



The Most Notable ISIS Violations against Syrian Society, and ISIS' Contribution to Distorting the Popular Uprising Calling for Freedom and Dignity

Nearly Two Years Since the Defeat of ISIS, the Fate of 8,684 Persons Forcibly Disappeared by ISIS Remains Unknown

Thursday 10 February 2022

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

SNHR
SYRIAN NETWORK FOR HUMAN RIGHTS
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Content

I. A Brief Background Summary on ISIS in Syria	3
II. The Report's Methodology	5
III. The Record and Analysis of the Most Notable Violations by ISIS in Syria, According to SNHR's Database	7
IV. The Subject of ISIS' Enforced Disappearances Has Been an Unresolved Issue for Years	17
V. ISIS Detention Centers and Torture Methods	24
VI. ISIS' Summary Execution of Detainees Raises Fears That the Forcibly Disappeared May Have Faced the Same Fate	30
VII. Testimonies of Families of Persons Forcibly Disappeared by ISIS	36
VIII. SDF Has Failed to Reveal the Fate of the Persons Forcibly Disappeared by ISIS.....	40
IX. Legal Conclusions and Recommendations.....	41

I. A Brief Background Summary on ISIS in Syria

ISIS emerged two years after the start of the popular uprising in Syria in March 2011, in which the Syrian people called for freedom and dignity, with the Syrian regime responding to these calls with brutal violations, some of which amounted to crimes against humanity. Extremist organizations benefited from the chaos and the continuation of the conflict in Syria for more than two years, capitalizing on the apparent complete impunity accorded to the Syrian regime, the lack of any prospect of a political solution, and the widespread despair and anger at the regime's use of chemical weapons, barrel bombs, lethal torture and other heinous practices to create a narrative based primarily on falsely positioning the extremists as the only alternative willing to right these injustices and avenge the regime's victims, which ISIS claimed it would achieve by establishing a state supposedly built on Islamic foundations. On April 9, 2013, Abu Bakr al Baghdadi announced, in an audio recording, the establishment of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant¹ (ISIS or, as Syrians abbreviated it, Da'esh). Subsequently, on June 29, 2014, Abu Muhammad al Adnani², the group's official spokesman, announced that it was abandoning the longer name and would henceforth be known only as the Islamic State³.

The organization's roots go back to the Al Qaeda of Jihad in Mesopotamia (Tanzim Qaidat al Jihad fi Bilad al Rafidayn), whose launch was announced by Abu Musab al Zarqawi on October 8, 2004,⁴ as an extension of the central al Qaeda organization, despite disagreement within the Salafi-jihadi movement over al Zarqawi's policy—a dispute that deepened further with the declaration of the Islamic State of Iraq led by Abu Omar al Baghdadi on November 15, 2005.⁶ ISIS' brutal policies in Iraq contributed to the defection of most of its allies and sympathizers, and led to widespread negative perceptions of the group among the people due to its members perpetrating heinous violations against civilians in both Sunni and Shiite areas. Its primary focus was on carrying out bombings in Shiite areas as a result of its sectarian depiction of the regional conflict in general, and in Iraq in particular, as well as its adoption of extremist theocratic doctrines permitting the killing of anyone seen as a violator, even within the jihadist movement itself, in addition to its adoption of methods such as bombings against civilians, along with torture and assassinations.

¹ The ISIS Reader: Milestone Texts of the Islamic State Movement, Haroro J. Ingram, Craig Whiteside, Charlie Winter, Paragraph 6. The Declaration of the Islamic State in Iraq and Al-Sham, <https://oxford.universitypressscholarship.com/view/10.1093/oso/9780197501436.001.0001/oso-9780197501436>

² On August 30, 2016, the ISIS-affiliated Amaq News Agency announced his death while participating in a battle in Aleppo.

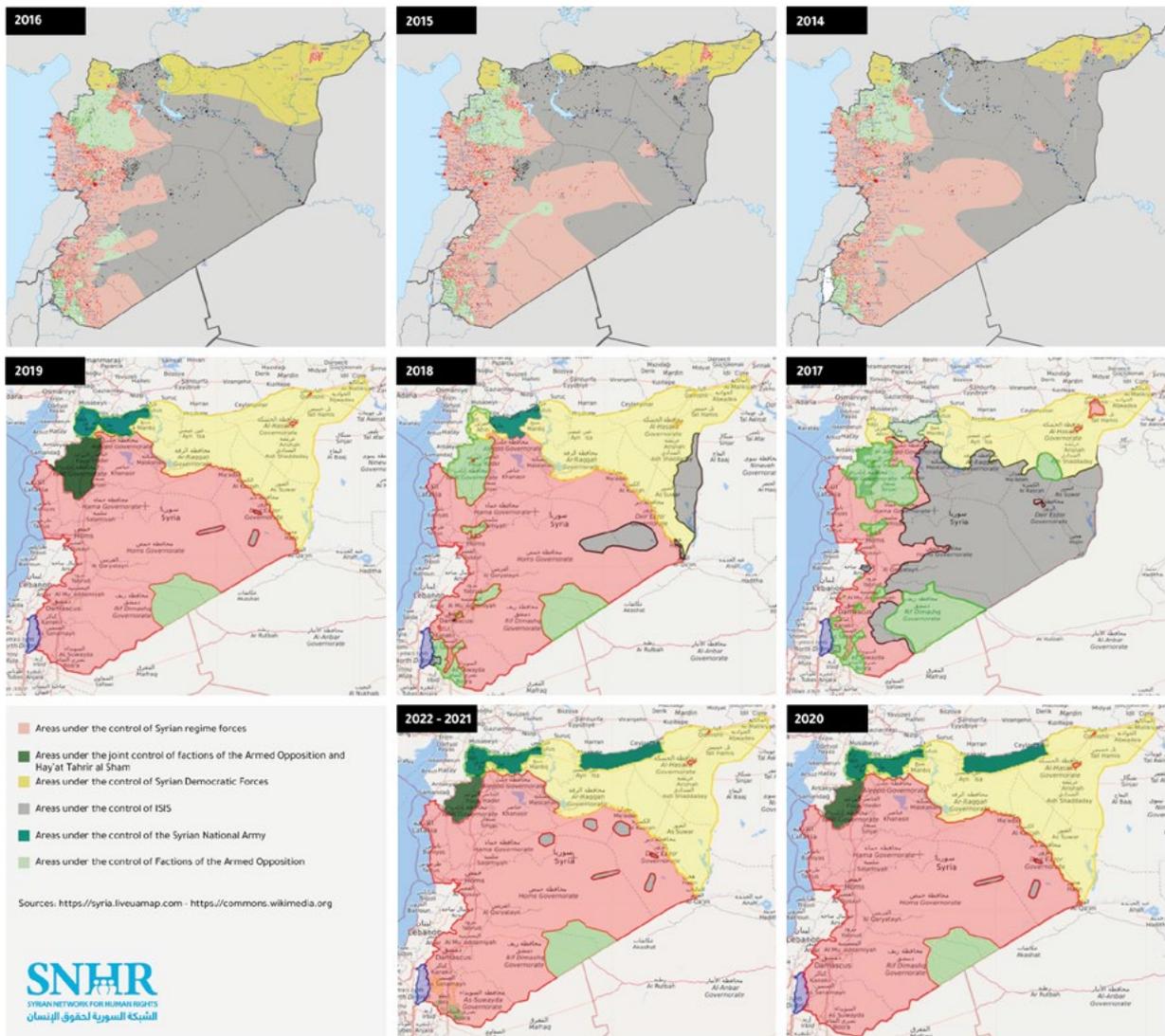
³ Geneva Centre for Security Policy (GCSP), ISIS and the Deceptive Rebooting of Al Qaeda, https://ciaotest.cc.columbia.edu/pbei/gcsp/0032432/f_0032432_26353.pdf

⁴ Brookings Institution, From Paper State to Caliphate: The Ideology of the Islamic State, Cole Bunzel, Part II, Development, <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/the-ideology-of-the-islamic-state.pdf>

⁵ Wilson Center, Timeline: the Rise, Spread, and Fall of the Islamic State, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/timeline-the-rise-spread-and-fall-the-islamic-state>

Based on this brutal and bloody history, the Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) warned since the initial months of ISIS' announcement of its involvement in Syria of the extent of the danger it poses, the need to expose and combat its practices, and the danger of joining the violent extremist organization. We issued an [expanded report](#) on ISIS in February 2014 as a reference source in which we provided details of its roots and the beginning of its emergence in many Syrian areas, cataloguing the most notable practices it had committed in its quest to bring areas under its control. This initial report was followed by [a large number of additional reports](#) in which we documented the numerous violations and practices carried out by ISIS.

The following photo shows the areas controlled by ISIS since 2014 and how they changed over the years until the end of January 2022.



Fadel Abdul Ghany, Director of SNHR, says:



There was a glimmer of hope among the families of persons forcibly disappeared by ISIS that after the defeat of the organization, the fate of their loved ones would be revealed. However, more than two years since the organization lost its last strongholds, their fate remains unknown. Frustration, mixed with intense anger, prevails among the families, and the more time passes, the more complex and difficult the task of revealing the fate of the disappeared becomes.

II. The Report's Methodology

Over the years, SNHR has monitored the violations carried out by ISIS as it became a party to the internal armed conflict, bound by the same requirements to respect international humanitarian law⁶ as the other parties. After ISIS took control of large areas of land, as a controlling force, it was compelled, like all other parties, to respect international human rights law⁷. This report relies mainly on analysis of the SNHR team's continuous daily monitoring and documentation of violations committed by ISIS, including videos published by the organization. Unlike other parties to the conflict, ISIS did not wish to conceal its crimes, but instead flaunted them, with ISIS members carefully recording their atrocities for public show as a means of outraging, terrorizing and intimidating its opponents and society at large (the UN Security Council classified ISIS as a terrorist organization in a number of its resolutions⁸).

SNHR archives all of the incidents that we document, constantly following up on and updating these records as required whenever new information emerges. All of the statistics included in our archive and in this report are registered according to each detainee's and victim's name, date, place and conditions of detention, the party responsible for the arrest and enforced disappearance, the latest observations and documented data, and other details. SNHR's Information Technology department has built a dedicated program within the database for each party to the conflict, providing information on detainees' original governorate, gender, marital and academic status, and age group, with all data being entered automatically.

Using the SNHR database, we can accurately map the death toll, cases of arrests, enforced disappearances, torture and other violations according to the governorate in which each incident took place, and the governorate which the victim comes from. In this report, we distribute the killings and cases of detention/enforced disappearances according to the governorate in which the detention/kidnapping incident

⁶ ICRC. IHL, Rule 139, https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/customary-ihl/eng/docs/v1_rul_rule139

⁷ ICRC. Geneva Convention (IV) relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/applic/ihl/ihl.nsf/Treaty.xsp?documentId=AE2D398352C5B028C12563CD002D6B5C&action=openDocument>

⁸ UN Security Council, Resolution 2178 of 2014, [https://undocs.org/en/S/RES/2178\(2014\)](https://undocs.org/en/S/RES/2178(2014))

UN Security Council, Resolution 2253 of 2015, [https://undocs.org/en/S/RES/2253\(2015\)](https://undocs.org/en/S/RES/2253(2015))

took place because ISIS deliberately targeted specific areas in its attacks. Similarly, we have also documented cases according to the governorate which the detainee/forcibly disappeared person comes from because ISIS targeted people on a regional basis, according to their area of origin, in order to show the extent of the loss and violence suffered by the people of each governorate compared to other governorates. The report's statistics do not include people who went missing during bombardment operations or during their displacement outside ISIS-held areas. We note that most of the violations documented were concentrated in the areas that were subject to ISIS crimes in the governorates of Raqqa, Deir Ez-Zour and Aleppo, given that these were the main ISIS-held areas and were under its control for a longer period compared to areas in other governorates such as Damascus, Daraa, Hama or Homs. As with all other information maintained in the SNHR database, this data is retained securely, with SNHR storing several backup copies in different locations. The methodology adopted by SNHR can be seen at this [link](#).

The report's methodology is also based on an analysis of documents obtained by SNHR, some of which come from open sources while others were provided to us by witnesses, in addition to photographed publications that ISIS circulated to residents of the areas it controlled as well as interviews we conducted with witnesses and survivors of ISIS' detention centers; victims who were subjected to other types of violations by the organization, who come from different governorates and include civilians, activists, or workers in several fields; and family members of victims who are still detained/forcibly disappeared. These interviews were conducted either inside or outside Syria through multiple means, including in-person visits or by phone via various communication programs such as Messenger, Skype, and WhatsApp, taking into account security requirements for our team members, as well as for the individuals who graciously agreed to be interviewed. In this report, we provide 10 accounts as a qualitative sample due to the similarities between some of the accounts and their significant overlap and consistency with each other.

SNHR obtained all the accounts included in the report directly rather than from open sources. In some cases, we have used aliases rather than the interviewees' names, and also concealed or changed some of the information that could help in identifying witnesses, to protect the witnesses' confidentiality and to prevent security services from harassing or persecuting them. The interviewees received no financial compensation nor any promises in exchange for participating in interviews. We explained the purpose of the report beforehand to all the interviewees we spoke with and obtained their consent to use the information they provided to serve the purposes of the report and the documentation processes. All of this is in accordance with our internal protocols, with which we have ensured compliance for years, and which we always strive to develop in order to keep pace with the best levels of psychological care for victims.

