

Brief Report: 167 Syrian Citizens, including 77 Children, Have Died Due to the Cold Since March 2011

An Urgent Distress Call for Nearly 700,000 People Recently Forcibly Displaced Due to Attacks by Russian-Iranian-Syrian Alliance Forces on Northwest Syria

SNHR

SYRIAN NETWORK FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

الشبكة السورية لحقوق الإنسان

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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.

Contents:

- I. Introduction
- II. The Death Toll Due to the Cold in Syria
- III. The Catastrophic Situation of IDPs from Idlib Region Threatens the Risk of Deaths Due to the Cold
- IV. Conclusions and Recommendations

I. Introduction

Syria and the region are currently in the grip of a wave of severe cold, with the temperature in Syria in the past two days reaching minus 8 degrees. At the same time, Since the past month, nearly 689,000 persons have been displaced in northwest Syria due to military operations launched by the Syrian-Iranian-Russian alliance on several cities and towns there with no regard for the rules of international humanitarian law, which provide for the prohibition of military practices that cause civilians to panic and thus force them to leave their homes and properties and to be displaced. According to the Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR), the Syrian-Iranian-Russian alliance have systematically violated all of these prohibitions, including specifically targeting the civilian population for attack and subjecting it to barbaric indiscriminate shelling with various types of weapons, including dropping barrel bombs on residential neighborhoods; these free-falling barrel bombs fall randomly according to the air current. This indiscriminate bombardment, along with the arrests and killings of civilians by regime, Russian and Iranian forces in areas previously under rebel control, was the main reason that the cities' residents were forced to flee, with more than 95 percent heading towards areas not controlled by the Syrian regime and its allies. We have addressed the issue of forced displacement in [a wide range of reports](#).



Fadel Abdul Ghany, Chairman of the Syrian Network for Human Rights, says:

“The issue of deaths and injuries due to the cold is closely related to the issue of forced displacement, and we are making a distress call to save hundreds of thousands of displaced persons in tents, and to create international pressure through calling an urgent meeting of the United Nations General Assembly to stop the military attack and provide a humanitarian truce to make arrangements for the conditions of the displaced, so that the truce may continue at least for a period exceeding the current severe cold ravaging the region. We are absolutely certain that the Syrian regime and its allies do not care about the lives and suffering of these displaced persons, but rather are the main reason for this suffering; the rest of the world’s states should pay attention to this urgent humanitarian catastrophe, which threatens the lives of dozens of newborn babies, as well as the sick and the elderly.”

II. The Death Toll Due to the Cold in Syria

Over the past nine years, the SNHR’s team has documented (the methodology of our work in documenting victims can be found [via the link](#)) numerous cases of deaths due to cold, as a result of the following three main reasons:

Displacement: The displacement of these people who are thus forced to live in the open air or in rudimentary makeshift tents and the lack of clothing or heating materials was the primary cause of deaths, as we indicated earlier.

Siege: We documented a number of deaths due to the cold that occurred without people being displaced, where people died because of the cold inside their homes, being left without any means of heating due to the long siege imposed on them. We have documented many cases in each of the areas of Eastern Ghouta, the cities of Darayya, Mu’adamiyet al Sham, and in Madaya in Damascus Suburbs governorate, in addition to the old neighborhoods of Homs and the eastern neighborhoods of Aleppo, all of which witnessed lengthy and brutal sieges imposed by Syrian Regime forces, while the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces applied the same siege policy to al Hawl Camp in the northeastern suburbs of Hasaka, and in Ein Eisa Camp in the northern suburbs of Raqqa.

Torture: Cold is [one of the methods of torture](#) used inside the Syrian regime’s detention centers. The SNHR has documented the deaths of 25 civilians due to cold in the Syrian regime’s detention centers, where Syrian Regime forces deliberately withhold the necessary amount of pillows, blankets and clothes, with detainees also denied access to appropriate



clothing and often left only with underwear, due to their clothing being reduced to soiled unwearable rags, torn during the torture process or forcibly removed by regime personnel during prison inspections; all of these practices further expose detainees to the severe cold in the winter, when temperatures plummet to around freezing, not to mention that the detention centers have no adequate heating at all.

