



On the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women: Ninth Annual Report on Violations against Females in Syria

28,405 Females Have Been Killed in Syria Since March 2011, 91 of Them by Torture, with 8,764 More Forcibly Disappeared

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AFP

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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.

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I. The Ninth Annual Report, Women in Syria Are Still Subjected to the Worst Types of Violations:

Women have special, gender-based requirements in armed conflicts, with international humanitarian law granting them wide-ranging protections. There are more than 560 articles in the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and their Additional Protocols of 1977 which protect both women and men as civilians or as combatants by laying down limitations on permissible means and methods of warfare, and also as combatants who have fallen into enemy hands (captured, sick and wounded). Among these 560 articles (all of which protect women) there are more than 40 specifically concerning women¹. In regard to these articles of legislation, however, a primary problem in Syria is the lack of practical implementation, with this problem apparently set to remain unresolved in the near future as there are no indications that any international bodies or institutions will exert effective pressure on dictatorial governments or on the parties to the conflict to force them to respect and apply international law; this means that the parties to the conflict do not respect or apply these articles, which are disregarded as though they did not exist. This issue becomes more complicated in the case of Syria where the ruling authority governing the state is the primary violator of all these articles, and the most prolific perpetrator of violations amongst all the parties involved in the conflict, with some of its violations amounting to crimes against humanity²; despite the ruling authority governing the Syrian state being the party with primary responsibility for protecting its citizens, it is the one primarily responsible for killing, torturing and displacing them. Since the establishment of the Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR), nearly a decade ago, up until today, hardly a day has gone by without multiple grave violations of the rights of women in Syria being recorded, with these violations against women being practiced without any discretion or consideration for their wellbeing, and with some of them clearly being of a discriminatory nature.

The SNHR attaches pivotal importance to documenting crimes perpetrated against women and girls on our database, and referring in particular to these in all the reports, statements and news items we issue. We also issue dedicated reports and news reports on crimes against women, with part of the SNHR's database specifically reserved for cataloguing violations committed against the women of Syria by all parties to the conflict since 2011 to date. While this includes all the crimes we have been able to document, it should be emphasized that the crimes which have been documented represent, beyond a doubt, only a small fraction of the total number of crimes perpetrated.

¹ ICRC, Women and war - update to the ICRC project, <https://www.icrc.org/en/doc/resources/documents/misc/5g5cs4.htm>

² International Criminal Court, Rome Statute, Article 7, <https://www.icc-cpi.int/resource-library/documents/rs-eng.pdf>

On the occasion of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women every year, we issue an extensive report that includes the most notable violations committed against the women of Syria during the past year (since the previous year's International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women up to the same date in the present year), focusing particularly on broader, more harmful violations, such as extrajudicial killing, arbitrary arrest/detention, torture, sexual violence, forced conscription, displacement, and deprivation of education. These reports do not address the profound psychological trauma suffered by women as a result of the violations perpetrated against them and its effects on their lives, nor does it address other types of violations such as forced marriage of minors, forced marriage to members of the extremist ISIS group, and the consequences of this, including the birth of unregistered children, or the death or disappearance of husbands from ISIS or other organizations classified as terrorists, with SNHR working on issuing a special report concerning some of these cases in the upcoming period.

As documented on the SNHR database, the vast majority of violations have been perpetrated against men. It should also be noted that just as the majority of men in Syria are civilians who did not carry weapons, some women have carried weapons. Dedicating a database specifically to documenting violations against women and issuing reports on women does not suggest in any way that women are weak or less capable than their male counterparts. Indeed, Syrian women have shown immense courage and excellence in many major areas and fields, including media, monitoring and documentation (the majority of SNHR's department directors are women), the Civil Defense, medical, relief and political work, and other fields. We simply wish to stress is that women have different needs from men, and it must be acknowledged that they are more susceptible to marginalization, discrimination and poverty in armed conflicts³. In addition, the loss of large numbers of male family members, whether husbands, sons, or brothers, has had a devastating effect and doubled the burden on women (men account for more than 90% of the forcibly disappeared in Syria, as well as the vast majority of the victims killed since 2011). Additionally, there are categories of violations in which women are more vulnerable to being affected, such as sexual violence; although this, like enforced disappearance and other violations, is inflicted on men and women alike, women are more at risk of it, with the degree of risk generally being affected by the type of violation.

Syria ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 2003⁴, along with its ratification of two International Covenants⁵ and the Geneva

³ Charlotte Lindsey, Women facing war - ICRC study on the impact of armed conflict on women
https://www.icrc.org/en/doc/assets/files/other/icrc_002_0798_women_facing_war.pdf

⁴ United Nations, List of Countries that ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women,
https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=IND&mtdsg_no=IV-8&chapter=4&lang=en

⁵ United Nations, List of Countries that ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women,
https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=IND&mtdsg_no=IV-8&chapter=4&lang=en

United Nations, International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights,
<https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cescr.aspx>

Conventions⁶. Whilst it's true that all the parties to the conflict have violated women's rights, the Syrian regime has far exceeded all other parties, individually or collectively, in terms of the amount of crimes perpetrated by the regime in a regular and systematic manner, in particular those crimes violating the inherent right to life and survival, as well as the prohibition of torture, enforced disappearance and sexual violence, which amount to crimes against humanity.

This report is based on the SNHR' archive, which has grown steadily since March 2011 through daily monitoring and documentation of violations, including extrajudicial killings, arbitrary arrest, enforced disappearance, torture, conscription, sexual violence, attacks with various types of weapons, and attacks on vital civilian facilities, with all the statistics included in the archive being documented in accordance with [our methodology](#) and including all the information and details that we have been able to access and verify. This report outlines the record of violations against females by the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in Syria between March 2011 and November 25, 2020, which SNHR's team has been able to document, highlighting the most notable of these violations, particularly those which took place between November 25, 2020, and November 25, 2020.

This report also draws on the accounts and interviews we conducted with female victims and survivors, and with victims' relatives, or witnesses of incidents in different areas of Syria, either by meeting with them directly or through talking with them via communication platforms. In this report, we provide 11 accounts, which we obtained directly rather than from open sources. In some cases, we have used aliases to protect witnesses' privacy and prevent them from being harassed or prosecuted. Witnesses received no financial compensation or promises in exchange for interviews. We explained the purpose of the report beforehand to all the interviewees we spoke with, and obtained their consent to use the information they provided to serve the purposes of the report and the documentation processes. All these procedures are carried out in accordance with our internal protocols, which we have worked on for years, and we strive constantly to develop these to keep pace with the best practices in maximizing psychological care and minimizing potential trauma for the victims.

The violations documented in this report represent only the bare minimum of the actual severity and magnitude of the violations that have occurred and that we were able to document. Also, the report doesn't include any analysis of the profound social, economic, and psychological ramifications.

⁶ ICRC, Geneva Conventions 1949 and their Additional Protocols,
<https://www.icrc.org/en/doc/war-and-law/treaties-customary-law/geneva-conventions/overview-geneva-conventions.htm>

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

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“We face exceptionally severe challenges in documenting the many types of violations perpetrated against Syrian women during nearly a decade of armed conflict. The various controlling authorities strenuously resist any disclosure of these violations in every way possible, meaning we cannot provide even an approximate assessment of their full extent, which has led to many of these violations and the resulting suffering sustained by Syrian women remaining unaddressed. This suffering also includes the hundreds of children born as a result of forced marriage/ rape by individuals affiliated with extremist groups designated as terrorists who subsequently disappeared; this is only one of the many types of violations which have been unaddressed, with the contents of this report representing only the tip of the iceberg. Syrian society cannot recover and become stable without starting by acknowledging the various violations against women and working diligently to end these, prevent their recurrence, and mitigate their intense and continuous repercussions.”

II. Record of the Most Notable Violations against Females according to SNHR's Database:

Extrajudicial killing

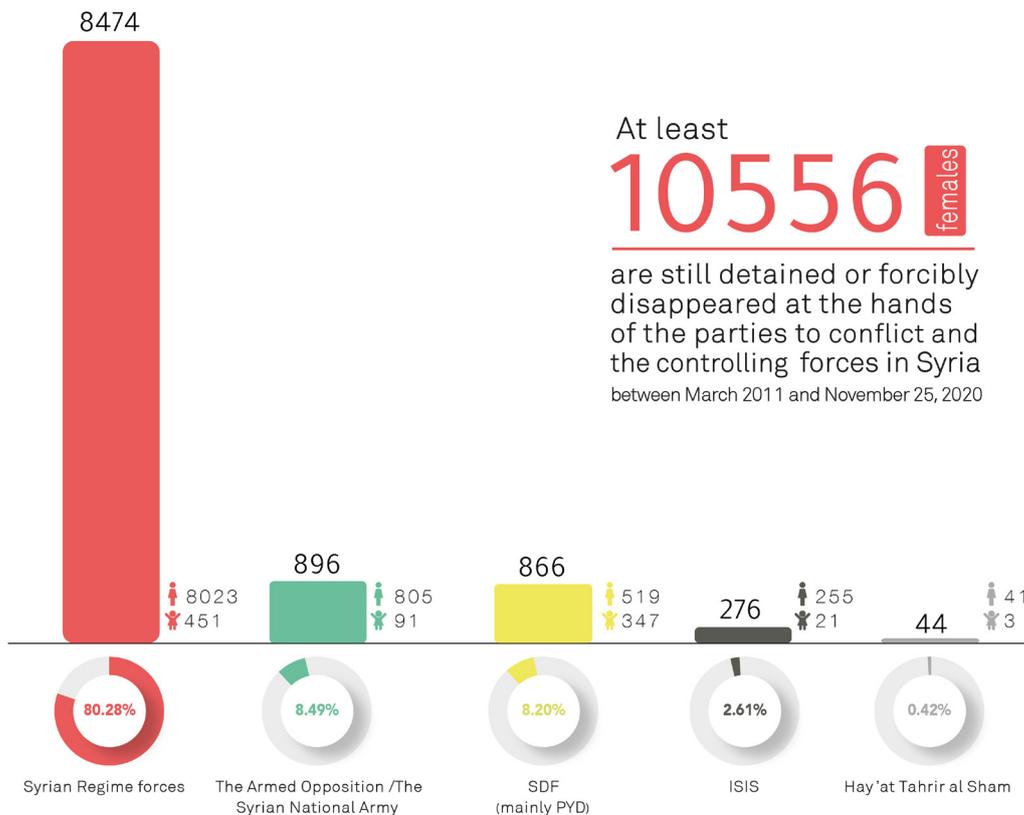
Between March 2011 and November 25, 2020, SNHR documented the deaths of 28,405 females at the hands of the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in Syria, distributed as follows:



