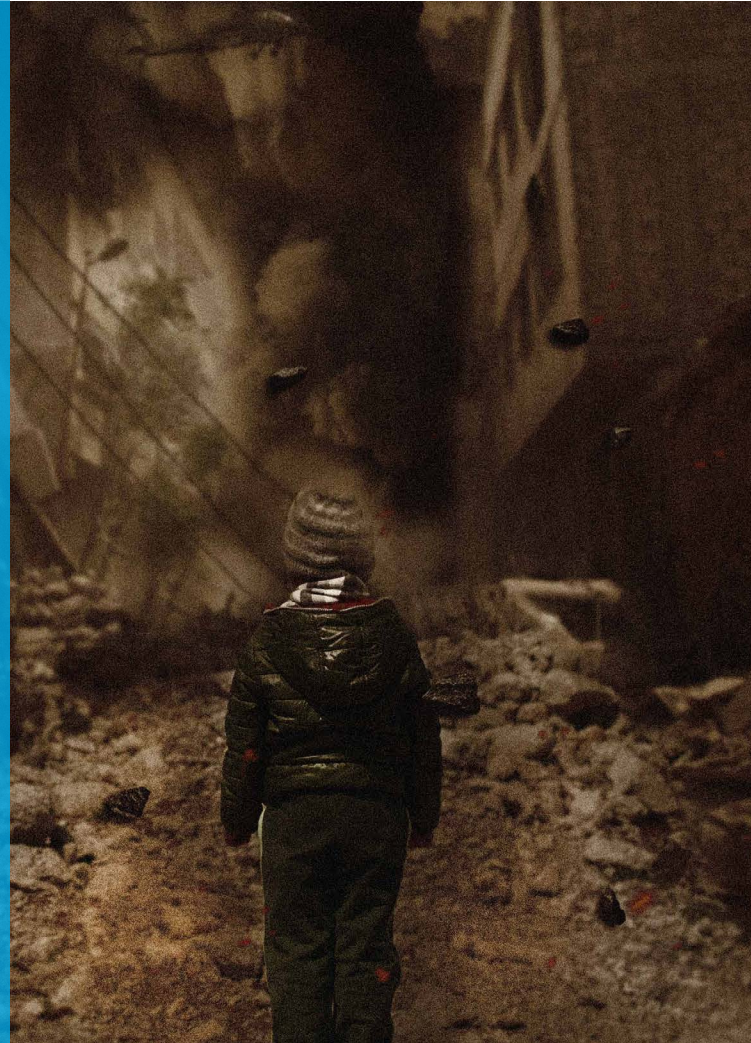


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65 Civilians, Including 16 Children, Four Women, and Four Victims Who Died due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria, in January 2023

A Blood-Soaked Start to the New Year in Syria



Wednesday 01 February 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. Background and Methodology

This report documents the death toll of victims whose deaths were documented by Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) as taking place at the hands of the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in Syria in January 2023. The report sheds light particularly on victims who died due to torture, and victims among medical personnel. The report also includes an outline of the most notable incidents during this month. Full details of every incident are maintained on the SNHR database.

Documenting deaths in Syria has been one of the most important roles performed by SNHR since March 2011. This is all the more crucial since murder is the most prevalent of all the violations perpetrated, and the one which most profoundly affects the Syrian people, with countless families suffering incalculable and irreparable trauma through the loss of parents, spouses, children, siblings, friends, etc.

These violations have become so widespread primarily due to the systematic killing of civilians by Syrian regime forces and their affiliated militias. Between March 2011, and the beginning of 2012, Syrian regime forces were responsible for the overwhelming majority of deaths. The Syrian regime began by using tanks and artillery, then proceeded to also use warplanes and helicopter gunships which were used in the deployment of barrel bombs, in addition to ballistic missiles and chemical weapons.

The emergence of several other parties during the Syrian conflict has further increased both the importance and complexity of documenting the victims killed in Syria.

The killing of civilians in Syria has continued for the eleventh consecutive year, as it has done continuously since the initial outbreak of the popular uprising for democracy in Syria in March 2011, resulting in casualty numbers that are among the largest worldwide; this underlines the fact that Syria is still the most dangerous nation in the world for civilians, and remains an exceptionally insecure and perilous environment wholly unsuitable for the return of refugees.