From March 2011 until January 31, 2020, the SNHR documented the deaths of 167 civilians as a result of the cold in Syria, including 77 children and 18 women (adult female). Among the victims are 25 civilians who died in Syrian regime prisons also as a result of the cold. The death toll is distributed according to the practices of the parties that caused these people to die from the cold, as follows:

- Syrian Regime forces: 146
- Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces: 11
- ISIS: Five
- Outside Syria: Five civilians died due to the cold while migrating to Europe

Examples of some deaths due to cold:

Ms. Huda Mohammad al Hafiri, from Douma city in Damascus Suburbs governorate, who was classified as having special needs, died on Wednesday, December 11, 2013, as a result of the cold after being deprived of any means of heating due to the siege imposed by Syrian Regime forces on the city.

On December 15, 2013, we documented the death of the infant Sham Malek Hasan al Sae-diya al Hariri as a result of the cold in al Yarmouk Camp due to the siege imposed by Syrian Regime forces there.

Mohammad Salah al Din Badawi Assaf and Ahmad Mohammad Fares both died in December 2013 due to the cold in Aleppo Central Prison, which is affiliated with Syrian Regime forces.

On January 23, 2019, we documented the death of the female child, [Habiba Uqba Dahham](#) al Khleif from Mouhasan village in Deir Ez-Zour governorate, after she fell ill as a result of severe cold when she was forced to flee along with her family from al Baghouz village, which was under the control of ISIS; her family was prevented by the SDF from taking her to one of the medical points in the area, and she died near al Omar Oil Field located in the Badiya of Theyban city in the eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour.



III. The Catastrophic Situation of IDPs from Idlib Region Threatens the Risk of Deaths Due to the Cold

At the beginning of December 2019, Syrian-Russian alliance forces escalated their attacks on the southern and eastern suburbs of Idlib after taking control of Khan Sheikhoun city and its environs, causing the displacement of these areas' people. In their next attack, they sought to control the strategically important city of Ma'aret al Numan city, with this attack also accompanied by a wave of displacement, which has been the worst on the humanitarian level since the beginning of the popular uprising in Syria; hundreds of thousands of people from Ma'aret al Numan cities and villages across the Jabal al Zaweya region were displaced toward Idlib city, to the northern suburbs of Idlib and to border areas; with Syrian Regime forces taking control of Ma'aret al Numan city in January 28, 2020. The military operations then extended to the north towards Khan al Sebel city, with another stage of displacement beginning in Saraqeb city, as well as in Ariha city in the north. In the second half of January 2020, the Sarmin, Binnesh, and Ma'aret Misreen areas witnessed a massive displacement movement of hundreds of families, including families who had been displaced previously from Ma'aret al Numan.

