



## On International Women's Day: Multiple Violations Committed by Various Parties to the Conflict in Syria

**Oppression of Women in All Groups' Areas of Control Perpetuates a State of Lack of Development, Equality, and Security**

Tuesday 8 March 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.

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## I. The Syrian Regime Which Killed 74 Women under Torture Cannot Be a Model to Compare with

Over the past eleven years, Syrian society has suffered from the consequences of the armed conflict, with women and girls being particularly badly affected due to their position in society and their gender. In many of our annual reports issued to mark International Women's Day on March 8, and the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women on November 25, we have addressed the violations that occurred, mainly in connection with the conflict and between the parties involved, and how this was reflected in violence, killing, displacement, enforced disappearance, torture and other violations against women. However, violations against women do not only take place between the parties to the conflict, thus violating international humanitarian law. Rather, many of the violations of women's rights we've documented have taken place in areas controlled by the forces involved in the conflict, that is, against the populations in areas they rule over.

The Syrian people who participated in the popular uprising hoped that the areas that were outside the control of the Syrian regime would be models of freedom, built around democracy, social justice, independence of the judiciary, and other requirements of the rule of law, this has not yet happened. The situation for the peoples living under the authorities in those areas is, tragically, often comparable with the same lack of freedoms, rights, and judicial fairness as under the Syrian regime; this comparison is wholly reprehensible because, for those who've escaped the regime's rule, the comparison should be with civilized governments that respect international law, rather than with a barbaric regime involved in committing innumerable violations that constitute crimes against humanity and war crimes, which has practiced enforced disappearances, and killed 74 women under torture, as well as drafting a constitution that embodies the characteristics of dictatorship, and which has established security courts affiliated with the security services with the aim of liquidating opponents. This is a brutal regime that committed the most terrible violations against women for demanding political change, retaliating by displacing millions of women, and arbitrarily arresting tens of thousands more.

In light of all these factors, this report presents an update on the previous years' reports, based on information from the Syrian Network for Human Rights' (SNHR) database and summarizing the record of the most notable violations perpetrated against women in connection with the internal armed conflict and in violation of international human rights law. This report also provides details of the violations and assaults that took place against women in the areas under the control of the three main controlling forces, namely the Armed Opposition, Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham (HTS), which violate international human rights law.

Violations against women are considered an obstacle to achieving development, equality, and a transition towards democracy and peace. These crimes also instill fear and insecurity in women and impede their ability to engage in basic activities such as work, movement, education, and to participate in political and social activities. Given all these factors, it is necessary, therefore, to expose violations against women, expose their perpetrators, and work to enact laws to penalize perpetrators of violations, all as part of a wider effort to empower women who have been subjected to violence and enable them to access a form of accountability and to mitigate the impact of violations that negate or erase them and deny them agency. This requires family and community solidarity and an increase in the degree of family and community awareness.

## II. Methodology

During the daily monitoring and documentation work that we have carried out since March 2011, we have documented a variety of violations against Syrian women, building a database of violations perpetrated against them, with details including the party that committed the violation, the date and location of the incident in question, and other details. The database shows that the Syrian regime and its Iranian and Russian allies once again far exceed the number of violations against Syrian women by all other parties, particularly arbitrary arrests, killings, and enforced disappearances. We periodically accumulate data and issue comprehensive statistics to show the huge loss that Syrian society has suffered as a result of the violations that have occurred against women. In this report, we will provide an updated data record of the most notable violations committed by the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in Syria against women "adult female" from March 2011 to March 2022, which we were able to document.

In its second part, the report discusses some aspects of women's suffering and the violations committed against them in areas outside the Syrian regime's control. Since we have talked at length about the Syrian regime's violations, we dedicate this part of the report to talking about violations by other parties and focusing on the broader and most damaging violations, where we outline the record of eight different forms of violence, which we were able to document, which women were subjected to in connection with their activities and the record of gender-based killings. Because we issue an annual report on International Women's Day, we will include the statistics that we were able to document within a year, i.e. from March 2021 to March 2022.

In addition to the above, the report relies on various accounts and interviews SNHR conducted with a number of women activists and workers in different fields who were exposed to one or more of the violations covered in the report, within the areas under the control of SDF, HTS, Syrian National Army forces/Armed Opposition factions, with these interviews conducted either by visiting the women directly or speaking with them via communication platforms. In this report, we provide nine accounts, which we obtained directly through speaking with the witnesses rather than from open sources. In most cases, we used aliases and concealed any relevant information that could pose a security risk to those providing

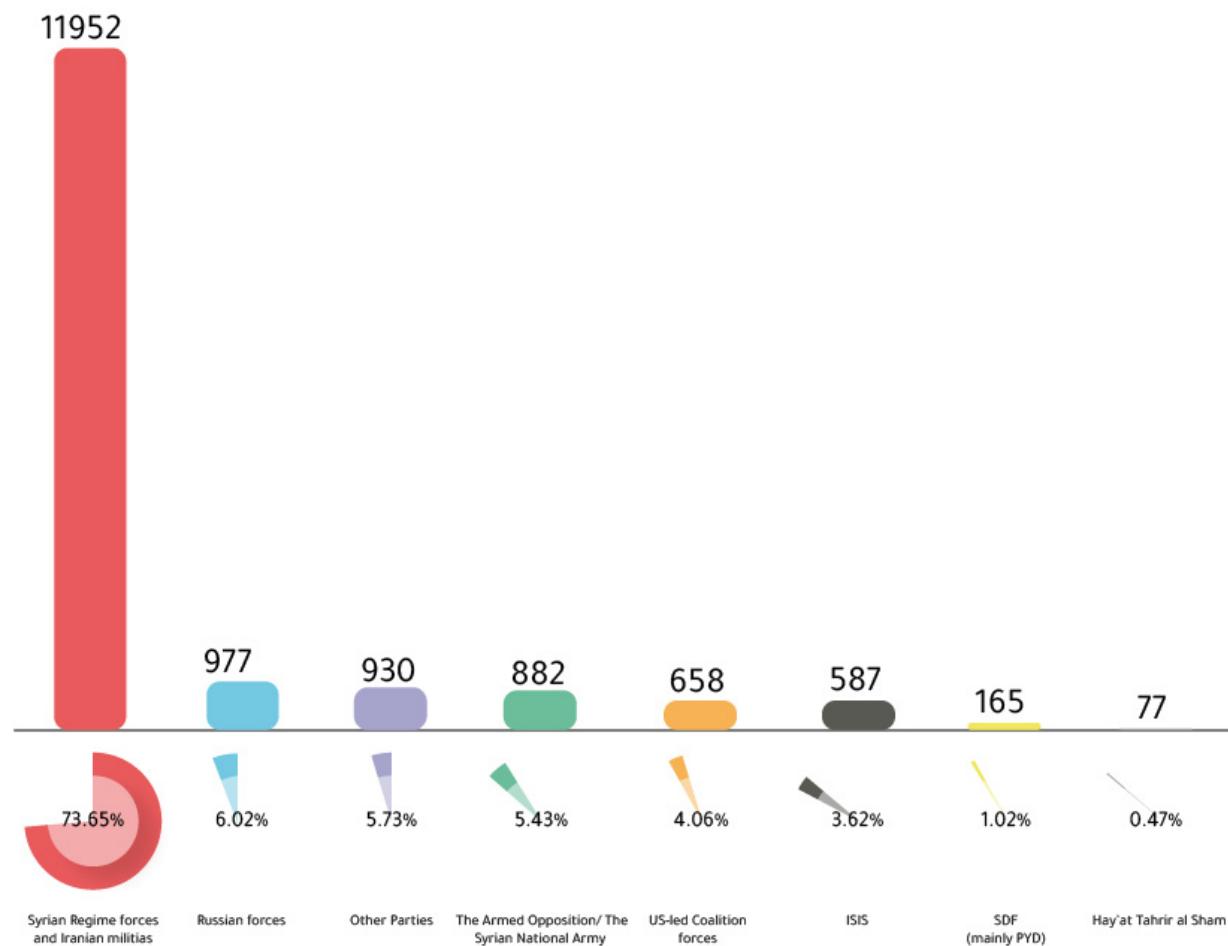
their testimonies, such as where they work or the areas where they live, at their request, and to prevent them from being subjected to harassment or security persecution. Witnesses received no financial compensation or promises in exchange for interviews. We explained the purpose of the report beforehand 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 we always strive to develop these to keep pace with the best levels of psychological care for victims.

