

Statement



The UN Secretary-General's Report on Children and Armed Conflict Shows Again That Syria Is Either the Worst or Amongst the Worst Countries Worldwide in Several Types of Violations

SNHR Is a Primary Source for Data on Violations against Children in Syria Through Continuous Cooperation with UNICEF

The United Nations Secretary-General has submitted his annual [report on “Children and Armed Conflict” for the year 2021](#) to the UN Security Council. The report, which highlights trends regarding the impact of armed conflict on children, includes details on violations committed by parties to a number of conflicts from government forces and other armed groups affiliated with or opposing the government against children in several countries, including Syria, in 2021. The report also identifies the perpetrators of violations. The violations included in the report are the recruitment and use of children, the killing and maiming of children, rape and other forms of sexual violence against children, attacks on schools and hospitals, and the abduction of children.

The Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) annually reviews the United Nations Secretary-General's report on children, given its status as a primary source on violations against children in Syria, through cooperation and partnership with the UNICEF Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM).

With regard to Syria, the report said that the UN had verified 2,271 grave violations against children in Syria in 2021,¹ including killing, maiming, recruitment, detention, deprivation of liberty, sexual violence, attacks on schools and hospitals, abduction, and denial of humanitarian access, affecting at least 2,022 children throughout the year.² The report further revealed that the monitoring process, in general, faced obstacles due to attacks or threats of attacks by the violating parties against monitors of violations, civic society activists, and human rights defenders.

By comparing Syria with other nations worldwide, we noted that Syria is:

1. The worst country in the world in terms of the recruitment and use of children³.
2. The second worst country in the world in terms of killing and maiming⁴.
3. The third worst country in the world in terms of attacks on schools and hospitals⁵.
4. The fourth worst country in the world in terms of denial of humanitarian access⁶.

¹ The United Nations, the report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict, 23 June 2022, paragraph 188, <https://undocs.org/en/S/493/2022>

² The United Nations, the report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict, 23 June 2022, paragraph 188, <https://undocs.org/en/S/493/2022>

³ The United Nations, the report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict, 23 June 2022, paragraph 189, <https://undocs.org/en/S/493/2022>

⁴ The United Nations, the report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict, 23 June 2022, paragraph 191, <https://undocs.org/en/S/493/2022>

⁵ The United Nations, the report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict, 23 June 2022, paragraph 193, <https://undocs.org/en/S/493/2022>

⁶ The United Nations, the report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict, 23 June 2022, paragraph 196, <https://undocs.org/en/S/493/2022>

By analyzing the content of the report, we noted the following:

- 1- The Syrian regime and its allies were responsible for the largest number of violations involving killing and maiming, followed by the Syrian Democratic Forces.⁷
- 2- All armed opposition factions/Syrian National Army were responsible for the largest number of cases involving recruitment and use of children, followed by Hay'at Tahrir al Sham, with Syrian Democratic Forces in third place.⁸
- 3- Syrian Democratic Forces were responsible for the largest number of cases involving deprivation of freedom,⁹ attacks on schools,¹⁰ and denial of humanitarian access,¹¹ followed by Syrian regime forces.
- 4- While the UN Secretary-General's report used the term "pro-government air forces",¹² we at the SNHR believe that it would have been better to specifically identify the Russian forces, as it is known that the Russian forces are the only ally of the Syrian regime with aerial capabilities. This is confirmed by dozens of SNHR reports, with Russia itself repeatedly acknowledging in hundreds of official statements, that its air force has carried out hundreds of thousands of flights in Syria.

The most prominent violations included in the report are:

First: Killing and maiming¹³

The UN Secretary General's report notes that the largest number of child casualties attributed to any one cause worldwide was seen in the category of those killed or maimed, with 8,070 children documented as being killed or maimed in 2021,¹⁴ with the report further adding that 2,257 of these victims were killed or maimed as a result of improvised explosive devices, explosive remnants of war, and landmines.¹⁵

In Syria, the report verified the killing and maiming of 898 children, with 424 of these victims killed, and the remaining 474 maimed, making Syria the second worst country in the world after Afghanistan in terms of killing and maiming, and the fifth worst globally in terms of mutilation. Syrian regime forces were the worst offenders amongst all the parties to the conflict in terms of killing and maiming, being responsible for the killing or maiming of 301 children.

⁷ The United Nations, the report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict, 23 June 2022, paragraph 191, <https://undocs.org/en/S/493/2022>

⁸ The United Nations, the report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict, 23 June 2022, paragraph 189, <https://undocs.org/en/S/493/2022>

⁹ The United Nations, the report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict, 23 June 2022, paragraph 190, <https://undocs.org/en/S/493/2022>

¹⁰ The United Nations, the report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict, 23 June 2022, paragraph 193, <https://undocs.org/en/S/493/2022>

¹¹ The United Nations, the report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict, 23 June 2022, paragraph 196, <https://undocs.org/en/S/493/2022>

¹² The United Nations, the report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict, 23 June 2022, paragraph 191, <https://undocs.org/en/S/493/2022>

¹³ The United Nations, the report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict, 23 June 2022, paragraph 191, <https://undocs.org/en/S/493/2022>

¹⁴ The United Nations, the report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict, 23 June 2022, paragraph 4, <https://undocs.org/en/S/493/2022>

¹⁵ The United Nations, the report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict, 23 June 2022, paragraph 7, <https://undocs.org/en/S/493/2022>

As the report further revealed that about 34% of the cases of killing and maiming in Syria resulted from the explosion of remnants of war and 33% as a result of shelling. The report additionally noted that most of these incidents occurred in the governorates of Aleppo and Idlib (291 and 290, respectively).

