

The Seventh Anniversary of the Syrian Regime's Chemical Weapons Attack on Syrian Citizens in the Two Ghoutas of Damascus

Damascus Suburbs Was Subjected to 71 Chemical Attacks, with 2015 Witnessing the Highest Number of Chemical Attacks in the Past Nine Years

Friday 21 August 2020

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

SNHR
SYRIAN NETWORK FOR HUMAN RIGHTS
الشبكة السورية لحقوق الإنسان

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I. On the Seventh Anniversary of the Chemical Attack on the Two Ghoutas, Russian Protection Is the Reason for the Syrian Regime's Continuing Impunity and Its Repeated Use of Chemical Weapons of Mass Destruction

Today marks the seventh anniversary of one of the most heinous and horrific tragedies suffered by the Syrian people in their modern history, especially the people of Eastern and Western Ghoutas of Damascus; while the victims' families who lost their children and other loved ones are still waiting for the international community to fulfill its promises and act on its 'red line' to punish the Syrian regime, whose use of chemical weapons against Syrian citizens has been repeatedly proven, shamefully no form of accountability has been achieved so far. Indeed, the same regime, led by the Assad family, which used chemical weapons on August 21, 2013, remains in power and continues to rule over Syria with the same murderous mentality, and through reliance on tens of thousands of security apparatus personnel like all totalitarian regimes.

This attack on August 21, 2013, together with the type and number of munitions loaded with gases used and the high death toll of victims, shocked the whole world. We hoped, after such an unspeakable atrocity, that the international community would take real and decisive action in response to the Syrian regime's flagrant breach of the 'red lines' drawn for it by several major world powers, contributing to the realization of the rights of the victims who were killed or injured, and achieving the type of punishment that the Syrian regime deserves for such a monstrous act and for its many other brutal practices against the Syrian citizens, with the regime deliberately using chemical weapons against residential neighborhoods full of civilians, including women and children.



"The Syrian regime's chemical weapons attack on the two Ghoutas of Damascus is considered the largest chemical attack known to the world since the adoption of the Chemical Weapons Convention, which entered into force on April 29, 1997, and constituted a shock to humanity and civilization. Even worse than the attack itself, however, was the international community's failure to punish the Syrian regime for carrying out such an attack, encouraging the regime to repeat similar chemical attacks dozens of times after that, and contributing to the majority of Syrians losing hope and faith in justice and international law; the anger at this failure provided a rich source of resentment which was exploited by extremist groups to recruit hundreds of people despairing of any hope of justice from the international community, into their ranks."



Fadel Abdul Ghany
Chairman of the Syrian
Network for Human Rights

II. The Two Ghoutas Chemical Attack

On the night of August 21, 2013, the Syrian regime launched nearly four chemical weapons attacks on populated areas in the Eastern Ghouta and Mu'damiyet al Sham town in the Western Ghouta in Damascus Suburbs governorate, in which regime forces used at least 10 missiles loaded with lethal toxic gases. With the capacity of each missile estimated at 20 liters, this meant that the total amount of Sarin gas used was 200 liters. The missiles were launched from special launch pads in the early hours of the morning after midnight, using large amounts of sarin gas, apparently with the planned and deliberate intention of exterminating as many residents as possible while they slept, thus minimizing their chances of survival and resulting in a higher death toll.

The relatively low temperature estimated in the area that night and the lack of any breeze there during the period between 02:00 a.m. and 05:00 a.m. indicates that those launching the missiles knew that the heavy poison gases would settle and remain close to the ground rather than scattering or being blown away, resulting in the injury to or deaths of as many residents as possible in the area, which later contributed to terrorizing and further traumatizing survivors of the attack and sending them and the rest of the Syrian people a very clear warning message against continuing to oppose the regime's dynastic rulers. This leads us, at the Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR), to believe that there was careful, deliberate and intentional planning by the Syrian regime with the objective of exterminating as many Syrian people as possible in retaliation for their demands for the end of the ruling family's hereditary dictatorship and to punish them for daring to have freed themselves from the regime's control and from the persecution of its security services.