This report catalogues the death toll of victims at the hands of the active parties to the Syrian conflict. It should be noted that accurately ascribing responsibility sometimes requires more time and investigation than usual, especially in the case of joint attacks. We also face additional challenges in assigning responsibility for attacks in some incidents of land bombardment, especially those in which the bombardment originates from an adjacent area that is controlled by a different party. In such cases, SNHR tries to thoroughly investigate the incident, in order to conclusively identify the party responsible for the bombardment.

Despite this, however, there are cases in which we are unable to definitively assign responsibility for a particular killing to one of two possible parties because of the area's proximity to the lines of engagement, the use of similar weapons, or other reasons. In such cases, the incident is classified within the category 'other parties' until such time as we have gathered sufficient evidence to conclusively assign responsibility for the violation to one of the two parties.

The parties to the conflict documented by SNHR as having as committed extrajudicial killings are:

1. Main parties:

- Syrian regime forces (army, security, local militias, Shiite foreign militias)¹
- All Armed Opposition Factions (SNA)
- Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF)

2. Other parties

1. We generally use the term 'the Syrian regime' rather than 'the Syrian government', because the nature of the ruling power in Syria is a totalitarian dictatorship where power is concentrated in the hands of a small circle of individuals, namely the President of the Republic and the heads of the security apparatus. Conversely, the ministers, including the Prime Minister and the Minister of Interior, play a restricted, largely ceremonial role, which is limited to implementing precisely what the ruling regime orders, with no real decision-making power or active role of their own. Syria is under a personalist/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. The Minister of Justice cannot even summon a low-ranking security office, let alone a security branch head. Syria is ruled by the heads of the security branches with the president.

While we at the SNHR are keen to accurately attribute incidents to the responsible parties, we exclude two types of attacks from the process of assigning responsibility, namely anti-personnel landmines, and remote explosions, including suicide or forced suicide attacks. We discussed this issue previously in [detailed reports](#).

As for the anonymous victims whose names we haven't yet been able to determine or on whom we have so far been unable to find any identifying information or any picture or video footage, these cases are catalogued in a private archive until any information confirming those victims' identity is received which would enable their cases to be transferred to the victims' archive, with their names and other details registered accordingly.

Through use of SNHR's extensive database, we can catalogue the victims according to the governorate where they were killed, and also by their governorate of origin. However, we choose in our monthly report to document the death toll of victims according to the governorate in which they were killed, rather than by their place of origin.

In this report, we record only the death toll of civilians whose deaths we were able to document during the last month. SNHR does not document the deaths of fighters and militants killed during the conflict, and while some of the victims documented may have been killed months or even years ago, as in some cases of death due to torture; in these cases, where the deaths have only recently been confirmed, we include two dates, the date when we were able to document the victim's death, and the date on which we think the death occurred.

The methodology adopted by the Syrian Network for Human Rights in documenting the victims can be found at this link.²

This report draws upon the constant daily monitoring of news and developments by SNHR's team, and on information from our extensive network of various sources that has been built up over the course of our work since 2011. The SNHR also [provides](#) a special form that can be completed by victims' relatives with victims' names and personal information so that the Victims Documentation Department can follow up on the information provided, verify its accuracy and then include it in the database.

We note that the death toll of victims detailed on SNHR's database includes extrajudicial killings by the controlling forces which occurred as a violation of either international human rights law or international humanitarian law or both, but does not include cases of natural deaths or those which occurred because of disputes between members of society or other such issues.

Our investigations confirm that all of the attacks included in this report that were carried out by the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in Syria targeted civilian areas where we documented no military presence or armories before or during the attacks. Also, the perpetrators of the attacks failed to issue any warnings to civilians prior to any of the attacks as required by international humanitarian law.

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.

