

# The Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in August 2020

Landmines Kill 25 Civilians,  
including Four Children, and the  
Highest Number of Coronavirus  
Infections to Date

Thursday 3 September 2020

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.

## Contents

I. INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY.....	2
II. SUMMARY OF THE MOST NOTABLE EVENTS IN AUGUST.....	2
III. THE MOST NOTABLE HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS IN SYRIA IN AUGUST.....	7
IV. THE SYRIAN REGIME BEARS PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE SPREAD OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC.....	12
V. ATTACHMENTS.....	16
VI. Conclusions and Recommendations.....	16

## I. Introduction and Methodology

Syria has seen an unprecedented number of violations since the start of the popular uprising for democracy in March 2011. Extrajudicial killings, arrests, torture and enforced disappearances are the violations most frequently perpetrated against Syrian citizens. While the Syrian regime and its affiliated militias were the sole perpetrators of these violations for the first seven months or so of the uprising, other parties subsequently joined in, also violating the rights of Syrian citizens. The Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) has continued to document every incident that its team members are able to verify, with these violations escalating very dramatically in 2012 and 2013, prompting us to expand our publication of periodic monthly reports recording and highlighting the continued suffering of the Syrian people, which subsequently grew to eight reports on different issues issued at the beginning of each month. In the course of our work, SNHR has compiled a massive database cataloguing hundreds of thousands of incidents, each of which involves a pattern of violations that we have been able to document.

By the end of 2018, with a reduction in the level of violence compared to previous years, we changed our previous strategy and now compile our reports into a single monthly report featuring the most prominent violations in Syria which we have been able to document in the preceding month.

This month's report focuses on the human rights situation in Syria in August 2020, and catalogues the death toll of civilian victims whom we documented killed by the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces during this period, as well as the record of cases of arrests and enforced disappearance. The report also highlights indiscriminate attacks and attacks on civilian objects, which SNHR's team was able to document during this period. To find out more about our working [methodology](#) in documenting and archiving data, please visit the following link that explains this in detail.

This report only represents the bare minimum of the actual severity and magnitude of the violations that occurred. Also, it doesn't include any analysis of the profound social, economic, and psychological ramifications.

## II. Summary of the Most Notable Events in August

In the context of bombardment and military attacks, we note that Syrian regime forces continued with artillery and missile bombardment of the areas of Jabal al Zaweya in the southern suburbs of Idlib on an almost daily basis throughout the month of August. We also recorded that fixed-wing Russian warplanes launched raids [on the outskirts of Binnesh city](#) on August 3, and we documented civilian casualties as a result of these raids. On August 18, fixed-wing Russian warplanes also carried out raids on a mountainous area near Harbanoush, northwest of Idlib city, which resulted in no casualties.

We also documented Syrian Regime forces and militias continuing their [looting of civilian property](#) in the areas they had taken control of in the Idlib region in northwestern Syria.

In August, more Turkish forces continued to enter Syrian territories and were deployed in several areas in the south and west of Idlib governorate. Also in August, we observed the continuation of Russian-Turkish patrols on the 'M4' International Road. During this month, these patrols were subjected to two attacks with unidentified RPG shells, on August 17 and 25, which caused material damage.

Following the assassination of a dignitary from al Ekidat tribe in Deir Ez-Zour governorate on August 2, civilians in the villages and towns of al Sh-heil, al Hawayij and Theyban in the eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour, protested against Syrian Democratic Forces to demand that they leave the area. These forces opened fire on the protesters in al Hawayij village, injuring six of them. SDF also launched a massive security campaign against these towns, [accompanied by arrests](#) and looting of the contents of some homes.

Bombings with car bombs and improvised explosive devices (IEDs) continued in several areas of the eastern suburbs of Aleppo, as well as in Ras al Ein area in the northwestern suburbs of Hasaka, and we documented the death of civilian victims as a result.

In August 2020, we recorded a remarkable increase in the proportion of victims among Syrian citizens killed by landmines - about 20% of the total death toll for the month. The death toll from landmines documented in August reached 25 civilians, including four children, with the incidents taking place in different governorates and regions in Syria, particularly in the governorates of Aleppo and Idlib, where we recorded several incidents, most notably in agricultural lands that resulted in the death of farmers while harvesting crops; in the north of Aleppo governorate, nearly 70 civilians found themselves caught in [in a minefield](#), including children and women, while they were trying to flee from areas controlled by the Syrian regime towards areas controlled by the Armed Opposition on the night of August 12, which resulted 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 removing landmines, or trying to determine their locations and fence them off, or to warn the local population about them.

Meanwhile, insecurity is still the most prominent problematic issue in most areas of Syria, with SNHR documenting the deaths of many civilians as a result of fires of unknown source in the governorates of Daraa, Deir Ez-Zour and Idlib in particular, while in the areas controlled by the Syrian regime, we monitored an increase in the rate of homicides and theft.