- **Syrian Regime forces (army, security, local militias, and Shiite foreign militias⁷):** 21,943 females, including 11,918 adult females and 10,025 female children.
- **Russian forces:** 1,579 females, including 969 adult females and 610 female children.
- **ISIS (the self-proclaimed 'Islamic State'):** 980 females, including 586 adult females and 394 female children.
- **Hay'at Tahrir al Sham⁸ (an alliance composed of Fateh al Sham Front and a number of factions of the Armed Opposition):** 82 females, including 77 adult females and five female children.
- **Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (the Democratic Union Party):** 254 females, including 159 adult females and 95 female children.
- **Factions of the Armed Opposition:** 1,313 females, including 877 adult females and 436 female children.
- **US-led coalition:** 960 females, including 657 adult females and 303 female children.
- **Other parties:** 1,294 females, including 827 adult females and 467 female children.

Arbitrary arrest and enforced disappearance

As of November 25, 2020, according to SNHR's database, at least 10,556 of the females arrested since March 2011 are still detained or forcibly disappeared at the hands of the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in Syria, distributed as follows:



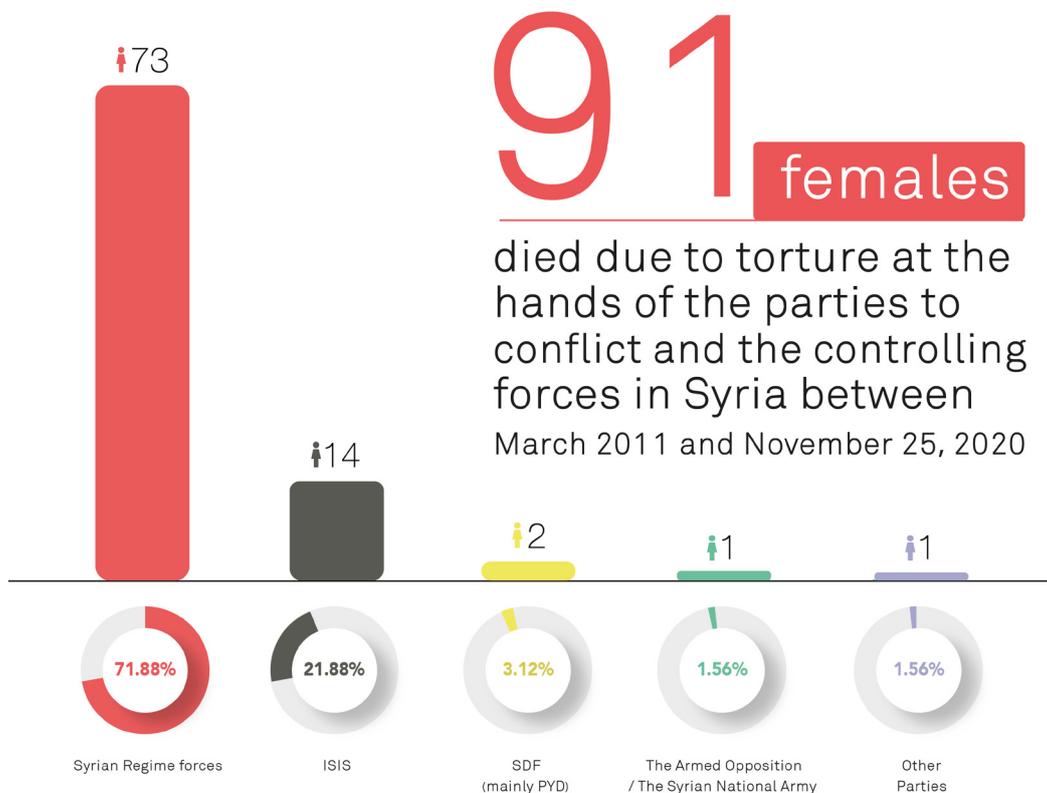
⁷ We generally use the term 'the Syrian regime' rather than 'the Syrian government', because the nature of the ruling power in Syria is a totalitarian dictatorship based on ruling the nation in an authoritarian fashion through a very limited group of individuals, primarily the President of the Republic 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.

⁸ The United Nations has designated it as a terrorist organization

- **Syrian regime forces:** 8,474, including 8,023 adult females and 451 female children.
- **ISIS:** 276, including 255 adult females and 21 female children.
- **Hay'at Tahrir al Sham:** 44 adult females, including 41 adult females and three female children.
- **Syrian Democratic Forces:** 866, including 519 adult females and 347 female children.
- **Factions of the Armed Opposition:** 896, including 805 adult females and 91 female children.

Female deaths due to torture

A total of 91 women (adult female) died due to torture at the hands of the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in Syria between March 2011 and November 25, 2020, distributed as follows:



- **Syrian regime forces:** 73.
- **ISIS:** 14.
- **Syrian Democratic Forces:** Two.
- **Factions of the Armed Opposition:** One.
- **Other parties:** One.

III. Details and Incidents of the Most Notable Types of Violations against Females in the Year Since the Last Annual Report:

1. Syrian Regime forces

A. Extrajudicial killing

The Syrian regime's military operations do not distinguish between civilians and combatants or between civilian and military targets. Rather, we have noted over the years that the vast majority of attacks have concentrated on civilian areas with the aim of terrorizing and retaliating against the Syrian masses supporting the popular uprising in revenge for their demands for freedom and a change in the ruling system, being forced by the regime and its allies to pay the heaviest price in an effort to force them not to reconsider any rebellion for decades to come. According to the SNHR database, between 65% - 70% of the human losses sustained in Syria since 2011 have been due to aerial bombardment (by fixed-wing warplanes - helicopters) of civilian areas whose populations include women and children, meaning that the occurrence of victims among them is inevitable. As we have documented on our database, females make up around 10 percent of the total civilian death toll since 2011, which is a high percentage and clearly shows the Syrian regime's deliberate targeting of civilians.

Between March 2011 and November 25, 2020, the SNHR team documented the deaths of 21,943 females, including 11,918 adult females and 10,025 female children, at the hands of Syrian regime forces, with the Syrian regime being responsible for about 78 percent of the total female death toll.

Through targeting females for killing and bombardment, the regime and other parties have further undermined Syrian families, leaving children in particular extremely vulnerable due to the lack of the protective, nurturing role played by mothers, aunts, grandmothers and other female caregivers in Syria. In addition to orphaning many children, these operations have also left tens of thousands of women and girls injured, suffering from severe and disfiguring burns, disabilities and deformities, whose painful impact is still being felt to this day. As for the psychological and emotional effects and dimensions of the terrible suffering inflicted on females since 2011, these far exceed what can be described or covered in this brief report.

Ms. Enaya Mahmoud Antouz, aged 34, from al Qalamoun region, northwest of Damascus Suburbs governorate, was killed on Saturday, January 11, 2020, when Syrian regime forces' fixed-wing warplanes fired missiles at Dawwar al Mal'ab al Baladi area 'al Arba'in Street', in the western outskirts of Idlib city.

Ms. Noufah Ahmad al Zaitoun, from al Bara village in the southern suburbs of Idlib governorate, was killed on Saturday, October 10, 2020, when Syrian regime forces fired a number of artillery shells at homes in al Sharqi neighborhood in al Bara village.

2. Arbitrary arrest, enforced disappearance, and torture

For years, Syrian regime forces have carried out widespread arrests of women, with these arrests broadly falling into four main categories:

1. As part of the regime's strategy of random arrests that aims to terrorize as much of society as possible, regardless of women's participation in the political uprising.
2. Through focused targeted operations against women active in the political uprising, including those involved in media, educational and research activities against the Syrian regime. This has even expanded to include female aid workers and those involved in humanitarian relief work, with dozens of women arrested for 'crimes' such as contributing to the transfer of medical or relief supplies to the besieged people.
3. Many women and girls have been targeted simply because of their kinship with dissidents or opponents of the Syrian regime, with the aim of deterring as many Syrian men as possible from participating in the popular uprising, for fear that their wives, sisters, mothers, daughters or other female relatives may be persecuted as a result. Women and girls have also been used as hostages with the aim of forcing their male relatives to surrender themselves in exchange for the release of their wives or daughters. In other cases, these arrests aim to create discord within female activists' families, in the hope the activists themselves will be held responsible for the suffering due to their political activity rather than the Syrian regime which is responsible for the arrest being held accountable, or in addition to the Syrian regime being held accountable. It is quite common for Syrian Regime forces to arrest, torture and often also rape a woman simply because her husband, son, brother, father or old male relative participated in or contributed to the uprising for freedom. We can also confirm that the Syrian regime has carried out kidnappings and taken many women as hostages.
4. For nearly a year, women have been tirelessly pursued and arrested in areas that the Syrian regime, backed by its Russian ally, has regained control over.