2. Syrian Network for Human Rights, "Syrian Network for Human Rights Methodology" http://sn4hr.org/public_html/wp-content/pdf/english/SNHR_Methodology_en.pdf

II. The Syrian Regime Has Failed to Register Hundreds of Thousands of Citizens It Killed Since March 2011 in the Death Records of the Civil Registry

Although hundreds of thousands of Syrian citizens have been killed, 'disappeared' or gone missing since the early days of the popular rising in March 2011, they have not been officially registered as dead by the relevant official state departments, namely the Civil Registry Department. The Syrian regime unconscionably controls the issuance of death certificates, which are not made available to any of the families of the victims, whether they were killed at the hands of the Syrian regime or by other parties, or to the families of the missing and forcibly disappeared. The Syrian regime only allows death certificates to be issued for those who meet the narrow criteria set by the regime and its security services. In many previous reports, we have discussed this phenomenon of the Syrian regime's forcing victims' families to sign false statements, written by the security authorities beforehand, stating that 'armed terrorist gangs', rather than the Syrian regime, killed their loved ones, if they wish to obtain a death certificate. The Syrian regime has not only failed to launch any investigations into the causes of death for hundreds of thousands of Syrians but has also failed to hold to account even one member of its security or military forces for their involvement in these killings.

In order to obtain a death certificate, **the Syrian regime relies on three things:**

- Medical reports prepared by regime personnel, citing a false cause of death, such as a heart attack for those forcibly disappeared in its detention centers, or claiming falsely that the victim died as a result of injuries from war munitions.
- Statements from the local neighborhood headman or 'Mukhtar' and from any witnesses, who are asked to confirm the death.
- Acknowledgement from the victims' families, who often urgently need to obtain a death certificate; for this reason, family members understandably feel they have no choice but to remain silent about the true cause of death and those responsible for it.

Through our exhaustive monitoring and investigation process, we have been able to document three methods used by the Syrian regime to register the deaths of a limited number of its victims who were killed, or forcibly disappeared then subsequently killed, which we detailed in a report we issued on August 19, 2022, entitled '[The Syrian Regime, Through Its Security Services and State Institutions, Controls the Incidents of Registering the Deaths of Victims Killed/'Disappeared' in the Armed Conflict Since March 2011](#)'.

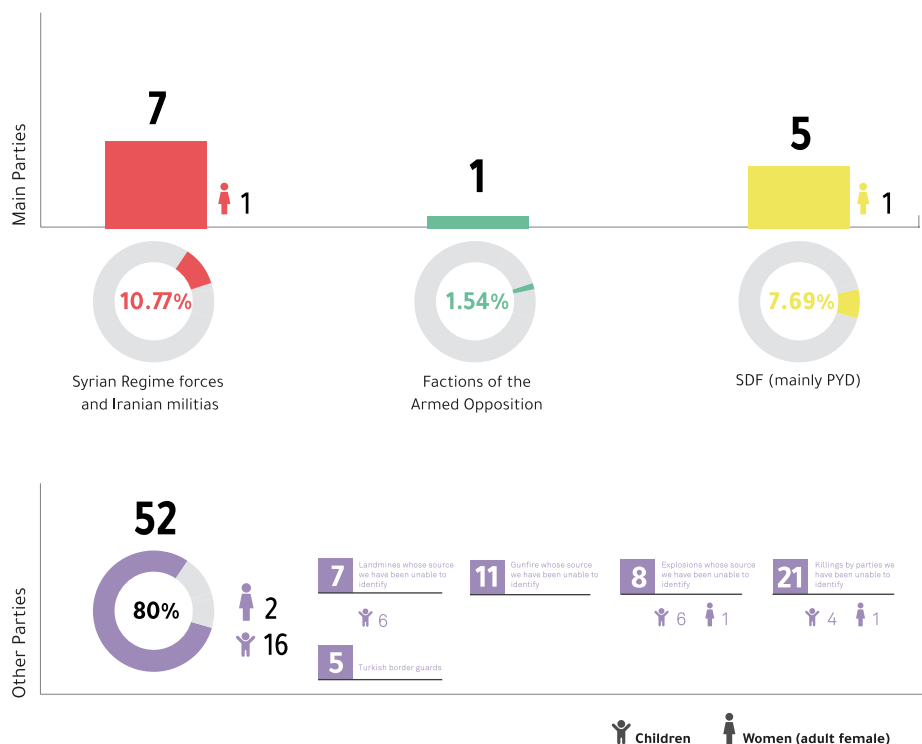
It is worth noting that the vast majority of victims' families are unable to obtain death certificates from the Syrian regime, for fear of linking their name with that of a person who was detained by the regime and killed under torture, which implies that they were a dissident who opposed the Syrian regime, or of their loved one had been registered as a 'terrorist' if they were wanted by the security services. Additionally, many victims' families have been forcibly displaced outside the areas controlled by the Syrian regime.