In addition, the crippling siege that had been imposed on the Eastern and Western Ghouta by the Syrian government since the end of 2012, which prevented the entrance of gas and fuel to these areas, along with the lack of basic medicine and medical equipment needed to treat the injured, further contributed to increasing the death toll.

All the above-mentioned reasons contributed to the huge number of casualties, including deaths and injuries. SNHR documented the deaths by suffocation of at least 1,144 individuals through the victims' names and other personal details. These were divided between:

- 1,119 civilians, including 99 children and 194 women (adult female)
- 25 Armed Opposition fighters

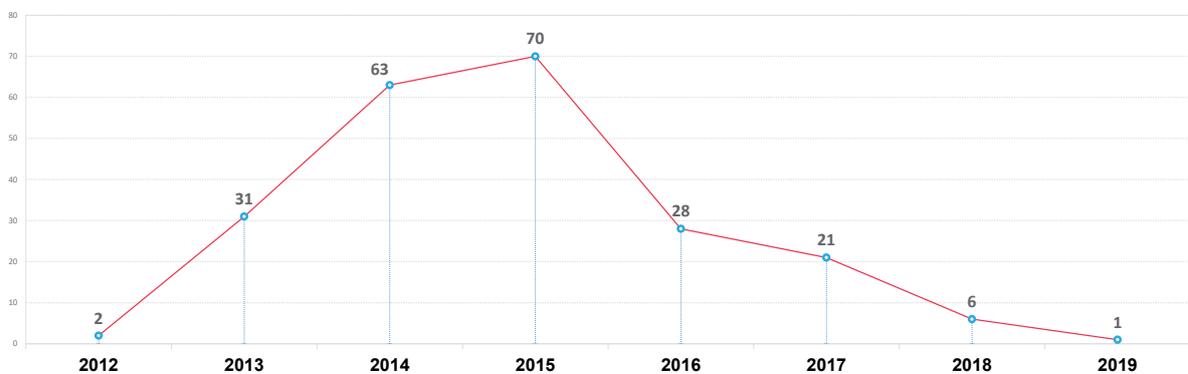
We also documented the injury of nearly 5,935 other people with respiratory and suffocation symptoms.

This death toll constitutes approximately 76% of the total victims killed as a result of the chemical attacks launched by the Syrian regime since December 2012 up until the most recent attack using chemical weapons which SNHR documented in al Kbaina in Latakia suburbs in May 2019, according to the SNHR database.

[We have issued numerous reports documenting the attack](#), with the related data collection process being continuous, concerning this attack and all chemical and other attacks, as we periodically add to the incident database whenever new evidence becomes available.

III. Damascus Suburbs Governorate Has Experienced 71 Chemical Weapons Attacks, the Greatest Number of Such Attacks of Any Syrian Governorate, with 2015 Witnessing the Highest Number of CW Attacks, According to the Analysis of the Syrian Network for Human Rights Database

The SNHR has documented a total of 222 chemical attacks on Syria since the first attack using chemical weapons documented by SNHR on December 23, 2012, until August 21, 2020, with approximately 98% of these carried out at the hands of Syrian Regime forces, and nearly 2% at the hands of ISIS, all of which distributed by year as follows:



These attacks and the resulting deaths and injured were distributed - according to the perpetrator of the attack – across the Syrian governorates as follows:

A. The Syrian regime carried out 217 chemical attacks on Syrian governorates since the first attack using chemical weapons which was documented by SNHR on December 23, 2012, until August 21, 2020, which resulted in the deaths of 1,510 individuals, distributed as follows:

- 1,409 civilians, including 205 children and 260 women (adult female).
- 94 Armed Opposition fighters.
- Seven Syrian regime prisoners of war who were being held in the Armed Opposition prisons.

These chemical attacks also injured 11,080 individuals, including five Syrian regime prisoners of war who were being held in the Armed Opposition prisons.

