

The Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in October 2020

Russian Warplanes Renewed Their Bombardment of Several Areas in Idlib Governorate, Very Far from the Lines of Contact, Causing the Displacement of Hundreds More Syrians

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

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I. Introduction 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 October 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 October:

In the context of bombardment and military attacks

the frequency of Syrian Regime forces' artillery and missile bombardment increased dramatically in the last week of October, targeting areas far from the lines of contact such as Ariha city, causing [civilian casualties](#); [many areas](#) in Sahl al Ghab in the western suburbs of Hama were also bombed, causing the displacement of hundreds more civilians to nearby areas.

Russian warplanes continued to launch raids in northwest Syria, which were concentrated in the first half of the month on the Jabal al Zaweya area in the southern suburbs of Idlib, while in the second half of the month, the bombardment [targeted](#) military camps of Hay'at Tahrir al Sham in al Hamama and al Sheikh Bahr forests in the western suburbs of Idlib. Russian warplanes also launched a raid on a military camp belonging to the 'Failaq al Sham' brigade, a faction affiliated with the National Front for Liberation, at al Dweila air base near Kafr Takhareem city in the western suburbs of Idlib governorate, on October 26, causing the deaths of at least 41 fighters, in addition to the death of a media activist. After this attack, factions of the Armed Opposition and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham launched ground bombardment on areas under the control of Syrian Regime forces in the suburbs of Hama, Idlib and Aleppo.

In October, we recorded several killings perpetrated by drones, which we believe belonged to the US-led coalition, with most of these attacks targeting military vehicles belonging to extremist Islamist groups. These incidents also resulted in the deaths of six civilians, including a [civilian activist](#) who was injured by shrapnel when she was near a car belonging to a leader of the Hurras al Din group at the moment of its being targeted on the Arab Saeed Road west of Idlib city on October 15, and who later died of her wounds. Those drones also targeted a dinner banquet in a farm in Jakara village in the suburbs of Idlib governorate on October 22, resulting in deaths, including leaders from Hay'at Tahrir al Sham; among the other victims killed were civilians.

October saw continuing deaths of civilian victims killed by landmines in various governorates and regions in Syria, particularly in the governorates of Aleppo and Idlib, where we recorded several such incidents, most notably on agricultural land in Jabal al Zaweya area, while civilian agricultural workers were heading to help with the olive harvest in the areas close to the contact lines between Syrian Regime forces and factions of the Armed Opposition. Several landmines exploded in areas under the Syrian regime's control in the northern suburbs of Hama and southern suburbs of Idlib, leaving a number of casualties. In total, the SNHR documented the deaths of 12 victims, including three children, as a result of the explosion

of landmines in October 2020, bringing the total death toll resulting from landmine-related incidents this year to 86 civilians, including 15 children, with this death toll being the highest in the world from this cause. This indicates that none of the controlling forces have made any significant efforts in the process of clearing landmines trying to determine their locations and fence them off, or warning the local populations about them.

Also in October, we documented continuing use of car bombs and improvised explosive devices, which caused explosions in several areas of the eastern suburbs of Aleppo, such as the cities of al Bab and Afrin, as well as in the area of Ras al Ein in the northwestern suburbs of Hasaka, and Tal Abyad in the northern suburbs of Raqqa, with these attacks inflicting civilian casualties and damaging several vital facilities. Among the victims that we were able to document were 20 civilians, including five children, who died on October 6 as a result of the explosion of a car bomb of unknown origin in al Bab city. The explosion also caused damage to the Othman bin Affan Mosque, in addition to destroying an ambulance belonging to the Syria Relief and Development Organization (SRD) which was dedicated for transporting suspected cases infected by COVID-19 pandemic.

Meanwhile, insecurity continues to be the most prominent problematic issue in most areas of Syria, with SNHR documenting the deaths of numerous civilians as a result of gunfire by parties we were unable to conclusively identify, particularly in the governorates of Daraa, Idlib and Deir Ez-Zour. Among the victims was Ahmad Abdul Aziz, one of the dignitaries of al Sh-heil city and a member of the Syrian Democratic Forces' local council, who was killed in al Sh-heil city on October 8. The prominent military commander, Adham al Karad, and four of his aides were also assassinated by unknown assailants who shot at the car they were traveling in near Tebna village junction on the Damascus-Daraa International Road on October 14.

