

**Speech Given by SNHR Chairman at an
International Event on the Sidelines of the UN
General Assembly Session**

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The 73rd Session of the UN General Assembly

First of all, I would like to thank the states sponsoring this crucial and pivotal event for it tackles an issue that affects and terrorizes hundreds of thousands of Syrians. Deepest gratitude goes to the United States, the United Kingdom, and France, and I would like to specifically thank the DRL office of the US Department of State. What started as a simple exchange of ideas has eventually blossomed into this pivotal meeting.

In the limited time I have, I am going to tackle only two points and speak about a number of recommendations, while whatever time I have left will be open for discussion.

1. The Syrian regime's acknowledgment of the death of hundreds of forcibly disappeared persons, what does it entail?
2. Analyzing the most significant data that came into light

The Syrian regime's acknowledgment of the death of hundreds of forcibly disappeared persons, what does it entail?

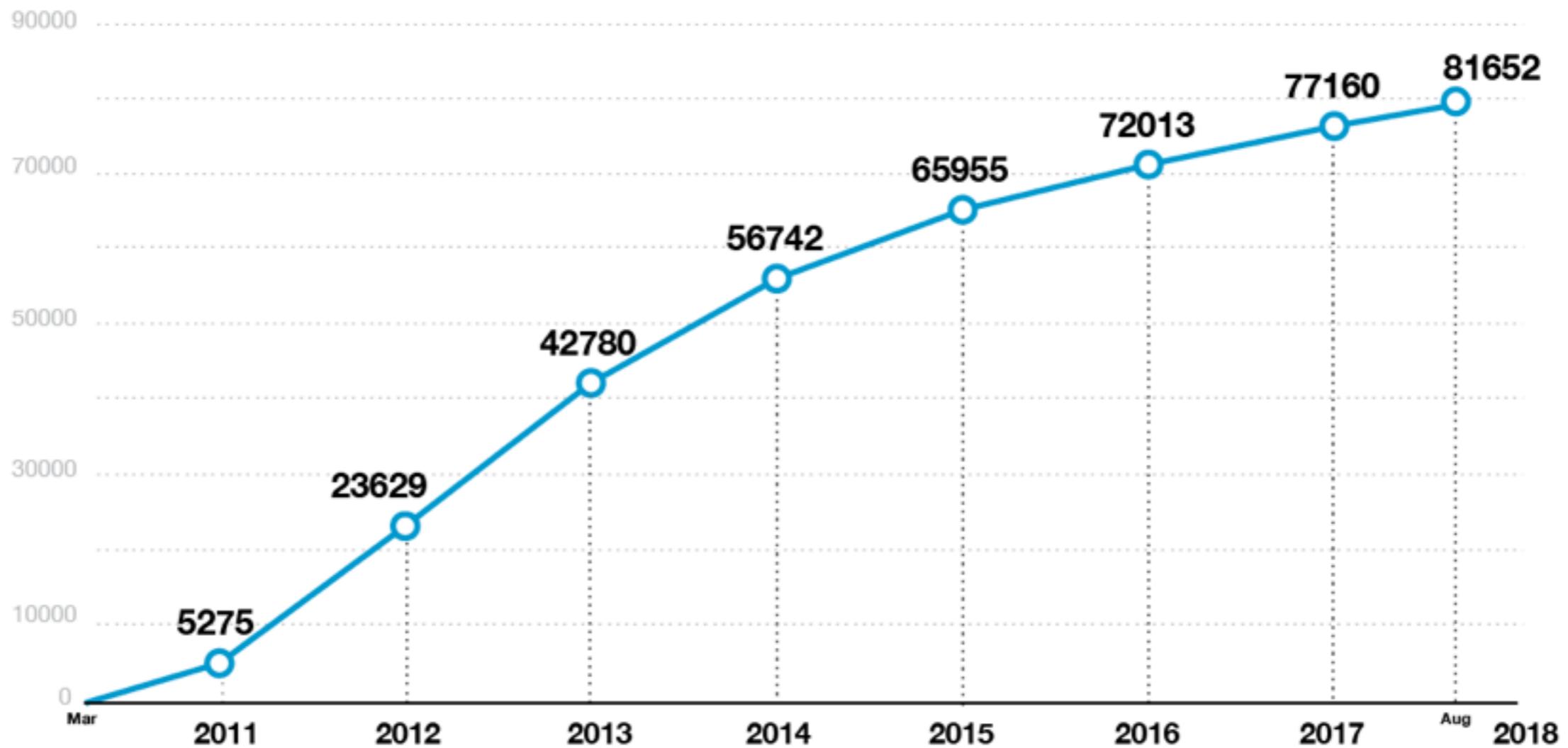
First: this meeting comes in the wake of a crucial development that didn't receive its due attention on the international stage. The Syrian regime has, for the first time since the beginning of the popular uprising, acknowledged that dozens of forcibly-disappeared persons had died. SNHR has been able to record 836 cases so far. Seeing that the Syrian regime has long denied having any forcibly-disappeared Syrian citizens, why did it reveal the fate of those victims? And how could the Syrian regime know that they have died if the Syrian regime never had him in the first place?

