

Tenth Annual Report: The Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in 2020

The Bleeding Decade



Tuesday 26 January 2021

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.

SNHR
SYRIAN NETWORK FOR HUMAN RIGHTS
الشبكة السورية لحقوق الإنسان

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Photo showing damage to residential buildings in Ariha city in Idlib suburbs caused by a Russian air attack - January 29, 2020

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I. Background:

The Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR), founded in June 2011, three months after the outbreak of the popular uprising in March 2011, is a non-governmental, non-profit independent organization whose primary objective is to document all violations that occur in Syria, archive them within our extensive database, and issue periodic reports and studies based on them, with SNHR aiming to expose the perpetrators of these violations as a first step to holding them accountable, protecting the rights of the victims, and saving and cataloguing the history of events. The Syrian Network for Human Rights [is a member of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines - Cluster Munition Coalition \(ICBL-CMC\)](#), the International Coalition for the Responsibility to Protect (ICRtoP), the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience, and the Every Casualty Worldwide Network.

It should also be noted that the [Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights](#) has relied, in all of its statistics on the analysis of victims of the conflict in Syria, on the Syrian Network for Human Rights as a primary source; SNHR also works in cooperation with the Independent International Commission of Inquiry (COI) and has signed a data-sharing agreement with the Independent International and Impartial Mechanism (IIIM), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), and other UN bodies, as well as with international organizations such as the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW). The SNHR is one of the most important [data sources for the Syria situation reports issued by the foreign ministries of many countries worldwide](#), with a large number of Arab and international news agencies relying on the SNHR's reports and statistics for their [coverage](#) and reports on Syria.



In 2020, the Syrian Network for Human Rights continued its work, issuing approximately 81 reports in which it addressed multiple types of the most notable human rights violations committed by the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in Syria, such as extrajudicial killings, arrest, torture, displacement and forced displacement, and the use of prohibited munitions and other highly destructive munitions, and other violations. These reports were based on evidence from numerous sources, including approximately 263 testimonies of injured or survivors of the attacks, paramedics, central signal workers or victims' families. All these testimonies were obtained through speaking directly with eyewitnesses, with none of them cited from any open sources. All these procedures are carried out under SNHR's internal protocols, which we have worked for years to perfect, and which we strive constantly to develop through our experience in order to keep pace with the highest standards of care and reliability, in addition to hundreds of photos, videos and other sources of information. Readers can study our working methodology more extensively at [this link](#).

As we emphasize in every report, the information provided in this report represents the bare minimum of the actual severity and magnitude of the violations that occurred which we were able to document, given the exceptional difficulties and challenges that we have faced during our work as shown in the methodology. Also, it doesn't include any analysis of the profound social, economic, and psychological ramifications. We also emphasize that the legal references which we use in relation to the Syrian situation are international humanitarian law and customary international law, along with international human rights law, and that we do not base our work on the Syrian constitution and local laws because both the constitution and many of these articles of legislation are security state texts that violate international law and the fundamental spirit of the law, meaning that we refer to them only when necessary.

In addition, the report includes key political, judicial and military events that occurred in 2020 in order to give a clearer picture of the context of the events in which these violations took place.

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

“ This is our tenth annual report since the start of the popular uprising in March 2011, and for the tenth consecutive year, we are still documenting egregious violations, some of which amount to crimes against humanity. The international community and the Security Council have failed to mitigate the severity of the violations in any way or even to achieve the bare minimum of ending any of the crimes against humanity. The root cause of the Syrian issue remains the combination of factional, dynastic regime opposing a popular uprising demanding political change to lead the country towards a democratic system that respects human rights and the transfer of power, and prioritizes the wellbeing of the Syrian state and people.

II. Landmark Key Events in 2020:

2020 saw three ceasefire agreements, all in the Idlib region:

The first:

Announced on January 9, 2020, when Major-General Yuri Borenkov, chief of the Russian Center for Reconciliation of the Opposing Parties in Syria, [declared](#) the start of a ceasefire in Idlib region, starting at 14:00 on the same day, which had no actual effect, even in briefly reducing the frequency of military attacks.

The second:

[The Turkish Ministry of Defense](#) announced that it had concluded a ceasefire agreement with Russia that would enter into force at 00:01 on January 12, 2020. Despite this agreement, the ground attacks by Syrian Regime forces did not stop, while the air strikes by Syrian-Russian alliance forces resumed after only two days on January 14, 2020.

The third:

The agreement resulting from the meeting of the Turkish and Russian Presidents, which came into force at 00:00 on March 6, 2020, is the fifth such agreement in the region since April 26, 2019. It should be noted that Russian forces committed [a massacre](#) against IDPs in Ma'aret Misreen town on March 5 during the Turkish-Russian consultations that concluded in this ceasefire agreement, clearly demonstrating a desire to kill as many people as possible before the beginning of the ceasefire.

We noticed that in the period between the last two agreements, Syrian regime's forces and allies managed to make advances on the ground which were the most extensive since April 26, 2019, seizing control of an area amounting to approximately 35 percent of the land area that had been outside regime control. By taking control of that area, the regime has tightened its control over the 'M5' Damascus-Aleppo International Road.

Following the ceasefire which came into effect on March 6, the SNHR monitored the cessation of air strikes by the Syrian-Russian alliance forces in the subsequent period, which saw several attacks by Russian forces, with most of these being against military sites of Hay'at Tahrir al Sham, while also documenting ground attacks by Syrian regime's forces and allies, although this has been the lowest number of such attacks compared to previous months, with the COVID-19 pandemic apparently affecting the military capabilities of the Syrian regime's army and affiliated Iranian militias, which has contributed to a reduction in the rate of their killing of Syrian civilians.

We further note that in 2020 we monitored the entry of dozens of Turkish military convoys into the Idlib region in northwest Syria, which were deployed at dozens of posts throughout the areas outside the control of Syrian Regime forces in the Idlib region.

Among the most prominent events in 2020, which had the greatest impact on the humanitarian situation for the Syrian people, was the renewal of Resolution 2165 (July 2014)¹ providing for the United Nations to provide cross-border delivery of humanitarian aid, which would have been renewed in December 2019 if the Russian-Chinese veto had not been used; thereafter, on January 10, both countries abstained from voting on Resolution No. [2504](#), which included additional amendments in favor of Russia, as the extension was limited to six months, that was, until July 10, with aid entry through the al Ramtha and al Ya'rubiya border crossings being canceled.

In July, the Russian regime and its Chinese ally used their UN veto twice against the extension of Resolution 2504, while on July 10, the Security Council was able to pass [Resolution No. 2533](#) providing for the delivery of humanitarian aid into Syria through only one crossing, the Bab al Hawa crossing, for a year.

Syrian Regime forces pursued their customary policy of brutal repression, constantly working to silence any dissent through continuous arrests, with the most prominent incident this year taking place on June 7, when peaceful demonstrations broke out in and around Suwayda city, protesting against the increasing cost of living and the deteriorating economic situation, with the protesters chanting slogans calling for the release of the detainees, and the fall of the Syrian regime. [On June 15, we recorded assaults](#) on demonstrators in Suwayda city by Syrian regime law enforcement personnel and shabiha (plainclothes pro-regime militias). This was followed by regime forces hunting down and arresting a number of activists and civilians who had participated in the protests, all of whom were forcibly disappeared. Among those detained were government employees who had earlier been arbitrarily dismissed from their jobs due to their dissent with the Syrian regime. We issued [a report on the incident](#).

In 2020, Russia has continued to use the remaining Syrian fighters in the areas whose population was compelled to conduct forced settlements with the Syrian regime; after the Syrian regime subsequently conscripted many of these fighters into its forces and arrested and disappeared a number of them, Russia exploited the remaining former fighters by luring them with huge salaries and other incentives, including offering them exemption from compulsory military service in the regime army, in exchange for being transferred to Libya to fight alongside the forces of General Khalifa Haftar. We obtained information indicating that this Russian recruitment drive originally began in Suwayda governorate, after which it was rolled out to Damascus and its suburbs, as well as to Daraa, Quneitra, Hama, Homs, Deir Ez-Zour, Raqqqa and Hasaka, with the fighters first being transferred to

¹ [Resolution](#) allowing the United Nations to provide cross-border aid delivery without the permission of the Syrian regime, through the Bab al Salam, Bab al Hawa, al Ya'rubiya and al Ramtha crossings, which had been extended five times in a row

the Hmeimim Military Airbase and from there to Benghazi airport in Libya. [Reuters](#) reported that the pace of this recruitment accelerated in May 2020, further noting that this recruitment has not been limited solely to former Armed Opposition fighters (meaning those living in the areas where forced settlements were imposed), but that Russia also worked to recruit fighters from pro-Syrian regime militias, especially the Shiite-majority ones.

The Russian regime has acknowledged on several occasions that it has tested several weapons in Syria; on November 7, Russian media outlets published [a statement](#) by Sergey Shoigu, the Russian Minister of Defense, stating that the military campaign in Syria was a test of the effectiveness of almost all of the Russian army's weapons, as well as allowing Russia to test the effectiveness of its military education system. On December 7, Sergey Chemezov, CEO of the Russian Rostec Corporation, [announced](#) that Kalashnikov attack drones had been tested during Russia's combat missions in Syria.

Although Syrian Democratic Forces announced the elimination of ISIS on March 23, 2019, the year 2020 saw activity by cells believed to be affiliated with ISIS in eastern Syria, in the suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate and the eastern suburbs of Hama governorate in particular; this activity targeted opponents of ISIS. The southern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour also saw clashes between Syrian Regime forces and ISIS, after the latter targeted convoys of Syrian regime forces and allies in ambushes.

In 2020, nine mass graves were discovered in Raqqqa governorate by the Initial Response Team², bringing the number of mass graves whose victims were recovered in Raqqqa governorate to 28 mass graves, with the total number of bodies recovered from these graves reached nearly 6,000, of which nearly 700 were identified, [according to the statements of the Initial Response Team](#). In the same context, the people of al Sh'aitat area in the eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour discovered a mass grave that included the remains of 26 civilians from al Sh'aitat tribe in the Badiya of Jamma village in the eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour who were killed by ISIS in al Sh'aitat massacre in August 2014.

During 2020, the Israeli air force launched dozens of airstrikes inside Syria, with most of these targeting military targets of Syrian regime forces and Iranian militias. The Israeli army revealed in its annual [statistics report](#) issued on December 31 that it had carried out 50 raids on targets in Syria throughout 2020.

² The Response Team is affiliated with the Reconstruction Committee of the Civil Council of Raqqqa affiliated with the Syrian Democratic Forces, whose mission is to discover mass graves, transfer the bodies and identify them. It started its work in January 2018.



Military operations and the use of prohibited weapons:

At the beginning of 2020, the Idlib region saw the continuation of the military campaign launched by the Syrian-Russian-Iranian alliance forces, which had lasted since October 2019. This campaign resulted in significant human losses, mainly due to bombardment of residential neighborhoods, randomly or deliberately, and caused massive destruction of infrastructure. We also documented dozens of attacks on vital civilian facilities and additional displacement of hundreds of thousands more citizens. This campaign was accompanied by these forces advancing on the ground and taking control over vast areas of territories in northern Syria that had not previously been under their control. Following the ceasefire which came into effect on March 6, airstrikes by the Syrian-Russian alliance forces ceased until the end of the year, although the period saw several violations by Russian forces, most of which targeted military sites of Hay'at Tahrir al Sham, while ground attacks by Syrian Regime forces and its allies continued, though these are the lowest numbers of such attacks compared to previous months, with the COVID-19 pandemic apparently affecting the military capabilities of the Syrian regime's army and affiliated Iranian militias, which has contributed to a reduction in the rate of their killing of Syrian civilians.

The past year was the best compared to the previous nine years in terms of the use of prohibited weapons, the use of which was largely limited to the first nine weeks of the year, as the Syrian regime used cluster munitions several times, and also used barrel bombs as part of its scorched earth policy in order to achieve an advance on the ground. In January, we recorded the use of this weapon in the Aleppo governorate for the first time since February 2018. We also monitored that the attacks using barrel bombs almost completely ceased after factions of the Armed Opposition shot down a Syrian regime helicopter in Idlib suburbs on February 14. Meanwhile, we were unable to document attacks using incendiary weapons or using chemical weapons during this year.

Factions of the Armed Opposition and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham continued their artillery shelling of areas under the control of Syrian Regime forces in the suburbs of Hama, Idlib and Aleppo, in response to the bombardment of the areas under their control, with most of these attacks being launched against military sites.

In 2020, we recorded dozens of killings resulting from targeting by drones which we believe belong to the US-led coalition, with most of these taking place in the second half of the year, with most of the incidents targeted military vehicles of extremist Islamist groups; these incidents also resulted in the death of some civilians, one of whom was [a civilian activist](#) who was hit by shrapnel when she was near the car of a leader of the Hurras al Din group 'Guardians of Religion' when it was targeted on the Arab Saeed Road, west of Idlib city, on October 15. She later died of her wounds.

Insecurity prevailed in most areas of Syria in 2020, with SNHR documenting several assassinations by unknown persons in Daraa governorate, most of which were against former fighters who had conducted settlements with the Syrian regime. The assassinations were not limited to Daraa governorate, however, although the vast majority of them occurred there, with the eastern governorates also witnessing assassinations, some of which were against tribal elders, while assassinations also took place in the Idlib region.

We also recorded dozens of killings at the hands of persons/ parties that we were unable to identify in most areas outside the control of Syrian Regime forces, with these killings concentrated in the Badiya (desert area) of the governorates of Deir Ez-Zour and Raqqqa; the most prominent of these incidents was the killing of 21 shepherds, whose bodies were discovered in separate locations in the Badyia of al Sabkha district in the eastern suburbs of Raqqqa on January 5; all of the victims had been shot dead.

In 2020, we also monitored bombings in areas under the control of the Syrian National Army forces in the suburbs of Aleppo, the suburbs of Raqqqa, and the suburbs of Hasaka, where it is difficult for us to identify the perpetrators of the bombings, which resulted in the death and injury of dozens of civilians. The most prominent of these incidents was the [explosion of a car bomb of unknown source](#) on April 28 in Rajou Street in the center of Afrin, which resulted in a massacre in which at least 44 civilians were killed; most of the victims' bodies were severely burnt, including nine children and three women, while about 55 others were injured and sustained burns of varying severity.

In 2020, civilian casualties continued to occur as a result of the explosion of remnants of previous bombardment, unexploded ordnance and [mines](#). Most of these incidents took place in the suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour, Hama and Idlib, and in areas under the control of Syrian Regime forces, resulting in the death of dozens of civilian; the majority of these incidents occurred on agricultural land, resulting in the death of farmers engaged in harvesting their crops. In a tragic incident in the north of Aleppo governorate, on the night of August 12, nearly 70 civilians, including women and children, found themselves trapped in [a minefield](#) while they were trying to flee from areas controlled by the Syrian regime towards areas controlled by the Armed Opposition, resulting in the death of a number of them. This incident is still under investigation. There is great difficulty in determining which parties are responsible for planting landmines, due to the multiplicity of forces controlling the areas in which these explosions occurred, with the high number of victims indicating that none of the controlling forces have made any significant efforts in the process of clearing landmines, or in attempting to determine their locations and fence them off, or to warn the local populations about their presence.

We documented several incidents of clashes in light of the insecurity witnessed in most areas outside the control of Syrian Regime forces, which resulted in civilian casualties, especially in northwest Syria and in Deir Ez-Zour suburbs; the most prominent of these was an incident of fighting between the al Bouferyo clan and the al Bakir clan in Mashekh village, which is administratively a part of al Bseira district in the northern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour, on May 23, which resulted in the deaths of at least 12 victims. Another incident was in the Afrin region in northwest Syria in May 2020, which saw clashes between factions of the Armed Opposition/ Syrian National Army and civilians.

The Ein Eisa district in the northern suburbs of Raqqqa witnessed several clashes between the Syrian National Army forces and Syrian Democratic Forces throughout the year, accompanied by bombings, the most recent of which were the clashes that erupted in November.



Continuous violations against children and women:

Syria's children continued to suffer in 2020 and were subjected to egregious violations such as extrajudicial killing, arbitrary arrest and enforced disappearance, in addition to death due to torture in official and unofficial detention centers, child conscription, and denial of healthcare and the educational process. Although Syria's government ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1993, the children of Syria have not obtained even the most basic of these rights, including freedom of thought, as the Syrian regime has annually held [‘enrollment parties’ for school children at the beginning of their first school year](#) and forcibly enrolling them in the al Ba'ath Vanguard Organization³; in the first grade of middle school, every child is compulsorily enrolled in another organization affiliated with the state-ruling Ba'ath Party, namely the Revolutionary Youth Union Organization⁴, which is a blatant exploitation of power for the benefit of one party and a clear example of indoctrination, once again demonstrating the Syrian regime's totalitarian and dictatorial nature.

Students affiliated with the al Ba'ath Vanguard Organization are also required to [pay a cash sum of approximately one thousand Syrian pounds](#) in exchange for their 'Vanguard Comrade' notebook, their 'Avant-Garde' identity tags and a subscription to the 'Avant-Garde' magazine. We note that only a few students receive these materials after paying their fees.

Syrian children are among the most vulnerable and worst-affected groups in society, with many additional factors exacerbating their suffering, such as the economic collapse, the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, and increasing unemployment, deprivation and family disintegration as a result of forced displacement. We also observed a greater prevalence of begging and homelessness in the streets among children, as well as documenting several incidents of child suicide this year. With the opening of schools in the areas controlled by the Syrian regime without taking any precautionary measures, the pandemic has spread among students and educational staff, contributing to the growing spread of the pandemic in wider Syrian society. In [a statement](#) published by Radio Sham FM on October 15, Hatoon Tawashi, Director of School Health in the Syrian regime's Ministry of Education, announced that the number of infections with coronavirus in schools affiliated with the Ministry of Education had increased, reaching 200 infections among students and teachers, and confirmed that there was no intention to close schools.

³ [A popular organization](#) in which all Syrian school children from grades one to six in basic education are enrolled, with affiliation with being mandatory. It aims to nurture and educate children in directive education according to the vision of the state-ruling Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party

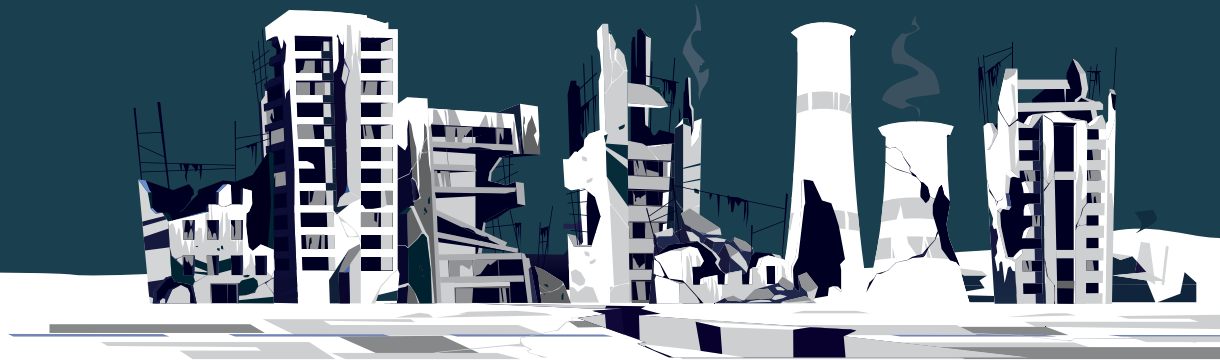
⁴ [An organization](#) affiliated with the state-ruling Ba'ath Party in Syria that works to educate young people in the preparatory and high school stages of the ideology of al Ba'ath Party and prepare them to join its membership, some of its members join the ranks of the Syrian Arab Army and the al Ba'ath Brigades

In other areas, extremist Islamist groups have taken over some schools and turned them into training camps, or - if they are maintained as schools - imposed extremist educational curricula that serve their agenda. Similarly, the Kurdish-dominated Syrian Democratic Forces have imposed educational curricula with racist discrimination in some schools in the areas under their control.

On December 16, Mr. Mark Lowcock, Emergency Relief Coordinator and Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, [said](#) during the UN Security Council session on Syria that the rate of stunted growth among children northwest Syria had risen by five percent this year; according to estimates, 34 percent of all children in this region are stunted.

The suffering of women in the past year 2020 was not less than previous years, with SNHR documenting the continuation of egregious violations practiced against them, foremost among which are killings, arbitrary arrests and enforced disappearances, which coincided with the practices of torture and cruel and inhuman treatment and sexual violence, in addition to the targeting of women through forced conscription in areas under the control of Syrian Democratic Forces. Women also suffered from harassment and restrictions in freedom of work, education, clothing, and expression in the areas under the control of the extremist Islamist groups.

Syrian women also suffer greatly from the loss of family breadwinners, especially in light of displacement, compelling many to assume new roles which are difficult to adapt to, because these often exceed their financial capabilities, skills and abilities, in addition to their being burdened by the aforementioned repercussions of the economic collapse and extreme poverty that the Syrian society in general suffers from, which has had a severe adverse impact on women.



Under Russia's orders, the Syrian regime is promoting the return of refugees in order to start the reconstruction:

The Syrian regime is the primary cause of the displacement of Syrian citizens through practicing multiple patterns of violations, some of which amount to crimes against humanity, as well as deliberately introducing massive obstacles in the path of refugees and IDPs to perpetuate their displacement, foremost among which is the systematic looting of homes and the introduction of legislation authorizing the confiscation of land and property; based on these factors, we believe that the Syrian regime has no desire for the return of refugees outside the country or even of IDPs in Syria who are only a few kilometers away, with fewer than 1% of these returning voluntarily, usually due to lack of options, so it is clear that the regime's implausible claims to be eager for the refugees' return only came about on Russian orders. The following are the most prominent of those attempts:

A: In early October, the Russian Ministry of Defense [called for](#) an international conference on the subject of Syrian refugees in the Syrian capital, Damascus, between November 10 and 12.

On November 11, the International Conference on the Return of Syrian Refugees began at the Conference Palace in Damascus, taking place over two days, with the participation of [27 countries and 12 organizations](#), including Russia, China, Iran, Lebanon, UAE, Pakistan and Oman, and in the absence of hundreds more countries and international bodies, including the United States of America, [the European Union](#) and [Canada](#).

In [its closing statement](#), the conference recommended the necessity of 'combating terrorism' and assisting in the voluntary safe return of the displaced to their chosen places of residence, along with the reconstruction of the affected areas under the stipulations of Security Council Resolution No. 2254; the conference further called on the international community to provide adequate support for the provision of housing for the displaced and their return to normal life, urging it to increase its contributions and support for Syria. We at the SNHR believe that the Syrian regime's promotion of the return of refugees is a sham staged to obtain possible financial support under the pretext of carrying out reconstruction.

B: Statistics based on official Syrian sources for the population census have shown an [increase](#) in the percentage of population growth since 2019, with this percentage increasing significantly in 2020, [reaching approximately 2.5%, according to](#) the World Population Review⁵ website, which we believe is being used to promote the idea of its being safe for refugees to return to areas of Syria under regime control. We have confirmed in [many reports](#) that Syria is still an extremely insecure country.

⁵ An independent US organization that displays population statistics in the countries of the world, relying for its statistics on Syria on the Syrian regime's Central Bureau of Statistics and the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs

C: While the Syrian regime has promoted its work on the rehabilitation of buildings and facilities in the areas previously subject to military operations and the return of their residents, we have observed in several cases that this is simply a form of propaganda, such as the opening of [the 'Martyr Najeeb al Arnous' school](#) in al Tah village in the southern suburbs of Idlib, in the presence of military figures. The photos of this event showed that the restoration included only part of the school building, while the remainder is still destroyed due to the military campaign by Syrian-Russian alliance forces against the village. Another example was the opening of an [automatic bakery in Helfaya city](#) in the northern suburbs of Hama governorate on December 3, which had witnessed a large massacre in 2012 known as the 'Bread Massacre', when the Syrian regime targeted civilians as they were buying bread.

D: The Syrian regime's institutions have set up dozens of [economic](#), [sports-related](#), [artistic](#) and cultural activities, with the aim of promoting the idea of returning normal life to normal and stabilizing conditions to attract investors and refugees.

E: On November 28, the Syrian regime, [in a statement issued](#) by the regime's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates, seized upon the disturbances witnessed by the Bcharre region in Lebanon following the killing of a Lebanese citizen by a Syrian citizen to renew the call for Syrian refugees to return to their homeland and live there in dignity and safety, provided that it provides all facilities for this return and guarantees the requirements of their decent living. The Syrian Network for Human Rights documented Syrian regime forces' arrest of 62 Syrian citizens who returned from Lebanon in 2020, as well as documenting the displacement of a number of returning Syrian refugees on the Lebanese-Syrian border.

F: Despite the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Syrian regime's Ministry of Internal Trade approved the licensing of three airlines during this year, namely the Golden Wings Company (May 2020), Peter Airline (June 2020) and Sama Al Sham Airlines (September 2020). On December 15, the Syrian regime's [Council of Ministers approved](#) the resumption of services at Aleppo and Latakia airports, as well as the resumption of services at al Qameshli International Airport for a temporary period; the Syrian regime's [Ministry of Transportation](#) had announced the resumption of services at Damascus Airport last October.

G: After the Syrian regime tightened its control over areas and towns, Syrian regime officials made repeated promises to citizens demanding that they be allowed to reenter their areas and towns that they would soon be allowed to return after the completion of the rehabilitation operations; despite these promises, we did not actually observe any return of civilians to their areas or any rehabilitation processes being carried out in them during the past year. The latest grotesque example of the regime's treatment of returning residents took place on December 16, when the Syrian regime forced the people displaced from three villages in the Wadi Barada area, namely Bassima, Ein al Fijah and Ein al Khadra, to [gather at one of the regime's checkpoints and forced them to chant praise for the president of the Syrian regime, Bashar al Assad](#), before allowing them to reenter their home villages for only a few hours, which they were only allowed to do on the condition that they had obtained security clearance. We note that the people of Wadi Barada have been subject to a forced displacement agreement that was reached between the [Syrian regime and factions](#) of the Armed Opposition in January 2017 following a brutal regime military campaign against the region. On January 18, 2018, the head of the Syrian regime issued [Law No. 1](#) under which it established the direct and indirect area around al Fijah water spring, and under which it acquired nearly half the area of the villages of Wadi Barada. The situation was no better in other areas, with SNHR also touching on [the reality faced by residents of al Yarmouk Camp](#), south of Damascus, in one of our reports in this regard.

H: On December 21, the General Consulate of the Syrian Arab Republic in Dubai announced, via its [official account on Facebook](#), that the personnel at the Immigration and Passports Department at the Jdeidet Yabous and Nasib crossings would inform every citizen coming from abroad of reports submitted against them and of their content, if any, and leave them free to choose whether to enter the country and settle their status, or return to their destination. We note that this was not the first time that the Syrian regime has promoted this approach.



Confiscating property and legalizing looting of property:

In 2020, Syrian Regime forces continued their policy of looting and confiscating citizens' properties, with the beginning of the year witnessing the Syrian regime taking control over a number of villages in the western, southern and northern suburbs of Aleppo, such as the villages of Ajel, Owaijel, Kafr Naha and al Sa'diya, in addition to five housing associations in the western suburbs of Aleppo, al Rashideen al Shamaliya and the Scientific Research areas; all of these areas have been subjected to a systematic process of looting by regime forces, with this pillaging of properties often beginning with the theft of the homes' furniture, including kitchen appliances and household furnishings, with the looting extending to stripping homes of domestic fixtures and fittings, such as electrical wiring and plumbing systems, along with flooring and even steel reinforcement rebars. We also documented this year that Syrian Regime forces and its militias continued to loot civilian property in the areas they controlled in the Idlib region in northwest Syria, issuing [a report](#) on the phenomenon.

We received news from residents of Eastern Ghouta, which we are still working to verify, about officers of the Syrian regime army confiscating a large number of houses in Douma city in Damascus Suburbs governorate owned by opposition figures and people displaced to the north of Syria, predominantly in the vicinity of al Burj al Tebbi, in addition to seizing some farms located between the cities of Douma, Harasta, and Ein Tarma town, as well as some houses located in the vicinity of the Southern Ring Road from the side of Zamalka city.

In 2020, we recorded that Syrian Regime forces carried out demolition operations targeting dozens of homes in al Qaboun neighborhood and the 'West Highway' area in Harasta city, the Eastern Ghouta, using bulldozers and heavy industrial machinery.

On another front, the Mhrada Division of the al Ba'ath Party published, on July 25, [a public auction announcement](#) offering guaranteed investments in lands planted with pistachio trees for one season (2020) in the Mhrada area, specifically in the districts of al Latamena - Latmin - Kafr Zita – al Zaka. These lands are owned by the residents of these areas who were displaced due to the military operations launched by the Syrian regime on these areas at the end of 2019.

In the eastern region, we continue to document looting of property and confiscation of homes committed by Iraqi, Iranian and Lebanese militias, which first began to clearly emerge during the battle launched by Syrian Regime forces, with the support of these militias, in Deir Ez-Zour governorate in mid-2017 against ISIS; since that time and following the elimination of ISIS, these militias have extended their control and expanded further, especially in the villages and towns west of the Euphrates, such as al Boukamal area close to the Syrian-Iraqi border. These militias have spread, setting up various headquarters and centers, most of which belong to civilians displaced to areas outside the Syrian regime's control, especially in the cities of al Boukamal and al Mayadeen in the eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour, with the members of these militias and their families setting up their headquarters in displaced civilians' homes.

While we have documented similar practices committed by other parties in the conflict, they have not been committed on the same massive scale as those perpetrated by the Syrian regime.

On August 5, we documented an announcement by the Self-Management Authority of Northern and Eastern Syria declaring the introduction of '[Law No. 7' concerning the management of property belonging to absentee owners and displaced people in areas under the authority's control](#), under the supervision of a specialist committee affiliated with it, in order to supervise these properties. The law, which proclaims the authority's full powers to dispose of and control these properties, is similar to the property control laws issued by the Syrian regime. After this legislation met with widespread protest from the people of the region and human rights organizations, [the Self-Management Authority announced](#) on August 14 that it would suspend implementation of Law 7 in order to review and reformulate it; we had previously documented the Self-Management forces' confiscation of dozens of residential buildings and homes belonging to civilians currently displaced outside Syria in the cities of al Tabqa and Raqqa, which have been under the authority's control since 2017. Its forces have also confiscated a number of homes owned by civilians in some villages and towns in the eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour, with the last of these, al Shheil city, coming under its control in January 2020; there, the authority's forces confiscated 10 civilians' homes that were turned into military headquarters, while others were commandeered by members of the Self-Management forces, who moved into them with their families, with some of these confiscations taking place in the context of ethnic grounds.



Displacement and forced displacement

The beginning of 2020 saw large displacements against the backdrop of the extension of the violent military campaign on northwest Syria, with the intensification of the campaign and in light of the shrinking areas still left outside the control of Syrian Regime forces, about 750,000 people were forced to flee away from the contact lines, despite the bad weather conditions and the weak humanitarian response. On March 12, [the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs](#) (OCHA) released its tenth report on the humanitarian situation in northwest Syria, in which it stated that approximately 960,000 people were displaced between December 1, 2019, and March 12, 2020, with most of those displaced since January 15, having been displaced more than once. On February 21, the chief of the Russian Center for Reconciliation of the Opposing Parties in Syria, Oleg Zhuravlev, [denied](#) that there had been displacement, even denying reports documenting this displacement. The Russian regime does not hesitate to deny and refute any reports speaking of its crimes, and this was not the first time it had done so.

Internally displaced persons (IDPs) have not been safe even while fleeing, with the displacement routes deliberately [bombed by the Syrian-Russian alliance forces](#); IDP camps and shelters also came under attack by the Syrian-Russian alliance forces, with SNHR [documenting 12 such incidents](#) in 2020.

The recent ceasefire that entered into force on March 6, 2020, which almost completely halted the air strikes of Syrian-Russian alliance forces, contributed to the return of approximately 300,000 IDPs to their homes in areas outside the control of the Syrian regime, according to the SNHR's estimates, after they were reassured that the Syrian regime would not mobilize to control these areas - at least at this stage. While we expected a wider return of IDPs, we have only seen a limited return of IDPs due to the widespread lack of confidence in the settlement agreements, which have been frequently and repeatedly violated, as well as due to the destruction and collapse of homes. We issued [a report](#) on the displacement caused by Syrian Regime forces and allies following the advance made on the ground in its recent military campaign against the Idlib region in northwest Syria, and the destruction that accompanied it, with the report detailing the destruction in the cities of Ma'aret al Numan and Saraqeb as examples by analyzing satellite imagery the SNHR obtained.

Some areas of the Sahl al Ghab region in the western suburbs of Hama witnessed a temporary displacement movement of hundreds of civilians during October due to the bombardment inflicted on the areas, with the displaced returning to their homes when the frequency of the bombing decreased. Ein Eisa district, in the suburbs of Raqqa, witnessed a displacement movement of hundreds of civilians fleeing their homes due to the bombing of the area by the Syrian National Army, with most of them moving towards Raqqa city.