As for the areas controlled by the Syrian regime, we monitored an increase in the rate of homicides, thefts and suicides, most of which appear to have taken place due to poor living conditions and extreme poverty. Zahir Hajo, the Director General of the Syrian regime's General Authority of Forensic Medicine, told the Syrian state-run al Watan newspaper [published](#) on October 15 that 332 killings have been documented since the beginning of this year, more than half of them in Aleppo, Daraa and Suwayda, stressing that 260 of the victims were male and 72 female.

Meanwhile, in regard to arrests and enforced disappearances

Syrian Regime forces in October continued to persecute Syrian citizens in connection with their political opposition and opinions, which are guaranteed by the constitution and international law, with persecution and arbitrary arrests affecting a number of Syrian citizens solely because they criticized the deteriorating living and economic conditions in the regime-controlled areas; among those arrested during this period have been government employees who were detained by Syrian Regime forces in raids on their homes and workplaces.

Second, we recorded arrests and prosecutions against citizens, including activists, in connection with their participation in earlier anti-Syrian regime protests and activities in Suwayda governorate, with most of these arrests taking place while they were passing through regime checkpoints in Suwayda city.

Third, Syrian Regime forces in October continued to persecute and arrest individuals who have concluded settlements of their security status with the Syrian regime in areas that previously concluded settlement agreements with the regime; these arrests have been concentrated in Daraa and Damascus Suburbs governorates, with most occurring during campaigns of mass raids and arrests.

Fourth, we have recorded arrests of Syrian citizens by Syrian Regime forces while they were traveling from areas under the Syrian regime's control to other areas.

In the context of cases in which individuals have been released, we recorded in October that Syrian Regime forces released 11 detainees from various Syrian governorates, all of whom were released from regime detention centers in Damascus governorate. Most of these individuals were released after the end of their arbitrary sentences, with the duration of their detention ranging from four to eight years.

Meanwhile, the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces continued enforcing the group's policies of arbitrary detention and enforced disappearance throughout the month of October, targeting 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 October, SNHR documented Syrian Democratic Forces carrying out arrests/ detentions targeting several families, as well as targeting several members of the same families, including elderly people, without providing clear charges, taking these detained to an undisclosed location. We also recorded Syrian Democratic Forces' abduction of children with the aim of taking them to its training and recruitment camps and forcibly conscripting them. Syrian Democratic Forces have prevented the children's families from communicating with them, and did not disclose their fate.

October also saw Hay'at Tahrir al Sham arresting civilians, with arrests concentrating in Idlib city, including activists working with civil society groups, media workers, lawyers, and clergymen, with most of these arrests occurring due to expressing their opinions criticizing the HTS's management of areas under its control. These arrests were carried out through 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 travelling or passing through temporary checkpoints.

The Armed Opposition/ the Syrian National Army also carried out arbitrary arrests and kidnappings in October, most of which occurred on a mass scale, in many cases targeting several members of the same families, including elderly people; we also recorded detentions 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.

In October, the wildfires that devastated vast areas of forests, agricultural lands and villages in the governorates of Latakia, Tartous, Hama, and Homs [devoured](#) dozens of homes and hundreds of hectares of land that are among Syria's most precious natural resources. These fires, which first broke out on the night of October 9, continued burning for four days, resulting in the deaths of two civilians, according to announcements by pro-Syrian regime sources. As in previous such fires, the Syrian regime showed total disregard and indifference to the blazes, as we documented no intervention at all by helicopters to extinguish the massive fires until they spread into villages and towns. Photos and videos published by pro-Syrian regime sources showed that local people used household tools to fight the fires, while [Syrian Regime forces](#) personnel put them out using shovels and tree branches. The Syrian regime has also failed to announce any plans to carry out any investigations to determine the cause of these fires for which it bears full responsibility; whilst it is incumbent upon the Syrian regime to fully compensate the citizens who depend on the burned crops as their sole source of income, the regime devotes all its capabilities and resources to serving the security and military services to maintain the ruling family in power. The wildfires also spread to areas controlled by Armed Opposition factions in northwest Syria, with the Syrian Civil Defense working tirelessly to extinguish them. On October 9, Dr. Ryad Qara Falah, a professor of climatology at Tishreen University in Latakia, said in a statement posted on [his Facebook account](#) that **“The fires were carried out by a person or a group of people, or an (educated and literate) party that tracks weather conditions and fully understands the weather conditions, in which**

the winds help in achieving the greatest possible expansion of the fires, and thus it is well aware of what it is doing, especially being aware that this is happening for the second time in a month, with the same weather conditions, and most importantly in new places that were not affected by the previous fires.”