This report outlines the most notable violations that we documented between April 2013 and January 2022 in order to show some of the catastrophic repercussions on Syrian society caused by ISIS, such as extrajudicial killings, arbitrary detention and kidnapping, enforced disappearance, torture, discrimination against women, sexual violence, use of chemical weapons, forced displacement, and suppression of basic

freedoms. The report's main objective, however, is to focus on the issue of persons forcibly disappeared at the hands of ISIS given that this is still an ongoing, active issue and that insufficient efforts have been made to address it. The report also discusses subjects related to this issue, such as ISIS detention centers, and the methods of torture they used, which may have caused the death of many detainees.

Given the exceptional difficulties and the magnitude of the violations, the cases mentioned in this report represent the barest minimum of violations which we have been able to document, and we confirm that the real figures are far higher. In addition, the report does not include any analysis of the profound social and psychological ramifications of the violations.

III. Record and Analysis of the Most Notable Violations by ISIS in Syria According to SNHR's Database

In this report, we provide statistics on the most notable violations carried out by ISIS since its inception until January 2022⁹. Although there has been no effective control by ISIS since March 2019, we continue to document many violations for which we believe ISIS cells are responsible. The statistics listed here are only those which our team was able to document as we indicated in our methodology, and therefore reflect only the bare minimum of the group's actual crimes. Nevertheless, they succeed to some degree in showing the vast extent of these violations and the percentage of the violations perpetrated by ISIS compared to those by the other parties to the conflict, such as the Syrian regime, Russia, the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), and all Armed Opposition factions/Syrian National Army.

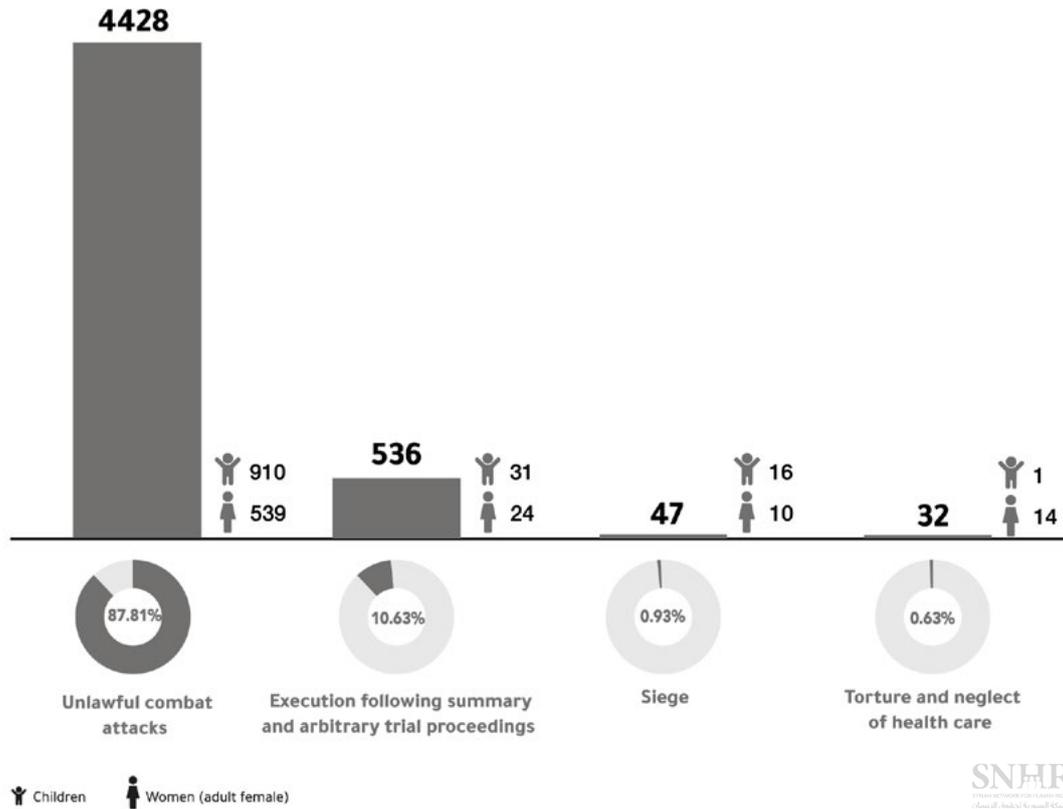
A. Extrajudicial killing

Since the announcement of its establishment on April 9, 2013, ISIS has pursued a policy of killing against the residents of areas controlled by its opponents. These killings occurred mainly during indiscriminate shelling, clashes in populated areas, arbitrary executions following summary trial proceedings, torture in detention centers, siege, and booby-traps in residential areas (we recorded only the incidents that ISIS acknowledged having carried out because identifying the perpetrator of bombings is complicated; for more details, please read our [methodology](#)).

ISIS also used anti-personnel mines, which caused many deaths and injuries, but these are not included in this death toll because, according to our methodology, we were unable to identify the perpetrators in the vast majority of mine-related deaths.

⁹ Unless otherwise indicated, all statistics are included during this period.

SNHR documented the deaths of at least 5,043 individuals, including 958 children and 587 women (adult female), at the hands of ISIS or as a consequence of ISIS' actions, since April 2013 until January 2022. These are distributed by type, as follows:

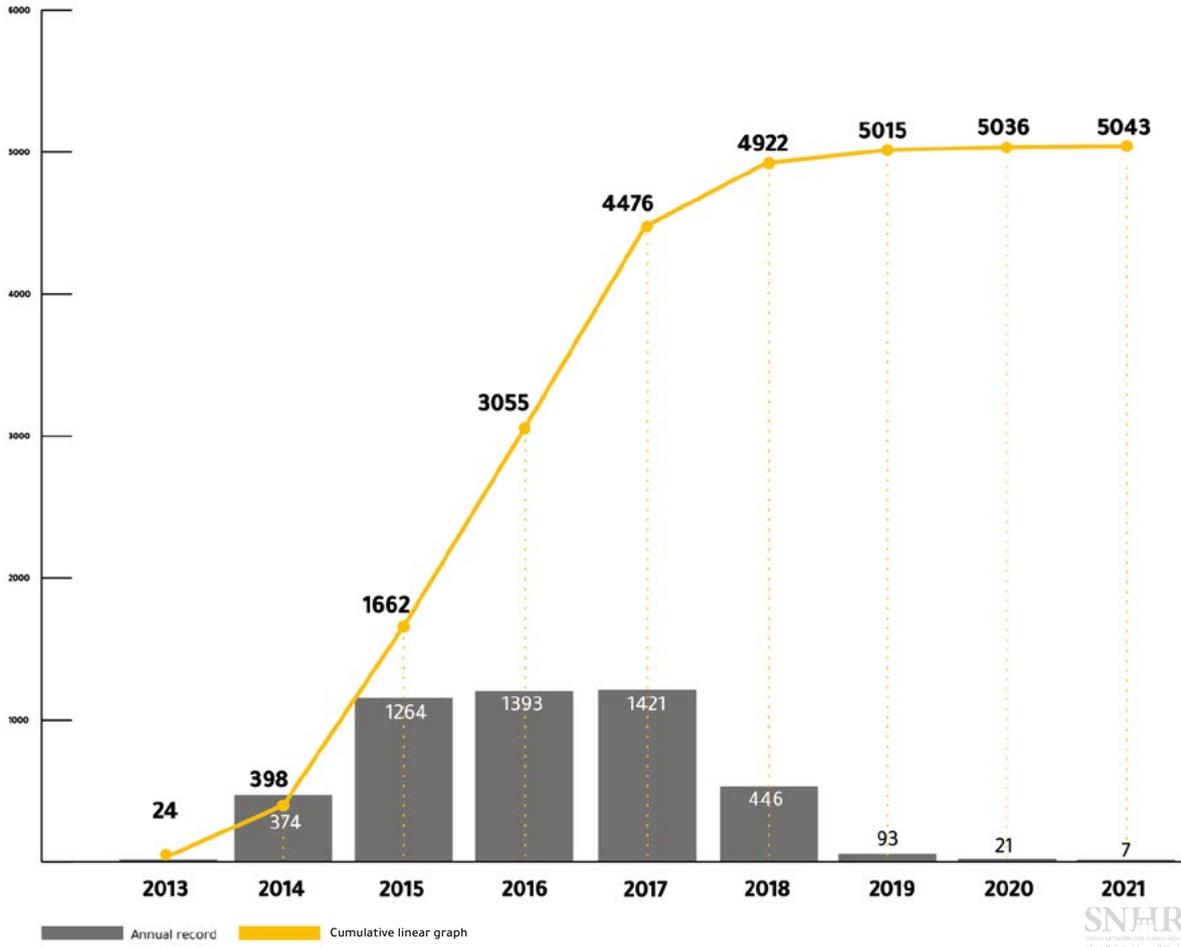


- **Unlawful combat attacks:**¹⁰ 4,428, including 910 children and 539 women.
- **Torture and neglect of health care:** 32, including one child and 14 women.
- **Execution following summary and arbitrary trial proceedings:**¹¹ 536, including 31 children and 24 women.
- **Siege:** 47, including 16 children and 10 women, who died due to lack of food and medicine as a result of the siege imposed by ISIS on their areas.

¹⁰ Unlawful bombings and clashes, and killings that accompanied ISIS military attacks, or the various killings carried out by the organization against the population in areas under its control. This death toll does not include the death toll from mines, or from explosions except those acknowledged by ISIS.

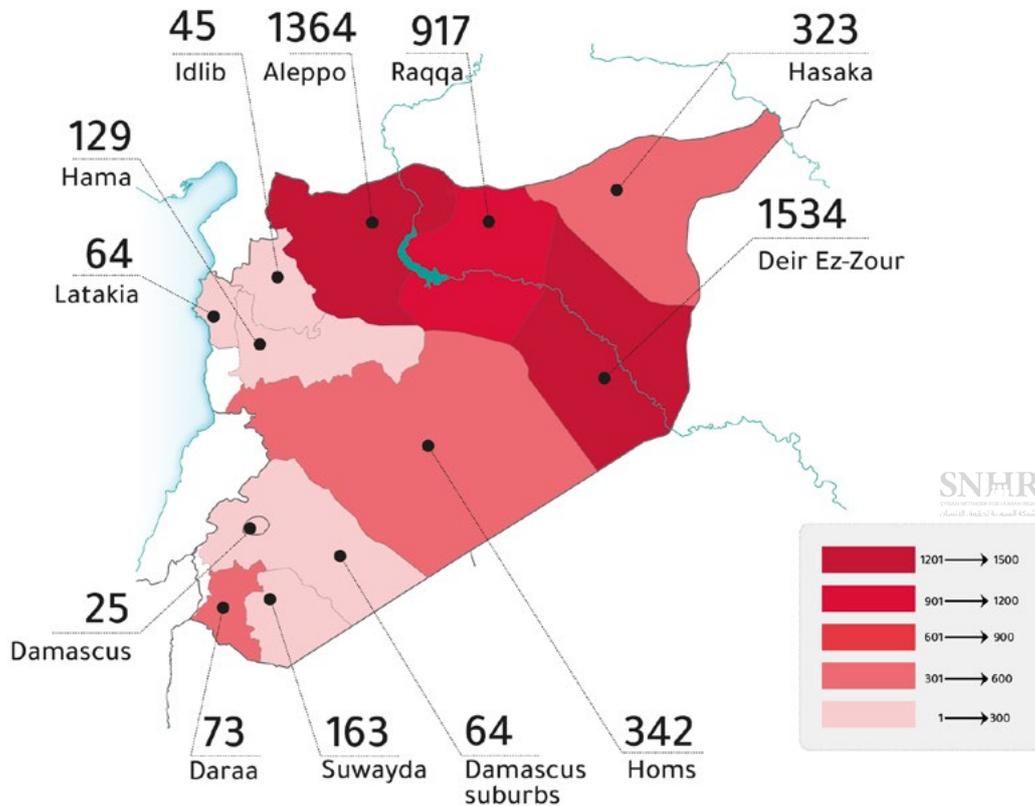
¹¹ Executions in ISIS detention centers, in squares, public places, homes, and during attacks on towns.

Chart showing the distribution of the death toll of victims killed by ISIS by year since the announcement of its establishment in Syria in April 2013, and the cumulative linear graph of that record:



The previous chart shows that 2017 was the worst year to date in terms of the death toll of victims killed by ISIS, followed by 2016 and 2015, then 2018.

Chart showing the distribution of the death toll of victims killed by ISIS by Syrian governorate:



The previous chart shows that Deir Ez-Zour governorate leads the other governorates in terms of the death toll, accounting for approximately 30.43% of the total deaths attributable to ISIS, followed by Aleppo, Raqqa, and Homs.

ISIS has often focused on killing prominent figures and active members of society, with the aim of establishing control by spreading fear as much as possible because killing and disappearing prominent figures will spread alarm exponentially due to these individuals' fame and impact. This explains to some extent the killing of a large number of activists and workers in international humanitarian organizations, foreign journalists, media workers, medical and relief personnel, as well as community¹² workers and educational¹³ personnel. Below, we list the death toll for some of these categories according to our database.

¹² Dignitaries, clergymen, clan elders, and specialists in various scientific disciplines

¹³ Teachers, education workers, and students at all educational levels

- **Deaths among Foreigners:**

Among the victims who were killed by ISIS, we recorded at least 89 citizens of other nationalities than Syrian, including 18 women and nine children. These were distributed according to their nationalities as follows:

Palestine: 67, Iraq: 16, USA: 3, Japan: 2, UK: 1

- **Deaths among Media Workers:**

At least 64 media workers, including one child, two women, and three foreign journalists.

