al-Qaeda affiliated group." Faruq al Suri, the group's leader, and Sami al Aridi, its religious leader, were also included on the sanctions list.

In May, the SNHR participated in several events on the sidelines of the Brussels VI Conference on supporting the future of Syria and the region, in open events and special meetings. On May 5, SNHR participated in an event [organized by the EuroMed Feminist Initiative](#), during which SNHR's representative spoke about the atrocious violations being perpetrated against women in Syria; on May 6, SNHR participated in an event entitled 'No Peace without Justice: the need for accountability in Syria.' in cooperation with [Crisis Action](#) and sponsored by the European Union's Permanent Representatives of Germany, Belgium, France, the Netherlands, and Sweden; on the same day, Baytna and SNHR held an event entitled '[Peace in Syria: Possibility or Fantasy](#)'; on May 10, Mr. Fadel Abdul Ghany met with a number of ambassadors of the permanent missions to the European Union. We issued a [statement](#) on our participation in these events.

III. The Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in May:

This report outlines the most notable human rights violations that were documented by the SNHR in May 2022 at the hands of the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in Syria.



A. Extrajudicial killing:

In May 2022, SNHR documented the deaths of 78 civilians, including 14 children and 11 women (adult female), the largest percentage of whom were killed at the hands of other parties. We also documented eight individuals who died due to torture, and at least one massacre. We issued a report on the first of this month detailing the civilian victims documented killed in May at the hands of the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in Syria.

The death toll of civilian victims was distributed according to the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in Syria as follows:

A. The main parties:

- **Syrian regime forces (army, security, local militias, and Shiite foreign militias):**² Eight civilians, including one woman.
- **ISIS:** Seven civilians.
- **Hay'at Tahrir al Sham:**³ One child.
- **All Armed Opposition factions/Syrian National Army:** Two civilians.

B. Other parties:

We documented the deaths of 60 civilians, including 13 children and 10 women, at the hands of other parties, distributed as follows:

- Landmines whose source we have not been able to identify: Nine civilians, including six children and one woman.
- Gunfire whose source we have been unable to identify: 35 civilians, including three children and two women.
- Bombings whose perpetrators we have not been able to identify: Four civilians, including two children.
- Killings by parties we have been unable to identify: 11 civilians, including one child and seven women.
- Jordanian border guards: One child.

B. Arbitrary arrest and enforced disappearance:

In May 2022, SNHR documented at least 147 cases of arbitrary arrests, including 13 children and four women (adult female), at the hands of the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in Syria. The largest number of arbitrary arrests was carried out by Syrian regime forces in the governorates of Damascus Suburbs, Daraa, then Aleppo. We issued a report on the second of this month detailing the record of cases of arrests and enforced disappearances which we documented in May at the hands of the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in Syria.

The record of cases of arbitrary arrests was distributed according to the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces as follows:

- **Syrian Regime forces:** 57, including one woman.
- **Hay'at Tahrir al Sham:** 11.
- **All Armed Opposition factions/Syrian National Army:** 31, including three women.
- **Syrian Democratic Forces:** 48, including 13 children.

²We 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 based on ruling the nation in an authoritarian fashion through a very limited group of individuals, primarily the President of the Republic and his selected leaders of the security services, while the ministers, including the Prime Minister and the Minister of Interior, play a restricted, largely ceremonial role, which is limited to implementing precisely what the ruling regime orders, without any decision-making power or active role; this means that the government's role is wholly subordinate and limited to serving the regime, with all the main powers being concentrated in the hands of the President of the Republic and the security services. Governance in Syria is wholly decided by the autocratic authority of the ruling family and there is no independent decision-making structure. Rather, the government is an empty façade there for show; the Minister of Interior receives orders from the security branches over which he nominally presides which are in turn under the command of the President, while the Minister of Justice cannot summon a civilian-level security agent other than the head of a security branch; the security branches, along with the president, are the true power and the governing regime in Syria. Although we acknowledge that the United Nations and its agencies use the term 'the Syrian government' in general, we believe that this is a completely inaccurate and misleading term in the Syrian context.