Meanwhile, at the level of arrests and enforced disappearances, Syrian Regime forces continued in August to prosecute Syrian citizens in connection with their political opposition and opinions, which are guaranteed by the constitution and international law, with prosecutions and arbitrary arrests affecting a number of Syrian citizens who had been displaced from the areas that the regime regained control over, while some of them have concluded forced settlement agreements with the Syrian regime. We also documented a number of medical personnel among the detainees despite the desperate need in Syrian society for medical workers to contribute to combating the COVID-19 pandemic. We also recorded arrests targeting some refugees who illicitly returned from Lebanon by illegal methods, who have been charged with wide-ranging and false charges related to terrorism. In addition to this, Syrian Regime forces carried out arrests against Syrian citizens while they were traveling from areas under the Syrian regime's control to other areas. Syrian Regime forces also targeted for arrest workers involved in the field of currency exchange with the aim of these arrests being to extort ransom money from the detainees' families, with these victims being released in exchange for huge sums of money.

In the context of cases in which individuals have been released, we recorded in August that Syrian Regime forces released 24 detainees from various Syrian governorates, all of whom were released from Syrian regime detention centers in Damascus governorate. Some of those released were former members of Armed Opposition factions who had previously made a settlement of their security status prior to their arrest. The periods of detention for those released ranged from three months to two years.

Meanwhile, Syrian Democratic Forces continued enforcing the group's policies of arbitrary arrest and enforced disappearance throughout the month of August, targeting activists and members of civil society groups who oppose their policies, or civilians who have kinship relationships with individuals in the Armed Opposition/ the Syrian National Army. Syrian Democratic Forces also carried out campaigns of mass raids and arrests, targeting many civilians, including children, on the pretext of fighting ISIS cells. These arrests were concentrated in Deir Ez-Zour governorate. Also in August, SNHR documented Syrian Democratic Forces carrying out arrests targeting children, with the aim of forced conscription. Syrian Democratic Forces 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 to an undisclosed location.

August also saw Hay'at Tahrir al Sham arresting activists working with civil society groups, as well as other civilians, media workers and lawyers, with most of these arrests occurring due to expressing their opinions criticizing the HTS's management of areas under its control, or in connection with their participation in protests against Hay'at Tahrir al Sham. These arrests were carried out 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 travelling or passing through temporary checkpoints.

The Armed Opposition/ the Syrian National Army also carried out arrests and kidnappings in August, most of which occurred on a mass scale, targeting displaced and forcibly displaced persons, in many cases targeting several members of the same families, including elderly people; we also recorded arrests carried out under an ethnic pretext, with these incidents being concentrated in areas under their control in Aleppo governorate. 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.

As for the COVID-19 pandemic, the month of August was the worst ever to date in all regions of Syria. In areas under the control of Syrian Regime forces, 2,008 cases of infection were officially announced by the Ministry of Health during this month, along with 69 deaths, making the total record announced [on August 31, 2,765 cases of infection and 112 deaths](#). We note that the toll recorded in August 2020 was four times higher than the number of cases recorded in previous month, July, while the death toll doubled twice. We at the SNHR believe that the figures announced represent only what the Syrian regime wishes to disclose, with the regime depending on the implementation of a 'herd immunity' policy in Syrian society, although most Syrians now suffer from poverty and severely weakened immunity, portending a humanitarian catastrophe.

In August, several media sources talked about estimates attributed to medical sources in Syria indicating the presence of tens of thousands of infection cases in Syria, including a report published by [the Guardian](#) on August 24, which mentioned the existence of 112,500 cases of infection in Damascus alone, according to estimates attributed to the Deputy Director of Damascus Health Directorate. We confirm, as we mentioned previously, that the Syrian regime is mishandling the coronavirus crisis; several pro-Syrian regime accounts have published news of the coronavirus spreading among the members of the national football team, with these accounts also publishing obituaries of dozens of doctors and lawyers who died due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In light of the spread of the pandemic, citizens have difficulty obtaining painkillers or oxygen cylinders which are subject to a monopoly imposed by merchants and cannot be obtained at prices commensurate with the citizens' income.

We note that the Syrian regime's Ministry of Health [issued a statement on August 12](#) informing citizens wishing to conduct PCR swabs in order to detect whether or not they were infected with the coronavirus, with the aim of travelling abroad that they should have these tests done in either [al Jalaa Sport City](#) from August 13, 2020, or at the Tishreen Sport City from August 16, 2020, with the health ministry revealing that it [had suspended](#) work in [the health centers formerly](#) specified for this purpose. On July 22, the ministry issued a directive compelling all citizens wishing to travel abroad via Rafiq al Hariri Airport in Beirut to pay the equivalent of 100 US dollars, according to the exchange rate of the Commercial Bank of Syria, for medical tests, also using these PCR swabs.