On August 10, 2022, the Minister of Justice in the Syrian regime government issued [Circular No. 22](#) specifying the procedures for the conduct of proceedings related to registering deaths at Sharia courts. The circular included new conditions stipulating that five items of evidence must be submitted to and approved by the relevant judges in proceedings related to registering the death. It also requires that all relevant courts involved in death registration cases comply with the circular's content. The circular also imposed security clearance on judicial authorities to register death cases, increasing the security services' intrusion. We issued a [report](#) in which we analyzed the constitutional and legal violations contained in this circular's text and the consequences thereof.

III. Death Toll of Civilian Victims

In January, SNHR documented the killing of 65 civilians, including 16 children and four women (adult female) at the hands of the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in Syria.

The documented death toll of civilian victims killed at the hands of the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in Syria in January is distributed as follows:



A. The main parties:

- **Syrian regime forces (army, security, local militias, and Shiite foreign militias):**

We documented the killing of seven civilians, including one woman.

- **All armed opposition factions/SNA**

We documented the killing of one civilian at the hands of all armed opposition factions/SNA.

- **SDF**

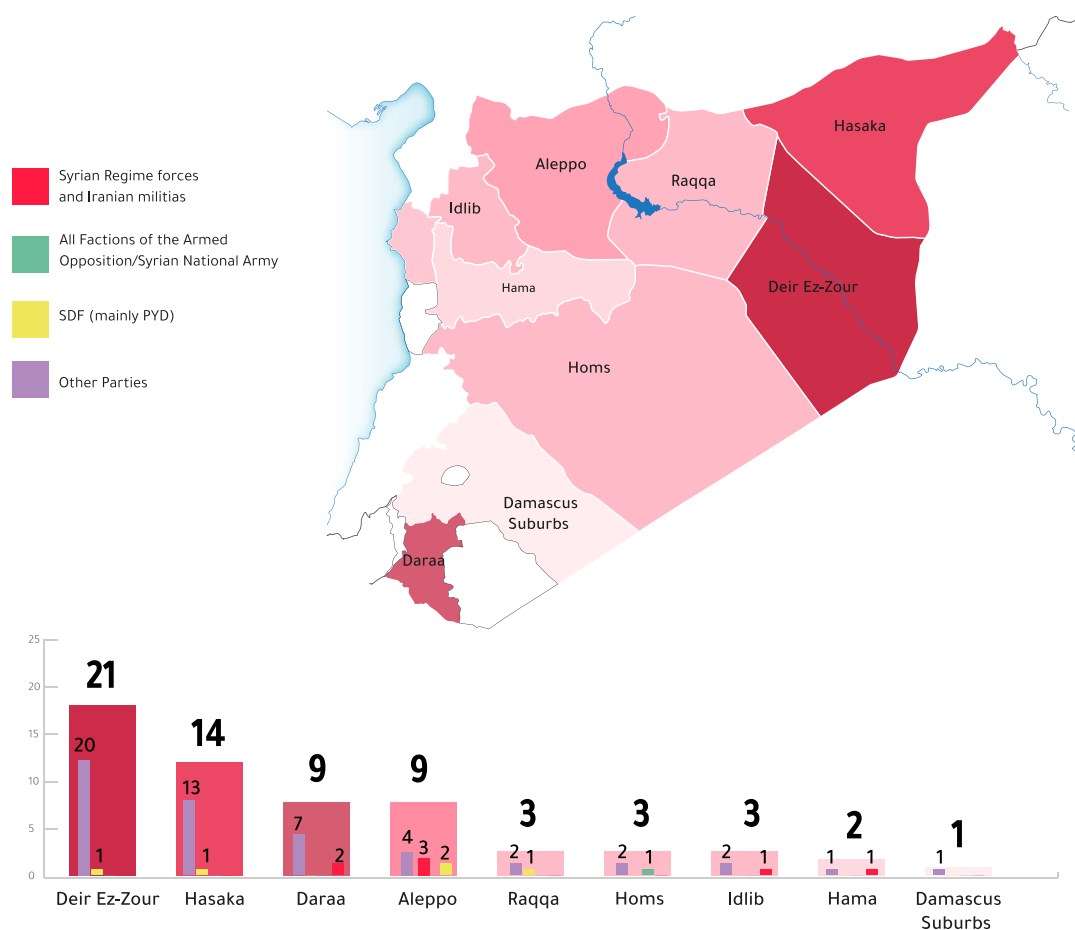
We documented the killing of 10 civilians, including one woman.

