

# The Twentieth Periodic Report and Sixth Annual Report on the US-led Coalition Forces against ISIS

The Need for Reparations for 3,039 Victims  
Killed, Reconstruction of Vital Facilities, and  
Establishment of a Democratically Elected  
Civilian Body to Begin

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

**SNHR**  
SYRIAN NETWORK FOR HUMAN RIGHTS  
الشبكة السورية لحقوق الإنسان



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## I. Twenty SNHR Reports on the Operations, Strategies, and Violations of the US-led Coalition to Eliminate ISIS

The US-led coalition, which was formed to fight the ISIS terrorist organization, announced its first strikes on September 23, 2014, with its attacks being focused on areas controlled by ISIS, mainly in the Arabian Jazira region. Although the painful strikes launched by the US-led coalition doubtlessly contributed to stopping the expansion of ISIS, and then to ensuring its decline, until it was confined to very small outposts, this success was accompanied by material, human and political losses. We believe that the US-led coalition could have avoided many of these, and could have crowned its military victory with a political victory by starting to establish a local body representing all the groups within Syrian society. It was also possible that it could have introduced reparations for victims as well as launching reconstruction in areas where ISIS had been vanquished, in parallel with military operations in other areas. Sadly, however, we note that none of these possibilities were accomplished; even in the period since [the announcement](#) of the defeat of ISIS in March 2019, we have not recorded any real political participation reparations for victims, or reconstruction operations on the desired level, although it should be emphasized that military action alone is not sufficient to end terrorist organizations, since this must be accompanied by political action with support for real representative democracy rather than for a system dependent on ethnic or sectarian discrimination which contradicts the most basic principles of human rights and simply instigates further societal conflict, paving the way for the return of extremist thinking which builds its grievances on political, administrative and economic failure.

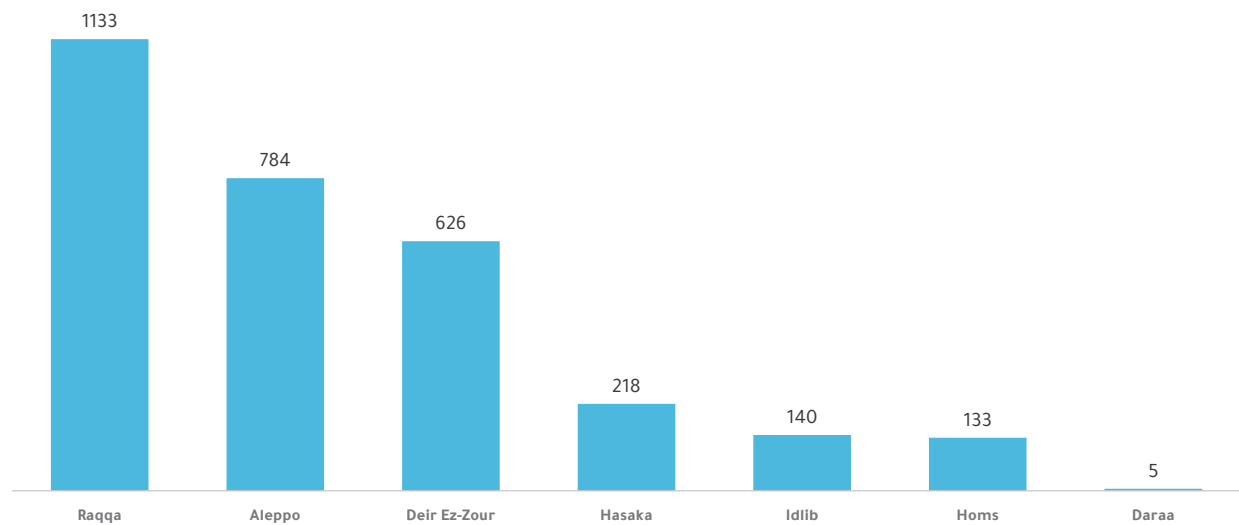
Since the first days of the US-led coalition forces' operations, the Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) has monitored their course, documented the developments of events and the violations perpetrated against civilians, residential buildings and vital facilities, and archived all of this within a special database. We have reflected the data we have documented in regular detailed reports, totaling 10 to date over the past six years, which have included information on developments in events on the ground and the shifting control of various areas, as well as the strategies followed, with these reports also contributing to the process of SNHR's continuous updating of the civilian death toll, and the violations that accompanied military operations, which constituted violations of rules of customary international law, hoping to avoid their subsequent recurrence. The following link contains all these reports.