³The United Nations has designated it as a terrorist organization

C. Attacks on vital civilian facilities:

In May 2022, SNHR documented at least seven incidents of attacks on vital civilian facilities.

Among these attacks, we documented one on an educational facility.

These attacks were distributed according to the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces as follows:

A. The main parties:

- **Syrian regime forces:** One.
- **Russian forces:** One.
- **Syrian Democratic Forces:** Two.

B. Other parties:

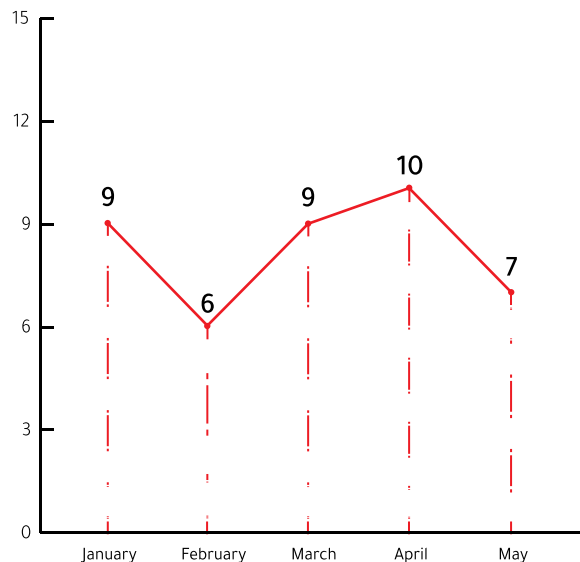
Other parties perpetrated three incidents, distributed as follows:

- Attacks whose perpetrators we have not been able to identify: One.
- Bombings whose perpetrators we have not been able to identify: Two.

The record of attacks on vital civil facilities documented in May 2022 was distributed according to the perpetrator parties as follows:

	Syrian regime forces	Russian forces	Syrian Democratic Forces	Other parties	
				Attacks whose sources we have not been able to identify	Bombings whose perpetrators we have not been able to identify
Vital Educational Facilities					
Schools			1		
Vital Cultural Facilities					
Archeological Sites	1				
Infrastructure					
Water facilities and related resources				1	1
Official Headquarters			1		1
Livestock farms		1			
Total:	1	1	2	1	2

The record of attacks on vital civilian facilities documented since the start of 2022 up to June of the same year at the hands of the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in Syria has now reached 41 in total, distributed monthly as follows:



The chart shows that the record of attacks on vital civilian facilities in May was relatively lower than the previous two months, with May accounting for 17% of the total record of attacks on vital facilities since the beginning of 2022.

The most notable attacks on vital civilian facilities documented in May:

On Wednesday, April 27, 2022, assailants whose identities we were unable to identify blew up an irrigation water pumping station in al Adnaniya village in the northern suburbs of Raqqqa governorate, using explosive devices, destroying the building of the station and putting it out of service. The Syrian Network for Human Rights is still trying to reach witnesses to that incident to obtain more details. Al Adnaniya village was under the control of Syrian Democratic Forces at the time of the incident.

On Saturday, April 30, 2022, Syrian regime artillery forces fired shells at the archaeological area of Kafr al Bara, located on the western outskirts of [al Bara](#) village in the southern suburbs of Idlib governorate. As a result, the buildings and archaeological facilities sustained minor material damage. The village was under the joint control of the Armed Opposition factions and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.

On Thursday, May 12, 2022, fixed-wing warplanes, which we believe were Russian, fired missiles on a poultry farm near Mantaf village in Jabal al Arba'in area, in the southern suburbs of Idlib governorate. A civilian was wounded and [the poultry farm building was partially damaged, with dozens of poultry birds also killed in the bombardment](#). The area was under the joint control of the Armed Opposition factions and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.