The information detailed in this report represents the bare minimum that we have been able to document in terms of the magnitude and severity of the violations that have occurred. In addition, the report doesn't include any analysis of the profound social, economic, and psychological ramifications from the events concerned.

### **III. The Record of the Most Notable Violations against Women According to SNHR's Database (In Connection with the Armed Conflict or in Violation of International Human Rights Law)**

#### **A. Extrajudicial killing:**

The SNHR team documented the deaths of at least 16,228 women (adult female) at the hands of the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in Syria from March 2011 to March 2022, distributed as follows:

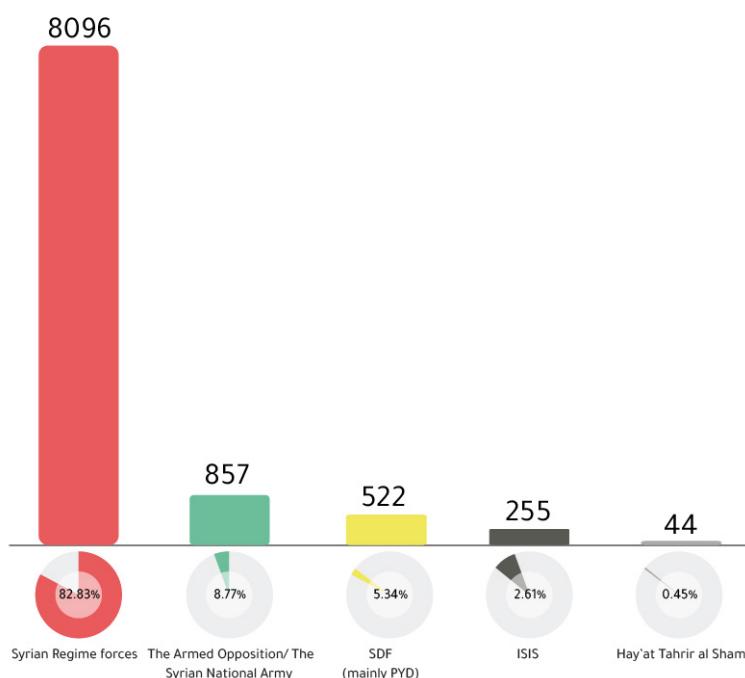


- **Syrian regime forces (army, security, local militias, and Shiite foreign militias):<sup>1</sup>** 11,952.
- **Russian forces:** 977.
- **ISIS:** 587.
- **Hay'at Tahrir al Sham:<sup>2</sup>** 77.
- **All Armed Opposition factions/Syrian National Army:<sup>3</sup>** 882.
- **Syrian Democratic Forces:** 165.
- **US-led coalition forces:** 658.
- **Other parties:** 930.

The chart of the women's death toll shows that the Syrian regime is responsible for approximately 74% of extrajudicial killings compared to the other parties to the conflict. This indicates that the Syrian regime deliberately targeted women for killing, with Russian forces responsible for the second highest number of women's deaths.

#### **B. Arbitrary Arrest/Detention or Enforced Disappearance:**

According to the SNHR database, at least 9,774 of the women arrested since March 2011 are still under arrest or forcibly disappeared at the hands of the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in Syria as of March 2022, distributed as follows:



<sup>1</sup> We generally use the term 'the Syrian regime' rather than 'the Syrian government', because the nature of the ruling power in Syria is a totalitarian dictatorship based on ruling the nation in an authoritarian fashion through a very limited group of individuals, primarily the President of the Republic and his selected leaders of the security services, while the ministers, including the Prime Minister and the Minister of Interior, play a restricted, largely ceremonial role, which is limited to implementing precisely what the ruling regime orders, without any decision-making power or active role; this means that the government's role is wholly subordinate and limited to serving the regime, with all the main powers being concentrated in the hands of the President of the Republic and the security services. Governance in Syria is wholly decided by the autocratic authority of the ruling family and there is no independent decision-making structure. Rather, the government is an empty façade there for show; the Minister of Interior receives orders from the security branches over which he nominally presides which are in reality under the command of the President, while the Minister of Justice cannot summon a civilian-level security agent other than the head of a security branch; the security branches, along with the president, are the true power and the governing regime in Syria.

Although we acknowledge that the United Nations and its agencies use the term 'the Syrian government' in general, we believe that this is a completely inaccurate and misleading term in the Syrian context.