The Syrian Network for Human Rights estimates that nearly 850,000 persons have been subjected to forced displacement in 2020, 90 percent of whom were displaced as a result of military operations launched by the Syrian-Russian alliance forces.

Camps in northwest Syria continue to suffer from the deteriorating humanitarian situation. We have recorded several incidents of fires breaking out in camps, whether due to misuse of cooking facilities or electrical short circuits. The harsh weather conditions also caused deaths among IDPs, in addition to the strong winds and rainstorms that struck the area which also damaged dozens of tents inside the camps. In addition, we recorded casualties among the residents of the random camps caused by venomous animals, with these camps lacking fences to protect the residents living in them from potentially lethal attacks by these creatures.

Most of the camps in the eastern region, in the areas under the control of Syrian Democratic Forces, have been under living conditions that have worsened following the inhumane Russian veto that blatantly violates human rights, through which Russia opposed the renewal of Security Council Resolution No. 2165⁶ in December 2019, after which the al Ya'roubiya crossing was closed, meaning that UN aid has to be taken to Damascus before being returned again to Hasaka. We documented the Syrian regime's looting of UN aid extensively in [a special report](#).

Tens of thousands of detained residents of al Hawl Camp are still suffering from harsh humanitarian conditions, and flagrant mismanagement by the Self-Management Authority there. On October 10, the Syrian Democratic Forces' Self-Management authority issued Decision [No.146](#), which allows Syrians wishing to leave al Hawl Camp⁷ to do so after completing the necessary procedures. However, through our monitoring of the implementation of this decision, we have seen no large-scale evictions or release of thousands of detained Syrians, and we have documented that those releases which have taken place have remained limited to cases arranged via tribal mediation, with SNHR detailing this extensively in [a previous report](#). We documented the departure of five groups of residents from the camp - about 2,000 of the camp's residents - up until the end of 2020, all from the governorates of Raqqa and Deir Ez-Zour. Many foreign countries have also repatriated a number of ISIS families from the camp, especially countries of East Asia and Russia, which repatriated the largest number of ISIS families, while European countries, as previously, have repatriated the lowest numbers of their citizens.

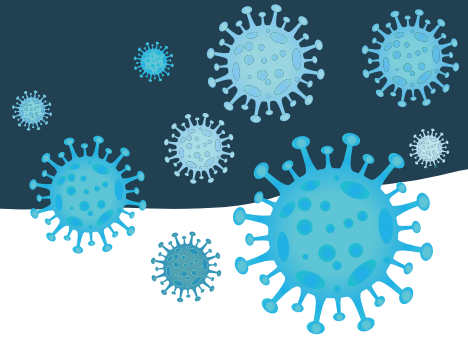
⁶ Reference no. 1

⁷ It is located east of Hasaka city, near the Iraqi-Syrian border, and houses nearly 60,000 people

Al Rukban Camp on the Syrian-Jordanian border is still subjected to siege imposed mainly by Syrian Regime forces, who often prevent personnel from the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) from delivering aid to the camp, leaving the camp residents, particularly children and women, in horrendous circumstances and in constant need of relief and aid, having access to only the most basic requirements.

On November 25, Ramesh Rajasingham, the Acting Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, explained in [his briefing](#) to the Security Council, that one-third of the 6.7 million internally displaced people in Syria lack proper shelter that provides adequate protection from severe weather conditions, as well as suffering from lack of basic essentials to protect the displaced from cold, such as heating fuel, blankets, warm clothes and shoes.

The living conditions in all Syria's refugee camps have continued to deteriorate due to the poor humanitarian conditions and the high cost of living, in addition to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic amid extremely poor conditions that prevent the implementation of any precautionary measures. In 2020, the Syrian Network for Human Rights documented the deaths of 68 IDPs, including 24 children and 13 women, [inside](#) the camps due to [the deteriorating](#) humanitarian [conditions there](#).



COVID-19 Pandemic:

At the beginning of 2020, the COVID-19 Coronavirus first appeared in the Chinese city of Wuhan, going on to spread gradually all over the world, and causing massive numbers of infections and deaths. Most of the world's stable democratic countries worldwide are dealing with it seriously and taking exceptional measures to protect the population; many countries have announced their desire to attract and employ more medical personnel, and some governments have released large numbers of imprisoned people and detainees as a precautionary measure to stop the disease from spreading.

In contrast, none of the controlling parties in Syria have taken any serious precautionary measures to prevent the spread of the pandemic since the announcement of its emergence, causing the disease to spread steadily, causing the death of large numbers of citizens; we have mentioned this in a wide range of [news reports](#) and in [many reports](#) in [recent months](#).

The following table, prepared by the Syrian Network for Human Rights and based on statistics issued by official authorities⁸, shows the steady increase in the number of infections and deaths resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic in various regions of Syria, by month since it was first announced until the end of 2020:

The distribution of infections and deaths due to the COVID-19 pandemic in Syria since the first case of infection was announced until the end of 2020

	Areas under the control of Syrian Regime forces			Areas under the control of the Armed Opposition/ Syrian National Army			Areas under the control of Syrian Democratic Forces	
	Number of infections	Number of deaths		Number of infections	Number of deaths		Number of infections	Number of deaths
Between March 22 and the end of April	43	3		-	-		2	-
May	79	2		-	-		-	-
June	157	4		-	-		-	-
July	478	34		31	-		23	-
August	2008	69		49	1		531	35
September	1435	88		992	5		1062	29
October	1528	88		3666	44		2986	61
November	2159	129		11264	192		2427	70
December	3547	294		4268	143		993	76
Total	11434	711		20270	385		8024	271

⁸ Statistics for the areas under the control of Syrian Regime forces based on [the reports of the Media Office](#) of the Syrian regime's Ministry of Health

Statistics for areas under the control of the Armed Opposition/ Syrian National Army based on the [Early Warning Alert and Response Network \(EWARN\)](#) reports

Statistics for the areas under the control of Syrian Democratic Forces based on [the reports of the Self-Management authority of Northern and Eastern Syria](#)

The whole of Syrian society is suffering as a result of mismanagement of the coronavirus crisis, in areas controlled by all the forces:

One: In the areas under the control of the Syrian regime:

Since the beginning of the global pandemic outbreak, the Syrian regime has dealt with it with callous, absolute, and extreme disregard and total negligence, with several countries announcing the arrival of infected cases from Syria since early March. Despite this, the Syrian regime continued to deny the existence of any infections in Syria until March 22.

According to the statistics issued by the Syrian regime on the number of infections and deaths caused by the pandemic, and despite these figures' lack of transparency (SNHR believes the statistics to be massively inaccurate due to the weakness of the testing and controlling operations), the regime was supposed to take more stringent measures in order to limit the spread of the disease. The regime has shown the same gross negligence in its handling of the COVID-19 pandemic as it has in its disastrous mismanagement of the Syrian state in recent years. In this context, it should also be emphasized that the Syrian regime and its Russian ally have been primary accused of the targeting, bombing and destruction of most medical facilities in Syria, and the killing of at least 722 medical personnel, as documented on the SNHR's database, with 3,334 of these lifesaving medics still classified as having been forcibly disappeared at the regime's hands, between March 2011 and the end of 2020.

The most prominent points that confirm the Syrian regime's mismanagement of the crisis and its disregard for the lives of its citizens are:

1. The Syrian regime's failure to take strict and effective precautionary measures to limit the spread of the disease, as it allowed schools, universities, markets and government departments to open.
2. Allowing mass gatherings of Syrian citizens in front of ATMs, state offices, and points of sale of consumer goods, with the regime also failing to take any measures to restrict public overcrowding or prevent crowds from gathering in stadiums to attend football matches or to impose measures obliging spectators to adopt precautionary measures; in light of the continued worsening of the bread and fuel crisis, bakeries and gas stations have witnessed severe overcrowding, with citizens packed together in queues for long hours, without any precautionary measures to prevent the pandemic from being transmitted.
3. Receiving Shiite religious delegations, officials and militias coming from Iran and Iraq (most notably the al Nujaba Movement, the Imam Ali Brigade, the Fatemiyoun Brigade, the Quds Corps Brigade, Abu al Fadl al Abbas Brigade, and the Haideriyoun Brigade) via the al Boukamal land crossing, and failing to prevent religious tourism to Shiite shrines, except for a short period.
4. The Syrian authorities have not taken any effective measures to limit air transport traffic from other countries, with Damascus International Airport still witnessing air traffic with many countries, including the pandemic-afflicted Iran.

5. The regime's failure to take serious measures to limit the merchants' monopoly on analgesics and oxygen cylinders, meaning that these items cannot be obtained at prices commensurate with the citizen's income.
6. The regime's failure to provide adequate health centers capable of responding to the spread of the pandemic among citizens free of charge.
7. Exploiting the need of citizens traveling outside Syria by forcing them to pay a \$ 100 charge, according to the exchange rate set by the Syrian Commercial Bank, to conduct PCR swabs to diagnose whether or not travelers are infected with the coronavirus, according to a statement issued by the Syrian regime's Ministry of Health [on July 22](#).
8. The Syrian regime's continuing arrests and the failure to initiate the release of tens of thousands of arbitrarily detained persons held in regime detention centers, which suffer from an almost complete absence of healthcare in addition to horrendous overcrowding among detainees. The Syrian Network for Human Rights can confirm that most of the detainees, especially in the four main security branches and military prisons, [have a space per person not exceeding 70 cm²](#) in cells that lack any ventilation or the most basic standards of cleanliness. In light of the detainees' close physical contact with regime security personnel who communicate with the outside world and with Iranian and Iraqi militiamen arriving in Syria from affected areas, there has been an increase in the well-founded fears of the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic within these centers.

The Syrian regime and its allies have taken advantage of the pandemic to demand the [lifting of sanctions imposed against the regime](#), with its allies demanding the lifting of sanctions, while both ignore the fact that the main reasons behind the deterioration of the health sector in Syria are the targeting of the medical sector by the regime and its allies (Russia and Iran) by bombing, killing and arresting medical personnel, causing the migration of most of the remainder. This problem is exacerbated by the wholesale corruption in all Syrian regime bodies, and the depletion of the Syrian state's monetary reserves which have been used to fund bombings, military operations and security services (about 150,000 security personnel) at the expense of strengthening the medical sector and purchasing medical equipment. The Syrian Network for Human Rights has demanded that Russia, a massively wealthy country, help its ally, the Syrian regime to provide treatment, particularly in light of the circumstances of the emergence of the COVID-19, which would be far better and less costly than air strikes on medical facilities, cities and towns in and around Idlib.

Two: In opposition-held areas in northwest Syria:

On July 9, the Early Warning Alert and Response Network (EWARN) [declared](#) the first positive test of COVID-19 in northwest Syria, with the virus found in a medical worker; since that date, the statistics announced by EWARN have recorded large leaps in the number of infections and deaths, with the published statistics being only for cases that the EWARN was able to test, which do not reflect the actual reality of infections. The Syrian Civil Defense ('White Helmets') organization has announced the burial of dozens of people whose deaths are suspected to have been caused by infection with the coronavirus, which foretells a humanitarian catastrophe. Despite these indicators, precautionary measures are still absent among civilians, as monitored by the Syrian Network for Human Rights, whether in mosques, markets, or elsewhere.

The situation is getting more dangerous in northwest Syria, due to the high number of cases among medical personnel, and the increasing spread of the disease in the camps.

The causes of the mismanagement of the COVID-19 pandemic crisis in northwest Syria are due to several points, the most prominent of which are:

1. The areas under opposition control suffer from an absence of a central authority to issue unified instructions, a shortcoming largely reflected in the disparity seen in the individuals' approach to prevention and medical treatment of the COVID-19 coronavirus.
2. A reduced degree of medical and religious awareness of the dangers of overcrowding and gathering. We have noted that dozens of people have routinely gathered in markets, or attended sporting events in stadiums and sport halls, with the controlling authorities failing to take any measures to restrict such overcrowding or to prevent the holding of collective prayers in mosques or graduation ceremonies for university students, as well as allowing schools to open and students to attend. Among many people in these areas, the prevailing attitude is one of indifference, primarily due to the multiple crises and traumas which they've already endured, including bombings, displacement and torture by the Syrian regime's forces and allies.
3. The lack of medical facilities capable of absorbing and treating all infections and injuries, due to the collapse of the medical sector in the region as a result of the military operations launched by the Syrian-Russian alliance forces in the area.
4. The region is witnessing massive overcrowding of civilians as a result of the displacement and forced displacement movements that it has experienced, with nearly 3 million people in areas outside the control of the Syrian regime in and around Idlib, the greatest number of whom were previously displaced to it from several areas such as the Eastern Ghouta, the northern suburbs of Homs, southern Syria, the northern suburbs of Hama and the southern suburbs of Idlib. Most of these peoples now live in hastily constructed camps or structures which are wholly inadequate and unsuitable for housing (such as schools, shops, unfinished apartments, demolished buildings, caves, etc.), which lack the most basic sanitary infrastructure such as toilets, functioning sewage networks, or clean water, which makes the available water allocations necessary for periodic personal hygiene for each person far less than would be available in normal conditions or in other areas in Syria. The IDPs are struggling to obtain enough tents, and are sometimes forced to live crammed together collectively in one tent.
5. Failure to close the crossings between the areas under the control of Syrian Regime forces or Syrian Democratic Forces with the areas of northwest Syria.

Three: In areas under the control of Syrian Democratic Forces in northeast Syria:

The situation in northeast Syria has been characterized by the absence of planning and management, and the lack of clarity and transparency, as evidenced by the following main points:

On April 29, the Self-Management of Northern and Eastern Syria announced in a [statement](#) that two cases of infection (a man and his wife) had appeared. The wife was quarantined in the hospital, with this considered to be the first COVID-19 case in Hasaka governorate, according to the hospital director.

On July 23 - that is, nearly three months after the first announcement - [Joan Mustafa](#), the co-chair of the Health Authority in the Self-Management of Northern and Eastern Syria, announced the emergence of 4 new cases, increasing the total number of infections that appeared in the region to six; since that date, the numbers of declared infections has continued to rise steadily, up until the time of preparing this report.

The northeast region of Syria suffers from a similar situation as in northwest Syria, in terms of favorable conditions for the spread of the pandemic, and also includes large numbers of IDPs in the camps, with the closure of the al Ya'rubiya crossing with Iraq, based on UN Resolution 2533⁹, having caused the region to be denied direct international aid, which is now provided exclusively through the Syrian regime, which deliberately puts obstacles and systematically carries out extortions.

The region also suffers from the massive destruction caused by the military campaigns that it experienced, with civilians in most parts of it lacking adequate buildings for housing and lacking the infrastructure that contributes to the application of precautionary measures.

⁹ Renewal of the procedures approved by the Security Council in paragraphs 2 and 3 of resolution [2165 \(2014\)](#), for a period of twelve months, that is, until July 10, 2021, with the exception of the al Ramtha, al Ya'rubiya and Bab al Salam border crossings.



The living and economic reality in Syria:

2020 saw a major collapse in the value of the Syrian currency, with the further decline in the value of the Syrian pound being reflected in all areas of life and in the prices of basic commodities in the various Syrian regions, with markets also seeing massive price increases at record rates in addition to the scarcity of basic materials in the areas controlled by Syrian Regime forces.

The situation is somewhat different in the opposition-controlled areas in northwest Syria, where the ruling authorities represented by the Salvation Government in the Idlib region and the Syrian Interim Government in the areas northwest of Aleppo have [dealt in Turkish currency](#) instead of the Syrian currency since mid-June 2020.

In 2020, the Syrian regime's Ministry of Internal Trade and Consumer Protection issued successive decisions to raise the prices of basic essential goods for Syrian citizens, such as food and household fuel (gas and diesel), with allocations of these items being distributed to each family according to the number of its members at 'subsidized' prices, using a smart card system that aims to organize access to these allocations without the need for overcrowding, which has seen Syrian citizens forced in 2020 to queue for hours a day in volatile weather conditions to obtain these materials, foremost among which are bread, in quantities that are barely enough for one family, setting the selling price of one kilogram of unpackaged subsidized bread at 75 Syrian pounds, as well as setting the price of a subsidized bread bundle weighing 1100 grams and packaged in a nylon bag at 100 Syrian pounds for the authorized distributors and consumers from the bakery outlet, in accordance with Resolutions [2990](#) and [2991](#) issued by the Ministry on October 28. We note that [the daily allocations](#) for families consisting of one or two members is one bread bundle, for those with three or four members two bundles, for a family of five or six members three bundles, and for a family of seven or more four bundles. Citizens we spoke with assured us that they often do not receive their full allocation and that the matter is subject to the whim of the person responsible for the distribution.

We also noticed an increase in the prices of most materials in the areas controlled by Syrian Regime forces, with price rises introduced in a random and unplanned manner, for example the price of a liter of 95 octane gasoline rose according to two [successive resolutions](#) in October, increasing by 1.75 times to 1,050 pounds per liter. The increase in the price of industrial diesel was foreshadowed by the closure of industrial facilities, imposing an additional burden on Syrian citizens.

On June 26, the World Food Program [estimated](#) that 9.3 million Syrians are now food insecure - an increase of 1.4 million over the previous six months. The report indicated that the standstill and the repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic have contributed to an increase in food prices of more than 200% in less than a year. The United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization's [\(FAO\) report](#), issued on October 30, ranked Syria 16th among the countries threatened by a severe increase in the level of hunger, and an increasing number of people suffering from food insecurity.

This collapse has greatly contributed to the inability of Syrian citizens across the country to take the necessary precautionary measures to prevent the COVID-19 pandemic, which requires financial resources to buy masks and cleaning materials, and to work continuously without interruption or lockdown to secure a livelihood.

We have observed an increased spread of the phenomena of unemployment, begging and homelessness than seen in the previous year, 2019, with the rate of kidnappings, theft, murder and suicide also rising in 2020, especially in the areas controlled by Syrian Regime forces. We shed light on this issue in [numerous reports](#) we issued in the past year.

Also in 2020, the Syrian regime restricted workers in the remittance sector, closing hundreds of remittance offices in exchange for keeping a limited number of companies open, and arrested dozens of workers employed in this field, in addition to carrying out security checks on the names of senders and recipients. This prevented millions of Syrian citizens from receiving remittances from their relatives outside Syria, on which they depended for their livelihood.

In regard to public services, Syrian citizens in all parts of the country suffered, and are still suffering, from a scarcity of services, especially in areas that had been subjected to military operations which left cracks in buildings and destroyed infrastructure. The Syrian Network for Human Rights has monitored several incidents of unstable buildings literally collapsing over the heads of their inhabitants who were forced by conditions and lack of alternative options to stay there, [resulting in casualties](#).

The promised rehabilitation and reconstruction of areas and towns that were subjected to destruction in the areas where the Syrian regime regained control are almost non-existent, with SNHR not recording any operations to remove rubble; we at the SNHR believe that this negligence on the regime's part is wholly intentional, with the regime, which has exhausted the state's resources through expenditure on bombing and torture operations, requiring others to step in to undertake reconstruction and restoration operations.

In addition to these problems, the already extreme suffering of Syrian citizens in the areas under the control of Syrian Regime forces worsened further, due to the increased hours of electricity-rationing, which in some areas means daily power cuts of six hours, with no more than one hour per day of 'constant' electricity; even during this brief hour, the electricity supply is intermittent, going

off repeatedly, with regime [officials](#) claiming that this power-rationing is due to the power stations' failure to generate sufficient quantities of electricity coupled with the heavy pressure on the power grid which they say is running at almost twice the normal level due to citizens' heavy electricity use. These power shortages further worsen the already bleak humanitarian situation, especially in light of the lack of sufficient quantities of diesel and gas available to Syrian citizens for heating and cooking purposes.

As for the areas controlled by Syrian Democratic Forces, Hasaka city and its suburbs in particular, the people suffered from successive and lengthy water cuts, with the Syrian National Army in the area suspending pumping of water from Allouk Water Station east of Ras al Ein city in the north-western suburbs of Hasaka, on six occasions in 2020; this station provides water to around 600,000 civilians. This action was taken in response to Syrian Democratic Forces' reduction of the electricity supply to al Mabrouka Electricity Station, which supplies electricity to areas controlled by the Syrian National Army forces, leading to a humanitarian crisis in both areas due to the conditions afflicting the region through due to the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the high temperatures.

The agricultural and industrial sectors, which are considered the main source of income in Syria, have suffered greatly from the repercussions of the economic crisis, as it has become difficult to secure labor supplies in terms of materials and labor and to secure a market for the sale of these products, with the restrictions imposed by security checkpoints in areas controlled by Syrian Regime forces having an adverse effect on the movement of products, while the fees and 'royalties' imposed on merchants and transport vehicles having the effect of stopping the investment in land and the closure of many industrial establishments.

We documented massive demonstrations by the people of several towns and villages in the areas controlled by Syrian Democratic Forces in the governorates of Deir Ez-Zour and Raqqa and the southern suburbs of Hasaka this year, with the participants protesting against the poor security, service and economic situation. Al Suwayda city in southern Syria also witnessed similar protests against the Syrian regime.

The main reasons behind the economic deterioration in Syria:

Although the Syrian regime and its allies attribute the decline in the value of the Syrian pound and the increase in the prices of basic materials to the sanctions imposed on the regime and on affiliated individuals and institutions, we at the SNHR believe that the main factors behind the collapse of the Syrian economy are, in short:

1. The destruction of entire neighborhoods and vital facilities; air missile attacks are responsible for the vast majority of the destruction, followed by barrel bomb attacks.

2. The displacement of nearly 13 million Syrians, including workers, technicians, highly qualified persons and merchants, who played a major role as central drivers of Syria's economy. The main reasons that forced them into displacement are the destruction of homes and shops, along with arrest, torture and forced conscription.
3. The draining of the resources of the Syrian state and cash reserves for expenditure on military operations to crush the popular uprising and thwart political change, regardless of the cost.
4. The continuing crisis affecting Lebanese banks, which were the Syrian regime's main conduit to the outside world, through which most of its purchases were made and which allowed it to bring various goods into Syria.
5. Additional reasons such as: the coronavirus pandemic, the sanctions imposed on Iran, the deep-rooted endemic corruption among the vast majority of the Syrian regime's institutions, and the increasing hostility between the Syrian regime and Rami Makhlouf, a cousin of Bashar al Assad and one of the wealthiest Syrian regime beneficiaries, who for decades monopolized hundreds of goods and services under the auspices of Bashar al Assad and his security services.
6. Finally, the Syrian regime's unwillingness to stop committing crimes against humanity and war crimes, to release tens of thousands of detainees, and to engage in a political transition that would contribute to lifting sanctions and restarting the wheel of the economy.

While there is no doubt that sanctions have had an impact on Syrian society, it is marginal compared to the six aforementioned reasons. We covered this issue previously in [an extensive report](#).

We note that the implementation of these sanctions is not fully applied, as we received reports from multiple sources, including media sources, that the Lebanese Hezbollah continues to smuggle gasoline and flour to the Syrian regime, while Syrian Democratic Forces are still exporting crude oil from the oil fields under its control to the Syrian regime, whether via the water crossings on the Euphrates River in the eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour, or via the land crossings through al Qatirji Company, which is affiliated with the Syrian regime, which we covered in [a previous report](#); all this is happening despite the fact that the Caesar Act has entered into force. We believe that the revenues from these smuggling operations are not being used for the benefit of ordinary Syrian citizens, but rather for the benefit of individuals and institutions affiliated with the Syrian regime.

During the last two years, we noticed a steep rise in drug trafficking activities in Syria, with what was revealed in 2020 showing that this was the worst year to date in this regard; the dealing and abuse of illicit drugs trafficking increased among Syrian citizens, especially in areas controlled by Syrian Regime forces, without the controlling parties taking any concrete measures to challenge drug cultivation, production and trading. We have received information about the existence of hashish farms in southern Syria supervised by individuals affiliated with the Lebanese Hezbollah, and we have monitored dozens of incidents during this year that confirm the smuggling of other narcotic drugs from Syria to other countries, with several countries, including [Jordan](#), [Egypt](#), [Italy](#) and [Romania](#), announcing that they thwarted attempts to smuggle drugs from Syria.

Despite the ongoing economic collapse, the Syrian regime worked constantly to promote and glorify itself through the launch of [several vanity projects](#) that required the expenditure of huge sums of money from the already massively depleted state treasury, including the Syrian regime's inauguration of the '[Golden Knight Basil al Assad](#)' Museum in al Assad Sports City in Latakia city on November 17, with the facility being lavish refurbishment; the facility appears to be very extravagant.

Finally, in 2020, Syria saw the widespread outbreak of dozens of fires whose cause has yet to be identified in forested areas and agricultural fields across Syria, starting from May, coinciding with the harvest seasons with these blazes causing significant damage to agricultural crops, and having a severe impact on farmers. The largest and most extensive fires broke out in the mountains of the Syrian coast, with the largest of these breaking out on October 9. As in previous similar fires, the Syrian regime showed total disregard and indifference to these blazes, as we documented no intervention at all by helicopters to extinguish the massive fires until they spread to villages and towns. The fires in 2020 caused human, agricultural and animal losses that will require hundreds of years to recover. The Syrian regime's Ministry of Agriculture [revealed](#) on December 20 that the number of fires in 2020 had reached 2,480 in all, distributed across four governorates.



Syrian regime officials make irresponsible and contradictory statements to justify the crises of the Syrian people:

In 2020, we documented many chaotic statements and decisions that indicated indifference and widespread chaos, corruption and irresponsibility on the part of Syria's regime, issued in light of the oppressive economic crisis afflicting the Syrian people. For example, Hussein Arnous, Prime Minister of the Syrian regime, [issued](#) a decision on July 8 obliging Syrian citizens and those of similar status wishing to return to Syria to exchange US \$ 100 or its equivalent in foreign currencies, in accordance with the exchange rates set by the Central Bank, before being allowed to do so. We [monitored the devastating consequences](#) of this mafiosi-style extortion on dozens of Syrian citizens who decided to return from Lebanon to Syria following the Beirut port explosion.

On November 4, the Syrian regime's president, [during](#) his visit to the 'Producers 2020' exhibition in Damascus city, offered an explanation for the reasons behind the economic crisis afflicting Syria, saying:

The economic problem has another reason, which is the money that the Syrians took and deposited in Lebanon, and when banks in Lebanon were closed, we paid the price. This is the core of the problem that no one talks about.

In light of the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Syrian regime's Minister of Health, Dr. Nizar Yazji, made [a statement](#) on March 10 in a television interview with an official agency concerning the procedures followed by the ministry to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic, saying:

Thank God, the Syrian Arab Army has cleared many of the germs from the soil of Syria, and I thank it for that.

This statement, likening dispossessed citizens of the nation to the germs of an infectious disease came from the Minister of Health, not the head of any of the regime's brutal security branches or a commander of its tank battalions.

In a video statement published by al Watan newspaper on September 9, Darem al Tabaa, the Syrian regime's Minister of Education, [commented](#) on closing schools as an urgently needed public health precaution in light of the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, saying:

“The return of students and teachers will reduce the pressure in residential communities, and they can spread across wide spaces during working hours in schoolyards, playgrounds, and classrooms. The Ministry of Education cannot close the doors of schools, while at the same time, hospitals and medical colleges have not closed their doors in light of the pandemic.”

On December 13, al Watan newspaper [published](#) an interview with Ahmad Nabulsi, deputy governor of Damascus, in which he commented about the cause of the recent congestion at petrol stations, claiming that there was no longer a lack of goods in December compared to the previous three months:

“The issue has to do with people’s psychological state. As soon as the citizen sees that there is a column of cars, he feels that the goods will be cut off, so he joins the queue to take his allocations, and thus the number of people waiting will increase and congestion occurs.”

Dr. Atef al Tawil, Director of the Communicable and Chronic Diseases Directorate at the Ministry of Health, speaking about securing the COVID-19 vaccine for Syria, [said](#) in a statement published on December 24:

It is true that there are countries that take larger shares because this is a purely commercial matter, but the longer the vaccine is delayed, the more the matter is in the interest of the citizen, as production increases, and thus the price decreases to reach a greater number of countries.

Commenting on the shortage of bread, [Ziad Hazaa](#), Director General of Bakeries, told Radio Ninar on September 14:

The shortage of bread is mainly because it has become an essential part of citizens’ sustenance; after the price hike, the demand for the material increased.

We at the Syrian Network for Human Rights believe that such statements would have led to the dismissal of these officials and their vilification and exposure through the media if they had been said in any country that respects its citizens, their feelings and their intelligence.



Iranian expansion and the spread of manifestations of Shiism in the areas controlled by Syrian Regime forces:

Since the start of the popular uprising, the Iranian regime has relied on ideological propaganda to justify its intervention in Syria in support of the Syrian regime against the popular uprising, and has widely promoted its claim to be ‘protecting Shiite shrines’; this ‘protection’ was not limited to protecting known shrines only, but also extended to extinct or different shrines, in addition to portraying and slandering the popular uprising as an extremist insurgency by Sunni terrorist organizations aiming to eradicate the Shiites in Syria, and as a preemptive war in Syria which would subsequently expand towards Iraq and Iran. All of this coincided with relentless attempts by Iran’s regime to spread the Shiite sect among the Syrians, with the aim of strengthening its presence by bringing about a sectarian change among Syria’s population. These attempts were most active in areas with a deteriorating economic and scientific situation in the areas where Shiite militias were stationed. In 2020, we monitored an increase in this activity, as the emergence of Shiite clerics spread even within the official celebrations held by the Syrian regime, and dozens of ceremonies featuring ritual Shia chest-beating (latmiyat) were held in public places, mostly in Damascus city, with all these events intended to send a message to all Syrians and to the various countries of the world emphasizing the extent of the penetration and spread of the Iranian regime’s presence in Syria.

The spread of the manifestations and proselytization on behalf of the Iranian regime’s fundamentalist form of Shiism was concentrated mainly in the governorates of Damascus and its suburbs, along with Deir Ez-Zour, Homs and Aleppo. The shrine of Sayyida Zainab and the shrine of Sayyida Ruqayya in Damascus are among the most famous Shiite shrines, with the significance of other more minor ones also being emphasized, for example, the Ayn Ali shrine in the Badiya of al Qourya city east of Deir Ez-Zour and al Nuqta Mosque in Aleppo city. The Iranian cultural centers scattered in many villages and towns are responsible for indoctrination, proselytization and related cultural activities which include distributing pamphlets and leaflets to spread Shiism among students and residents.

In addition, Iran’s regime has signed several agreements with the Syrian regime in various fields, with 2020 witnessing the signing of [an agreement to support education](#) in Syria; it seems that the primary aim of this is to spread the fundamentalist ideology of the extremist mullahs’ regime among the children of Syria, in addition to signing several economic and [military](#) agreements aimed at extending Iranian control over important sectors.

III. Most Prominent Political, Military and Human Rights Events Related to Syria in 2020:

We try to explain the correlation between political events, military matters and rapidly changing facts on the ground in order to understand the picture more clearly, while emphasizing that this explanation is in no way a justification for any form of human rights violations by any party.

A. Most Prominent political events

On January 3, the US State Department announced the addition of the 'Asaib Ahl al Haq' militia, which works for Iran's regime in Syria and Iraq, and of two of its leaders, to the US list of foreign terrorist organizations.

On January 7, [Russian President, Vladimir Putin visited Damascus](#) for the second time since the Russian military intervention in Syria in September 2015, meeting with Bashar al Assad, the head of the Syrian regime, at the headquarters of the Russian Armed Forces group in Syria, before heading to the Hmeimim Airbase.

On March 17, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, his French counterpart Emmanuel Macron, German Chancellor Angela Merkel and British Prime Minister Boris Johnson held a quadripartite summit via closed-circuit television, to discuss the situation in Idlib and the refugee issue.

On March 22, the Syrian regime's president, Bashar al Assad, issued [Legislative Decree No.6 of 2020](#), granting a general amnesty for crimes committed before the date of the issuance of the decree, which focused on securing the release of perpetrators of crimes, felonies and offences. [According to the SNHR's Detainees Department, however, the decree included only a very small number](#) of the detainees referred to exceptional courts such as the Counter-Terrorism Court and the military field courts, and excluded the largest proportion of detainees who were not subjected to any trial during the years of their detention, who have been classified as forcibly disappeared.

On April 9, Mr. Josep Borrell, High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, [welcomed](#) the release of the first report of the OPCW's Investigation and Identification Team, and called for those responsible for the use of chemical weapons to be held accountable.

On April 22, the foreign ministers of the guarantor states of the Astana process, Russia, Turkey and Iran, held a meeting via tele-conference during which they affirmed Russia, Iran and Turkey's adherence to respecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic, in accordance with UN Security Council Resolution 2254.

On May 30, the Syrian regime's president, Bashar al Assad, issued [decrees](#), in which he dismissed and replaced the incumbent governors in five Syrian governorates, namely Homs, Daraa, Suwayda, Quneitra, and Hasaka; this was followed by [Decree 143](#), on June 11, dismissing the Prime Minister, Imad Khamis, from his post and appointing Hussein Arnous to assume his duties.

