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.

On Tuesday, February 15, 2022, the Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) held an online launch event for SNHR’s Two Reports on the Most Notable Violations by Hay’at Tahrir al Sham and ISIS, with the participation of Mr. Ibrahim Olabi, a lawyer (barrister) at Guernica 37 in London, Mr. Hossam Jazmati, Syrian writer and researcher, whose work focuses on analysis of jihadist movements, and Mr. Fadel Abdul Ghany, SNHR’s Director. The event, which was moderated by the Syrian journalist Nour H. Murad, was broadcast via Zoom and social media platforms.

On January 31, 2022, SNHR issued a report on the most notable Hay’at Tahrir al Sham violations since the establishment of Jabhat al Nusra to date, which revealed that HTS continues to commit multiple types of human rights violations, mainly in its detention centers.

On February 10, 2022, SNHR issued another report, concerning the most notable ISIS violations against Syrian society and ISIS’ contribution to distorting the popular uprising calling for freedom and dignity. In this report, SNHR revealed that ISIS has killed at least 5,043 individuals since the announcement of the organization’s establishment in Syria in April 2013, noting that despite the passage of almost two years since the defeat of ISIS, the fate of nearly 8,684 persons forcibly disappeared by ISIS remains unknown.
Mr. Fadel Abdul Ghany indicated that work on the report of Hay’at Tahrir al Sham took about a year and a half. Mr. Abdul Ghany began by talking about the establishment and history of Hay’at Tahrir al Sham in its various iterations and different names, and about the restrictions imposed by the group on rights and freedoms, with SNHR documenting hundreds of cases of persecution and detention in connection with criticizing or opposing Hay’at Tahrir al Sham’s policies, no matter how minor or limited these criticisms were, such as writing a post or tweet on Facebook and Twitter. Mr. Abdul Ghany also talked about HTS’ judicial system and its al Hesba ‘police’ apparatus, as well as its security judiciary, which is extremely similar to the Syrian regime’s Counter-terrorism Court. He also talked about the severe restrictions and control imposed by the group’s al Hesba apparatus on the freedoms of individuals and public liberties in society.

Mr. Abdul Ghany reviewed the statistics of the most notable violations carried out by Hay’at Tahrir al Sham since its establishment up until December 2021, with SNHR documenting the deaths of at least 505 civilians, including 71 children and 77 women (adult female) at the group’s hands, as well as noting that at least 2,327 of the individuals arrested by Hay’at Tahrir al Sham since the beginning of 2012, including 43 children and 44 women (adult female), are still arbitrarily detained or forcibly disappeared by the group as of December 2021.

Mr. Abdul Ghany stated that the SNHR had documented the names of the most prominent security officials involved in arbitrary detentions, torture and enforced disappearances, stressing that disclosing their names is part of the accountability process.

Following Mr. Abdul Ghany’s address, Mr. Ibrahim Olabi spoke about legal and accountability factors, noting: “The files of ISIS and Jabhat al Nusra [Hay’at Tahrir al Sham] are completely different ones, with one of them having almost been defeated to a large extent by the US-led coalition and a large number of countries, while the other was exposed for political and structural changes during the past ten years.” He added, “From a legal and human rights perspective, the focus should be on human rights violations, which do not have a statute of limitations and the reality of their occurrence does not alter any political changes.”

With regard to the persons forcibly disappeared by ISIS, he added, “The US-led coalition-backed Syrian Democratic Forces bear a legal responsibility towards the forcibly disappeared and for seeking to reveal their fate, as well as for [creating] the existence of impartial courts with high transparency to try those involved to restore the dignity of the victims.”

Speaking about HTS, Mr. Olabi indicated, “HTS must hold the perpetrators of violations accountable, no matter how senior their positions, and the countries that have lines of communication with HTS must press for accountability,” and emphasized the importance of revealing the fate of the forcibly disappeared and compensating the victims as much as possible.

Mr. Olabi also stressed that HTS “cannot use double standards regarding its being a controlling force, while it is not committed to [compliance with] international and human rights laws,” concluding his statement by emphasizing that “the focus of today’s event and the two reports on the crimes of ISIS and Hay’at Tahrir al Sham does not mean at any point that the Syrian regime’s criminality and the violations it committed were not a cause of what we have reached today,” noting that academic opinion affirms that “the Syrian regime’s brutality, torture and violations are the acts that led to the emergence of extremism and supported the narrative of extremist groups.”
After Mr. Olabi’s address, Mr. Hossam Jazmati spoke about HTS’ viewpoint and the group’s quest to change its image and escape from its extremist classification and inclusion in terrorist lists, noting that this approach “does not intersect with our concerns in the search for rights and freedoms in the areas under HTS control.” He further underlined that “HTS is not in any way interested in negotiating with any local party or in allowing local human rights organizations to visit prisons,” as well as stressing that identifying violators by name is very important in order to support accountability.

During the second part of the event, Mr. Abdul Ghany reviewed SNHR’s report on the most notable violations by ISIS since its establishment in April 2013. The report analyzes the group’s detention centers and the methods of torture used. Mr. Abdul Ghany stressed the importance of revealing the fate of the forcibly disappeared following the defeat of ISIS, as well as emphasizing the responsibility of the US-led Coalition and Syrian Democratic Forces in working to reveal the fate of the forcibly disappeared.

Mr. Ibrahim Olabi stressed the importance of holding ISIS members who are subject to trials in European countries accountable on the basis of crimes against humanity and war crimes committed, not just on the crime of terrorism, in order to protect the rights of the victims.

Mr. Hossam Jazmati emphasized the importance of finding a solution to the issue of the forcibly disappeared, highlighting the importance of supporting international organizations to help in revealing their fate, especially with regard to dealing with mass graves, as these need special expertise and advanced capabilities. He also stressed the importance of ensuring the cooperation of the controlling parties on this issue.

The event concluded with a session featuring interactive questions and discussion. The entire event is available on our YouTube channel at the following link, and on our Facebook page via the following link.