Second: Deprivation of Freedom¹⁶

The report verified 62 cases of deprivation of liberty of children in Syria during 2021, and assigned responsibility for 52 of these cases to Syrian Democratic Forces (People's Protection Units/Women's Protection Units/Internal Security Forces under the Self-Management authority in northern and eastern Syria), while Syrian regime forces and pro-regime forces were responsible for another eight cases. The report indicated that at least 800 children remain in detention in northeastern Syria for alleged association with ISIS.

Third: Recruitment and use¹⁷

The report documented the recruitment and use of 6,310 children, with Syria being the worst country in the world in terms of recruitment and use of children. According to the report, 1,296 children were recruited and used in Syria in 2021, with 1,285 of them serving in combat roles.¹⁸ Here, we note that this number is higher than that recorded in the Secretary-General's previous report, which documented the recruitment and use of 837 children in Syria in 2020.

As the report noted, all armed opposition factions/Syrian National Army were responsible for the largest number of cases involving recruitment and use of children in this period, with 596 cases in total followed by Hay'at Tahrir al Sham with 380. Syrian Democratic Forces (People's Protection Units/Women's Protection Units/Internal Security Forces under the Self-Management authority in northern and eastern Syria) came third, recruiting and using 245 children.

Fourth: Attacks on schools and hospitals¹⁹

The report verified 45 attacks on schools and hospitals in Syria in 2021 (including protected persons in relation to schools and/or hospitals), 23 of which were carried out by government forces and pro-government forces, including three that the report attributed to pro-government air forces. Here we emphasize that Russian forces are the only ally of the Syrian regime that possesses an air force. Meanwhile, 11 such attacks were carried out by Syrian Democratic Forces. According to the report, 40% of these attacks occurred in Idlib governorate, followed by Daraa with 20%.

¹⁶ The United Nations, the report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict, 23 June 2022, paragraph 190, <https://undocs.org/en/S/493/2022>

¹⁷ The United Nations, the report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict, 23 June 2022, paragraph 189, <https://undocs.org/en/S/493/2022>

¹⁸ The United Nations, the report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict, 23 June 2022, paragraph 4, <https://undocs.org/en/S/493/2022>

¹⁹ The United Nations, the report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict, 23 June 2022, paragraph 193, <https://undocs.org/en/S/493/2022>

With regard to the military use of schools and hospitals, the report recorded 20 incidents (17 schools, 3 hospitals), attributing 15 of these to Syrian Democratic Forces (Kurdish People's Protection Units/Women's Protection Units/Internal Security Forces).

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Fifth: Denial of humanitarian access²⁰

The United Nations verified 3,945 incidents of denial of humanitarian access worldwide,²¹ with Syria being the fourth worst country in the world in relation to this phenomenon, accounting for 24 incidents in total; Syrian regime forces and Syrian Democratic Forces were the worst offenders amongst all the parties to the conflict, being responsible for 5 and 6 incidents each, respectively.

SNHR Cooperation with the UNICEF Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism and the UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances

Since 2014, the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism in Syria has documented grave violations of the rights of children in the context of the armed conflict and has methodologically investigated them. The Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism in Syria is mandated by the Security Council in accordance with [Resolution 1612 \(2005\)](https://undocs.org/en/S/493/2005) and subsequent resolutions, having been activated after the annual report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict listed the parties to the conflict that commit grave violations against children.

²⁰ The United Nations, the report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict, 23 June 2022, paragraph 196, <https://undocs.org/en/S/493/2022>

²¹ The United Nations, the report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict, 23 June 2022, paragraph 4, <https://undocs.org/en/S/493/2022>

The SNHR cooperates with the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism in Syria through a constant monthly sharing of the SNHR's data, documenting all relevant incidents which our team has been able to document showing multiple types of violations against children, such as killing and maiming of children, recruitment, abduction, arrest/detention, attacks on schools, hospitals, health or educational personnel, sexual violence, and denial of humanitarian access to children.

The SNHR stresses the importance and the essential nature of the work of the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism in Syria and adds that we shall continue to cooperate and share data with this body, as we do with a number of other United Nations bodies operating in Syria, which we consider to be an essential component in the course of attaining justice by exposing the perpetrators of violations and putting pressure on them and on their backers, as a basis for holding them accountable. We hope that this report will put pressure on all parties to the conflict in Syria, compelling them to stop committing violations against Syria's children.