On June 22, [the Fourth Brussels Conference](#) entitled 'Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region', organized by the European Union in cooperation with the United Nations, took place between June 22 and 30, with the aim of providing financial support from the international community to Syria and to neighboring countries hosting refugees.

On July 19, the Syrian regime held the People's Assembly elections for the third legislative term. We issued [a report](#) on the illegitimacy of these elections.

On August 24, the meeting of the Constitutional Committee¹⁰, which was [scheduled](#) to take place in Geneva, was suspended after three of the delegates due to participate tested positive for COVID-19.

On 27 August, the meetings of the Constitutional Committee, which had been suspended on the original date set, [resumed in Geneva](#), and we note that this round of meetings is the first after a nine-month hiatus due to disagreements over the agenda then due to COVID-19 restrictions.

On September 7, the Syrian regime's president, Bashar al Assad, hosted a Russian delegation, including Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, on his first visit since 2012 to Damascus, headed by Deputy Prime Minister Yury Borisov, along with a number of Russian diplomats.

On October 8, the [Syrian regime's president claimed](#) in an interview with Sputnik news agency that the constitutional committee talks in Geneva: "are a political game, and it is not what the Syrians focus on. Syrians do not think about the constitution and no one talks about it. They care about the reforms that we need to launch and the policies that we need to change to meet their needs."

On October 22, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Vershinin [stated](#) in a speech delivered to the Russian Parliament that his country opposed the adoption of a US-sponsored draft resolution on Syria based on a report of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) at the UN Security Council, and sought to cooperate with other countries on this issue.

On November 5, the [United States revoked the designation](#) of the Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement, also known as ETIM, as a 'terrorist organization', which has a branch of the Turkestan Islamic Party in Syria.

¹⁰ The Constitutional Committee was set up by the United Nations in order to draft a new constitution for Syria as part of the political process in accordance with UN Resolution 2254, and it is divided in parallel between the regime, the opposition and representatives of civil society organizations.

On November 7, Ambassador James F. Jeffrey, the Special Representative for Syria Engagement and Special Envoy for the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS, who had adopted a position in support of the Syrian people, [resigned](#).

On November 11, the International Conference on the Return of Syrian Refugees began at the Conference Palace in Damascus over a period of two days, with the participation of [27 countries and 12 organizations](#), including Russia, China, Iran, Lebanon, UAE, Pakistan and Oman.

On November 16, the Syrian regime's Prime Ministry published [an obituary](#) mourning the death of Walid al Muallem, Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates, who died at dawn on the same day. On November 22, the Syrian regime's president issued [Legislative Decree 322 stipulating](#) the appointment of Faysal al Miqdad as Foreign and Expatriates Minister.

On November 16, Muhammad al Rahmoun, the Syrian regime's Minister of Interior, [said in a speech](#) delivered to the People's Assembly that more than \$ 21.5 million had been collected from payments for passports issued to Syrian citizens outside the country. We believe that these revenues obtained from Syrian citizens will be used to fund military operations, arrests and torture against Syrian citizens.

On November 16, Russian Foreign Minister [Sergey Lavrov stated](#) in an article which he wrote to mark the 75th anniversary of the founding of UNESCO: "It is time for the international community, under the auspices of UNESCO, to take effective action to restore international antiquities in Syria that have been destroyed by terrorists."

SNHR notes that we have maintained a database of attacks on archaeological sites in Syria since March 2011 and we have been working for months to prepare a report about these attacks, which will confirm the central role of Russia and the Syrian regime in sabotaging many of these sites in several ways.

On November 17, [Russian President Vladimir Putin stated](#) at the BRICS summit that "There is still a lot to be done to bring about a political settlement in Syria."

On November 20, the National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces issued [a decision to form](#) a 'High Election Commission', which was met with a wave of rejection by Syrian civil and political bodies and civil actors. The Coalition subsequently issued [a decision on the 23rd](#) of the same month to suspend work on the formation decision.

On November 23, Yasin Aktay, the advisor to Turkey's governing Justice and Development Party, [affirmed](#) in a television interview that Turkey has not and will not give up on Idlib, which has become a refuge for Syrians displaced from the injustice inflicted by Russia, the Assad regime and the Popular Mobilization Forces (al Hashd al Sha'bi).

On November 26, Italy's Foreign Minister Luigi Di Maio [stated](#) that his country supports the UN-led political process in Syria.

On November 30, [the fourth round of talks of the Syrian Constitutional Committee](#), hosted by the United Nations in Geneva, was launched in order to discuss national foundations and principles, with constitutional principles being on the agenda for discussion at the next meeting, with this round of talks continuing until December 4.

On December 3, Joel Rayburn, the US Special Envoy for Syria, [stated](#) during a virtual press conference in Istanbul, Turkey, that any elections held by the Assad regime in 2021 outside the framework of Security Council Resolution 2245 will not enjoy legitimacy, as the elections must be sponsored and guaranteed by the United Nations. Rayburn also accused the Syrian regime of slowing down and continuously obstructing the work of the Constitutional Committee, and indicated that Russia is required to pressure the regime to play ^a constructive and purposeful role.

On December 4, the fourth round of meetings of the Constitutional Committee concluded in Geneva. Although the issue of the constitution was not addressed during the meetings, Geir O. Pedersen, the UN Special Envoy for Syria, [indicated](#) in the final statement that it was agreed that the constitutional principles would be on the agenda of the next round of talks scheduled to be held at the end of January 2021. SNHR has not noticed any real progress through these committee meetings, while all the rounds of talks in Geneva have not achieved any breakthrough in terms of the political transition, and we believe that if it continues at this pace, it will take several decades to complete the course set down by Security Council Resolution 2254 and the Geneva Communiqué

On December 9, the [Sudanese Ministry of Interior announced](#) in a statement that it had canceled its decision to exempt Syrians from entry visas upon entering Sudan.

On December 16, [the People's Assembly approved](#) the state budget for the coming year at 8.5 thousand billion Syrian pounds.

On December 17, the Syria Trust for Development, which is controlled by Asmaa al Assad, the wife of the Syrian regime's President, [won](#) the rank of international arbitrator in the elections of the International Evaluation Commission for a group of non-governmental organizations in the Arab region, during the fifteenth session of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO) commission for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage, held in Paris. We at the SNHR urge UNESCO to reverse this decision that legitimizes institutions affiliated with the Syrian regime, which has destroyed cultural heritage in Syria, in the eyes of the international community, and to withdraw its tacit approval of Asmaa al Assad, who has been placed on the US and European sanctions lists for involvement in supporting the gross violations practiced by her husband.

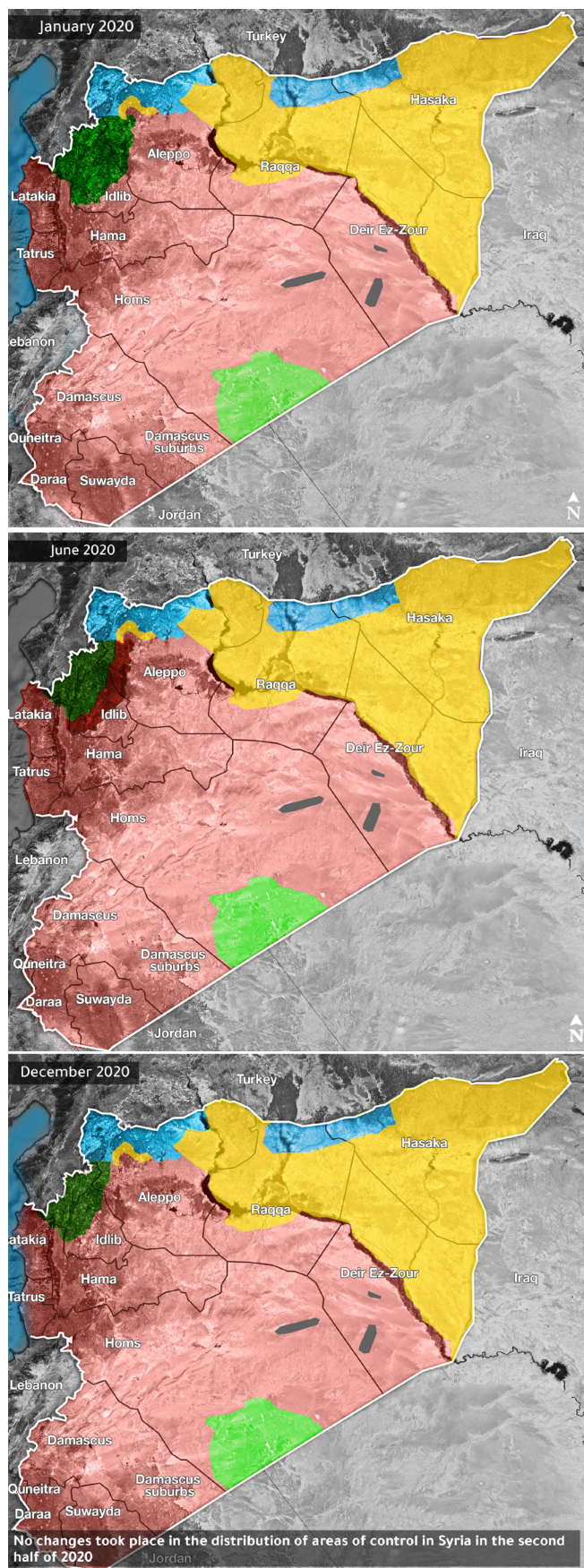
On December 18, Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova [said](#) in a statement that Moscow is ready to cooperate on Syria with all interested countries, including the United States, and claimed that Russia had played a key role in delivering a crushing blow to international terrorism in Syria.

On December 19, Russian RT channel broadcast a press interview with Faysal Miqdad, Minister of Foreign Affairs in the Syrian regime's government, in which he [stated](#) that the unilateral US sanctions against the Syrian regime aim to affect the upcoming presidential elections.

B. The military developments:

The pace of military operations decreased in 2020 compared to previous years, with these operations being severely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic as well as the ceasefire agreement in the Idlib region that came into effect on March 6; as a result, SNHR documented a reduction of 85 percent in the rate of military operations, with those which took place mainly limited to ground attacks, without making any significant advance on the ground. We note that the change in areas of control that occurred in 2020 was limited to the Idlib region and its environs. The map below, prepared by SNHR's Design Team based on the livemap website, shows the change in the reality of control of the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in 2020:

- Areas under the control of Syrian regime forces
- Advance by Syrian regime forces
- Areas under the joint control of factions of the Armed Opposition and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham
- Areas under the control of Syrian Democratic Forces
- Areas under the control of ISIS
- Areas under the control of the Syrian National Army
- Areas under the control of Factions of the Armed Opposition



On February 1, fixed-wing warplanes, which we believe were Russian, launched an air raid [on the center of al Bab city](#) in the eastern suburbs of Aleppo governorate; this was the first time al Bab city had been subjected to aerial bombardment by Syrian-Russian alliance forces since it came under the control of the Armed Opposition factions supported by Turkish forces in February 2017.

On February 11, [Syrian Regime forces took control of al Rashideen neighborhood](#), west of Aleppo, with this operation meaning that the regime had assumed full control of the entire 'M5' Damascus-Aleppo International Road.

On February 27, Turkey launched Operation Spring Shield in northwest Syria following a Russian air attack on Turkish forces in Balyoun village, in the suburbs of Idlib governorate, in which 33 Turkish military personnel were killed. In conjunction with this operation, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan stated that his country would not close its borders to migrants because the European Union has not fulfilled its obligations.

On March 1, Syrian Regime forces and affiliated militias stormed neighborhoods in al Sanamayn city in the northern suburbs of Daraa, where members of former Armed Opposition factions were living; this was followed by arrests, before a settlement agreement was concluded on the same day, with the mediation of the Fifth Corps affiliated with Russia, which provided for the displacement of 21 of the former Armed Opposition members to northwest Syria.

On March 18, Syrian Regime forces bombed Masaken Jilleen town in the western suburbs of Daraa, following a clash with armed groups on the outskirts of the town, after personnel at one of the regime checkpoints killed the leaders of the Central Committee in the western suburbs of Daraa. The bombing caused civilian casualties.

On March 24, the General Command of Syrian Democratic Forces [called on](#) the parties to the conflict in Syria to refrain from any military initiatives or actions, and to immediately commit to a humanitarian armistice in response to the repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic, and announced the commitment of its forces to the state of legitimate defense.

On March 27, clashes erupted in Qrayya town, south of al Suwayda governorate, between the National Defense Forces and the Men of Dignity Movement¹¹ on one side, and the Eighth Brigade of the Fifth Corps formed by Russia on the other, following an attack on the posts of the Ahmad al Awda-led Eighth Brigade on land owned by the people of al Suwayda. In a statement issued on April 1, the Men of Dignity Movement [held](#) Russia responsible for these clashes.

On May 5, a joint Turkish-Russian patrol was conducted on the 'M4' Latakia-Aleppo Road for the first time without obstacles along the entire route agreed upon in the ceasefire agreement concluded on March 6. We note that the International Road saw civil sit-ins supported by Hay'at Tahrir al Sham, in rejection of the conduct of these patrols, with the sit-ins limiting the movement of patrols along the entire route since the start of the first patrol on March 15 up to this date.

On May 27, Russian and US forces conducted their first joint patrol since their forces entered Syria, in the vicinity of Deir Ghosn village in Hasaka governorate in northeast Syria.

On June 4, [Syrian Democratic Forces issued a statement announcing](#) the start of the first phase of their operation codenamed 'Deterring Terrorism' in a search for ISIS cells in the southern suburbs of Hasaka and the eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour, extending to the Iraqi-Syrian border, which was ended on June 10, according to [a statement](#) SDF issued.

On June 20, a military bus being used by the Syrian regime-affiliate Fifth Corps, supported by Russia, was targeted on the road between the towns of Kahil and al Sahwa, east of Daraa, using explosives, with the attack overturning the bus and killing 10 of the individuals on board, most of whom were former fighters with Armed Opposition factions who had joined the Corps, and injuring at least 30 others, some seriously.

On July 17, [Syrian Democratic Forces announced](#) the start of the second phase of their 'Deterring Terrorism' operation in several cities and towns in the eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour, namely al Bseira, al Zir, Jdeed Ekidat and al Sh-heil, in a search for ISIS cells; according to statements issued by the Syrian Democratic Forces, this operation was launched at the request of clan dignitaries in Deir Ez-Zour suburbs during a meeting with Mazloun Abdi, the commander-in-chief of the Syrian Democratic Forces, on July 14. [The operation continued until July 20.](#)

On July 22, [the joint Turkish-Russian patrols followed](#) the entire route scheduled for them, from Saraqeb city in the Idlib suburbs to Ein al Hour village in the Latakia suburbs, for the first time since the first patrol took place on March 15.

On August 18, Russia launched [Operation White Desert](#) to pursue ISIS cells in the Badiya (desert area) of al Sukhna in the eastern suburbs of Homs, following the killing of Russian Maj. Gen. Vyacheslav Gladkikh, the military advisor to the Russian forces, using an explosive device planted at the side of the road near al Taim oil field.

¹¹ The Movement, which has widespread influence in al Suwayda governorate, was formed in 2012 by Sheikh Wahid al Bal'ous, to protect the Druze population in al Suwayda from any attack or incursion by any hostile party, and remains neutral in the Syrian conflict.

On September 2, independent sanctions monitors stated in [a report submitted](#) to the United Nations Security Council's Libya Sanctions Committee that Russia has stepped up its logistical support for the private military contractor Wagner Group in Libya with some 338 military cargo flights from Syria to Libya between November 2019 and the end of July 2020.

C. On the human rights issue:

On January 10, Russia and China abstained from voting on Security Council Resolution [No. 2504](#), which included additional amendments to Resolution 2165 in favor of Russia. The extension was limited to six months, excluding al Ramtha and al Ya'rubiya border crossings, and accordingly, cross border delivery of humanitarian aid was extended until July 10, 2020. We commented on Russia's use of the veto, especially in the face of humanitarian aid, in [a special report](#), in which we emphasized that despite Russia's status as a party to the Syrian conflict, it is using the veto in its favor, in violation of the United Nations Charter.

On January 29, [the UN Security Council held](#) a session on responsibility for the deteriorating humanitarian situation in northwest Syria, coinciding with the continuing Russian military escalation.

On February 28, [the UN Security Council held](#) an emergency session to discuss the crisis in Idlib, after Syrian regime and Russia forces targeted Turkish military forces in Idlib suburbs, killing 33 Turkish military personnel in an attack on Balyoun village in the Jabal al Zaweya area in the region.

On June 24, the United Nations [contacted](#) humanitarian organizations operating in northern Syria to notify them that the Russian regime had informed the UN the previous day that it would not participate in the de-confliction mechanism, which the United Nations and its humanitarian partners use to exchange information with parties to the conflict. We note that SNHR has documented Russian and Syrian Regime forces' targeting of several medical facilities participating in this mechanism, further confirming that the Syrian regime and Russia do not adhere to any mechanisms or laws, and that they always strive to deliberately cause the greatest harm to civilians.

On July 7, Russia and China used their UN veto at the Security Council against a German-Belgian [draft resolution](#) providing for continuing delivery of humanitarian aid into Syria through the Bab al Salam and Bab al Hawa crossings for a year. This was the fifteenth time that Russia has used its veto in favor of the Syrian regime.

On July 9, on July 9, Russia failed to [pass a Security Council draft resolution](#) aimed at reducing cross-border humanitarian aid to Syria through only one crossing and for a period of six months due to the opposition of Germany, France, the United Kingdom, the United States of America,

On July 10, Russia and China used their veto power for the second time within one month against [a draft resolution](#) submitted by Germany and Belgium on extending the mechanism for delivering cross-border humanitarian aid for a period of six months through the Bab al Salam and Bab al Hawa crossings on the Turkish-Syrian border. This was the [sixteenth time](#) that Russia has used the veto in favor of the Syrian regime.

On July 10, the Security Council was able to pass [Resolution No. 2533](#) providing for the delivery of humanitarian aid into Syria through only one crossing, the Bab al Hawa crossing, for a year

On July 10, the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons' (OPCW) Executive Council (EC) adopted by vote [a decision](#) addressing the possession and use of chemical weapons by the Syrian regime, with the Council expressing its deepest sympathies for the victims of chemical weapons use.

On July 17, the United Nations Human Rights Council [adopted](#) a deterrent resolution calling on the Syrian regime and its supporters to provide full, timely, immediate, unrestricted and safe humanitarian access to Syria.

On September 10, [the OPCW refused](#) to close the file on finding chemical materials inside Syria, accusing the Syrian regime of concealing information from the OPCW in conjunction with Germany's accusation that the Russian regime is engaged in covering up the crimes of the Syrian regime.

On October 5, the UN Security Council held [a special session](#) to discuss the issue of chemical weapons disarmament in Syria. Izumi Nakamitsu, the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, stated that the OPCW Declaration Assessment Team had visited Damascus and collected samples to replace those gathered during its previous deployment, adding that the OPCW technical secretariat still planned to conduct two further rounds of inspections at the Barzah and Jamrayah facilities of the Syrian Scientific Studies and Research Centre in 2020.

On October 13, Russia and China were elected as members of the Human Rights Council during its next term. [We issued a report](#) in which we talked about the countries that voted in favor of the violations of the Syrian regime at the Human Rights Council, with Russia being at their forefront; this accession will lead to more votes against the decisions of the Human Rights Council, which constitutes support for the violations of the Syrian regime, and questions the feasibility and effectiveness of the work of the International Commission of Inquiry.

On October 14, the Secretary-General of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons issued a report¹² confirming that the Syrian regime failed to meet the 90-day deadline and had not declared any of the facilities where the chemical weapons used in al Latamena attacks were developed, with the report also noting that the regime hasn't declared any of the chemical weapons it currently possesses, or revealed any information about any of its chemical weapons production facilities; all of this means that the Syrian regime has not resolved all or any of the outstanding issues regarding its initial declaration that it would destroy its chemical weapons stockpile, with the report accordingly being submitted to the UN Security Council and the UN General Assembly.

On October 27, Geir O. Pedersen, [the UN Special Envoy for Syria, emphasized](#) in his briefing to the Security Council that resolving the Syrian conflict through constitutional reform or a new constitution alone would not be possible. He indicated that progress in the Constitutional Committee could open the door to a deeper and wider process.

On October 27, Mr. Mark Cutts, Deputy Regional Humanitarian Coordinator, Kevin Kennedy, UN Assistant Secretary-General and Regional Humanitarian Coordinator, and a number of other prominent figures [visited a number of camps](#) in northwest Syria.

On October 28, [the Committee to Protect Journalists released](#) a report entitled 'Getting Away with Murder', which ranked Syria as the second worst country in the world in the CPJ's 2020 Global Impunity Index.

On November 23, in a letter addressing United Nations agencies, [Human Rights Watch](#) called on them to activate the UN's human rights framework for Syria in their aid plans; HRW confirmed that, despite the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, aid agencies continue to face significant and longstanding obstacles in transporting materials and personnel from Damascus to nongovernment-controlled areas of northeast Syria as well as within government-held areas, including delays in permission to move aid shipments, barriers to collecting test samples, and discriminatory distribution of protective personal equipment.

On December 11, Fernando Arias, [head of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons \(OPCW\)](#), confirmed during a Security Council videoconference meeting that Syria's initial declaration of chemical weapons on its territory cannot be considered accurate and complete, while Syria and its allies insisted that those stockpiles had been confirmed all destroyed by 2014.

On December 17, Syria [ranked last in the Freedom Index](#) published by the Fraser Research Institute¹³ and the Cato Institute¹⁴ for the year 2020.

¹² The report entitled "[Implementation of EC-94/DEC.2 on addressing the possession and use of chemical weapons by the Syrian Arab Republic](#)"

¹³ The Fraser Institute is an independent, non-partisan research and educational organization based in Canada

¹⁴ Founded in 1977, the Cato Institute is a public policy research organization headquartered in the USA, dedicated to the principles of individual liberty, limited government, free markets, and peace. Its scholars and analysts conduct independent, nonpartisan research on a wide range of policy issues.

On December 30, the OCHA [issued](#) the '2020 Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP)', which sets out the framework according to which the humanitarian community will respond to the large-scale humanitarian and protection needs in Syria throughout 2020, which it prepared in consultation with the Syrian regime's government, with the document's proclaimed primary objective for both parties remaining the timely and adequate delivery of humanitarian assistance to people in need in accordance with international law and the United Nations Charter. We at the SNHR found it distinctly odd that this plan was issued only hours before the end of the year, and we also call for creating a platform for relief organizations to coordinate their work and negotiate with the Syrian regime in a more centralized manner.

IV. The Syrian Regime's Direct Responsibility for Committing Violations in Syria in 2020 and the Names of Individuals We Believe Are Involved in Committing Egregious Violations:

The Syrian regime is very centralized, and undertakings involving huge military operations cannot be carried out without the knowledge and approval of the regime's head, Bashar al Assad, who is at the same time the Commander-in-Chief of Syria's Army and the Armed Forces. Indeed, it is not even possible to carry out operations far smaller than this without his knowledge and approval. International Humanitarian Law takes into account the hierarchical nature of the armed forces and the discipline imposed by leaders and holds commanders criminally responsible on the personal level, not only for the actions and breaches they have personally committed but also for the actions committed by their subordinates. According to an authoritative study of customary international humanitarian law carried out by the International Committee of the Red Cross, **the responsibility of leaders developed into the following customary rules:**

- Commanders and other superiors are criminally responsible for war crimes committed pursuant to their orders¹⁵.
- Commanders and other superiors are criminally responsible for war crimes committed by their subordinates if they knew, or had reason to know, that the subordinates were about to commit or were committing such crimes and did not take all necessary and reasonable measures in their power to prevent their commission, or if such crimes had been committed, to punish the persons responsible¹⁶.
- Commanders must ensure that members of the armed forces under their command are aware of their obligations under international humanitarian law¹⁷.

The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court strengthens these elements of responsibility and extends them to include crimes against humanity committed in peacetime or war, and war crimes, whether committed in an international or internal armed conflict¹⁸. The law holds military commanders as well as other superiors, including civilians, responsible for this¹⁹.

The International Court of Justice has affirmed that

According to a well-established rule of international law, which is of customary character, 'the conduct of any organ of a State must be regarded as an act of that State'. In the case of the Democratic Republic of the Congo v. Uganda (see above), the International Court of Justice upheld that "The conduct of individual soldiers and officers of the UPDF is to be considered as the conduct of a State organ. The contention that the persons concerned did not act in the capacity of persons exercising governmental authority in the particular circumstances, is therefore without merit"²⁰.

¹⁵ ICRC, customary international humanitarian law, [Rule 152](#)

¹⁶ ICRC, customary international humanitarian law, [Rule 153](#)

¹⁷ ICRC, Additional Protocol (I) to the Geneva Conventions of 1977, [Article 87-2](#)

¹⁸ The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, [Article 25](#)

¹⁹ The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, [Article 28](#)

²⁰ [Report](#) of the International Court of Justice (1998-1999)

[Report](#) of the International Court of Justice (2004-2005)

Generally speaking, international criminal courts require that **three elements must be proved** before a person may incur superior responsibility for the crimes committed by subordinates:

- The existence of a relationship of superiority and subordination between the accused and the perpetrator of the underlying offence;
- The knowledge of the superior that his subordinate had committed or was about to commit the crime;
- The failure of the superior to prevent the commission of the crime or to punish the perpetrators.

We believe that all these requirements are fulfilled in the case of the Syrian and Russian regimes and the relationship of the head of the regime and its leaders and the strict, hierarchical and centralized chain of command, meaning that both regimes and the higher-ranking leaders are all directly involved in committing violations that amount to crimes against humanity and war crimes against the Syrian people.

The Russian regime was not satisfied with simply committing violations in Syria, going so far as to encourage and reward those perpetrating them by honoring personnel who carried out missions in Syria, including Lieutenant General Alexander Yuryevich Chaiko, the commander of the Russian forces in Syria since September 2019; on July 9, 2020, it was announced that he had been awarded [the title 'Hero of Russia'](#), which is the highest honorary title in Russia.

Names and positions of the most prominent leaders of the Syrian regime implicated in committing violations in Syria in 2020:

Hundreds of leaders of the Syrian regime's security services, army and other state institutions have been implicated in the violations that have been committed against the Syrian people and the Syrian state since 2011 to date, with SNHR maintaining a database that includes detailed [reports](#) on thousands of individuals involved, their positions and the work they carried out, and working to update this database continuously whenever new details emerge. We have talked about many of these figures in reports and other materials we've issued over the past ten years. Here we present a sample of the most notorious of these leaders and prominent figures who are still in their jobs as of the end of 2020, including those who assumed their posts in 2020:

- **Bashar al Assad**

President of the Republic and Commander-in-Chief of the Army and Armed Forces.

- **Ali Abdullah Ayoub**

Deputy Commander-in-Chief, Minister of Defense.

- **Ali Mamlouk**

the Syrian regime's Vice President of Security Affairs.

- **Muhammad Deeb Zaitoun**

Head of the National Security Bureau in Syria.

- **Muhammad Khaled Rahmoun**

Minister of Interior.

- **Maher al Assad**

Head of the Fourth Division in the regime's forces, which has committed extensive violations throughout the years of the popular uprising, and which aims to protect the Syrian regime from internal and external threats. Fourth Division checkpoints are spread across most areas, with reports of its personnel engaging in looting.

- **Hossam Luqa**

Head of the General Intelligence Directorate known as the State Security Branch.

- **Nasser Ali**

Head of the Political Security Division.

- **Kifah Melhem**

Head of the Military Intelligence Division.

- **Ghassan Jawdat Ismail**

Head of the Air Force Intelligence Directorate.

- **Hussein Jumaa**

Director of the Criminal Security Directorate.

- **Ghayath Dallah**

Commander of the 40th Brigade of the 4th Division.

- **Ramadan Ramadan**

Commander of the Fifth Corps.

- **Suheil al Hasan**

Commander of the 25th Division.

- **Salah Assi**

Commander of a local militia in Misyaf affiliated with the Military Security Branch.

- **Turki al Hamad**

Commander of the National Defense Militia in Ma'dan village in Raqqah governorate.

- **Younes Muhammad**

Deputy Commander of the 25th Division.

- **Saleh al Abdullah**

Commander of the 116th Regiment.

- **Nassif Ibrahim**

Commander of the Sixth Assault Regiment.

- **Da'as al Ali**

Head of the State Security Branch in Deir Ez-Zour.

- **Ghassan al Asadi**

Head of the Air Force Intelligence Department in Izra in Daraa.

- **Nabil al Abdullah**

Commander of the National Defense militia in al Sqailbiya city in Hama.

- **George Sam'an**
Commander of the National Defense militia in Seydnaya.
- **Khairu Abdul Bari**
Commander of the Imam al Reza Brigade of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps.
- **Talal al Daqqaq**
Commander of a group affiliated with the Military Security Branch in Hama.
- **Louay al Ali**
Head of the Military Security Branch in Daraa.
- **Wafiq Nasser**
Head of the Military Security Branch in Hama.
- **Issa Muhammad**
Deputy Commander of the 666th Regiment of the 4th Division in Daraa.
- **Rami Mawas**
Security Officer of the 25th Division.
- **Sariya Makhoul**
Assistant Security Officer of the 25th Division.
- **Haitham Barakat**
Commander of al Hawarith militia, affiliated with the 25th Division.
- **Yousef Kan'an**
Commander of al Hawashim militia, affiliated with the Military Security.
- **Haider N'asan**
Commander of al Taramih militia, affiliated with the 25th Division.
- **Nizar Fandi**
Commander of the 103rd Reconnaissance Battalion of the 9th Division.
- **Shadi Hadid**
Commander of al Quds Brigade in Deir Ez-Zour.
- **Adnan al Sayyed**
the Military Commander of al Quds Brigade in Aleppo.
- **Talal al Ali**
Head of the Sa'sa' Branch of the Military Intelligence Division.
- **Ali al Saleh**
Deputy Head of the Sa'sa' Branch of the Military Intelligence Division.
- **Mujahid Ismail**
Commander of al Ba'ath Brigades, affiliated with the National Defense Administration in Damascus.
- **Khaled al Zaher**
Commander of the National Defense militia in al Sfeira and Khanaser region.
- **Basel al Khatib**
Commander of the Haidariyoun militia, affiliated with the 25th Division.
- **Jumaa al Jasem**
a militia leader of clans of the northern and eastern Hama suburbs, affiliated with the Military Security Branch in Hama.
- **Adnan Abbas**
Commander of the Abu al Fadl al Abbas militia in al Mayadeen city in Deir Ez-Zour.
- **Idris Salameh**
Commander of a militia in al Boukamal, affiliated with the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps.
- **Duraïd Awad**
in charge of the artillery division of the 25th Division.

V. Achieving Progress in the Accountability Process:

Ten years have passed without the attainment of any tangible achievement in terms of ensuring criminal accountability for perpetrators of violations, despite the fact that their multiple violations amount to crimes against humanity; Russia and China have thwarted any referral of the Syrian case to the International Criminal Court, and the Security Council has failed to establish a special criminal tribunal for Syria, with universal jurisdiction remaining the only option left in the framework of criminal accountability. Despite the limitations of what universal jurisdiction can achieve in general, 2020 witnessed slight progress compared to the almost total stalemate in the preceding years, seeing the entry into force of the Caesar Syria Civilian Protection Act into force and the European Union's application for more sanctions against individuals involved in committing violations against the Syrian people. We at the Syrian Network for Human Rights hope that in 2021 we will witness further efforts, legal cases and lawsuits against perpetrators of violations in Syria, and we have, since 2013, affirmed our full support for the universal jurisdiction process, as expressed in our motto, **"No Justice without Accountability."**

The most prominent events that we monitored in the course of accountability in the past year:

On February 17, the European Union foreign ministers unanimously [adopted](#) new sanctions against eight Syrian businesspersons and two entities to whom the conditions of the European sanctions [executive regulations](#) apply due to their financial support for the Syrian regime in its use of violent repression against the Syrian people, with these latest sanctions bringing the total number of those targeted by the European Union's restrictive measures in Syria to 70 entities and 273 individuals.

On March 9, the United Kingdom government [announced](#) a list of restrictions imposed on Syria, foremost among which is the introduction of a ban on the transfer of any equipment used for internal repression and the restriction of the passage of goods into Syria, and this list will continue to be imposed until December 31, 2020.

On March 17, the United States [imposed](#) sanctions on Ali Ayoub, Minister of Defense of the Syrian regime's government, over his responsibility for measures that prevented a ceasefire in northern Syria since December 2019 and caused the displacement of nearly one million people.

On April 23, [the first session](#) of the trial of Anwar Raslan, a former Syrian General Intelligence officer, was held in the German city of Koblenz for charges on crimes against humanity committed between March 2011 and September 2012, when he was responsible for investigations in the General Intelligence al Khatib Branch in Damascus, also known as Branch 251.