<sup>2</sup> The United Nations has designated it as a terrorist organization

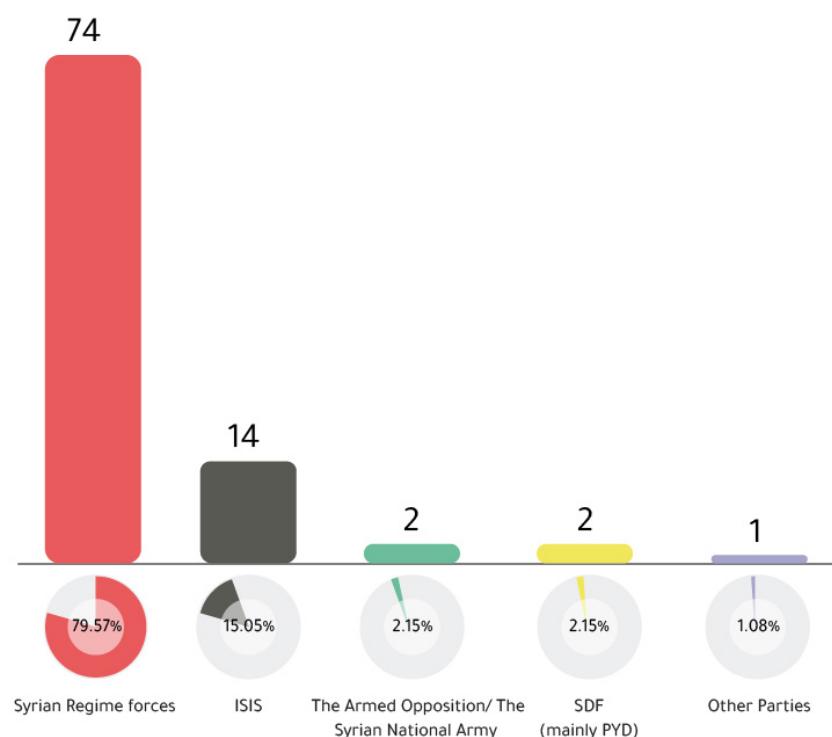
<sup>3</sup> Various Armed Opposition factions/Syrian National Army that emerged since 2011 to date in all areas that came under their control.

- **Syrian regime forces:** 8,096.
- **ISIS:** 255.
- **Hay'at Tahrir al Sham:** 44.
- **All Armed Opposition factions/Syrian National Army:** 857.
- **Syrian Democratic Forces:** 522.

The chart documenting the women detained or forcibly disappeared shows that the Syrian regime is responsible for approximately 83% of arrests and enforced disappearances compared to the other parties to the conflict. This indicates that the Syrian regime deliberately pursues, arrests/detains, and disappears females for multiple motives, in a planned and deliberate manner.

#### C. Death due to torture:

The SNHR team documented the deaths of at least 93 women due to torture at the hands of the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in Syria from March 2011 to March 2022, distributed as follows:

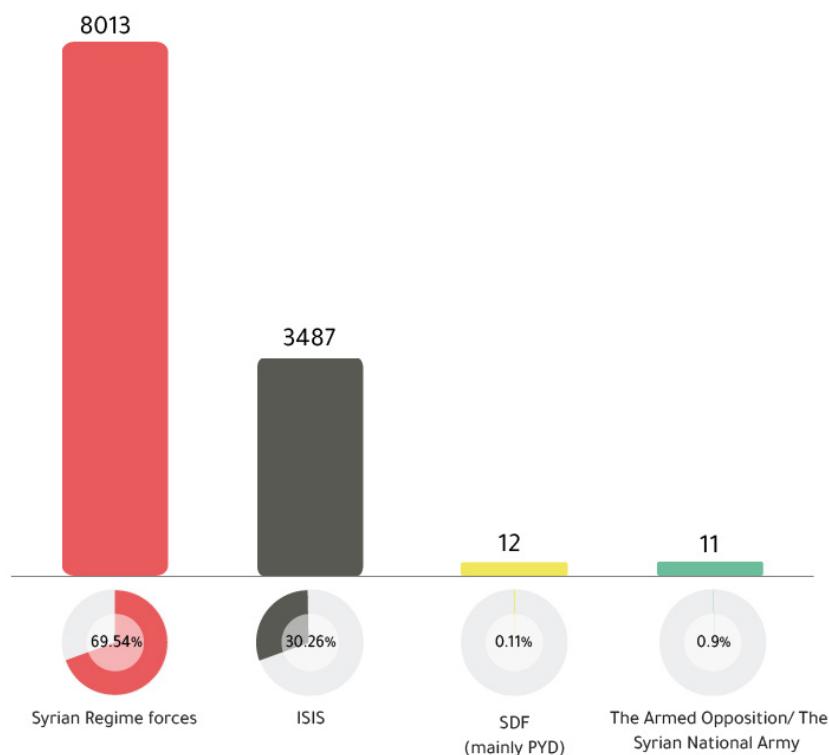


- **Syrian regime forces:** 74.
- **ISIS:** 14.
- **Syrian Democratic Forces:** Two.
- **All Armed Opposition factions/Syrian National Army:** Two.
- **Other parties:** One.

The SNHR records indicate that among the women victims who were killed due to torture at the hands of the Syrian regime forces, there was one woman whose photo appeared in the Caesar photographs and two women whom the Syrian regime registered at the civil registry as having died. The chart showing the death toll of women who died due to torture shows that the Syrian regime is responsible for approximately 80% of deaths due to torture, compared to the other parties to the conflict.

#### D. Sexual violence:

We recorded at least 11,523 incidents of sexual violence against females at the hands of the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in Syria from March 2011 to March 2022, distributed as follows:



- Syrian regime forces:** 8,013.
- ISIS:** 3,487.
- Syrian Democratic Forces:** 12.
- All Armed Opposition factions/Syrian National Army:** 11.

The previous graph shows that the Syrian regime is responsible for approximately 70% of the sexual violence cases recorded by SNHR, followed by ISIS. The two sides have practiced sexual violence as a strategic weapon of war and a tool of torture and revenge against Syrian society.

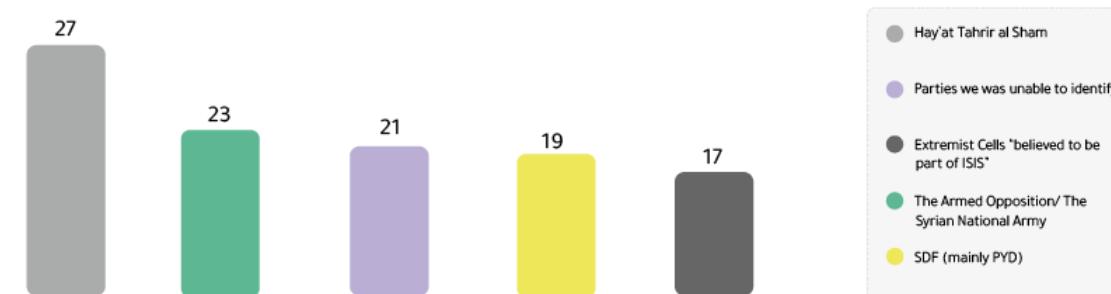
#### **IV. At Least 107 Incidents of Assault and Intimidation against Women Due to Their Activities in Northeast and Northwest Syria:**

We have documented many cases of women workers and activists being subjected to multiple types of violence in northeast and northwest Syria, to varying degrees from one region to another. Women involved in the community, political, media, and humanitarian activities, such as providing media coverage of clashes or participating in rescue and police operations, paid a heavy price, embodied by many of them being exposed to various types of risks and threats, and to both verbal and physical assault. Among the most prominent of these practices and violations are:

- Restrictions on freedom of movement, clothing, and education.
- Repeated summons to security centers on specious allegations for investigation, with fabricated charges being brought against them.
- Being forced to sign a pledge after being summoned for investigation or to appear before the judiciary vowing to stop their activities and work, as well as being forced to promise not to reveal what they were subjected to during interrogation.
- Many violations coincided with defamatory statements slandering women's reputation and dignity and posting comments insulting them on social media pages, with the aim of tarnishing their reputation in their local communities, and thus ostracizing them from society.
- Women were subjected on some occasions to a double attack, by the controlling force and the local community, given some of the customs and traditions of society.
- In some of the cases that we documented, we noticed that the levels of violence reached the point of threats or death, and threats directed at their families, with some women forced to stop their work or close centers concerned with women's affairs under the pretext of not having obtained the relevant work permit or license from the controlling force. In many cases, we documented the suspension of specific activities in women's centers (without closing the centers completely), such as activities and programs related to sexual violence against women or the political empowerment of women. These practices were mainly concentrated in the areas controlled by HTS.