As for the COVID-19 pandemic

the number of recorded cases of infection continued to rise across Syria, with October being the worst month to date compared to previous months. In areas under the control of Syrian Regime forces, the Ministry of Health officially announced in October 1,528 cases of infection and 88 deaths, bringing the official total to [5,728 cases of infection with 288 deaths, as of October 31](#). We at the SNHR believe, however, that the officially reported figures represent only what the Syrian regime wishes to disclose.

In addition, [cases of infection](#) with coronavirus in northwestern Syria saw the largest leap in terms of the number of infections and deaths in October, with the Early Warning Alert and Response Network (EWARN) announcing that 3,666 infections and 44 deaths were recorded for the month, bringing the total number of infections and deaths announced by the EWARN to date to 4,738 cases of infection and 50 deaths. The highest number of infections was recorded in Idlib city with 1,821.

On October 8, Syria Relief [declared](#) that the COVID-19 pandemic is an emergency that calls for urgent support from state governments and called on all actors involved in the Syrian conflict to direct resources away from fighting and towards providing medical support to the victims.

In northeastern Syria, [as of October 31](#), a total of 4,604 coronavirus infection cases, including 125 deaths, had been announced by the Health Authority in the Self-Management Authority of Northern and Eastern Syria. We note that October saw the announcement of a larger number of cases, with 2,986 cases of infection and 61 deaths. Despite the outbreak of the pandemic, the Self-Management Authority of Northern and Eastern Syria issued [Decision No. 149](#) on October 11, which stipulates the opening of all border crossings from the day following the decision.

On October 27, Mark Lowcock, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, [indicated](#) in a virtual open session of Security Council members on Syria that the confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Syria were mostly the result of community transmission, and that healthcare facilities in some areas were unable to provide treatment for all suspected cases, forcing them to suspend surgeries or adapt wards to take in more patients. He also expressed concern about densely populated areas, such as urban centers in and around Damascus, Aleppo and Homs, and crowded displacement camps, settlements and collective shelters in the north-west and northeast of the country.

On the living situation level

Syrian citizens have continued to suffer from the repercussions of the economic collapse, particularly in the areas under the control of Syrian Regime forces; despite this, the Syrian regime raised the prices of fuel and bread this month. As stated in [Resolution No. 2664](#) issued on October 7, the price of gasoline 95 octane was to be raised to 850 Syrian Pounds per liter as of the following day, an increase of 150 percent on the previous price. Only a few days later on [October 19](#), this was increased again to 1,050 pounds, while the cost of a liter of industrial and commercial diesel was increased to 650 Syrian pounds. The increase in the price of industrial diesel was foreshadowed by the closure of industrial facilities, imposing an additional burden on Syrian citizens.

On October 20, the Ministry of Internal Trade and Consumer Protection [issued](#) a resolution setting the retail price of a liter of subsidized premium gasoline to the consumer at 450 Syrian pounds. In the resolution, the ministry set the retail price for a liter of unsubsidized premium gasoline to the consumer at 650 Syrian pounds.

On October 28, the Ministry issued Resolutions [2990](#) and [2991](#) which respectively set the retail price of one kilogram of unpackaged subsidized bread at 75 Syrian pounds and set 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. The Ministry justified the increase in the price of bread to the difficulties it faces in providing the materials for the staple foodstuff and its high value and shipping costs.

The Syrian regime attributes the increase in the prices of basic materials to the US sanctions imposed on it and on individuals and institutions loyal to it. We note that these sanctions are not fully implemented, as Lebanese media sources regularly report that the Lebanese Hezbollah group continues its smuggling operations of gasoline and flour to the Syrian regime. The Syrian Democratic Forces are also still selling oil to the Syrian regime, as we outlined in a [previous report](#), despite the entry into force of the Caesar Act, and we believe that the revenue from these smuggling operations doesn't benefit the Syrian citizen, but instead benefits persons and institutions affiliated with the Syrian regime.