On May 28, the European Union [renewed](#) its sanctions imposed on 77 entities and 291 individuals until June 1, 2021, for their participation and support for the Syrian regime and for committing war crimes against the Syrian people.

On June 17, [a court in Paris sentenced](#) Rifaat al Assad, the uncle of the Syrian regime's president Bashar al Assad, to four years in prison for "money laundering and misappropriation of public funds" in Syria, and for confiscating all his real estate assets in France, which are estimated to be worth nearly 90 million euros. It also confiscated one of his real estate assets in London, with a value of 29 million euros.

On June 17, the United States of America began implementing the 'Caesar Act'²¹ under which [sanctions were imposed on 39 individuals or entities](#) related to the Syrian authorities, including the president of the Syrian regime and his wife, Asma al Assad. We note that the US Senate approved the law - within the Defense Department's budget for 2020 - on December 17, 2019, and the US President later signed it into law.

On June 18, [it was announced that a criminal case would be filed](#) with the German Federal Public Prosecutor against officials of the security services in Syria, on behalf of seven Syrians who survived torture in the Syrian regime's detention centers, all of whom had been subjected to sexual violence. The case was drafted by the European Center for Constitutional and Human Rights, and was presented jointly by the Syrian Women's Network and the Urnammu Organization.

On June 22, the German Federal Public Prosecutor [announced](#) the arrest of Syrian doctor Alaa al Mousa in the German state of Hessen, on charges of committing crimes against humanity while practicing his profession in the Homs Military Hospital before he sought asylum in Germany.

On July 29, the U.S. Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) [imposed](#) sanctions on one individual and nine additional entities supporting the Syrian regime.

On August 20, the United States of America [announced](#) new sanctions against 6 Syrian individuals supporting the Syrian regime, to be added to the list of US sanctions. Among the individuals who were included in these new sanctions were Luna al Shibl, the presidential media advisor of the Syrian regime and Muhammad Ammar al Saati, a member of the Regional Command of the Socialist Ba'ath Party and previously the president of the National Union of Syrian Students.

On September 18, the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs [announced](#) in a statement its decision to hold the Syrian regime responsible under international law for gross human rights violations and torture in particular, adding that it had informed the regime of this decision by means of a diplomatic note. We at the Syrian Network for Human Rights support this step and welcome further similar steps by other countries in regard to agreements that the Syrian regime has ratified and subsequently violated in a heinous manner, for which it must be held accountable.

²¹ [The Caesar Syria Civilian Protection Act](#)

On September 30, the United States [announced](#) 17 Syria sanctions designations in order to achieve the goals of the Caesar Syria Civilian Protection Act of 2019 and hold the Assad regime and his enablers accountable for their crimes.

On October 6, lawyers representing victims of chemical weapons attacks in Syria [announced](#) that they have filed criminal complaints with the Federal Prosecutor General in Germany against Syrian regime officials blaming them for the deaths of hundreds of civilians in areas that were under the control of factions of the Armed Opposition at the time of the attacks.

On October 12, the European Union [announced](#) the extension of its imposition of sanctions on persons and entities involved in the development and use of chemical weapons in Syria for one year.

On November 6, eight ministers from the Syrian regime's new government were added to the European Union sanctions list. The European Union affirmed [in its statement](#) that the EU remains committed to finding a lasting and credible political solution to the conflict in Syria on the basis of UN Security Council resolution 2254 and the 2012 Geneva Communiqué.

On November 9, the U.S. Department of the Treasury [imposed](#) Syrian-related sanctions on seven individuals and 10 new entities, with these sanctions focusing on individuals and entities providing support to the Syrian regime's oil production network. Among the individuals is Hussam Katerji, Chairman of the Katerji International Group and a member of the Syrian regime's People's Assembly.

On November 11, Denmark's Financial Crimes Unit [announced](#) charges against a Danish company for violating the European Union's sanctions on Syria by selling kerosene to Russian companies, which as a result was delivered to Syria.

On November 11, the UK government [announced](#) the guidelines for the sanctions regime it would impose on Syria related to cultural property, which subsequently came into effect on December 31, 2020.

On December 10, Congressman [Joe Wilson introduced](#) the "Stop the Killing in Syria Act" on behalf of the House Republican Study Committee, which aims to prohibit recognition of the Assad regime as a legitimate government, or recognition of Bashar al Assad's right to run for any future elections in Syria. It also includes proposals to increase pressure on the Assad regime in order to protect civilians, including intensified sanctions that affect al Assad and his officers in charge of detention centers, and government officials in countries that help or normalize relations with Syria, in addition to institutions and bodies linked to Bashar al Assad's financial network.

On December 11, seven European countries, namely the UK, Germany, Belgium, Estonia, France, Ireland and Norway, [demanded](#) in an open session at the UN Security Council on the Syria chemical weapons program, that arrangements be put in place to identify the perpetrators of the use of chemical weapons in Syria, stressing that any party involved in using them will not be tolerated.

On December 16, the German Federal Prosecutor's Office [issued](#) an extended arrest warrant for a Syrian doctor, Alaa al Mousa, in the German state of Hesse, on the grounds of charges against him for committing crimes against humanity while practicing his work in the Homs Military Hospital before he obtained asylum in Germany. He was arrested on June 22, 2020.

On December 22, a new US sanctions list [was issued](#) on Syria, with the most prominent of the sanctions included being against members of Asmaa al Assad's family and against the Central Bank of Syria, with the list including seven individuals and 10 entities.

The role of the Syrian Network for Human Rights in supporting the accountability process in 2020:

The Syrian Network for Human Rights' documentary work generally falls within the framework of criminal and non-criminal accountability, such as imposing economic sanctions and taking political decisions to make efforts to stop crimes against humanity and achieve a political transition towards democracy and human rights. The year 2020 was marked by our signing of several share-data cooperation agreements with many bodies working in this field, the most prominent of which are:

Memorandum of Understanding with [the Humanitarian Outcomes](#).

The Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons' (OPCW) [Investigation and Identification Team \(IIT\)](#).

We have become an [official member of the International Campaign](#) to Ban Landmines – Cluster Munition Coalition (ICBL-CMC), due to years of efforts to document violations related to the use of cluster munitions and landmines.

The Syrian Network for Human Rights has also been one of the most prominent sources of information in many reports issued by foreign ministries and status reports from countries around the world, for example:

- [The US Department of State's report](#) on the human rights situation in Syria 2019.
- [The Netherlands' Ministry of Foreign Affairs' report](#) on the general situation in Syria issued in May 2020.
- [The European Asylum Support Office's \(EASO\) report](#) on the security situation in Syria issued in May 2020.

- The report of [Immigration Service](#) of the Ministry of Immigration and Integration of the Danish government on the security, economic and social situation in the governorates of Damascus Suburbs and Damascus in Syria, issued in October 2020.
- The Syria situation report, issued by [the German Foreign Ministry](#) in December 2020.
- And many other countries' reports.

We also contributed to the case [against Anwar Raslan](#) by providing data, based on the SNHR database of victims of torture, to the German Public Prosecutor through our partner organization, the European Center for Constitutional and Human Rights (ECCHR).

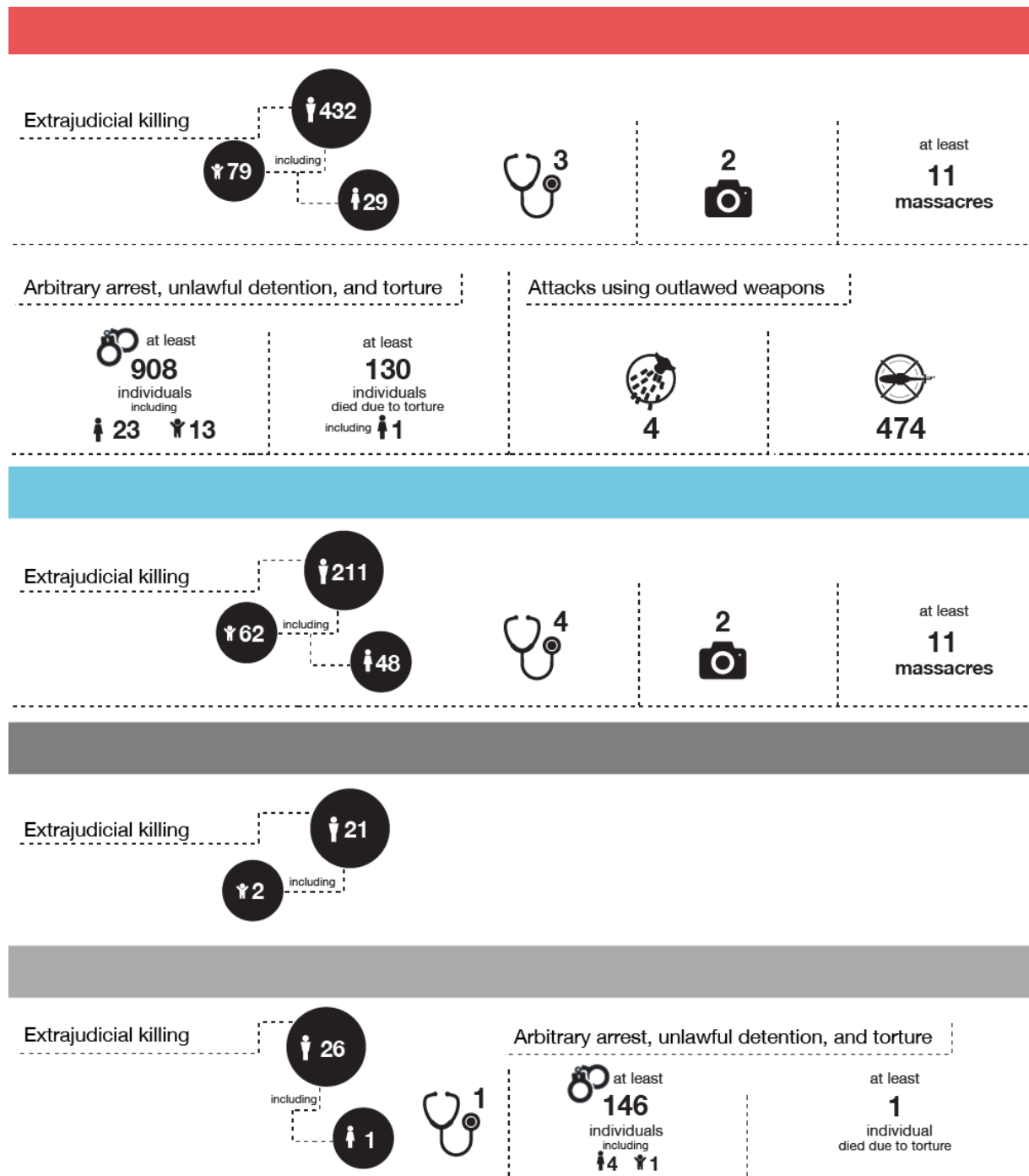
We also contributed as a Pivotal Partner to a website [launched in April 2020 by the Global Public Policy Institute \(GPPI\) on Chemical Weapons in Syria](#).

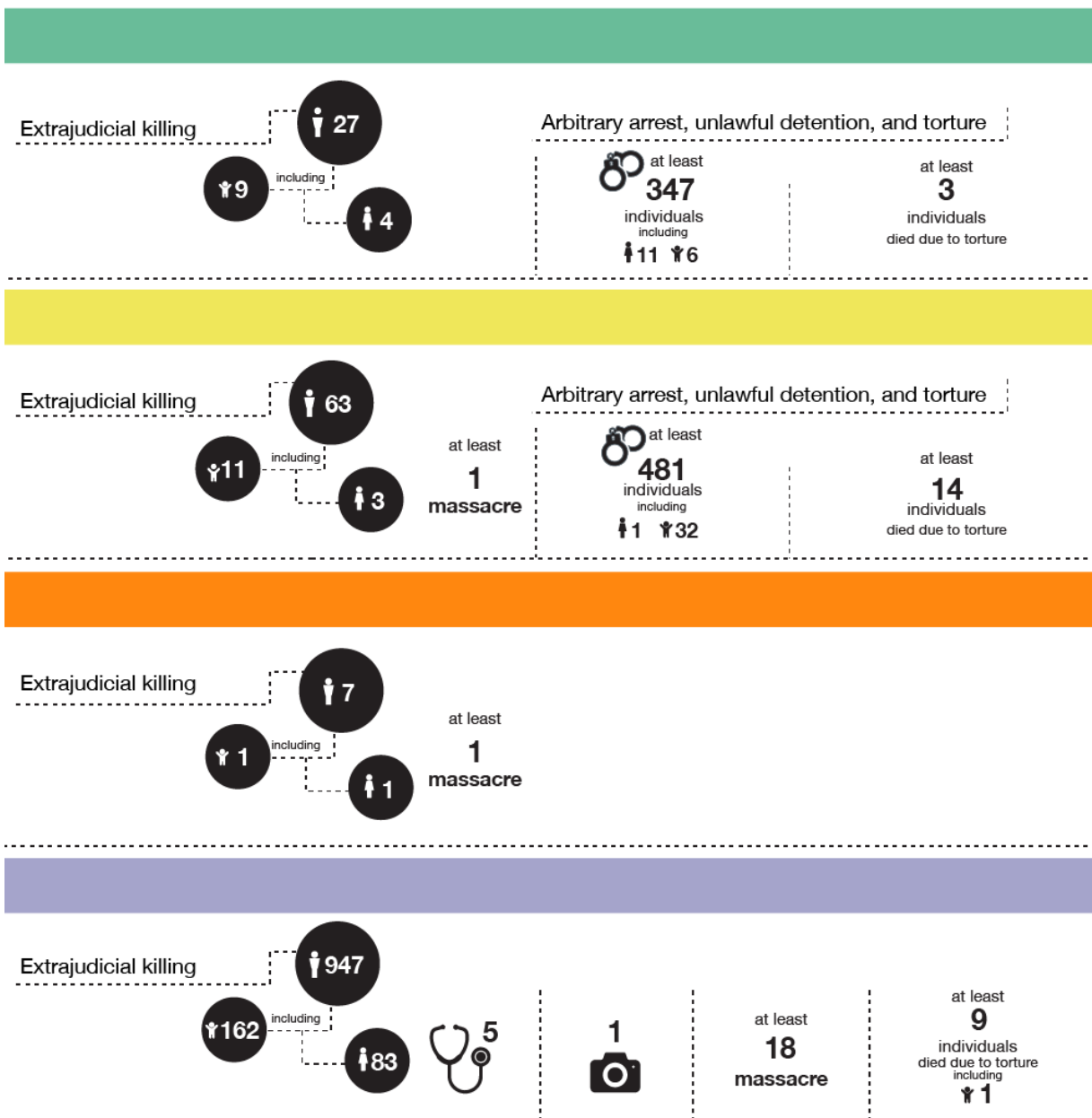
In addition to all the above, SNHR also [submitted a report](#) to the Human Rights Committee established by the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights with the aim of informing it of the most prominent violations committed by the Syrian regime of a large number of articles of the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, on August 25.

Finally, we successfully nominated Syrian [child Enar al Hamrawi](#), who reported on the suffering of Eastern Ghouta's children, for the International Children's Peace Prize for the year 2020.

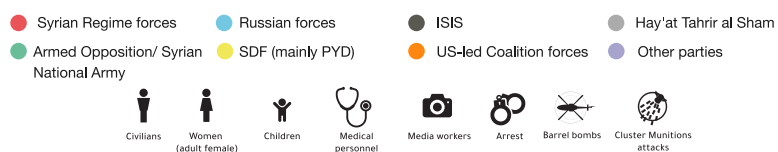
VI. Record of the Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in 2020 According to the SNHR Database:

This report covers the most notable human rights violations by the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in Syria between January 1, 2020, and January 1, 2021. These violations are outlined in the following infographic:





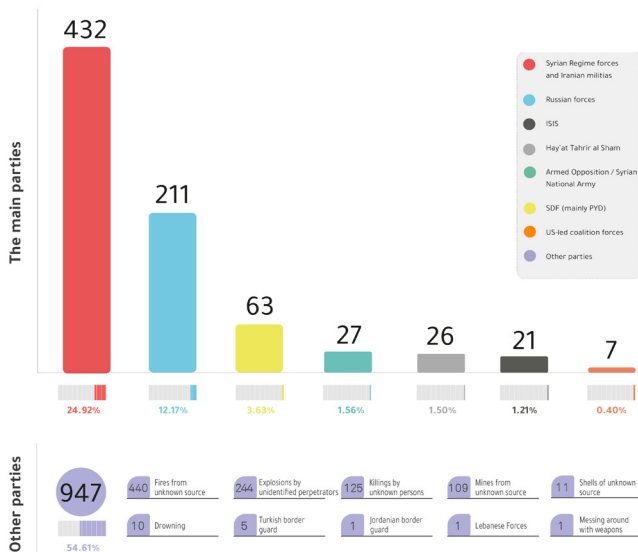
Nearly 850,000 persons have been forcibly displaced in 2020 as a result of the military operations launched by the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces.



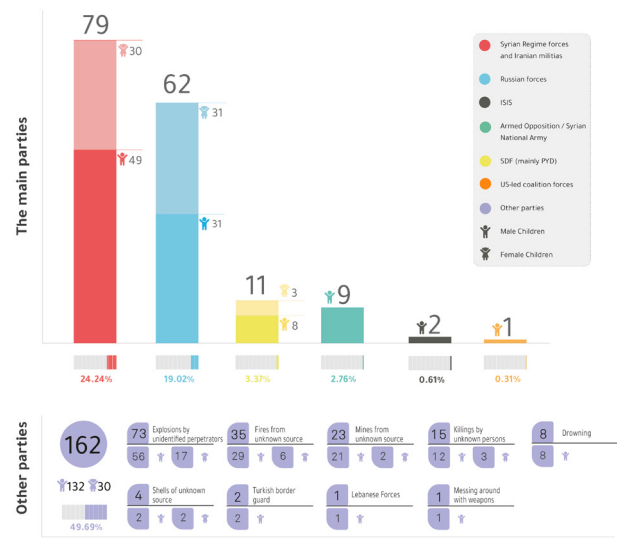
1. Extrajudicial Killing:

SNHR documented in 2020 the deaths of 1,734 civilians, including 326 children and 169 women (adult female), killed at the hands of the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in Syria, distributed as follows:

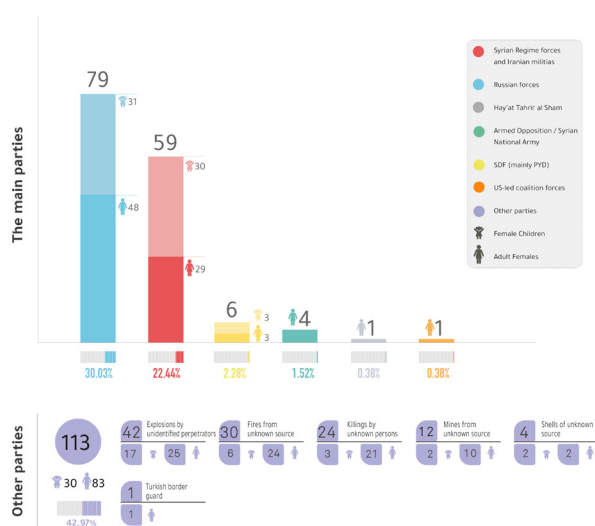
1,734 civilians were killed at the hands of the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in Syria in 2020



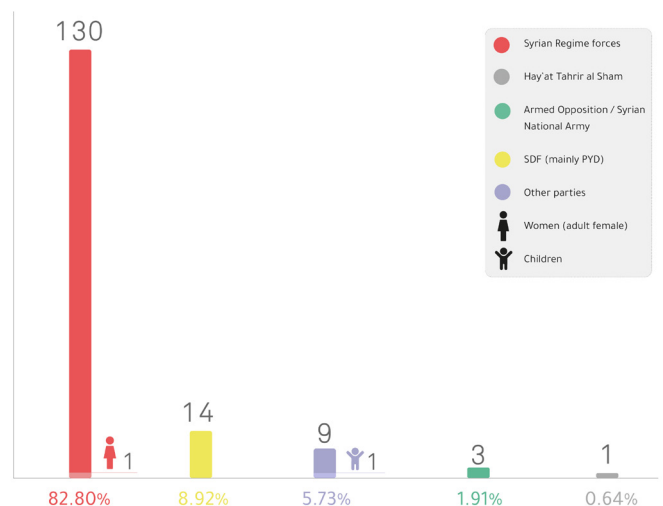
326 children were killed at the hands of the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in Syria in 2020



263 females were killed at the hands of the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in Syria in 2020



157 individuals died due to torture at the hands of the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in Syria in 2020



A. The main parties:

- Syrian Regime forces (army, security, local militias, and Shiite foreign militias)²²: 432 civilians, including 79 children and 29 women.
- Russian forces: 211 civilians, including 62 children and 48 women.
- ISIS (the self-proclaimed 'Islamic State')²³: 21 civilians, including two children.
- Hay'at Tahrir al Sham²³: 26 civilians, including one woman.
- The Armed Opposition/ The Syrian National Army: 27 civilians, including nine children and four women.
- Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (the Democratic Union Party): 63 civilians, including 11 children and three women.
- US-led coalition forces: Seven civilians, including one child and one woman.

B. Other parties:

We documented the deaths of 947 civilians, including 162 children and 83 women, at the hands of other parties, distributed as follows:

- Landmines of unknown origin: 109 civilians, including 23 children and 10 women.
- Shelling from unknown source: 11 civilians, including four children and two women.
- Gunfire of unknown source: 440 civilians, including 35 children and 24 women.
- Killings by unknown persons: 125 civilians, including 15 children and 21 women.
- Bombings whose perpetrators have not yet been identified: 244 civilians, including 73 children and 25 women.
- Turkish border guards: Five civilians, including two children and one woman.
- Jordanian forces: One civilian.
- Lebanese border guards: One child.
- Drowning: 10 civilians, including eight children.
- Messing around with weapons: One child.

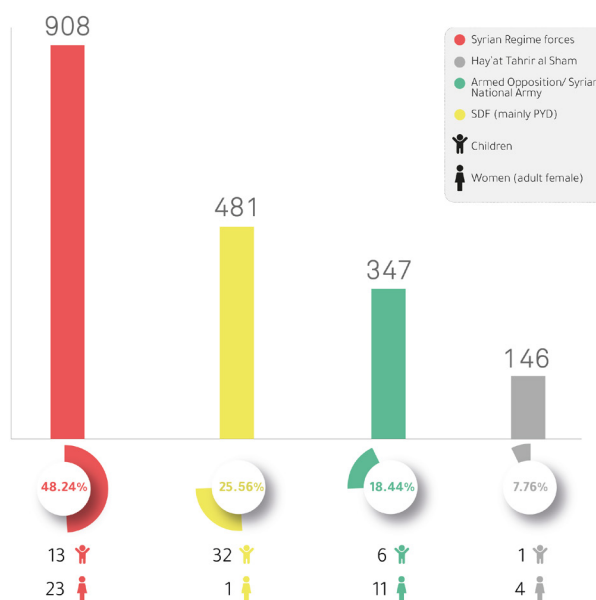
²² We generally use the term 'the Syrian regime' rather than 'the Syrian government', because the nature of the ruling power in Syria is a totalitarian dictatorship based on ruling the nation in an authoritarian fashion through a very limited group of individuals, primarily the President of the Republic 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.

²³ The United Nations has designated it as a terrorist organization

2. Arbitrary Arrest and Unlawful Detention:

In 2020, SNHR's team documented at least 1,882 cases of arbitrary arrests, including 52 children and 39 women (adult female), at the hands of the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in Syria, distributed as follows:

- Syrian Regime forces: 908, including 13 children and 23 women.
- Hay'at Tahrir al Sham: 146, including one child and four women.
- The Armed Opposition/ The Syrian National Army: 347, including six children and 11 women.
- Syrian Democratic Forces: 481, including 32 children and one woman.



3. Targeting Medical Personnel:

SNHR documented in 2020 the deaths of 13 medical personnel at the hands of the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in Syria, distributed as follows:

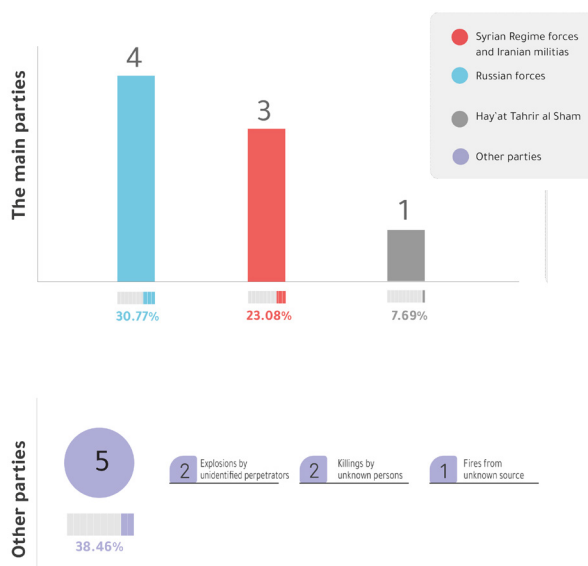
A. The main parties:

- Syrian Regime forces: Three.
- Russian forces: Four.
- Hay'at Tahrir al Sham: One.

B. Other parties:

We documented the deaths of five medical personnel at the hands of other parties, distributed as follows:

- Bombings whose perpetrators have not yet been identified: Two.
- Killing by unknown persons: Two.
- Gunfire of unknown source: One.



4. Targeting Media Workers:

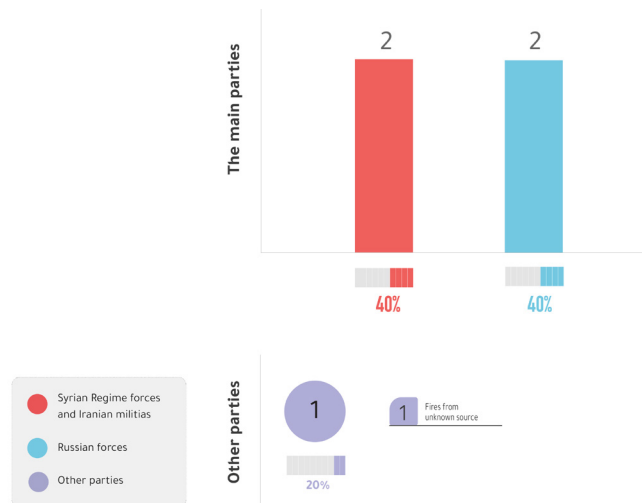
SNHR documented in 2020 the deaths of five media workers at the hands of the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in Syria, distributed as follows:

A. The main parties:

- Syrian Regime forces: Two.
- Russian forces: Two.

B. Other parties:

We documented the death of one media worker as a result of gunfire from an unknown source.



5. Attacks on Vital Civilian Facilities:

In 2020, SNHR documented at least 326 incidents of attacks on vital civilian facilities. These attacks were distributed according to the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces as follows:

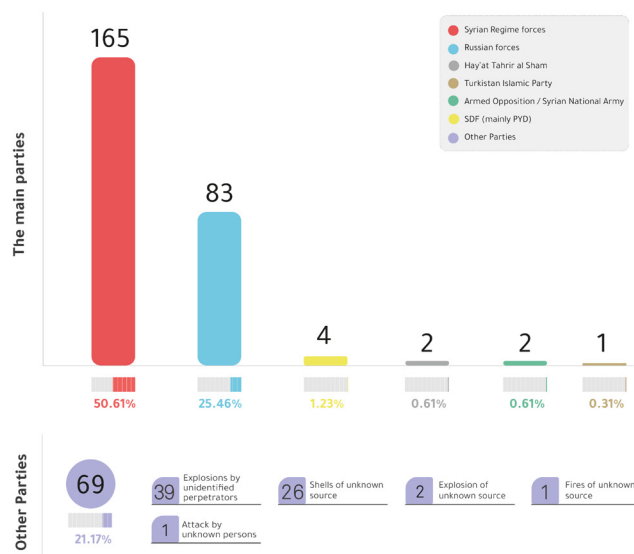
A. The main parties:

- Syrian Regime forces: 165.
- Russian forces: 83.
- Hay'at Tahrir al Sham: Two.
- Turkistan Islamic Party: One.
- The Armed Opposition/ The Syrian National Army: Two.
- Syrian Democratic Forces: Four.

B. Other parties:

Other parties committed 69 incidents, which were distributed as follows:

- Bombings whose perpetrators have not yet been identified: 39.
- Shelling from unknown source: 26.
- Attacks by unknown persons: One.
- Gunfire of unknown source: One.
- Explosion of unknown source: Two.

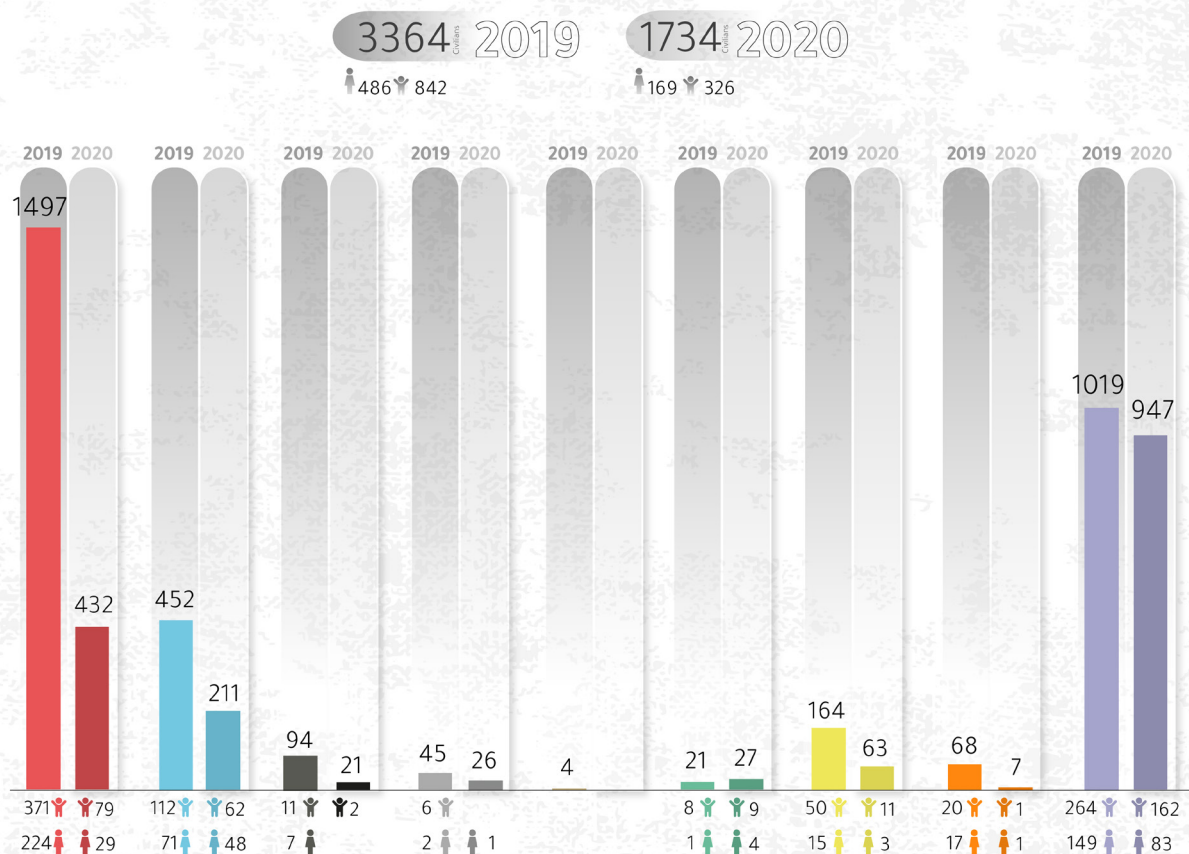


6. Unlawful attacks:

- Cluster Munitions: We documented four cluster munition attacks in 2020, all of which at the hands of Syrian Regime forces.
- Barrel Bombs: We documented at least 474 barrel bombs dropped by the Syrian regime's helicopter and fixed-wing warplanes.