In their detention of females in the security branches' detention centers, Syrian regime forces do not take into account any considerations of the females' nature or needs, and subject them to the same conditions of detention men suffer, not distinguishing between them, with women being placed in cells adjacent to the cells where males are held, using the same bathrooms, and being searched and taken for interrogation by male officers, with no female officers to supervise them within the security branches. Female detainees are also subjected to all the same forms and methods of torture inflicted on men; we previously published [an extensive study](#) of the most notable physical and psychological methods of torture used in Syrian regime detention centers. According to the SNHR database, 73 females (adult women) have died as a result of torture in detention centers of the Syrian regime between March 2011 and November 25, 2020.

In many cases, women are arrested with their children, or arrested while they are pregnant, which increases their suffering during detention, where they are deprived of all their physical or psychological needs and of the necessary healthcare and medical care for them and their children, who are subjected to the same conditions imposed on their mothers throughout the period of their detention. Between March 2011 and November 25, 2020, we recorded at least 143 cases of children being detained along with their mothers, and at least 87 births in detention centers, with all these babies suffering from a complete lack of post-natal health care and a total absence of any provision of their needs, resulting in the deaths of seven of the babies.

Female political detainees or those detained in connection with expressing their opinion are often held within the sections designated for the detention of female criminals accused of theft, murder, drug-dealing, etc. in civilian prisons, which increases their suffering. Detainees are subject to kangaroo trials in courts that lack the most basic standards of fair litigation, such as the [Counter-Terrorism Court](#), military courts and Military Field Courts ('al Midan' courts), with these trials, occurring only when the detainees are transferred to civilian prisons. However, detainees in security branches and unofficial detention centers are not subject to any trial or held in connection with any specific charges. According to the SNHR database, as of November 25, 2020, at least 8,474 females, including 8,023 adult females and 451 female children, arrested since March 2011 are still detained or forcibly disappeared in the official and unofficial detention centers of the Syrian regime. During their time spent in custody in regime security branches' detention centers, female detainees are denied access to or contact with their families and prevented from appointing a lawyer, with their presence in these centers often lasting for months or years; when family members enquire about their whereabouts, regime authorities routinely deny having arrested them, with arbitrary arrests often going on to be classified as enforced disappearance.

Mrs. Heyam Muhammad al Nafea, born in 1985, came from al Qouriya city in the eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate. She was arrested on Tuesday, March 3, 2020, by Syrian regime forces at the Immigration and Passport Building in Damascus city, and was taken to the regime's infamous Palestine Branch in the city. Almost since then, she has been classified as forcibly disappeared, with nobody, including a lawyer, being allowed to visit her.

On Monday, May 11, 2020, Syrian regime forces notified her family of her death 10 days earlier on Friday, May 1, 2020, notifying them that they could collect her body from the Tishreen Military Hospital in Damascus city. According to information SNHR has received, she was in a good health at the time of her arrest, indicating that she probably died due to torture and medical negligence.

We spoke with Mr. Abdul Baqi⁹, a relative of the victim, Heyam, who said, “Heyam was arrested upon her visit to the Immigration and Passports Department in Damascus city in order to extract a country visit request for her brother, who works in Lebanon. Less than two months after her arrest, we learned that she had died in the Palestine Branch about ten days after her arrest, with her husband receiving a call from the Military Hospital, in which he was informed of her death. It was written on the death certificate that the cause of death was a heart attack.” Abdul Baqi added that the security forces had informed Heyam’s husband when she was taken to the Palestine Branch that they would take some action and then release her.

Rawdah al Mughir, Sara Ibrahim al Thelli, and Nisreen Ibrahim al Thelli, from al Mouwazafin neighborhood in Deir Ez-Zour city, were arrested by Syrian regime forces on Friday, April 3, 2020, as they were returning from areas under the control of Syrian Democratic Forces to their homes in al Mouwazafin neighborhood, and taken to an undisclosed location.

The SNHR spoke with Mr. Ahmad al Mughir¹⁰, a relative of Rawdah, who told us, “The brother of Sara and Nisreen al Thelli, who is a member of the Syrian regime forces in Deir Ez-Zour city, called for his two sisters to return from areas under the control of Syrian Democratic Forces to Deir Ez-Zour city; after he insisted, they agreed to return with one of their relatives, Rawdah al Mughir. Upon their arrival in al Mouwazafin neighborhood in Deir Ez-Zour city, Syrian regime forces were waiting for them, arrested them and took them to an undisclosed location.” Ahmad said that they learned later that Syrian regime forces charged the women with working for the Syrian Democratic Forces, adding that these charges are not based on any evidence. All three women are still forcibly disappeared.

On Wednesday, August 12, 2020, Syrian regime forces released six women and a female child - who had been arrested in 2015 - as part of exchange deals they had conducted with Hay’at Tahrir al Sham in Ma’aret al Na’san area in the northern suburbs of Idlib governorate; in exchange, Hay’at Tahrir al Sham handed over three Syrian regime forces personnel who they had previously captured, including a captain. We retain information about them and the conditions of their arrest in our archives.

We spoke with Ms. A.L.¹¹, one of the women released in the exchange deal, who related how she was arrested while she was passing through one of the Syrian regime’s checkpoints in Homs city in 2015, saying, “They took me from the checkpoint to the Military Security branch, where I stayed for 20 days in a solitary cell without anyone speaking to me; I used to hear the sounds of torture and crying on a daily basis. One time, I banged hard on the door and screamed, telling them to stop beating a young man whom they were torturing in front of my cell, so an officer entered and hit me with the stick and said: “I will put you next to him if you make a sound again”. The next day, they

⁹ Via phone on May 12, 2020

¹⁰ Via phone in May 2020

¹¹ Via phone on September 6, 2020

took me out for interrogation, and I learned that I was detained because of my father who works in Idlib, who I visited there several times in previous years, in secret. The interrogator told me that I would not get out of prison and would be executed, then he returned me to the cell, where I stayed for five months, during which they put women detainees with me and then transferred them to undisclosed locations. After that, I was transferred to Damascus and then to Adra Central Prison, and I was to be tried at the Field Court 'al Midan'. I remained in prison until I was released as part of the exchange deal, and I did not know yet what the ruling was under which I was detained, because I did not appear before any court." Ms. A.L. said that she [was transferred](#) ten days before her release to the State Security branch with other women, some of whom were with her in Adra Prison, while some of them were brought from other security branches.



Ms. Nedal Yasin al Balkhi, her husband Fadel Muhammad al Balkhi and their daughter Maha Fadel al Balkhi, from al Najih village in the suburbs of Daraa governorate, who lived in al Yarmouk Camp, south of Damascus city, were born in 1957, 1950 and 1989 respectively. They were arrested by Syrian regime forces on Sunday, May 26, 2013, in al Tadamun neighborhood, south of Damascus city, and taken to an undisclosed location.

The SNHR spoke with Ms. Huda Abu Halawa¹², a relative of the Balkhi family's, who told us, "On May 26, 2013, Nedal decided to go with her husband Fadel and their daughter Maha to prefabricated housing in al Tadamun neighborhood, south of Damascus city, to check on the house of her detained son Anas. Before entering the house, a patrol of the regime forces approached them, and when they asked the family what they were doing near this house, their response was that they came to check on their son Anas's house; then the patrol personnel arrested them and took them to an undisclosed location; since that time, we have not received any information about them."

¹² Via phone on October 6, 2020

Sisters Marwa, Suzan and Ula Suleiman al Zaid, from al Bseira village in the suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate, were residents of al Bardeh village in Damascus Suburbs governorate where they worked. The three sisters, who were born in 1994, 1998, and 2000 respectively, were arrested by Syrian regime forces at the regime's al Van checkpoint near al Bardeh village, south of Damascus Suburbs governorate, on Tuesday, March 5, 2013, along with their father, Suleiman, with the father and daughters being taken to an undisclosed location.

The SNHR spoke with Ms. Nour¹³, another of Suleiman Ali al Zaid's daughters, who recounted the details of the arrest incident: **"My father and sisters worked in a factory that manufactures detergents. The bus they were taking to the factory stopped at the al Van Checkpoint near al Bardeh village, with the personnel at the checkpoint asking them to disembark from the bus, under the pretext that my sisters didn't have ID cards, and they were taken to an undisclosed location."** Nour and her family have received no information about her father and sisters since their arrest. Nour adds, **"We tried to ask about them at Adra Central Prison, but we were beaten and threatened by regime forces personnel there."**



On Wednesday, February 5, 2020, Syrian regime forces arrested five civilians, including an infant and two women, who come from al Iteiba town in the Eastern Ghouta in Damascus Suburbs governorate, after they were summoned to one of the regime's detention centers in al Iteiba town. They were taken to an undisclosed location.

On Monday, March 2, 2020, Syrian regime forces arrested a woman from al N'eima town in the eastern suburbs of Daraa governorate, in al Matar neighborhood in the center of Daraa city. We recorded that she was released on March 7, 2020, from the Military Security branch in Daraa city.

On Thursday, April 2, 2020, Syrian regime forces arrested a woman from Harasta city in the Eastern Ghouta, east of Damascus Suburbs governorate, while she was passing through one of the regime's checkpoints on the outskirts of Harasta city, and took her to an undisclosed location.