The destruction of a poultry farm near Mantaf village, Ildib, as a result of a Russian airstrike - May 12, 2022

On Thursday, May 12, 2022, Syrian Democratic Forces used a missile launcher to bomb a southern neighborhood of al Bab city in the eastern suburbs of Aleppo governorate. The missiles fell on a residential building located close to the Amna Bint Wahab School for Basic Education, partially damaging the residential building, while no material damage to the school building was recorded. Al Bab city was under the control of Syrian National Army forces at the time of the incident.

D. Record of indiscriminate attacks and attacks using outlawed weapons:

The Syrian Network for Human Rights was unable to document any indiscriminate attacks or attacks using outlawed weapons in May.

IV. Attachments:

[78 Civilians, Including 14 Children, 11 Women, and Eight Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria in May 2022](#)

[At Least 147 Arbitrary Arrests/Detentions Documented in Syria in May 2022, Including 13 Children and Four Women](#)

V. Conclusions and Recommendations:

Conclusions:

- The evidence we have gathered indicates that attacks continue to be directed against civilians and civilian objects. Syrian-Russian alliance forces have committed various crimes, including extrajudicial killings, arrests, torture, and enforced disappearances. In addition, the indiscriminate bombardment and other attacks carried out caused the destruction of facilities and buildings. There are reasonable grounds to believe that the war crime of attacking civilians has been committed in many cases.
- The Syrian government has not only violated international humanitarian law and customary law, but has also breached a number of UN Security Council resolutions, particularly resolution 2139, resolution 2042 on the release of detainees, and resolution 2254, all without any accountability.
- We could find no record of any warnings being issued by the Syrian Regime or Russian forces prior to any attack under the requirements of international humanitarian law. This has been the case since the beginning of the popular uprising for freedom, providing another blatant demonstration of these forces' total disregard for the lives of civilians in Syria.
- The magnitude and frequency of the violations, the disproportionate use of military force, the indiscriminate manner of the bombing, and the coordinated approach of these attacks lead to the inescapable conclusion that these acts are wholly deliberate and based on high-level orders, and as such constitute a part of state policy.
- The indiscriminate and disproportionate bombardment carried out by the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces is considered to be a clear violation of international humanitarian law, with indiscriminate killings amounting to war crimes.
- Hay'at Tahrir al Sham has violated international humanitarian law, causing the death of many civilians, as well as damage to vital civilian facilities.
- All Armed Opposition factions/Syrian National Army violated UN Security Council Resolution 2139 through carrying out attacks that are considered to violate customary international humanitarian law, causing civilian casualties or accidental injuries.
- All the attacks documented in this report, particularly bombings, caused massive collateral damage that involved loss of lives, injuries, or significant damage to civilian objects. There are strong indicators suggesting that this damage was excessive compared to the anticipated military benefit.
- The use of explosive arms to target densely populated areas reflects a criminal and wholly deliberate mindset, with the perpetrators clearly intending to inflict the greatest possible number of deaths, which is a clear contravention of international human rights law and a flagrant violation of the Geneva IV Convention (arts. 27, 31, 32).

Recommendations:

UN Security Council

- The Security Council must take additional steps following its adoption of Resolution 2254, which clearly insists that “ all parties immediately cease any attacks against civilians and civilian objects as such.”
- The Syrian issue should be referred to the International Criminal Court and all those who are responsible for violations should be held accountable, while Russia must stop using the veto, as it is a party to the Syrian conflict, and the UNSC states’ veto power should be withheld when crimes against humanity and war crimes are committed.
- Ensure peace and security and implement the principle of responsibility to protect civilians’ lives and to save the Syrian people’s heritage and historical artifacts from destruction, looting and vandalism.
- The Security Council should adopt a resolution banning the use of cluster munitions and landmines in Syria, similar to the existing prohibition on the use of chemical weapons, and include advice on how to safely remove the remnants of such dangerous weapons.
- The four other permanent member states should put pressure on the Russian government to end its support for the Syrian regime, which uses chemical weapons, and to expose its involvement in this regard.
- Request that all relevant United Nations agencies make greater efforts to provide food, medical and humanitarian assistance in areas where fighting has ceased, and in internally displaced person camps, and to follow-up with those States that have pledged voluntary contributions.