Second: The way by which the Syrian regime revealed this information perfectly reflects the Syrian regime's sadistic mindset towards the Syrian community, as security branches and prisons instructed civil registration offices to take care of this task. Our team found out that the first of those cases came into light in May of this year when some families from Talkalakh city, western suburbs of Homs, went to those offices. Similar cases followed in al Heffa town, suburbs of Latakia governorate, and then Kafr Zita city, Hama suburbs. When some families went to civil registration offices to acquire standard documents, such as marriage, divorce, or inheritance, they were told by employees there that their son or relative have been registered as dead, sending many families into a state of complete shock and panic given that it is not, even remotely, the responsibility of the civil registration office to inform the residents that their beloved ones have been dead. On the contrary, when a family member dies, in the rest of the world, their relatives are the ones who register them as dead at civil registration offices.

Hundreds of thousands of Syrians fell into a state of fear in the wake of this news, and started flooding to civil registration offices hoping to know anything about the fate of their beloved ones who were dragged to security branches and detention centers at the early stages of the popular uprising.

Third: To get a sense of the gravity of the enforced-disappearance disaster in the Syrian community, it is important to note that 85% of all detainees turn into enforced-disappearance cases. According to SNHR database, which we have been constantly updating since 2011, the Syrian regime still has 81,652 Syrian citizens who are now considered forcibly-disappeared. The following chart shows how enforced-disappearance numbers have escalated over the past few years.

Accumulative indicator of no less than 81,652 cases of enforced-disappearance by the Syrian regime from March 2011 until August 2018. Cases are distributed by year as follows:



As documented
by SNHR

Those 82,000 individuals have friends and families. The Syrian regime has used enforced-disappearance as a weapon of war. As such, we can maybe fathom the panic and terror that engulfed the Syrian families who were utterly devastated fearing for the lives of their beloved ones, fearing that they have already lost their beloved ones just like the hundreds of names revealed by the Syrian regime.

Fourth: Why would the Syrian acknowledge that Syrian citizens have died which effectively convicts the Syrian regime itself?

It is difficult to tell for sure what the Syrian regime's goal is, but I think there are two possible answers – the first is that the Russians were the ones who told the Syrian regime to do that in order to end this issue that poses a hurdle in the way of wrapping up the Syrian catastrophe. The calls for having the refugees go back come in the same context as they hope that all of this will lead to the start of reconstruction efforts. The second one is that the Syrian regime wants to show that he has achieved victory on the ground, and all that is left to do is to end the detainees issue so residents and society can go back under its submission accepting the fact that this is their only choice.