¹³ Via phone on June 20, 2020

On Saturday, August 22, 2020, Syrian regime forces arrested a woman after raiding her house on al Kurneish Street in Douma city in the Eastern Ghouta, east of Damascus Suburbs governorate, on charges of communicating with her relatives in northern Syria by phone, and took her to an undisclosed location.

On Friday, August 28, 2020, Syrian regime forces arrested a woman along with her infant, from al Sahwa town in the suburbs of Daraa governorate, while she was passing through one of the regime's checkpoints in Damascus city, and took them to an undisclosed location.

On Sunday, October 18, 2020, members of the Syrian regime's Air Security Force arrested one woman along with her child in al Sharqi Garage in Daraa al Mahatta area in Daraa city, and took them to the Air Security Branch in the city.

3. Sexual violence

Based on the record of former female detainees imprisoned or forcibly disappeared by the Syrian regime, and the [testimonies of survivors](#) of detention centers, we have a well-founded fear that the Syrian regime continues to use sexual violence against female detainees in its detention centers, with the regime providing no reason for us to believe that it has stopped practicing torture, including sexual violence, which has been used as an effective torture tool in order to extract confessions in connection with crimes not committed by the female detainee, or to obtain information or as a form of punishment, as well as to spread fear and humiliation among both female and male detainees. Several forms of sexual violence are routinely practiced during inspections, by forcing female detainees to undress and strip in front of guards, watching them while they use the bathrooms and toilets, and subjecting them to verbal sexual threats. Females are often more vulnerable to sexual violence during investigation and interrogation in order to break them and weaken their will. Many survivors told us that the security interrogator asked them intensely personal questions about their sex lives and demanded to know whether they were married or not, often with the aim of knowing whether or not they were virgins; we have noted that these practices are routine in the various security services in all Syrian governorates, not only in Damascus.

Detained women are subjected to other, physically invasive forms of sexual violence, including touching their breasts and thighs during transfers between security detention centers, especially when the distances are long, with special transport vehicles not being designated for females, who are transferred along with male detainees. We have recorded, in many cases, instances of sexual blackmail on the basis of barter, whereby females are subjected to sexual extortion in exchange for access to basic services such as food, water and other foodstuffs. In previous years, we have documented instances of sexual violence by Syrian regime forces during house raids in a widespread and deliberate manner, with regime personnel being given full authority and *carte blanche* by their superiors to perpetrate these acts with absolute impunity and with the tacit or overt approval of the responsible officers in order to spread fear and terror in Syrian society.

Syrian regime forces have also forced at least 11 female detainees, including girls under the age of 18, to appear on state television to make clearly coerced confessions of having had sex with members of factions of the Armed Opposition, with all these women and girls forcibly disappeared following their appearance and 'confessions'. The SNHR estimates that at least 8,021 incidents of sexual violence have been committed by Syrian regime forces, including approximately 879 incidents in detention centers and at least 443 cases of sexual violence against girls under the age of 18.

By inflicting sexual violence in a planned, systematic and widespread manner, the Syrian regime aims to force the population to flee their areas, and to break the people's will in order to force them to abandon their demands for freedom and democracy, and force them into submission; in a society that is generally conservative, such as Syria's, this is a particularly cruel form of revenge, with the aim of destroying the social fabric.

Sexual violence has also led to serious and severe physical and psychological trauma for the victims, who often suffer from despair, isolation and depression, with the effects being worsened and prolonged in light of the victims' sense of societal insecurity and lack of safety, as well as to the stigmatization and ostracism they face in their social environment, which leads many most women and girls to prefer not to report such acts, instead suffering in silence about the sexual violence they have been subjected to.

The SNHR spoke with Ms. Jihan al Hennou¹⁴, 25-year-old from Damascus Suburbs governorate, who was arrested by a patrol of Syrian regime forces while traveling on the Manbej-Aleppo Road on March 7, 2020, and taken to the Military Security branch in Aleppo city, subsequently being released on April 14, 2020. She told us, **"I was trying to travel to Izaz city to meet my family, and upon our arrival to an area near Manbej city, the checkpoint personnel refused to let us in and said that the crossings were closed and that no one was allowed to pass, so we turned back; on the way back, a regime patrol stopped us and asked for our personal IDs, and when they discovered that I was from Damascus Suburbs and on my way to Izaz, they put me in the patrol car, and took me to the Military Security branch in Aleppo, where an officer forced me to take off my clothes under the pretext of the investigation, and accused me of transferring money and weapons to terrorists in Izaz, knowing that I was only carrying a personal bag. He attacked me with humiliating insults and threatened to rape me, then he asked to return me to the cell, where I stayed for five days, before he summoned me again for investigation, and he took information from me about my family and the reason for my travel; during the investigation, he asked one of his personnel to beat me on my genitals, along with insults that I cannot forget to date."** Jihan told us that she was released after her family paid a sum of money to the officer who investigated her, who threatened her before leaving that if they re-arrested her while she was traveling, she would not leave the branch without being raped.

¹⁴ Via phone on August 8, 2020

2. Russian forces

Since the first day of their military intervention in Syria on September 30, 2020, Russian forces have committed killings deliberately and in a widespread manner through aerial bombardment of populated areas, such as markets, city centers, gatherings, residential buildings, and vital facilities, and failed to distinguish between civilians and combatants. In [our reports, we have documented](#) most of the types of weapons deployed by Russian forces since the start of their military intervention in Syria, including cluster munitions, incendiary munitions, [fortified piercing missiles](#), [Caliber missiles](#), and Toshka-style missiles. According to the SNHR database, Russian bombardment with various types of weapons has resulted in the deaths of 1,579 females as of November 25, 2020, including 969 adult females and 610 female children. We have also documented many attacks using the double-tap strike¹⁵ tactic. We have issued numerous reports documenting the massacres and violations inflicted by the Russian bombardment, most recently [on the fifth anniversary of Russian intervention in Syria](#).

Ms. Amal Mustafa, aged 20, from Kafr Joum village in the western suburbs of Aleppo governorate, was killed on Monday, January 20, 2020, when fixed-wing warplanes, which we believe were Russian, fired missiles on Kafr Joum village.

Ms. Sabihah Der'ab, from Shamikou area in the western suburbs of Aleppo governorate, was killed on Monday, February 3, 2020, when fixed-wing warplanes, which we believe were Russian, fired a missile at a microbus carrying IDPs from Shamikou area in the western suburbs of Aleppo governorate while it was passing through Jam'iyet al Rahhal area in the western suburbs of Aleppo governorate heading towards safer areas.

Ms. Amenah Dani, from Kansafra village in the southern suburbs of Idlib governorate, died on Friday, June 12, 2020, of her wounds sustained on Tuesday, June 9, 2020, when fixed-wing warplanes, which we believe were Russian, fired missiles at the outskirts of Balyoun village in Jabal al Zaweya in the southern suburbs of Idlib governorate.

3. Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (the Democratic Union Party)

A. Extrajudicial killing

Since the first days following the establishment of the PYD's Self-Management forces in January 2014, the Syrian Democratic Forces have practiced indiscriminate shelling of areas outside their control, have engaged in clashes in populated areas, and have planted large numbers of mines in homes and agricultural land before withdrawing from areas under their control, in addition to carrying out indiscriminate shootings, sniping and executions during raids and incursions; we also documented SDF personnel committing several ethnicity-related massacres. All these practices have resulted in the deaths of civilian victims, including females.

¹⁵ A tactic used based on the principle of bombing a previously targeted site within a short period, allowing sufficient time for concerned local people and paramedics to gather at the location to help those wounded in the first airstrike before carrying out the second bombing, in order to inflict the greatest possible human and material losses.

Between January 2014 and November 25, 2020, we documented the deaths of 245 females, including 159 adult females and 95 female children, at the hands of the SDF.

Ms. Turfa Meqdeh, from Afrin city in the northern suburbs of Aleppo governorate, was killed on Monday, January 20, 2020, when Syrian Democratic Forces' artillery forces fired a number of shells targeting al Shar'iya neighborhood in Afrin city.

Ms. Athraa Abdul Hamid al Khayer, from al Hawayej village in the eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate, was killed on Tuesday, August 4, 2020, when Syrian Democratic Forces personnel opened gunfire indiscriminately at houses in al Hawayej village, following a protest in the village.

B. Arbitrary arrest, enforced disappearance, and torture

Syrian Democratic Forces' detentions of women can be divided into four main categories:

1. Detention/ kidnapping with the aim of conscripting girls and women into its forces for use in combat operations, with this category representing the majority of the detention cases that occurred within the year since the last annual report.
2. In the context of a close kinship between the detainees and factions of the Armed Opposition or ISIS; these girls and women are detained without evidence, with mere suspicion being considered sufficient, since the arrests are not carried out according to judicial warrants, as we have recounted in detail [in the monthly reports](#) that we issue.
3. Some women and girls are detained for criticizing the Syrian Democratic Forces' practices.
4. We have recorded cases of women and girls being arrested for visiting areas under the control of the Armed Opposition, being detained upon their return at Syrian Democratic Forces' security checkpoints.

According to the SNHR database, at least 866 of the females arrested since the group's establishment, including 519 adult females and 347 female children, are still detained or forcibly disappeared in SDF detention centers as of November 25, 2019.

During their detention in SDF detention centers, females endure extremely poor conditions, including overcrowding, lack of ventilation and hygiene, and ill-treatment. During their detention, they are subjected to various methods of torture such as severe beatings, nail extraction, hair shaving, and falqa (foot-whipping). They are often mistreated on the basis of their ethnicity, denied healthcare and food, and held in cells lacking the basic conditions of detention. Women are also held without facing any specific charges and without any trial being held until long after their original detention, which can last for periods of several months or years. Torture, medical negligence and poor detention conditions have resulted in the deaths of two women in SDF detention centers.