In addition, new cases of infection with coronavirus continued to appear in northwestern Syria throughout the month of August, with the Early Warning Alert and Response Network (EWARN) announcing 49 cases of infection and one death in August, with the total reaching 80 cases [on August 31](#), according to the figures announced by EWARN, with one of those infected, a woman, dying on August 18 in al Dana city in Idlib governorate, whilst other infection cases were concentrated in al Bab city in Aleppo suburbs, with 24 cases. On August 9, the first infection case was recorded in Bab al Salama camps in the northern suburbs of Aleppo.

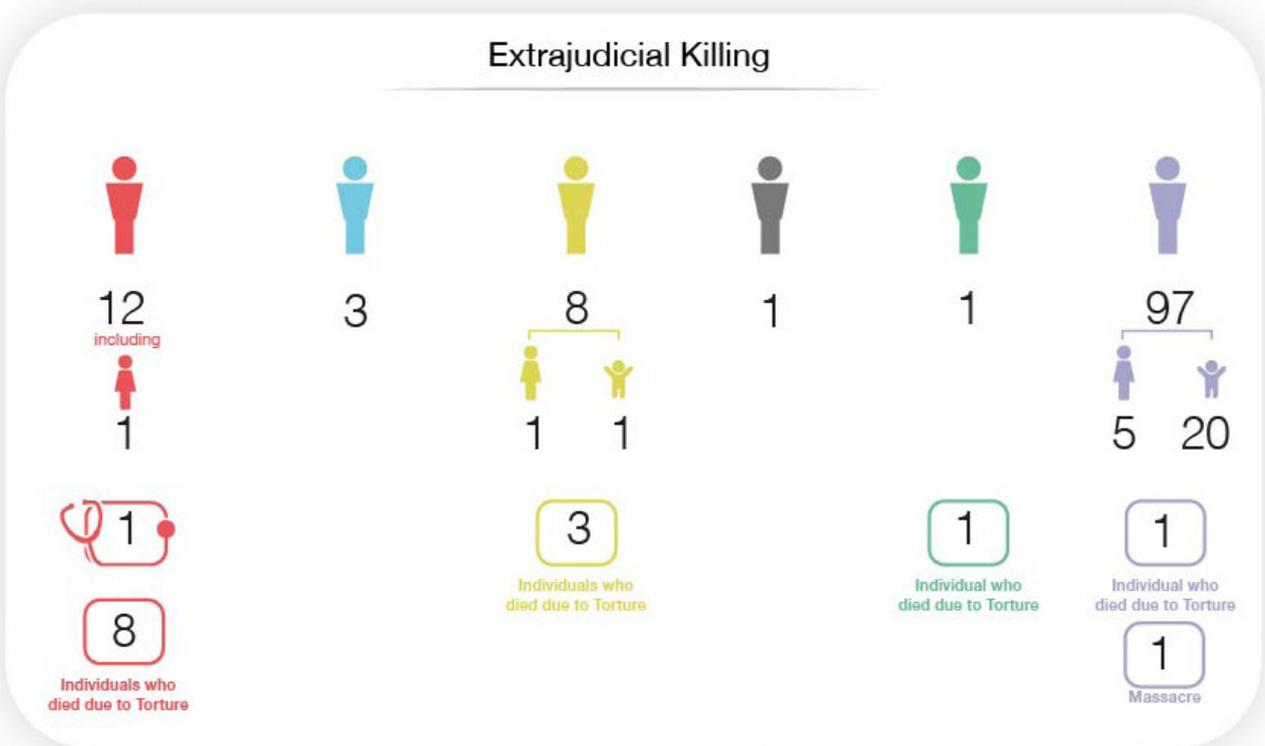
In northeastern Syria, [as of August 31](#), a total of 556 coronavirus infection cases had been announced by the Health Authority in the Self-Management Authority of Northern and Eastern Syria, including 35 deaths. We note that the month of August saw a leap in the number of infections announced compared to the figures announced until the end of July, with 531 cases, of whom 35 died, portending the spread of the pandemic in those areas.

On August 13, the water crisis in Hasaka city and its suburbs reemerged when the Syrian National Army stopped pumping water from Allouk Water Station east of Ras al Ein city in the northwestern suburbs of Hasaka, which supplies about 600,000 civilians; it was announced that this measure came 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, to 12 megawatts; this caused 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. On August 22, it was announced that an agreement had been reached between the Syrian Democratic Forces and the Syrian National Army, with Russian mediation, to restore electricity and water to both areas. We note that this was not the first time that the water has been cut off from Hasaka city and its environs since the Syrian National Army took control of Allouk Station in October 2019. The Syrian Network for Human Rights stresses the need that basic life requirements must not be included in any form of political or military rivalry, as humanitarian aid must be allowed to pass and flow freely to civilians, whatever the combat and political conditions.

On 27 August, [the meetings of the Constitutional Committee](#), which had been suspended on the original date set, the 24th of the same month after four members of the Constitutional Committee tested positive for COVID-19, 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.