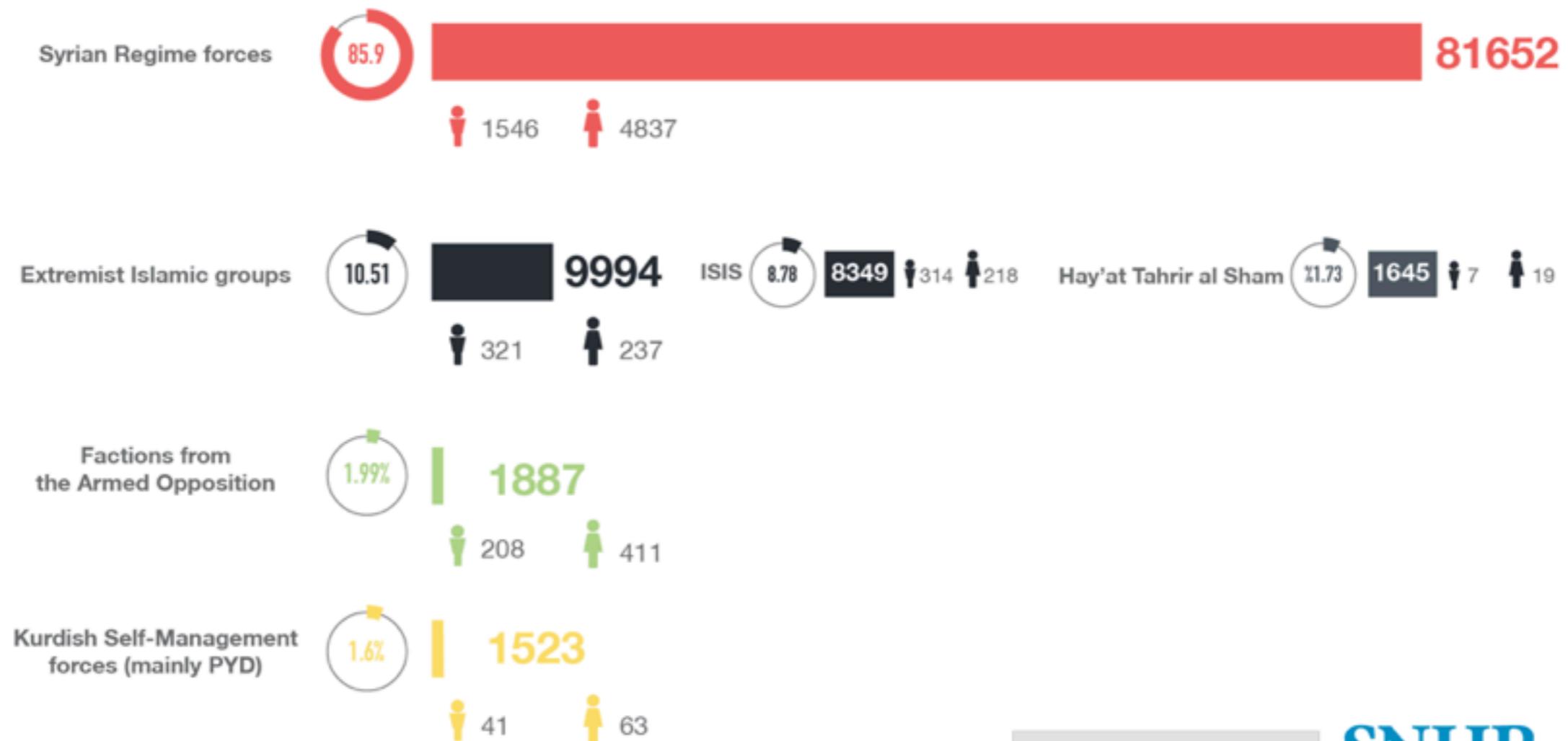
A regime that fails to merely deliver dead bodies is the primary accused of disappearing them in the first place, and, secondly, of killing them after concealing them from the outer world for years. The Syrian regime also refuses to deliver their dead bodies. We aren't talking about a government anymore, but a fully-fledged mafia.

Analyzing the most significant data that came into light

SNHR possesses a database that contains the names of 82,000 forcibly-disappeared Syrian citizens. We have also the names of 14,000 Syrian citizens who died due to torture inside Syrian regime detention centers in a separate database.