Stéphane Dujarric, [Spokesman](#) for the UN Secretary-General, announced in his daily press briefing on October 6 that 11 million people in Syria need urgent assistance due to the deteriorating living conditions and high prices there.

The living conditions in all refugee camps in Syria 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 addition to these severe challenges, the residents of camps in northeast Syria, primarily those of al Hawl Camp, are suffering from inhumane conditions of detention imposed by Syrian Democratic Forces. On October 29, the SNHR issued [a report](#) on the inhuman conditions suffered by the camp residents, touching on Decision 146 issued by the Syrian Democratic Forces' Self-management authority on October 10, which allows Syrians wishing to leave the camp 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.

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.

In early October 2020, the Immigration Service of the Danish government's Ministry of Immigration and Integration issued [a report](#) on the security, economic and social situation in the governorates of Damascus Suburbs and Damascus in Syria. The SNHR was the primary source of the data included in the report with 63 citations, followed by the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) with 42 citations.

In early October, the Russian Defense Ministry [called for](#) an international conference for Syrian refugees to be held in the Syrian capital, Damascus, between November 10 and 12, in what appears to be an attempt to legitimize and rehabilitate the Syrian regime and prepare for the reconstruction of Syria.

On October 1, the Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) issued two separate reports, each of which dealt with an incident of alleged use of chemical weapons in Syria. The first incident concerned the alleged use of chemical weapons by the Syrian regime against the people of Saraqeb city on August 1, 2016, which wasn't under its control at the time, and the second was related to the Syrian regime's allegation that the Syrian opposition used chemical weapons against neighborhoods in Aleppo city on November 24, 2018. We issued [a report](#) on the subject.

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.

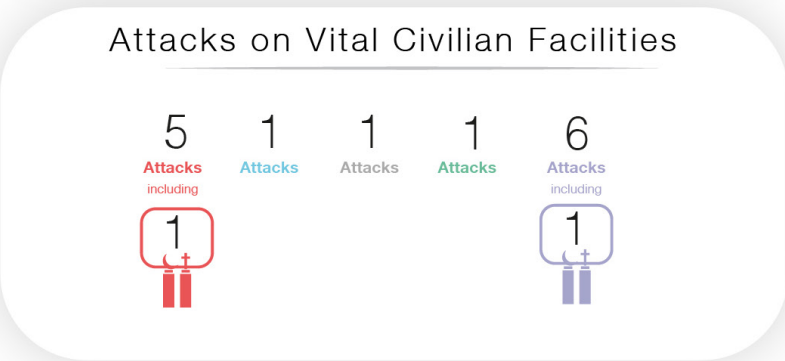
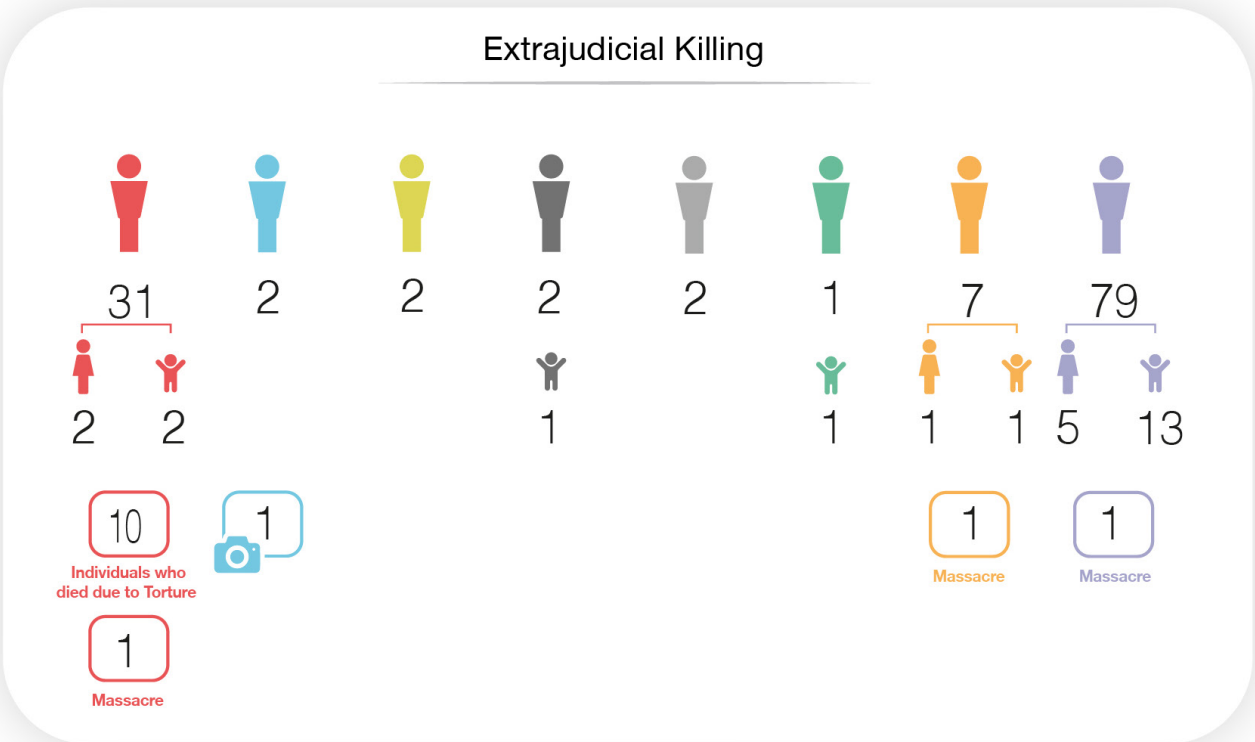
On October 12, the European Union [announced](#) the extension of its imposition of sanctions on persons and entities involved in the development and use of chemical weapons in Syria for one year.