- **Deaths among Relief and Humanitarian Personnel:**

At least 36 relief personnel and humanitarian workers, including 18 women.

- **Deaths among Medical Personnel:**

At least 36 medical personnel, including 18 women.

- **Deaths among Community and Educational Personnel:**

At least 53 community and educational personnel, including nine women.

The most notable victims of extrajudicial killings by ISIS:

The following are executions committed by ISIS against individuals who had a prominent societal impact through relief and media activity, or when ISIS assembled the people of the area and carried out executions in front of them to spread terror among them:

David Cawthorne Haines, a British national, relief activist and logistical official for the ACTED French aid organization, was beheaded by ISIS with a sharp implement. ISIS presented the execution in a video broadcast on Saturday, September 13, 2014; ISIS members had kidnapped David from Atma village in Idlib suburbs in March 2013.

On Thursday, September 27, 2018, ISIS executed three civilians by shooting them dead in al Baghouz village, which is administratively a part of al Boukamal city in the eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate, on charges of apostasy, after subjecting them to a summary trial.

On Wednesday, October 17, 2018, ISIS executed five civilians, by shooting them dead in al Sh'afa city in the eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate, on charges of working for the Kurdish-majority SDF, and for their contact with US-led coalition forces, after subjecting them to a summary trial.

Qasem Ahmad Al Medhi, from Abu Hamda village in the southern suburbs of Hasaka governorate, was executed by ISIS on Friday, June 15, 2018, by being shot dead in the village, on charges of apostasy and theft, after having been subjected to a summary trial.

B. Enforced Disappearance:

Although all ISIS detention centers have been captured and taken control of, mainly by the SDF, the fate of thousands of individuals forcibly disappeared by ISIS remains unknown. According to SNHR's database, at least 8,684 of the individuals forcibly disappeared by ISIS since the announcement of its establishment in early 2013 are still documented as forcibly disappeared as of January 2022, including 319 children and 255 women (adult female).

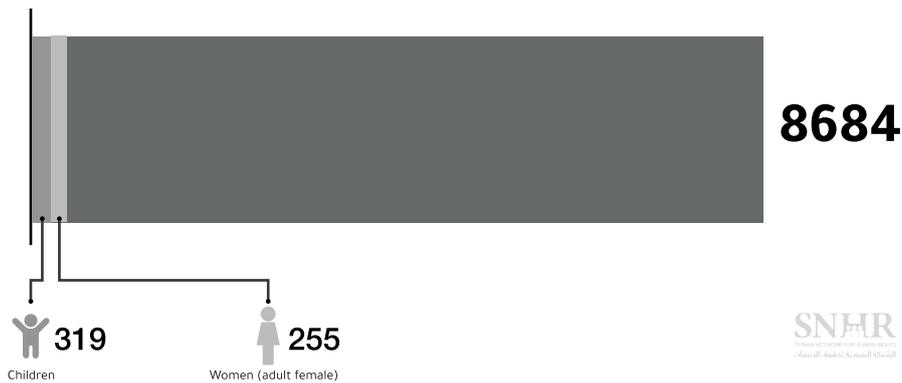
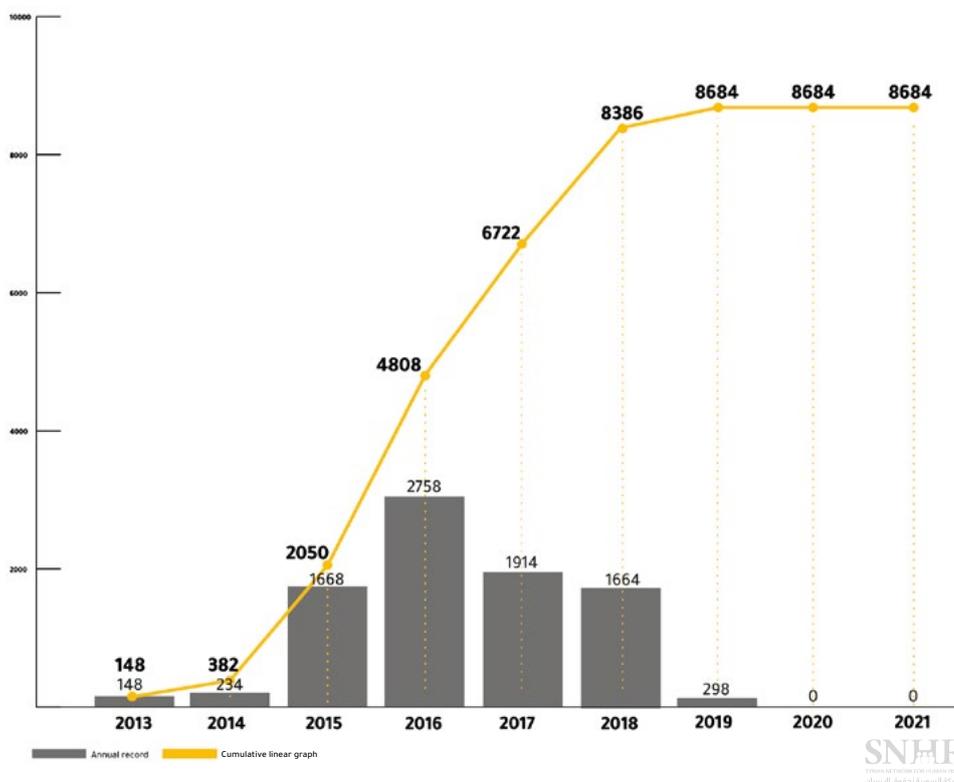
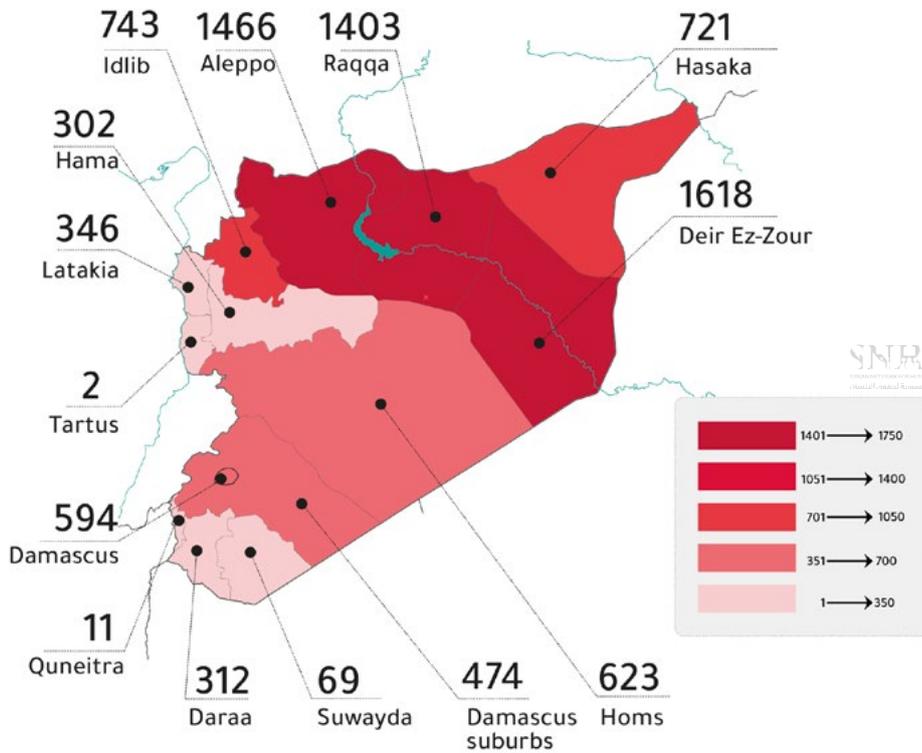


Chart showing the distribution of the record of enforced disappearance by ISIS by year since the announcement of the establishment of ISIS in Syria in April 2013, and the cumulative linear graph of that record:

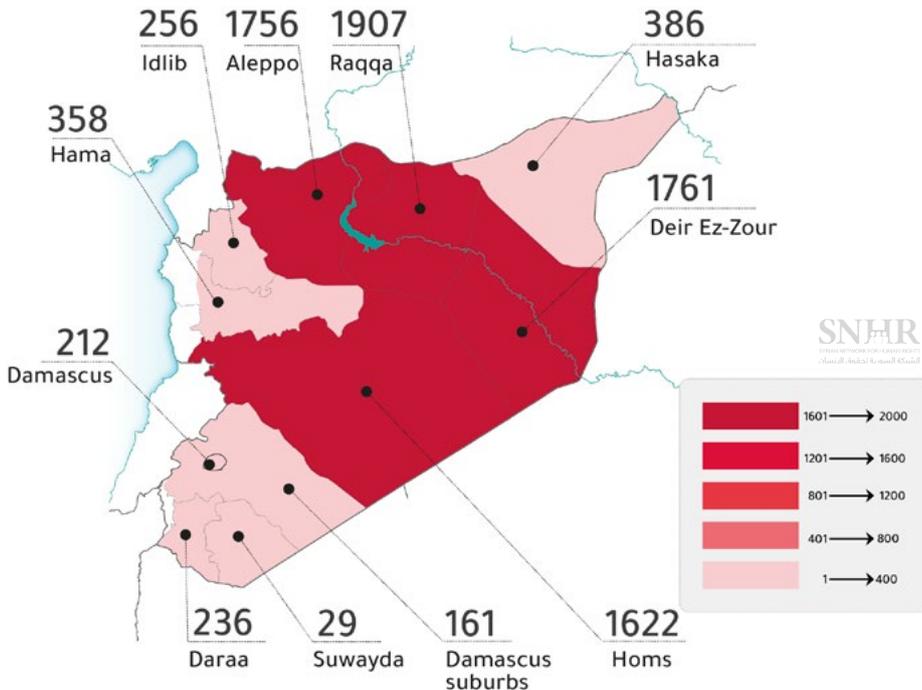


The previous chart shows that 2016 was the worst year in terms of the number of people forcibly disappeared, followed by 2017, 2015, then 2018. SNHR did not document any new cases in 2020 or 2021, with the table showing that the total number remains the same in both years.

Map showing the distribution of the record of the persons forcibly disappeared by ISIS according to the Syrian governorates from which victims come:



Map showing the distribution of the record of the persons forcibly disappeared by ISIS according to the location of the detention/ kidnapping incident:



The previous map shows that Deir Ez-Zour governorate leads other governorates by 18.63% in terms of the number of victims of enforced disappearance among its residents, followed by Aleppo, Raqqqa, Idlib, then Hasaka. Meanwhile, Raqqqa governorate saw the highest number of victims of enforced disappearance in terms of the location of the incident, followed by Deir Ez-Zour, Aleppo, then Homs.

Enforced disappearance is prohibited under customary international humanitarian law according to Rule 98,¹⁴ which prohibits enforced disappearance in international and non-international armed conflicts. Rule 117 of the same law states: “Each party to the conflict must take all feasible measures to account for persons reported missing as a result of armed conflict and must provide their family members with any information it has on their fate.”

International criminal law also prohibits enforced disappearance. According to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, the systematic practice of enforced disappearances is, by its very nature, a crime against humanity,¹⁶ applies to the actions of ISIS in terms of the widespread and systematic manner of cases, as indicated by our data. International humanitarian law prohibits taking hostages. Taking hostages,¹⁷ constitutes a war crime.¹⁸

As with targeted executions, SNHR noted that ISIS used the same policy in targeting activists and active members of civil society for persecution, arbitrary detention and enforced disappearance. Indeed, this practice was more widespread, according to what the data shows. We provide a record of victims of enforced disappearance for some of these categories, according to our database.

- **The Disappeared among Foreigners:**

ISIS kidnapped at least 84 individuals, including three women, distributed according to their nationality among:

Palestine: 37, Iraq: 29, Turkey: 7, Lebanon: 5, Mauritania: 2, Italy: 1, New Zealand: 1, USA: 1, UK: 1.

- **The Disappeared among Media Workers**

ISIS kidnapped 48 journalists and media activists, including one woman and eight foreign journalists.

- **The Disappeared among Relief and Humanitarian Personnel:**

ISIS kidnapped 46 relief and humanitarian personnel, including one woman.

- **The Disappeared among Medical Personnel:**

ISIS kidnapped five medical personnel, including two women.

- **The Disappeared among Community and Educational Personnel:**

ISIS kidnapped at least 2,142 individuals, including 26 women from educational and community personnel.

¹⁴ ICRC, IHL, Rule 98, https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/customary-ihl/eng/docs/v1_rul_rule98

¹⁵ ICRC, IHL, Rule 117, https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/customary-ihl/eng/docs/v1_rul_rule117

¹⁶ International Criminal Court, Rome Statute, Article 7, paragraph 1-I, <https://www.icc-cpi.int/nr/rdonlyres/add16852-ae9-4757-abe7-9cdc7cf02886/283503/romestatuteng1.pdf>

¹⁷ ICRC, IHL, Rule 34, https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/customary-ihl/eng/docs/v1_rul_rule34

ICRC, Convention (IV) relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, Common Article 3, <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/applic/ihl/ihl.nsf/Treaty.xsp?documentId=AE2D398352C5B028C12563CD002D6B5C&action=openDocument>

ICRC, Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts (Protocol I), Article 75(2-c), <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/applic/ihl/ihl.nsf/Treaty.xsp?documentId=D9E6B6264D7723C3C12563CD002D6CE4&action=openDocument>

ICRC, Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and relating to the Protection of Victims of Non-International Armed Conflicts (Protocol II), Article 4(2-c), <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/applic/ihl/ihl.nsf/Treaty.xsp?documentId=AA0C5BCB5C4A85C12563CD002D6D09&action=openDocument>

¹⁸ International Criminal Court, Rome Statute, Article 8, <https://www.icc-cpi.int/nr/rdonlyres/add16852-ae9-4757-abe7-9cdc7cf02886/283503/romestatuteng1.pdf>

C. Chemical Weapon Attacks:

According to SNHR's database, ISIS carried out at least five chemical weapon attacks, all in Aleppo governorate, the first of which was on Marea city in the suburbs of Aleppo on August 21, 2015. These attacks injured 132 individuals. The Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Syria (COI) [identified](#) ISIS' responsibility for one attack using chemical weapons, while the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism identified ISIS' responsibility for [two attacks](#). We detailed the five attacks recorded in our database in [previous reports](#).