Ms. Seham al Khalaf, born in 1986, from Raqqa city, who works in a sewing workshop, was arrested by Syrian Democratic Forces on Monday, September 7, 2020, in a raid on her home in the city's al Thakana neighborhood, and taken to an SDF detention center in the city. She was released on Wednesday, September 30, 2020.

We spoke with Ms. Seham¹⁶, who informed us, “One day before the raid on my house, an Asay-ish member came to my workplace and told me to visit the General Security Center in the city, but I did not go because I didn't know the reason behind the summons. The next night, a patrol came to my house and arrested me along with my husband. They took me to their security headquarters, then released my husband one day later, while I remained in detention. During the investigation, they charged me with being a regime agent because I travel from time to time to regime areas to visit my family, but I denied the charge. They searched my cell phone and they found nothing to prove their charge against me, then they started screaming at me to intimidate me and push me to confess, then they threatened to hand me over to the regime if I did not confess. I stayed in a solitary cell for a whole week, being interrogated by them on a daily basis, being accused of the same allegation, as well as being beaten with a whip on my hands and feet.” Seham added, “I had nothing to confess to; then they transferred me to another prison near the silos, where I was put in a room where there were other women and the treatment was very bad.” Seham added that nearly a month later, she was taken before a judge at the Court of Raqqa who ordered her release.

On Monday, March 2, 2020, members affiliated with Syrian Democratic Forces carried out a campaign of raids and arrests in Theyban town in the eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate. SNHR documented the arrest of three civilians, including one woman, who were taken to an undisclosed location.

Rahaf Hasan al Saleh, aged 21, from Homs city, was arrested by Syrian Democratic Forces on Monday, June 15, 2020, as she was passing through an SDF' checkpoint in Ein Eisa city in the northern suburbs of Raqqa governorate while travelling to Tal Abyad city in Raqqa suburbs. We recorded that she was released on Sunday, June 21, 2020.

Khadijah Muhammad Hasan, from Deir Ez-Zour city, was arrested by Syrian Democratic Forces on Monday, March 2, 2020, in Theyban town in the eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate, and taken to an undisclosed location.



Rahaf Hasan al Shaleh

¹⁶ Via phone on October 2, 2020

Buthainah Qasem al Awwad, from Deir Ez-Zour city, was arrested by Syrian Democratic Forces on Monday, March 9, 2020, in Theyban town in the eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate, and taken to an undisclosed location.

C. Forced conscription

The SDF has continued to carry out forced conscription in a widespread manner in areas under their control, targeting both female adults and children, forcing them to join the SDF's ranks, which has deprived these female children of education, with the group taking them by force to their recruitment camps after kidnapping them from streets, markets and their homes, preventing the detained girls and women from communicating with or visiting their families or receiving visits from them and forcing them directly into combat operations. In most of cases, the families do not disclose the kidnapping of their daughters out of fear for their fate, or prefer to allow local mediation to ensure they are returned to their families.

The **Ciwanên Şoreşger** ('Revolutionary Youth') Organization¹⁷ and the Women's Protection Units are among the most prominent parties responsible for child-conscription operations and for placing children in the training camps and in the Syrian Democratic Forces' combat units. We have noted an increase in cases and incidents of kidnapping of female and male children by both these entities since the beginning of 2020. Many of the conscripted children's families told us that they had searched for their children and asked about them at the SDF headquarters, but had received no response to their inquiries, while a number of the desperately worried parents were threatened with violence if they reported that their child had been conscripted.

Female child, Rawan Omran al Alikou, from al Derbasiya city in the northern suburbs of Hasaka governorate, who was born in 2004, was kidnapped for forced conscription by Syrian Democratic Forces on Thursday, October 8, 2020, in al Qameshli city in the northern suburbs of Hasaka governorate, and taken to an undisclosed location.

The SNHR spoke with the father of the female child Rawan al Sayyed Omran¹⁸, who told us that Rawan, an eleventh-grade student, used to go daily to her school located in al Qameshli city; on October 6, she was late in returning home. He adds, "I called her, and she told me that she was in training (as she is a football player) and she was tired and would not be able to return, so I contacted the coach and he told me that she was safe, and I could come the next day to pick her up. I arrived in al Qameshli the next day around 12:00 noon, with the coach



Female child Rawan Omran al Alikou

¹⁷ The Ciwanên Şoreşger Organization, known as the 'Revolutionary Youth', is an armed organization that operates within the areas controlled by the SDF and under its auspices and receives its instructions from the PKK

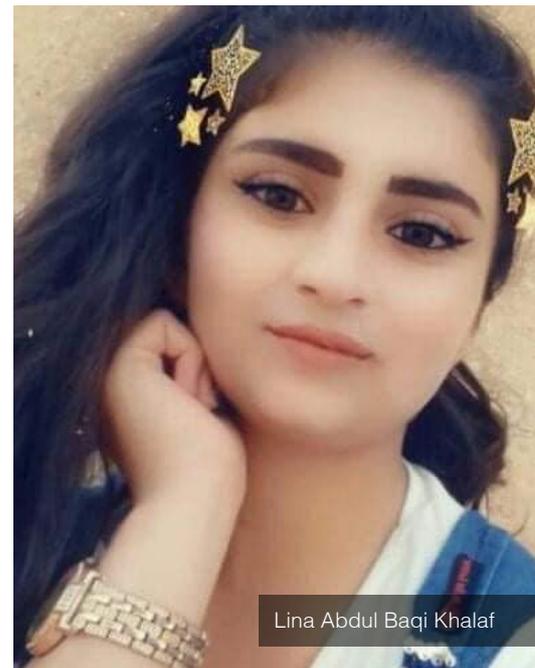
¹⁸ Via WhatsApp on October 9, 2020

calling me at the time and telling me that a girl named Sahar al Hussein told Rawan that they should meet before Rawan's return home." The child's father adds that he called his daughter on the phone but she told him that she was not able to speak, then her cell phone was switched off, "The next day, on Thursday, I managed to find Sahar al Hussein's number and called her; she denied her relationship with Rawan, and after several attempts, she said to me: 'Uncle! Rawan was with me at home and my mother [called Parwen] took her to the Asayish Center.' I asked Sahar about her mother's work. She said that she is a member of the Women's Asayish Center in al Jazira province, and she provided me with her mother's work address. Sahar said to me: 'Go now before they take Rawan to another place.' I went there and asked about my daughter Rawan, but they denied her presence. Until this moment, I have no information about my daughter."

[Hifi Fahd Ghaibi](#), a 15-year-old girl from al Qameshli city in the northern suburbs of Hasaka, was kidnapped by gunmen affiliated with the 'Ciwanên Coreger' for forced conscription on Thursday, June 25, 2020, after finishing the day's classes in a ninth-grade educational course in al Qameshli city, and taken to one of the group's recruitment centers in Hasaka governorate.

Lina Abdul Baqi Khalaf, a female child born in 2005, from Tal Karam village, which is administratively a part of al Derbasiya district in the northwestern suburbs of Hasaka governorate, was kidnapped for forced conscription by Syrian Democratic Forces personnel in Tal Karam village on Thursday, July 2, 2020, and taken to an undisclosed location.

[Jacqueline Muhammad Ayyoub](#), a 14-year-old female child from Minas village, west of Ein al Arab 'Kobani' city, in the eastern suburbs of Aleppo governorate, was kidnapped for forced conscription by Syrian Democratic Forces personnel on Tuesday, July 7, 2020, while she was standing in front of her village's school, and taken to an undisclosed location.



Lina Abdul Baqi Khalaf

D. Sexual violence

The SDF has practiced many types of sexual violence against females, both in the group's detention centers and in the camps managed and administered by the group. Among the most prominent types of sexual violence committed are harassment during searches, and verbal sexual violence such as sexually explicit statements or threats of rape. We also documented many of these practices in [our report](#) on the violations against thousands of male and female detainees in al Hawl Camp, which is under the control of Syrian Democratic Forces.

We documented at least 11 incidents of sexual violence committed by SDF personnel as of November 25, 2019.

4. Hay'at Tahrir al Sham

A. Extrajudicial killing

Hay'at Tahrir al Sham has launched indiscriminate shelling during its attacks on areas outside its control, fought clashes within populated areas against its opponents in opposition factions, and engaged in indiscriminate gunfire during raids and searches of houses and camps, during which women and children were killed. These attacks resulted in the deaths of 82 females, including 77 adult females and five female children, killed by HTS between the emergence of al Nusra Front (currently known as Hay'at Tahrir al Sham) in January 2012 and November 25, 2019.

B. Arbitrary arrest, enforced disappearance, and torture

Hay'at Tahrir al Sham's detentions of women can be divided into three main categories:

1. In the areas under HTS' control, the group has targeted female activists with humanitarian organizations and working in the media field, charging them in connection with their activities, with allegations including treason, in order to pressure them to stop their work or to work within the limits and proscriptions imposed by HTS.
2. HTS has harassed women who participated in protests against it or who objected to its practices.
3. HTS targeted women simply for their kinship with their opponents in opposition factions, Syrian Democratic Forces, or ISIS.

According to the SNHR database, at least 44 females, including 41 adult females and three female children, are still detained or forcibly disappeared in HTS detention centers.

Detentions are not carried out by HTS according to judicial standards, a fact which we refer to on a regular basis in our monthly reports on cases of detention, with women imprisoned in HTS detention centers being subjected to harsh conditions of detention, including lack of ventilation, lighting and hygiene, as well as being subjected to severe psychological torture, including threats to kill them or have them executed. Additionally, these female detainees also face serious charges intended to intimidate them and force them to provide information about their work, as well as being subjected to other methods of torture such as severe beatings and denial of healthcare and food.

