

# Eight Years Since the Start of the Popular Uprising in Syria, Terrible Violations Continue

From Minority Rule, Repression and Dictatorship Towards Pluralism, Human Rights and Democracy

# SNHR

SYRIAN NETWORK FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

الشبكة السورية لحقوق الإنسان

Monday, March 11, 2019

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

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## I. Introduction

For eight years, Syrian citizens have suffered from a vast and terrible range of violations of a staggering magnitude, which have reached the level of crimes against humanity. This has been continuous ever since the beginning of the people's popular uprising in March 2011 in which citizens first simply demanded freedom and dignity, and later the overthrow of the regime entailing the end of the hereditary family's rule over Syria. Nobody could have imagined that Syrian citizens would be exposed to this horrific pattern of violations, including fatal torture, rape of men and women, and death by barrel bombs, Scud missiles and chemical weapons; further exacerbating the people's suffering and hindering their struggle has been the international community's status as a passive, silent spectator, tacitly giving the ruling Syrian regime a green light to do whatever it wishes to the Syrian people, treating them as though they were expendable creatures less worthy of respect than slaves.

Despite all this, and despite the magnitude of the great challenges and the entry of extremist Shiite and Sunni Islamist terrorist organizations into the popular uprising, as well as the intervention of external forces directly led by Iran and Russia in support of the regime, the crux of the problem remains the conflict between Syrian society's wish for freedom and the various forms of counter-revolutionary tyranny, oppression and minority family rule. This has also been the guiding compass in the eyes of most of those involved in the struggle to



transfer Syria from brutal, regressive hereditary dictatorship by one family via factional sectarianism to a modern, democratic, pluralistic state under a fairly elected government truly representing the Syrian society and people, primarily based on the exchange of power and respect for the rights and dignity of the Syrian citizen.

Rather than all the countries of the world and the leading international organizations and figures severing any connection or coordination with a regime involved in tens of thousands of crimes against humanity and war crimes, Syrian society which supports the progressive advance of peaceful change has noted with dismay the rush by some countries to normalize relations with the regime, sending a clear message rejecting the values of dignity and democracy, instead legitimizing and strengthening despotism and establishing a state of hatred and instability that will extend over decades.

Fadel Abdul Ghani, Chairman of the Syrian Network for Human Rights, states:

**“Defending the rights of Syrian citizens, especially the right to elect and change those who govern them, and to live under a government that respects the principles of human rights and preserves their freedom and dignity, is a moral and human duty, which all the peoples of the world should support and help the Syrians attain a civilized advancement for their nation to reach a fair, pluralistic and democratic state, and [failure to support this] exposes anyone who supports repression, autocracy and the use of chemical weapons. “**

As a reminder of the progress made by the Syrian people for democracy and change, we have issued a summary issued to mark the eighth anniversary of the popular uprising, reviewing the most prominent human rights violations, which we were able to record on the Syrian Human Rights Network’s database between March 2011 and March 2019. These statistics represent the bare minimum of the crimes perpetrated, given the difficulties and challenges facing the documentation process. For more details on the mechanism of gathering and investigating information, you can read the methodology of our work here<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> “Syrian Network for Human Rights Methodology”, Syrian Network for Human Rights, <[http://sn4hr.org/public\\_html/wp-content/pdf/english/SNHR\\_Methodology\\_en.pdf](http://sn4hr.org/public_html/wp-content/pdf/english/SNHR_Methodology_en.pdf)> accessed date: 10 March 2019



SNHR has launched an [interactive interface](#) on its official website showing the toll of civilian victims who were killed in Syria since March 2011 until January 2019. The interactive graphics show the magnitude of victims distributed across Syrian governorates according to the perpetrator party. In addition, they show the distribution according to the perpetrator party by year. The graphics also show the toll of victims distributed by the governorate from which they originally came and classify them according to category as adult male, female and child, in addition to listing the party responsible for the killing. This clarifies the casualties that we were able to document in every governorate which help to draw a clear picture to evaluate the process of transitional justice in future.

## II. Extrajudicial killing

Extrajudicial killings have continued to be the most serious violations against civilians in Syria, with these killings assuming a widespread methodological form. No distinction has been made between civilians and combatants. No child, woman or detainee was spared. In addition, cease-fire efforts and cessation of hostilities statements, followed by agreements of de-escalation and the Sochi agreement, were all wholly ornamental, doing nothing to stop the daily killings.