D. Forced Displacement:

ISIS attacks on and taking control over densely populated areas forced the civilian population to flee and migrate towards the borders or to neighboring cities and villages for fear of reprisals by the organization every time it seized control of a new area, including fear of killing, arrest and torture. Many of these cities and villages were thus emptied of their residents and turned into a permanent line of engagement during the period of ISIS' control over them.

The following are notable examples of incidents of forced displacement perpetrated or caused by ISIS.

The displacement of at least 30,000 people from al Sh-heil city in the eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour:

In mid-2014, al Sh-heil city was an important stronghold for Jabhat al Nusra members (currently Hayat Tahrir al Sham), with a large number of its residents joining Jabhat al Nusra members to participate in their confrontation with ISIS. At the beginning of July 2014, ISIS besieged the city and imposed conditions on the people and members of Jabhat al Nusra, who announced their surrender. The conditions included that all types of weapons in the city must be surrendered and that all residents must leave the city for at least ten days and obtain ISIS permission to return.

On Friday, July 3, 2014, the implementation of the conditions began. [At least 30,000 people were displaced](#) outside the city, with the largest part of this group being displaced to the Badiya of the eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour, while the remainder were displaced to villages west of the Euphrates

Photos of some residents of al Sh-heil city during their displacement from the city



River. ISIS did not secure any alternative housing, with thousands forced to live in the open without any shelter in extremely difficult humanitarian conditions, such as facing searingly hot summer temperatures and a lack of food, water and health services. ISIS did not allow the people to return until after 21 days had passed, and we documented that many families were harassed by ISIS personnel at military posts. We also documented many arrests carried out by ISIS against the people after their return to the city.

The displacement of at least 33,000 people from Abu Hamam city in the eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour:

On Tuesday, August 5, 2014, ISIS announced that Abu Hamam city was a military zone and warned civilians to evacuate, then began shelling the city using artillery and mortar shells. This was followed by raids and storming of the city. On August 10, 2014, ISIS took control of the city and the adjacent villages of Ghranij and al Keshkiya, which are administratively a part of Abu Hamam city. The Armed Opposition factions, which had controlled the city, withdrew and [thousands of residents were displaced](#) to the villages of al Boukamal suburbs (al Sousa, al Sh'afa, al Jalaa, al Bahra, al Abbas, al Ramadi, and Hasrat), while other people were displaced towards al Mayadeen and al Ashara cities, for fear of ISIS' revenge.

On Tuesday, November 25, 2014, ISIS imposed several conditions on the residents of Abu Hamam city and the neighboring villages in exchange for allowing them to return to their villages, the most important of which was the surrender of weapons, the holding accountable all those who took up arms against the organization, and the submission of all those aged over 16 who wished to return to attend Sharia courses organized by ISIS.



Photo showing one of the cars transporting displaced people from Abu Hamam city after ISIS stormed the city.

The displacement of at least 2,100 families in the eastern suburbs of Aleppo:

In early July 2014, ISIS mobilized large forces in the Jarablos area in the eastern suburbs of Aleppo and in al Shoyoukh town, which is administratively a part of Jarablos, with the aim of attacking the villages located in the eastern suburbs of Aleppo and those close to Ein Arab city (Kobani), one of the largest cities in which Kurdish nationalism is concentrated. Ein Arab city was under the control of the PKK and the YPG Kurdish Protection Forces affiliated with the Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD). Clashes continued between ISIS and the Kurdish forces for several days, after which the Kurdish forces withdrew from the area and ISIS was then able to control the following villages: Kharb Atou, Zour Maghar, al Zeyara, al Bayadiya, Jebna, Jaroukha, Jarekh Ali, Binder, Ta'lak, Kandari, Abdkooy, al Tabbash, al Mlouh, and Sousak. These military operations, and the residents' fear of reprisals, caused [the displacement of at least 2,100 families](#), most of whom fled to the Turkish border or to Ein Arab city.

IV. The Subject of ISIS' Enforced Disappearances Has Been an Unresolved Issue for Years

All violations committed by ISIS and other perpetrators of violations have a long-lasting impact. The killing of a family member, sexual violence or forced displacement are all violations whose impact and effects cannot be easily erased, and which necessitate work to document all the crimes and to help all surviving victims. In most of these cases, we are as certain as possible that these violations have occurred, and the fate of these victims, including those displaced or subjected to torture, has been revealed. What distinguishes the issue of the persons forcibly disappeared by ISIS, however, is that their fate has not been revealed, despite all the former ISIS detention centers being liberated and no longer under the organization's control. This is primarily because no real efforts have been made by the SDF which now controls these facilities as Kurdish forces have failed to demonstrate interest or to pursue investigations into this sensitive issue. Despite this, we at SNHR believe that steps can be taken towards revealing these victims' fate, and we hope that the information provided in this report will contribute to achieving this vital task for society.

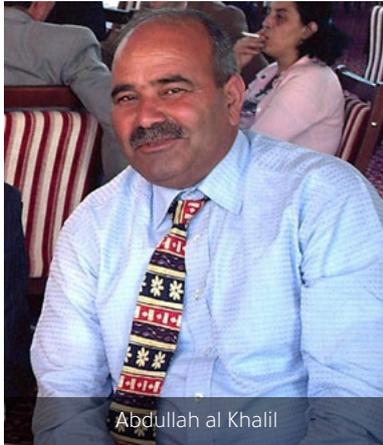
ISIS has practiced enforced disappearances on a widespread basis against all categories in society and in every area it controlled or was present in, using this as a weapon of terror and intimidation and as a strategy to deter and crush its opponents, including activists, dignitaries and influential figures, as well as during its attacks on areas outside its control. ISIS also specifically targeted foreigners with the aim of obtaining huge sums of money in ransoms, as well as journalists, aid workers, media activists, humanitarian organizations' personnel, members of ethnic and religious minorities, and individuals accused of violating the extremist doctrines and edicts imposed by the group, whether religious or otherwise. Those forcibly disappeared also included fighters from groups opposing ISIS.

We have documented six main variants of the enforced disappearance strategy used by ISIS, which have been practiced in a widespread manner:

One: Targeting activists and prominent figures in civil society

ISIS targeted activists in various fields, mainly media workers who tried to convey the conditions of life for populations under ISIS rule, as well as those criticizing the organization, by arresting or kidnapping them. ISIS also targeted activists or workers in civil and humanitarian institutions, even those who had not criticized the organization or challenged its existence, who posed no threat to it. From ISIS' perspective, however, these individuals held heretical ideas and views that did not correspond to the beliefs it imposed. The group also targeted dignitaries, clergymen, tribal sheikhs, and locally influential figures, and sought to rid society of highly educated people, such as engineers, lawyers, teachers, doctors, and even university and school students, excluding the enlightened from the population. The organization resorted to kidnapping those it targeted from homes, workplaces and markets or at its checkpoints under various pretexts. SNHR also documented mass kidnappings targeting members of the aforementioned groups while they were traveling between the areas under ISIS control and those under the control of other parties to the conflict. We noted previously that ISIS resorted to these practices since the first days of taking control of a new area. SNHR's database shows that the highest rate of arrests or kidnappings targeting these individuals was seen in 2014 and 2015, with 2,241 of the people arrested or kidnapped in this period, including 89 women, still being forcibly disappeared.

The following are prominent examples of ISIS' targeting of activists and prominent civil society figures:



Abdullah al Khalil, a lawyer from Raqqa city born in 1961, was kidnapped by gunmen affiliated with ISIS on Saturday, May 18, 2013, in Raqqa city. His fate remains unknown.



Farhad Hamo, born in 1989, is a Rudaw Media Network correspondent from Hasaka city. He was kidnapped by gunmen affiliated with ISIS on Monday, December 15, 2014, while travelling along the road linking Qameshli city and al Ya'rubiya town in the suburbs of Hasaka governorate. His fate remains unknown.



Othman Yousef Ismail, born in 1967, a doctor from Ein Arab city (Kobani) in the eastern suburbs of Aleppo governorate, was detained by ISIS gunmen on Saturday, February 7, 2015, in Ein Arab city. His fate remains unknown.



Abdul Qader Rateb Haddad, a journalist and photographer from Damascus city, and a former Syrian regime conscript who had defected from regime forces, was born in 1992. He was detained by gunmen affiliated with ISIS on Wednesday, June 26, 2013, as he was passing through an ISIS checkpoint in the Atma area in the suburbs of Idlib governorate while he was on his way back from Turkey. His fate remains unknown.

Two: Mass kidnappings and hostage-taking

ISIS launched attacks on villages and towns under the control of other parties, either with the aim of controlling them or taking revenge on them. These attacks were accompanied by mass kidnappings of civilians, mainly women and children. Some of the attacks were of a sectarian or ethnic nature, especially when targeting villages and towns with a sizeable ethnic and sectarian minority population, such as villages inhabited by a Kurdish, Yazidi, Alawi, Ismaili and Christian majority. These operations also targeted specific clans that had a rivalry with the organization. Detainees were taken to ISIS detention centers in its areas of control, or to the military headquarters and homes of its leaders. These attacks caused a mass flight and displacement of residents in the areas adjacent to or close to ISIS control.

We have documented many operations in which ISIS resorted to detaining and kidnapping civilians to use them as hostages and human shields, especially when the group faced defeat or was forced to withdraw from areas it controlled. We also recorded many attacks in which ISIS targeted vehicles carrying civilians while they were traveling between areas or passing through areas close to those it controlled, in which the civilians were kidnapped en masse. While a few of them were released after paying hefty ransoms, the vast majority of those kidnapped in these cases went on to be classified as forcibly disappeared. The SNHR has documented at least 2,467 individuals, including 123 children and 61 women, who were kidnapped in groups by ISIS and who are still forcibly disappeared. The most violent mass kidnappings took place in 2014 and 2016 in the governorates of Homs, Hama and Hasaka.

The following are prominent examples of ISIS' use of mass kidnapping and hostage-taking:

On Saturday, February 22, 2014, ISIS personnel set up an ambush near Aliya village, west of Tal Tamer town in the northern suburbs of Hasaka governorate, in which they seized 12 vehicles carrying civilians who were heading from Ein al Arab city in the northern suburbs of Aleppo governorate to al Qameshli city in the northern suburbs of Hasaka. SNHR documented the arrest of 74 civilians, including workers who were heading to the Semalka crossing in the suburbs of Hasaka governorate on the Syrian-Iraqi border, all of whom were taken to an undisclosed location.

On Wednesday, May 7, 2014, ISIS personnel kidnapped 16 teachers near Manbej city in the northern suburbs of Aleppo governorate, while they were on their way from Aleppo city to Ein al Arab city after receiving their salaries in Aleppo city, and took them to an undisclosed location.

On Thursday, May 29, 2014, ISIS personnel arrested 23 children as they were passing through one of ISIS' checkpoints in Manbej city in the northern suburbs of Aleppo governorate while they were on their way to Ein al Arab city from Aleppo City, where they had finished taking their basic education exams in Aleppo city. The children were taken to an undisclosed location.

On Tuesday, March 31, 2015, ISIS-affiliated personnel stormed al Mab'ouja village, which is administratively a part of al Salamiya city in the eastern suburbs of Hama governorate, from three directions simultaneously. The storming operation was accompanied by the kidnapping of at least 40 civilians, including women, children and elderly people. Of the civilians kidnapped, ISIS executed six and released 24 more, while the fate of the remaining 10 civilians, including six women and three children, remains unknown.

On Saturday, February 20, 2016, ISIS personnel launched a campaign of raids and arrests in al Tabaqa city and the villages of al Mshairfa and Dabsi Faraj in the western suburbs of Raqqa governorate. SNHR documented the arrest of 27 civilians from al Naser tribe, who were taken to an undisclosed location.

On Saturday, November 24, 2018, ISIS personnel kidnapped nine civilians from Ghranij town, which is administratively a part of al Sh'aitat area in the eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate, after storming the town, taking their captives to Hajin city in the eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate before withdrawing from the town.

Three: Detentions targeting violators of religious and administrative rulings imposed by ISIS

ISIS imposed hundreds of rulings and edicts on residents of the areas it controlled that significantly restricted and limited the basic freedoms of the population, including bans on mixed-gender events and on wearing certain clothes, as well as demanding that shops close during prayer times, preventing the use of the Internet except through networks monitored by ISIS, prohibiting smoking, and prohibiting all travel outside ISIS-controlled areas except after obtaining a permit of approval. ISIS detained anyone violating its draconian rules, imposing fines and other penalties, such as flogging and imprisonment in cages placed in public squares as a form of defamation, to spread fear and warn society of the consequences of even minor infringements of its rules. SNHR has documented that at least 1,967 of the individuals arrested by ISIS over violations of its teachings and rulings in the areas it controlled remain forcibly disappeared up till the present moment, with those still missing including 58 children and 11 women.