On this occasion every year, we issue an expanded annual report that outlines the most prominent events of the past year, in which we reflect an update on the outcome of the data we have documented, with recommendations that correspond to the nature of the stage in question. This is the twentieth [periodic report](#), as well as the sixth annual report. Readers can view our working methodology in documenting the data via [the following link](#).

## II. The Record of the Most Notable Violations by the US-led Coalition Forces Since the Start of Their Military Intervention, According to the SNHR's Database

### A. Civilian death toll:

The SNHR documented the deaths of 3,039 civilians, including 924 children and 656 women (adult female), at the hands of US-led coalition forces between September 23, 2014, and September 23, 2020, distributed across the Syrian governorates as follows:



The civilian death toll of victims killed at the hands of US-led coalition forces was distributed as follows:

- From September 23, 2014, to September 23, 2015: 249 civilians, including 12 children and 62 women.
- From September 23, 2015, to September 23, 2016: 398 civilians, including 168 children and 113 women.
- From September 23, 2016, to September 23, 2017: 1,753 civilians, including 578 children and 311 women.
- From September 23, 2017, to September 23, 2018: 432 civilians, including 103 children and 131 women.
- From September 23, 2018, to September 23, 2019: 205 civilians, including 63 children and 39 women.
- From September 23, 2019, to September 23, 2020: Two civilians.

### B. Record of massacres (incidents resulting in the deaths of five or more persons in the same incident):

The SNHR documented at least 172 massacres committed by US-led coalition forces.

**C. Record of incidents of attacks on vital civilian facilities:**

The SNHR documented at least 181 incidents of attacks on vital civilian facilities, 16 of which were on medical facilities, 25 on schools, and four on markets.

**D. Record of the use of incendiary munitions:**

The SNHR documented at least five incendiary munitions attacks carried out by US-led coalition forces.

**E. Enforced displacement:**

Intense aerial attacks carried out by US-led coalition forces in the past six years, which often failed to distinguish between civilian and military targets, caused widespread panic among the population, reinforced by the widespread use of artillery shelling, forcing tens of thousands of civilians to flee and be displaced. Military operations in the governorates of Raqqa, Deir Ez-Zour and Hasaka caused the displacement of at least 560,000 people. The US-led Coalition forces and Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF)/PYD bear responsibility for their displacement, along with the ISIS terrorist organization, which used them as human shields on many occasions, with US-led coalition forces and the SDF failing to provide housing or tents in the locations where people were expected to be displaced to, as the attacking forces did not provide the urgently required essential basic assistance needed after the displacement of such massive numbers of people.

In addition, US-led coalition forces and Syrian Democratic Forces did not work effectively in requesting that the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) assume its responsibilities towards these displaced persons or in monitoring this request with the ICRC to ensure these needs were met. Finally, these parties took no tangible steps to enable the displaced to return to their areas, with many subsequently being confined to tents in extremely poor conditions. Not enough effort was made towards returning these displaced people to their areas or to work towards rehabilitating them, with all these factors mainly related to the absence of any democratically elected civilian administration / body representing the citizens from three governorates of the Syrian Jazira, namely Raqqa, Hasaka, and Deir Ez-Zour.