Nour al Shallou, a media activist and humanitarian worker, from al Atareb town in the western suburbs of Aleppo governorate, born in 1992, was arrested by HTS-affiliated personnel on Saturday, September 19, 2020, as she was leaving Sarmada Court in Sarmada city in the northern suburbs of Idlib governorate, and taken to an undisclosed location.



Nour al Shallou

We spoke with Mr. Hussein al Shallou¹⁹, Nour's uncle, who told us that Nour - the wife of Abdul Latif Abdul Rahman al Fajj, who was killed during the Syrian regime's incursion into al Atareb city in 2012 - had been engaged in a dispute with her husband's family over the custody of their three children, adding that the lawyer representing her husband's family had previously accused her of immorality-related charges, and had threatened her during earlier court hearings. Recalling the events surrounding her arrest, Hussein said: "Nour drove her car to the Sarmada court to attend a court session related to the custody of her children. On that day, Nour filed a lawsuit against the opponent's lawyer regarding his attacks on her and his immorality-related accusations against her, with the aim of winning the custody case. During the session, Hay'at Tahrir al Sham security personnel entered to arrest Nour under the instructions of the opponents' lawyer, but the Chief Prosecutor - Abu al Farouq - prevented them from arresting or detaining her. The security personnel waited for the session to end, and arrested Nour immediately after her exit from the court, and her fate remained unknown to her family, although the family contacted the Salvation Government's Minister of Justice several times to request permission to see Nour or find out any information about her fate." Mr. Hussein told us that about two months after Nour was arrested and forcibly disappeared, the family learned that she has been charged with treason and other criminal charges, but Hay'at Tahrir al Sham had not provided any opportunity for family members to inquire about her or appoint a lawyer for her.

On Thursday, November 19, 2020, Hay'at Tahrir al Sham issued [an official document](#) citing its justification for the arrest of the activist Nour al Shallou.

Ms. Mahdiyah Ahmad al Hmoud, from Khafsin village in the northern suburbs of Hama governorate, was arrested by Hay'at Tahrir al Sham personnel on Monday, May 11, 2020, along with her husband Daher Hussein al Hmoud, in Maram IDP Camp west of Sarmada city in the northern suburbs of Idlib governorate. We recorded that she was released the next day.

Ms. Sanaa Khaled al Qasem, from Kafranbel city in the southern suburbs of Idlib governorate, was arrested by Hay'at Tahrir al Sham personnel on Monday, May 11, 2020, in a raid on her house in Idlib city, with the aim of pressuring her to reveal the hiding place of her husband, Ammar al Swaid, who is an ISIS member previously detained by HTS in the eastern suburbs of Idlib; it seems that he managed to escape following the raids on the Idlib Central Prison in March 2019. Ms. Sana was subjected to torture and verbal insults for two days to force her into revealing her husband's whereabouts, before she was released on Thursday, May 14, 2020.

¹⁹ Via phone on November 18, 2020

C. Restricting and assaulting women

Hay'at Tahrir al Sham has forced women in the areas under its control to submit to a number of proscriptions and has imposed rules regarding clothing, as well as limiting their freedom of movement unless accompanied by male relatives. With many of these rules, women have been specifically targeted, which is blatant discrimination against women, and constitutes a violation of a large number of rules of international human rights law, with these practices being carried out through the group's so-called Hesba body.

At the beginning of May 2020, Hay'at Tahrir al Sham established the Hesba body known as 'al Falah Center', which is supervised by individuals of foreign nationalities. SNHR [documented](#) the appearance of a number of vehicles affiliated with the new Hesba body, which have been seen in markets and public gathering places in Idlib city, with the objective of increasing the restrictions on people in the areas under the group's control; for instance, in these areas women are forbidden from sitting with men in restaurants and offices, publicly smoking Shisha, or entering any store where the male owner or a male staff member is alone, in addition to many other regulations which severely hamper and proscribe women's and girls' movements and personal human liberties, implemented according to the perspective of HTS' extremist ideology and enforced on everyone in areas under the group's control. Anyone violating these extremist proscriptions is subject to fines.

In addition to the aforementioned severely restrictive practices, we have documented many instances of HTS personnel physically and verbally assaulting women by beating or insulting them during their raids, searches and other actions in many of the areas under its control. Video filmed on September 6, 2020, in which masked gunmen affiliated with Hay'at Tahrir al Sham can be seen assaulting women in an IDP camp in the suburbs of Idlib governorate



5. The Armed Opposition/ the Syrian National Army

A. Extrajudicial killing

The indiscriminate shelling carried out by factions of the Armed Opposition/ the Syrian National Army over the past nine years has sometimes resulted in civilian casualties, including women, with a number of victims, including women, also killed during internal fighting between some factions. These practices resulted in the deaths of 1,313 females, including 877 adult females and 436 female children, killed by Armed Opposition/ Syrian National Army forces in different Syrian governorates since the initial formation of armed factions in early 2012 up until November 25, 2020.

Ms. Moumenah Tweikh, from al Bab city in the eastern suburbs of Aleppo governorate, died on Saturday, May 16, 2020, after being shot during clashes between two factions of the armed oppositions (al Hamzah Brigade and al Shamiah Front which are affiliated with the Syrian National Army) in al Bab city in the eastern suburbs of Aleppo governorate.

Ms. Sabihah Sidou Sadeq, from Darakir village, which is administratively a part of Afrin city in the northern suburbs of Aleppo governorate, died on Wednesday, July 22, 2020, after being shot during clashes between two armed opposition groups affiliated with the Jaysh al Sharqia Brigade of the Syrian National Army in Afrin city.

B. Arbitrary arrest, enforced disappearance, and torture

Factions of the Armed Opposition/ the Syrian National Army have established many official detention centers, as well as converting their military headquarters into detention centers, and have targeted females for detention/ kidnapping, either because of their activities or due to their objection to these forces' practices in areas under their control. We have recorded many incidents in which females have been targeted due to their ethnicity, especially in Afrin city in the northern suburbs of Aleppo. This year, we have recorded mass detentions of a number of women while they were passing through areas under the control of the Syrian opposition.

Most of these incidents took place without any judicial warrant, with no clear charges against those detained, and without the participation of the police, who are the administrative body officially authorized by the judiciary to conduct arrests and detentions.

As of November 25, 2020, the SNHR team documented the continuing detention or enforced disappearance of at least 869 females, including 505 adult females and 91 female children, in detention centers of the Armed Opposition/ Syrian National Army.

During their detention in the detention centers belonging to the Armed Opposition/ Syrian National Army, detained women are routinely subjected to various methods of torture such as severe beatings, electrocution, death threats, and solitary confinement; detained women are also deprived of healthcare, food and other essential requirements, in addition to being deprived of their children if they are arrested with them. Torture and medical negligence have resulted in the death of one woman in a detention center of the Armed Opposition.

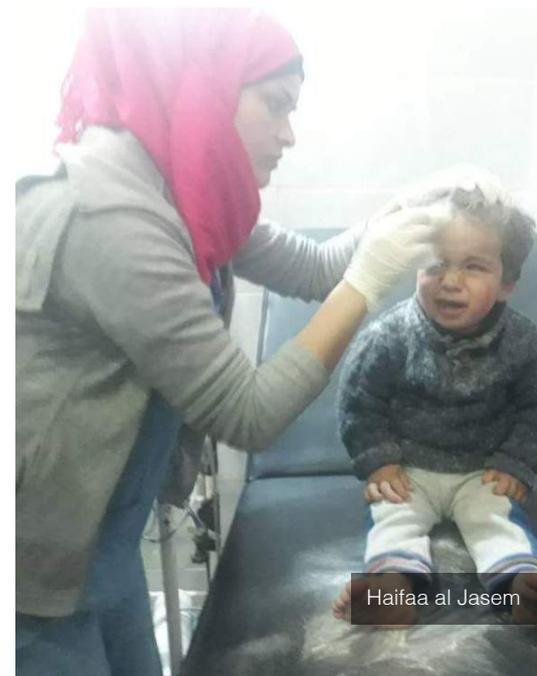
Ms. Walaa al Jumah, an employee of a local relief organization, from Sarmada city in the northern suburbs of Idlib governorate, was arrested by members of Syrian National Army's al Sultan Murad faction on Saturday, April 11, 2020, while she was working in the distribution of financial payments to the displaced in Jendeires town in the northern suburbs of Aleppo governorate. She was released on Sunday, June 28, 2020. She told SNHR, **"I was with a team from my organization working during a tour of some of the IDPs' houses to distribute financial payments. While we were in a house there, members of al Sultan Murad faction came and asked us about our work, then they went away; after a while, a car full of gunmen came and asked me to go with them. When I inquired about the reason, they pushed me and threw me into the car and drove off. While we were in the car, they took my cell phone and my bag, and covered my head with a cloth. They took me to a place I did not know, where I was insulted and threatened with murder, and they accused me of treason and investigating them, then they put me in the bathroom and closed the door. Two days later, they transferred me to the Political Security branch, and there they interrogated me about my work, and I stayed in the branch until they released me."** Walaa told us that the conditions of her detention were poor and she constantly heard the sounds of torture. Although she needed medicine in her bag on several occasions during her detention, they refused to give it to her. She learned that she was released after the mediation of the organization which she works for with the Political Security branch, as her kidnappers were unable to prove any of the charges brought against her.