B. Other parties:

We documented the killing of 52 civilians, including 16 children and two women at the hands of other parties, distributed as follows:

- Landmines whose source we have been unable to identify: seven civilians, including six children.
- Gunfire whose source we have been unable to identify: 11 civilians.
- Bombings whose perpetrators we have been unable to identify: eight civilians, including six children and one woman.
- Killings by parties we have been unable to identify: 21 civilians, including four children and one woman.
- Turkish border guard: five civilians.

The death toll of civilian victims killed at the hands of the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces documented in January 2023 is distributed across Syrian governorates as follows:



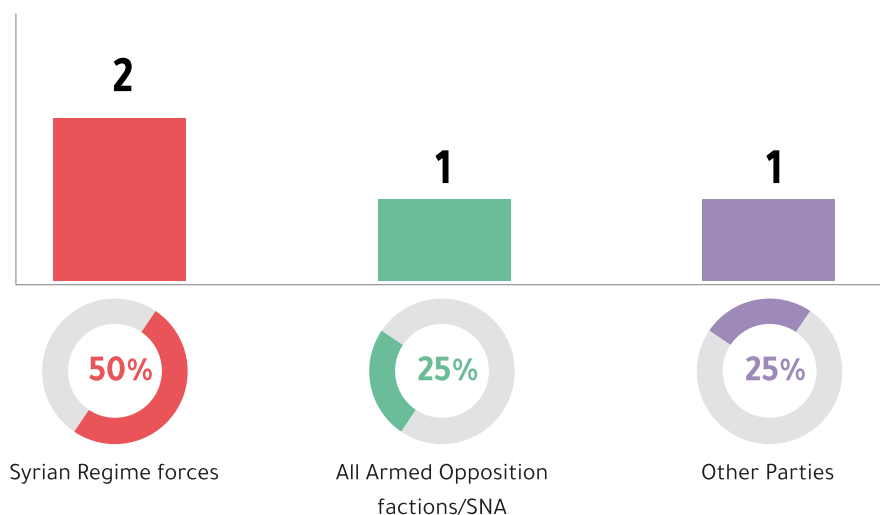
Deir Ez-Zour governorate saw the highest death toll of victims documented killed in January, accounting for approximately 32 percent of the total monthly death toll, followed by Hassaka with approximately 21 percent, then the two governorates of Daraa and Aleppo with approximately 14 percent each. Most of the victims in all governorates were killed by other parties.

IV. Death Toll of Victims Who Died Due to Torture, and Victims Amongst Media, Medical and Civil Defense Personnel

A. Death toll of victims who died due to torture

In January 2023, SNHR documented the deaths of four victims due to torture at the hands of the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in Syria.

As documented by SNHR, deaths due to torture at the hands of the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in Syria in January are distributed as follows:



A. Main Parties:

- Syrian regime forces: two
- All armed opposition factions/SNA: one

B. Other parties: one

The most notable cases are:

Yahya Ali al-Eissa, a construction worker from Khattab town in the northern suburbs of Hama governorate, was arrested by pro-regime forces on Wednesday, May 7, 2014, in a raid on his home in Khattab town. Yahya, who was born in 1962, was taken to a regime detention center in Deir Shmiel village in western Hama governorate, and then to a local branch of the Syrian regime's

Air Force Intelligence Directorate in Hama city. He has been forcibly disappeared ever since, with the Syrian regime denying his detention and refusing to allow anyone, even a lawyer, to visit him. On Friday, January 6, 2023, his family learned that he had died in a regime detention center in 2017. We can confirm that Yahya was in a good health at the time of his arrest, which makes it highly likely he died due to torture and medical negligence. We can also confirm that the Syrian regime has not returned his body to his family.