The forces of the Syrian-Russian-Iranian alliance have perpetrated killings of every kind by carrying out indiscriminate or deliberate attacks using missile, artillery, chemical weapons and improvised explosive devices against purely civilian targets, with many of the atrocities by Syrian Regime forces backed by Iranian proxy militias having distinctive sectarian undertones. Another tool used by the Syrian Regime has been starvation and denial of food and health care as weapons of war, mainly on areas that broke free of its control.

International Coalition forces and Syrian Democratic Forces have also launched indiscriminate attacks that have claimed the lives of thousands of civilians and have failed to take appropriate precautions to avoid casualties in many of these attacks.

Extremist Islamist groups have also continued to carry out extrajudicial killings, while mines planted by ISIS in the areas from which they've withdrawn have killed hundreds of civilians. We have recorded the deaths of hundreds of civilians at the hands of factions of the Armed Opposition, whether through random bombardment targeting areas under the control of the Syrian Regime or during clashes with other factions of the Armed Opposition or with Extremist Islamist groups.

The death toll of civilian victims killed since the outbreak of the popular uprising for democracy in Syria from March 2011 until March 2019, according to the SNHR's database, has reached 223,161 civilians, including 28,486 children and 15,425 women (adult female). These deaths have been recorded through continuous daily documentation on the SNHR's

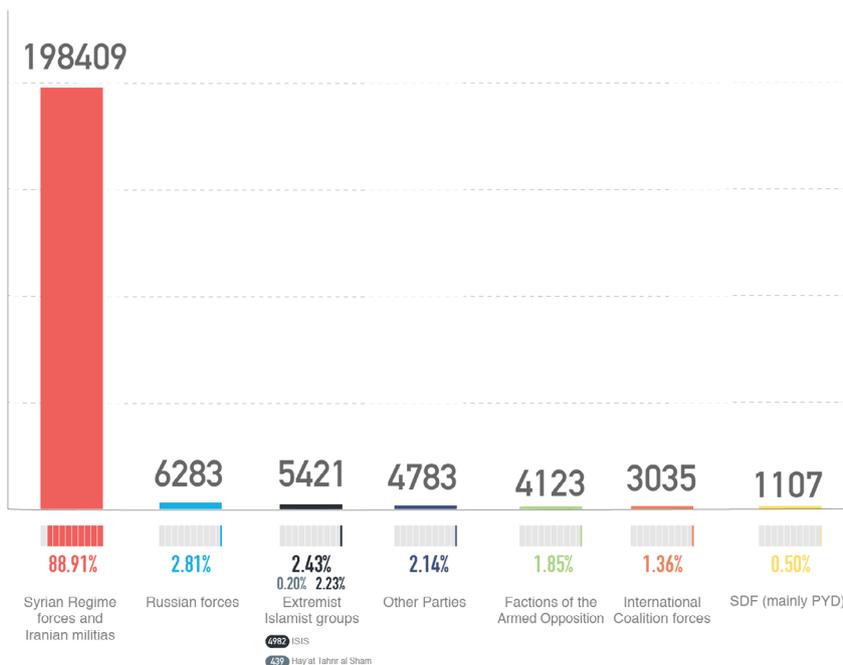


database, providing various details such as the name, location and time of death, the type of weapon used, and the party that carried out the killing. According to the statistics catalogued on the database, the Syrian-Russian alliance is responsible for 92 percent of the death toll compared to the other parties, with 18 percent of the total number of victims consisting of women and children, an excessive ratio which further confirms that the Syrian-Russian alliance is deliberately targeting civilians.

The following charts showing the toll of civilian victims killed in Syria and their distribution according to perpetrators:



Distributed as follows:

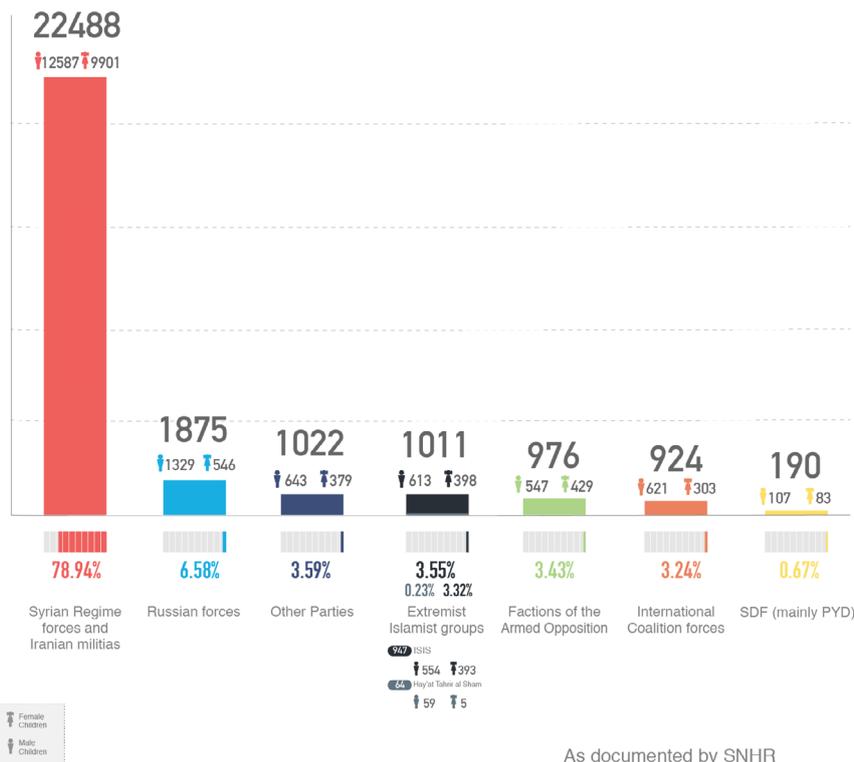


**223161**  
**civilians**  
**were killed**  
 at the hands of  
 the main parties to  
 the conflict in Syria  
 from March 2011 to March 2019

As documented by SNHR



Distributed as follows:

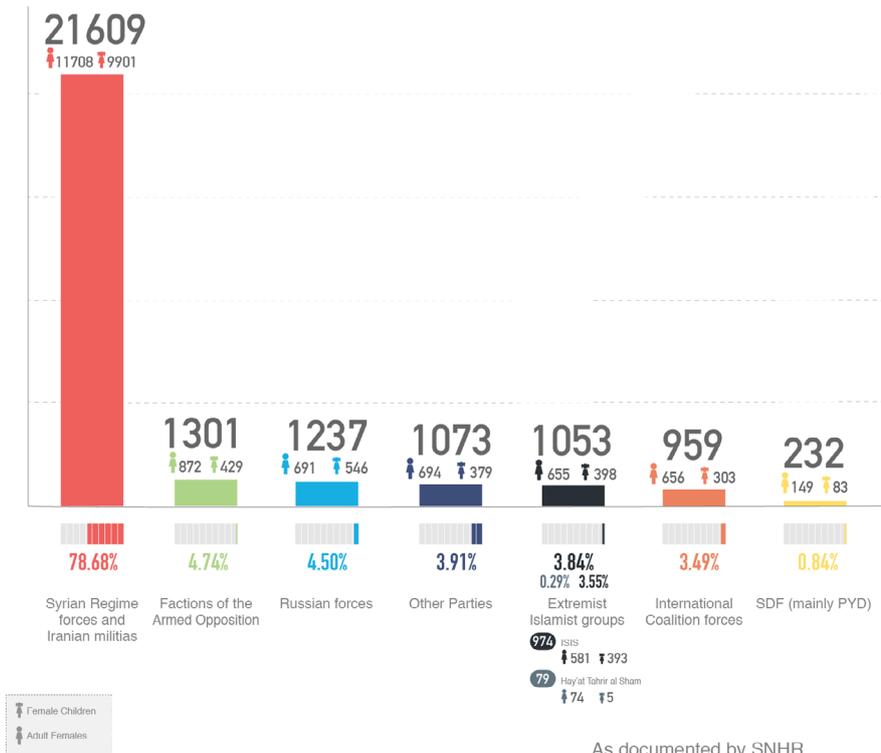


As documented by SNHR

**28486**  
**children**  
**were killed**  
at the hands of  
the main parties to  
the conflict in Syria

from March 2011 to March 2019

Distributed as follows:



As documented by SNHR

**27464**  
**females**  
**were killed**  
at the hands of  
the main parties to  
the conflict in Syria

from March 2011 to March 2019



### III. Arbitrary Arrest and Enforced Disappearance

Tens of thousands of Syrians have been subjected to arrests and kidnappings carried out mainly by the Syrian Regime forces and affiliated militias. These crimes have not been limited to activists, aid workers and participants in the popular uprising, with the highest percentage consisting of apparently randomly chosen victims from all parts of society. Most of the arrest incidents took place without any warrant or cause of arrest being provided, making them more akin to abductions, being carried out while the Syrian citizens were passing through checkpoints or during raids on their homes or workplaces. In addition, many of the arrests occurred after Syrian citizens acquiesced to the procedures of the regime's 'security settlement', according to which civilians or activists in the popular uprising submitted official documents to the Judicial Settlement Committees in their areas consisting of officers of the regime's security branches, requesting settlement of their situation and pledging not to return to any opposition activity; in most of these cases, this has been followed a few days later by security forces arriving at the applicants' homes or workplaces to detain, arrest, interrogate and torture them.

Security forces of the four main intelligence services are often responsible for detentions unconnected to the judiciary or process of law. Every detainee is tortured and humiliated from the first moments of his/her detention, being denied any contact with their family or lawyer. The Syrian regime has deliberately concealed the fate of tens of thousands of detainees since the beginning of the popular uprising, with 85 percent of the cases of detention turning into enforced disappearances. In May 2018, the Syrian regime, acting with its customary casual malice, issued death of the forcibly disappeared via local civil registry departments. SNHR has recorded 878 such cases.

According to the SNHR's database, approximately 127,916 of the individuals seized by the regime between March 2011 and March 2019 are still detained or forcibly disappeared in the official and unofficial detention centers of the Syrian regime.

The Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces have also carried out arbitrary arrests and enforced disappearances in areas under their control, targeting political activists and media workers opposing their policies, as well as conducting extensive arrests with the aim of forced conscription, in which they have detained civilians, including children and women. We have recorded some of the arrests which were largely of an ethnic nature.

We have documented at least 2,705 individuals who are still detained in the prisons of the Syrian Democratic Forces since its establishment until March 2019.



ISIS has also sought to implement a policy of arbitrary arrest and enforced disappearance against civilians in areas under its control, and carried out mass abductions of civilians during attacks on areas free of its control, taking them as hostages. We have recorded that ISIS arrested at least 8,143 individuals since its establishment until March 2019; even after the elimination of ISIS in most areas of Syria, their fate remains unknown.

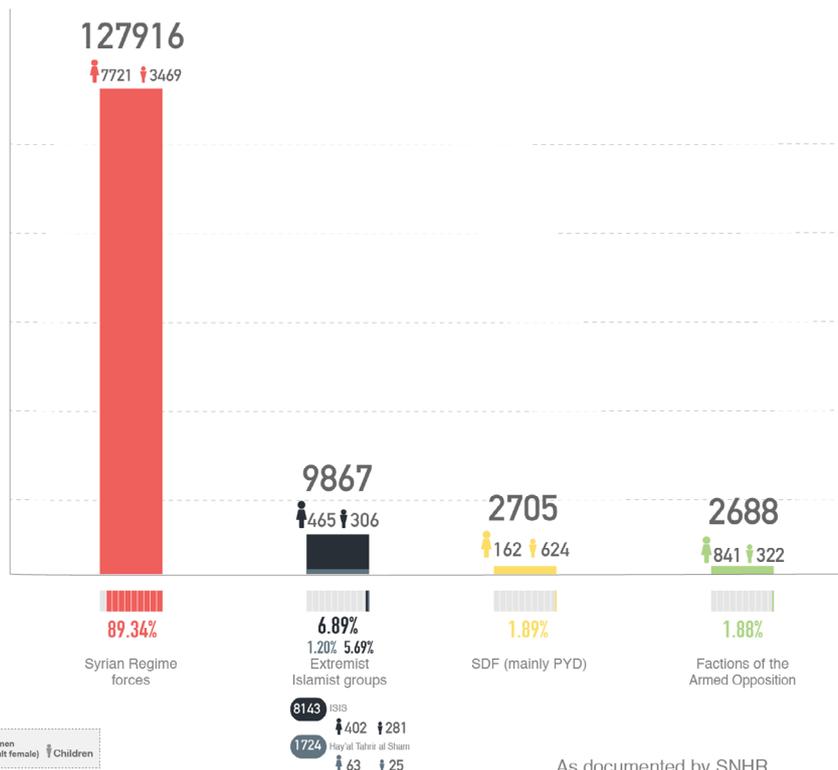
Meanwhile, Hay'at Tahrir al Sham (formerly al Nussra Front) has also engaged extensively in arbitrary arrests and security-related persecution. During the last year, Hay'at Tahrir al Sham increased the number of its violations, storming a number of villages, and arresting dozens of people, including activists, aid workers, mosque preachers, and personnel from civil society institutions, local councils and education and health departments of the Syrian Interim Government. According to SNHR's database, at least 1,724 individuals are still detained at the hands of Hay'at Tahrir al Sham up to March 2019.