The severity and type of violations differed from one area to another according to the controlling party, and the nature/type of activity of women who were subjected to violence. In general, we noticed that many forms of violence that were practiced against women were similar in practice by the controlling parties in northwest and northeast Syria, in areas under the control of HTS, Syrian National Army, and SDF.

**The SNHR team recorded at least 107 incidents of assault and intimidation against women activists and workers, or against centers for women in connection with their activities in northeast and northwest Syria, between March 2021 and March 2022, distributed according to the party responsible for them as follows:**



**Hay'at Tahrir al Sham:** 27

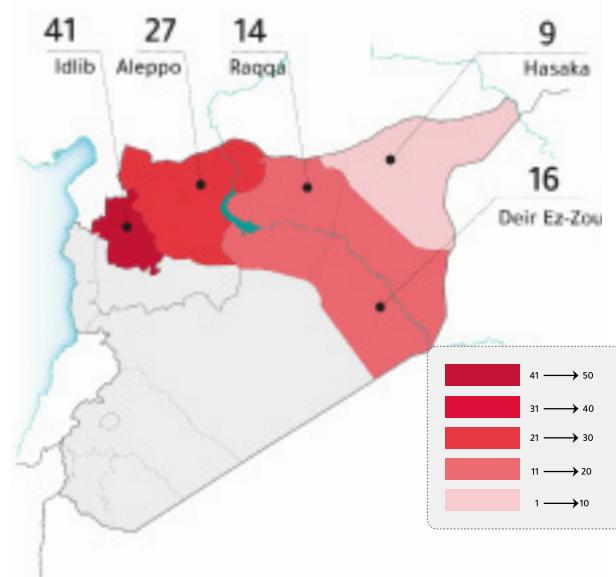
**Parties we were unable to identify:** 21

**Extremist cells (we believe these belong to ISIS):** 17

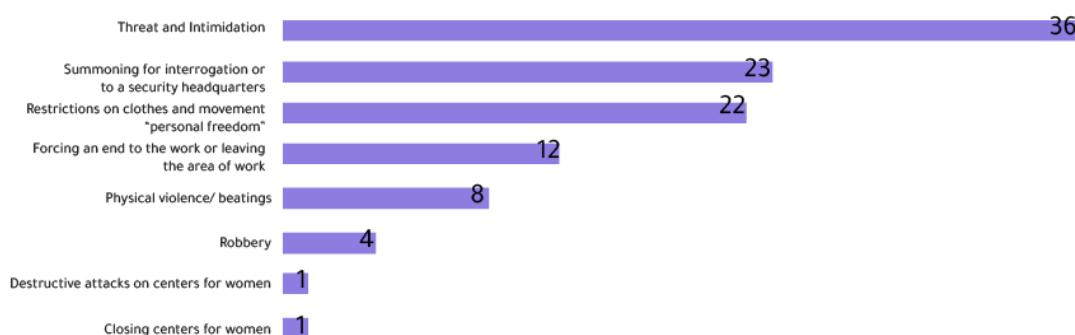
**All Armed Opposition factions/Syrian National Army:** 23.

**Syrian Democratic Forces:** 19.

This record was distributed across the governorates in which the incidents occurred as follows:



The record was also distributed according to the type of incident to:



- **Threats and intimidation:** 36.
- **Women summoned for investigation or to a security headquarters:** 23.
- **Restriction on clothing and movement, personal freedoms:** 22
- **Forced to stop work and leave the work area:** 12.
- **Physical violence/beating:** Eight.
- **Pillage:** Four.
- **Attacks on/vandalism of women's centers:** One.
- **Closure of women's centers:** One.

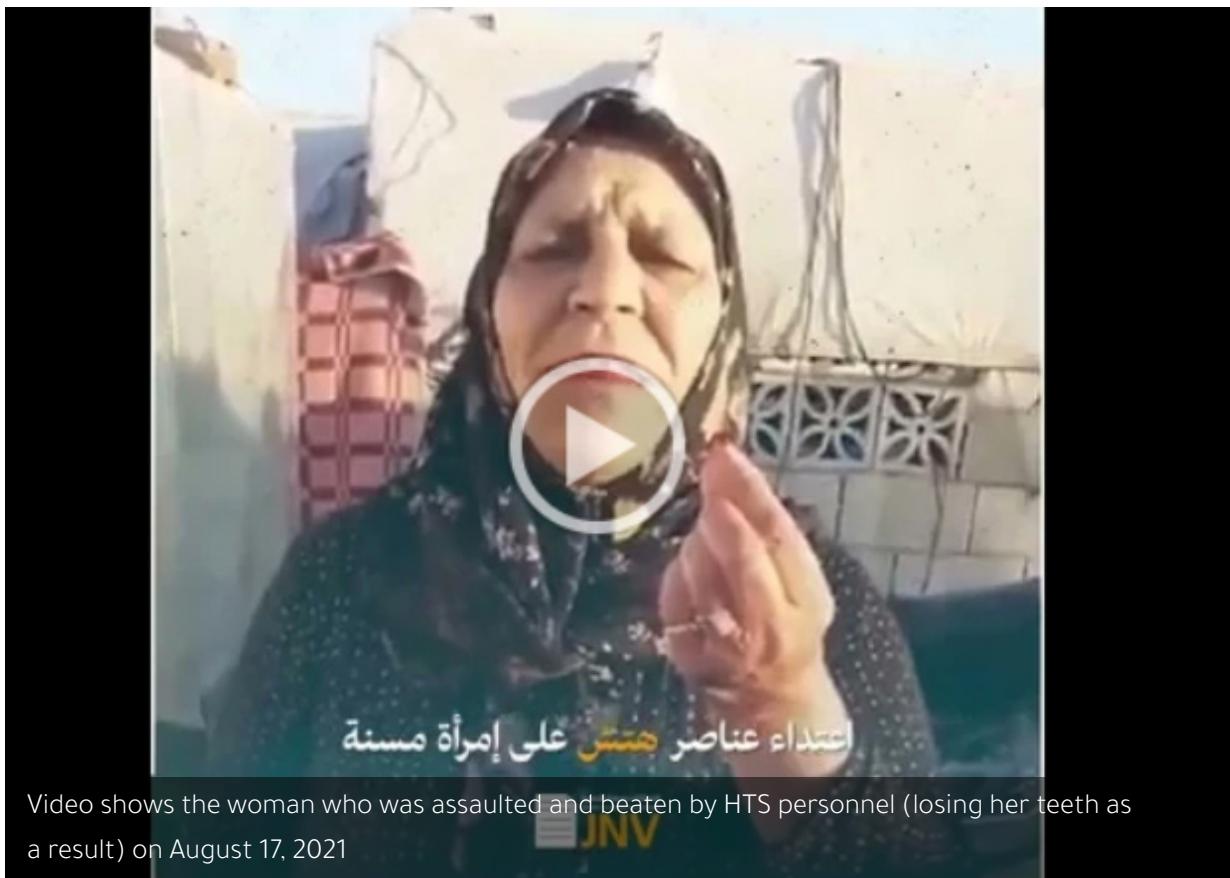
These violations have deterred women from actively participating in various fields, including political and media activities, in relation to freedom of opinion and expression, and even publishing on social media pages, especially in relation to criticizing violations of women's rights. These violations have also contributed to putting pressure on the women's families to force them to stop working, or getting them dismissed from the jobs or local entities for which they'd been working, while many of the women exposed to these violations were either forced to reduce and limit their activities or to give up their jobs and end their activities completely and often forced to flee to other areas or abroad as a result of threats, leading to further displacement.