These attacks were distributed across the governorates as follows:

Damascus Suburbs governorate: 71 attacks distributed by year as follows:

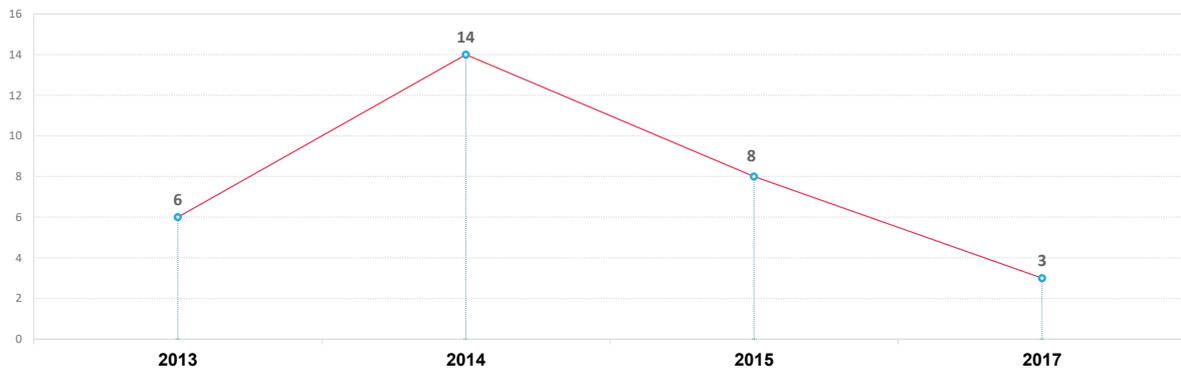


These chemical attacks resulted in the deaths of 1,245 individuals, distributed as follows:

- 1,172 civilians, including 110 children and 209 women.
- 66 Armed Opposition fighters.
- Seven Syrian regime prisoners of war who were being held in the Armed Opposition prisons.

These chemical attacks also injured nearly 7,749 individuals, including five Syrian regime prisoners of war who were being held in the Armed Opposition's prisons.

Damascus governorate: 31 attacks distributed by year as follows:

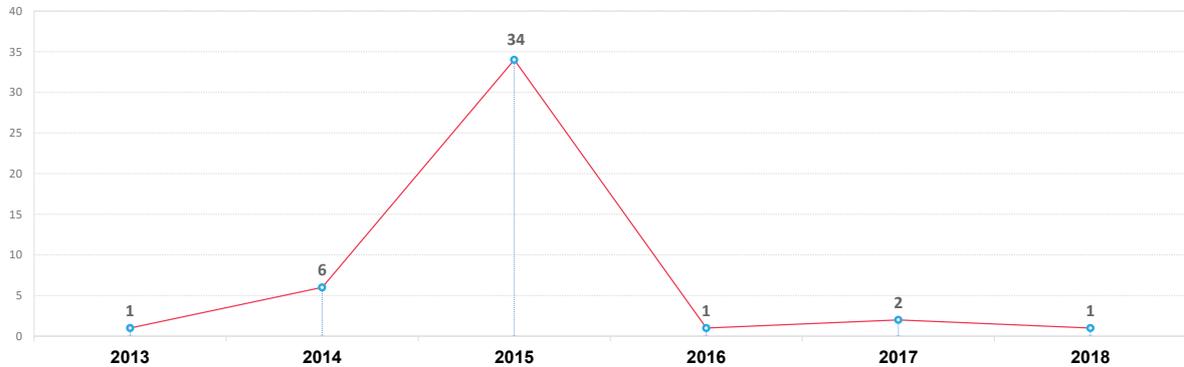


These chemical attacks resulted in the deaths of 13 individuals, distributed as follows:

- Seven civilians.
- Six Armed Opposition fighters.