Factions of the Armed Opposition have also carried out arrests against civilians after storming areas controlled by Syrian Regime forces or in areas under their control. In addition, these arrests have also targeted media activists and doctors, as well as personnel of civil society organizations in areas under their control. We have documented 2,688 individuals as still being arbitrarily detained in the prisons of factions of the Armed Opposition until March 2019.

The following chart showing the record of cases of arbitrary arrest or enforced disappearance distributed by perpetrators:



Distributed as follows:



At least  
**143,176**  
individuals  
are still detained  
or forcibly disappeared  
at the hands of  
the main parties to  
the conflict in Syria  
from March 2011 to March 2019



## IV. Torture

Syria continues to lead all the countries in the world in the practice of torture against detainees, which leads to death in many cases. The Syrian regime is responsible for 99 percent of the cases of death by torture documented on the SNHR database, while all the rest of the parties combined have responsibility for the remaining one percent. Torture is used as a tool to intimidate, impose power, crush opponents and terrorize society, destroy it and push it into submission, silence and surrender to the hereditary dictatorship of the family.

The Syrian regime has instinctively resorted to the use of torture as a brutal weapon against its opponents throughout its rule, a practice which has increased since 2011. Torture has become closely associated with arbitrary arrests and enforced disappearances according to the regime's integrated system that begins with unlawful detention up to brutal torture during the period of forced disappearance. This often ends with death due to torture. We documented 13,983 individuals who died due to torture in the Syrian regime's prisons between March 2011 and March 2019.

The same methods have been used against detainees by ISIS, with torture used against detainees and forcibly disappeared individuals in stages according to the charges against them, and according to the detention center. Detainees held in secret detention centers on charges of opposing the so-called 'Islamic State' were subjected to more severe torture than other persons arrested on charges of Shari'a violations assessed according to ISIS' extremist perspective, with the most horrendous forms of torture being practiced with extreme savagery against those in the first category, using methods including waterboarding, gas asphyxiation, severe beatings with the aim of breaking bones, electric shocks, pulling out fingernails and burning. Torture often lasts for days and weeks and leads to death. The second category of prisoners were subjected to less cruelty during torture, such as severe beating, and use of favorite regime torture methods, such as the excruciatingly painful 'wheel' and the Shabeh (or Ghost), which lasts for a few hours or days.

We have recorded the deaths of 32 individuals due to torture in the prisons of ISIS since its establishment in April 2013 until March 2019, using methods including the stoning to death of detained girls.

Detainees and abductees held by Hay'at Tahrir al Sham are also routinely subjected to severe beatings, flogging, and use of the regime's 'Shabeh' torture technique. The group also practices psychological torture, such as mock executions, and threats of death and assassination against individuals in case they are charged again. We have documented the deaths of 21 individuals due to torture in their prisons until March 2019.



Following the takeover of new areas in the governorates of Raqqa and Deir Ez-Zour by the Kurdish -led Syrian Democratic Forces, we documented increasing arrests and incidents of torture, with hundreds of civilians arrested on charges of having links with ISIS, then tortured with harsh methods such as having nails pulled out, skin removed and use of the regime's 'Shabeh' torture method. Activists and politicians opposing the SDF's policies have been subjected to severe beatings and deprivation of food and healthcare. We have documented the deaths of at least 38 individuals due to torture in the SDF's prisons since its establishment until March 2019.