### **III. How the US-led Coalition's Tactics in Dealing with ISIS Have Changed Over the Years, and Cases of Civilian Detention with the Participation of Coalition Forces Documented**

Over the past six years, we have noted a difference in the tactics followed by the US-led coalition forces in dealing with ISIS, as the attacks in the first two years until approximately September 2016 were focused and well-planned, targeting the supply routes used by the organization, its headquarters, and the weapons and ammunition depots that it supervised. Since the end of 2016, however, attacks have become more indiscriminate, and have caused nearly 79% of the death toll among victims whose deaths we documented at the hands of the US-led coalition forces in the past six years.

Since September 2018, we have noted a clear decrease in the frequency of attacks; it appears that this reduction is due to the shrinking of the area that ISIS has come to control and its stationing in the Hajin area, as well as the expansion of the attacks by forces on the ground, carried out by Syrian Democratic Forces.

The period of time that followed the announcement of the elimination of the organization in March 2019 witnessed the reliance of the US-led coalition forces, in a tangible way, on the intensive airdrops, through which they supported Syrian Democratic Forces present in the field, in attempts to pursue ISIS members. Despite supposedly being carefully planned and carried out to ensure high levels of accuracy, these operations have led to civilian casualties, with SNHR documenting numerous violations from one such attack by the US-led coalition forces against ISIS in al Sh-heil city on May 9, 2019 and in another on al Keshkiya town on January 3, 2019. In general, we have documented many arrests, as well as the use of threats and intimidation of civilians, and looting of property during these operations in many villages.

Since the beginning of 2020, US-led coalition forces have participated in raids and arrests carried out by Syrian Democratic Forces, claiming to pursue ISIS cells, through airdrops on the areas where individuals wanted by Syrian Democratic Forces are located, mainly in the governorates of Deir Ez-Zour and Raqqa, in addition to the southern suburbs of Hasaka.

In addition, we recorded that Syrian Democratic Forces, backed by the coalition forces, have detained civilians with no links to ISIS, based on security reports from Syrian Democratic Forces, with a number of those detained being people with special needs and children; we have documented the release of some of these individuals, either through tribal negotiations or in exchange for ransom money which their families are blackmailed into paying to secure their release.

The raids and arrests backed by the coalition are often accompanied by imposing a curfew on the area, cutting off communications, deploying checkpoints and cutting off roads. In several incidents, we have documented beatings, assaults, looting of property and burning of homes targeting civilians in the airdrop area, carried out by personnel affiliated with Syrian Democratic Forces, which have been concentrated mainly in the areas of al Sh-heil, al Bseira, Theyban, and Jdeed Ekidat in the eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour.

According to the SNHR's database, we have documented the arrest of at least 122 individuals, including four children, at the hands of Syrian Democratic Forces personnel, with the participation of the US-led coalition forces, between September 2014 and September 20, 2020, of whom 56 individuals, including two children, have been detained since March 2019; that is, after the announcement of the defeat of ISIS.

## IV. Basic Requirements After Defeating ISIS Terrorist Organization Militarily

During the very long and arduous military struggle to rid humanity of the ISIS terrorist organization, which lasted nearly five years, many violations occurred, with SNHR providing details throughout this time on all the incidents that we were able to document; the areas previously controlled by the barbaric organization and their inhabitants have borne the greatest cost, with nearly 8,648 Syrian citizens from the areas formerly controlled by ISIS, including 319 children, still being categorized as disappeared, having suffered an unknown fate. The already traumatized people of those areas have waited impatiently for the announcement of the defeat of ISIS, in order to finally return home and start rebuilding their lives and resuming their long-suspended civil, economic and social life. SNHR can confirm that any military victory will be hollow and meaningless for these people if it's not accompanied by reparations for the families of those who were killed, and if the dispossessed, including those unjustly detained in camps, are unable to return home to their villages and towns, with real effort made to help them return and to help launch a process of genuinely democratic local elections, so that the people of these areas do not feel that they are once again languishing under military oppression, having already endured ISIS. The most important requirements, which we believe that the US-led coalition must work on seriously to help to achieve as quickly as possible, are summarized in the following eight points:

**One: Holding local elections for a civilian governing body representing the population of three Syrian governorates: Raqqa, Deir Ez-Zour, and Hasaka:**