The following are prominent examples of ISIS' use of religious and administrative rulings:

On Tuesday, November 11, 2014, ISIS-affiliated elements detained eight individuals from al Sekhna village in the eastern suburbs of Homs governorate under the pretext that they had sent livestock and food-stuffs towards areas controlled by Syrian regime forces for the purpose of trade without obtaining ISIS approval. The individuals were taken to an undisclosed location.

On Sunday, February 8, 2015, ISIS affiliated elements detained a woman from Raqqa city, together with four of her brothers, with an ISIS patrol, near the city, detaining them on the pretext of traveling without obtaining an approval permit, and took them to an undisclosed location.

On Tuesday, January 5, 2016, ISIS affiliated elements raided a house in al Boukamal city in the eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate. SNHR documented the detention of 16 civilians from one family, on charges of smoking hookah, and took them to an undisclosed location. In February 2016, we recorded the release of five of them, nearly a month after their detention, while the remaining 11 are still unaccounted for.

Four: Fighters

In its battles or attacks on opponents' posts during conflicts with opposition factions or SDF and Syrian regime forces, ISIS arrested a large number of fighters, estimated at hundreds, whose names have not been disclosed and who have not been subjected to any trials. These fighters were dealt with in a brutal and vengeful manner, with a few of them shown in the materials published by ISIS being subjected to grisly 'punishments,' including murder by beheading or shooting. The vast majority of these detainees have been classified as forcibly disappeared and missing persons, with SNHR receiving many reports from the families of the missing fighters. We also documented ISIS' pursuit and kidnapping of fighters outside the scope of battles and clashes, through security operations aimed at kidnapping and forcibly disappearing these individuals. While we believe that the vast majority of these detainees were murdered, we have no evidence of this, so we continue to classify them as being among the ranks of the forcibly disappeared.

The following are prominent examples of ISIS' targeting of fighters:

On Sunday, August 24, 2014, ISIS-affiliated militants captured at least 217 fighters from the Syrian regime's forces, following an [ISIS attack](#) to seize control of al Tabaqa military airbase in al Tabaqa city in the western suburbs of Raqqa, taking the prisoners collectively to an undisclosed location. On Thursday, August 28, 2014, ISIS published a video filmed in the vicinity of al Tabaqa military airbase, showing the gruesome execution of dozens of these prisoners by releasing them, then shooting them as they fled.



On Tuesday, October 4, 2016, ISIS elements captured nine members of an Armed Opposition faction during an attack launched by ISIS on Tleil al Hussen village in the northern suburbs of Aleppo governorate, taking them to an undisclosed location.

Badr Muhammad al Kharrat, Abdul Rahim al Hasan and Qutaiba Rahmoun, members of an Armed Opposition faction from Kansafra village (Qutaiba from Mar'yan village) in the suburbs of Idlib governorate, were detained by gunmen affiliated with ISIS on Thursday, June 6, 2018, while they were travelling along the road between al Mastouma village and Ariha city in the suburbs of Idlib governorate, and were taken to an undisclosed location.

On Tuesday, November 20, 2018, ISIS elements captured seven SDF fighters during an attack launched by ISIS to seize control of the outskirts of Hajin city in the eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour, taking them to an undisclosed location.

Five: Foreigners

Except for the foreigners who joined the organization's ranks, ISIS pursued non-Syrian nationals in order to take them hostage and blackmail their countries' governments to obtain huge financial ransoms. ISIS also killed some of these hostages in shockingly brutal ways in order to draw media attention and make its supporters feel powerful. SNHR documented ISIS kidnapping at least 84 foreigners, including three women, who are still classified as forcibly disappeared.

The following are prominent examples of ISIS' targeting of foreigners:

Father Paolo Dall'Oglio, a Jesuit Italian priest, born in 1954, was kidnapped by gunmen affiliated with ISIS on Monday, July 29, 2013, in Raqqa city. His fate remains unknown.



Father Paolo Dall'Oglio

Louisa Akavi, a New Zealand nurse working for the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), was kidnapped by gunmen affiliated with ISIS, along with two Syrian drivers, Alaa Rajab and Nabil Baqdounes, on Sunday, October 13, 2013, while they were part of a Red Cross convoy heading to deliver supplies to medical facilities in Idlib governorate. The three individuals were taken to an undisclosed location.



Louisa Akavi

Kayla Mueller, an American human rights activist and relief worker, born in 1988, was kidnapped by gunmen affiliated with ISIS in August 2013 in Aleppo city, with ISIS blackmailing her family to obtain a ransom in exchange for her release. In February 2015, the organization announced that she had been killed in an airstrike on her place of detention. SNHR was unable to verify her fate.



Kayla Mueller

Journalist Samir Kassab, a Lebanese television cameraman and a member of a Sky News team, was kidnapped by gunmen affiliated with ISIS on Tuesday, October 15, 2013, while he was covering field events in Aleppo governorate, and was taken to an undisclosed location.



Samir Kassab

Six: Random detentions/ kidnappings

We documented many incidents of arbitrary detention carried out by ISIS in areas under its control. While we were unable to determine the objectives of these operations, we believe that they were part of a general strategy aimed at spreading fear to terrorize and subjugate society, or expressing the animosity of the organization's local elements/leaders towards the kidnap victims. In this category, SNHR documented at least 1,632 individuals, including 29 children and 13 women, who are still forcibly disappeared.

The following are prominent examples of arbitrary detentions by ISIS:

On Saturday, August 18, 2015, ISIS personnel launched a campaign of raids and arrests in al Sheikh Jarrah village, which is administratively a part of al Bab city in the eastern suburbs of Aleppo governorate. SNHR documented the arrest of 14 civilians in these raids, all of whom were taken to an undisclosed location.

On Monday, November 23, 2015, ISIS personnel launched a campaign of raids and arrests in al Boukamal city in the eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate. SNHR documented the arrest of 18 civilians in these raids, who were taken to an undisclosed location.

V. ISIS Detention Centers and Torture Methods

ISIS established detention centers in the areas it controlled, some of which were secret 'black sites' whose whereabouts were unknown to the general public, including local residents. We previously published an [extensive report](#) on the most prominent 19 ISIS detention centers, their locations and size, with an approximate estimate of the number of detainees held in them. However, we believe that there are several more detention centers whose whereabouts and details we have so far been unable to determine, and that knowledge of these remaining detention centers is pivotal in the context of revealing the fate of the individuals still missing and forcibly disappeared at the hands of ISIS. The following are the most prominent detention centers that we were able to identify, together with a map showing the location of each:

Raqqa governorate - Eight detention centers:

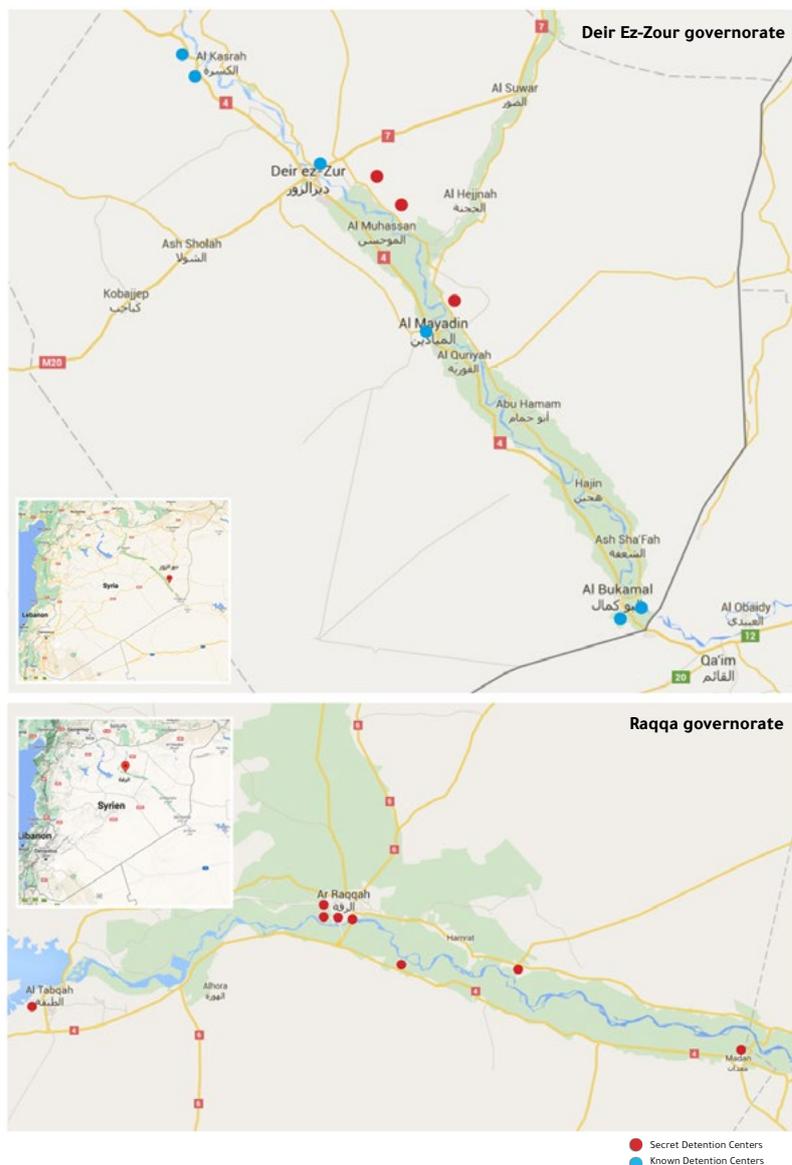
Governor's Palace, Ekershi Camp, Municipal Stadium (al Mal'ab al Baladi), Mu'aweya School Prison, al Hesba Prison in Ma'dan, Women's Prison, al Hesba Prison in al Karama town, Islamic Police Prison in al Tabqa City.

Deir Ez-Zour governorate - Six detention centers:

Al Shamitiya, al Tebni, al Husseinia, al Bseira, al Mayadeen, al Boukamal.

Aleppo governorate - Four detention centers:

Jarablos, Manbej, Deir Hafer, al Bab, in addition to other separate detention centers.



The information that SNHR obtained from local residents confirmed that these detention centers were empty when ISIS withdrew from each of the areas as it evacuated the detention centers upon withdrawing. Therefore, the issue of determining and locating the whereabouts of the individuals still missing and forcibly disappeared by ISIS years since its defeat is a fundamental question that must be seriously investigated.

Those detained and forcibly disappeared by ISIS were subjected to extremely cruel torture methods which posed a grave threat to their lives throughout the period of their detention/disappearance. The following are the most prominent methods of torture used by ISIS that we were able to identify, mainly by talking with dozens of survivors of ISIS detention centers. In a [previous report](#), we documented some of the main methods of torture used in the Syrian regime's detention centers, numbering 72 in total, all of which were also practiced to a large extent by ISIS. In general, each detainee is subjected to more than one method of torture within a single torture session. In this report, we will only list the 17 most prominent methods of torture characteristically used by ISIS, meaning those methods which its members practiced repeatedly and extensively. We have included explanatory drawings showing some of these methods, which are provided to clarify their mechanisms, due to the difficulty of imagining them through verbal descriptions alone. We have sorted the 17 methods of torture into two categories: 15 physical methods and 2 psychological methods.

A. Physical torture methods

1- Amputation of a body part:

The organization's members performed amputation of detainees' organs during interrogations. According to the accounts SNHR obtained from survivors of detention centers, we recorded cases in which parts of detainees' fingers were amputated or an ear was severed. ISIS used amputation of organs as a punishment imposed on those accused of certain crimes or violations, such as cutting off the hand of a thief.



Photo showing ISIS members amputating part of a detainee's hand

2- Flogging:

ISIS used flogging as a punishment against those who violated its doctrines, carrying this out both in detention centers and in public squares in full view and hearing of the people. The organization's members also practiced flogging as a method of torture against detainees, with the torturer first stripping the detainee of their clothes, then forcing them into different positions, such as tying them to a pole or forcing them to lie flat on their stomach or back and then flogging their exposed body parts. According to accounts obtained by SNHR, ISIS members used whips, clubs or electric cables to flog detainees.

3- Beating:

The detainee is restrained and subjected to continuous and severe beatings on all parts of his/her body. Beating is practiced on a continuous basis as part of all the torture methods and in all the positions used. It is inflicted with clubs, rods, electrical cables or plastic tubing.

4- Biting/the Biter:

The torture method known as 'biting' was used mainly against female detainees by al Hesba women affiliated with ISIS, with members of al Hesba force biting some women's faces or arms with their teeth or using a torture implement that survivors of detention called the 'Biter,' which is similar to a pair of pliers, except that its metal teeth are wider and thicker than the jaws of a pair of pliers.

ISIS also used the Biter during the interrogation of detainees, which is a sharp, scissors-like device with serrated heads, with the organ or exposed body part being placed between its jaws before closing them on it.

5- Electrocutation:

The ISIS members responsible for torturing the detainee use electrodes connected to the victim's hands or feet, through which they pass an electrical current or use an electric baton like a cattle prod that is directed at various parts of the victim's body.

6- Burning:

ISIS deliberately tortured detainees by exposing their bodies to burning, using two methods in particular in implementing this:

- Heating a metal object and attaching it to the back, chest, or face of the detainee.
- Pouring or spraying water heated until it is close to a boiling point on different parts of the detainee's body, leading to victims suffering burns of different degrees depending on the amount and temperature of the water used.