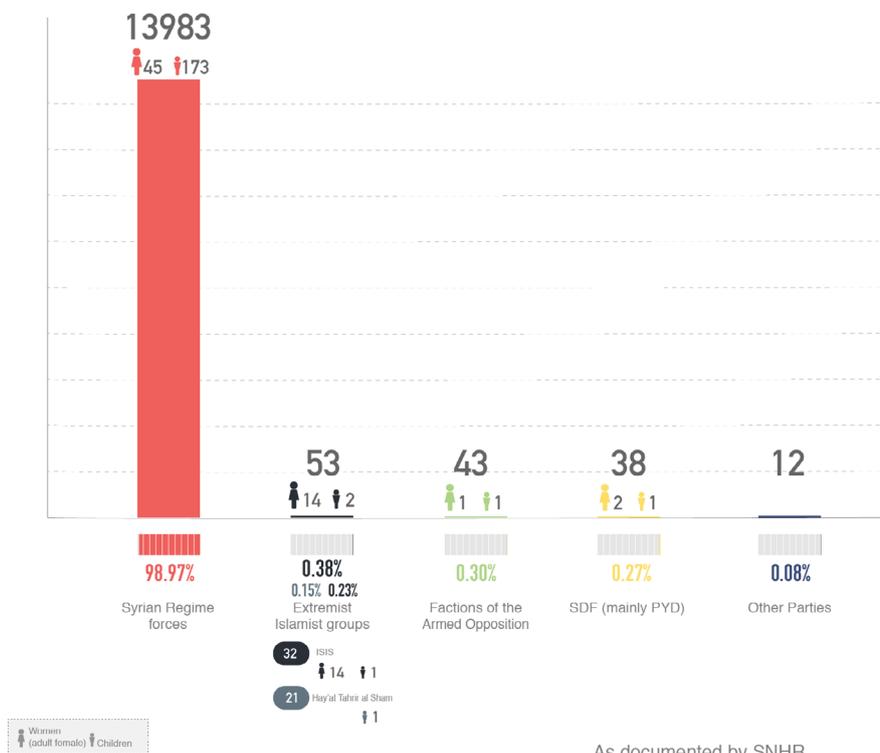
The forces of the Armed Opposition have also used methods of torture such as flogging, whipping, and electrocution, as well as 'the wheel' against those who criticize their policies, mainly against local media activists. These practices markedly increased between the beginning of 2017 and June 2018.

We have documented the deaths of 43 individuals due to torture until March 2019 at the hands of all Armed Opposition factions.

The following chart showing the record of victims who died due to torture and their distribution according to perpetrators:



Distributed as follows:



**14129**  
**individuals**  
**have died**  
**due to torture**  
**at the hands of**  
**the main parties to**  
**the conflict in Syria**  
**from March 2011 to March 2019**

As documented by SNHR



## V. Siege

Syrian Regime forces have consistently adopted a policy of imposing starvation siege on areas under the control of factions of the Armed Opposition, using the policy of starvation as a form of collective punishment. These sieges and the deliberate withholding of food and medicine led to the spread of cases of malnutrition, drought and anemia, in addition to the outbreak of a number of disease epidemics due to environmental pollution, which resulted from the accumulation of waste and the damage to sewage networks. We have documented the deaths of 921 civilians, including 398 children and 187 women (adult female) due to lack of food and medicine in the areas besieged by the Syrian regime since March 2011. Despite the end of siege in many areas as a result of the Syrian regime imposing control over them after displacing the residents and evacuating them to the areas in north Syria, al Rukban Camp on the Syrian-Jordanian border is still subjected to siege by the Syrian regime as one of the most important reasons of the siege of the camp.

ISIS used the same techniques against the neighborhoods of al Joura and al Qosour in Deir Ez-Zour city, as well as in al Yarmouk Camp south of Damascus. In addition, factions of the Armed Opposition besieged towns in the suburbs of Idlib and Aleppo where the majority of residents are loyal to the Syrian regime, leading to the deterioration of the living situation there. 2018 saw the end of the siege of all those areas after Russian, Syrian and Iranian regime forces seized control of the besieged areas.

## VI. Indiscriminate Attacks and Outlawed Weapons

Syrian Regime forces used cluster munitions extensively in the context of its war on civilians. The SNHR's database indicates that the first documented use of cluster munitions occurred in July 2012. The period following the Russian military intervention on September 30, 2015, saw an unprecedented escalation in the use of cluster munitions. In addition, new models of munitions that have not been seen in the Syrian arena before, whether in the form of air or ground munitions, launched via missile launchers, have been tested in Syria. The Syrian-Russian alliance forces continue to use these weapons in operations that serve their military advances despite the horrific consequences of using these munitions and their sub-munitions, such as severe injuries and terrible mutilation, which the Syrian state will suffer from for generations to come.

As of March 2019, we documented at least 441 cluster munition attacks carried out by the Syrian-Russian forces, distributed according to perpetrator as:

- A. Syrian Regime forces: 201 attacks.
- B. Russian forces: 232 attacks.
- C. Russian / Syrian attacks: Eight attacks.