A [video published](#) online on Friday, May 29, 2020, shows members of the military police and opposition factions raiding the headquarters of another opposition faction, al Hamzah Brigade, which is affiliated with the Syrian National Army, present in Afrin city in the northern suburbs of Aleppo governorate. In the video, detained women appear to be held inside the headquarters building. Going by the content of the video, SNHR estimates that eight women were being detained there at the time, including one holding an infant; we have managed to identify them as women who were kidnapped between 2018 and 2020 by gunmen, some of whom belong to Syrian National Army that we were able to identify, and others who we have not been able to identify, with some of these women's families being subjected to blackmail to secure their release. We note that the Military Police subsequently once again handed over the kidnapped women to al Hamza Brigade, with their fate remaining unknown up to the time of the publication of this report, except for one of them who was released.

We spoke with media activist Mr. Kamal Abu al Abd²⁰, who was one of the people who witnessed the incident in which the kidnapped women were found in the headquarters of al Hamza Brigade in Afrin city. He told us, “During the wave of anger that followed the killing of a civilian and a child on May 28 by members of al Hamza Brigade, a group of civilians and gunmen who had been displaced from the Eastern Ghouta came and attacked al Hamza headquarters in al Mahmoudiya Street and stormed the headquarters to arrest the members that killed the civilian and the child and assaulted another IDP. The members fled, with the families finding a group of kidnapped women in one of the rooms in the headquarters, one of whom was carrying an infant.” Kamal added, “After that, the Military Police came and took the kidnapped women away in their cars. Some of the women were screaming and calling out ‘We’ve done nothing wrong and we want to see our families!’” Kamal said that he had not received any information since then about the fate of the kidnapped women, adding that although the Military Police said that they would be tried at the Military Court in the Afrin region, they had disappeared again.

The kidnapped women who appeared in the video have been identified as:

Haifaa al Jasem, from Afrin city in the northern suburbs of Aleppo, was working as a nurse in Avrin Hospital in Afrin city before the Syrian National Army took control of the city in March 2018. She was detained/ kidnapped by gunmen affiliated with al Hamzat faction, one of the Syrian National Army factions in Afrin city.



Haifaa al Jasem

²⁰ Via WhatsApp on August 13, 2020

Nadia Hasan Suleiman, aged 20, from al Ras al Ahmar village, which is administratively a part of Afrin city in the northern suburbs of Aleppo governorate, was detained/ kidnapped by the Syrian National Army in May 2018.

We note that Nadia's husband, Ahmad Rashid, aged 24, was detained/ kidnapped by the Syrian National Army in May 2018 while he was passing through one of National Army's checkpoints on the Afrin-Kafr Janna Road in the northern suburbs of Aleppo governorate. Two weeks later, Nadia received a phone call from unknown persons, who told her that her husband was being held in 'Sajou Prison' in Izaz city in the suburbs of Aleppo governorate, and that she could visit him there. After the call, she went to the prison with her friends, although her contact with them was cut off. It was later revealed that she had been kidnapped.



Nadia Hasan Suleiman and her husband Ahmad Rashid



Roushan Amouni and her husband Abdul Aziz Hajj

Roushan Muhammad Amin Amouni, from Dar Kabir village, which is administratively a part of Afrin city in the northern suburbs of Aleppo governorate, was born in 1976. She was detained/ kidnapped by gunmen affiliated with al Hamzat faction, one of the Syrian National Army factions, on Saturday, June 9, 2018, in a raid on her home in Dar Kabir village, along with three of her family members.



Lonjin Muhammad Khalil Abdou

Lonjin Muhammad Khalil Abdou, from al Thahera al Dunya village, which is administratively a part of Afrin city in the northern suburbs of Aleppo governorate, was born in 1995. She was detained/ kidnapped by members of the '12th Division' of al Sultan Murad faction, one of the Syrian National Army factions, on Monday, June 25, 2018, along with her father Muhammad Khalil Abdou, born in 1968, in a raid on their home in al Thahera al Dunya village, and taken to an undisclosed location.

Roujin Muhammad Khalil Abdou, from al Thahera al Dunya village, which is administratively a part of Afrin city in the northern suburbs of Aleppo governorate, born in 2001, was detained/ kidnapped by members of the '12th Division' of al Sultan Murad faction, one of the Syrian National Army factions, on Wednesday, July 4, 2018, along with her uncle Kamal Khalil Abdou, born in 1966, in a raid on their home in al Thahera al Dunya village, and taken to an undisclosed location. We subsequently documented the release of Kamal Khalil Abdou in December 2018.



Nayrouz Anwar Bakr Abdou, aged 17, from Rajo village, which is administratively a part of Afrin city in the northern suburbs of Aleppo governorate, was detained/ kidnapped by gunmen affiliated with al Shamiah Front faction, one of the Syrian National Army factions, on Saturday, September 1, 2018, in a raid on her home in Rajo village, and taken to an undisclosed location, before she was released on Tuesday, June 2, 2020.



Rouken Manla, aged 27, from Jouqa village, which is administratively a part of Afrin city in the northern suburbs of Aleppo governorate, was detained/ kidnapped by gunmen affiliated with al Hamzat faction, one of the Syrian National Army factions, on Wednesday, September 5, 2018, along with her 35-year-old husband, Kawa Jamal. We note that Rouken was two months pregnant at the time of her detention, kidnaping, and gave birth to her baby, Roukan, inside the detention center.



Arin Dali Hussein, aged 21, from Kimar village, which is administratively a part of Afrin city in the northern suburbs of Aleppo governorate, was detained/ kidnapped by gunmen affiliated with al Hamzat faction, one of the Syrian National Army factions, on Thursday, February 27, 2020, and taken to an undisclosed location.

On Sunday, January 12, 2020, Syrian National Army forces carried out a campaign of raids and arrests in Kourkan village, which is administratively a part of Afrin city in the northern suburbs of Aleppo governorate. SNHR documented the detention of 11 civilians, including three women, who were taken to an undisclosed location.

On Wednesday, April 8, 2020, Syrian National Army forces carried out a campaign of raids and arrests in Kotana village, which is administratively a part of Afrin city in the northern suburbs of Aleppo governorate. SNHR documented the detention of five civilians, including one woman, who were taken to an undisclosed location.

On Tuesday, June 2, 2020, members of the Syrian National Army's Civil Police in Tarhin village, near al Bab city in the eastern suburbs of Aleppo governorate, detained a woman from al Sfirah city in the eastern suburbs of Aleppo governorate, on charges of being affiliated with ISIS, taking her to an undisclosed location.

On Sunday, September 6, 2020, Syrian National Army forces carried out a campaign of raids and arrests in Ma'batli district, which is administratively a part of Afrin city in the northern suburbs of Aleppo governorate. SNHR documented the detention of seven civilians, including two women, who were taken to an undisclosed location.

IV. Conclusions and Recommendations:

Legal conclusions

The parties to the conflict in Syria have not treated women in accordance with due regard for their gender as stipulated in international law, with Rule 134 of customary international humanitarian law²¹ stating that "The specific protection, health and assistance needs of women affected by armed conflict must be respected."

The parties to the conflict, in particular the Syrian regime which has perpetrated the largest number of violations in the conflict, have violated many of the articles pertaining to women, which are included in the Protocol II Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 1977, including: Violence to life and person, in particular murder of all kinds, mutilation, cruel treatment and torture; outrages upon personal dignity, in particular humiliating and degrading treatment²², rape, enforced prostitution and any form of indecent assault²³.

This report has proven that there are patterns of discrimination against women in a number of practices being perpetrated in Syria that constitute violations of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women²⁴, which stipulated the provisions that states must apply to protect women from the negative effects of discrimination, in addition to violating Security Council Resolution No. 1325²⁵.

²¹ ICRC, International Humanitarian Customary Law, Rule 134, https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/customary-ihl/eng/docs/v1_cha_chapter39_rule134

²² ICRC, First Geneva Convention, Article 3(1), <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/applic/ihl/ihl.nsf/INTRO/365>

ICRC, Protocol Additional Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and relating to the Protection of Victims of Non-International Armed Conflicts (Protocol II) to the Geneva Conventions 1949, Article 4 <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/applic/ihl/ihl.nsf/INTRO/475>

²³ ICRC, Protocol Additional Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and relating to the Protection of Victims of Non-International Armed Conflicts (Protocol II) to the Geneva Conventions 1949, <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/applic/ihl/ihl.nsf/INTRO/475>

²⁴ United Nations, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CEDAW.aspx>

²⁵ UNSC Res 1325 (31 October 2000) UN Doc S/RES/1325

The crimes included in the report that the Syrian regime has practiced in the form of widespread and systematic attacks which constitute crimes against humanity include: murder; torture; rape, and persecution.

Forced marriage may amount to a crime against humanity; the ISIS terrorist group practiced this violation in a widespread manner, through which it committed a crime against humanity; it has also been practiced by Hay'at Tahrir al Sham, but we were unable to document widespread use of this practice by the group due to the difficulty of determining this issue, and because of the tight security grip which the group wields over areas it controls and the fear felt by women and their families about the possible consequences of speaking out.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child²⁶ defines what the rights of the child are, aims to protect children's rights at all times, and stipulates that signatory states and parties (which include Syria), shall take "all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse. The convention also stipulates that signatory states and parties shall in particular prevent: (a) The inducement or coercion of a child to engage in any unlawful sexual activity; (b) The exploitative use of children in prostitution or other unlawful sexual practices; (c) The exploitative use of children in pornographic performances and materials²⁷. This means that the state has an obligation to prevent and protect children from sexual abuse by the state and by non-state parties.