7- Gas asphyxiation:

Exposing the detainee/abductee to gas asphyxiation by opening a gas cylinder or tear gas grenade during interrogation, or making the smoke from a fire enter his/her cell.



8- Waterboarding:

The detainee is tied to a stretcher or a seat, with a piece of wet fabric then placed over the detainee's nose and mouth, making it hard for him/her to breathe, after which cold water is poured onto his/her face. This technique was usually used against foreign detainees in simulation of CIA interrogation methods used against suspects after the attacks of September 11, 2001.



9- Sleep deprivation:

Sleep deprivation is practiced against detainees as a method of torture, and during long interrogation sessions, with the aim of forcing them to provide information. According to accounts obtained by SNHR, whenever a detainee fell asleep during such sessions, he would be beaten by the ISIS member responsible for interrogating and torturing him. This also resulted in additional psychological intimidation that affected detainees in general throughout their detention, leaving them traumatized and suffering from insomnia.

10- Starvation:

The detainee is deprived of part or all of his/her usual portion of food, and also prevented from drinking water. According to survivors, ISIS practiced this method as a punishment against detainees, or to force them to provide certain information.

11- Forced labor:

ISIS members forced detainees to carry out excavation and forced labor. According to the accounts SNHR obtained, the detainees were forced to dig tunnels and trenches and to reinforce military posts.

Four particular methods of torture used by ISIS were carried out with the intention of killing the victims and were used against the perpetrators of actions which ISIS defined as crimes or violations. These methods are:

12- Dragging:

The penalty of dragging to death would be carried out by tying a detainee's feet or hands together and attaching the detainee, bound in this way, behind a vehicle, which would then drag him or her along a road until this resulted in their death. ISIS members also used this as a non-lethal torture method during interrogations and when transferring detainees between detention centers.

13- Stoning:

The penalty of stoning to death, which was imposed in most cases against those accused of adultery, was carried out by tying up the detainee, placing him or her in the middle of a public square, in full view of the people, and then throwing stones at him or her until s/he dies. ISIS elements often forced the local population to participate in the stoning.

14- Throwing from a high place:

The penalty of throwing from a high place with the aim of ending the victim's life was imposed by ISIS in most cases against those accused of homosexuality, with the detainee being thrown from the top of a high-rise building with the intention of killing him/her.



Photo showing an ISIS detainee being thrown from a high-building

15- Throwing:

With this method, ISIS security forces would tie the hands and feet of the detainee, then lift the victim and throw him/her to the ground, or would grab him/her by all four limbs and swing him/her left and right before hurling him/her against a concrete wall or an iron door.

B. Psychological torture methods

16- Simulation of death:

ISIS personnel would inform the detainee that they are taking him/her to be executed, and take him to a place of execution where they show him/her the knife, which they claim will be the tool used for his/her slaughter; this process is repeated several times. In some cases, ISIS members fire bullets towards the victim with the intention not of injuring him/her but of psychologically terrorizing him/her through this 'fake execution.'

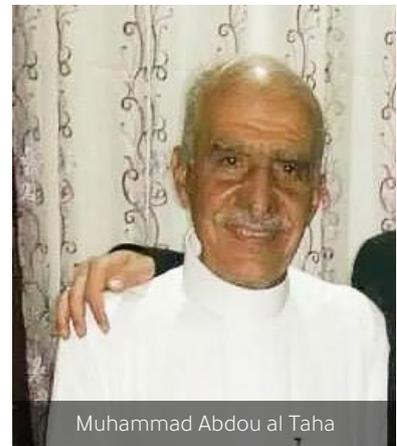
17- Forcing detainees to watch videos and recordings showing previous ISIS executions in which victims were beheaded or burnt alive.

A photo published by ISIS shows detainees being forced to watch footage of its earlier atrocities in Jarablos city in Aleppo governorate.



Deaths due to torture:

Muhammad Abdou al Taha, a 75-year-old man from al Bab city in the suburbs of Aleppo, was detained by gunmen affiliated with ISIS on Thursday, June 5, 2014, from his home in the city. He was released three months later on Tuesday, September 2, 2014, with his body bearing signs of severe torture, after which he was transferred to a Turkish hospital, where he died on Sunday, September 14, 2014, as a result of being hit on the head during his arrest.



Muhammad Abdou al Taha

Muhammad Saleh al Hussein, a 58-year-old sheikh from Raqqa city, was detained by gunmen affiliated with ISIS on Saturday, April 18, 2015, from his home in the city. On Sunday, April 26, 2015, his family obtained information confirming that he had died as a result of torture in one of the organization's detention centers. Muhammad Saleh al Hussein



Muhammad Saleh al Hussein

Emad Owda al Dahsh, from al Boukamal city in the eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate, was detained by gunmen affiliated with ISIS on Monday, November 30, 2015, from a location in the city. On Wednesday, December 30, 2015, SNHR obtained information confirming that he had died as a result of torture in one of ISIS' detention centers in al Boukamal city.

Mustafa Salim al Darfil, from al Mayadeen city in the southern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate, was detained by gunmen affiliated with ISIS in June 2017 on charges of collaborating with Syrian regime forces. On Tuesday, August 22, 2017, SNHR obtained information confirming that he had died as a result of torture in one of the organization's detention centers in the city. His body was handed over to his family, who were informed that the cause of his death was poisoning inside the prison.

VI. ISIS' Summary Execution of Detainees Raises Fears That the Forcibly Disappeared May Have Faced the Same Fate

We documented that ISIS summarily executed dozens of detainees without any justification, viewing them effectively as worthless hostages and feeling no legal, moral or human responsibility for ensuring their wellbeing; there are no controls that deter ISIS from killing whoever it wants. In addition to killing victims under torture using the torture methods cited above, ISIS summarily executed many detainees under the pretext that they posed a threat to the organization without presenting any evidence or conducting any trials. Rather, ISIS' leadership only issued direct orders to its personnel to carry out killings, deeming most of detainees as apostates, or infidels, whose blood it claimed it was legitimate to shed, according to its perverse doctrines. ISIS also killed some of its detainees in shocking and ostentatious ways with the objective of attracting attention and mobilizing followers, and killed others following mock trials with very brief or almost non-existent trial procedures, with the sentences issued against detainees stipulating that they be killed according to certain methods.

ISIS carried out five main types of killings against detainees, namely the killing of detainees before reaching detention centers, killing detainees before withdrawing from areas under ISIS control, killing detainees by assigning them dangerous jobs that could lead to their death, killing detainees through very summary procedures, and killing detainees in ostentatious ways which confirm ISIS' indifference to their victims' lives.

A. Killing the detainees before reaching the detention centers

ISIS gave sweeping powers to detention center officials and commanders to carry out killings with quick procedures, with the simple justification for these executions being the use of religion, accusing the victims of apostasy, heresy, and blasphemy. This made it easier for ISIS followers brainwashed by its extrem-

ist ideology to carry out the instructions, and even to believe that such acts would draw them nearer to God. Many detainees were killed through the use of such indoctrination. We have heard accounts from many people in areas that were under ISIS control of them seeing many mutilated, burnt or decapitated bodies discarded near garbage dumps, or dumped at the side of the roads, or thrown into mass graves containing between 3 to 11 bodies, with these mass graves spread across a wide area. In many previous SNHR reports, we described mass graves in areas that were under ISIS control, and in some cases, we documented families and Civil Defense teams finding a number of these mass graves. While some were discovered inside or near detention centers, the bulk of the mass graves were found in remote places relatively distant from detention centers, with ISIS often using water wells or stone quarry pits to dispose of victims' bodies. Among the evidence that confirms that the remains discovered were those of former detainees is the presence of signs of torture and abuse of the bodies, with hands tied and eyes blindfolded. Additionally, many of the bodies were identified by the detainees' families, who confirmed that their loved ones had been arrested or kidnapped by ISIS.

While we believe that many of those forcibly disappeared by ISIS have died in this manner, without sufficient evidence, such as bodies or verifiable photographs of these individuals' remains, we cannot change the status of their classification as forcibly disappeared persons.

B. Killing the detainees before withdrawing from the area

The Syrian Network for Human Rights documented that in many cases ISIS killed detainees before withdrawing to another area, in order to avoid difficulties in transferring them due to the likelihood that this might slow their movement, which could delay the withdrawal of the organization and consequently incur more losses among its ranks, making it easier from ISIS' perspective simply to kill all the detainees; this decision would be placed in the hands of one person, appointed by the organization as the local governor (Wali), who is the leader in the area. We have documented some of these incidents, and we believe that there are many similar instances that we could not document, while Syrian Democratic Forces, which took control of the centers formerly used as ISIS headquarters following the organization's withdrawal from areas it previously controlled, have not disclosed what they found inside.

The most notable incidents of killing carried out by ISIS prior to its withdrawal from the areas it controlled:

Children's Hospital in Aleppo city

SNHR has documented that, in many cases, ISIS killed detainees before withdrawing to another area in order to avoid difficulties in transferring them due to the likelihood that this might slow their movement, which could delay the withdrawal and consequently incur more losses among its ranks, making it easier from ISIS' perspective simply to kill all the detainees. This decision would be placed in the hands of one person, appointed by the organization as the local governor (Wali), who is the leader in the area. We have documented some of these incidents, and we believe that there are many similar instances that we could not document, while the SDF has not disclosed what it found when it took control of the centers formerly used as ISIS headquarters following the organization's withdrawal from areas it previously controlled.



Al Khazzanat Detention Center in Khan Sheikhoun city in the eastern suburbs of Idlib governorate

Al Aqsa Brigade (Lewa' al Aqsa), an extremist organization that joined and pledged allegiance¹⁹ to ISIS, committed mass killings in a detention center called al Khazzanat ('Tanks'), a former Syrian regime fuel storage facility in Khan Sheikhoun city in the eastern suburbs of Idlib governorate.

On Saturday, February 18, 2017, Lewa' al Aqsa began withdrawing towards ISIS-held areas in the eastern suburbs of Hama, with the withdrawal process taking a number of days. On Wednesday and Thursday, February 22-23, 2017, the Civil Defense teams in Idlib governorate found mass graves near al Khazzanat detention center. Area residents identified most of the victims' bodies, although some remained unidentified, with all subsequently being buried in local cemeteries in the area. SNHR documented the killing of at least 142 individuals, most of whom were gunmen belonging to factions of the Armed Opposition, who had been detained and then shot dead, and who included one civilian media worker. We subsequently discovered that the killings took place on Wednesday, February 15, and on the evening of Thursday, February 16, 2017. We issued a [report](#) documenting the incident in detail.

C. Assigning dangerous, potentially lethal tasks to detainees

ISIS used detainees to carry out dangerous tasks such as digging trenches and tunnels, strengthening earth berms, and otherwise working in the service of the organization's fighters, all of which are considered combative activities and which posed a threat to the detainees' lives due to placing them on the front lines or in military positions, which are considered legitimate targets in armed conflicts. SNHR re-

¹⁹ Pledging allegiance is a declaration of loyalty and obedience to the organization and the implementation of its orders.

corded the death of many detainees because of their presence in these dangerous places, with the vast majority of these detainees being from Deir Ez-Zour governorate due to the proximity of the detainees' homes to the areas and lines of engagement with Syrian regime forces, meaning they could be easily seized and returned.

The most notable cases of detainees being killed during forced labor operations:

Hussein al Allawi, from Ebhira village in the suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate, was 20 years old when he was killed by gunfire from Syrian regime forces on Friday, October 16, 2015, on the battlefield of Deir Ez-Zour Military Airbase, while digging trenches at the location. ISIS had detained him earlier while he was grazing sheep, arresting him on charges of wearing clothes that the ISIS members claimed violated Sharia law, then transferred him to the Deir Ez-Zour Military Airbase in order to dig a trench as a punishment imposed by the organization.

Moufaq al lleiwi, from al Mayadeen city in the southern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate, was killed by gunfire from Syrian regime forces on Thursday, October 22, 2015, on the battlefield of Deir Ez-Zour Military Airbase, while digging trenches at the location. ISIS had detained him earlier in 2015.

Qasem Najm al Jalal, from al Boulayl town in the eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate, was killed by gunfire from Syrian regime forces on Friday, October 16, 2015, on the battlefield of Deir Ez-Zour Military Airbase, while digging trenches at the location. ISIS had detained him in early October 2015 on charges of smoking cigarettes, then transferred him to Deir Ez-Zour Military Airbase in order to dig a trench as a punishment imposed by the organization.

Muhammad Jasem al Zghaib, from al Boulayl town in the eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate, was killed on Tuesday, December 1, 2015, on the battlefield of Deir Ez-Zour Military Airbase, as a result of a mortar shell fired by Syrian regime forces while digging trenches at the location. ISIS had detained him earlier in November 2015 on the pretext that he had raised his voice against a member of ISIS' al Hesba 'police' force, then transferred him to Deir Ez-Zour Military Airbase in order to dig a trench as a punishment imposed by the organization.