The people of al Jazira region do not feel that they are represented by the Self-Management body that was imposed on them as an unelected de facto authority, which the people there had no choice in selecting to govern them. In addition, the current Management body is mainly dominated by the Kurdish Democratic Union Party, a branch of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) which is classified as a terrorist party. As a result of this, representation in this body is based on ethnic discrimination, which contradicts the most basic principles of human rights. Elections must, therefore, be prepared in which all Syrians from the region can run for positions on the management authority regardless of race, religion or sect, with ballot boxes distributed to all areas to allow every citizen to vote; such a pluralistic democratic transformation would have a tremendously positive effect in conditions in region in terms of ensuring political stability and thus security and economic stability, since all the residents would be able to participate in electing their representatives and democratically appointing leadership officials rather than an administration being imposed on the people.

In view of the current lack of any such democratic process despite more than a year-and-a half having passed since the defeat of ISIS, many areas in al Jazira region have witnessed angry popular protests, especially in Deir Ez-Zour governorate. We have noted severe congestion among the civilian population, with the situation worsening after the death of a dignitary of al Ekidat clan along with

his escort, which this clan representing the majority of the population of Deir Ez-Zour governorate; this assassination took place on August 2, 2020, when gunmen, whom we have so far been unable to identify, shot him dead near one of the Syrian Democratic Forces' checkpoints in al Hawayej village in the eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour, although the SDF has not yet launched any serious investigation into this incident. On August 11, 2020, dignitaries from al Ekidat clan held a meeting, at which they agreed on several demands to be presented to the US-led coalition, foremost among which is that administration of the region should be handed over to its people.

[Video](#) of the statement issued by al Ekidat clan to the US-led coalition – August 11, 2020

[Photo of the statement](#) issued by al Ekidat clan to the US-led coalition

**Two: Contributing to the reconstruction processes after the establishment of a democratically elected civilian body:**

The military operations caused widespread destruction, turning entire villages and city neighborhoods into rubble and leaving homes uninhabitable, with the destruction also extending to vital infrastructure such as hospitals, markets, schools, irrigation networks and bridges; many areas on the Syrian Jazira have not witnessed even any effort to remove the rubble or to restore any of the most important vital facilities such as hospitals, schools and markets, which is one of the main factors that have left the displaced unable to return to their homes.

The elections process must be followed by an active contribution by the states of the US-led coalition in the reconstruction and restoration process, and it is possible to benefit from the region's wealth of oil, gas, wheat and others in funding the restoration of the infrastructure, especially the educational and medical sectors.

**Three: Taking a firm stand on the operations of Syrian Democratic Forces' sales of oil and gas to the Syrian regime, especially after the implementation of the Caesar Act, and demanding that the SDF disclose the expenditure of financial revenues from the sale of oil and gas:**

After Syrian Democratic Forces took control of the oil and gas fields in Deir Ez-Zour governorate following the conclusion of their battles with ISIS at the end of 2017, they began selling oil to the Syrian regime; in September 2019, we issued [a detailed report](#) on the oil support operations that the SDF provided to the Syrian regime. Our investigations indicated that the main persons responsible for these oil smuggling operations are individuals working for al Qatirji Company, whose owner, Muhammad al Qatirji, was placed under sanctions by the United States in September 2018 for his clear support of the Syrian regime and its crimes against the Syrian people. These traders are dispersed across a number of areas under the control of the Syrian regime and in other areas under the control of Syrian Democratic Forces in Deir Ez-Zour governorate, where they are tasked with concluding deals between the two sides indirectly; these are the individuals who pay money to the leaders of Syrian Democratic Forces and the Deir Ez-Zour Military Council, which is administratively affiliated with Syrian Democratic Forces; this council is the body primarily involved in the oil-smuggling operation with the Syrian regime.