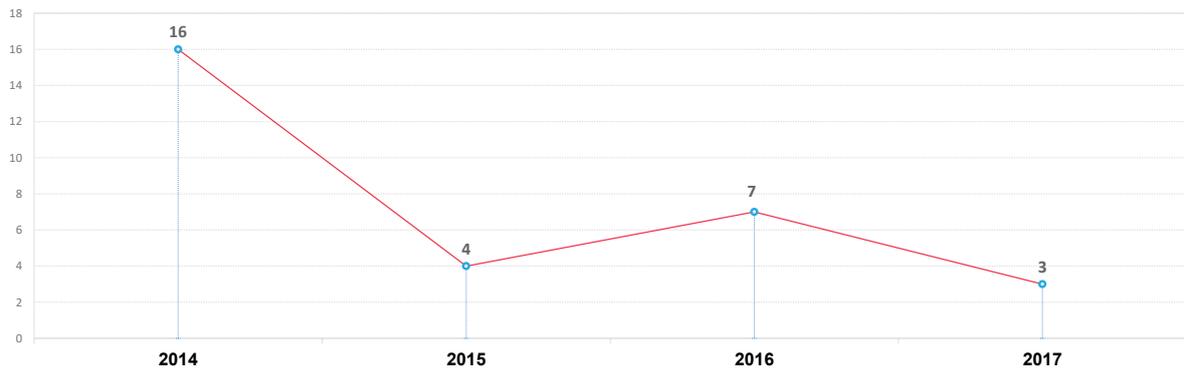
These chemical attacks also injured 319 individuals.

Idlib governorate: 45 attacks distributed by year as follows:



These chemical attacks resulted in the deaths of 109 civilians, including 42 children and 27 women, and injured 1,475 more individuals.

Hama governorate: 30 attacks distributed over by year as follows:

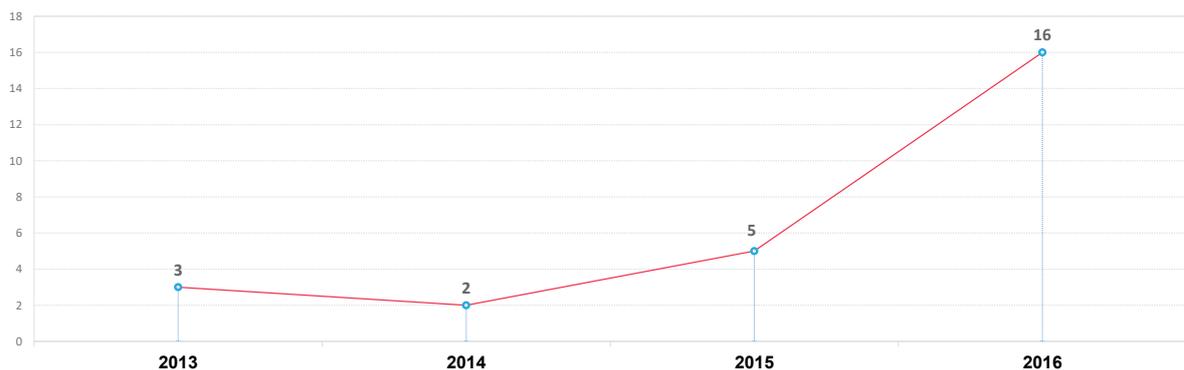


These chemical attacks resulted in the deaths of 77 individuals, distributed as follows:

- 76 civilians, including 37 children and 14 women.
- One Armed Opposition fighter.

These chemical attacks also injured 737 individuals.

Aleppo governorate: 26 attacks distributed by year as follows:

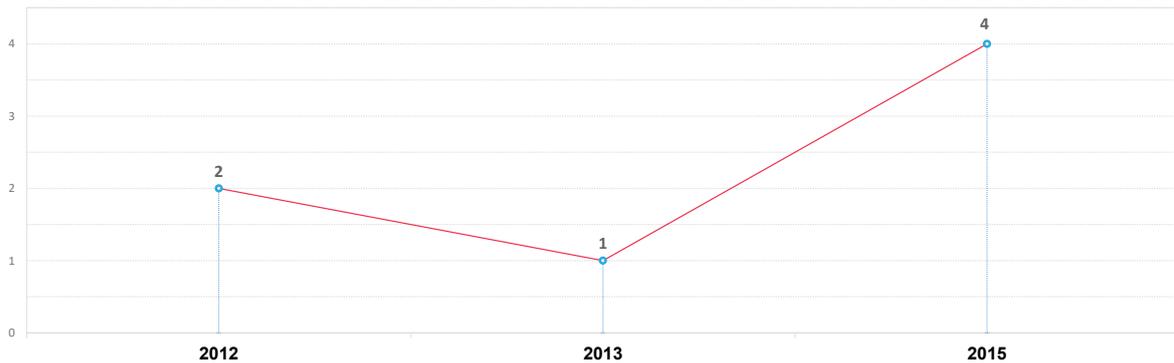


These chemical attacks resulted in the deaths of 47 individuals, distributed as follows:

- 37 civilians, including 13 children and nine women.
- Ten Armed Opposition fighters.

These chemical attacks also injured 545 individuals.

Homs governorate: Seven attacks distributed by year as follows:



These chemical attacks resulted in the deaths of 14 individuals, distributed as follows:

- Three civilians.
- 11 Armed Opposition fighters.

These chemical attacks also injured 191 individuals.

Daraa governorate: Three attacks distributed by year as follows:



These chemical attacks injured 33 individuals

Deir Ez-Zour governorate: Three chemical weapons attacks all of which took place in 2015, which resulted in the deaths of five civilians, including three children and one woman, and injured 27 more individuals.

Latakia governorate: We documented one attack in 2019, which injured four Hay'at Tahrir al Sh-am's fighters.

B. ISIS carried out five chemical attacks since its establishment on April 9, 2013, until August 21, 2020, all of which were in Aleppo governorate, distributed by year as follows:

2015: Two

2016: Three

These chemical attacks injured 132 individuals.

The distribution of attacks according to the UN Security Council resolutions on the use of chemical weapons in Syria:

According to the SNHR's database documenting chemical attacks carried out in Syria, the total number of chemical weapons attacks documented to date amounts to at least 222 since December 23, 2012, up to August 21, 2020. These attacks are distributed according to the perpetrator party as follows:

A. The Syrian regime has carried out 217 chemical attacks, distributed according to the Security Council resolutions as follows:

First: Prior to Security Council Resolution 2118 of September 27, 2013: 33 attacks.

Second: After Security Council Resolution 2118 of September 27, 2013, to date: 184 attacks.

Third: After Security Council Resolution 2209 of March 6, 2015: 115 attacks.

Fourth: After the formation of the United Nations Mechanism and Security Council Resolution 2235 of August 7, 2015: 59 attacks

B. ISIS carried out five chemical weapons attacks all in Aleppo governorate, which constitute a breach to Security Council Resolutions 2118, 2209, and 2235.

IV. Russia and China Support the Syrian Regime in Its Use of Weapons of Mass Destruction Through Their Veto in the Security Council, Then Call for Lifting Sanctions Against the Regime Under the Pretext of Fighting the COVID-19

Russia's and China's use of the veto in the Security Council for the benefit of the Syrian regime has contributed to increasing the number of deaths and injuries among the Syrian people. Both states have blocked the passage of many draft resolutions that would have contributed to punishing the Syrian regime and deterring it from committing numerous violations, including the use of chemical weapons. Although Russia entered directly as a party to the armed conflict in Syria in September 2015, it has continued to use its veto, which blatantly violates the Charter of the United Nations, as we indicated in [our report](#) issued on July 17, 2020, which addressed the issue of Russia's and China's arbitrary use of their veto power in the Security Council after the start of the popular uprising against the Assad family's hereditary dictatorship.

Due to the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic to most countries worldwide, including Syria, a number of totalitarian dictatorships (Russia, China, Iran, Cuba, Venezuela, Nicaragua, North Korea), and civil society organizations affiliated with them have raised their voices to call on those nations which imposed sanctions on the Syrian regime for the large number of violations it perpetrated, many of which constitute war crimes and crimes against humanity, urging them to reduce or lift those sanctions, supposedly so that the Syrian regime can combat this pandemic. However, the anniversary of the Syrian regime's use of chemical weapons of mass destruction in the two Ghoutas on August 21, 2013, is a somber reminder to all countries of the world that the sanctions imposed on the Syrian regime are a basic form of accountability, and that the sanctions must be further extended to include the backers of the Syrian regime, especially Russia, China, and Iran.