### III. The Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in August

This report outlines the most notable human rights violations that were documented by the SNHR in August 2020 at the hands of the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in Syria.



- Syrian Regime forces
- Russian forces
- SDF (mainly PYD)
- ISIS
- Hay'at Tahrir al Sham
- The Armed Opposition \ The Syrian National Army
- Other parties

- Civilians
- Women (adult female)
- Children
- Medical Personnel
- Schools
- Medical Facilities
- Places of worship

**A. Extrajudicial killing:**

In August 2020, SNHR documented the deaths of 122 civilians, including 21 children and seven women (adult female), the largest percentage of whom were killed at the hands of other parties; among the victims were one medical worker and 13 individuals who died due to torture. We also recorded at least one massacre. We issued a report on the first of this month detailing the civilian victims documented killed in August at the hands of the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in Syria.

The death toll of civilian victims was distributed according to the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in Syria as follows:

**A. The main parties:**

- **Syrian Regime forces (army, security, local militias, and Shiite foreign militias):** 12 civilians, including one woman.
- **Russian forces:** Three.
- **ISIS (the self-proclaimed 'Islamic State'):** One.
- **The Armed Opposition/ The Syrian National Army:** One.
- **Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (the Democratic Union Party):** Eight civilians, including one child and one woman.

**B. Other parties:**

We documented the deaths of 97 civilians, including 20 children and five women, at the hands of other parties, distributed as follows:

- Landmines of unknown origin: 25 civilians, including four children.
- Fires of unknown source: 42 civilians, including four children and three women.
- Bombings whose perpetrators have not yet been identified: 23 civilians, including 10 children and two women.
- Killings by unknown persons: Five civilians, including one child.
- Turkish border guards: Two civilians, including one child.

**B. Arbitrary arrest and enforced disappearance:**

In August 2020, SNHR documented at least 146 cases of arbitrary arrests/ detention, including four children, at the hands of the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in Syria. The largest number of arrests was carried out by Syrian Regime forces in the governorates of Damascus Suburbs then Daraa. We issued a report on the second of this month detailing the record of cases of arrests and enforced disappearances which we documented in August 2020 at the hands of the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in Syria.

The record of cases of arbitrary arrests were distributed according to the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces as follows:

**Syrian Regime forces:** 58.

**Hay'at Tahrir al Sham:** 21, one child.

**The Armed Opposition/ The Syrian National Army:** 31.

**Syrian Democratic Forces:** 36, including three children.

### **C. Attacks on vital civilian facilities:**

In August 2020, SNHR documented at least seven incidents of attacks on vital civilian facilities, five of which took the form of bombings whose perpetrators have not yet been identified, which were concentrated in Aleppo governorate.

Among these attacks we documented one on a school, another on a medical facility and one other on a place of worship.

These attacks were distributed according to the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces as follows:

#### A. The main parties:

- **Syrian Democratic Forces:** One.

#### B. Other parties:

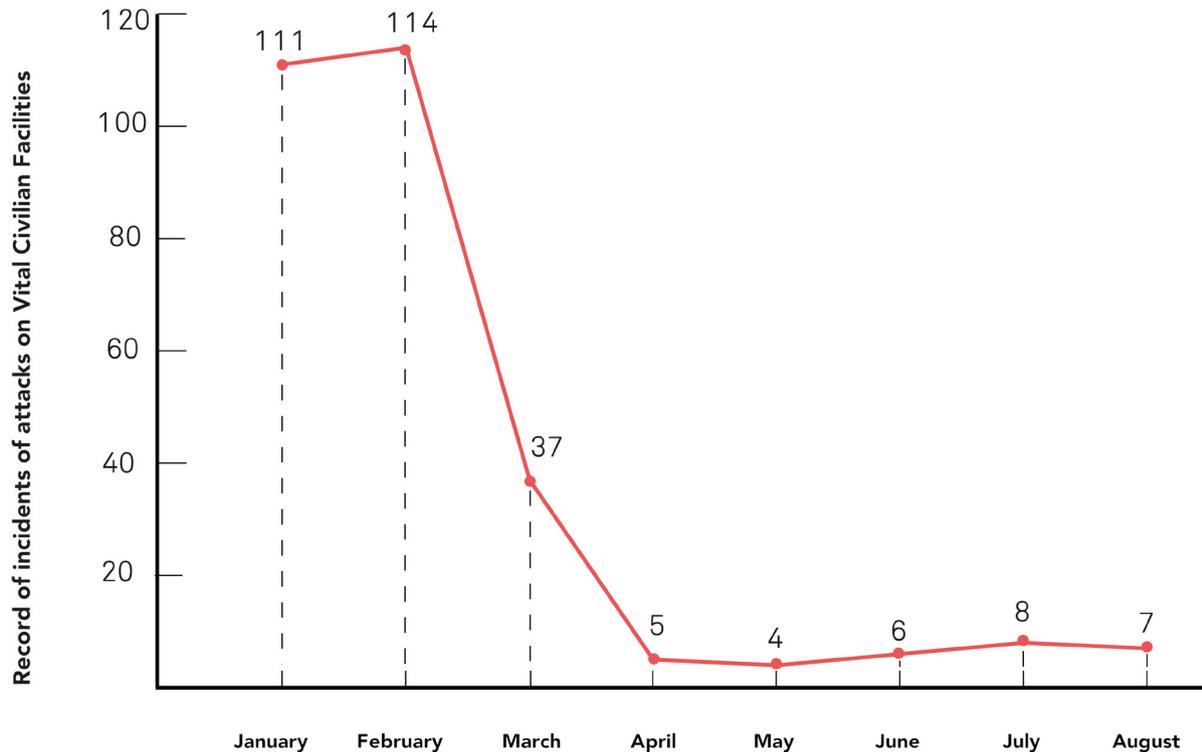
Other parties perpetrated six incidents, distributed as follows:

- **Bombings whose perpetrators have not yet been identified:** Five.
- **Attacks by unknown groups:** One.

The record of attacks documented in August 2020 on vital civilian facilities was distributed according to the perpetrator parties as follows:

Attacked Facility	Perpetrator Party		
	Syrian Democratic Forces	Other parties	
		Bombings whose perpetrators have not yet been identified	Attacks by unknown groups
<b>Places of Worship</b>			
Mosques		1	
<b>Vital Educational Facilities</b>			
Schools			1
<b>Vital Medical Facilities</b>			
Medical Facilities		1	
<b>Communal Facilities</b>			
Markets		3	
<b>Infrastructure</b>			
Water facilities and related resources	1		
<b>Total</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>1</b>

Thus, the record of attacks on vital civilian facilities documented since the start of 2020 up to the start of September of the same year at the hands of the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in Syria has now reached 292 in total, distributed monthly as follows:



The previous chart shows a continuing decline in the number of the attacks on vital civilian facilities for the fifth consecutive month, with the ceasefire agreement that entered into force on March 6 having had an effect on this, along with the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic which has affected the capabilities of the Syrian regime's army and affiliated Iranian militias.

#### The most notable attacks on vital civilian facilities in August:

On Thursday, August 13, 2020, personnel affiliated with Syrian Democratic Forces stormed the drinking-water purification station in [al Sh-heil](#) city in the eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate, where [they destroyed](#) and [sabotaged the pumps, control and monitoring](#) panels, and some of the station's equipment, putting it out of service. The city was under the control of Syrian Democratic Forces at the time of the incident.

On Saturday, August 15, 2020, a motorcycle bomb of so-far unknown origin exploded in a local market near Dawwar al Shuhadaa in Jarablos city in the eastern suburbs of Aleppo governorate, resulting in casualties, in addition to causing [moderate material damage](#) to a number of shops. SNHR is still trying to contact witnesses and survivors of the incident to obtain more details. The city was under the control of Syrian National Army forces at the time of the incident.

On Thursday, August 27, 2020, an IED of so-far unknown origin exploded in a local market in Ras al Ein city in the northwestern suburbs of Hasaka governorate, resulting in casualties, [in addition to causing moderate material damage](#) to [a number of shops](#). SNHR is still trying to contact witnesses and survivors of the incident to obtain more details. Ras al Ein city was under the control of Syrian National Army forces at the time of the incident.



Damages caused by the explosion of a car bomb of so-far unknown origin in a local market in Ras al Ein city, Hasaka – August 27, 2020

#### **D. Record of indiscriminate attacks and attacks using outlawed weapons:**

The Syrian Network for Human Rights was unable to document any indiscriminate attacks or attacks using outlawed weapons in August.

## **IV. The Syrian Regime Bears Primary Responsibility for the Spread of COVID-19 Pandemic**

The COVID-19 pandemic has swept across most of the world, and caused massive numbers of infections and deaths, with most of the world's stable countries worldwide 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.

By contrast, since the beginning of the global pandemic outbreak, the Syrian regime has dealt with it with callous, total and extreme disregard and total negligence, with several countries announcing the arrival of infected cases from Syria since the beginning of March 2020. Despite this, the Syrian regime continued to deny the existence of any infections in Syria until March 22.

The COVID-19 does not distinguish between one person or another or between one region and another, and all the regions of Syria, particularly Idlib and surrounding areas, that have witnessed bombings, destruction and forced displacement are suffering from further challenges in addition to the usual ones, which cannot be compared to those in any other location; at the forefront of these challenges are the nearly 1.1 million Syrian citizens displaced between mid-December 2019 and the beginning of March 2020, with exceptional humanitarian aid efforts required to focus particularly on these people in the areas to which they were displaced. There are a number of factors which make them more vulnerable than others to infection with COVID-19, most notably:

- The Idlib region and the northwestern suburbs of Aleppo and its environs are already experiencing massive overcrowding due to the earlier displacement of tens of thousands of Syrians to these places from several areas such as the Eastern Ghouta, the northern suburbs of Homs, southern Syria, and recently the suburbs of Idlib and Hama, which has caused a drastic increase in the existing overcrowding, making the process of social physical distancing virtually impossible.
- Most of these people 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 in a tent collectively, which particularly negatively affects women due to their special needs.
- The healthcare system in and around Idlib continues to suffer from the repercussions of violent and focused targeting by the Syrian and Russian regimes' forces, which has contributed to a large number of health centers being put out of service. According to estimates from a number of local relief and humanitarian organizations, the number of doctors in the region ranges between 500 to 600, while the number of beds in medical centers ranges between 2,500 to 3,000, with the number of beds in intensive care units numbering 201 in total; in addition, only 95 ventilators are available for adults, with all of these being in use. The tremendous disparity between these figures and the population levels in northwest Syria shows the immensity of the grave deficit.

On April 14, [Médecins Sans Frontières](#) warned that the health system in Idlib, which is currently overstretched and low on supplies, will be overrun if COVID-19 spreads there.

The Syrian Jazira region (Deir Ez-Zour, Hasaka, Raqqqa), which is controlled by the Kurdish-majority Syrian Democratic Forces, suffers from a similar situation, and also includes large numbers of IDPs living in camps. Russia's use of its United Nations veto has caused the cancellation of three of the four crossings, with al Ya'rubiya crossing with Iraq being one of the crossings canceled; this caused the region to be denied direct UN aid, which is now provided exclusively through the Syrian regime that deliberately creates obstacles to aid provision and systematically carries out large-scale extortion, which we addressed extensively in our report: [Sanctions Are Linked](#) to the Syrian Regime's Continuing Violations and Don't Include Medical Supplies and Food, Which Shouldn't Be Delivered Through the Regime, with the United Nations Secretary-General speaking about this in [his report issued](#) on February 21, 2020. [Human Rights Watch also issued a report](#) on the crisis facing the medical sector in that region and the complex difficulties it faces due to the closure of al Ya'rubiya crossing.

As for the areas under the control of the Syrian regime, whilst these are better off than the Idlib region, its environs, and the Syrian Jazira region, they suffer mainly from the exodus of medical personnel, and from the massive corruption in all the regime's organs, as well as from the depletion of the Syrian state's monetary reserves, which are spent on bombings, military operations, and security services at the expense of supporting the medical sector and services. SNHR has also demanded that Russia, a massively wealthy country, help its ally, the Syrian regime, given the circumstances of the spread of the COVID-19, as this would be far better and less costly than air strikes on medical facilities, cities and towns in and around Idlib.

In short, the whole of Syrian society suffers from mismanagement of the coronavirus crisis, in all areas of control:

One: In the areas under the control of the Syrian regime, these shortcomings are summarized in the following main points:

1. The Syrian regime denied the existence of any cases of COVID-19 in areas under its control until March 22; it should be borne in mind that when the regime finally admitted the existence of a case of infection, it was in a girl coming from outside the country. Another problematic factor is the complete lack of any transparency in the announcement of cases of infection and deaths, which are certainly far greater than those officially announced, due particularly to the constant contact with Shiite religious groups, individuals and militias coming from Iran and Iraq (most notably the al Nujaba Movement, the Imam Ali Brigade, the Fatemiyoun Brigade, the Quds Corps Brigade, the Abu al Fadl al Abbas Brigade and the Haideriyoun Brigade) via the al Boukamal land crossing, with the Syrian regime failing to close the al Sayyidah Zaynab area, which is known to be very crowded with Iranians and Iraqi Shiites, until April 2.
2. The Syrian authorities have not taken any effective measures to limit air traffic from other countries, with Damascus International Airport still witnessing multiple flights to and from many countries, including Iran.

3. Quarantine centers are not equipped and lack the minimum levels of hygiene, in addition to lacking the most basic conditions for healthcare and medical protection and the facilities to provide the medical procedures and services related to COVID-19, which are supposedly intended to contribute to curbing the spread of the disease if discovered. [Press websites](#) and social media platforms have published photos and videos [showing the dire situation](#) of the [Quarantine Center](#) in [al Dwair area](#), [where people](#) were placed after arriving on a trip from Iran
4. The Syrian regime has not taken any serious measures to prevent overcrowding of citizens in front of ATMs (such as, for example, increasing the number of ATMs available), in front of [retail outlets](#), bakeries or in [commercial markets](#). The regime also failed to take any measures to prevent overcrowding during the Eid al Adha period, as markets and [theme parks were](#) crowded with civilians, as we have mentioned in a wide range of news reports in recent months.

#### Two: In and around opposition-held areas in Idlib:

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.
2. Reduced degree of medical and religious awareness of the dangers of overcrowding and gathering. We have noted that dozens of worshipers have been gathering in some mosques to perform the prayers for Jum'ah (Friday Prayer) and Eid, as well as in some markets, in addition to attending [sporting events](#), without the controlling authorities imposing any restrictions on them, with a situation of indifference prevailing among many people, primarily caused by what they have been subjected to, including the bombings, displacement and torture by Syrian regime's forces and allies.