On October 13, Russia and China were elected as members of the Human Rights Council during its next term. The SNHR believes that their election constitutes support for the benefit of the Syrian regime and its continuous violations and for the benefit of many other dictatorial regimes around the world. We issued [a report](#) with the objective of exposing the countries that have voted in favor of committing more violations in Syria over the past nine years, and showing the number of times they have voted.

On October 15, Human Rights Watch issued [a report](#) entitled 'Targeting Life in Idlib', highlighting 46 of the repeated attacks by the Syrian-Russian alliance forces on Idlib region. SNHR contributed extensively to this report by sharing its data with the organization.

III. The Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in October:

This report outlines the most notable human rights violations that were documented by the SNHR in October 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
- US-led Coalition forces
- Other parties



A. Extrajudicial killing:

In October 2020, SNHR documented the deaths of 126 civilians, including 18 children and eight women (adult female), the largest percentage of whom were killed at the hands of other parties; among the victims were one media worker and 10 individuals who died due to torture. We also recorded at least three massacres. We issued a report on the first of this month detailing the civilian victims documented killed in October 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):** 31 civilians, including two children and two women.
- **Russian forces:** Two civilians.
- **ISIS (the self-proclaimed 'Islamic State'):** Two civilians, including one child.
- **Hay'at Tahrir al Sham (an alliance composed of Fateh al Sham Front and a number of factions of the Armed Opposition):** Two civilians.
- **The Armed Opposition/ The Syrian National Army:** One child.
- **Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (the Democratic Union Party):** Two civilians.
- **US-led coalition:** Seven civilians, including one child and one woman.

B. Other parties:

We documented the deaths of 79 civilians, including 13 children and five women, at the hands of other parties, distributed as follows:

- Landmines of unknown origin: 12 civilians, including three children.
- Gunfire of unknown source: 28 civilians, including three children and two women.
- Bombings whose perpetrators have not yet been identified: 33 civilians, including seven children and one woman.
- Killings by unknown persons: Five civilians, including two women.
- Turkish border guards: One civilian.

B. Arbitrary arrest and enforced disappearance:

In October 2020, SNHR documented at least 154 cases of arbitrary arrests, including five children and three women, 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 Daraa then Damascus Suburbs. We issued a report on the second of this month detailing the record of cases of arrests and enforced disappearances which we documented in October 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:** 73, including two children and two women.
- **Hay'at Tahrir al Sham:** 16.
- **The Armed Opposition/ The Syrian National Army:** 21, including one woman.
- **Syrian Democratic Forces:** 44, including three children.

C. Attacks on vital civilian facilities:

In October 2020, SNHR documented at least 14 incidents of attacks on vital civilian facilities, five of which were perpetrated by Syrian Regime forces, which concentrated in Idlib governorate.

Among these attacks we documented two on places of worship, three on markets, and three others on Civil Defense centers.