Yahya Ali al-Eissa

B. Death toll of medical personnel

In January, SNHR documented the killing of one medical personnel at the hands of Syrian regime forces

The most notable cases are:

On Thursday, January 26, 2023, 51-year-old doctor Ali Ahmad al-Saed, a neurological specialist from al-Mzayereeb town in the western suburbs of Daraa governorate, was shot dead in al-Kashef neighborhood in Daraa city being hit in crossfire between two groups from the Syrian regime's Military Security division. Dr. Al-Saed was a civilian who was never involved with any military formations in the governorate. The area is under the control of Syrian regime forces.



Doctor Ali Ahmad al-Saed

C. Death toll of media workers

SNHR documented no victims among media workers in January 2023.

D. Death toll of Civil Defense personnel

SNHR documented no deaths among Civil Defense personnel in January 2023.

V. Record of Most Notable Massacres

In January, SNHR documented two massacres at the hands of other parties.

Other parties:

- Killings by parties we have been unable to identify: one massacre.
- Bombings we have been unable to identify their perpetrators: one massacre.

On Friday, December 30, 2022, gunmen we have not yet been able to identify first used IEDs to attack two buses transporting oilfield workers, before opening fire on the vehicles with machine guns. The incident took place near al-Tayyem Oil Field in the badiya (desert area) adjacent to al-Mouhasan city in the eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour. Ten of the civilian workers employed at the oilfield were killed in the attack. The field is under the control of Syrian regime forces.

On Sunday, January 14, 2023, five civilians from the same family (father, mother, and three children) were killed by the explosion of an unidentified object (which we believe was a landmine) under their car while they were at work moving stones in Dubai village, located in the vicinity of Jabal Kawkab in eastern Hasaka governorate. The family lived in al-Salihiya neighborhood in Hasaka city. The area was under the control of **Syrian regime forces at the time of the incident.**

VI. What is SNHR Doing About the Extrajudicial Killing Issue?

Since 2011, SNHR has been developing complex program to archive and categorize the victims' data, which the team collects and verifies, enabling us to catalogue the victims according to their gender, age, the date and place of death, method of killing, type of weapon used, and perpetrator party, and to make comparisons between these parties. We can also distribute the death toll according to the governorate in which the incident of death occurred, and according to the governorate from which the victim originated, in order to show the extent of the loss suffered by the people of that governorate, enabling us to accurately ascertain the highest rates of violence documented in the case of each violation. SNHR's Victim Documentation Department team constantly updates the network's comprehensive database, with all the data added to the SNHR's database being retained securely, and several backup copies being stored in different locations.

Since 2011, we have also been exceptionally concerned with the documentation of incidents involving the killing of children and women; there is hardly any statistic recorded on our database that does not include victims in either category, due to the vulnerability of these groups in the community, and because they give an indication of the rate of targeting of civilians. We later added other civilian groups which have played a key role in the popular uprising and later in the armed conflict, such as media, medical, relief and Civil Defense personnel.

For nearly 11 years, we have issued [daily death tolls of victims](#), as well as [daily news reports](#) on killing incidents. We also issue [a monthly report](#) detailing the death toll of victims, whose deaths were documented in Syria during the previous month, amongst civilians, as well as of those who died [due to torture](#), in addition to issuing a biannual report and annual report, as well as dozens of other special reports documenting the total death toll or the death toll at the hands of one of the parties to the conflict in particular, in addition to a [monthly report](#) and special and periodic reports documenting the [massacres](#) committed on Syrian soil.

We have also turned the victims' database into a map and interactive charts accessible on our website, which categorize the victims by governorate, gender, age group, the party responsible for their deaths, and other criteria. There are also charts detailing the death toll of victims killed at the hands of all parties to the conflict, as well as others giving information on specific groups, such as specifically detailing the death toll among women and children victims, with all of these being updated regularly.