We note that on most occasions, the controlling parties took no steps to ensure the protection of women and to hold the perpetrators accountable. On the contrary, many women who resorted to the judiciary or police stations to file complaints at their mistreatment told us that they met with inaction and indifference, or even with those they complained to blaming the women themselves and their activism, due to the weak legal and legislative structure that protects women's rights, and the inability or unwillingness of authorities in their areas to pursue investigation and ensure accountability mechanisms to hold accountable those involved in violations of women's rights.

#### **A. Areas under the control of HTS:**

Negative discrimination against women is the most prominent issue suffered by women in the areas under the control of HTS, with discrimination affecting freedom of movement, clothing, and work, especially work in civil society, media, relief, and political organizations. This led to a noticeable decrease in the contribution of women in public affairs, and many women were forced to move to other areas in search of work, especially women who provide for their families after the death or disappearance of their husbands. We issued a [detailed report](#) on HTS' violations against Syrian society, in which we recorded at least 108 incidents in which women were targeted on the basis of their work or opposition to the practices of HTS, from the beginning of 2014 until December 2021. We also discussed HTS judiciary and detention centers, with the imbalance in the judicial system and its lack of independence undermining women's rights and equity.

On Tuesday, August 17, 2021, HTS personnel assaulted a woman, damaging her teeth, because the woman had attempted to prevent HTS personnel from arresting her son. The incident took place when HTS carried out a campaign of raids and arrests on the Khair al Sham IDP Camp in north of Kelli town in the northern suburbs of Idlib governorate. SNHR documented the arrest of three civilians who were taken to an undisclosed location, with the arrests accompanied by heavy shooting and an assault on a civilian man.



Batool al Abdou, a media activist and a photographer who works with several media agencies, from Kafranbel city in the south of Idlib governorate, received a summons on December 28, 2021, to the Public Prosecution Office of the Salvation Government in Idlib city, over her involvement in and filming of a group activity for women in the middle of a camp in the suburbs of Idlib governorate at the end of November 2021, as part of a special event on the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, and over her criticism of a teacher at Idlib University of the Salvation Government in a comment on a public local page.

The SNHR contacted the activist Batool al Abdou,<sup>4</sup> who told us: "I received a message via WhatsApp from a person informing me that I would visit the Public Prosecutor in Idlib city tomorrow. I went to visit the Public Prosecutor accompanied by one of my family members. I entered the Prosecutor's office, then he asked me many questions about my activities, the parties I work with, and why I attack them, describing me as electronic flies, knowing that I only attacked one of the teachers at Idlib University because he expelled a displaced student who could not pay his university tuition. Then, he asked me about a regular event for women and why I filmed it, knowing that I did not publish anything about it. He said that our society is Islamic and we have to respect that and he warned me not to repeat these acts as he described, otherwise they will file a lawsuit against me." Batool said that she stopped covering any work related to women because of the problems she faces when photographing and publishing, whether by the community or HTS.

Ms. Hend al Ahmad, from Atama town in the northern suburbs of Idlib governorate, who works as a volunteer teacher at a school in the town, was assaulted and her bag was confiscated on January 6, 2022, while she was at an HTS checkpoint in the town due to a verbal altercation between her husband and checkpoint personnel, and because there were school textbooks belonging to the Interim Government in her bag. She told us:<sup>5</sup> "**While I was with my husband in our car heading towards al Dana city, the checkpoint personnel stopped us and demanded to search the car, then searched our phones and a laptop that was in the car. Their behavior was very bad. When they asked for my personal bag, my husband told them that they went too far and that my bag was private and did not contain anything. They then shouted. My husband asked me to get out of the car and move away from the checkpoint towards the opposite side, then one of the personnel pushed me, forcibly removed my bag, and searched it, where they found a book printed by the Interim Government. He told me he would not give it back. After about half an hour of argument with them, they recorded our information and refused to return the bag.**" Hend added that the checkpoint personnel told her that they would summon her for interrogation, but they had not contacted her as of the date of the interview.

<sup>4</sup> Via phone on February 6, 2022.

<sup>5</sup> Via phone on February 6, 2022.

### **B. Areas under the control of Armed Opposition factions/Syrian National Army:**

The Armed Opposition factions/Syrian National Army have practiced many types of harassment against women, with working women and media activists being summoned to either the security headquarters of the various factions or the security services, over the women's political or media active criticism of the practices of the Syrian National Army forces in the areas under their control, during which they were interrogated and forced to stop their work or arrested. We also noted the occurrence of some practices of a discriminatory nature on the basis of ethnicity, such as restrictions on certain jobs and on the personal freedoms of Kurdish women in the northern suburbs of Aleppo.

Ms. Hayat al Na'san is a community health worker for a humanitarian organization working in the northern suburbs of Aleppo. On September 8, 2021, Hayat participated in a community campaign to raise awareness of the danger of the spread of the COVID-19 coronavirus. During one of her tours of several areas in Afrin city, she was harassed by personnel affiliated with Syrian National Army forces because of her clothes, which forced her to stop following her tours with her team. Hayat says:<sup>6</sup> “**We went out for several days in September 2021 as part of awareness tours during which we visited homes, shops, and gatherings and distributed brochures on preventing infection with the Coronavirus. On one of the tours, which was part of a team of women, three armed men, who were in the neighborhood, approached and told me that I had to wear decent clothes so that I can visit the people, and they said abusive words to me, like that I am an immoral person, and they warned me that if they saw me again wearing these clothes, they would act in another way.**” Hayat told us that she did not feel she could resort to any party to file a complaint against the personnel who threatened her because of her lack of confidence in the feasibility of the complaint and her fear of revenge from the HTS personnel.