Based on all the above facts, there is no doubt that the negligence shown by the Syrian regime and its disastrous mismanagement of the Syrian state in recent years are further clear indications of the regime's indifference to citizens' wellbeing, showing once again that the only Syrians which it cares about protecting are the ruling family, the regime's inner circle and its wealthy elite; this indifference to the Syrian public may well lead to massive additional numbers of deaths among Syrian citizens. It should always be remembered 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 hundreds of medical personnel, as documented on the SNHR's database, with dozens of these lifesaving medics still classified as having been forcibly disappeared at the regime's hands.

The regime's failure to release arbitrarily detained individuals, particularly the elderly and individuals detained with no charges, provides further clear evidence of the Syrian regime's primary responsibility for the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic in Syria, as the regime controls and manages state institutions, and has completely failed to provide even the most rudimentary protection to Syrian civilians, but has instead exploited the state institutions to protect and benefit the ruling family in order to ensure their continued rule, even if 13 million Syrian citizens are displaced from their homes to achieve this, with most of those displaced unable to return home since their homes have been ransacked and subjected to widespread looting and destruction by regime forces and affiliated militias.

## V. Attachments

(1) [122 Civilians, including 21 Children and Seven Women, Documented Killed in Syria in August 2020, with Landmines Claiming the Souls of 20% of the Victims](#)

(2) [At least 146 Cases of Arbitrary Arrests/ Detention Documented in Syria in August 2020, including Four Children](#)

## VI. Conclusions and Recommendations

### **Conclusions:**

- The evidence we have gathered indicates that attacks continue to be directed against civilians and civilian objects. Syrian-Russian alliance forces have committed various crimes, including extrajudicial killings, arrest, torture, and enforced disappearance. In addition, the indiscriminate bombardment and other attacks carried out caused the destruction of facilities and buildings. There are reasonable grounds to believe that the war crime of attacking civilians has been committed in many cases.
- The Syrian government has not only violated international humanitarian law and customary law, but has also breached a number of UN Security Council resolutions, particularly resolution 2139, resolution 2042 on the release of detainees, and resolution 2254, all without any accountability.
- We could find no record of any warnings being issued by the Syrian Regime or Russian forces prior to any attack in accordance with the requirements of international humanitarian law. This has been the case since the beginning of the popular uprising for freedom, providing another blatant demonstration of these forces' total disregard for the lives of civilians in Syria.
- The magnitude and frequency of the violations, the disproportionate use of military force, the indiscriminate manner of the bombing, and the coordinated approach of these attacks leads to the inescapable conclusion that these acts are wholly deliberate and based on high-level orders, and as such constitute a part of state policy.
- The indiscriminate and disproportionate bombardment carried out by the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces is considered to be a clear violation of international humanitarian law, with indiscriminate killings amounting to war crimes.
- Extremist Islamist groups have violated international humanitarian law, causing the death of many civilians, as well as damage to vital civilian facilities.
- Factions of the Armed Opposition violated UN Security Council Resolution 2139 through carrying out attacks that are considered to violate customary international humanitarian law, causing civilian casualties or accidental injuries.
- All the attacks documented in this report, particularly bombings, caused massive collateral damage that involved loss of lives, injuries, or significant damage to civilian objects. There are strong indicators suggesting that this damage was excessive compared to the anticipated military benefit.

- The use of explosive arms to target densely populated areas reflects a criminal and wholly deliberate mindset, with the perpetrators clearly intending to inflict the greatest possible number of deaths, which is a clear contravention of international human rights law and a flagrant violation of the Geneva Convention (arts. 27, 31, 32).

### **Recommendations:**

#### **UN Security Council**

- The Security Council must take additional steps following its adoption of Resolution 2254, which clearly insists that “all parties immediately cease any attacks against civilians and civilian objects as such.”
- The Syrian issue should be referred to the International Criminal Court and all those who are responsible for violations should be held accountable, while Russia must stop using the veto, as it is a party to the Syrian conflict, and the UNSC states’ veto power should be withheld when crimes against humanity and war crimes are committed.
- Ensure peace and security and implement the principle of responsibility to protect civilians’ lives and to save the Syrian people’s heritage and historical artefacts from destruction, looting and vandalism.
- The Security Council should adopt a resolution banning the use of cluster munitions and landmines in Syria, similar to the existing prohibition on the use of chemical weapons, and include advice on how to safely remove the remnants of such dangerous weapons.
- The four other permanent member states should put pressure on the Russian government to end its support for the Syrian regime, which uses chemical weapons, and to expose its involvement in this regard.
- Request that all relevant United Nations agencies make greater efforts to provide food, medical and humanitarian assistance in areas where fighting has ceased, and in internally displaced persons camps, and to follow-up with those States that have pledged voluntary contributions.