International Community

- In light of the split within the Security Council and its utter inability to take any effective action, action should be taken on the national and regional levels to form alliances to support the Syrian people by protecting them from daily killing and by lifting sieges, as well as by increasing support for relief efforts. Additionally, the principle of universal jurisdiction should be enacted in local courts regarding these crimes in order to conduct fair trials for all those who were involved.
- SNHR has repeatedly called for the implementation of the ‘Responsibility to Protect’ in dozens of studies and reports and as a member of the International Coalition for the Responsibility to Protect (ICRtoP) after all political channels through the Arab League’s plan and then Mr. Kofi Annan’s plan have proved fruitless, along with the Cessation of Hostilities statements and Astana agreements that followed. Therefore, steps should be taken under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations, while the norm of the ‘Responsibility to Protect’, which was established by the United Nations General Assembly, should be implemented. The Security Council is still hindering the protection of civilians in Syria.
- Renew pressure on the Security Council to refer the case in Syria to the International Criminal Court.
- Work on fulfilling justice and achieving accountability in Syria through the United Nations General Assembly and the Human Rights Council and to activate the principle of universal jurisdiction.

Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)

- The OHCHR should submit a report to the Human Rights Council and other organs of the United Nations on the incidents mentioned in this report and previous reports since these attacks were perpetrated by the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces.

Independent International Commission of Inquiry (COI)

- Launch investigations into the cases included in this report and previous reports. SNHR is willing to co-operate and provide further evidence and data.
- Focus on the issue of landmines and cluster munitions within the next report.

International, Impartial, and Independent Mechanism (IIIM)

- Collect further evidence about the crimes documented in this report.

The United Nations Special Envoy to Syria

- Condemn the perpetrators of crimes and massacres, and those who were primarily responsible for dooming the de-escalation agreements.
- Re-sequence the peace process so that it can resume its natural course despite Russia's attempts to divert and distort it, empowering the Constitutional Committee prior to the establishment of a transitional governing body.

The Syrian regime

- Stop indiscriminate shelling and targeting of residential areas, hospitals, schools and markets, and end the use of outlawed weapons and barrel bombs.
- Ensure compliance with UN Security Council resolutions and customary humanitarian law.

The Russian regime

- Launch investigations into the incidents included in this report, make the findings of these investigations public for the Syrian people, and hold those responsible accountable.
- Compensate all the damaged centers and facilities, rebuild and rehabilitate them, and compensate all the families of victims who were killed by the current Russian regime, as well as all the wounded.
- Completely cease the bombing of hospitals, protected objects, and civilian areas, and respect customary international law.
- As a guarantor party in Astana talks, the Russian regime must stop thwarting de-escalation agreements, and apply pressure on the Syrian regime in order to end all indiscriminate attacks and to allow unconditional passage of humanitarian aid to besieged areas.

The Coalition (US-led coalition and Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces)

- The states supporting the SDF should apply pressure on these forces in order to compel them to cease all of their violations in all the areas and towns under their control.
- Syrian Democratic Forces must immediately stop conscripting children, hold the officers involved in such violations accountable, and pledge to return all children who have been arrested for conscription immediately.

All Armed Opposition factions/Syrian National Army

- The Armed Opposition/Syrian National Army must ensure the protection of civilians in all areas under their control. These forces should also take care to distinguish between civilians and military targets and cease any indiscriminate attacks.
- Take punitive action against those who commit violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law.

Humanitarian Organizations

- Develop urgent operational plans to secure decent shelter for internally displaced persons.
- Provide protected facilities and vehicles, such as medical facilities, schools, and ambulances, with distinctive signs that can be distinguished from long distances.

Acknowledgments

We wish to extend our sincere thanks to all family members, relatives and friends of the victims, as well as eyewitnesses and local activists whose contributions have enriched this report.



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