Ms. Hadiya al Abdullah, an IDP from Homs city, residing in Souran city in the northern suburbs of Aleppo, who is a media activist and cartoonist, was summoned by personnel affiliated with the Syrian National Army forces for interrogation on November 28, 2021, in connection with a satirical caricature she drew depicting a political figure in the Syrian opposition and a military figure in the Syrian National Army forces. She was forced to sign not to publish and share her drawings of any figure. She told us:<sup>7</sup> “**I usually comment on any event that people are talking about on social media through a cartoon that expresses the event. We are all aware of the residents' discontent with the opposition politicians and some military commanders. So I drew two drawings and sent them to a newsgroup on Telegram, and I thought I was sharing an opinion. The next day, I was surprised when a military police patrol came and asked me to visit one of the police headquarters within 24 hours. When I went there, I was shocked when they directed accusations to me, including that I was paid for and contributed to spreading sedition, along with insults claiming that I was stupid and shallow and that these criticisms were above my understanding. At the end of the interrogation, the interrogator told me that he would keep my file and they would monitor my work, and if I touch again upon any figure associated with their areas, they would imprison me, file a lawsuit against me and prosecute me.**”

<sup>6</sup> Via phone on January 16, 2022.

<sup>7</sup> Via phone on January 30, 2022.

Hadiya added that since she was summoned, she has largely stopped her activities and narrowed her work to some general issues that do not provoke reactions against her, such as bombing operations, detainees, and others.

Ms. Roushin Mustafa, a Kurdish-language teacher from Jandres in the northern suburbs of Aleppo governorate, was summoned twice in December 2021 due to her work, on the pretext that she had worked in a school affiliated with Syrian Democratic Forces while the Afrin region was under SDF control. Roushin was also subjected to threats and physical assault on the pretext that she was 'spreading secular ideas' during her work. She told us:<sup>8</sup> "**When they summoned me from my work for interrogation, they took detailed information about my work in the school during the period of the presence of Syrian Democratic Forces in the village and about my connection with them. Despite my assertion that I am a teacher and my work has nothing to do with the authorities in control, I found myself accused and they were not convinced of my statement and told me that they would summon me repeatedly until they know my orientation. Being summoned was not the only thing that I was subjected to, but on one occasion, gunmen entered the school and threatened me with other classmates at school that if we spread ideas about atheism or secularism among the children, they would kill us.**" Roushin said that the members of the factions are undisciplined and they do whatever they want, especially against Kurdish teachers, as the allegations they present are always ready-made.

### **C. Areas under the control of SDF:**

The Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) carried out similar practices to the other parties, and as we mentioned earlier, all the controlling forces participate in many types of violations and attacks against women. We have recorded attacks by the SDF on women who demanded their right to work and to their freedom of opinion, with some of these women being detained as a result. We also documented discriminatory practices against Arab women on the basis of their ethnicity, which was embodied in the denial or suspension of their work, and restrictions on their freedom of movement. Many women activists were also threatened because of their opinion. The judicial system in the SDF areas is not independent of the military executive authority, which has a blatant negative impact on women's rights.

Ms. Houriyah al Bakri, a nurse from Raqqa city, was beaten and assaulted on July 8, 2021, by personnel affiliated with Syrian Democratic Forces during a raid on the clinic where she works because she refused to allow them to search it. She told us:<sup>9</sup> "**General Security forces raided the clinic and immediately removed the door. I stood up to them and asked them what they wanted, then they beat me and pushed me from the door, then they sabotaged the clinic and asked me about the doctor's location even though they had detained him the previous day. They did not search it, but only came to beat me and sabotage the clinic.**" Houriyah added that they released the doctor she works for on the same day they raided the clinic and she believes they beat her for spreading the news of the arrest.

<sup>8</sup> By meeting her on February 2, 2022.

<sup>9</sup> Via phone on February 7, 2022.

Between November 27 and November 29, 2021, many families of children conscripted in Syrian Democratic Forces camps participated in public demonstrations and anti-Syrian Democratic Forces sit-ins in the cities of Amouda and al Qameshli in the suburbs of Hasaka governorate, calling for their children to be released from the SDF's military centers and allowed to return to their homes. Due to the demonstrations, SNHR documented that many of the women who participated in the demonstrations received threats from Syrian Democratic Forces to force them to stop their protests. We issued [a detailed report](#) on the conscription of children.

SNHR contacted Ms. Jacqueline Eisou,<sup>10</sup> from Amouda city in the suburbs of Hasaka governorate, one of the organizers and participants in the protests in Amouda city demanding that the SDF release child soldiers and allow them to return to their families. She told us: "**Although our protest was peaceful and only for a brief time, the personnel of Ciwanen Soresger<sup>11</sup> attacked the protesters and also chased me to my house and vandalized it and threatened me that if the protests against them continued, they would hold me accountable. Many of the women who participated in the protest faced these threats because it is easy to threaten women and there is no accountability for these personnel.**".

#### **D. Extremist cells we believe belong to ISIS:**

Despite the defeat of ISIS and its lack of effective control over the territory it previously controlled, we recorded threats and assaults targeting women in some areas under SDF control and in areas controlled by the Syrian National Army forces. The attacks were concentrated within the areas of the Syrian Badiya and those adjacent to it or on the border with the State of Iraq. We believe that the source of these threats and assaults are cells affiliated with ISIS. Many women have been subjected to killings, death threats, and looting, because of their activities or work, and this is an example of the failure of the controlling forces to protect women and society in the areas under their control.

Ms. Fatimah al Asali, a relief worker with a humanitarian organization that provides services in al Hawl Camp in the suburbs of al Hasaka governorate, was beaten and threatened on December 11, 2021, by unidentified gunmen, whom we believe belong to ISIS, while she was on her way to work in the camp. She told us:<sup>12</sup> "**During our work, we often face threats from ISIS cells or people who still believe in the ISIS ideology inside or outside the camp because we are working to provide humanitarian services to the family members of ISIS. On that day, I was going to work and waiting for the organization's car at one of the junctions in al Hawl town to take me to the camp, when two persons on a motorbike approached me and chanted the phrase 'The state is coming, you agent of the PKK!' then one of them kicked me with his foot and ran away because of the approach of a number of passing cars.**" Fatimah said that ISIS cells are active from time to time in her area and target women working with relief organizations to frighten them. She further revealed that two of her female colleagues stopped working in the camp because of the fear of threats they received, whether through text messages on their phones or after being intercepted by ISIS cells.

<sup>10</sup> Via phone on December 23, 2021.

<sup>11</sup> Ciwanen Soresger of Revolutionary Youth Movement is an armed organization that operates in the Syrian Democratic Forces territory and receives instructions from the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK).