In mid-2019, the US-led coalition forces launched several attacks on oil smuggling routes, and in some of those attacks, Syrian Democratic Forces participated formally in order to demonstrate its supposed hostility to this trade with the Syrian regime; despite these attacks, however, SDF has not stopped its oil trade with the Syrian regime, although its volume has been reduced.

After the Caesar Act entered into force in June 2020, we were optimistic that this would contribute to ending the Syrian Democratic Forces' support of the Syrian regime with oil. These hopes were apparently premature, with the oil trade continuing unimpeded; [video](#) footage filmed on July 8, 2020, clearly shows dozens of tankers loaded with crude oil that were transported through al Sh-heil crossing, which is under the control of Syrian Democratic Forces, towards Buqrus crossing, which is under the control of Syrian Regime forces and their allies, in the eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour.

Between July 17-21, 2020, Syrian Democratic Forces closed all river crossings, and installed a number of observation points and checkpoints on the banks of the Euphrates River with the objective of preventing trade and smuggling operations, which has led to a limited decline in the oil trade. Up to the moment of preparing this report, however, we are still documenting sales and oil-smuggling operations conducted via small water ferries carrying oil tankers with a capacity of 30 liters, so it seems that the recent campaign is similar to previous campaigns in terms of ineffectiveness, indicating a temporary or limited suspension of activities before the situation returns to its former status in trading and smuggling.

Worse than this is the lack of any financial transparency by the Syrian Democratic Forces and the controlling Self-Management authority, with nobody knowing where the oil and gas revenues go, with SNHR fearing that these funds are likely to be poured into supporting the terrorist Kurdistan Workers' Party; we have raised this sensitive issue with several US Administration agencies, noting that this is why the oil-rich areas of Syria have witnessed no increase in the standard of services or living, but instead continue to suffer from power and water cuts and poor infrastructure, which causes an increase in tensions and in discontent among the people of these areas.

**Four: Working to free detainees in the northeastern region's camps:**

Thousands of residents of the camps controlled by Syrian Democratic Forces, such as Ein Eisa Camp north of Raqqa and al Hawl Camp in Hasaka suburbs, are considered to be forcibly detained, because they have been unable to return to their areas or leave the camps, some of which have turned into detention facilities resembling large prison camps, which was confirmed by the Independent International Commission of Inquiry in [its latest report](#) issued a few days ago; despite the end of the military operations on the ground and a significant decrease in the frequency of the coalition forces' raids, Syrian Democratic Forces are still practicing arbitrary policies that prevent some displaced people from the towns of al Baghouz, al Sh'afa, al Sousa and Hajin from returning to their homes.

Numerous appeals and mediations by dignitaries and tribal sheikhs with the responsible authorities in Syrian Democratic Forces have been unsuccessful in resolving this situation, and we can confirm that these camps suffer from extremely challenging humanitarian and social conditions, with some families forced to pay huge sums of money to camp officials in order to be allowed to leave them. The International Committee of the Red Cross should exert far greater efforts in supervising and supporting these camps.

**Five: Supervising the mass graves issue:**

The issue of mass graves arose after the return of some residents to their homes, especially in Raqqa city, where they revealed the presence of dozens of mass graves spread across several areas in the city. These graves were dealt with at the beginning of 2018, when Syrian Democratic Forces controlling the area formed the Initial Response Team that undertook the task of uncovering these graves with 27 mass graves having been discovered, and the number of bodies exhumed from these graves reaching approximately 5,218 in total, according to the statements of the Initial Response Team.

Nearly three years after the withdrawal of ISIS from Raqqa city, the subject of mass graves remains one of the unresolved issues, with efforts to locate and exhume the victims buried there still being faltering and insufficient; it is clear that more resources and more financial and logistical support must be devoted to supporting the teams responsible for uncovering and transporting dead bodies, stressing the need for securing and protecting the sites of these graves to avoid destroying the available evidence, and that the controlling authorities must deal with this subject with greater responsibility. We talked about the issue of mass graves in an [expanded report issued in March 2019](#).