D. Killing of detainees following very summary procedures

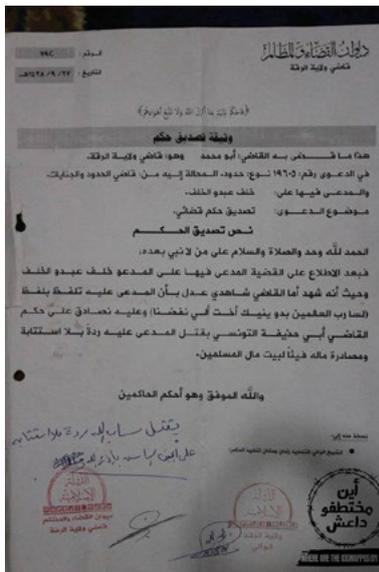
ISIS issued its own rulings based on its extremist ideological doctrine. It cannot be said that there is any real judiciary, judicial rulings, court, or defense on which ISIS relied in the death sentences it issued. Rather, its sentences were based mainly on the charge of disbelief and apostasy levelled against the vast majority of people, leading to judgments being issued following very summary procedures.

Below is a sample of the data gathered by SNHR on executions carried out by ISIS. We believe that there were many such executions of detainees/forcibly disappeared persons that we have not been able to document because we lost contact with many of the areas that ISIS controlled for a long time due to the media blackout imposed by the organization.

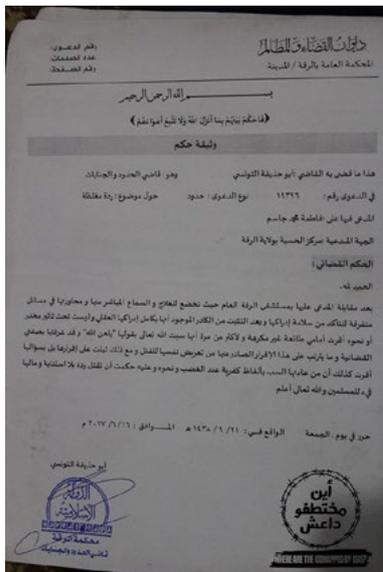
On Friday, August 21, 2015, ISIS issued a collective death sentence against 44 individuals from the western suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate who had been detained earlier. [Here is a list of their names:](#)

الاسم الثلاثي	العنوان	الحكم	ملاحظة
سليم بن صالح	التبليدة	القتل	
جمال بن صالح	التبليدة	القتل	
عبد السلام بن صالح	التبليدة	القتل	
عبد الرحمن بن صالح	التبليدة	القتل	
عبد العزيز بن صالح	التبليدة	القتل	
عبد الله بن صالح	التبليدة	القتل	
عبد الحامد بن صالح	التبليدة	القتل	
عبد الجبار بن صالح	التبليدة	القتل	
عبد الكريم بن صالح	التبليدة	القتل	
عبد المطلب بن صالح	التبليدة	القتل	
عبد الوهاب بن صالح	التبليدة	القتل	
عبد الوكيل بن صالح	التبليدة	القتل	
عبد الواحد بن صالح	التبليدة	القتل	
عبد العزيز بن صالح	التبليدة	القتل	
عبد الله بن صالح	التبليدة	القتل	
عبد الحامد بن صالح	التبليدة	القتل	
عبد الجبار بن صالح	التبليدة	القتل	
عبد الكريم بن صالح	التبليدة	القتل	
عبد المطلب بن صالح	التبليدة	القتل	
عبد الوهاب بن صالح	التبليدة	القتل	
عبد الوكيل بن صالح	التبليدة	القتل	
عبد الواحد بن صالح	التبليدة	القتل	
عبد العزيز بن صالح	التبليدة	القتل	
عبد الله بن صالح	التبليدة	القتل	
عبد الحامد بن صالح	التبليدة	القتل	
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عبد الكريم بن صالح	التبليدة	القتل	
عبد المطلب بن صالح	التبليدة	القتل	
عبد الوهاب بن صالح	التبليدة	القتل	
عبد الوكيل بن صالح	التبليدة	القتل	
عبد الواحد بن صالح	التبليدة	القتل	

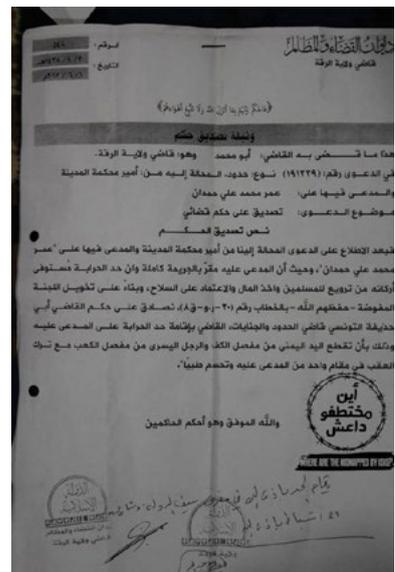
الاسم الثلاثي	العنوان	الحكم	ملاحظة
سليم بن صالح	التبليدة	القتل	
جمال بن صالح	التبليدة	القتل	
عبد السلام بن صالح	التبليدة	القتل	
عبد الرحمن بن صالح	التبليدة	القتل	
عبد العزيز بن صالح	التبليدة	القتل	
عبد الله بن صالح	التبليدة	القتل	
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عبد الوكيل بن صالح	التبليدة	القتل	
عبد الواحد بن صالح	التبليدة	القتل	
عبد العزيز بن صالح	التبليدة	القتل	
عبد الله بن صالح	التبليدة	القتل	
عبد الحامد بن صالح	التبليدة	القتل	
عبد الجبار بن صالح	التبليدة	القتل	
عبد الكريم بن صالح	التبليدة	القتل	
عبد المطلب بن صالح	التبليدة	القتل	
عبد الوهاب بن صالح	التبليدة	القتل	
عبد الوكيل بن صالح	التبليدة	القتل	
عبد الواحد بن صالح	التبليدة	القتل	



A sentence ratification document dated September 22, 2017, clarifying the death sentence issued against a civilian, Khalaf Abdou al Khalaf. The document states that the "sentence of death of the defendant over apostasy without repentance and the confiscation of his money to the Muslim treasury" was issued by Judge Abu Huthaifah al Tunisi, the Border and Criminal Judge in Raqqa governorate, on charges of al Khalaf uttering a sentence containing insults and disbelief.



A sentence ratification document dated June 16, 2017, clarifying the death sentence issued against Ms. Fatima Muhammad Jasem. The document, which states that "she was sentenced to death over apostasy without repentance and the confiscation of her money to the Muslim treasury," was issued by Judge Abu Huthaifah al Tunisi, the Border and Criminal Judge in Raqqa governorate, on charges that she said, "Damn God."



A sentence ratification document dated June 1, 2017, clarifying the herabah sentence issued against the civilian Omar Hamdan. The document, which states, "The imposition of the herabah sentence against the defendant by cutting off the right hand from the wrist joint and the left foot from the ankle joint," was issued by Judge Abu Huthaifah al Tunisi, the Border and Criminal Judge in Raqqa governorate, on charges of theft.

[Majd al Shu'aib](#), a student of Informatics Engineering, from Raqqa city, was 20 years old when he was detained by ISIS in February 2016 in Raqqa city. On Monday, August 8, 2016, ISIS informed his family of his execution on charges of belonging to Syrian regime forces on the basis that they had found photos of him dressed in military trousers on his phone. ISIS failed to hand over his body to his family.

Professor Iskandar Me'ser al Shlash, a History Master's degree graduate from al Hawayej village in the eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate, was 32 years old when he was arrested by ISIS on Sunday, September 6, 2015, in the village. He was executed 10 days later on Wednesday, September 16, 2015, on the pretext that he had travelled to teach at al Furat University in Hasaka city, which was at that time under the control of the Syrian regime. His severed head was displayed by ISIS in Theyban town in the suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate. His family was not allowed to hold a funeral ceremony, his body was not handed over for burial, and all his money was confiscated.

E. The killing of detainees in ostentatious ways confirms ISIS' indifference to their lives

ISIS was distinguished from the rest of the perpetrators of violations in Syria by filming brutal killings of detainees, using modern cinematic and media methods. The shocking and graphic films that ISIS broadcast showed the organization's indifference to the detainees' lives, with its willingness to film its executions and to publicly promote them, at planned times that sometimes coincided with battles it was fighting, or in relation to certain political events. It seems that this promotion of the organization's brutality was intended to draw as much attention as possible to itself, meaning more fame that brought with it followers and money. These executions targeted specific individuals, including activists from different fields, especially journalists, and to a lesser extent detained fighters. ISIS went to great lengths in using the most graphic and shocking methods of execution, including beheading, bombing, drowning, and burning. SNHR documented the killing of at least 72 detainees in the video materials filmed and issued by ISIS, which numbered at least 14 videos released and broadcast by the organization, with SNHR maintaining copies of these as evidence.

Some of the victim detainees whose executions were filmed by ISIS specifically for release as videos:

On Saturday, June 25, 2016, the media office of ISIS in Deir Ez-Zour governorate published a video titled '[The Devil's Revelation](#)' in which it showed the killing of five individuals, including four media activists in Deir Ez-Zour governorate, whom ISIS had detained earlier. The death sentences against them were carried out in different, particularly horrific ways and using different implements for each, with the executions filmed and broadcast through this video. **Below are the details of two of the victims:**

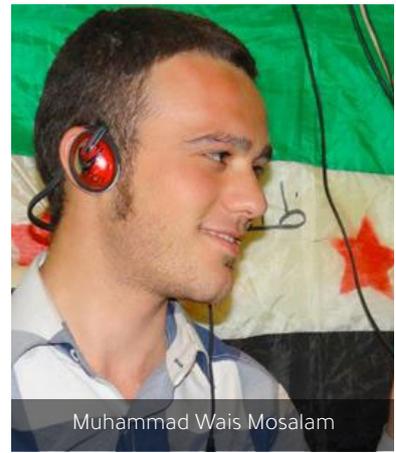
[Samer Muhammad al Abboud](#) was slaughtered in Deir Ez-Zour city on the charge of apostasy. Samer, nicknamed Abu Jafar, [a university student](#), media activist, and director of the Interaction Development Network, who was 25 years old when he was executed, came from the al Hamidiya neighborhood in Deir Ez-Zour city. He had been detained by ISIS in November 2015.

[Sami Jawdat Rabah](#), Sami Jawdat Rabah, was killed by ISIS by attaching an [explosive device](#) to his laptop. He was executed on charges of filming and providing locations and details of ISIS headquarters to US-led Coalition forces. The murder took place in his house in Deir Ez-Zour city. Sami, a media activist from Deir Ez-Zour city, had been detained by ISIS in December 2015.

On January 8, 2017, the media office of ISIS in Deir Ez-Zour governorate published a video titled 'He Brought Me Back by His Blood,' in which it presented footage of the killing of a number of people it had detained earlier, including Ilwan Taysir al Ka'four, who was shot dead on charges of being employed by the SDF. Another of those killed, Ilwan al Ka'four, from al Qahtaniya village in the suburbs of Hasaka governorate, who was 29 years old at the time of his death, had been detained by ISIS earlier in 2017.

VII. Testimonies of Families of Persons Forcibly Disappeared by ISIS:

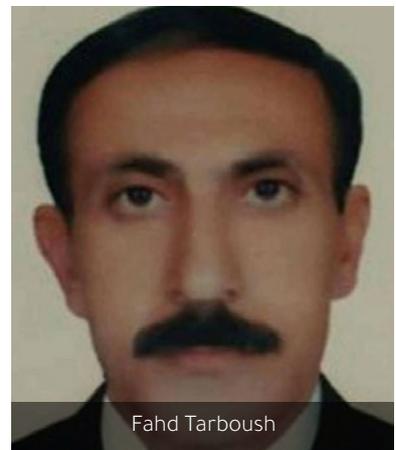
Muhammad Wais Mosalam, a media activist, as well as one of the founders of the Fraternity Coordination (Hevrêza Biratî), and editor of the Kobani Kurd media network, was born in 1994. Muhammad, from Ein al Arab city in the eastern suburbs of Aleppo governorate, was detained by gunmen affiliated with ISIS on Tuesday, August 27, 2013, in Khirbet Hadla village in the suburbs of Raqqa governorate. His fate remains unknown.



Muhammad Wais Mosalam

SNHR spoke with Mr. Ismail Muslim,²⁰ Muhammad's cousin, who said, **"Muhammad traveled from Kobani to Iraqi Kurdistan to attend a media course. When he arrived in the suburbs of Raqqa, members of ISIS stopped him and took him to an undisclosed location. Muhammad has been disappeared since then, and we did not receive any further information about him."** Ismail said that Muhammad's family had contacted many of those released by ISIS in previous years but had not received any information about him. Ismail believes it is probable that ISIS members initially arrested Muhammad because of his identity and his being from Ein al Arab city, then learned about his media activism and forcibly disappeared him due to that.

Fahd Tarboush, a human rights activist from Manbej city in the eastern suburbs of Aleppo governorate, was 45 at the time of his arrest in Manbej city by gunmen affiliated with ISIS on Sunday, September 14, 2014. He was taken to an undisclosed location.



Fahd Tarboush

SNHR spoke with Suhaib Tarboush,²¹ a cousin of the victim Fahd, who told us: **"Fahd was working on documenting human rights violations in Manbej city. He was known to everyone and had relations with the local council, activists and the media outlets. At the start of ISIS' entry into Manbej, he refused to leave and was harassed and persecuted for his work. Then he was kidnapped from the city, and from the first moment he was kidnapped by ISIS members, his family heard no news about him except that ISIS took him out of the city to an undisclosed**

²⁰ Via phone on June 9, 2019

²¹ Via phone on May 29, 2019

location." We learned from Suhaib that the family tried to communicate with personnel at the group's headquarters in Manbej to find out his fate, but they did not receive any response and were threatened with death if they repeated their questions because ISIS considers human rights activists a great danger to the organization, especially since Fahd was known for his activism in Manbej City.