International humanitarian law provides general protection for children as persons taking no part in hostilities²⁸, and special protection as persons who are particularly vulnerable unarmed individuals²⁹. Rule 135³⁰ of Customary International Humanitarian Law states that "Children affected by armed conflict are entitled to special respect and protection" in both international and non-international armed conflicts.

The Geneva Conventions of 1949 and the two Additional Protocols of 1977 also recognize that "Children must be the object of special respect and must be protected against any form of indecent assault. The parties to the conflict must provide them with the care and aid they require, whether because of their age or for any other reason³¹." Common Article 3³² states that children, as persons taking no active part in the hostilities shall in all circumstances be treated humanely, without any adverse distinction. The provisions of the agreements focus on protecting children from hostilities, and ensuring that they are provided with the necessary care, relief and protection, especially for children in areas of armed conflict.

²⁷ Reference 26, Article 34.

²⁸ ICRC, Geneva Convention (IV) relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War 1949, Article 3, <<https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/ihl/INTRO/380>>

²⁹ ICRC, Geneva Convention (IV) relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War 1949, Article 14, <<https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/ihl/INTRO/380>>

³⁰ ICRC, Customary International Humanitarian Law, Rule 135, <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/customary-ihl/eng/docs/v1_rul_rule135>

³¹ ICRC, Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions (Protocol I) 1977, Article 77(1), <<https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/ihl/INTRO/470>>

³² ICRC, Geneva Convention (I) for the Amelioration of the Condition of the Wounded and Sick in Armed Forces in the Field 1949, Article 3, <<https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/applic/ihl/ihl.nsl/INTRO/365>>

It is true that armed groups, as non-state parties, cannot formally join the parties to international human rights treaties, but they are nonetheless bound to respect basic human rights and by customary international law, since these parties effectively control parts of the state's territory. The prohibition on the recruitment of children under the age of 15 has attained the status of customary international law, and this prohibition, which was initially stipulated in regard to international armed conflicts, has been expanded to include non-international armed conflicts. The statute of the International Criminal Court clarifies that both in cases of international armed conflict and of non-international armed conflict, forcibly conscripting or recruiting children under the age of 15 and enlisting them in armed forces or armed groups or using them in conflicts is a war crime³³.

Despite the legal arsenal, including UN Security Council resolutions that stipulate respect for the rights of women and children, including female children, the Syrian regime controlling the Syrian state was the first party to violate laws, doing so on a large scale, and has been the only party to commit crimes against humanity. The other parties to the conflict followed its footsteps, and indeed committed violations that were not practiced by the Syrian regime itself, such as forced marriage, restrictions on clothing, freedom of movement and forced conscription, some of which amount to war crimes. International law has been violated in a comprehensive manner in the Syrian conflict that has spanned nearly a decade to date. The crimes perpetrated against Syrian women will not end without a political transition towards a democratic system that respects human rights, in particular the rights of women, and extends over the entire Syrian territory.

Recommendations:

All parties to the conflict:

- The regime must fulfill its obligations based on its ratification of CEDAW³⁴, implement the recommendations of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, including General Recommendation No. 30³⁵, respect the two International Covenants³⁶ and the Geneva Conventions, and accordingly stop committing crimes against humanity and war crimes.
- All parties to the conflict should immediately release forcibly detained women, particularly those detained in the context of armed conflict, abide by international laws on the detention of women and girls, including segregation from male prisoners, appoint female guards and security personnel to conduct searches, and implement protocols for searching prisoners upon entering custody to allow female detainees to report incidents of sexual violence.

³³ International Criminal Court, Rome Statute, Article 8-2-b(XXVI) and Article 8-2-e(VII), <<https://www.icc-cpi.int/resource-library/documents/rs-eng.pdf>>

³⁴ Reference 4.

³⁵ United Nations, General recommendation No. 30 on women in conflict prevention, conflict and post-conflict situations, <https://undocs.org/en/CEDAW/C/GC/30>.

³⁶ United Nations, International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/ccpr.aspx>

United Nations, International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cescr.aspx>

- Abide by Security Council resolutions related to the Syrian conflict and Security Council resolutions related to the role of conflict parties in protecting women from sexual violence, in particular Resolutions 1325³⁷ and 2122³⁸.
- Permanently end the recruitment of children, including female children, and release all children under the age of 15 from all military formations and duties.
- Conduct investigations into perpetrators of violations, hold them accountable, and begin compensation and reparation of victims.
- Provide protection and security for the work and movement of women, provide them with support, and end all forms of restrictions and suppression of freedoms.
- Support the efforts made by women in combating violence against them and mitigate the economic and social repercussions that the conflict imposes on their lives.
- Spare women the scourge of war by taking all necessary steps to ensure that all forms of violations against women are ended, and ensure that women deprived of their freedom are placed in separate locations from men.
- Expand the effective participation of women in all political formations and within the peace process.

International community and UN Security Council:

- Provide protection and assistance to forcibly displaced women, including IDPs and refugees, especially girls, taking into account their specific needs, primarily for protection.
- All countries worldwide must ratify CEDAW, fulfill their obligations under it to hold the Syrian regime accountable, expose the regime's criminal practices against Syria's women, and make every possible effort to mitigate and stop these.
- Expose all States backing the Syrian regime in their efforts to rehabilitate or support perpetrators of crimes against humanity and war crimes against the women of Syria.
- Take all possible legal, political and financial measures against the Syrian regime and its allies, as well as against all perpetrators of violations in the Syrian conflict to pressure them to commit to respect the rights of women.
- Fulfill the commitment of pledged financial contributions:
 - Assist neighboring countries and provide all possible support to increase the level of education and healthcare in these countries which host the largest number of female refugees.
- At a minimum, pressure must be applied on the Syrian regime to ensure that international observers, including the Independent International Commission of Inquiry, are given unconditional and unrestricted access to women and girls in detention centers.
- 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 spanned nearly a decade in Syria.

³⁷ UNSC Res 1325 (31 October 2000) UN Doc S/RES/1325

³⁸ UNSC Res 2122 (18 November 2013) UN Doc S/RES/2122

Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women:

- Given the extent of the widespread violations by the Syrian regime against women, some of which amount to crimes against humanity, the Committee must highlight what it is doing in regard to Syria, as its efforts are not noticeable to us, and it must intensify its work on individual cases and groups in Syria, as we recommend that survivors communicate with the Committee and submit complaints individually, and the Committee should take the initiative to expand its work points.

The Special Rapporteur on violence against women:

- The Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences should intensify her efforts in Syria. This is especially crucial given the extent of the violence that Syrian women are subjected to, particularly by the Syrian government itself, compared to women under any other government worldwide, especially women imprisoned in the detention centers of the Syrian regime and its security apparatus.

European States and European Union

- Economic sanctions on the two main backers of the Syrian regime, namely Iran and Russia, must be intensified, which is something that can be effectively achieved by the European Union. While civilian protection and safe zones are still the primary demands, economic sanctions also remain an effective course of action.
- Provide every possible assistance to the active civil society groups working to rehabilitate and reintegrate female victims into their communities.
- Support the operations for the support and rehabilitation of female survivors in areas of displacement and asylum.
- Syria is one of the worst affected countries in the world in terms of the perpetration of several types of violations against women, and therefore it needs a greater amount of assistance compared to other countries and regions, especially considering that these violations are still ongoing to date.
- Support the judicial accountability process, including supporting the mandate of the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism (IIIM) to assist in the investigation and prosecution of individuals responsible for the most serious crimes in accordance with the classification of international law committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011, in accordance with General Assembly Resolution 71/248³⁹, as well as supporting the path of litigation through universal jurisdiction.

High Commissioner for Human Rights:

- Release a special report on the violations that Syrian women, in particular, have been subjected to.

³⁹ United Nations, General Assembly Resolution 71/248 (11 January 2017), <https://undocs.org/en/A/RES/71/248>

Independent International Commission of Inquiry (COI):

- Investigate the incidents included in this report and utilize them during the preparation of the next report.

The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and local and international humanitarian and relief organizations:

- Coordinate humanitarian aid operations according to the areas worst affected and reject attempts at pressure and blackmail by the Syrian regime which is working to harness aid to its advantage.
- Allocate adequate resources for the rehabilitation of female survivors, especially those who have been subjected to violence, sexual exploitation and forced marriage, giving priority to the areas worst affected.
- Expand support for services provided for female adult and child victims of violence, in particular victims of sexual violence, including providing funding for shelter, treatment and rehabilitation, counseling and ensure that these services are tailored to the specific needs of women and girls, with priority given to pregnant women, those who have recently given birth, and breastfeeding mothers.
- Establish special care and protection refuges for abused women who have been ostracized by their families and communities.

Feminist organizations around the world:

- Advocate for Syrian women and raise awareness of the extent of the violations they are exposed to which is almost without precedent globally, carry out activities and projects to rehabilitate the survivors of arrest, torture and forced displacement, and shed more light on the suffering of Syrian women in displacement camps, asylum and detention centers.

Neighboring countries:

- Ensure that refugees, especially women, fleeing Syria are able to seek asylum, respect their rights, including the prohibition of refoulement, and expedite reunification. EU states and other countries should alleviate the burden on neighboring countries and receive more Syrian refugees, while donor countries should increase their assistance to the UNHCR and civil societies organizations in countries of asylum.

The High Commissioner for Refugees:

- Create a stable and safe environment for refugee women and intensify work to reintegrate them into society through long-term psychological treatments.
- Promote investment in education, health and psychological rehabilitation.

Thanks

The Syrian Network for Human Rights extends its sincere thanks to everyone who has shared news and information, especially survivor victims, eyewitnesses, and local activists, whose information has contributed to substantiating and strengthening the available data and evidence in documenting the various incidents included in this report.



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