#### **International Community**

In light of the split within the Security Council and its utter inability to take any effective action, action should be taken on the national and regional levels to form alliances to support the Syrian people by protecting them from daily killing and by lifting sieges, as well as by increasing support for relief efforts. Additionally, the principle of universal jurisdiction should be enacted in local courts regarding these crimes in order to conduct fair trials for all those who were involved.

SNHR has repeatedly called for the implementation of the ‘Responsibility to Protect’ 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 have proved fruitless, along with the Cessation of Hostilities statements and Astana agreements that followed. Therefore, steps should be taken under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations, while the norm of the ‘Responsibility to Protect’, which was established by the United Nations General Assembly, should be implemented. The Security Council is still hindering the protection of civilians in Syria.

- Renew pressure on the Security Council to refer the case in Syria to the International Criminal Court.
- Work on fulfilling justice and achieving accountability in Syria through the United Nations General Assembly and the Human Rights Council and to activate the principle of universal jurisdiction.
- Work to launch projects to create maps revealing the locations of landmines and cluster munitions in all Syrian governorates. This would facilitate the process of removing them and educating the population about their locations.

### **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 since these attacks were perpetrated by the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces.
- Train Syrian organizations to undertake clearance of mines and other unexploded ordnance, and raise local awareness of the dangers of such ordnance.
- 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.
- Work on preparing a special report on the use of landmines in Syria and the risks they pose to civilians, and identify the most prominent locations where landmines were planted.

### **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.
- Focus on the issue of landmines and cluster munitions within the next report.

### **The United Nations Special Envoy to Syria**

Condemn the perpetrators of crimes and 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 establishment of a transitional governing body.

### **The Syrian regime**

- Stop indiscriminate shelling and targeting of residential areas, hospitals, schools and markets, and end the use of outlawed weapons and barrel bombs.
- End the acts of torture that have caused the deaths of thousands of Syrian citizens in detention centers.
- Reveal the fate of some 84,000 Syrian citizens arrested by the security services whose fate has been concealed to date.
- Ensure compliance with UN Security Council resolutions and customary humanitarian law.
- Provide detailed maps of the locations where the regime planted landmines, especially in civilian areas or near residential communities.

### **The Russian regime**

- Launch investigations into the incidents included in this report, make the findings of these investigations public for the Syrian people, and hold the those responsible accountable.
- Compensate all the damaged centers and facilities, rebuild and rehabilitate them, and compensate all the families of victims who were killed by the current Russian regime, as well as all the wounded.
- Completely cease the bombing of hospitals, protected objects, and civilian areas, and respect customary international law.
- As a guarantor party in Astana talks, the Russian regime must stop thwarting de-escalation agreements, and apply pressure on the Syrian regime in order to end all indiscriminate attacks and to allow unconditional passage of humanitarian aid to besieged areas.
- Stop using incendiary weapons in populated areas, compensate the victims and their families for all human and material damage caused by the use of these weapons, and provide treatment for dozens of civilian casualties.
- Provide detailed maps of sites where Russian forces have launched cluster munition attacks, issue these to the United Nations and inform the Syrian public about them, thus facilitating the safe disposal of unexploded ordnance.
- Begin to achieve a breakthrough in the issue of detainees by revealing the fate of 83,000 people forcibly disappeared by the Syrian regime.

### **The Coalition (US-led coalition and Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces)**

- The states of the coalition must unequivocally and sincerely acknowledge that some of their bombing operations have resulted in the deaths of innocent civilians. Rather than attempting denial, these states should take speedy steps to launch serious investigations, and immediately compensate and apologize to the victims and all those 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.
- Syrian Democratic Forces must immediately stop conscripting children, hold the officers involved in such violations accountable, and pledge to return all children who have been arrested for conscription immediately.
- Provide detailed maps of the locations where the SDF planted landmines, especially civilian sites or near residential communities.

### **The Armed Opposition/ the Syrian National Army**

- The Armed Opposition/ the Syrian National Army must ensure the protection of civilians in all areas under their control. These forces should also take care to distinguish between civilians and military targets and cease any indiscriminate attacks.
- Pledge to cease any arbitrary arrests, and investigate incidents that have resulted in violations of international humanitarian law.
- Take punitive action against those who commit violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law.
- Provide detailed maps of the locations where the Armed Opposition/ Syrian National Army planted landmines, especially civilian sites or near residential communities.

### **Humanitarian Organizations:**

- Develop urgent operational plans to secure decent shelter for internally displaced persons.
- Exert efforts in landmine clearance operations in parallel with relief operations whenever the opportunity arises.

## **Acknowledgments**

We wish to extend our sincere thanks to all family members, relatives and friends of the victims, as well as eyewitnesses and local activists whose contributions have enriched this report.



[www.snhr.org](http://www.snhr.org) - [info@sn4hr.org](mailto:info@sn4hr.org)