No less than 95,056 individuals are still forcibly disappeared at the hands of the parties to the conflict in Syria from March 2011 until August 2018

As follows:



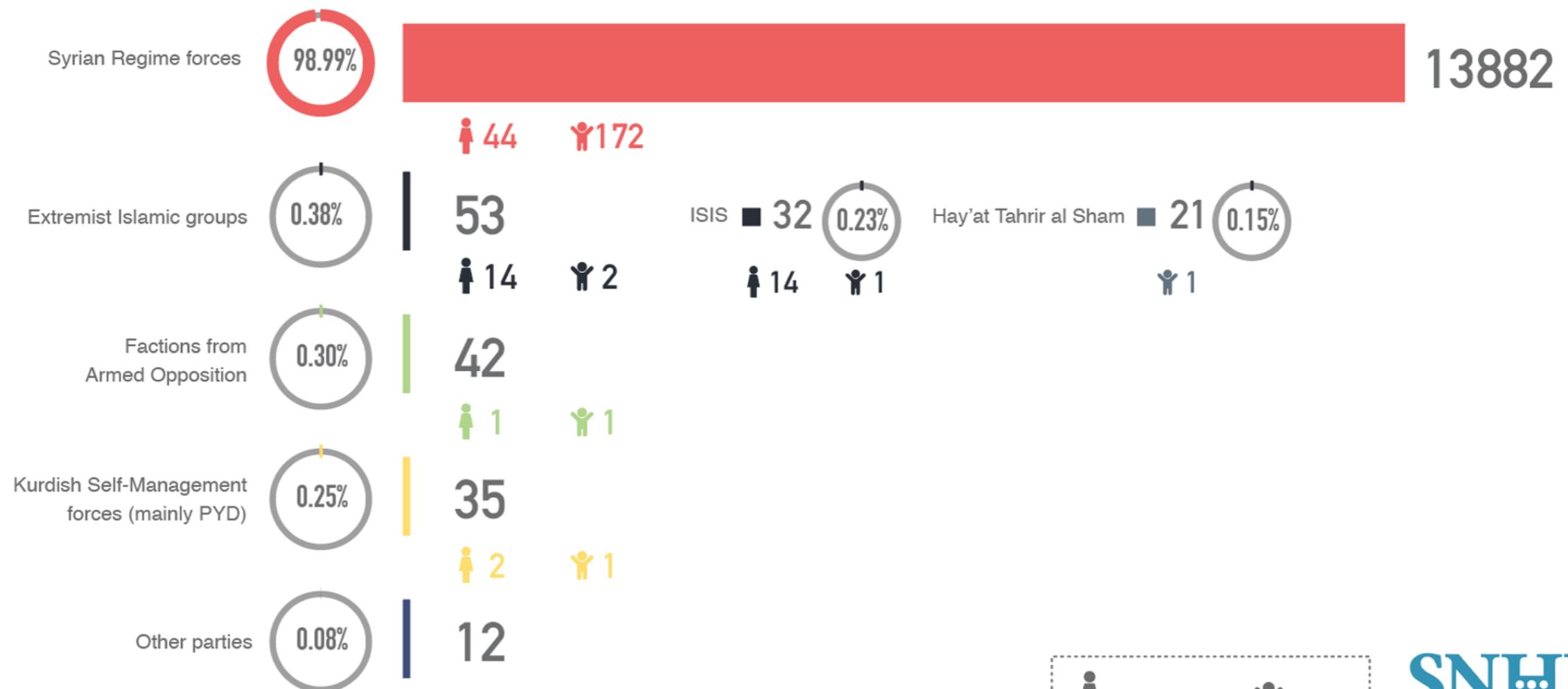
 Children
  Women (adult female)



As documented by SNHR

A total of 14,024 individuals died due to torture

at the hands of the parties to the conflict in Syria from March 2011 until September 2018, as follow:



 Women (adult female)
  Children



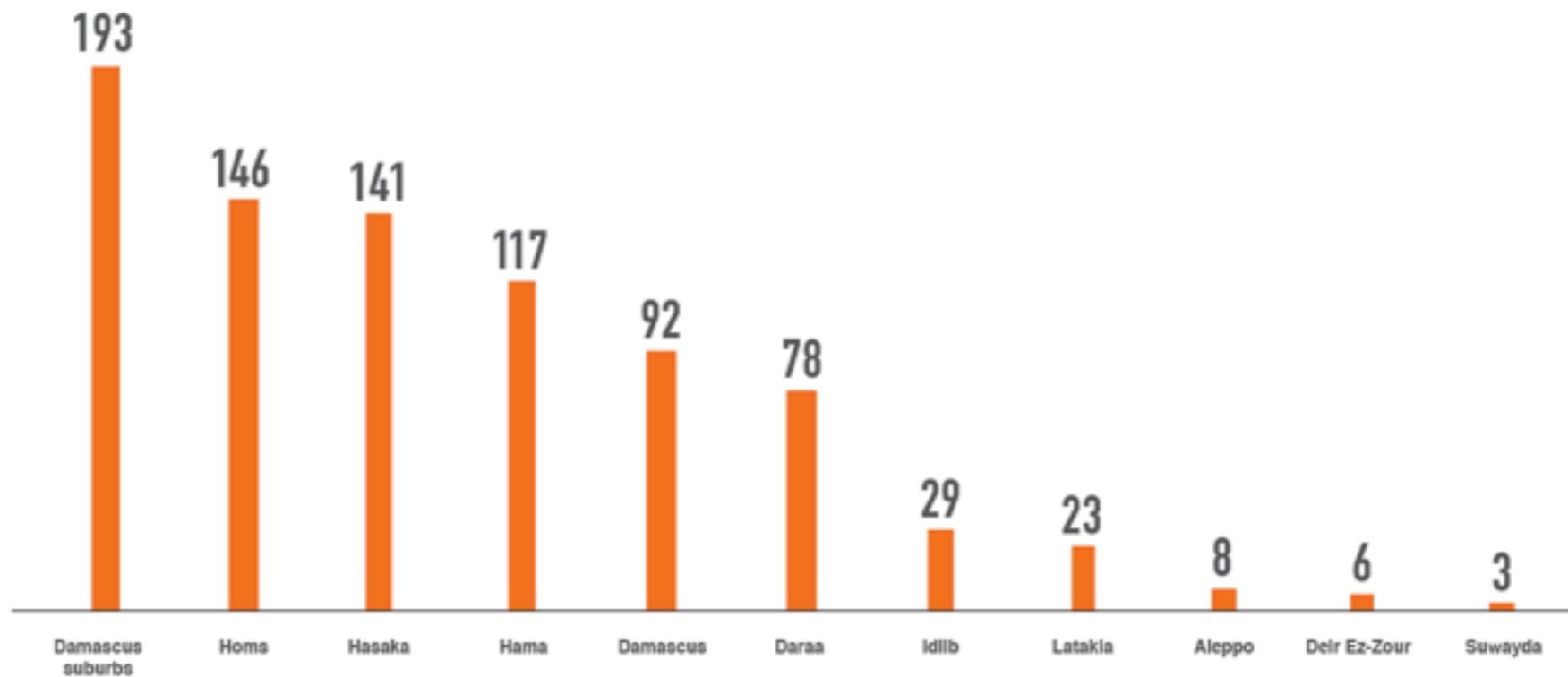
As documented by SNHR

We have contacted the residents and we acquired lists that were publicized at civil registration offices. After cross-checking against our enforced-disappearance database and our database for the victims who died due torture, we found out the following:

First: The Syrian regime didn't reveal the cause of death or the date of death at the time. The Syrian regime didn't deliver the dead bodies or the victims' belongings to the families. As per the international law, it is safe to say that this acknowledgment does not constitute a true reveal of fate without delivering dead bodies. As such, those victims are still considered forcibly-disappeared. SNHR believes that the cause of death in those 836 cases is torture. There are only 37 victims that we have reasons to believe that they were killed in summary executions by al Midan Military Court. The 836 death cases are distributed across Syrian governorates as shown in the following chart:

SNHR has documented 836 enforced-disappearance cases where the Syrian regime revealed their fate to be death from May 2018 until August 2018.