With regard to the use of chemical weapons, we have documented nearly 216 chemical attacks carried out by the Syrian regime since the first use in December 2012 until March 2019, 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: 183 attacks

Third: After Security Council Resolution 2209 of March 6, 2015: 114 attacks

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

58 attacks

Fifth: After the Russian veto on the extension of the task of the Joint Investigation Mechanism on November 17, 2017: Seven attacks

These attacks resulted in the deaths of at least 1,461 individuals, documented by SNHR by name and in detail, distributed to:

- 1,397 civilians, including 185 children, and 252 women (adult female).
- 57 Armed Opposition fighters.
- Seven prisoners from Syrian regime forces who were being held in an opposition prison.

We have also documented the injury of at least 11,076 individuals in these attacks.

ISIS also used chemical weapons in Aleppo governorate, where we recorded nearly five attacks that caused the injury of at least 132 individuals.

The Syrian regime's helicopters and fixed-wing warplanes have never stopped dropping barrel bombs, completely ignoring Security Council Resolution 2139, with the Security Council itself failing to monitor or condemn the Syrian regime's use of this barbaric weapon. According to our statistics, the Syrian regime's helicopters and fixed-wing warplanes have dropped nearly 77,146 barrel bombs since the first documented use on July 18, 2012, up to March 2019.

Since March 2011, the Syrian regime has also used incendiary munitions and barrel bombs loaded with incendiary materials; we documented a marked increase in the use of such weapons in 2016 and 2017, when Russian forces were most responsible for these attacks. According to the SNHR's database, we documented at least 149 attacks using incendiary weapons on civilian residential areas, distributed according to perpetrators:

A. The Syrian regime: 19 attacks.

B. Russian forces: 125 attacks.

C. International Coalition forces: Five attacks against residential neighborhoods in Raqqa city.



## VII. Attacks on Civilian Objects

The Syrian-Russian alliance forces have consistently and deliberately targeted vital civilian facilities, especially hospitals, places of worship and schools. We have documented dozens of massacres caused by the attacks on these facilities, and on many occasions repeated attacks on the same vital facility, indicating deliberate targeting, with intent to destroy or inflict serious damage on infrastructure.

Other parties have committed similar violations to varying degrees, though these have never approached the level and magnitude of violations committed by the Syrian-Russian-Iranian alliance forces.

The attacks we recorded include deliberate shelling that targeted civilian objects, theft and looting operations, as well as attacks that include the disabling of these facilities and preventing them from performing their role in the service of civilians, despite the absence of any urgent military necessity or of their use for combat purposes by one of the parties which could be used as justification for targeting them by other parties to the conflict.

## VIII. Forced Displacement

Internal displacement and forced displacement represent one of the greatest tragedies that the Syrian people have suffered since the outbreak of the popular uprising for democracy in March 2011, having worsened and intensified to staggering levels over the years. 2017 and 2018 in particular saw huge waves of displaced persons forced to leave their homes and land as a result of military operations launched by parties to the conflict or as the result of truces and agreements imposed on besieged cities and towns, whose content blatantly violates international humanitarian law.

The SNHR estimates that approximately 14.2 million people have been forcibly displaced since March 2011, of whom eight million have been displaced inside Syria, while nearly 6.2 million have been displaced outside Syria.

Military operations launched by Syrian-Russian-Iranian alliance forces are by far the largest cause of the mass displacements of Syrians. Even after the de-escalation agreement that nominally took effect in May 2017, the regime's ferocious bombardment and brutal attacks continued to escalate. 2018 saw the collapse of this agreement following the Syrian regime and affiliated Iranian militias seizing control of three areas included in the agreement of de-escalation, which was achieved by the full and brutal invasion of these areas and the imposition of forced displacement on most of these areas' residents.

Attacks by the forces laterally called the Syrian Democratic forces and formerly known as the Kurdish Democratic Union Party, backed by International Coalition forces, have also displaced hundreds of thousands of people from the governorates of Raqqa and Deir Ez-Zour.



## IX. Conclusions and Recommendations

We noted that most of the attacks and incidents of violations were directed primarily by all the parties to the conflict against civilian individuals, which is a violation of international humanitarian law and the relevant Security Council resolutions. In addition, a large proportion of the incidents, which we documented and which were reflected in the statistics cited in this report, have caused civilian casualties, injuries or damage to civilian objects, many of which have constituted crimes against humanity and war crimes.