SNHR also periodically submits a special form to the United Nations [Special Rapporteur](#) on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, as well as to the Special Rapporteur on torture, submitting cases of killings on which we were able to document all of the available data, having obtained the consent of each victim's family members before submitting them.

It should be noted that the United Nations has relied on SNHR for all the statistics it has used in its analysis of victims in the conflict, given SNHR's prominent role as one of the most credible sources. SNHR also has signed a [Memorandum of Understanding with Humanitarian Outcomes on contributing to its Aid Worker Security Database \(AWSD\)](#) project. The MoU stipulates the establishment of a joint coordination and cooperation mechanism aimed at documenting and archiving violations and violence affecting aid workers. SNHR has also partnered with numerous United Nations bodies, in addition to governments of states, to provide them with statistics from our databases, in order to serve the path of justice, and ultimately to ensure the accountability and prosecution of criminals. SNHR is also used as a trustworthy source by a large number of Arab and international news agencies and many international human rights organizations.

VII. Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

- The evidence we've collected regarding incidents involving deaths indicates that the attacks documented in this report were deliberately directed against civilians and civilian objects. Syrian-Russian alliance forces have committed various crimes of extrajudicial killings, including fatal torture. Their attacks and indiscriminate bombardment have resulted in 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.
- A large proportion of Syrians were killed as a result of landmines, and none of the perpetrator forces in the Syrian conflict have revealed maps of the locations where landmines were planted. This indicates total indifference to the lives of civilians, and children in particular.
- The Syrian regime has not only violated international humanitarian law and customary law, but has also breached a number of UN Security Council resolutions, particularly resolution 2139 and resolution 2042 on the release of detainees, as well as resolution 2254, all without any accountability.
- The indiscriminate and disproportionate bombardment carried out by Syrian Democratic Forces is considered a clear violation of international humanitarian law, with the crimes of indiscriminate killing amounting to war crimes.
- The use of remote bombings to target densely populated areas reflects a criminal mindset intent on deliberately inflicting the greatest possible number of deaths, which is a clear contravention of international human rights law and a flagrant violation of the Geneva VI Convention, Articles 27, 31, and 32.
- We've documented cases of extrajudicial killings committed by various controlling forces against the populations under their control, which constitute serious violation of international human rights law.

Recommendations

UN Security Council

- The Security Council should take additional steps following the adoption of Resolution 2254, which clearly demands that all parties should, *"...Immediately cease any attacks against civilians and civilian objects as such, including attacks against medical facilities and personnel, and any indiscriminate use of weapons, including through shelling and aerial bombardment."*
- The Syrian issue should be referred to the International Criminal Court and all those involved in perpetrating crimes against humanity and war crimes should be held accountable.
- Members of the Security Council must stop using their veto to protect the Syrian regime, which has committed hundreds of thousands of violations over the past ten years, many of which constitute crimes against humanity and war crimes.

- Establish security and peace in Syria and implement the 'Responsibility to Protect' norm (R2P) in order to preserve Syrians' lives, heritage, and cultural artifacts from being destroyed, looted, and ruined.
- Request all relevant United Nations agencies to make greater efforts to provide humanitarian and food aid and medical assistance in areas where the fighting has ceased, and in internally displaced persons' camps, and follow-up with those states that have pledged the necessary contributions.
- Seriously work to achieve a political transition under the Geneva Communiqué and Security Council Resolution No. 2254, to ensure the stability and territorial integrity of Syria, and the dignified and safe return of refugees and IDPs.
- Allocate a significant amount of money for clearing mines left over by the Syrian conflict from the United Nations Mine Action Service, particularly in areas prepared to carry out this task with transparency and integrity.