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

A. The main parties:

- **Syrian Regime forces:** Five.
- **Russian forces:** One.
- **Hay'at Tahrir al Sham:** One.
- **The Armed Opposition/ The Syrian National Army:** One.

B. Other parties:

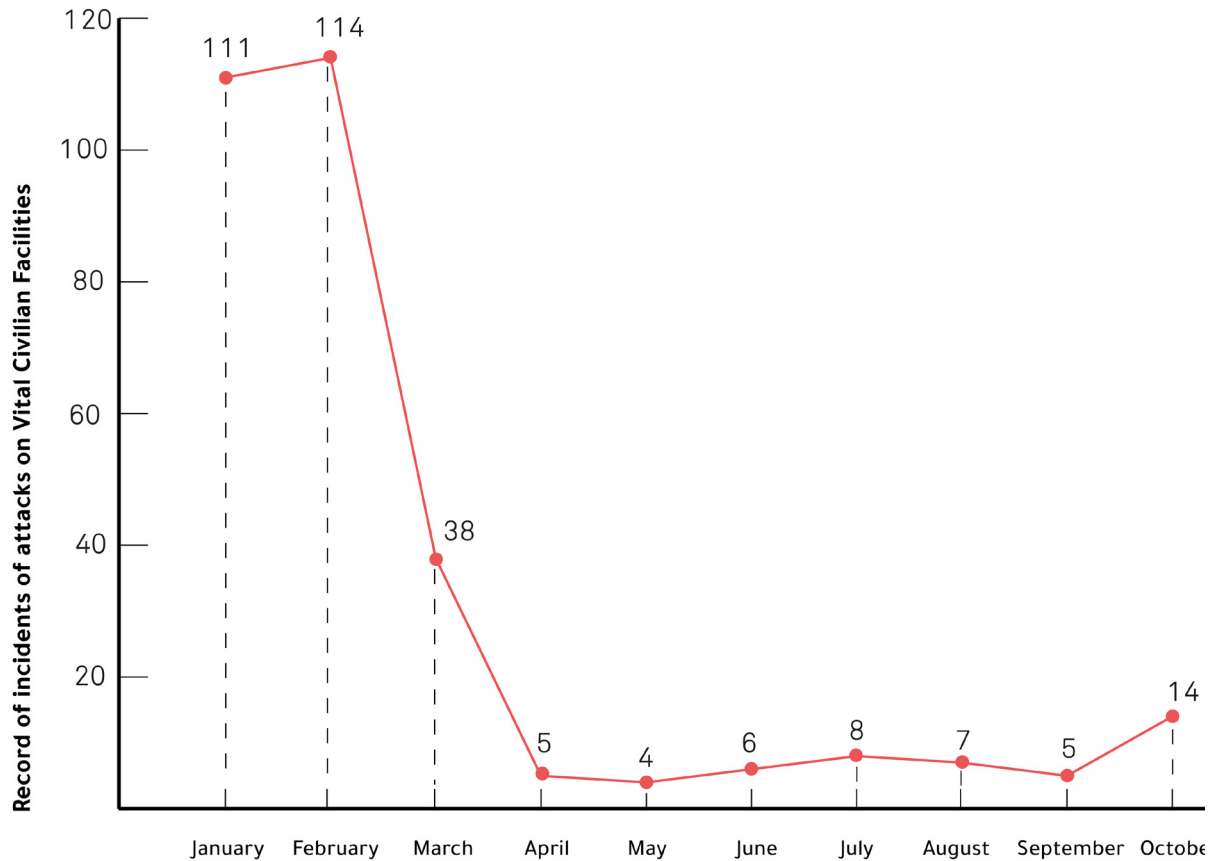
Other parties perpetrated six incidents, distributed as follows:

- **Bombings whose perpetrators have not yet been identified:** Five.
- **Shelling from unknown source:** One.