### **Recommendations:**

#### **Security Council and the United Nations**

- Members of the Security Council must stop using their veto to protect the Syrian regime, which has committed hundreds of thousands of violations over the past eight years, many of which constitute crimes against humanity and war crimes.
- Following the failure of the parties, in particular the Syrian regime, to comply with any of the Security Council resolutions concerning the use of chemical weapons, barrel bombs or enforced disappearance, the Security Council must, after eight years, to intervene militarily in order to protect Syrian civilians.
- The dossier on the crimes perpetrated in Syria must be referred to the International Criminal Court and all those involved should be held accountable.
- Ensure peace, security and the implementation of the principle of responsibility to protect civilians, intervene to save Syrians' lives, heritage and cultural artefacts from destruction, looting and vandalism.

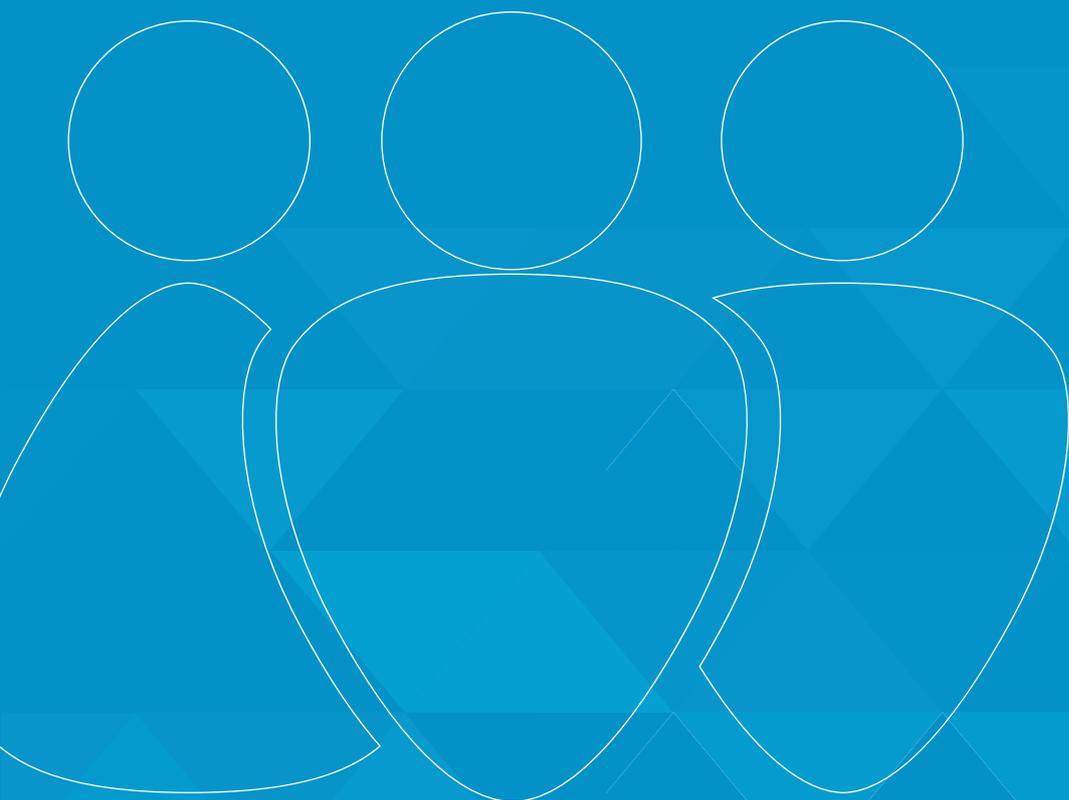
#### **International Community**

- The Syrian regime has not only failed to protect citizens for eight years to date, but has been by far the primary perpetrator of every kind of crimes. The international community must immediately intervene to protect civilians after all their unimaginable losses and suffering.
- Put real pressure on Russia and Iran, and categorize them as key partners in the violations committed in Syria since they continue to supply the Syrian regime with weapons, as well as due to their direct involvement in thousands of violations against Syrian citizens.

#### **All Parties to the Conflict**

Comply with the rules of customary humanitarian law and Security Council resolutions, ensure that civilians are treated as neutral and not subjected to suffering, release detainees and hostages, stop torture, reveal the fate of the disappeared and missing persons, and lift the siege.





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