VII. Comparison between the Most Notable Patterns of Human Rights Violations in 2019 and 2020:

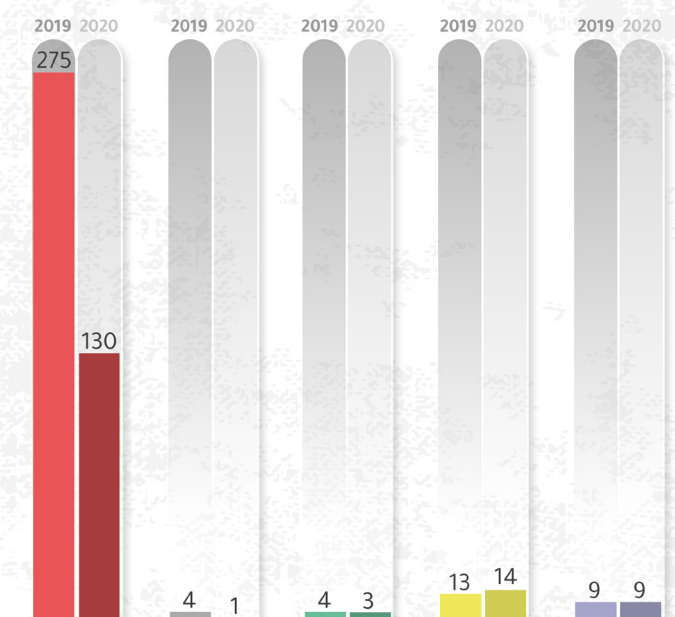
Comparison between death tolls of **civilian victims killed** at the hands of the parties to the conflict and controlling forces in Syria in 2019 and 2020



Comparison between death tolls of victims who **died due to torture** at the hands of the parties to the conflict and controlling forces in Syria in 2019 and 2020

2019 305

2020 157

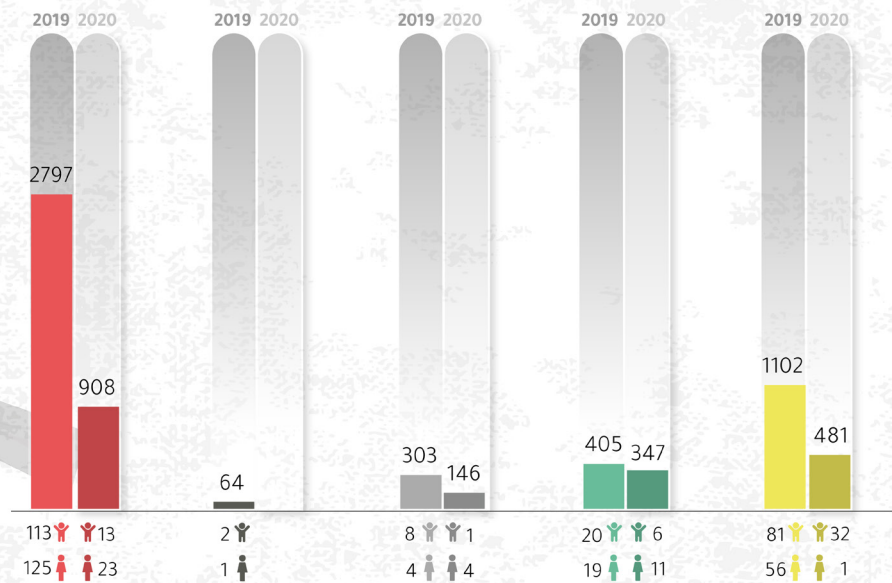


● Syrian Regime forces and Iranian militias
 ● Russian forces
 ● ISIS
 ● Hay'at Tahrir al Sham
 ● Turkistan Islamic Party
 ● The Armed Opposition/the Syrian National Army
 ● SDF (mainly PYD)
 ● US-led coalition forces
 ● Other parties

👤 Women (adult female)
 👶 Children

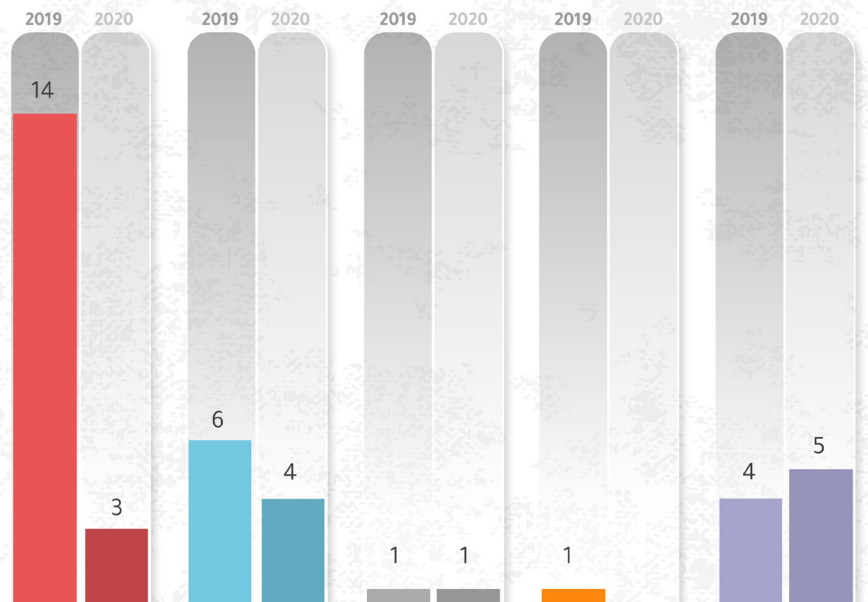
Comparison between **records of arbitrary arrests** at the hands of the parties to the conflict and controlling forces in Syria in 2019 and 2020

2019 4671
 205 224
2020 1882
 39 52



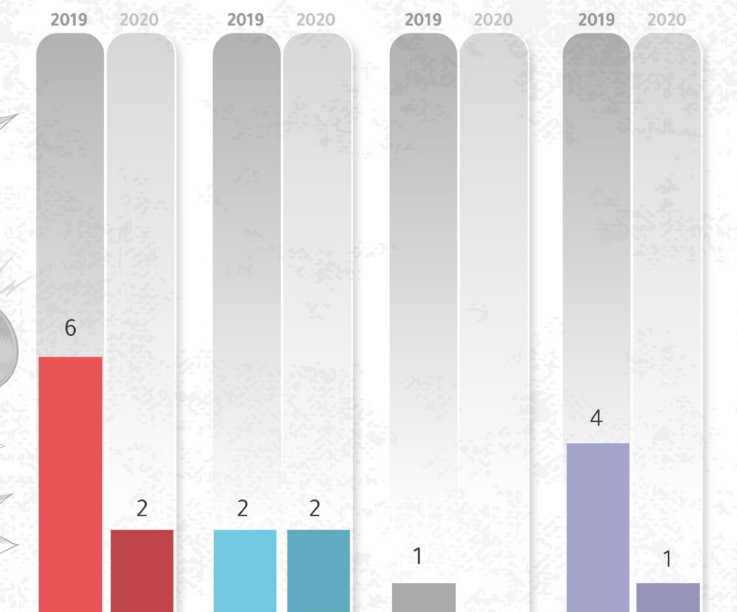
Comparison between death tolls of **medical personnel killed** at the hands of the parties to the conflict and controlling forces in Syria in 2019 and 2020

2019 26
2020 13



Comparison between death tolls of **media workers killed** at the hands of the parties to the conflict and controlling forces in Syria in 2019 and 2020

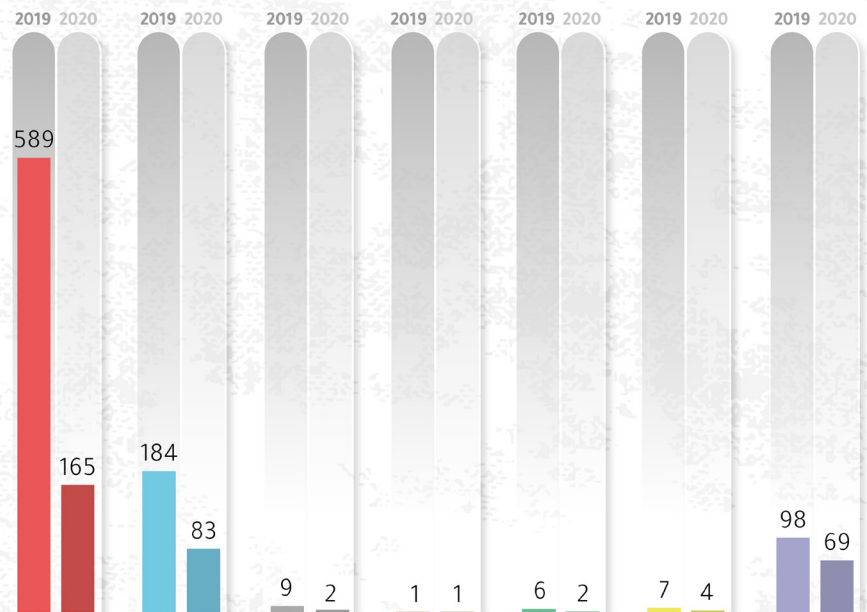
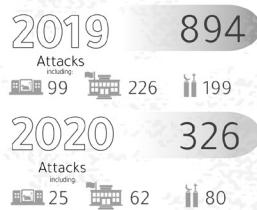
2019 13
2020 5



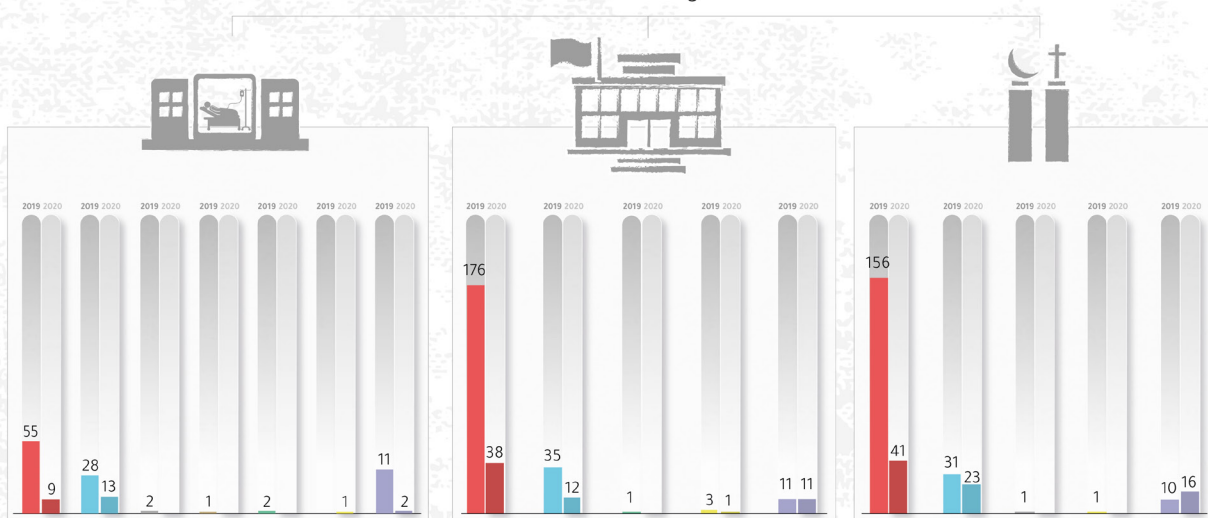
● Syrian Regime forces and Iranian militias ● Russian forces ● ISIS ● Hay'at Tahrir al Sham
 ● The Armed Opposition/the Syrian National Army ● SDF (mainly PYD) ● US-led coalition forces ● Other parties

👤 Women (adult female) 👤 Children

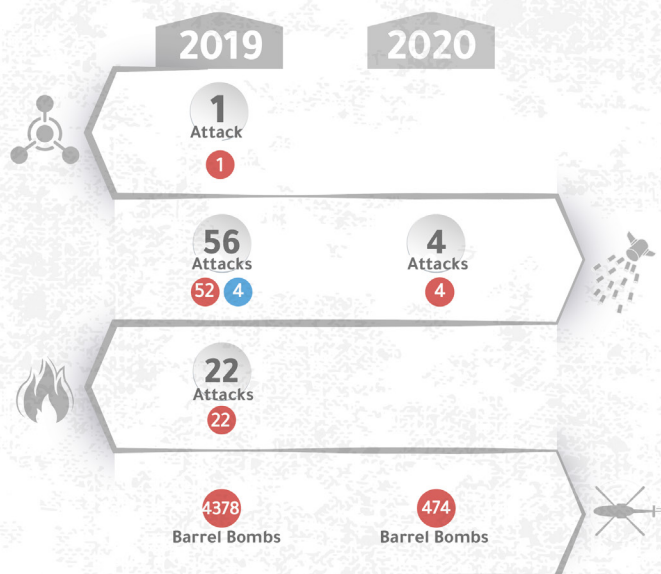
Comparison between records of incidents of attack on vital civilian facilities at the hands of the parties to the conflict and controlling forces in Syria in 2019 and 2020



including:



Comparison between records of unlawful attacks carried out by the parties to the conflict and controlling forces in Syria in 2019 and 2020

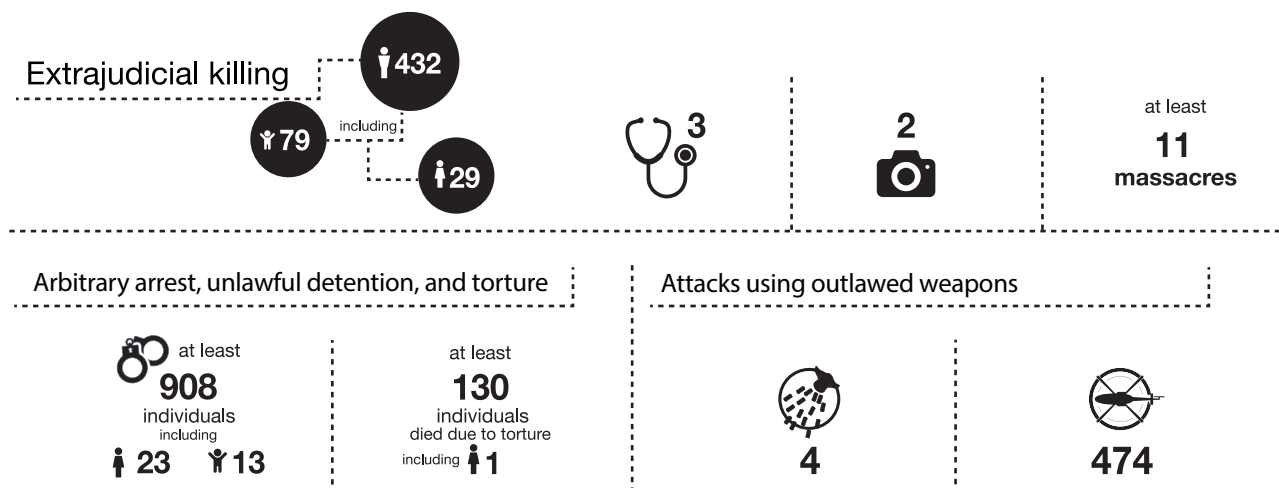


● Syrian Regime forces ● Russian forces ● Hay'at Tahrir al Sham ● Turkistan Islamic Party ● The Armed Opposition/the Syrian National Army ● SDF (mainly PYD) ● Other parties

🏥 Medical facilities 🎓 Educational facilities 🕌 Places of worship ☠️ Chemical Weapons 🔥 Incendiary Weapons 🚬 Barrel Bombs 💣 Cluster Munitions

VIII. Summarizing the Most Notable Human Rights Violations Committed by the Parties to the Conflict and the Controlling Forces in Syria in 2020:

A. Syrian Regime forces (army, security, local militias, and foreign Shiite militias):



1. Violations related to the treatment of civilians and hors de combat fighters

a. Massacres and other acts of extrajudicial killings:

The killing of civilians in Syria continued for the tenth consecutive year, in massive numbers, indicating the continuing instability of the situation in the nation, which makes it still the most dangerous country in the world for civilians' lives, demonstrating and emphasizing that Syria remains an insecure and wholly unsafe place for the return of refugees. Although we have noted that 2020 witnessed a decline in the rates of civilian deaths at the hands of Syrian Regime forces and allies, Syria continues to have one of the highest rates of extrajudicial killings in the world.

In the first nine weeks of the year, we recorded a very high rate of deaths at the hands of Syrian Regime forces, amounting to 58% of the total annual death toll, as a result of the brutal military operation that the regime launched on the Idlib region in northwest Syria until the ceasefire agreement entered into force on March 6.

In 2020, SNHR documented the deaths of 432 civilians, including 79 children and 29 women (adult female), as well as 11 massacres, at the hands of Syrian Regime forces.

The percentage of women and children among the total number of civilian victims is 25%, once again clearly indicating that Syrian Regime forces continue to deliberately target civilians through indiscriminate shelling and executions.

In 2019, Syrian Regime forces killed 1,497 civilians, including 371 children and 224 women (adult female), and committed 43 massacres, according to the SNHR archive.

- **Most notable incidents of extrajudicial killing at the hands of Syrian Regime forces:**

On Sunday, January 5, 2020, at around 13:00, fixed-wing Syrian regime (Su-24) warplanes fired some six missiles in succession targeting three sites within al Gharbi neighborhood in Ariha city in the eastern suburbs of Idlib governorate; two of these missiles landed in front of 'al Muhdatha' [Khaled Bashir al Halabiya School](#), while two other missiles landed 200 meters away in front of [al Hadidi Prayer Place](#) known as al Imam Malik Mosque, and the last two missiles fell 300 meters from the Prayer Place [in the area of the Aleppo-Latakia International Road, where there is a residential complex and an open yard used as a car park](#). The [bombardment](#) resulted in [the deaths](#) of [13 civilians](#) (two near [al Hadidi Prayer](#) Place and [11 in the area](#) of the International Road), including three male children and [one woman](#), and injured about 30 others. Ariha city was under the joint control of factions of the Armed Opposition and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.

On Saturday, January 11, 2020, at around 12:15, fixed-wing Syrian regime (MiG-21) warplanes fired a number of missiles at a house in al Janoubi neighborhood in [al Nayrab](#) village in the southern suburbs of Idlib governorate, [resulting in the deaths](#) of [five civilians](#) from [one family](#), who were IDPs from Atashan village in the eastern suburbs of Hama governorate, including [two children](#) (one male and one female), and injuring seven others. Al Nayrab village was under the joint control of factions of the Armed Opposition and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.

On Saturday, January 11, 2020, fixed-wing Syrian regime (MiG-23) warplanes fired missiles at a main street in the Dawwar al Mal'ab al Baladi area, known as al Arba'in Street, in the west of Idlib city, resulting in [the deaths](#) of [eight civilians](#) at one time, including [two children](#) (one male and one female) and one woman, and injuring around 30 others. Idlib city was under the control of Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.

On Wednesday, January 15, 2020, at around 14:05, the SNHR team documented bombardment of the east of Idlib city by fixed-wing Syrian regime (MiG-23) warplanes using two missiles. The first missile landed in al Hal Market behind the perimeter wall of the National Museum building, while the second landed in the middle of the industrial zone, approximately 290 meters - by line of sight - south of the site of the first missile; [according to our victims'](#) department, the [attack resulted in the deaths](#) of [22 civilians](#), including [two children](#), and [injured](#) around 68 others; among the fatalities was [Muhammad Shadi al Asaad](#), a member of the Syrian Civil Defense's 'Idlib Center 3'. This massacre, which is considered the largest massacre committed by the Syrian regime in northwest Syria in terms of the death toll for a single incident since April 26, 2019, came just three days after the supposed declaration of a ceasefire. We issued [a report](#) on the incident.

All of the people we spoke with assured us that the target zone was crowded with civilian shoppers at the time it was targeted and that it was free of any potential military targets.

The SNHR spoke with media activist Ahmad Ghajar, from Idlib city, who was in al Najjarin Market (Carpenters market) in the industrial zone at the time of the attack, when he learnt through observatories' notifications of the flight of fixed-wing warplanes from the airspace of Saraqeb city towards the west, which, he explained, is the course the warplanes usually take before entering the skies over Idlib city. He told us: **"I tracked the warplane and watched it from the roof of our shop as it travelled from east to west, then I saw its swoop up to 1 km above the ground and fire two missiles, the second of which landed about 700 meters away from me. Those were then followed by thermal balloons; the warplane then headed west, then south towards Ariha."**

Visual guide shows the impact sites of the two missiles in al Hal Market and the industrial zone:



Ahmad told us that he then went directly to the impact site of the missile to photograph the damage, but he quickly began helping the paramedics to recover the dead and injured instead, adding: **"The largest number of victims was in the industrial zone, including Muhammad Shadi al Assad, known as 'Shadi Ambulance', a member of the Civil Defense team."** Ahmad added that the destructive ability of the missile used was greater than those usually used by the Syrian air force, causing the total collapse of the building.

On Sunday, March 1, 2020, fixed-wing Syrian regime warplanes fired a number of missiles at homes in Kafrantin village located in the east of Darat Ezza city in the western suburbs of Aleppo governorate, resulting in [the deaths](#) of [five civilians](#), including [one child](#), most of whom came from one family. We note that the targeted area is located near a site where Turkish forces are stationed. Kafrantin village was under the joint control of factions of the Armed Opposition and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.

On Sunday, May 31, 2020, Syrian Regime forces personnel stationed at a temporary military checkpoint, established east of Nawa city in the western suburbs of Daraa governorate, shot dead Taha Musa al Sa'di and Hayel Muhammad al Sa'di as they tried to take another road after being surprised by the checkpoint. The area was under the control of Syrian Regime forces at the time of the incident.

On Tuesday, September 29, 2020, militiamen affiliated with Syrian Regime forces attacked a group of civilians, mostly members of the same family, who were working grazing their sheep; the civilians were residents of al Fasda village in the Badiya [desert] area in the southeast of al Sa'en town in the eastern suburbs of Hama governorate. After murdering the civilians, the militiamen looted and ransacked their home, stealing their property, including money, as well as stealing their vehicles and their sheep. We note that most of the victims were former residents of al Rukban Camp on the Syrian-Jordanian border in the suburbs of Homs governorate, who had returned to the area. The area was under the control of Syrian Regime forces at the time of the incident.

On Sunday, December 6, 2020, a civilian named Amer Muhammad al Nayef was shot dead by Syrian regime forces personnel stationed at a military checkpoint in al Sayyal village, which is administratively a part of al Boukamal city in the eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate. The area was under the control of Syrian Regime forces at the time of the incident.

b. Arbitrary arrest and unlawful detention:

Syrian Regime forces in 2020 particularly targeted individuals who have concluded settlements of their security status with the Syrian regime in areas that previously concluded conciliation/ settlement agreements with the regime for persecution and arrest; these arrests have been concentrated in Damascus Suburbs and Daraa governorates, with most occurring during campaigns of mass raids and arrests, targeting civilians, former workers in humanitarian organizations, popular uprising activists, and defectors from Syrian Regime forces. SNHR's Detainees Department has documented at least 307 cases of arrest against individuals who have concluded settlements of their security status.

The areas that Syrian Regime forces took control of as a result of their military operations during 2020 in the suburbs of Aleppo, Idlib and Hama governorates saw arrests, targeting civilians who had remained in their homes and refused to be displaced. The highest rate of arrests documented this year took place, according to the SNHR database, in February 2020.

Since the beginning of 2020, we have documented arrests targeting citizens returning from the areas of their displacement to their original areas, which are controlled by Syrian Regime forces, as well as arrests [targeting those who illegally returned from Lebanon](#) to their home towns, who have been charged with 'terrorism'. In this context, we always recommend that refugees or IDPs should not return to Syrian regime-controlled areas because there are no real guarantees that the regime

will not subject them to arrest, torture, enforced disappearance, or compulsory military conscription there. The SNHR team has documented at least 156 cases of arrest against returnees, including 89 cases of arrest targeting returnees from outside Syria.

In 2020, Syrian Regime forces continued to persecute Syrian citizens in connection with their political dissent and expression of opinions, despite the right to both being guaranteed by the constitution and international law; amongst those subjected to persecution and arbitrary arrest are a number of Syrian citizens detained solely because they criticized the deteriorating living and economic conditions in the regime-controlled areas, including lawyers and teachers, who were detained by Syrian Regime forces in raids on their homes and workplaces. We also recorded arrests and persecution of citizens in connection with their participation in anti-Syrian regime protests and activities in [Suwayda governorate](#), including college students, with most of these arrests taking place while they were passing through regime checkpoints in Damascus and Suwayda cities.

Syrian Regime forces also carried out arrests against persons in connection with their movement between and travel to the areas outside the control of the Syrian regime, while they were passing through regime checkpoints. We also documented arrests of individuals for making phone calls to areas outside the Syrian regime's control, with those detained including children, women and elderly people.

We also documented some arrests against workers involved in the field of currency exchange; the aim of these detentions is often to extort ransom money from the detainees' families, with these victims being released in exchange for huge sums of money. Amongst those subjected to arbitrary arrest are a number of former detainees released in recent months, who have been rearrested under various pretexts, such as claiming that they have destroyed their personal documents, that their arrest warrants are still outstanding, or in order to conscript them for military service.

We also recorded in 2020 that Syrian Regime forces released 545 detainees from civilian prisons in various Syrian governorates, with most of these being released after the end of their arbitrary sentences, with the duration of their detention ranging from four to nine years. Among those released, we recorded at least 93 individuals who were released in November and December under a special presidential pardon as part of a reconciliation process that targeted detainees from Daraa governorate who had previously made settlements, including dissidents from Syrian Regime forces, whose duration of detention ranged from one to two years. We also recorded that 287 of the released persons were discharged from detention centers due to the issuance of Amnesty Decree No. 6 of 2020. We issued [a special report](#) on this, noting that some of the articles included in the partial amnesty decree, which were related to reducing the sentence's period, included those released. We also issued [a report](#) detailing how the Syrian regime managed to relieve international pressure on it to release tens of thousands of detainees following the outbreak of COVID-19 through a deceptive amnesty decree. Photos of some of the released detainees clearly showed that they were subjected to malnutrition and neglect of healthcare during their detention.

The Syrian regime does not care about the lives of detainees in light of the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic:

The numerous catastrophic risks that threaten the lives of detainees in the Syrian regime's detention centers have multiplied and increased with the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic due to the inhuman conditions of detention to which they are exposed, especially overcrowding in very narrow spaces, with large numbers of detainees being crammed into cells of various sizes, with an average cell area measuring 4 x 6 square meters containing approximately 50 detainees; this means that each detainee barely has an area of 70 cm² for sitting and sleeping, with detainees usually taking turns to attempt to sit or lie down to sleep when their numbers exceed the holding capacity of the cell, as they routinely do. These cells also lack ventilation and the most basic standards of sanitation and cleanliness, with the conditions being even more squalid in the solitary confinement cells located on the detention centers' lower floors which lack even light. Throughout the duration of their detention in the security branches, detainees are also prevented from going outside to get any exercise, or exposure to fresh air or sunlight. A comparison between the record of those released after the recent amnesty decree, which is 287 individuals, and the record of cases of arrest, which is 905 cases, a figure that exceeds the record of releases by nearly two and a half times, confirms that the Syrian regime does not care about the lives of detainees; we have documented the highest number of arrests since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in September 2020. We have also documented at least 26 cases of arrest of medical personnel, including one woman (adult female), between January 2020 and the end of December 2020, by Syrian Regime forces.

The SNHR team documented the arbitrary arrest by Syrian regime forces of at least 908 individuals, including 13 children and 23 women (adult female), in 2020, with 212 of those detained being released, and most not charged or tried. Many others were forcibly conscripted into military service, and at least 696 more individuals, including four children and seven women, were classified as forcibly disappeared. In the previous year, 2019, SNHR documented 2,797 cases of arbitrary arrest by Syrian Regime forces, including 113 children and 125 women. This decrease in the numbers of officially documented arrests is due to increasing difficulties in documentation and verification in the areas under the control of the Syrian regime, which has re-established its brutal security grip on those areas, with the population there fearful of reporting and documenting violations, for fear of being subjected to further persecution and threats by Syrian Regime forces.

- Most notable incidents:

On Friday, February 7, 2020, Syrian Regime forces carried out a campaign of raids and arrests in Ein Tarma town in the Eastern Ghouta in Damascus Suburbs governorate. SNHR documented the arrest of five former volunteers with the Civil Defense Organization, known as 'the White Helmets', who were taken to an undisclosed location.

On Friday, April 3, 2020, Syrian Regime forces arrested three women from al Mowazzafin neighborhood in Deir Ez-Zour city as they were returning from areas under the control of Syrian Democratic Forces to their homes in al Mowazzafeen, taking them to an undisclosed location.

On Monday, June 15, 2020, Syrian Regime forces carried out a campaign of raids and arrests in al Seir Square in the center of Suwayda city following anti-regime demonstrations in the city. SNHR documented the arrest of nine civilians. Among those detained were government employees who had earlier been arbitrarily dismissed from their jobs due to their dissent with the Syrian regime. We documented that they were released on Thursday, July 9, 2020.

On Friday, July 3, 2020, Syrian Regime forces carried out a campaign of arrests at one of the regime's checkpoints at the entrance of al Yarmouk Camp, south of Damascus city. SNHR documented the arrest of five civilians, including one woman, with all those detained being taken to an undisclosed location.

- Most notable cases:

Thaer Munir al Na'san, a college student at the faculty of Veterinary Medicine in Daraa University, from Tseel town, west of Daraa governorate, was arrested on Sunday, January 19, 2020, by gunmen affiliated with Syrian Regime forces in Daraa al Mahatta area of Daraa city. His fate remains unknown to SNHR.

Mahmoud al Sarhan, a dissident conscript from Syrian Regime forces, from al Joulan town in the suburbs of Quneitra governorate, and a resident of Daraa Palestinian Refugee Camp in Daraa city, was arrested by members of the Syrian regime's Military Security forces on Friday, June 12, 2020, while he was passing through one of the regime's checkpoints near the National Hospital in al Sahari neighborhood of Daraa city. We documented that he was released the next day, with the photo of him taken after his release showing the effects of severe torture on his body.

Photo showing the effects of severe torture on the body of Mahmoud al Sarhan after his release



[Abdul Rahim al Samman](#), a lawyer from Hama city, was arrested by Syrian Regime forces in the city on Saturday, September 19, 2020, in connection with his having criticized the poor living conditions in the city on his personal 'Facebook' account', and taken to the Criminal Security Branch in the city. We documented that he was released on Thursday, September 24, 2020.

Israa Eisa Khamis and her female child Hatoun Ajaj, from Kanaker village in Damascus Suburbs governorate, were arrested by members of the Syrian regime's Air Security Force on Tuesday, September 20, 2020, while they were passing through one of the regime's checkpoints near al Teiba town's bridge in western Damascus Suburbs governorate. We documented that they were released on Wednesday, October 7, 2020.

Female child Hatoun Ajaj



Photos of detainees released by Syrian Regime forces show the effects of the gross neglect of medical and health care during their detention:

Abdul Hamid Mahmoud al Ghafel al Haj Ali, from Kherbet Ghazala town in the eastern suburbs of Daraa governorate, who was arrested on Tuesday, December 9, 2014, by Syrian Regime forces in Kherbet Ghazala town and detained for about five-and-a-half years, was released on April 17, 2020 from Seydnaya Military Prison in Damascus Suburbs governorate.

Photo comparing Abdul Hamid al Haj Ali's health and physical condition before his arrest and after his release



Fares Jhayyem, a dissident conscript from Syrian Regime forces, from Zakiya town in the west of Damascus Suburbs governorate, who was arrested in 2017, by Syrian Regime forces when he voluntarily came forward to undergo a settlement after he had received guarantees from the reconciliation committee in Zakiya town. On Sunday, April 19, 2020, he was released from Seydnaya Military Prison in Damascus Suburbs governorate.

Photo comparing Fares Jhayyem's health and physical condition before his arrest and after his release



Bashar Qasem al Balkhi, from Nasib village in the eastern suburbs of Daraa governorate, who was arrested in 2018 by Syrian Regime forces and detained for about two years, was released on July 27, 2020, from Seydnaya Military Prison in Damascus Suburbs governorate.

Photo comparing Bashar Qasem al Balkhi's health and physical condition before his arrest and after his release



c. Torture in detention centers:

In a description that applies to almost all detainees, all those who experienced arrest and detention are subjected to torture from the very first moment of their arrest, throughout the period of their detention, and routinely during their transfer between detention centers. In a previous detailed report, SNHR documented the most notable torture methods used by Syrian regime forces in the regime's detention centers and military hospitals, [detailing 72 methods](#) of physical, psychological and sexual torture, which we described in a way that, as much as possible, lets readers know the reality of these abuses, with this harrowing report inspired by the accounts which hundreds of surviving detainees provided to us.

In most cases, the Syrian regime does not inform its victims' families of their death in the detention center on the date of their death, with families instead learning of the death of their loved ones either through survivors of the detention centers or after they visit the military police headquarters in Damascus several times, or through the Civil Registry departments; families often get this harrowing information several years after the date of the detainees' death; we have recorded at least 18 individuals whose deaths were discovered by their loved ones through their families' visit to the Civil Registry departments in the Syrian governorates in 2020. The families of most of these individuals confirmed to us that their deceased relatives were in good health when they were arrested, leading us to believe that they died due to torture and lack of healthcare, except for a small number of them who died as a result of death sentences issued by the Military Field Courts.

In 2020, we monitored Syrian Regime forces handing over the bodies of 14 of those who died due to torture in the regime detention centers, mainly in Seydnaya Military Prison - and of those who had previously settled their security status - a relatively short time after their arrest, ranging from several weeks to one year, with these cases involving people in Daraa governorate.

In 2020, the SNHR team documented the deaths of at least 130 individuals due to torture and lack of healthcare by Syrian Regime forces, including one woman, compared to 275 individuals who died due to torture by Syrian Regime forces in 2019.