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

Attacked Facility	Perpetrator Party					
	Syrian Regime forces	Russian forces	Hay'at Tahrir al Sham	The Armed Opposition/ The Syrian National Army	Other parties	
					Bombings whose perpetrators have not yet been identified	Shelling from unknown source
Places of Worship						
Mosques	1				1	
Vital Medical Facilities						
Ambulances					1	
Communal Facilities						
Markets	1	1			1	
Infrastructure						
Civil Defense centers					1	
Water facilities and related resources	3					
Official Headquarters				1		1
Transport features					1	
IDP Camps						
IDP Camps			1			
Total	5	1	1	1	5	1

Thus, the record of attacks on vital civilian facilities documented since the start of 2020 up to the start of November of the same year at the hands of the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in Syria has now reached 312 in total, distributed monthly as follows:



The previous chart shows a relative increase in the number of incidents of attacks on vital civilian facilities in October, in contrast to the previous six months, with the indiscriminate shelling by the Syrian regime and its allies, which affected civilian areas far from the contact lines with the Armed Opposition factions and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham, having had an effect on this, despite the ceasefire agreement that entered into force on March 6.

The most notable attacks on vital civilian facilities in October:

On Thursday, October 1, 2020, unidentified gunmen used IEDs to blow up a gas pipeline linking al Thalja gas station in Markada city in the southern suburbs of Hasaka governorate and al Jabasa gas refinery in al Shaddadi city, also in the governorate's southern suburbs, causing [severe material](#) damage to the pipeline, which was put out of service as a result. SNHR is still trying to contact witnesses to obtain more details of the incident. The area was under the control of Syrian Democratic Forces at the time of the incident.

On Tuesday, October 6, 2020, a car bomb of so-far 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](#) affiliated [with Syria Relief and Development \(SRD\)](#) dedicated to transferring persons infected by COVID-19 pandemic 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.



Destruction of an ambulance dedicated to transferring persons infected by COVID-19 pandemic, caused by the explosion of a car bomb of unknown origin in al Bab city, Aleppo – October 6, 2020

On Friday, October 23, 2020, forces which we believe to be Russian and stationed at the Hmeimin Russian Military airbase in the suburbs of Latakia governorate fired three long-range missiles at al Afyoul market in al Dabes village in the south of Jarablous city in the eastern suburbs of Aleppo governorate, where fuel tankers were present, resulting in casualties, and [causing massive fires in the market](#), as well as inflicting severe material damage to its facilities. The village was under the control of the Syrian National Army at the time of the incident.



A video showing the damage caused by a ground attack, which we believe was Russian, on the Afyoul market in al Dabes village, Aleppo - October 23, 2020

On the night of Tuesday, October 27, 2020, Syrian Regime artillery forces - stationed in al Hamediya 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.



Damage caused by a Syrian regime ground attack on al Kabir Mosque in Ariha city, Idlib – October 27, 2020

On the night of Tuesday, October 27, 2020, Syrian Regime artillery forces - stationed in al Hamediya military camp near Ma'aret al Numan city in the southern suburbs of Idlib governorate - fired a shell at Ariha city in the southern suburbs of Idlib governorate. One of the shells landed in the main square inside the Civil Defense Center compound to the north of the city, causing minor material damage to [the center's building](#), in addition to [inflicting various](#) types of material damage to two ambulances belonging to it. The SNHR notes that the Civil Defense Organization is headquartered in the former Garage building. 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.

The [Syrian Civil Defense](#) Organization published a news report on the targeting of the center via its official Arabic-language account on the 'Twitter' social networking platform.



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 October.

IV. The Syrian Regime Bears Primary Responsibility for the Spread of the 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 absolute 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 coronavirus 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, Raqqa), 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 retail outlets or in [commercial markets](#). The regime has also failed to take any measures to limit the holding of [shopping festivals](#), as well as failing to impose any measures compelling retailers and shoppers to follow preventive measures, with [bakeries](#) witnessing overcrowding and citizens queuing in front of them for long hours without any social distancing or other precautionary measures to prevent the spread of the pandemic in light of the worsening bread crisis and the lack of raw materials supporting the bakeries, 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. A low 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), with crowds of shoppers also seen in some markets, in addition to other people attending [sporting events](#), without the controlling authorities imposing any restrictions on any of these groups, with a sense 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) [Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 126 Civilians, Including 18 Children, Eight Women, One Media Worker, and 10 Victims Due to Torture, in October 2020](#)
- (2) [At least 154 Cases of Arbitrary Arrests/ Detention Documented in Syria in October 2020, Including Five Children and Three Women](#)

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.
- Hay'at Tahrir al Sham has violated international humanitarian law, causing the death of many civilians, as well as damage to vital civilian facilities.
- The Armed Opposition/ the Syrian National Army 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 Gener-

al 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 in-

volved 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.

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