<sup>12</sup> Via phone on January 28, 2022.

Meanwhile, despite the termination of ISIS militarily, the repercussions of its barbaric practices against Syrian women in the areas it controlled still continue to date. The most prominent of these is forcing the many females to marry members of ISIS' affiliates, many of them were minors, while families on many occasions were forced to their daughters be married for economic motives or out of fear of ISIS, and at other times to take advantage of ISIS' authority and protection. We also recorded cases of forced marriage of women after they were detained and kidnapped from their homes, and the vast majority of these marriages took place without official registration. In many cases, we monitored that women were ignorant of the true names of their husbands and that females who were forcibly married to ISIS members suffered from severe consequences, especially after leaving or losing their husbands, including negative discrimination against them. These women's suffering increases if they had children because there is a great difficulty in registering children without the presence or knowledge of the father, which means that these women's children remain with unknown parentage, without identity, and deprived of their fundamental legal rights and unable to obtain identification documents. SNHR recorded at least 184 cases of forced marriage of females in Aleppo, Deir Ez-Zour, Raqqa, and Hama during the time of ISIS control over areas of these governorates, but we believe that this record represents only a very small part of the reality, because there are enormous difficulties in documenting cases of forced marriage.

#### **E. Parties we were unable to identify:**

We have monitored many cases of threats against women in connection with their activities and work, committed by parties that we were unable to identify, and we believe that the vast majority of them may be affiliated with ISIS cells or extremist Islamist groups. The total number of those threats that we received from women activists in northwest Syria reached approximately 21 cases, most of which were concentrated on women activists in women's issues and affairs.

Ms. Marwa al Yasin, an evaluation employee at one of the organizations operating in Deir Hassan camps in the suburbs of Idlib governorate, from Sarmada town in the suburbs of Idlib governorate, was attacked on June 16, 2021, by a masked group that attacked the location of the project that she was monitoring in Deir Hassan area. She told us:<sup>13</sup> "**I was at my usual work and before leaving the workplace, which was a sewing center for women, three masked individuals attacked me and threw stones at me and left with a motorbike in a hurry. I could not identify them, but women's work in this area is generally [viewed as] undesirable.**" Marwa said that although she informed the camp administration of the incident that she was exposed to, she found no helpful response in doing so.

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<sup>13</sup> Via phone on September 3, 2021.

## V. Twenty-Four Gender-Based Killings of Women Since March 2021 Until March 2022

We have recorded many cases of persecution and violence against women, which sometimes amounted to killing them, on the grounds of gender, mainly related by the misnomer of "honor crimes".<sup>14</sup> We believe that these attacks and crimes are far from any honor, law or moral decency, and clearly reflect the fragility of the legal and judicial structure regulating women's rights.

There are severe difficulties in documenting violations and violence against women in Syria, with one of the most complex and sensitive violations to document being domestic violence because it is very rarely reported; instead, it is concealed, and the crime is falsified. Despite that, we were able since March 2021 until March 2022, to record 24 cases of murder of women at the hands of their families or partners, most of which were committed under the pretext of "honor" or due to women's refusal to be forced into marriage, or resulting from being subjected to violence by men.

Eida Muhammad al Badr, aged 18, from Hasaka city, a member of al Sharabin clan, was shot dead by her brothers and uncles inside an abandoned house in Masaken al Zohour neighborhood in al Malikiya suburbs in Hasaka governorate on June 28, 2021, under the pretext of 'honor'. On Sunday, July 4, 2021, a video clip spread on social media pages showing a group of gunmen dressed in civilian clothes, driving Eida to an abandoned house and chanting phrases promising to 'wash the shame', before shooting the girl dead with a military weapon in the abandoned house after recapturing her when she managed to escape them. The area is under the control of Syrian Democratic Forces. On July 28, 2021, the Internal Security Forces [announced](#) that they had arrested four people involved in the crime.



<sup>14</sup> Murders in which women and girls are killed under the pretext of defending the honor of the family or of a man or a gender-based killing.

On Friday, December 10, 2021, a woman from Taftanaz town in the suburbs of Idlib governorate was shot dead by her ex-husband, using a rifle in front of her three children, while she was visiting her children at his home in Taftanaz city. Activists in the area told the SNHR that the woman, who had been living in Germany, had regularly come to Syria to see her children. On the same day as the crime, personnel from Taftanaz police station, which is run by the Salvation Government, arrested the criminal.

On Tuesday, December 14, 2021, local residents found a woman's burnt body at a garbage dump in Hazzano town in the northern suburbs of Idlib governorate. Civil Defense rescue workers removed the body and transferred it to the forensic medicine facility in Idlib city, whose staff determined that the woman was in her thirties and had been deliberately burnt no more than 10 hours before her body was found. On December 17, 2021, the police station in Kelli town in the suburbs of Idlib governorate announced the arrest of three men involved in her killing, who turned out to be her father and two of her brothers, who had strangled her and then burnt her using diesel and acid. According to the father's confession, he and his sons had murdered his daughter 'because of 'family problems'.

Ms. Ayat Muhammad al Refa'i, aged 19, from Damascus city, was killed on Friday, December 31, 2021, by her husband. On January 2, 2022, the Syrian regime forces' Criminal Security Branch arrested her husband and his parents for their participation in her murder; they had killed her by hitting her on the head after subjecting her to continuous brutal beatings and violence.



## VI. Conclusions and Recommendations

### **Legal conclusions:**

The Syrian regime controlling the Syrian state was the first party that violated international human rights law and international humanitarian law and practiced widespread violations against women in many types such as killing, torture, and enforced disappearance, while the other parties to the conflict followed its footsteps in varying degrees, some of which committed violations against the Syrian women that were not practiced by the Syrian regime itself, such as restrictions on clothing, and freedom of movement.

It is true that armed groups, as non-state parties, cannot formally join the parties to international human rights treaties, but they are nonetheless bound to respect basic human rights and by customary international law, since these parties effectively control parts of the state's territory.

This report has proven that there are patterns of discrimination against women in a number of practices being perpetrated in Syria that constitute violations of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women,<sup>15</sup> which stipulated the provisions that states must apply to protect women from the negative effects of discrimination, in addition to violating Security Council Resolution No. 1325.<sup>16</sup>

Forced marriage is considered one of the atrocious violations against women; ISIS had practiced this violation in a widespread manner, through which it committed a crime against humanity; it has also been practiced by HTS and the Syrian regime, but we've been unable to document widespread use of this practice by the two parties due to the difficulty of determining this crime, and because of the tight security grip which the group wields over areas it controls and the fear felt by women and their families about the possible consequences of speaking out.

This report talked about many practices that are based on laws and legislation of all parties to the conflict, that violate women's rights in contravention of international human rights standards.

This report emphasized that most practices of violence and violations against women are aimed at deterring them from engaging in public affairs, particularly political and media activity.

