

# The UN Secretary General Report on Children and Armed Conflict Doesn't Accurately Reflect the Atrocious Reality in Syria

Syria is the World's Worst Country in Terms of Child Mortality

# SNHR

SYRIAN NETWORK FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

الشبكة السورية لحقوق الإنسان

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The Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR), founded in June 2011, is a non-governmental, independent group that is considered a primary source for the OHCHR on all death toll-related analyses in Syria.



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## I. Introduction

On October 6, 2017, The U.N. Secretary General submitted his report to the Security Council on “Children and Armed Conflict” that was released on August 24, 2017. The report sheds light on the toll armed conflict have on children, and contained the violations by parties to the conflict, including government forces and other armed groups affiliated to the government or anti-government groups, against children in a number of states around the world in 2016 including Syria.

This report comes in light of a significant escalation in offensives and indiscriminate attacks that are being perpetrated by the parties to the conflict in Syria – most notably aerial bombardment by the Syrian-Russian alliance and the warplanes of the international coalition in the governorates of Idlib, Raqqa, and Deir Ez-Zour. As most of the victims of the conflict in Syria are civilians, among these civilians were children who were, and are being, killed, disfigured, and displaced. Syria needs generation to redress the humanitarian and psychological disorders that have befallen those children.

Even though the report states, in its methodology, that “**the information contained in the report is only indicative and does not always represent the full scale of incidents**”, we believe that there is a vast difference between what the report says, and what we have been able to document, with taking into consideration that we believe we only document the bare minimum of the actual magnitude of the violations. For instance, Afghanistan topped



the report, as the U.N. verified the killing of 3,512 children victims, while only 652 children deaths were verified in Syria, while this is hugely and vastly less than the children deaths that SNHR team has been able to document, by name and details, in 2016, as we recorded the killing of 3,923 children – six times more than what the U.N. verified in Syria. This is not, by any means, owed to flaws in the methodology, but to a blatant carelessness in documenting children victims, and the violations in Syria in general. This is can be explained by the shortage of manpower in the team working on Syria at the U.N., as the OHCHR website has completely stopped counting the victims of the armed conflict in Syria in 2014, without establishing any alternative option to separately document the death toll for each new year. We call on the U.N. Secretary General to address this alarming problem, and hire additional personnel to work on the complex violations in Syria.

Despite its shortcomings, the report is extraordinarily important for shedding light on the catastrophic reality of childhood in Syria, as the report highlighted a remarkably important point that many dismiss – organizations and individuals, local or international, whether deliberately or maliciously – where the report notes in most of the violations that the major perpetrator is the Syrian regime (which truly reflects the nature of the incidents and events, and is corresponded by statistics). In this report, we only seek to shed light on some notes, where, hopefully, they are addressed in future reports through greater coordination and collaboration with the national institutions that work on documenting and archiving violations of human rights. We will be drawing some comparisons between the U.N. Secretary General report and what we have been able to document in 2016 with respect to violations against children in Syria.

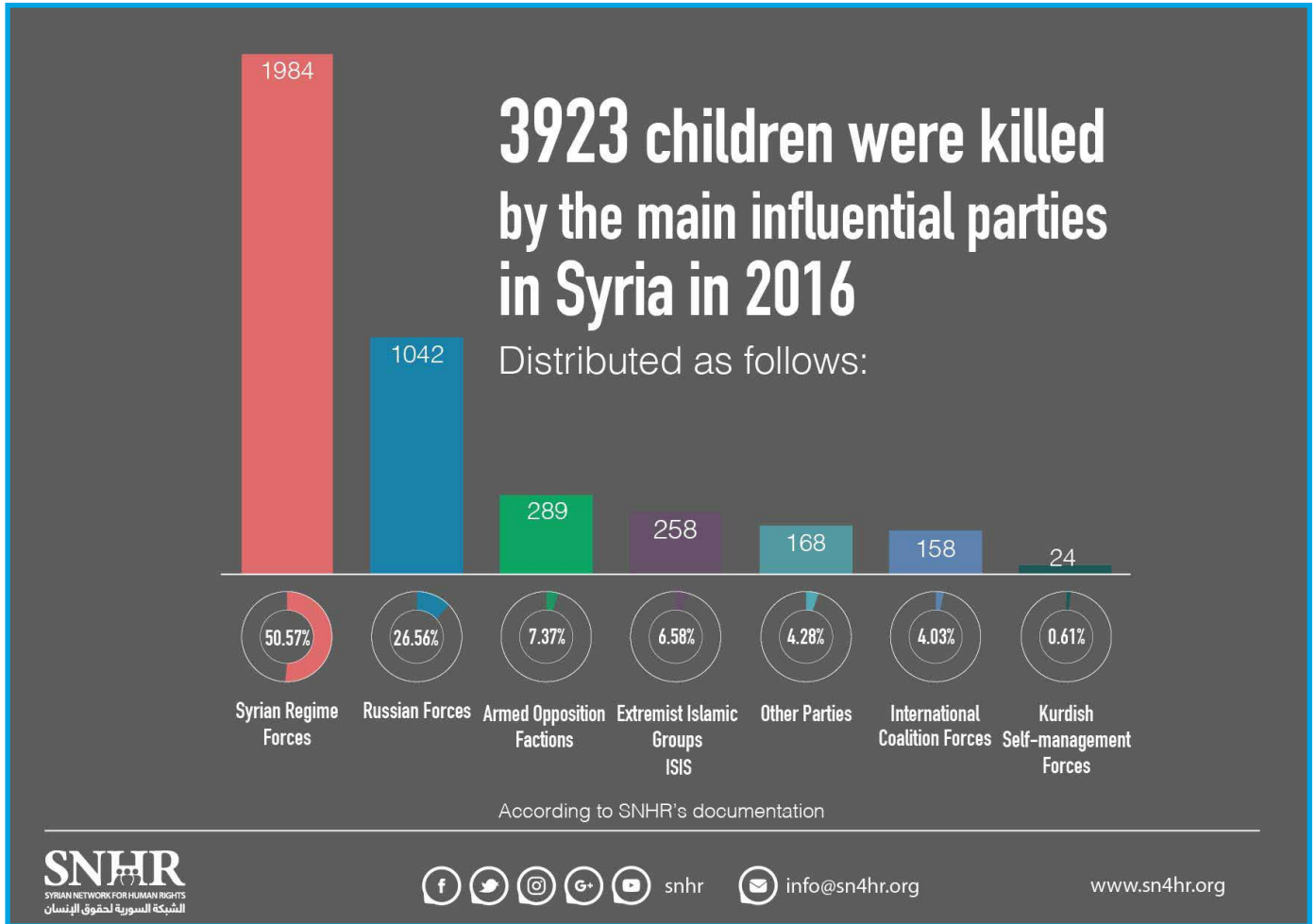
## **II. The Report is Far from the Gravity of the Catastrophe, and Contains Factual Errors**