- Most notable cases:

[Omar Muhammad Ghannoum](#), born in 1992, was a university student at the Faculty of Human Medicine at Tishreen University in Latakia city at the time of his arrest. Omar, from al Hamidiya village, which is administratively a part of al Qsair city, west of Homs governorate, was arrested by Syrian Regime forces on Wednesday, May 1, 2013, at Tishreen University. On Friday, January 17, 2020, his family learned that he had been registered at the Civil Registry Department as having died on Monday, November 24, 2014. SNHR believes that it is most probable that he died due to torture in one of the regime's detention centers.

The death certificate of the victim Omar Ghannoum

الرقم الوطني	الاسم	تاريخ الميلاد	مكان الميلاد	الجنس	تاريخ الوفاة	مكان الوفاة	سبب الوفاة	الطبيب	ملاحظات
1511000000000000000	أحمد محمد غننوم	2013/05/01	الحميدية	ذكر	2014/11/24	مركز خدمة المراجعة	سبب الوفاة	أحمد محمد غننوم	ملاحظات

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 that date, she has been classified as forcibly disappeared, as nobody, including a lawyer, was allowed to visit her. On Monday, May 11, 2020, Syrian Regime forces notified her family of her death 10 days earlier on May 1, informing them that they could collect her body from the Tishreen Military Hospital in Damascus city. According to information SNHR has received, she was in good health at the time of her arrest, indicating a strong probability that she died due to torture and lack of healthcare.

Dr. [Ibrahim Abdul Qader al Zu'bi](#), a cardiologist who was a Ph.D. graduate in electrocardiography from the British University of Leicester, came from al Yadoda town in the western suburbs of Daraa governorate. Dr. al Zu'aibi, who was born in 1964, was arrested by members of the Syrian regime's Military Security branch on Monday, June 22, 2020, during a raid on his home in Damascus city's Baghdad Street and taken to the '248' Military Investigation branch in the city. Almost since that date, he has been classified as forcibly disappeared, with the Syrian regime denying his arrest and preventing anyone, even a lawyer, from visiting him.

On Thursday, July 30, 2020, Syrian Regime forces informed Dr. al-Zu'aibi's family that he had died in al Muwasa Hospital in Damascus city. SNHR's information confirms that he was in good health at the time of his arrest, indicating a strong probability that he died due to torture and lack of healthcare.

d. Sexual violence:

In 2020, we documented at least eight incidents of sexual violence perpetrated against adult females, five of which occurred in detention centers, while we documented two incidents of rape by Syrian Regime forces personnel in Hama governorate that ended in the victims being killed, and one incident that occurred at one of the regime checkpoints in Homs governorate.

e. Violations of children's rights:

The violations against children in Syria are numerous, and in view of the existence of many such crimes with various levels of severity and the devastating detrimental impact of these, we at the Syrian Network for Human Rights focus on categories of serious and gross life-threatening violations that have been identified by the United Nations Security Council, and are working to document them according to our methodology. The killing of children is at the forefront of these violations and is the most severe crime in Syria due to the high percentage of child victims, with arrest coming second; in the vast majority of cases, these arrests turn into enforced disappearance. Torture of children and child conscription are other issues which we have focused on documenting, along with attacks on educational facilities and the consequences, with many children left unable to take part in the educational process or forced to abandon education altogether. As with every other kind of violation, the Syrian regime is far ahead of all other parties to the conflict in terms of the number of violations.

You can read our latest report, which was issued on World Children's Day, entitled [“Ninth Annual Report on Violations against Children in Syria”](#), in which we documented the most notable violations of children's rights in Syria, especially in 2020.



On Tuesday, February 11, 2020, at around 12:10, fixed-wing Syrian regime (MiG-23) warplanes fired a number of missiles at Idlib city, two of which fell in an area crowded with civilians in the industrial zone to the east of the city, with [the impact site of one missile](#) being approximately 50 meters from [the other missile](#); these attacks [resulted](#) in [the deaths](#) of [12 civilians](#), [including](#) seven [male children](#), and [injured](#) around [33 others](#). Idlib city was under the control of Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.



Evacuating one of the victims of a massacre perpetrated in an air attack by the Syrian regime on the industrial zone of Idlib city – February 11, 2020 – Photo by Ahmad Rahhal

On Tuesday, February 25, 2020, fixed-wing Syrian regime (Su-24) warplanes fired a number of missiles targeting three sites on the southeastern outskirts of Ma'aret Misreen town in the northern suburbs of Idlib governorate. Two missiles fell in [a residential area](#) about 100m from Taqneyat al Ha-soub School. About 300m away, two other missiles targeted both the Munib Kmaisheh School and the [Zuhair Radwan Basic School](#), where IDPs were living, while another missile fell on [a residential area](#) located between the first and second sites approximately 200m from the second site. The bombardment resulted in the deaths of 11 civilians at the three sites, including four children (three males and one female), and injured 20 others. Ma'aret Misreen town was under the joint control of factions of the Armed Opposition and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.

On Wednesday, July 1, 2020, a 10-year-old [female child, Zainab Muhammad al Kreiz](#), died after she was shot by Syrian Regime forces while she was working on harvesting caper fruits in al Kreizat area on the outskirts of al Bab city in the eastern suburbs of Aleppo governorate. The area was under the control of Syrian National Army forces at the time of the incident.

f. Violations of women's rights:

The basic rights of Syrian women continued to be violated at the civil, political, social, economic, health, and psychological levels, with the country's women, through the loss of family breadwinners, losing the protection and prevention from the repercussions of the conflict, with this situation extending to imposing additional burdens on them in an already unstable society, exposing them to forced displacement, frequent displacement, and restrictions on their rights to work and movement. Despite the fact that most international charters and covenants, such as the Geneva Convention and the Additional Protocols, international humanitarian law, and the International Covenant on Political and Civil Rights have accorded special protection to women in their articles, in all circumstances and despite their increased vulnerability, Syrian women still do not enjoy the lowest levels of protection and security, with violations of their rights being frequently practiced against them with impunity due to their gender. You can read our latest report, ["Ninth Annual Report on Violations against Females in Syria"](#), in which we documented the most notable violations and incidents to which women in Syria were subjected, especially in 2020.



2. Violations Concerning the Conduct of Hostilities:

a. Military operations and unlawful attacks:

1. Artillery and aerial attacks:

Syrian Regime forces used barrel bombs, which are a highly indiscriminate, devastating and lethal weapon, in 2020, without being subject to any condemnation or restriction by the international community. Following the latest ceasefire agreement in the Idlib region that came into effect on March 6, the regime forces' military operations focused on ground attacks that sometimes reached remote areas away from the front lines, such as the cities of Idlib and Ariha.

The Syrian regime used a total of at least 474 barrel bombs in 2020, compared to at least 4,378 barrel bombs dropped by the Syrian regime's helicopters and fixed-wing warplanes in 2019. We note that the Syrian regime's use of barrel bombs has stopped since February 14, when factions of the Armed Opposition managed to shoot down a helicopter belonging to the Syrian regime in Idlib suburbs, causing an almost complete halt of the attacks using barrel bombs.

On Wednesday, January 15, 2020, Syrian regime helicopters dropped a number of barrel bombs on Kfarrouma village in the southern suburbs of Idlib governorate, causing material damage to public and private properties. We note that the village was empty of most of its residents at the time due to their displacement as a result of continuous attacks by Syrian-Russian alliance forces on the region since April 26, 2019, which in the days before this attack

had focused on Ma'aret al Numan and its environs. Kfarrouma village was under the joint control of factions of the Armed Opposition and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.

Video showing the moment the Syrian regime helicopter dropped a barrel bomb until it reached the ground and exploded in Kfarrouma village, Idlib - January 15, 2020



On Tuesday, January 28, 2020, at around 03:20, Syrian regime helicopters dropped a number of barrel bombs on [al Maghara](#) village in Jabal al Zaweya in the southern suburbs of Idlib governorate. One of the barrel bombs fell on Ali al Khatib Basic School in the middle of the village, [severely destroying the school building](#) and [causing significant material damage to its furniture](#). Al Maghara village was under the joint control of factions of the Armed Opposition and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.

On Monday, February 10, 2020, Syrian regime helicopters dropped a number of barrel bombs on Ebeen Sam'an village in the western suburbs of Aleppo governorate, resulting in the deaths of four civilians, including a father and his two young daughters – IDPs from Saraqeb city in the eastern suburbs of Idlib governorate - and injuring others. The village was under the joint control of factions of the Armed Opposition and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.

On Friday, September 11, 2020, Mustafa Hussein Houriyah, a fourth-year Human Medicine student, died due to wounds sustained on Monday, September 7, 2020, when Syrian Regime forces used heavy artillery in tandem with a missile launcher to bomb Ariha city in the southern suburbs of the governorate. The city was under the joint control of factions of the Armed Opposition and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.

On Friday, October 9, 2020, Syrian Regime forces used artillery to fire shells at homes in Shnan village in Jabal al Zaweya area in the southern suburbs of Idlib governorate, resulting in [the death](#) of a two-year-old female child, Najmah al Suleiman. The village was under the joint control of the Syrian National Army/ the Armed Opposition and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.

On Wednesday, November 4, 2020, Syrian Regime forces used artillery to fire a number of shells at Ariha city, targeting al Midan neighborhood while a vehicle transporting employees working for Ihsan Relief and Development was passing by, resulting in the deaths of [four civilians](#), including one female child and two employees of the institution. The city was under the joint control of factions of the Armed Opposition and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.

2. Sniper attacks:

Using snipers to kill people within urban environments has the advantage for perpetrators that the sniper can lurk out of victims' sight while observing them closely through the scope of his weapon, and is fully aware of victims' identities before killing them. This is similar to executions, since the murderer in this case knows exactly the characteristics of his victim and deliberately kills him or her, although snipers target people without caring about their victims' identities or distinguishing between men, women or children, or even disabled people, and certainly without knowing the religion of the victim. 2020 was marked by sniping operations in the contact areas between Syrian Regime forces and the Armed Opposition factions, most of which targeted civilians on their agricultural lands.

In 2020, we documented the deaths of five civilians, including one child, who were shot dead by Syrian regime snipers, while in 2019 we documented the deaths of six civilians, including four children, who were shot dead by Syrian regime snipers.

On Thursday, June 4, 2020, snipers affiliated with Syrian Regime forces opened fire against a group of civilians from the same family who were working on harvesting wheat crops on agricultural lands in the vicinity of Iffes village in the northern suburbs of Idlib governorate, resulting in the death of a 13- year-old boy, Maher Malek Nouri Durrah, from al Tahliyya village in the northern suburbs of Idlib governorate.

3. Siege and threats of military operations:

In 2020, Syrian Regime forces continued their policy of besieging and storming areas to force their residents to sign settlement agreements and submit to their terms; these attacks were focused this year on southern Syria.

On March 1, Syrian Regime forces stormed al Gharbi neighborhood of al Sanamayn city in the northern suburbs of Daraa to arrest former members of the Armed Opposition factions; this assault was accompanied by bombardment targeting civilian homes. On the evening of the same day, a settlement agreement was concluded with the mediation of the Fifth Corps, which is linked to the Russian Hmeimim Airbase, between Syrian Regime forces and the Iranian militias on the one hand, and the people of the city on the other. The agreement mainly provided for settling the security status of armed individuals and displacing all those who refused to submit to this settlement. On March 2, 21 Armed Opposition factions' fighters were displaced to northwest Syria through the Zandin crossing, which separates the areas controlled by Syrian Regime forces and those controlled by factions of the Armed Opposition in the Aleppo suburbs.

On September 20, Syrian Regime forces arrested three women and one female child from Kanaker town in Damascus Suburbs governorate, after which the townspeople protested, setting light to tires and burning pictures of the Syrian regime's president in the vicinity of the military checkpoints in the town. As a result of these protests, the town was besieged by Syrian Regime forces from the morning of September 22, with the siege continuing for 18 days, in order to pressure the people into complying with the regime's demands to end the protests and accept the settlement agreement, which was reached through Russian mediation, and whose primary result was a security settlement for about 1,000 young men from the town, most of whom had failed to perform their compulsory and reserve military service, or were military defectors, and those wanted by the regime's security branches in connection with criminal cases, while other cases related to joining the ranks of the opposition factions previously.

b. Specifically protected individuals and objects

1. Medical sector:

In 2020, the medical sector suffered from the repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic throughout all the Syrian regions, with SNHR attributing the most prominent causes of this deterioration to the collapse of the medical sector as a result of the systematic targeting of medical facilities and personnel by Syrian Regime forces over the past nine years. SNHR's data confirm that the Syrian regime and its Russian ally are responsible for the vast majority – over 90 percent - of the most brutal violations perpetrated, such as killing, indiscriminate shelling, torture and enforced disappearance adding that targeting medical personnel with killing, arrest and torture pushed hundreds of them to flee outside Syria, meaning that Syria has not only lost those who have been killed or forcibly disappeared, but has also forced huge numbers of medical personnel to migrate, fearing for their lives. We also noted that Syrian Regime forces deliberately targeted some medical facilities in a repeated manner with the clear objective of inflicting as much damage as possible to these facilities and denying their services to civilians.

In 2020, we documented the deaths of at least three medical personnel at the hands of Syrian Regime forces. We also documented at least nine incidents of attack on hospitals and medical points, while we documented in 2019 the deaths of 14 medical personnel, and at least 55 incidents of attack on hospitals and medical points by Syrian Regime forces.

Most notable victims among medical personnel

Dr. Ibrahim Abdul Qader al Zu'bi, a cardiologist who was a Ph.D. graduate in electrocardiography from the British University of Leicester, came from al Yadoda town in the western suburbs of Daraa governorate. Dr. al-Zu'aibi, who was born in 1964, was arrested by members of the Syrian regime's Military Security branch on Monday, June 22, 2020, during a raid on his home in Damascus city's Baghdad Street and taken to the '248' Military Investigation branch in the city. Almost since that date, he has been classified as forcibly disappeared, with the Syrian regime denying his arrest and preventing anyone, even a lawyer, from visiting him.

Dr. Ibrahim al Zu'bi



On Thursday, July 30, 2020, Syrian Regime forces informed his family that he had died in al Muwasa Hospital in Damascus city. SNHR's information confirms that Dr. Ibrahim was in good health at the time of his arrest, indicating a strong probability that he died due to torture and lack of healthcare.

Most notable attacks on medical facilities

On Wednesday, January 8, 2020, Syrian Regime forces used a missile launcher to shell Ma'aret al Numan Central Hospital - known as the [National Hospital](#), which was functioning as an emergency unit - in Ma'aret al Numan city in the southern suburbs of Idlib governorate, with the attack [partially destroying](#) the [hospital's building](#) and [some sections](#), as well as [causing moderate](#) material damage to [its equipment](#) and [water tanks](#). We note that the hospital is the only medical facility currently serving the Ma'aret al Numan area where most medical facilities have either suspended their operations or been completely put out of service due to the ongoing campaign of military escalation by Syrian-Russian alliance forces on the Idlib region since April 26, 2019. The city was under the joint control of factions of the Armed Opposition and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.

On Thursday, February 6, 2020, at around 12:25, Syrian Regime forces used artillery to fire a shell at Anadan Dispensary, which is supported by the Independent Doctors Organization (IDA), in [Anadan city](#) in the northern suburbs of Aleppo governorate, [partially destroying](#) the [dispensary's perimeter](#) wall, and [causing moderate](#) material [damage](#) to [its equipment](#) and [furniture](#). Anadan city was under the joint control of factions of the Armed Opposition and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.

Photo showing Anadan Dispensary in Anadan city, Aleppo, before and after it was targeted by Syrian regime's ground attack - February 6, 2020



2. Educational sector:

The educational sector is one of the most active sectors in contributing to building societies, with the Syrian regime controlling educational institutions since its establishment and harnessing them to indoctrinate children with totalitarian Ba'athist ideology by holding training courses for educational cadres and almost forcibly demanding them to join the ruling Ba'ath Party and to adopt educational curricula that manipulate and indoctrinate emerging generations to believe in the party's doctrines. With the outbreak of the popular uprising, we recorded flagrant attacks on educational facilities, through indiscriminate and systematic bombing operations. In 2020, we monitored an increase in the Syrian regime's transforming some educational facilities into military headquarters, especially in the areas it regained control over in 2019 and 2020.

In 2020, we documented at least 38 attacks on educational facilities (schools and kindergartens), while in 2019, we documented at least 176 attacks by Syrian Regime forces.

On Tuesday, February 25, 2020, Syrian Regime forces used artillery to fire a number of shells at al Yarmouk School in Kafrantin village located near Darat Ezza city in the western suburbs of Aleppo governorate, [partially destroying](#) the [school building](#), and [causing moderate](#) material damage to its furniture. The village was under the joint control of factions of the Armed Opposition and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.

On Thursday, September 10, 2020, a photo shared online showed Syrian Regime forces personnel and vehicles at the Abdul Aziz Qazziz School in Ma'aret al Numan city in the southern suburbs of Idlib governorate, after the regime forces had seized the school and looted its contents, including cladding materials, before transferring these stolen materials to a training center for Syrian Regime forces personnel. The SNHR was unable to determine the date of the Syrian Regime forces' takeover of the school, as Ma'aret al Numan city has been under regime control since January 28, 2020.



On the morning of Wednesday, November 4, 2020, Syrian Regime forces used artillery to fire dozens of shells at [Ariha](#) city in the southern suburbs of Idlib governorate; one of the shells fell on the Martyr Zakariya Saedou School in the city, [partially destroying the schoolyard](#), and causing minor [material damage to the school building](#). SNHR notes that the school had also been subjected to an earlier artillery attack by the same forces less than a week before, on the night of Friday, October 30, 2020. Ariha city was under the joint control of factions of the Armed Opposition and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of both incidents.

3. Places of worship:

Syrian Regime forces failed to observe the sanctity of places of worship, including mosques, churches, and others, storming them, turning many of them into military headquarters, and using the minarets of mosques as snipers' nests from which to target civilians. Many places of worship were bombed, especially during military campaigns, and some were bombed more than once. We note that we attach special importance to targeting places of worship, which we refer to in our monthly report on the most notable human rights violations, issued by the Syrian Network for Human Rights once a month, which it documents attacks on vital civilian facilities.

In 2020, we documented at least 41 attacks on places of worship by Syrian Regime forces, while we documented at least 156 attacks on them in 2019.

On Wednesday, January 11, 2020, fixed-wing Syrian regime warplanes fired missiles near the [Omar bin al Khattab Mosque](#) in Bineen village, in Jabal al Zaweya in the southern suburbs of Idlib governorate. This was followed by Syrian regime helicopters dropping barrel bombs on the same location, causing [partial destruction](#) to [the mosque building](#), and [causing minor material damage](#) to [its furniture](#). Bineen village was under the joint control of factions of the Armed Opposition and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.

On Thursday, February 6, 2020, Syrian Regime forces used artillery to fire a shell at al Rawda Mosque in Idlib city. The shell fell on the mosque's perimeter wall, [partially destroying](#) the [mosque building](#) and wall, and causing minor material damage to its furniture. We note that this was the first time in two years that Idlib city had been subjected to artillery shelling by Syrian Regime forces. Idlib city was under the control of Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.

On the night of Tuesday, October 27, 2020, Syrian Regime artillery forces - stationed in al Hamed-iyah military camp near Ma'aret al Numan city in the southern suburbs of Idlib governorate - fired a shell at [al Kabir Mosque](#) in the middle of Ariha city in the southern suburbs of Idlib governorate, [partially destroying](#) its [roof](#), and causing moderate material damage to its furniture. Ariha city was under the joint control of factions of the Armed Opposition and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.

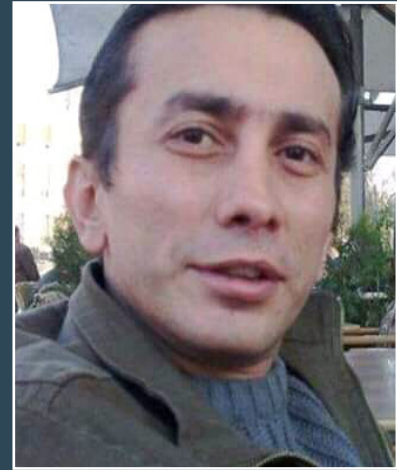
4. Media workers:

Syria still ranks last globally in terms of press freedom, according to [the 2020 World Press Freedom Index](#), published by Reporters Without Borders (RSF); the reality is not much different from what was the case in previous years, with the Syrian regime, which controls the Syrian state, bearing the greatest responsibility for debasing Syria and dragging the nation down to such an abject level, ranking among the most oppressive states in the world in regard to freedom of the press and media work. The regime is considered by far the most prolific perpetrator of violations against citizen journalists compared to the other parties to the conflict. The Syrian Network for Human Rights has endeavored, since the start of its work, to document the violations committed against media personnel, including killing, arrest, injury and harassment, both through documenting these incidents in the daily news reports and in issuing [monthly reports](#) and [special reports](#) that record these violations committed by all the perpetrator parties to the conflict in Syria.

The violations committed by Syrian Regime forces against media workers are varied, including arrest and killing, with Syrian Regime forces documented as killing two media workers in 2020, while we documented the deaths of six media workers in 2019 by Syrian Regime forces.

Jihad Muhammad Jamal, from Aleppo city, was a media activist in addition to his activism in the Syrian popular uprising. Nicknamed 'Milan', Jihad, born in 1972, was a qualified lawyer, having obtained his law degree from Aleppo University. He was arrested for his activism by Syrian Regime forces for the fourth and final time on Wednesday, March 7, 2012, in the Ninar Café in the Bab Sharqi neighborhood of Damascus city, along with a number of other activists, and taken to the regime's infamous Palestine Security Branch '235' in the city. During his interrogation at the Palestine Branch, Jihad was severely tortured and accused of treason; Jihad was subjected to a trial in the Military Field Court in December 2012. After this, he was detained in Seydnaya Military Prison in Damascus Suburbs governorate, where his family managed to visit him for the last time at the beginning of 2016.

Jihad Muhammad Jamal



On Monday, April 13, 2020, the SNHR obtained information indicating that he had died, with his family obtaining a document on Saturday, March 7, 2020, stating that he had died on Friday, November 2, 2016, according to the records of the Civil Registry Department. Since the regime has not handed over his body to anyone, he is still classified amongst those 'disappeared' by the Syrian regime.

SNHR spoke with Noura al Jizawi, Jihad's colleague who worked with him, who said, **"Jihad worked on many societal, legal and political issues before the start of the revolution, such as campaigns for organ donation and against the law of honor crimes. With the start of the revolution, he participated strongly in organizing and coordinating protests and sit-ins in both Aleppo and Damascus. He also worked on producing a documentary film about the sit-in in al Sa'a Square (New Clock Tower Square) in Homs city."**

Noura was arrested 19 days after Jihad's arrest, learning during her own interrogation that he was being held in the Palestine Branch; the investigating officer told her the charges against Jihad in an effort to extract information from her and tortured her more when she denied them.

SNHR also spoke with Mansour al Omari, another friend of Jihad who worked with him, who recalled, **"Jihad was a media activist and he reported the news of the revolution in Syria to many channels, such as the BBC and others. I was helping him in editing the reports he was filming and sending to news channels like Orient and others."**

We note that Jihad Jamal had previously been detained three times before his last arrest by Syrian Regime forces. The first time he was arrested was in the Milano Cafe in Aleppo city on May 5, 2011, after which he was released on June 4, 2011; the second was in Damascus city on August 4, 2011, after which he was released on October 2, 2011; and the third time was on October 14, 2011, after which he was released on December 29, 2011.

The Syrian Network for Human Rights on several occasions called on the Syrian regime to reveal Jamal's fate, and highlighted his condition among the groups of portraits that were exhibited in advocacy events in several countries, which were outlined in [a report we previously issued](#). Jamal's portrait can be seen at [this link](#).

c. Use of prohibited weapons

1. Cluster Munitions:

SNHR documented in 2020 at least four cluster munition attacks, all of them by Syrian Regime forces, with these attacks concentrated in the governorates of Idlib and Hama. These attacks resulted in the deaths of 13 civilians, including seven children and three women, and injured 27 others, with SNHR documenting at least 52 cluster munition attacks carried out by Syrian Regime forces the previous year, 2019.

On Wednesday, January 1, 2020, at around 11:43, Syrian Regime forces used a missile platform, which we believe was stationed in Jabal Azan area in the western suburbs of Aleppo, to fire a Tochka 9M79 missile loaded with 9N24 cluster munitions, which fell on al Sharqi neighborhood of Sarmin city in the eastern suburbs of Idlib. Most of the submunitions spread across a civilian area that includes a school, a Sharia institute and a shelter center housing IDP families from southern suburbs of Idlib. The shelling resulted in the deaths of 12 civilians, including seven children and three women (adult female), and injured at least 20 others.

[Some submunitions](#) also [spread in the main market of Sarmin city](#) and [near al Fardous](#) and Othman bin Affan Mosques, with their explosions causing varying degrees of material damage to the market facilities and the two mosque buildings. The city was under the joint control of factions of the Armed Opposition and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.

On Tuesday, February 25, 2020, Syrian Regime forces used artillery and missile launchers to fire several shells and missiles, targeting Idlib city, the center of the governorate. Among these missiles, we were able to verify the presence of at least one missile loaded with [cluster munitions](#). The cluster missiles fell on al Thawra School, known as al Baraem Model School, resulting in the death of a teacher, and injuring five other people. The city was under the control of the Armed Opposition/ the Syrian National Army and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.

Conclusions

Syrian Regime forces have perpetrated various crimes that amount to crimes against humanity, ranging from extrajudicial killing to sexual violence, torture, and others, with all these crimes being perpetrated in a systematic and widespread manner. In addition, Syrian Regime forces have committed war crimes through indiscriminate shelling, and the destruction of buildings and facilities. Not only did the Syrian government breach international humanitarian law and customary law, but it also violated Security Council resolutions – particularly Resolution No. 2042 which is concerned with releasing detainees, and Resolution No. 2139 which is concerned with ceasing indiscriminate attacks and enforced disappearances. All of these issues have yet to be addressed with any form of accountability in light of the legitimacy conferred through Russian-Chinese protection and Western silence.



Remnants of URGAN 9M27K missile used by Syrian Regime forces to bomb al Baraem Model School in Idlib city - February 25, 2020

B. Russian forces

In 2020, the Russian military intervention in Syria continued for the fifth consecutive year in support of the Syrian regime and against the popular uprising and political change, with this intervention contributing to preserving the Syrian regime, protecting it from accountability and supporting the violations and policies that it practiced, regardless of their brutality, extending to the use of chemical weapons. We detailed this [extensively in the fifth annual report on the Russian military intervention in Syria](#).

Also in 2020, Russia continued to play the same political, economic and military roles in support of the Syrian regime. With the entry into force of the ceasefire agreement on March 6, the frequency of military air attacks decreased significantly, and these forces' role on the ground emerged as we monitored their deployment in several locations, with their role also emerging in conducting settlement agreements between the Syrian regime and the people of cities and towns.




a. Extrajudicial killing

We documented the deaths of 211 civilians, including 62 children and 48 women (adult female), killed by Russian forces in 2020, as well as 11 massacres perpetrated by Russian forces. In 2019, we documented the deaths of 452 civilians, including 112 children, 71 women (adult female), killed by Russian forces, as well as 22 massacres perpetrated by Russian forces.

On Tuesday, January 21, 2020, at around 11:45, fixed-wing warplanes, which we believe were Russian, fired missiles at a house on the outskirts of [Kafr Ta'al](#) village in the western suburbs of Aleppo governorate, resulting in the deaths of [nine civilians](#) from [one family](#), including [six children](#) ([three males](#) and [three females](#)) and [one woman](#). Kafr Ta'al village was under the joint control of factions of the Armed Opposition and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.

On Wednesday, January 29, 2020, at around 17:00, fixed-wing warplanes, which we believe were Russian, fired missiles at the main street, located between al Gharbi Mosque and Nouri Hamesho Mosque, in the middle of [Kafr Lata](#) village in Jabal al Arba'in area in Jabal al Zaweya in the southern suburbs of Idlib governorate, [resulting in the deaths of 19 civilians](#) including [four children](#) (three males and one female) and two women, in addition to injuring 30 others. Kafr Lata village was under the joint control of factions of the Armed Opposition and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.



Victims from one family killed in a massacre perpetrated in an air attack we believe was Russian on Jedraya village, Idlib – February 5, 2020

On Monday, February 3, 2020, 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 the Jam'iyet al Rahhal area in the western suburbs of Aleppo governorate heading towards safer areas, resulting in the deaths of [nine civilians](#) at [one time](#), including [five children](#) ([four males](#) and [one female](#)) and two women. The area was under the joint control of factions of the Armed Opposition and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.

On Wednesday, February 5, 2020, at around 20:00, fixed-wing warplanes, which we believe were Russian, fired missiles at a house in [Jedraya](#) village in the northern suburbs of Idlib governorate, resulting in [the deaths](#) of [six civilians](#) from [one family](#), including a female child and four women, all of whom were IDPs from al Kammari village in the southern suburbs of Aleppo governorate. Jedraya village was under the joint control of factions of the Armed Opposition and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.

On Thursday, March 5, 2020, at around 02:05, fixed-wing warplanes, which we believe were Russian, carried out a raid using at least two missiles, targeting a poultry farm where IDPs from Idlib and Aleppo suburbs were living. The poultry farm is located on the western outskirts of Ma'aret Misreen town in the northern suburbs of Idlib governorate - about 2 km by line of sight - on the road between Ma'aret Misreen and Batenta. The poultry farm building consists of two hangars used for raising chickens, which are linked on the western side to a two-storey residential building where the IDPs were living. At the entrance to the poultry farm there is a building for guards where IDPs also reside.

At around 02:27, after the recovery operations for the wounded and the injured had begun, the same warplanes again targeted the site with at least two missiles. No casualties were reported in this second attack among the paramedics and rescue workers, who were able to escape the scene prior to the bombardment. We note that we were unable to accurately verify the number of missiles and the impact site of each of them up until the time of preparing this report, because the attacks were carried out at night, and because we have been unable to visit the site of the incident so far. The area was under the joint control of factions of the Armed Opposition and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident. The two attacks resulted in [the deaths](#) of [15 civilians](#), including two [female children](#) and [seven women](#), and [injured](#) at least [19 others](#), in [addition](#) to [killing hundreds](#) of [birds](#) that were in the hangars, and [almost complete](#) destroying [the poultry](#) farm building and some of the houses surrounding it. We issued [a report](#) on the incident.

The SNHR spoke with Marwan Abu Hatem, the commander of the Civil Defense Center in Ma'aret Misreen city, whose team went to the site of the massacre after hearing loud explosions from the western outskirts of the town. He told us: **"We arrived at the site about 20 minutes after the first raid was carried out, with Russian reconnaissance aircraft flying over in the air, according to the observatories' reports circulation, which warned us a few minutes later of the presence of Russian warplanes in the implementation status, so we left the site immediately,"** Marwan added that the Civil Defense

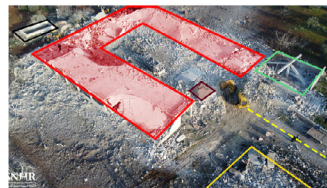
rescue workers moved their vehicles and put them among the trees in a location relatively far from the site of the massacre as a precautionary measure before returning to the site to recover those stuck under the rubble following these second airstrikes: **"Transferring the victims took a long time due to our vehicles being some distance from the place and we kept working until the morning, when we had recovered 15 victims, including women and children, and more than 15 injured, all of whom were among the IDP residents at the poultry farm and homes surrounding it."**

Laith al Abdullah, a media worker for the Civil Defense Organization - Saraqeb Center, headed with his team to the site of the massacre to support the team from Ma'aret Misreen, which was subjected to a double-tap airstrike. He told SNHR: **"At around 2:00 am on March 5, Russian warplanes launched a violent raid on Ma'aret Misreen, the sound of which resonated across Idlib suburbs. The warplanes launched another raid about 25 minutes later. Following the second attack, we received calls to support the Civil Defense team at the site, so we immediately went there. Upon our arrival, I saw the scale of the great destruction that had taken place, which seemed as if the missiles used were of a new type that were more powerful, as I saw three large craters in the place when I arrived. We worked until about 08:30 and we were able to retrieve the bodies of a female child, a woman and two men."**

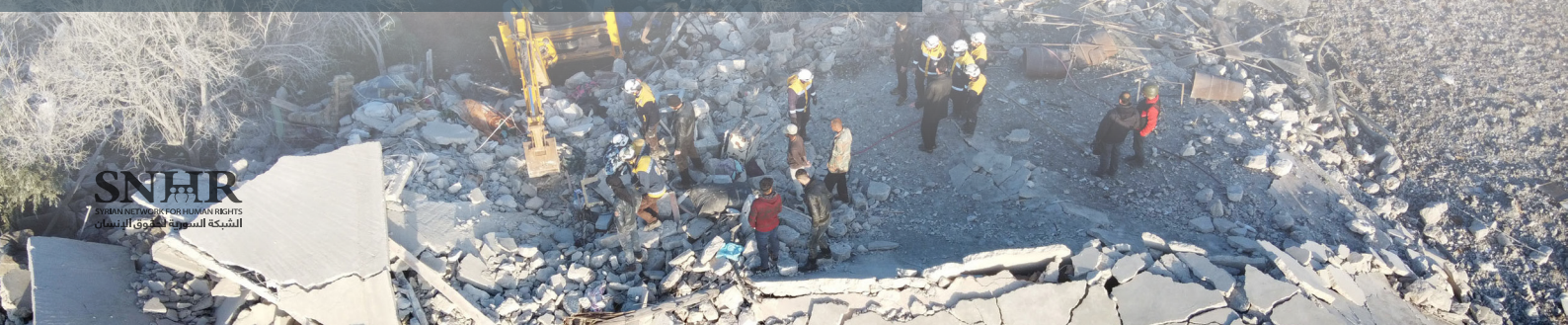
Laith confirmed that the death toll from the attack was 15 martyrs, some of whom died after arriving at the hospital, and 19 injured, in addition to the deaths of hundreds of chickens that were in the poultry shed.