This report also emphasized that dozens of women's basic rights are being violated, foremost among which are the right to life, not being tortured, arbitrarily arrested, or forcibly disappeared, the freedom of movement, clothing, freedom of opinion and expression, work, and other rights.

Enhancing the role of women and protecting them from violence and violations, including their right to political and media work and freedom of opinion, will reflect positively on the whole of society, as all of this is essential in the pursuit of equality and development.

### **Recommendations:**

#### **All parties to the conflict/controlling forces:**

- Respect the rules of customary international humanitarian law and the rules of international human rights law, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women - CEDAW, and end all forms of discrimination against women.
- All parties to the conflict should immediately release forcibly detained women, particularly those detained in the context of armed conflict, abide by international laws on the detention of women and girls, including segregation from male prisoners, appoint female guards and security personnel to conduct searches, and implement protocols for searching prisoners upon entering custody to allow female detainees to report incidents of sexual violence.

<sup>15</sup> United Nations, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CEDAW.aspx>

<sup>16</sup> UNSC Res 1325 (31 October 2000) UN Doc S/RES/1325

- Abide by Security Council resolutions related to the Syrian conflict and Security Council resolutions related to the role of conflict parties in protecting women from sexual violence and respecting the role of women in participating in various political and societal fields, in particular Resolutions 1325,<sup>17</sup> 1820, 1889, 1960, 2122,<sup>18</sup> and 2467.
- Conduct investigations into perpetrators of violations and violence against women, hold them accountable in accordance with an independent judicial system and provisions that take into account international laws, and begin compensation and reparation of victims.
- Provide protection and security for the work and movement of women, provide them with support, and end all forms of restrictions and suppression of freedoms.
- Support the efforts made by women in combating violence against them and mitigate the economic and social repercussions that the conflict imposes on their lives.
- Spare women the scourge of war by taking all necessary steps to ensure that all forms of violations against women are ended, and ensure that women deprived of their freedom are placed in separate locations from men.
- Expand the effective participation of women in all political formations and within the peace process.
- Amend the laws and legislation in line with international human rights standards and build an independent judicial system.
- Provide various forms of support and assistance to women in their search for work, especially displaced women, who have lost their breadwinner.
- Build a social welfare system for orphans and widows, support women who have been forcibly married, and work to find solutions to their suffering, especially the issue of registering children born from forced marriage and whose fathers were killed.

#### **International community and UN Security Council:**

- Provide protection and assistance to forcibly displaced women, including IDPs and refugees, taking into account their specific needs, primarily for protection.
- All countries worldwide must ratify CEDAW, fulfill their obligations under it to hold the Syrian regime accountable, expose the regime's criminal practices against Syria's women, and make every possible effort to mitigate and stop these.
- Take all possible legal, political, and financial measures against the Syrian regime and its allies, as well as against all perpetrators of violations in the Syrian conflict to pressure them to commit to respecting the rights of women.
- Fulfill the commitment of pledged financial contributions and allocate the bulk of them to women who have lost their breadwinner, those who have been forcibly married, and women who have lost their jobs due to threats and violence, through the support of centers specialized in these tasks.
- Refer the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court, or quickly establish a tribunal dedicated to trying crimes against humanity and war crimes to end the cycle of impunity that has spanned nearly a decade in Syria.

<sup>17</sup> UNSC Res 1325 (31 October 2000) UN Doc S/RES/1325

<sup>18</sup> UNSC Res 2122 (18 November 2013) UN Doc S/RES/2122

**Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women:**

- Given the extent of the widespread violations by the Syrian regime against women, some of which amount to crimes against humanity, the Committee must highlight what it is doing in regard to Syria, as its efforts are not noticeable to us, and it must intensify its work on individual cases and groups in Syria, as we recommend that survivors communicate with the Committee and submit complaints individually, and the Committee should take the initiative to expand its work points.

**The Special Rapporteur on violence against women:**

- The Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences should intensify her efforts in Syria. This is especially crucial given the extent of the violence that Syrian women are subjected to, particularly by the Syrian government itself, compared to women under any other government worldwide, especially women imprisoned in the detention centers of the Syrian regime and its security apparatus.

**European States and European Union:**

- Economic sanctions must be intensified on the two main backers of the Syrian regime, namely Iran and Russia, which participated in committing violations that constitute war crimes and crimes against humanity against women in Syria.
- Provide every possible assistance to the active civil society groups working to rehabilitate and reintegrate female victims into their communities, particularly women who have been forcibly married, widows who have lost their breadwinner, and survivors of sexual violence and torture.
- Support the judicial accountability process, including supporting the mandate of the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism (IIIM) to assist in the investigation and prosecution of individuals responsible for the most serious crimes in accordance with the classification of international law committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011, in accordance with General Assembly Resolution 71/248,<sup>19</sup> as well as supporting the path of litigation through universal jurisdiction.

**Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR):**

- Release a special report on the violations of international human rights law against Syrian women in various conflict areas.

**Independent International Commission of Inquiry (COI):**

- Investigate the incidents included in this report and utilize them during the preparation of the next report.

**The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and local and international humanitarian and relief organizations:**

- Coordinate humanitarian aid operations according to the areas worst affected and reject attempts at pressure and blackmail by the Syrian regime which is working to harness aid to its advantage.

<sup>19</sup> United Nations. General Assembly Resolution 71/248 (11 January 2017). <https://undocs.org/en/A/RES/71/248>

- Allocate adequate resources for the rehabilitation of female survivors, especially those who have been subjected to violence, sexual exploitation, and forced marriage, giving priority to the areas worst affected.
- Expand support for services provided for women victims of violence, in particular victims of sexual violence, including providing funding for shelter, treatment, and rehabilitation, counseling and ensure that these services are tailored to the specific needs of women and girls, with priority given to pregnant women, those who have recently given birth, and breastfeeding mothers.
- Establish special care and protection refuges for abused women who have been ostracized by their families and communities.

**Feminist organizations around the world:**

- Advocate for Syrian women and raise awareness of the extent of the violations they are exposed to which is almost without precedent globally, carry out greater activities and projects to rehabilitate the female survivors of arrest, torture, and forced displacement, and shed more light on the suffering of Syrian women in displacement camps, asylum and detention centers.
- Provide psychological support to survivors of sexual violence and torture, to women who have been forcibly married, and women who have lost their jobs under threat and violence.
- Demand the disclosure of the fate of thousands of forcibly disappeared women in Syria.

**Neighboring countries:**

- Ensure that refugees, especially women, fleeing Syria are able to seek asylum, respect their rights, including the prohibition of refoulement, and expedite reunification. EU states and other countries should alleviate the burden on neighboring countries and receive more Syrian refugees, while donor countries should increase their assistance to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and civil societies organizations in countries of asylum.

**The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR):**

- Create a stable and safe environment for refugee women and intensify work to reintegrate them into society through long-term psychological treatments.
- Promote investment in education, health, and psychological rehabilitation.

## Thanks

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