### **A. Extrajudicial killings**

The U.N. report raises a statistic that 652 children were killed in Syria in 2016, most of them were killed by government forces and pro-government forces, whereas SNHR documentation team recorded six times more than that figure, as 3,923 children victims' names have been documented with details and place and time of death, in addition to pictures and videos. This difference is considerably vast, and doesn't give an accurate perception of the magnitude of the killing in Syria.

Also, the U.N. report didn't address the children victims who were killed in 2016 by international coalition forces who killed a total of 158 children.





## B. Recruitment

The report notes that the violations related to recruiting children and using them in combat operation had doubled in 2016 compared to what was documented in 2015. While undoubtedly true, the report holds armed opposition factions as the party most responsible for recruiting children and by a large margin -and we did document cases of children being recruited by armed opposition factions- followed by ISIS, government militias, Kurdish People's Protection Units, and then government forces, as the report states:

**“The United Nations verified 851 cases attributed to armed groups self-affiliated with the Free Syrian Army (507), ISIL (133), pro-government militias (54), People’s Protection Units (46), government forces (29), Army of Islam (28), Ahrar al-Sham (17), the Nusra Front (also known as Jabhat Fath al-Sham) (10), Nur al-Din al-Zanki (3) and unidentified armed groups (24); 20 per cent of verified cases involved children under the age of fifteen. Payment of salaries, ideology and family or community influence continued to be incentives. As a result of their association with parties to conflict, at least 37 children were killed and 17 injured.”**



However, this contradicts with what we monitored in light of incidents and evidences. According to what we recorded, the Kurdish People's Protection Units tops all other parties in terms of recruiting children. We even recorded hundreds of cases where children were arrested and abducted for the purpose of conscription. In 2016, we recorded approximately 1,926 cases of children being recruited by the Kurdish People's Protection Units.

### **C. Arbitrary arrest and enforced-disappearance**

The U.N. report only recorded 12 cases where children were arrested by government forces and pro-government forces, while we, in the same period of time, recorded no less than 251 cases. In addition, we recorded that two children died due to torture at the Syrian regime detention centers.

### **D. Important crimes and violations that weren't included in the U.N. report**

The report sheds light on the children victims who were killed in attacks on educational and medical facilities, and also the children victims who died under siege and due to the inability to access food and medication. However, the report completely ignores the children who were killed or injured in the chemical attacks that were carried out by the Syrian regime. In this regard, we recorded that no less than 21 children were killed and 35 children were injured in 25 chemical attacks carried out by government forces in 2016 alone.

Furthermore, the report fails to address the toll of children victims who were killed in attacks by government forces and Russian forces in which cluster munitions and landmines were used, as we recorded a notable rise in the use of such weapons in 2016, where we recorded no less than 171 attacks using cluster munitions by the Syrian-Russian alliance that resulted in the killing of 113 children.

## **III. Recommendations**

- The Special Representative of the U.N. Secretary General for Children and Armed Conflict should coordinate and work with Syrian human rights groups who are active in the field of documenting and archiving violations in Syria, in order to contribute to and assist the U.N.'s efforts for the sake of obtaining more comprehensive and accurate information and data on Syria.
- The team working on documenting the violations in Syria at the OHCHR should be expanded.
- Issue immediate statements in the event of massacres against children in Syria, which was the case, for instance, in incidents where schools and kindergartens were directly bombarded by the Syrian-Russian alliance.





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