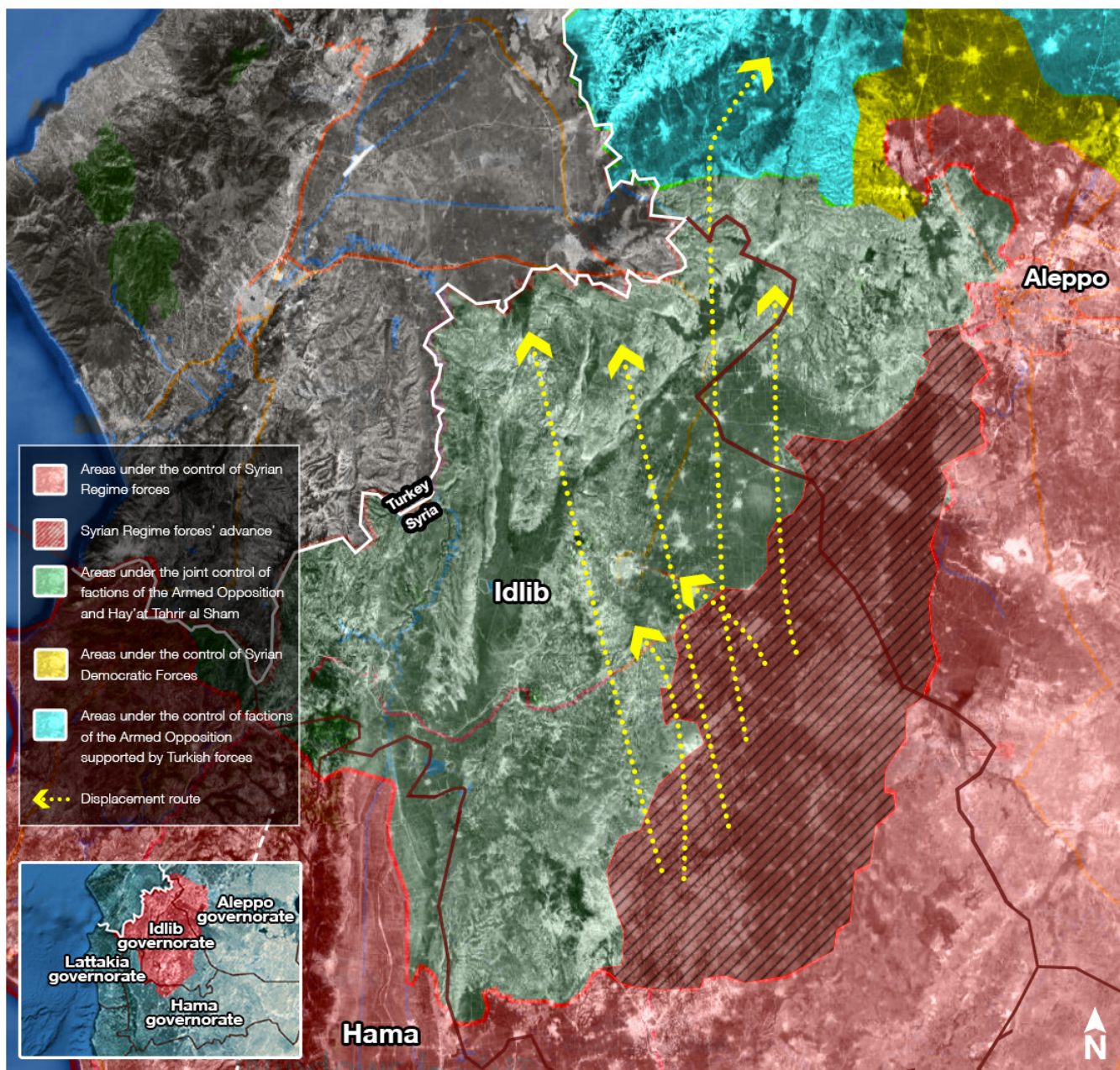
According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, [at least 689,000](#) displaced persons have been forced to leave their homes and land as a result of the military operations seen in the Idlib region since December 1, 2019, following the escalation of bombardment by the Syrian regime's forces and its ally, Russia on the region, in addition to hundreds of thousands of residents already living in makeshift tents in dire conditions due to previous military operations.

Hundreds of thousands of displaced persons are now living in separate areas, some of whom have spread across the Syrian-Turkish border, where hundreds of small camps have sprung up, while others have moved towards the mountainous areas in the northern suburbs of Idlib, with these people hardly finding any shelter in light of the subzero temperatures that have reached minus 8 degrees in the past days, which threatens further deaths, injuries and disease epidemics due to the severe cold.



Map showing the Syrian Regime forces' advance in the southern and eastern suburbs of Idlib and the displacement routes taken since December 1, 2019:

Map showing the Syrian Regime forces' advance in the southern and eastern suburbs of Idlib and the western suburbs of Aleppo, and the displacement routes taken by civilians between December 1, 2019, and February 12, 2020



VI. Conclusions and Recommendations

Syrian-Russian alliance forces have practiced the crime of displacement in a systematic, widespread and organized manner against the civilian population, which constitutes a war crime in non-international armed conflicts when committed as part of a deliberate or widespread attack against the civilian population (Articles 8 (2) (b) (7) and 8 (2) (e) (8) of the Statute of the International Criminal Court), and may also be considered crimes against humanity (Article 7 (1) (d) of the Statute of the International Criminal Court). We have not recorded any measures by these forces to provide shelter, health care or food to the displaced civilians.

Recommendations:

UN Security Council:

- The UN Security Council must pass a resolution concerning some seven million internally displaced persons in Syria that addresses forced displacement, to ensure that this does not become a long-term crisis, and must put pressure on the Syrian regime to end displacements, and enact laws aimed at preventing the plunder of displaced persons' properties and possessions.
- The UN Security Council must pass a resolution in order to establish a truce and create a safe area for the fleeing IDPs, which will constitute a relatively stable zone for them, ensuring that they won't be displaced again.

UN General Assembly

- The UNGA must attribute full responsibility to the ruling Syrian regime for the displacement of one-third of the Syrian people, including legal and material responsibility, and must also ensure that victims receive full compensation for the heavy losses they have suffered, including the return of looted properties to their owners.
- The UNGA must also hold an emergency meeting to address the conditions of nearly 700,000 suffering IDPs in the midst of a terrible cold wave, and devise solutions to protect these people from future displacements by creating a safe zone protected from all forms of bombardment.