**Six: Contributing to the fight against landmines and IEDs:**

Landmines, which are widely distributed in the areas from which ISIS withdrew, pose a frightening threat to the safety of the local population, especially children, and are perhaps one of the primary issues in discouraging displaced local people from returning to their homes, with landmines and improvised explosive devices (IEDs) primed to explode at the slightest touch being distributed randomly along the area's roads, among the rubble of houses, and even amongst home furniture. These landmines have already killed dozens of residents and injured hundreds of others, causing severe wounds often requiring amputation of limbs; despite this, the response of the SDF's local council has been inadequate, not reaching the required level, with the states of the US-led coalition against ISIS failing to take any action in this issue, which adds to the disaster.

The SNHR has documented the deaths of 435 civilians, including 97 children and 38 women, and the injury of 1,800 others by landmines in the governorates of Raqqa, Deir Ez-Zour and Hasaka between October 2017 (that is, after the withdrawal of ISIS from Raqqa governorate) and September 2020.

In addition, the Syrian Network for Human Rights, through [its membership](#) in the International Campaign to Ban Landmines - the Cluster Munition Coalition (ICBL-CMC), which it has furnished with the data it possesses on minefields and casualty incidents that have occurred, is ready to contribute to taking effective anti-mine action in various Syrian governorates.

**Seven: Contributing to disclosing the fate of approximately 8,648 citizens disappeared by ISIS, whose fate is still unknown:**

ISIS lost control of the areas it controlled in northeastern Syria in March 2019, with its presence subsequently limited to narrow enclaves in the Syrian Badiya and scattered cells, meaning that there are, therefore, no longer any detention centers affiliated with it. According to the data the SNHR team was able to collect, we note that ISIS previously had at least 54 main detention centers and many secret detention centers, whose locations are difficult to determine. The largest number of the group's detention centers was located in Raqqa governorate which had 26 such centers in total, followed by Deir Ez-zour governorate with 20, then Aleppo governorate with eight detention centers. In a previous report, entitled [The Black Bottom](#), we talked about the 19 most notable ISIS detention centers.

Following the end of the group's presence in the main areas that were under its control, this led to complications in the process of tracking the detainees' and abductees' fate; we believe that ISIS evacuated its detention centers and took those who were still alive among the detainees to unknown areas, making tracking the fate of the abductees/ detainees in its custody extremely difficult and complex, especially in the cases of those who had disappeared or been held hostage after being kidnapped years before, whose families have not received any information about them since the moment of their arrest/ detention. We also fear that ISIS killed whoever they were unable to transfer, either individually or collectively. In addition to this, the Syrian Democratic Forces' lack of any serious cooperation or of any actual investigation, and its indifference shown in the failure to launch even one investigation into the fate of these forcibly disappeared and missing persons, further confirms our aforementioned belief that these forces are a military control force playing no role in civil and societal work, instead dedicating financial resources solely to their own security and military objectives. Based on all this, the fate of thousands of Syrian citizens forcibly disappeared by ISIS remains unknown, with SNHR's team documenting at least 8,648 individuals, including 319 children and 225 women, who are still forcibly disappeared by ISIS, since the announcement of the establishment of ISIS up until September 2020.

**Eight:** Following up on the complete elimination of ISIS cells active in northeastern Syria:

Based on information we have obtained from eyewitnesses and residents of villages in the eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour, who told us about the spread of many ISIS cells, the terrorist group is still active in several towns, including al Bseira, al Sh-heil, al Zer, al Hawayej, and Theyban, and continues to terrorize the population, as well as demanding the shop owners pay 'taxes' and Jizya (tribute).

We note that these cells exploit the fragile political and security situation in these crisis-hit areas, with these cells working in concert to once again expand the organization and empower its ranks.

### **Thanks and Condolences**

We wish to extend our sincere condolences to all the families of the victims and those affected whose names we have been able to identify and document, and for all the families of the missing and forcibly disappeared persons from the Syrian Jazira, and to express our gratitude to the families, local activists and victims' families, without whose contribution we would not have been able to build such an extensive database and issue this report.



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