Radi Mohammad al Ayyashi, a former government employee at the Public Electricity Company in Raqqa city, was 50 at the time of his arrest. He was detained along with his son Waddah by gunmen affiliated with ISIS from their home in Raqqa city in January 2017 and taken to an undisclosed location.

SNHR met with Mr. Samir,²² a relative of the victim Radi, in Idlib city where he is currently living as a result of displacement. He told us: **"A group belonging to a sheikh called Abu Aisha Mayadeen raided Radi's house and smashed up all its contents and took him with his son Waddah, who lived with him in the same house. They explained that they had heard that Radi and his son were expressing their intention to leave Raqqa and travel to regime areas after ISIS clamped down on residents. Then we tried to mediate for them with people working with the group, but to no avail. Our last attempt was when they told us that they had put [Radi and his son] on the front lines, and whoever mediated for them would join them."** We also learned from the victims' relative that a number of those released from ISIS prisons told family members that Radi and his son Waddah had been executed after digging tunnels in the eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-zour governorate, but the family could not verify this information.

Abdul Mu'in al Zayyan, a livestock trader from Raqqa city and resident of al Mayadeen city in the suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate, was 44 years old when he was detained, along with three members of his family, by gunmen affiliated with ISIS on Monday, February 6, 2017, in the market in al Mayadeen city. Abdul Mu'in and his family members were taken to an undisclosed location outside the city.

SNHR met with Mr. Abdul Jabbar al Zayyan,²³ the son of the disappeared Abdul Mu'in, who said: **"The news of the arrest of my father by ISIS reached my family through merchants in al Mayadeen market, so my uncle went to the al Hesba police station in the city to inquire about him, but the center's official told him that he could not give the reasons and they would interrogate him in a camp outside al Mayadeen city and then release him; he asked my uncle not to return and ask but to wait. A week later, my uncle returned to the al Hesba station and asked about my father, but the station's official expelled him and warned him not to return, and told him that he was not responsible for my father's arrest; after that, my uncle did not go again because of fear, especially since the official of the station was Moroccan and had no mercy on anyone from the people of al Mayadeen. After a while, one of my father's acquaintances told us that the one who arrested him was an ISIS emir who also traded in livestock, and he wanted to disappear my father so that he would not compete with him."** Abdul Jabbar added that the family had not been able to obtain any information about his father or the cousins who were detained along with him.

²² Via phone on May 29, 2019

²³ We contacted him in Lebanon in June 2017.

Mahmoud al Suhail, from Jilleen town in northwestern Daraa governorate, was detained by gunmen affiliated with ISIS on Monday, July 9, 2018, when they raided his place of residence in the town and took him to an undisclosed location.

We spoke with Khaldoun al Suhail,²⁴ Mahmoud's brother, who told us: **"Some gunmen from ISIS wanted to seize Mahmoud's house for its strategic location during their battles with the Syrian regime, but my brother refused, so they simply took him in a car outside the town. Since then, I haven't seen him or found out anything about his fate or whereabouts. I think they killed him outside the town, but I still have hope that he will return safely one day."**

Muhammad Hussein al Omar, born in 1989, a media activist and a university student at Aleppo University's Faculty of Civil Engineering, from Misyaf city, west of Hama governorate, was kidnapped along with Samar Saleh, born in 1988, a media and relief activist, and BA graduate from Aleppo University's Faculty of Archeology and Museums, from al Atareb city, west of Aleppo governorate, by gunmen affiliated with ISIS on Tuesday, August 13, 2013, in al Atareb city. Their fate remains unknown.



Muhammad Hussein al Omar and Samar Saleh

SNHR contacted Ms. Deyaa al Bahri,²⁵ Muhammad's mother, who told us: **"At the beginning of the popular uprising in 2011, Muhammad was one of the young people motivated to support this uprising and was one of its activists, who was arrested twice by the Syrian regime in 2012 and released from Aleppo Central Prison; his motivation and activism made us feel fearful for him, especially after he was arrested twice, so we forced him to travel to Egypt in 2013 to complete his studies there and get him out of the country, despite his refusal to travel and his connection to Syria. Several months later, we received news that Muhammad had been kidnapped by ISIS elements in al Atareb area in the suburbs of Aleppo, accompanied by Samar al Saleh, who had been planning their engagement. We did not believe this news, because Muhammad was in Egypt. After verifying this information, we knew that Muhammad went to Turkey and then to Raqqa governorate, and then al Atareb 10 days before his abduction. While he was in a car accompanied by Samar Saleh and her mother in al Atareb area, a vehicle carrying ISIS elements blocked their way and a number of gunmen got out. They violently beat both Samar and Muhammad, dragged Samar by her hair in front of her mother's eyes, and put Muhammad and Samar in one of the accompanying cars, and since that time we have not received any information about them."**

²⁴ We contacted him via Skype in July 2018.

²⁵ We contacted her via phone in August 2021.

Mahmoud Eisa al Hajar and Myassar Yousef Mhaimeid al Hajar, from al Sh-heil city in the eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate, born in 1994 and 1998 respectively, were detained by gunmen affiliated with ISIS on Friday, July 18, 2014, as they were passing through one of ISIS' checkpoints near Raqqa city, while they were on their way to the Syrian-Turkish border, and were taken to an undisclosed location.

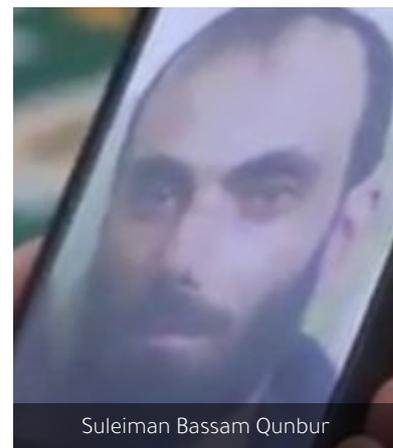
SNHR contacted Mr. Muhammad al Hajar,²⁶ a cousin of the disappeared men, Mahmoud and Myassar, who told us: **"After ISIS took control of al Sh-heil city, ISIS imposed Sharia courses and conscription on the youth, forcing hundreds of young people to leave the city, including my cousins Myassar and Mahmoud; they set out on a bus, the destination was northern Syria, and from there to Turkey, with the bus setting off from al Sh-heil city around six in the morning, in which were about 10 passengers; upon their arrival at the ISIS al Furusiya Checkpoint near Raqqa city, ISIS personnel asked for the passengers' IDs, then asked Myassar, Mahmoud and a third person from one of the villages near al Sh-heil city to get off the bus, and they instructed the driver to continue along the road without discussion. Then we learned of their arrest from the bus driver. The next day, my uncles went to Raqqa city in order to find out their fate, and they met several ISIS emirs of different nationalities, most of whom denied their detention by the organization and some of the emirs claimed that Myassar and Mahmoud were fighters with Jabhat al Nusra, and they would be sentenced as apostates and they would receive their punishment; retribution."** Muhammad added that his cousins were civilians and did not take part in any military activity, and that their family kept visiting Raqqa city to find out their fate even after the SDF took control of the city, but have not received any information about them so far.



Mahmoud Eisa al Hajar

Suleiman Bassam Qunbur, from Deir Ez-Zour city, born in 1980, was detained by gunmen affiliated with ISIS on Sunday, June 5, 2016, in al Hamidiya neighborhood in Deir Ez-Zour city, and taken to an undisclosed location.

SNHR contacted Ms. Om Suleima,²⁷ the mother of the disappeared Suleiman, who told us: **"Elements of the al Hesba apparatus of ISIS arrested Suleiman in al Hamidiya neighborhood in Deir Ez-Zour city without knowing the reason, as the neighbors told me. At the time, I was staying with my husband in al Joura neighborhood, which is under the control of the Syrian regime. He was then taken to one of the organization's prisons in Deir Ez-Zour city, then we tried to communicate with the organization's emirs in the city in order to find out his whereabouts or the reason for his arrest, but we only got promises to release him. A few months**



Suleiman Bassam Qunbur

²⁶ We contacted him via phone on October 14, 2021.

²⁷ We contacted him via phone on October 14, 2021.

later, we got news through one of our relatives that the organization had transferred all detainees from inside Deir Ez-Zour city to the suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour without knowing their destination, and his fate remained unknown to us.” Ms. Om Suleiman added: “After the Syrian Democratic Forces took control of the suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour, we heard that the SDF had found detainees in one of the organization’s headquarters in the al Baghouz area, and transferred them to one of its prisons in al Qameshli, in the suburbs of Hasaka; then, I went to al Qameshli to search for my son, but no one knew of him, and I haven’t been able to get any information about him yet.”

VIII. SDF Has Failed to Reveal the Fate of the Persons Forcibly Disappeared by ISIS

The US-led Coalition forces played an essential role in eliminating ISIS, with the SDF taking control of the territories that had been under ISIS control. This controlling force bears civil, legal and human rights responsibilities to the society it now controls. The issue of the persons forcibly disappeared by ISIS is one of the most prominent and important issues affecting tens of thousands of families in these areas. Despite the defeat of ISIS since March 2019 from its last stronghold in Deir Ez-Zour, and many months before that from the governorates of Raqqa and Hasaka, no real efforts have been made by the controlling force to reveal the fate of the forcibly disappeared.

This report has included details on a number of the complex difficulties and challenges that will face all those involved in working on this issue, but it is imperative to note that neglecting this issue, and prolonging the period of individuals’ enforced disappearance will increase the complications and societal tensions as the vast majority of the families of the forcibly disappeared who we spoke with assign the responsibility for resolving this matter to the SDF. The SNHR database shows that around 35% of the 8,684 forcibly disappeared persons have now been classified as disappeared for nearly five years.

Despite all the complications listed above, we believe that tangible achievements can be attained on this sensitive issue if there is a sincere will and desire to work in the service of society given that the controlling forces possess many files and documents that were in ISIS detention centers and headquarters. In addition, thousands of ISIS members and their families are still detained in al Hawl Camp, and it is possible to launch extensive and focused investigations with them and to inform the local public of the results. The families of the forcibly disappeared have the right to know what steps the controlling force has taken on this issue, the information they possess, and what results, if any, they have reached.

Many of the families of the forcibly disappeared have told us that the SDF has not taken any tangible steps in resolving this issue, compelling many of these relatives to take the initiative to individually investigate the fate of their family members using various available methods and ways, through personal relations or in return for payment of money to some local leaders. Yet all those we contacted told us that they had not managed to obtain any conclusive information about their loved ones.

IX. Legal Conclusions and Recommendations

Legal conclusions:

- In many bombardment incidents, ISIS violated the principles of distinction and proportionality, with some attacks causing material and human losses; indiscriminate attacks on populated areas constitute a terrible violation of international humanitarian law.
- ISIS has violated international humanitarian law by using an internationally prohibited weapon, and thus has committed a war crime, as well as violated the Security Council resolutions in this regard; the use of chlorine gas is a violation of Security Council Resolutions No. 2118 and 2209.
- ISIS has committed widespread violations of international human rights law against the people in areas under its control through kidnappings, arbitrary detentions, enforced disappearances and torture, and also prevented people from leaving the areas under its control in order to exploit them for cover and use them as human shields.
- ISIS has perpetrated acts of violence against the detainees it held, including torture, poor detention conditions, and summary executions against civilians and prisoners from the ranks of Armed Opposition fighters, SDF, and Syrian regime forces, in violation of Common Article III to the Geneva Conventions, and customary international law, amounting to a war crime.

Recommendations:

The international community and UN Security Council:

- The international community and UN Security Council's negligence in failing to resolve the conflict in Syria has contributed to strengthening ISIS' power and ability to spread its extremist ideology, resulting in the continuation of tyranny and human rights violations.
- Support local communities and organizations that contribute to spreading religious and political awareness based on respect for human rights.
- Take serious steps to end the conflict in Syria, including setting a strict timetable for the political transition process in accordance with Security Council Resolution 2254, as this process has remained stagnant since the Geneva Communiqué of June 2012 to date.
- The survival of the Syrian regime, which is involved in crimes against humanity, is one of the main causes and enablers of the spread of extremist religious ideology, and is one of the most important points on which extremist organizations build their narrative, which is based on the massive injustice that has befallen millions of Syrians at the hands of the Syrian regime. The Syrian regime and all perpetrators of violations in Syria must be held accountable.
- Allocate resources and create development plans and jobs to try to attract and dissuade those who joined or might otherwise be tempted to join extremist groups through financial incentives, appeals to morality and reasoning, and raising awareness.
- Extremist organizations pose an existential threat to all the people of Syria and have material resources that enable them to pay the salaries of their fighters. It is imperative to support all moderate societal factions in their war against the globalized extremist organizations, with all possible forms of financial and military support.

Influential states:

- Support vital civil society organizations in areas of northern and eastern Syria, which stand as a line of defense against extremist organizations by spreading awareness and providing services.
- Push for an end to the Syrian conflict and put pressure to accelerate the process of political transition towards democracy and stability.

US-led Coalition forces:

- Allocate material and human resources, and work seriously to reveal the fate of those still missing at the hands of ISIS.
- Put pressure on the SDF to launch methodological investigations into ISIS members and former leaders in order to reveal the fate of those persons still missing at the hands of ISIS.

Syrian Democratic Forces:

- Seriously work on making the issue of people forcibly disappeared by ISIS a top priority.

Gratitude and Solidarity

We wish to express our heartfelt solidarity with the victims and their families, and to extend our sincere thanks and appreciation to the families, local activists and lawyers, without whose efforts this report could not have been prepared in this way.



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