International Community

- In light of the split within the UN Security Council and its utter incapability, action should be taken at the national and regional levels to form alliances to support the Syrian people and increase support for relief efforts. Additionally, the principle of universal jurisdiction should be applied 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' doctrine (R2P) in dozens of studies and reports and as a member of the International Coalition for the Responsibility to Protect (ICR2P) after all political channels through the Arab League's plan and then Mr. Kofi Annan's plan were exhausted, with the Cessation of Hostilities statements and Astana talks that followed proved equally fruitless. Therefore, steps should be taken under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations and the norm of the "Responsibility to Protect" doctrine, which was established by the United Nations General Assembly, should be implemented. The UN Security Council is still hindering the protection of civilians in Syria.
- Refer the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court, or quickly establish a tribunal dedicated to trying crimes against humanity and war crimes to end the cycle of impunity that has now spanned a decade in Syria.
- 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.
- Work to launch projects to create maps revealing the locations of landmines and cluster munitions in all Syrian governorates. This would facilitate the process of clearing them and educating the population about their locations.
- Support the political transition process and impose pressure to compel the parties to implement the political transition within a time period of no more than six months so that most of the violations end and millions of displaced people can safely and settled return to their homes.
- Stop any forcible return of Syrian refugees, since the situation in Syria continues to be unsafe, and put pressure to achieve a political transition that would ensure the automatic return of millions of refugees.

UN Human Rights office

- The OHCHR should submit a report to the Human Rights Council and other organs of the United Nations on the violations mentioned in this report and previous reports and should shed greater light on the issue of the continuing killing in Syria.

Independent International Commission of Inquiry (COI)

- Launch extensive investigations into the cases included in this report and previous reports. SNHR is willing to cooperate and provide further evidence and data.
- Focus on the issue of landmines and cluster munitions within the next report.
- Work on identifying the responsibility of individuals within the Syrian regime who are involved in crimes against humanity and war crimes, publish their names to expose them to international public condemnation, and end all dealings with them at every political and economic level.

International, Impartial, and Independent Mechanism (IIIM)

- Collect further evidence about the crimes documented in this report, and provide an exchange of experiences with Syrian organizations working in the field of documentation, data collection and analysis.

The United Nations Special Envoy for Syria

- Condemn the perpetrators of these crimes and of the 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 transitional governing body.
- Call for rapid implementation of democratic political change that restores victims' rights and embodies the principles of transitional justice.
- There is no sense in pursuing any political process in light of the continued bombing of hospitals and UN aid, and the pursuit of a zero-security military solution by the Syrian regime and its allies, and the UN Envoy must acknowledge this.
- Clearly assign responsibility to the party responsible for the death of the political process,

and disclose to the Syrian people the timing of the end of the political transition process.

Syrian regime

- Stop indiscriminate shelling and targeting of residential areas, hospitals, schools and markets.
- End the acts of torture that have caused the deaths of thousands of Syrian citizens in detention centers.
- Ensure compliance with UN Security Council resolutions and customary humanitarian law.
- Provide detailed maps of the locations where the regime planted landmines, especially in civilian areas or near residential communities.

Russian regime

- Completely cease the bombing of hospitals, protected objects, and civilian areas, and respect customary international law.
- As a guarantor party in the 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 allow the unconditional passage of humanitarian aid to besieged areas.
- Provide detailed maps of sites where Russian forces have launched cluster munition attacks, issue these to the United Nations and inform the Syrian public about them, thus facilitating the disposal of unexploded ordnance.

The Coalition (US-led coalition and SDF)

- The states supporting the SDF should cease all forms of support until the SDF commits itself to complying with the rules of international human rights law and international humanitarian law. This is primarily the responsibility of the supporting states.
- The SDF should form a special committee to investigate incidents of violations committed by SDF forces, disclose the details of their findings and apologize for them, hold those responsible accountable, and compensate the victims and affected.
- Provide detailed maps of the locations where the SDF planted landmines, especially civilian sites or near residential communities.

All Armed Opposition factions/SNA

- 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.
- Launch investigations into the human rights violations that took place, hold those responsible accountable and make the findings of these investigations public for the Syrian people.
- Provide detailed maps of the locations where the Armed Opposition factions/Syrian National Army planted landmines, especially civilian sites or near residential communities.

Humanitarian organizations

- Develop urgent operational plans to secure decent shelter for internally displaced persons, primarily widows and orphans.
- Exert efforts in landmine clearance operations in parallel with relief operations whenever the opportunity arises.

Acknowledgment

Our most heartfelt gratitude goes out to the victims' families and friends, eyewitnesses, and local activists for their significant and valued contributions to this report.



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