Visual guide of the impact site of a Russian air attack which targeted a poultry farm sheltering IDPs, resulting in a massacre in Ma'aret Misreen town:



Recovering people stuck under the rubble as a result of a Russian air attack on Ma'aret Misreen, Idlib - March 5, 2020 – Photo by Aref Watad



On Monday dawn, August 3, 2020, fixed-wing warplanes, which we believe were Russian, fired missiles at a farm in the northern outskirts of Binnesh city in the northern suburbs of Idlib governorate, resulting in the deaths of [three civilians](#) from one family - IDPs from al Burj village in the eastern suburbs of Idlib governorate. The city was under the joint control of factions of the Armed Opposition and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.

b. Targeting medical personnel and their related facilities

Russian forces systematically and deliberately targeted medical facilities and personnel, with SNHR documenting dozens of incidents in which these forces resorted to the double-tap airstrike policy to deliberately inflict the greatest possible damage to medical facilities and the personnel working in them.

In 2020, we documented the deaths of four medical personnel in attacks, which we believe were carried out by Russian forces, in addition to 13 attacks on medical facilities during the same period. In contrast, we documented the deaths of six medical personnel and at least 28 attacks on medical facilities in 2019.

- Death among medical personnel:

[Zakwan Tammaa](#), from Ariha city in the southern suburbs of Idlib governorate, was an anesthesia technician and the [administrative director](#) at al Shami Hospital, also known as Ariha Surgical Hospital, north of Ariha city. Zakwan, who was born on June 15, 1977, died on Saturday, February 1, 2020, due to wounds sustained on Wednesday, January 29, 2020, in the blasts from three airstrikes launched by fixed-wing warplanes, which we believe were Russian, when they used missiles against al Shami Hospital and the surrounding area in Ariha city.

Abdul Rahman Majed Hilal, Obaidah Khaled Hilal, and Muhammad Raed Haj Asaad, all paramedics, were killed on Thursday, February 6, 2020, in bombardment by fixed-wing warplanes that we believe were Russian, which used missiles to target an ambulance belonging to the 'Free' Idlib Health Directorate's Idlib Ambulance System. The warplanes launched the missile strike as the ambulance was driving through al Kurneish al Sharqi area - Qmainas crossing road - in the eastern outskirts of Idlib city.

[Abdul Rahman Majed Hilal](#), from Saraqeb city in the eastern suburbs of Idlib governorate

[Obaidah Khaled Hilal](#), from Saraqeb city in the eastern suburbs of Idlib governorate

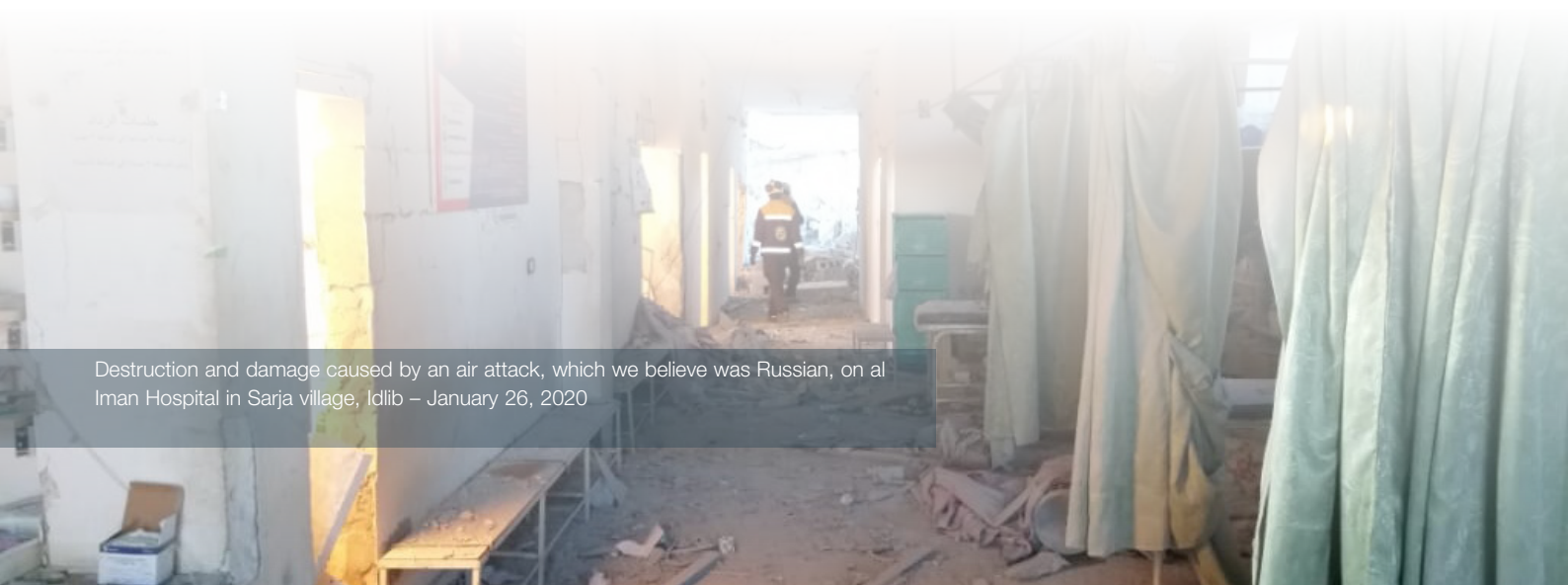
[Muhammad Raed Haj Asaad](#), from Joubas village in the eastern suburbs of Idlib governorate

- Most notable attacks on medical facilities:

On Sunday, January 26, 2020, at around 04:10, fixed-wing warplanes, which we believe were Russian, fired missiles at al Iman Hospital in the east of [Sarja](#) village in Jabal al Zaweya area in the southern suburbs of Idlib governorate, injuring a number of civilian reviewers at the hospital, in [addition](#) to [severely destroying](#) the [hospital building](#), and [causing significant](#) material [damage](#) to its equipment, putting it out of service. Sarja village was under the joint control of factions of the Armed Opposition and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.

On Wednesday, January 29, 2020, at around 22:40, fixed-wing warplanes, which we believe were Russian, launched three consecutive missile strikes on [al Shami Hospital](#), known as Ariha Surgical Hospital, and the surrounding area, resulting in the death of one of the hospital's medical personnel, [in addition](#) to [causing extensive](#) destruction to [its building](#), and [inflicting significant](#) material damage to [its equipment](#), putting it out of service. We note that the bombardment caused a massacre of IDP civilians as a result of targeting one of the residential buildings adjacent to the hospital. Ariha city was under the joint control of factions of the Armed Opposition and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.

On Saturday, February 1, 2020, at around 10:40, fixed-wing warplanes, which we believe were Russian, launched two missile strikes on al Huda Surgical Hospital, which is supported by the SKT Organization, in [Hour](#) village in the western suburbs of Aleppo governorate. The missiles fell in the middle of the hospital's yard, [partially destroying](#) the [hospital building](#), and [causing significant](#) material damage to [its equipment](#). The hospital, which was established in 2014, provides services to nearly 250,000 people, treating around 6,000 people per month, and providing 13,000 free medical services per month. Hour village was under the joint control of factions of the Armed Opposition and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.



Destruction and damage caused by an air attack, which we believe was Russian, on al Iman Hospital in Sarja village, Idlib – January 26, 2020

c. Targeting educational facilities

We documented at least 12 attacks on educational facilities in attacks that we believe were Russian in 2020, while we documented at least 35 attacks on educational facilities in 2019.

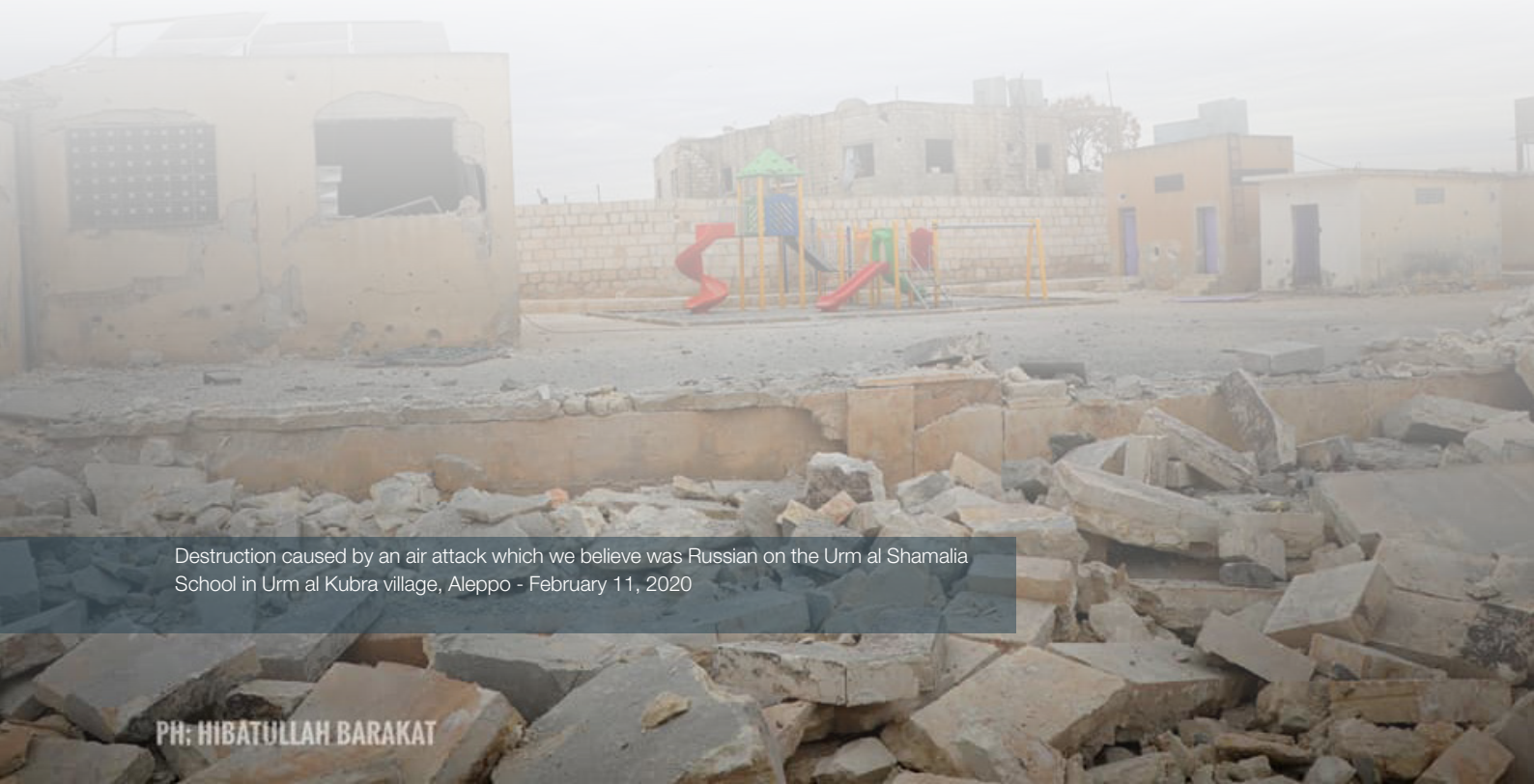
- Most notable attacks on educational facilities:

On Monday, February 3, 2020, at around 04:30, fixed-wing warplanes, which we believe were Russian, fired missiles at a compound containing three schools adjacent to each other in Binnesh city in the northern suburbs of Idlib governorate, namely, Binnesh High School for girls, Mustafa Farhat School, and al Reefiyah School. The missiles directly targeted Binnesh High School for girls, [severely destroying](#) the [school building](#), and [causing moderate](#) material [damage](#) to [its furniture](#), in addition to inflicting minor material damage to the two other school buildings. Binnesh city was under the joint control of factions of the Armed Opposition and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.

On Tuesday, February 11, 2020, fixed-wing warplanes, which we believe were Russian, fired a missile at the Urm al Shamalia School in Urm al Kubra village in the western suburbs of Aleppo governorate, causing partial destruction of the school building, and causing moderate material damage to its furniture. Urm al Kubra village was under the joint control of factions of the Armed Opposition and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.

d. Targeting places of worship

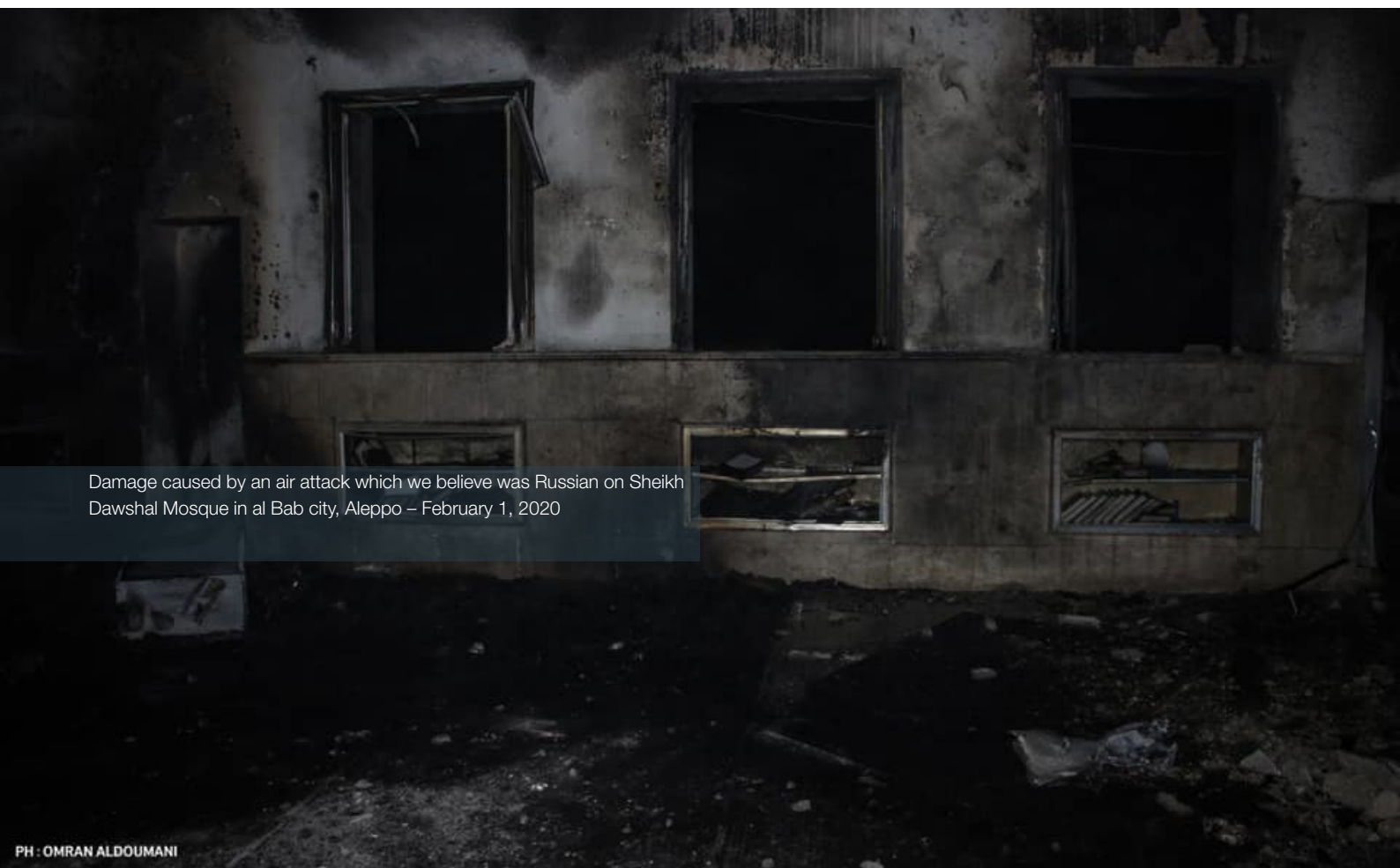
The decrease in the frequency of Russian military attacks in 2020 compared to 2019 did not have a clear impact on the record of attacks on places of worship, as we documented at least 23 attacks on places of worship in attacks that we believe were Russian in 2020, while we documented at least 31 attacks on places of worship in 2019.



Destruction caused by an air attack which we believe was Russian on the Urm al Shamalia School in Urm al Kubra village, Aleppo - February 11, 2020

On Saturday, February 1, 2020, at around 23:30, fixed-wing warplanes, which we believe were Russian, fired four missiles that landed in the middle of al Bab city in the eastern suburbs of Aleppo governorate. One of the missiles fell on the dome of [Sheikh Dawshal Mosque](#) in the city, [partially destroying](#) the [mosque building](#) and [causing](#) a [fire that burnt](#) its furniture, as well as causing significant material damage to its cladding. Another missile fell near [al Kabir Mosque](#), causing minor material damage to its building and furniture. We note that this was the first time al Bab city had been subjected to aerial bombardment by Syrian-Russian alliance forces since it came under the control of the Syrian National Army in February 2017. The city was under the control of the Syrian National Army forces at the time of the incident.

On Thursday, February 20, 2020, fixed-wing warplanes, which we believe were Russian, fired missiles at [al Gharbi Mosque](#) in Kafr Lata village in the southern suburbs of Idlib governorate, [partially destroying](#) the mosque building and causing significant material damage to its furniture. Kafr Lata village was under the joint control of factions of the Armed Opposition and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.



Damage caused by an air attack which we believe was Russian on Sheikh Dawshal Mosque in al Bab city, Aleppo – February 1, 2020

e. Targeting media workers

We documented the deaths of two media workers in attacks that we believe were Russian in 2020, while two media workers were killed by Russian forces in 2019.

On Tuesday, February 4, 2020, at around 07:00, media activist Amjad Muhammad Anas Aktalati, was killed when fixed-wing warplanes, which we believe were Russian, fired a number of missiles targeting al Midan neighborhood in Ariha city in the southern suburbs of Idlib governorate, which was under the joint control of factions of the Armed Opposition and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident. Amjad, a photographer with the General Media Center, was a married father of three from Ariha city. Born in 1992, he had been a third-year student at the Faculty of Education - Department of Psychology - University of Damascus.

The SNHR contacted the media worker, Anas Tracy, a friend of Amjad, who told us: **“When I heard the news of Amjad’s death, I contacted one of the Civil Defense personnel who was at the site of Amjad’s death, who told me that the Russian warplanes launched several missile airstrikes targeting the al Midan neighborhood in Ariha city, one of which targeted the house of Fadi Rahal, a friend of Amjad, in whose house Amjad spent the night, which resulted in the death of Amjad and his friend Fadi.”** Anas added that the bodies of the two martyrs were not retrieved until the next day because of the intense shelling that day and the great destruction in the area.

On Monday, October 26, 2020, media activist Rashid Rashid al Bakr died due to shrapnel wounds to most of his body sustained when fixed-wing warplanes, which we believe were Russian, fired a number of missiles at al Dweila airbase near Kafr Takhareem city in the western suburbs of Idlib governorate, while he was reporting on the military training inside a military camp belonging to Failaq al Sham brigade faction affiliated with the National Front for Liberation. The city was under the joint control of factions of the Armed Opposition ‘the National Front for Liberation’ and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.

Rashid, a war correspondent for the Failaq al Sham brigade faction and a photographer for Syria 1 News Agency and al Moharar Media Network, from Kafr Takhareem city, born in 1996, held a high school certificate, and was unmarried.

Amjad Aktalati



Rashid Rashid al Bakr



SNHR spoke with Rashid's colleague, media activist Muhammad Walid Jebbs²⁴, who told us, **"Russian Air Force warplanes launched four missile strikes on al Dweila airbase in al Dweila area, near Kafr Takhareem city in the western suburbs of Idlib while Rashid was reporting on military training at a military camp belonging to the Failaq al Sham brigade faction, affiliated with the National Front for Liberation, inside the airbase. As a result, Rashid was injured by several pieces of shrapnel throughout most of his body, which led to his death on the spot."** Muhammad added, **"At the beginning, we received news that Rashid was injured, so I went with his brother to look for him in the medical centers. At first, we could not find him until we reached the Martyr Wasim Hussein Surgical Hospital in the center of Kafr Takhareem city, where we saw the bodies of dozens of dead fighters; Rashid's brother was able to recognize him from the pieces of his torn clothes and some marks on his body; Rasheed's body was torn to pieces."** Muhammad also noted that the same bombardment resulted in the deaths of 38 fighters and injured around 70 others.

Conclusions

Russian forces have, beyond any doubt, violated Security Council Resolution No. 2139, as well as Resolution No. 2254, through indiscriminate bombardment. Additionally, Russian forces have violated many rules of international humanitarian law, committing dozens of crimes that amount to war crimes through indiscriminate, disproportionate bombardment, particularly given the use of excessive power in these attacks.

C. ISIS (the self-proclaimed 'Islamic State')

Extrajudicial killing

21

2

including

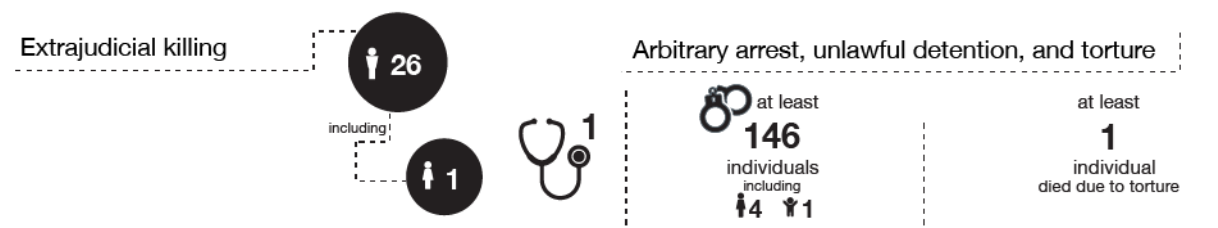
a. Extrajudicial killing

After the ISIS terrorist group lost control over large areas at the end of March 2019, the pace of violations that we were able to document in 2020 at the group's hands decreased, with the most prominent of violations being extrajudicial killing.

In 2020, SNHR documented the deaths of 21 civilians, including two children, killed by ISIS, while the death toll of civilian victims killed by ISIS in 2019 reached 94 civilians, including 11 children and seven women (adult female).

²⁴ Via WhatsApp on October 29, 2020

D. Hay'at Tahrir al Sham (an alliance composed of Fateh al Sham Front and a number of factions of the Armed Opposition)



a. Extrajudicial killing

In 2020, we documented that Hay'at Tahrir al Sham killed 26 civilians, including one woman (adult female), while the death toll of civilian victims killed by HTS in 2019 reached 45 civilians, including six children and two women (adult female).

On Monday, October 12, 2020, a civilian, Fuad Ali al Fayyad, was shot dead by personnel affiliated with Hay'at Tahrir al Sham while he was collecting firewood for heating in the wood of al Hamama village in the western suburbs of Idlib governorate. The area was under the control of Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.

b. Arbitrary arrest and enforced detention:

2020 saw Hay'at Tahrir al Sham carrying out detentions of civilians, with arrests concentrated in Idlib city, including activists working with civil society groups, media workers, lawyers and clerics; most of these arrests occurred due to the detainees expressing opinions critical of the HTS's management of areas under its control or because of their work in institutions affiliated with the Interim Government in areas controlled by the Armed Opposition/ the Syrian National Army. Most of these detentions were carried out using summons issued by the Public Prosecution Service of the Salvation Government, which is affiliated with Hay'at Tahrir al Sham, and took place arbitrarily in the form of raids in which HTS members stormed their victims' homes, often breaking down the doors, or by kidnapping their victims while they were traveling or passing through temporary checkpoints.

In 2020, we documented Hay'at Tahrir al Sham's detention of at least 146 individuals, including one child and four women. Of these individuals, 57 were released after the end of their sentences or after paying money for their release. Meanwhile, 89 individuals, including one woman, are still either arbitrarily detained or forcibly disappeared in the HTS detention centers. In 2019, we documented the arrest of at least 303 individuals by Hay'at Tahrir al Sham, including eight children and four women.

- Most notable incidents:

On Tuesday, March 3, 2020, gunmen affiliated with Hay'at Tahrir al Sham detained three civilians, including a media activist, from Sarmin city in the northern suburbs of Idlib governorate, while they were passing through one of HTS' checkpoints on the outskirts of Harem city in the western suburbs of Idlib governorate, with the group releasing them an hour later.

On Saturday, October 3, 2020, the Public Prosecution service of the Salvation Government, which is affiliated with Hay'at Tahrir al Sham, detained eight lawyers from the suburbs of Idlib and Aleppo, after they were summoned to the Public Prosecution service's office in Idlib city, and sentenced each of them to three days imprisonment, flogging and a fine. We documented that they were released the next day.

- Most notable cases:

Dr. Msallam al Yousef, Dean of the Faculty of Sharia and Law at the University of Idlib, from Khan Sheikhoun city, south of Idlib governorate, was detained by members of Hay'at Tahrir al Sham on Saturday, July 18, 2020, after [being summoned](#) by [its Attorney General](#) in Idlib city, and taken to an undisclosed location. We recorded that he was released on Monday, July 20, 2020.

[Saleh Haj Yousef](#), a media activist and cameraman for Orient News Channel, from Ariha city in the southern suburbs of Idlib governorate, was detained by the Public Prosecution Service of the Salvation Government, which is affiliated with Hay'at Tahrir al Sham, on Sunday, October 4, 2020, after they summoned him to the Public Prosecution building in Idlib city in connection with his criticism of an employee of the Salvation Government's Civil Registry on his personal 'Facebook' [account](#). We documented that he was released the next day.

c. Torture in detention centers:

The methods of torture practiced by HTS in its detention centers vary, with a number of its torture practices being very similar to those inflicted by the Syrian regime in its detention centers, although HTS has also devised its own methods of torture. We recorded at least 15 methods of torture practiced systematically by HTS in its detention centers.

In 2020, the SNHR's team documented the death of at least one individual who was killed due to torture and medical negligence at the hands of HTS, while we documented the deaths of four individuals who died due to torture by HTS in 2019.

Hassan Saleh Abs, from Sarmin city in the northern suburbs of Idlib governorate, born in 1980, was arrested by gunmen affiliated with Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the beginning of April 2020 in Sarmin city, and taken to one of the group's detention centers, where he was tortured to death. On April 20, 2020, his body was handed over to his family. We note that Hassan had sustained war injuries in several battles with Syrian Regime forces, and more recently in battles with Syrian Democratic Forces after joining ISIS in Raqqa. He was also previously detained then released by Syrian Democratic Forces because of a neurological disease and physical problems.

The body of Hassan Saleh Abs



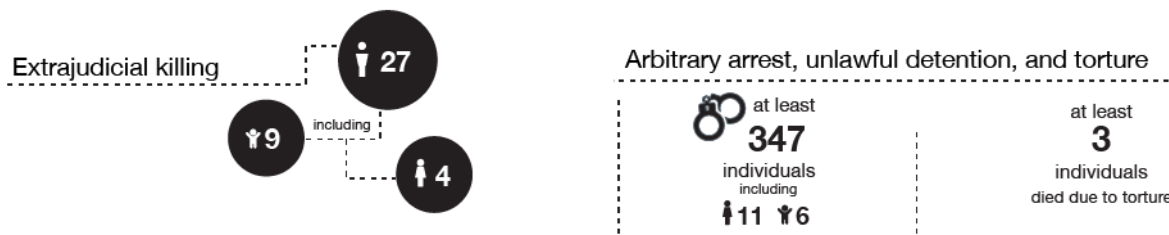
[Muhammad Ageb Hammam Tannou](#), from Darat Ezza city in the western suburbs of Aleppo governorate, was 19 years old when he was detained by members of Hay'at Tahrir al Sham in October 2019. On Monday, April 20, 2020, his family received information stating that Hay'at Tahrir al Sham had carried out a death sentence against him, executing him by firing squad inside one of its detention centers on charges of disbelief, subsequently notifying his family that they could collect his body from the Idlib city National Hospital.

[Mudar al Ali](#), a college student from Ma'ar Zita village in the southern suburbs of Idlib governorate, was detained by members of Hay'at Tahrir al Sham in Tuesday, November 19, 2020, in a raid on his home in the village. On Thursday, June 18, 2020, his family received information stating that Hay'at Tahrir al Sham had carried out a death sentence against him, executing him by firing squad inside one of its detention centers on April 15, 2020. His body wasn't handed over to his family.

Conclusions

Extremist Islamist groups have violated many basic rights, including the right to life. They have also practiced multiple other violations such as torture and enforced disappearance, as well as being responsible for numerous war crimes through indiscriminate shelling, displacement, looting, abduction, imposing restrictions on women, and restrictions on freedom of movement, and attempting to enforce an extremist religious ideology.

E. Armed Opposition Factions/ Syrian National Army



a. Extrajudicial killing

Most of the unlawful killings by the Armed opposition factions/ Syrian National Army forces occurred during clashes between these factions themselves which resulted in the deaths of civilians caught in the crossfire. In 2020, we documented the deaths of 27 civilians, including nine children and four women (adult female), while we documented the deaths of 21 civilians in 2019, including eight children and one woman.

- Most notable incidents of extrajudicial killing:

On Saturday, May 16, 2020, Ms. Moumenah Tweikh died after being shot by stray gunfire during clashes between al Hamzah Brigade faction and al Shamiah Front faction, both of which are affiliated with the Syrian National Army, in al Bab city in the eastern suburbs of Aleppo governorate. The SNHR was unable to determine which of the two parties was responsible for her death up to the time of preparing this report. Al Bab city was under the control of the Syrian National Army forces at the time of the incident.

On Friday, July 3, 2020, a female child Rimas Muhammad died after being shot by stray gunfire during clashes between al Hamzah Brigade faction and al Sultan Murad faction, both of which are affiliated with the Syrian National Army, in Ras al Ein city in the northwestern suburbs of Hasaka governorate. The SNHR was unable to determine which of the two parties was responsible for her death up to the time of preparing this report. Ras al Ein city was under the control of the Syrian National Army forces at the time of the incident.

b. Arbitrary arrest and unlawful detention:

The Armed Opposition/ the Syrian National Army continued carrying out arbitrary detentions and kidnappings in 2020, most of which occurred on a mass scale, in many cases targeting several members of the same families, as well as persecuting civilians who protested against its policies in the areas under its control and against the poor living conditions there, in addition to targeting media activists, with SNHR also documenting mass arrests that targeted those coming from the areas under the control of Syrian Regime forces. We also recorded detentions carried out within an ethnic context, with these incidents being concentrated in areas under the group's control in Aleppo governorate, in and around Afrin region. Most of these arrests occurred without judicial

authorization and without the participation of the police force, which is the legitimate administrative authority responsible for arrests and detentions through the judiciary, as well as being carried out without presenting any clear charges against those being detained.

In 2020, the SNHR's team documented the arrest/ detention of at least 347 individuals, including six children and 11 women, by the Armed Opposition factions, with 98 of these individuals subsequently released and at least 249 others, including five children and seven women, still detained or forcibly disappeared in the detention centers of the Armed Opposition factions. Meanwhile in 2019, we documented the detention of at least 405 individuals, including 20 children and 19 women.

- Most notable incidents:

On Sunday, January 12, 2020, gunmen affiliated with a faction of the Armed Opposition 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 arrest of 11 civilians, including three women, all of whom were taken to an undisclosed location.

On Saturday, June 20, 2020, personnel affiliated with the Syrian National Army detained four teachers in Rajou district center in the northern suburbs of Aleppo governorate, on charges of dealing with the Self-Management forces, and took them to an undisclosed location.

On Sunday, September 6, 2020, the 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.