Likewise, through standing by the Syrian regime, even on the issue of its use of the most horrific and internationally outlawed types of weapons, these countries which are demanding the lifting of sanctions imposed on the Syrian regime supposedly under the pretext of easing the impact of the pandemic on the Syrian people clearly demonstrate the extent of the blatant and abject hypocrisy and deceit that they have reached. Rather than standing by the Syrian people and their just demands for freedom and human rights, condemning the Syrian regime's use of chemical weapons, and demanding that it be held accountable and punished, these states have chosen to be accomplices to and supporters of its crimes.

V. Recommendations

UN Security Council and the United Nations, According to Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations:

- Impose economic, political and military sanctions on the Syrian regime on the anniversary of its use of chemical weapons in the two Ghoutas of Damascus, as a form of moral compensation for the victims' families.
- Call on the Syrian regime's allies to condemn its use of chemical weapons, work with the rest of the world to hold the Syrian regime accountable, and pressure it to enter into a political process that leads to a real political transition towards democracy, which would contribute to lifting sanctions and moving towards democracy and stability.
- The Syrian case should be referred to the International Criminal Court and all those who are responsible for crimes should be held accountable, while Russia must stop using the veto, as it is a party to the Syrian conflict, and the UNSC states' veto power should be withheld when crimes against humanity and war crimes are committed.
- Since it has been proven that the UN Security Council has failed for nine years to date to end any of the Syrian regime's crimes against humanity or to refer them to the International Criminal Court, the United Nations General Assembly should intervene based on Resolution No. 377 of 1950 (the Uniting for Peace Resolution), and work to refer the case to the International Criminal Court and hold all those involved in using chemical weapons against Syrian citizens accountable.

- Initiate fundamental reforms, particularly in the area of the use of the veto in accordance with international law and human rights, and establish strict limitations and standards for the use of the veto.
- Place the public interest, especially that of victims and affected countries and the attainment of just security and peace before the economic and political gains and interests of any permanent member state.

The European Union, the United States of America, Canada, Australia and the rest of the world that imposed sanctions on the Syrian regime:

- Insist on a permanent link between the issue of sanctions and achievement of a real political transition since easing the sanctions in the presence of the same individuals and entities involved in crimes against humanity and war crimes means providing support to these repressive entities, and impose direct sanctions on the backers of the Syrian regime, primarily Russia and Iran.
- Increase the provision of humanitarian assistance to the World Health Organization to work in all regions of Syria, and ensure that its work is practiced freely away from the influence of local organizations affiliated with the Syrian regime in the areas under its control.
- Continue to work to hold the Syrian regime to account for its use of weapons of mass destruction.
- In light of the continued failure of the UN Security Council, it is imperative to consider establishing a civilizational and humanitarian alliance in accordance with clear criteria aimed at providing urgent protection for civilians from brutal regimes in the event of committing war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Executive Council of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW):

- Responsibility should be promptly transferred to the Security Council, which should be requested to intervene in accordance with Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations, given that a Member State's use of weapons of mass destruction is assumed to constitute a serious threat to international peace and security.
- In the event that the Security Council fails and is unable to take a decision, responsibility should be transferred to the United Nations General Assembly, and if this fails, responsibility should pass to the international community, especially the civilized democratic nations which claim to uphold human rights.
- Work more on the issue of holding accountable all Syrian regime individuals involved in the use of chemical weapons, including senior leaders. We at the Syrian Network for Human Rights have full details on our database of those involved in committing violations, as well as data on a large number of the individuals who contributed to the use of chemical weapons, and we will, according to the agreement signed with the Investigation and Identification Team, coordinate for further cooperation in this context.

Condolences

To all the families of the victims, who were killed by the Syrian regime through use of chemical weapons, and to all their friends and loved ones, we pledge that we will not abandon our persistence or falter in our efforts to ensure that all those involved in using chemical weapons in Syria and in killing Syrian citizens are held accountable until this is achieved.



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