Cases are distributed across governorates as follows:



Second: Most of the revealed cases were arrested back in 2011 and 2012. Most of the cases are for forcibly-disappeared persons in Saydnaya Prison, branch 215, and branch 227. Out of the 836 cases, there are nine individuals who were children at the time of their arrest, in addition to one woman. Lastly, the document issues by civil registration offices has two dates: the first one is seemingly the date of death which goes back to 2012, 2013, or 2014, while the second one is the date on which the document was registered. All of the documents we've reviewed are dated May 2018 and onwards. This implies that the plan to execute this barbarian scenario started back in May 2018. I am not going to go into more details for my time is limited. You can find more details in our study which is already available and can be found on our website.

Examples of prominent popular uprising activists who were among the dead.

Among the 836 cases we were able to document were no less than 22 well-known popular uprising activists – 10 university students, two engineers, three athletes, four teachers, and three religious figures.

All of them were never involved in armed activities and never promoted violence, killing, or any vandalization acts. They were known in their communities for their peaceful messages and launching civil initiatives that aimed to preserve public places and raise awareness on rights and freedoms, as well as gifting water and flowers to Syrian regime forces. For this very particular reason, they were a strategic target for the Syrian regime who wanted to bury the peaceful popular uprising, and push the uprising to extremism in light of the Syrian regime's racist, sectarian, and brutal practices.



Islam Khirou Dabbas

Islam Khirou Dabbas, a university student at the faculty of architecture, a popular uprising activist, from Darayya city, western Damascus suburbs governorate, born in 1989. He was arrested by Syrian regime forces on Friday, July 22, 2011. We learned on Monday, July 16, 2018, that he died on Sunday, December 15, 2013, according to civil records. We suspect that he was executed per a death sentence at Saydnaya Military Prison, Damascus suburbs governorate.

This is what we were told by Islam's mother when we contacted her:

“After the names of the dead detainees have been publicized on social media, one of our relatives went to the civil registration office where we found out through a family statement that Islam died and they didn't tell us anything else, but we were told previously by a former detainee who was with Islam at Saydnaya that he was executed.”

“Islam was never involved in armed activities. On the contrary, he gifted security forces flowers and cold water when they used to go out with the demonstrations. He always talked about how they shouldn't vandalize and keep the streets clean after the demonstrations.”



Safwan al Hajjar

Safwan al Hajjar, an electronics engineer, from al Muhajireen neighborhood, Damascus city, born in 1976. He was arrested by Syrian regime forces on Sunday, December 23, 2012, in al Muhajireen neighborhood. On Tuesday, July 24, 2018, we received information that he died in 2014 according to civil records. We suspect that he died due to torture inside a Syrian regime detention center.

I have two recommendations

First: Despite this fathomless travesty and the great panic that engulfed the Syrian community, the UN's response was disappointing. Besides the Commission of Inquiry, which we contacted and provided with the necessary details as they are currently carrying out an investigation ahead of their upcoming report, the OHCHR hasn't addressed this issue. We also haven't heard any comment from the UN special envoy for Syria Mr. Staffan de Mistura when he should be demanding some sort of clarification from the Syrian regime and Russia as to what is happening. The Security Council hasn't held a meeting to discuss this matter which threatens hundreds of thousands of Syrian citizens. In light of that, we call on the states in session to work towards having the Security Council meet and the UN General Assembly issue a statement on this crucial issue. We want to ask the Russians in front of the whole world: what does the Syrian regime do with the dead bodies? What about the tens of thousands of people who are still disappeared?

Second: Other than statements from some of the states meeting here - the UK's Foreign Office, which was followed by a statement from the US Department of State and other states, and the letter to the Secretary-General signed by 41 states, and, again, I have to extend my most sincere gratitude to the states that signed the letter, we still have yet to see any sort of international follow-up to this crucial matter, which is why this meeting is of great importance.

I recommend that an alliance is formed by some of the states meeting here to tell the Syrian civil society and the rest of the world that we will shoulder the enforced-disappearance issue in Syria and that we are willing to fully take care of it.

Thank you

Fadel Abdul Ghany

Chairman of the Syrian Network for Human Rights

www.sn4hr.org

Fadel@sn4hr.org