The UN Secretary-General:

- The UN Secretary-General should clearly identify perpetrators of violations and contribute to condemning their actions, exposing their practices, and sending a message of solidarity to the affected communities. Meanwhile, ignoring any mention of the perpetrators of apparent violations encourages them to commit and repeat further violations.



- The UN Secretary-General should also request that the Security Council take urgent action, and hold an emergency meeting to ensure a ceasefire and to protect tens of thousands of displaced civilians.

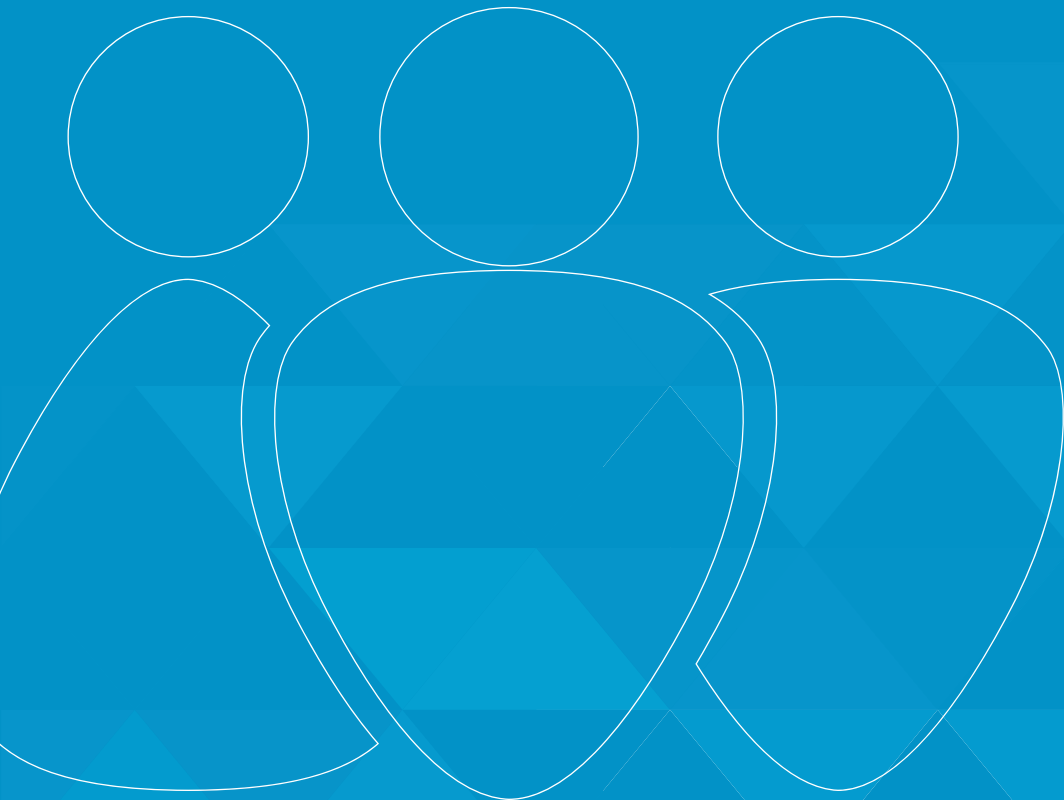
International Community:

- In light of the split within the Security Council and its utter inability, action should be taken at the national and regional levels to form alliances to support the Syrian people that can protect them from the daily killings and siege 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.
- The SNHR has repeatedly called for the implementation of the ‘Responsibility to Protect’ principle in dozens of studies and reports and as a member of the International Coalition for the Responsibility to Protect (ICRtoP) after exhausting all political channels from the Arab League’s plan, then Mr. Kofi Annan’s plan proved fruitless. Therefore, the steps recommended under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations should be adopted and 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 situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court
- Work to fulfil justice and achieve accountability in Syria through the United Nations General Assembly and the Human Rights Council and to implement the principle of universal jurisdiction.

UN OCHA

Urgent action must be taken at the international and regional levels, to provide urgent assistance to thousands of IDPs, and to put in place urgent implementation plans in order to secure decent housing centers equipped with heating devices suitable for severe weather conditions to avoid the deaths of more people due to the cold.





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