- Most notable cases:

Salah Ibou, aged 40, from Qerzaihel village of Shirawa district, which is administratively a part of Afrin city in the northern suburbs of Aleppo governorate, who is an employee with the Bahar Relief Organization, was detained on Monday, March 9, 2020, by the Syrian National Army forces, while he was passing through one of their checkpoints in Tranda village, which is administratively a part of Afrin city in the northern suburbs of Aleppo governorate. We documented that he was released on Wednesday, May 13, 2020.

Ms. Silvana Abdul Rahman Qara Gul, aged 45, from Satya village in the northern suburbs of Aleppo governorate, who lives in al Ashrafiya neighborhood of Afrin in the suburbs of Aleppo governorate, was detained by the Syrian National Army forces on Wednesday, June 3, 2020, in a raid on her home in al Ashrafiya neighborhood, and taken to one of their detention centers in the city.

Silvana Qara Gul



[Ramadan Muhammad Allou](#), aged 72, from Qastal Khadraya village, which is administratively a part of the Bulbul district in Afrin region, in the northern suburbs of Aleppo governorate, was detained by the Syrian National Army forces on Saturday, July 25, 2020, in a raid on his home in Qastal Khadraya village, and taken to an undisclosed location.

c. Torture in detention centers:

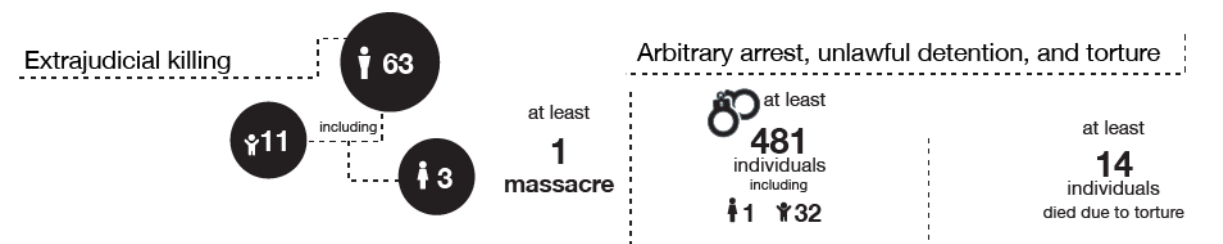
Factions of the Armed Opposition have practiced torture in their detention centers, and resorted to severe beatings, electrocution, shabeh, the tire, and primarily flogging. We also recorded opposition factions resorting to kidnappings and torturing the kidnapped hostages to force their families to pay ransom money in exchange for their release, mainly in areas under their control in the northern suburbs of Aleppo governorate. Torture has often been inflicted on the basis of ethnic discrimination and has been practiced against civilians, including women and children, to force them to agree to requests by opposition factions' members, such as the use or seizure of these people's property. In 2020, the SNHR's team documented the deaths of at least three individuals who were killed as a result of torture and medical negligence in detention centers run by factions of the Armed Opposition/ Syrian National Army, compared to four individuals who died due to torture in 2019.

[Fares Karraf al Hamidi](#), a 43-year-old man from Hawija Abdi village, which is administratively a part of Tal Abyad city in the northern suburbs of Raqqah governorate, was detained by Military Police personnel affiliated with Syrian National Army forces on Monday, June 1, 2020, after being summoned to one of their detention centers in Tal Abyad city. Almost since that date, he has been classified as forcibly disappeared, with the Syrian National Army preventing anyone, even a lawyer, from visiting him or revealing his fate. On Saturday, August 1, 2020, his body was handed over to his family bearing signs of torture sustained in one of the Military Police detention centers in Tal Abyad city.

Conclusions

The aforementioned documented cases, among others, demonstrate that a number of Armed Opposition factions/ Syrian National Army forces have committed numerous violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law, foremost among which are torture, enforced disappearance, looting and theft of property, and ethnic discrimination.

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



In July of 2012, forces affiliated with the Kurdish Democratic Union party emerged and began to spread and take control of territory across areas of Syria. Subsequently, the party and its forces joined the Kurdish Self-Management forces, which were established in January 2014. At the request of the US-led coalition against ISIS, and in particular the US Administration, the Kurdish Democratic Union Party conducted a cosmetic change process on October 10, 2015, by incorporating some personnel from Arab and Assyrian backgrounds, in order to announce the launch of what was called the Syrian Democratic Forces, which were able, with the help of the US-led coalition, to take control of the northeastern region of Syria.

a. Extrajudicial killing

We documented that Syrian Democratic Forces killed 63 civilians in 2020, including 11 children and three women (adult female), in addition to committing at least one massacre, while the civilian death toll of victims who were killed by the SDF in 2019 reached 164 civilians, including 50 children and 15 women, with the SDF committing at least six massacres during this period.

- Most notable incidents of extrajudicial killing:

On Sunday, March 8, 2020, Syrian Democratic Forces personnel fired at civilians protesting in Mheimida village in the western suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour, while the civilians were holding a peaceful demonstration to denounce the rampant corruption in the Syrian Democratic Forces' Civil Council, resulting in the death of a civilian protestor named Najm Hussein al Atwan. The village was under the control of Syrian Democratic Forces at the time of the incident.

On Wednesday, March 18, 2020, Syrian Democratic Forces fired artillery shells at Afrin city in the northern suburbs of Aleppo governorate, with some of the shells targeting Villas Street in the city center, resulting in [the deaths](#) of [five civilians](#) at one time, including two children. Afrin city was under the control of the Syrian National Army/ the Armed Opposition at the time of the incident.

On Friday, May 29, 2020, Syrian Democratic Forces raided the water crossing linking Theyban town and al Mayadeen city in Theyban town in the eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate, and fired at civilians trying to cross, resulting in the death of a 13-year-old child, Amer Hmoud al Rajab al At-tiyah. The SNHR notes that al Mayadeen city was under the control of Syrian Regime forces, while Theyban town was under the control of Syrian Democratic Forces at the time of the incident.

b. Arbitrary arrest and unlawful detention

Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces continued enforcing the group's policies of arbitrary detention and enforced disappearance throughout 2020, targeting activists and members of civil society groups who oppose their policies. We also recorded SDF carrying out mass raids and arrests of civilians who took part in anti-SDF demonstrations in areas under its control, as well as targeting civilians for their kinship relationships with individuals in the Armed Opposition/ the Syrian National Army. Syrian Democratic Forces also carried out campaigns of raids and arrests, targeting many civilians, including children and persons with special needs, on the pretext of fighting ISIS cells, with some of these campaigns backed by US-led coalition helicopters. Also in 2020, we documented Syrian Democratic Forces carrying out arrests of civilians, including children, with the aim of forcibly conscripting them. SDF also targeted several families for arrest, as well as targeting several members of the same families, including elderly people, without providing clear charges, taking these detained individuals to undisclosed locations.

In the context of cases in which individuals have been released, we documented in 2020 that Syrian Democratic Forces released 221 civilians from SDF detention centers. The duration of detention for those released ranged from eight months to two years, with most being released as a result of tribal mediation.

In 2020, the SNHR's team documented the arrest of at least 481 individuals by Syrian Democratic Forces, including 32 children and one woman, of whom 213 were released; most of these releases were organized under tribal agreements, while at least 268 individuals, including 19 children, are still arrested/ detained or forcibly disappeared in the SDF's detention centers. Meanwhile, we documented the arrest of at least 1,102 individuals in 2019, including 81 children and 56 women. We note that some of the arrests were of an ethnically discriminatory nature.

- Most notable incidents:

On Tuesday, March 3, 2020, personnel affiliated with Syrian Democratic Forces carried out a campaign of raids and arrests in Ja'bar village, which is administratively a part of al Tabaqa area in the western suburbs of Raqqqa governorate. SNHR documented the arrest of four civilians from one family, who were taken to an undisclosed location.

On Friday, August 7, 2020, Syrian Democratic Forces carried out a campaign of raids and arrests in al Sh-heil city and al Hawayej village in the eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate, in connection with earlier protests against the SDF in the two areas. SNHR documented the arrest of 28 civilians, including two children, who were taken to an undisclosed location.

- Most notable cases:

Omar and Omran Ismail Ibrahim al Salem, two children from al Hawayej village, were detained by Syrian Democratic Forces on Friday, August 7, 2020, in a raid on the village in connection with earlier protests against the SDF, and taken to an undisclosed location.

[Abdul Rahim Suleiman al Mesleh](#), a prominent figure in al Jabour clan in Hasaka governorate, from Tefla village, which is administratively a part of Tal Barrak district in the eastern suburbs of Hasaka governorate, was detained by Syrian Democratic Forces on Tuesday, October 20, 2020, as he was passing through one of the SDF's checkpoints near Tal Barrak district. We documented that he was released on Friday, October 23, 2020.

Muhammad Haj al Rahim, a correspondent for the 'Shu-fi Mafi' radio station, from al Mansour neighborhood, east of Raqqa city, was detained by Syrian Democratic Forces personnel on Thursday, November 19, 2020, in a raid on his home in the neighborhood, and taken to an undisclosed location.

Muhammad Haj al Rahim



c. Torture in detention centers

Syrian Democratic Forces have used torture in the group's detention centers against detainees and abductees as a way to extract confessions, with torture often carried out in a vengeful way and based on ethnic prejudice. The methods of torture used by SDF vary and are often similar to those practiced by the Syrian regime, with the most common methods, according to the accounts of the survivors of detention centers, being severe and harmful beatings, fracturing bones, falqa (foot-whipping), shabeh, flogging, pulling out fingernails, and electrocution, in addition to solitary confinement and shaving part of the detainees' heads as a punishment to further humiliate and insult detainees. Other torture methods used by the SDF include deprivation of food and medicine, overcrowding, and poor hygiene. In 2020, we recorded a noticeable increase in the death toll of torture victims by Syrian Democratic Forces, and documented a number of cases in which the bodies of victims handed over by the SDF to their families bore clear signs of torture.

In 2020, SNHR documented the deaths of at least 14 individuals due to torture and medical negligence in the SDF's detention centers, compared to 13 individuals who died due to torture in 2019.

Fajr Ibrahim, a teacher of physical education from al Tabqa city in the western suburbs of Raqqa governorate, was detained in February 2019 by Syrian Democratic Forces in al Tabqa city. On Wednesday, January 29, 2020, SNHR received information confirming his death due to medical negligence in an SDF detention center in Raqqa city. [His body was handed over to his family.](#)

[Talal al Mayyah](#), who formerly worked for the SDF-affiliated traffic police division known as ‘al Trafik’, was detained by Syrian Democratic Forces in a raid on his home in his home village of Eseila, which is administratively a part of al Qahtaniya town in the northeastern suburbs of Hasaka governorate. Almost since that date, he has been classified as forcibly disappeared, with the SDF preventing anyone, even a lawyer, from visiting him or revealing his fate. On Wednesday, July 29, 2020, his body was handed over to his family bearing signs of torture.

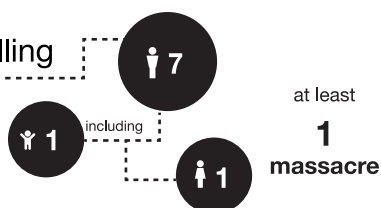
[Muhammad Khalil Khalaf al Samhi](#), a special needs person from Mouhasan city in the eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate, was detained in October 2019, by Syrian Democratic Forces. On Monday, November 16, 2020, his family learned from a former detainee of his death in the SDF’s Ghwayran Prison in Hasaka city. Our data from numerous sources confirms that he was in good health at the time of his arrest, indicating that he probably died due to torture and lack of health-care. SNHR confirms that his body hasn’t been handed over to his family.

Conclusions

Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces have violated many basic rights, including the right to life. These forces carried out many other violations, including torture, forced disappearance, and displacement, as well as looting the region’s natural resources, such as oil and gas, without issuing any financial transparency reports about their revenues and how these are spent. We fear that these funds are likely to be poured into supporting the terrorist Kurdistan Workers’ Party, the leader of the Democratic Union Party.

G. US-led coalition forces

Extrajudicial killing



c. Extrajudicial killing

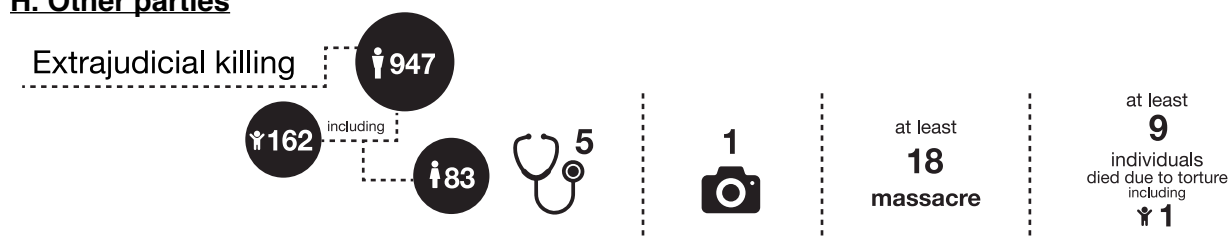
2020 marked the sixth annual anniversary of the US-led coalition military intervention in Syria, which began on September 23, 2014. Following the announcement of the elimination of ISIS in March 2019 in al Baghouz town, the last stronghold of ISIS, the frequency of the US-led coalition airstrikes decreased. Thereafter, the type of military operations in the area changed largely to joint raid patrols between the US-led coalition and the SDF to target the remaining ISIS cells. We talked about the US-led coalition forces’ strategy in 2020 in the [sixth annual report](#), which was issued in September 2020.

We documented the deaths of seven civilians, including one child and one woman (adult female), as well as one massacre, at the hands of US-led coalition forces in 2020, while in 2019, SNHR documented that US-led coalition forces killed 68 civilians, including 20 children and 17 women (adult female), and committed at least three massacres.

Conclusions

The member states of the US-led coalition are responsible for the violations perpetrated by their forces that have occurred since their intervention began. Indiscriminate, disproportionate incidents of bombardment are explicit violations of international humanitarian law. The member states of the US-led coalition have also failed during all the years of their presence in Syria, especially after the defeat of the ISIS terrorist group, to achieve political stability in northeast Syria, failing to enable democratic local elections through which power could be handed over to democratically elected local figures who are not affiliated with a particular ethnic or sectarian party.

H. Other parties



SNHR's documentation of the victims killed in Syria in 2020 includes a range of classifications, such as victims who were killed in bombings whose perpetrators SNHR has been unable to identify, victims who died in gunfire of unknown source, victims killed by landmines and shelling of unknown source, victims killed by parties SNHR has been unable to identify, victims who drowned, and victims who were killed by Jordanian, Lebanese or Turkish border forces.

Under this category, SNHR documented the deaths of 947 civilians, including 162 children, 83 women (adult female), five medical personnel, one media worker, and nine victims who died due to torture, in addition to at least 18 massacres; in the same category in 2019, we documented the deaths of 1,019 civilians, including 264 children, 149 women (adult female), four medical personnel, four media workers, and nine victims who died due to torture, in addition to at least 35 massacres.

Also, bombings and attacks carried out by the forces included in this category were responsible for nearly 69 attacks on vital civilian facilities in 2020, including two on medical facilities, 11 on educational facilities, and 16 on places of worship, while in 2019, SNHR documented nearly at least 98 attacks on vital civilian facilities, including 11 on medical facilities, 11 on educational facilities, and 10 on places of worship.

- Most notable killings:

On Friday, April 3, 2020, local people discovered [the bodies of eight civilians](#), including two women, from Ma'dan Atiq village, which is administratively a part of al Tebni district. All the victims, who were related to one another, had been shot dead by unknown gunmen who attacked the camp site where the group were sheltering while grazing their sheep in the Badiya of al Tebni district, in the southwestern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate. The Syrian Network for Human Rights is still trying to reach witnesses or survivors of the incident to obtain more details. The area was under the control of Syrian Regime forces at the time of the incident.

On Tuesday afternoon, April 28, 2020, [a car bomb of unknown origin exploded](#) at the entrance to a local market in a public thoroughfare, known as Rajou Street, in the center of [Afrin](#) city in the northern suburbs of Aleppo governorate, with fires resulting from the explosion spreading across a large area due to the presence of a truck loaded with fuel at the site of the explosion. We documented [the deaths](#) of [at least](#) 44 [civilians](#) as [a result](#) of [the explosion](#), most of whose bodies were severely charred, including [nine children](#) and [three women](#), while about 55 others were injured and sustained burns. The Syrian Network for Human Rights is still trying to reach witnesses or survivors of the incident to obtain more details. Afrin city was under the control of the Armed Opposition/ Syrian National Army at the time of the incident.

On Tuesday, October 6, 2020, a car bomb of an unknown origin exploded in Othman bin Affan Street on the northeastern outskirts of al Bab city in the eastern suburbs of Aleppo governorate, resulting in [the deaths](#) of [20 civilians](#), including [five children](#) and [one woman](#), and injuring nearly 30 others. The SNHR is still trying to contact witnesses and survivors of that incident to obtain more details. Al Bab city is under the control of the Armed Opposition/ Syrian National Army.

On Wednesday, October 28, 2020, a landmine planted by a party which we have so far been unable to identify exploded as a car carrying workshop workers engaged in harvesting olives in a local grove was driving through the outskirts of Khan Sheikhoun city in the southern suburbs of Idlib governorate, resulting in the deaths of five civilians. SNHR is still trying to contact witnesses and survivors of the incident to obtain more details. The area was under the control of Syrian Regime forces at the time of the incident.

- Death among media workers:

On Saturday, December 12, 2020, media activist [Hussein Ibrahim al Khattab](#) was [killed](#) by being [shot in the chest, heart and head](#) by unidentified gunmen using a military pistol, whilst he was filming a report on the COVID-19 pandemic near the northern cemetery in al Bab city in the eastern suburbs of Aleppo governorate. The SNHR is still trying to contact witnesses of the incident to obtain more details. The city was under the control of the Syrian National Army forces at the time of the incident.

Hussein, a married father-of-four, who was born in 1983, and who was also [known as Kara al Safrani](#), was a photographer from al Sfeira city in the southern suburbs of Aleppo southeastern suburbs, who worked with the TRT Arabi channel. The SNHR notes that Hussein had previously been subjected to an assassination attempt by unknown gunmen a few weeks earlier on September 23, 2020.

The SNHR contacted media activist Abu Shadi al Safrani²⁵, a friend of Hussein, who heard the details of the incident from residents of the neighborhood who had witnessed it. Abu Shadi told us, **“While Hussein was preparing a report on the coronavirus pandemic near the northern cemetery in al Bab city, he was shot directly with a military pistol by two unidentified gunmen on a motorcycle; he was hit by several bullets in the chest, heart and head. He was immediately taken by the people of the area to al Bab Hospital, but he died before reaching it. Hussein had been subjected to a failed assassination attempt on September 23, 2020, near the Tarhin area near al Bab city.”**

- Death among medical personnel:

[Muhammad Abdul Rahim al Bardan](#), [a gynecologist](#), from Tafas city in the western suburbs of Daraa governorate, was [killed](#) on Saturday, February 1, 2020, when [unknown gunmen](#) shot him in front of his clinic in Tafas city. SNHR is still trying to contact witnesses of the incident to obtain more details.

[Dr. Emad Taher Ismail](#), [aged 56](#), was the head of the radiology department at al Basel Hospital in al Qerdaha city in the western suburbs of Latakia governorate, and was from al Qerdaha city. On Wednesday, March 11, 2020, local pro-Syrian regime media outlets reported that the body of Dr. Ismail, who was married with children, had been found on the road to Joubet Berghal near the junction of the al Areza village in al Qerdaha city, and that he appeared to have been killed by a gunshot wound to his head. SNHR is still trying to contact witnesses of the incident to obtain more details.

[Ammar Muhammad Sheikh Ahmad](#), from Saraqeb city in the eastern suburbs of Idlib governorate, a dentist and coordinator of physical therapy projects with the [‘Hand in Hand for Aid and Development’](#) organization, was the director of the ambulance system in Saraqeb city, and also worked as [the referral coordinator](#) in the Syria Relief and Development (SRD) organization. On Monday, September 14, 2020, [he died](#) of wounds sustained as a result of the explosion of a vehicle whose source is unknown driven by a suicide/ forced suicide bomber in Afrin city in the northwestern sub-

²⁵ Via his personal account on Facebook on December 19, 2020

urbs of Aleppo governorate in a main street near the Dawwar Kawa in the city center. The explosion caused a massacre, with the SNHR still trying to reach witnesses and survivors of that incident to obtain more details.

- Most notable attacks on vital civilian facilities:

On Sunday, January 12, 2020, a number of rocket shells of unknown source fell on a number of neighborhoods of Aleppo city. One of the rocket shells hit [al Ittihad Private University](#) in al Shahbaa al Jadida neighborhood, resulting in the death of a student at the Information Engineering Faculty, [in addition](#) to [causing moderate](#) material [damage](#) to [the university's building](#) and [furniture](#). SNHR is still trying to reach witnesses and survivors of the incident to obtain more details. Aleppo city was under the control of Syrian Regime forces at the time of the incident.

On Thursday, May 21, 2020, a motorcycle bomb and an IED, both of unknown origins, simultaneously exploded in a popular market in al Bseira city in the eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate, resulting in casualties, as well as causing significant material damage to [a number of shops](#) and market facilities. SNHR is still trying to contact witnesses to obtain more details of the incident. Al Bseira city was under the control of Syrian Democratic Forces at the time of the incident.

On Tuesday, October 6, 2020, a car bomb of unknown origin exploded in a densely populated area of Othman bin Affan street in the northeast of al Bab city, the eastern suburbs of Aleppo governorate, resulting in a massacre and [destroying](#) an [ambulance belonging](#) to [the Syria Relief](#) and Development (SRD) organization, that was being used for transferring persons infected by the COVID-19 coronavirus for medical treatment, which was at the explosion site, putting it out of service, as well as injuring three SRD medical personnel. SNHR is still trying to contact witnesses to obtain more details of the incident. Al Bab city was under the control of the Syrian National Army at the time of the incident.

On Monday, November 2, 2020, an IED of unknown origin exploded in the covered vegetable market in [Ras al Ein](#) city in the northwestern suburbs of Hasaka governorate, [injuring](#) a number of [civilians](#), and [causing moderate](#) material [damage](#) to [the market](#) facilities. SNHR is still trying to contact witnesses to obtain more details of the incident. The city was under the control of the Syrian National Army at the time of the incident.

IX. Recommendations:

UN Security Council and the United Nations:

- The Security Council should take additional steps following the adoption of Resolution 2254, which clearly demands that all parties should, "...Immediately cease any attacks against civilians and civilian objects as such, including attacks against medical facilities and personnel, and any indiscriminate use of weapons, including through shelling and aerial bombardment."
- Find ways and mechanisms to implement Security Council Resolutions 2041, 2042, 2139 and Article 12 of Resolution 2254 regarding detainees and forcibly disappeared persons in Syria.
- Take action under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations to protect detainees from certain death inside detention centers, and to put an end to the pandemic of enforced disappearance that continues to plague Syria, posing a threat to the security and stability of society, act to end torture and deaths due to torture inside Syrian regime detention centers, and save whoever is left among the detainees as quickly as possible.
- Following the failure of the parties, in particular the Syrian regime, to comply with any of the Security Council resolutions concerning the use of chemical weapons, barrel bombs or enforced disappearance, the Security Council must, after ten years, intervene militarily in order to protect Syrian civilians.
- There should be no use of the veto in the case of any state involved in the conflict, with Russia, which is an active brutal participant in the Syrian conflict, using the veto in its own and the Syrian regime's favor, despite both being primary parties in the conflict.
- There is a need to refer the Syrian issue from the Security Council to the United Nations General Assembly after 9 years of failure on the part of the Security Council to protect civilians or to help in ending the Syrian conflict.
- The Syrian issue should be referred to the International Criminal Court and all those implicated in perpetrating crimes against humanity and war crimes should be held accountable.
- Establish security and peace in Syria and implement the 'Responsibility to Protect' norm in order to preserve Syrians' lives, heritage, and cultural artifacts from being destroyed, looted, and ruined.
- Monitor the Iranian regime's claims of continuing to supply weapons, equipment and militias to the Syrian regime.
- Ensure the safety and security of millions of Syrian refugees, especially women and children, who have been displaced worldwide, and ensure their safety from arrest, torture or enforced disappearance if they choose to return to areas controlled by the Syrian regime.
- Request all relevant United Nations agencies to make greater efforts to provide humanitarian and food aid and medical assistance in areas where the fighting has ceased, and in internally displaced persons' camps, and follow-up with those states that have pledged the necessary contributions.

- Allocate a significant amount of money for clearing mines left over by the Syrian conflict from the United Nations Mine Action Service, particularly in areas prepared to carry out this task with transparency and integrity.

International Community:

- In light of the split within the Security Council and its complete inability to take any effective action, action should be taken at the national and regional levels to form an alliance outside the purview of the Security Council, whose aim is to protect civilians in Syria from crimes against humanity and war crimes.
- SNHR has repeatedly called for the implementation of the ‘Responsibility to Protect’ doctrine in dozens of studies and reports and as a member of the International Coalition for the Responsibility to Protect (ICRtoP) after all political channels through the Arab League’s plan and then Mr. Kofi Annan’s plan were exhausted, with the Cessation of Hostilities statements and Astana agreements that followed proving equally fruitless. Therefore, steps should be taken under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations and the norm of the “Responsibility to Protect” doctrine, which was established by the United Nations General Assembly, should be implemented. The UN Security Council is still hindering the protection of civilians in Syria.
- 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 now spanned a decade in Syria.
- Expand political and economic sanctions against the Russian regime for committing war crimes in Syria, for continuing to violate sanctions imposed against the Syrian regime, and for assisting it in breaching UN Security Council resolutions, including those regarding non-recurrence of using chemical weapons and barrel bombs.
- Put real pressure on Russia and Iran, and categorize them as key partners in the violations committed in Syria since they continue to supply the Syrian regime with weapons, as well as due to their direct involvement in thousands of violations against Syrian citizens.
- Provide protection and assistance to forcibly displaced women and children, including IDPs and refugees, and take into account their specific needs, primarily for protection.
- All countries worldwide must ratify the CEDAW Convention and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and fulfill their obligations under these conventions to hold the Syrian regime accountable, expose the regime’s criminal practices against Syria’s women and children, and make every possible effort to mitigate and stop these.
- 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 and child refugees.
 - ▶ Establish mechanisms to end the bombing of schools and kindergartens, protect these facilities, and work to create a safe learning environment, which is the least possible level of protection that could be offered for civilians.

- 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.

OHCHR:

- The OHCHR should submit a report to the Human Rights Council and other organs of the United Nations on the incidents mentioned in this report considering that these attacks were perpetrated by the parties to the conflict.
- Train Syrian organizations to begin clearance of mines and other unexploded ordnance, and raise local awareness of the lethal dangers of such munitions.
- Establish a platform that brings together a number of Syrian organizations active in documenting violations and humanitarian assistance, in order to facilitate an exchange of skills and experiences within Syrian society.

Independent International Commission of Inquiry (COI):

- Launch investigations into the cases included in this report and previous reports. SNHR is willing to cooperate and provide further evidence and data.

International, Impartial, and Independent Mechanism (IIIM):

- Collect further evidence about the crimes documented in this report.

UNHCR:

- Create a stable and safe environment for Syrian refugee children and intensify work for their reintegration into society through long-term psychological treatment.
- Increase investment in education and health.

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 child and female survivors, especially those who have been directly affected by violations, or subjected to violence, sexual exploitation and forced marriage, giving priority to the areas worst affected.

The United Nations Special Envoy to Syria:

- Condemn the perpetrators of these crimes, the massacres, and those who were primarily responsible for dooming the de-escalation agreements.
- Re-sequence the peace process so that it can resume its natural course despite Russia's attempts to divert and distort it, empowering the Constitutional Committee prior to the transitional governing body.

Supporting States and European Union:

- Support the processes of documenting human rights violations in Syria that expose the Syrian regime's atrocious practices and their continuing nature, as well as the regime's violation of the principles of international law.
- Take further steps towards accelerating the completion of the political transition towards democracy and human rights.
- The situation in Syria is still in a critical state in terms of respecting basic rights, and any citizen may be subjected to arrest under these vague and overly broad laws. Therefore, we recommend that refugees not be returned until such a political transition is achieved, as there will be no stability and security in light of the survival of the current Syrian regime and the Counter-Terrorism Court.
- Economic sanctions imposed 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, and support the operations for the support and rehabilitation of female survivors in areas of displacement and asylum.
- 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 under the classification of international law committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011, under General Assembly Resolution 71/248 , as well as supporting the path of litigation through universal jurisdiction.

Neighboring countries:

- Ensure that refugees 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.

League of Arab States:

- Absolutely reject the return of the Syrian regime to the Arab League in light of its continued involvement up to the present date in committing crimes against humanity and war crimes.

The Syrian regime

- Ensure compliance with UN Security Council resolutions and customary humanitarian law.
- Stop indiscriminate shelling and targeting of residential areas, hospitals, schools and markets.
- End the acts of torture that have caused the deaths of thousands of Syrian citizens in detention centers.
- Reveal the fate of nearly 130,000 Syrian citizens arrested by the security services whose fate has been concealed to date.
- Repeal all barbaric laws and inflexible expressions included in these that can be interpreted without limits in order to arrest and torture any political opponent.
- Reveal of the fate of nearly 99,000 forcibly disappeared persons, and immediately release tens of thousands of arbitrary detainees and detained persons whose sentences have ended.
- Return the property and money confiscated from detainees.
- Release prisoners of conscience unconditionally, reveal the fate of the disappeared among them, compensate those affected, and stop tampering with their fate and extorting their families.
- Stop treating the Syrian state as a private family property.
- Stop terrorizing the Syrian people through enforced disappearances, torture, and death due to torture.
- Stop tampering with the constitution and laws, using them to serve the goals of the ruling family, and enacting deceptive legislation.
- Take responsibility for all legal and material costs and compensate the victims and their families from the resources of the Syrian state.

The Syrian regime allies, primarily the Russian regime:

- Condemn the barbaric courts established by the Syrian regime, and demand that these be abolished along with all the associated sentences and rulings issued by them, including those legitimizing the looting of property and money.
- Put pressure on the Syrian regime to repeal all laws that contradict international human rights law, which carry overbroad and vague phrases that can be easily applied to political opponents.
- Demand that the Syrian regime separate the different state powers and stop encroaching on the judicial and legislative powers.
- Stop supporting a regime that conducts political trials which are considered the most reprehensible in modern history, since this support is direct complicity and participation in the multiple crimes against humanity and war crimes which the Syrian regime has perpetrated and continues perpetrating against detainees and their property.

- Contribute to dissolving the regime's security services whose members outnumber the army and pose a direct threat to Syrian society, as well as to the country's judiciary and its citizens' human rights.
- Launch investigations regarding the incidents included in this report, make the findings of these investigations public for the Syrian people, and hold all those involved accountable.
- Compensate all the damaged centers and facilities, rebuild and rehabilitate them, and compensate all the victims' families, who were killed by the current Russian regime, as well as all those wounded.
- Stop investing in the Syrian regime, which is hostile to the vast majority of the Syrian people, and which is involved in committing crimes against humanity, and support a process of real political change in order to achieve stability.

The Coalition (US-led coalition forces and Syrian Democratic Forces)

- The states of the coalition must unequivocally and sincerely acknowledge that some of their bombardment operations have resulted in the death of innocent civilians. Instead of denying these facts, these states should take speedy steps to launch serious investigations, and immediately compensate and apologize to the victims and all those who were affected.
- The states supporting the SDF should apply pressure on these forces in order to compel them to cease all of their violations in all the areas and towns under their control.
- The states supporting the SDF should cease all forms of support until the SDF commits itself to complying with the rules of international human rights law and international humanitarian law. This is primarily the responsibility of the supporting states. Providing the SDF with weapons and support while knowing that the SDF violates the rules of international humanitarian law can be seen as a contribution to these violations.
- The SDF should form a special committee to investigate incidents of violations committed by SDF members, disclose the details of their findings and apologize for them, hold those responsible accountable, and compensate the victims and affected.
- Syrian Democratic Forces must immediately stop conscripting children, hold accountable the officers involved, and pledge to return all children who have been arrested for conscription to their families immediately.

The US-led coalition forces:

- Work to protect Idlib and its environs, similar to the protection provided for areas of northeast Syria from the aerial bombardment of the Syrian and Russian regimes.
- Support a local election process in northeast Syria that leads to the establishment of local councils representing the people of the region and the affiliation of military and security forces with them, then start to support reconstruction operations.

Armed Opposition factions:

- Ensure the protection of civilians in all of the areas under their control. Also, Armed Opposition factions should distinguish between civilian and military targets, and cease any indiscriminate attacks.
- Pledge to cease any conscription of children, and investigate incidents that have resulted in violations of international humanitarian law.
- Take punitive actions against those who commit violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law.
- End arbitrary arrests, enforced disappearances, torture, confiscation and looting of property, and all other measures that violate the most basic principles of international human rights law.

Humanitarian Organizations:

- Develop urgent operational plans to secure decent shelter for internally displaced persons.

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Extreme conditions in Syria

Forgotten emergencies of 2020

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