

Statement



The Syrian Network for Human Rights participates in organizing an event on the sidelines of the 101st session of the OPCW's Executive Council

Fact Review: Documentation of Expanded Use of Chemical Weapons in Syria

Monday, 3 October 2022: At the invitation of the US Permanent Mission to the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), represented by Ambassador Joseph Manso, the Syrian Network for Human Rights, represented by Executive Director, Mr. Fadel Abdul Ghany, participated in an event held on the sideline of the 101st meeting of the OPCW's Executive Council, entitled: "Reviewing the Facts: Documenting Syria's Expansive Chemical Weapons Use".

The event analyzed the history and scope of chemical weapons use in Syria, the impact on victims, and the ongoing work to document and investigate these attacks. It also addressed the importance of documenting facts to counter disinformation and of holding the Syrian regime accountable. Participants also considered the challenges faced by civil society in ensuring the accuracy of reports compiled in the midst of active conflict amid a climate of widespread disinformation, and what action needs to be taken to preserve potential evidence obtained by NGOs to be used in national or international courts, as well as discussing what can be done to maintain awareness and interest in the subject of the use of chemical weapons in Syria and to counter international fatigue.

In his address, Mr. Fadel Abdul Ghany spoke about the Syrian Network for Human Rights' exhaustive work to document incidents of the use of chemical weapons in Syria, explaining that SNHR has paid particular attention to this issue because chemical weapons are considered to be weapons of mass destruction, and because the Syrian regime was the first to use chemical weapons since the Chemical Weapons Convention was adopted. Mr. Abdul Ghany also referred to the international community's slow response to the Syrian regime's use of chemical weapons in Syria, explaining that the regime had already carried out 30 attacks using chemical weapons before the two Ghoutas attack of 21 August 2013, which attracted the attention of the international community due to the large scale of the attack and the horrific number of victims killed. He stressed that **"This negligence took place before the Khan Sheikhoun attack in April 2017, as the Syrian regime launched many chemical attacks but these did not draw the attention of the international community, until that [2013] attack."**

He also spoke about the international community's response and the Syrian regime's ratification of the Chemical Weapons Convention, noting that **"This would be a good achievement if the Syrian regime stopped using chemical weapons against the Syrian people."**

He “On 4 January 2016, the OPCW announced the destruction of the last of the Syrian chemical weapons, but Latamneh chemical attacks took place 14 months after this date; the chemical attack of Khan Sheikhoun took place days later, which is new evidence of the extent to which the Syrian regime practiced disinformation and deception against the international community and on the OPCW. Then came the attack of Saraqib two years later.” He further stressed that “Syrian human rights organizations, which specialize in documenting chemical weapons violations, UN organizations, the OPCW, and international organizations such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International have effectively succeeded in proving the Syrian regime’s use of chemical weapons”.

Mr. Abdul Ghany continued his speech by recalling that “Carrying out the attacks in which chemical weapons were used is a complex process, and the Syrian regime is a highly centralized one, so it cannot take place without the consent and knowledge of Bashar al-Assad. Therefore, the decision is central, and it is a deliberate policy of the Syrian regime, in which the Army and Security Institution were involved - mainly the leadership of the General Military Intelligence Directorate, the leadership of the Air Force Intelligence Directorate, the National Security Office, and the Scientific Studies and Research Center, mainly Institute 1000 and Branch 450. Our database also indicates the involvement of at least 387 people from the most senior military officers, security services and civil and military workers, who should all be placed on US and European sanctions lists.”

The SNHR director concluded his speech by making a number of recommendations, calling for holding Russia responsible for the Syrian regime’s use of chemical weapons, since Russia had terminated the mandate of the Joint International Investigation Mechanism, threatened witnesses and survivors of the Douma attack launched by the regime in April 2018, and directly supported the regime’s ‘Tiger Forces’ responsible for carrying out the Saraqib chemical attack.

He also emphasized the importance of condemning all attempts to re-establish relations with a regime that has been proven to use weapons of mass destruction against its own people.

Mr. Abdul Ghany also called for supporting efforts to document violations, provide evidence to UN investigation mechanisms and the OPCW, and use this in trials based on universal jurisdiction.

The Syrian Network for Human Rights has worked extensively on the chemical weapons file, issuing [45 reports to date](#), and signing an [agreement with the OPCW's Investigation and Determination of Responsibility Team](#), and is cited as a reference in all reports issued by the body.

The Syrian Network for Human Rights has documented 222 chemical weapons attacks in Syria since our first documented use of chemical weapons on 23 December 2012 until 20 August 2022, of which approximately 98% were carried out by Syrian regime forces.

The chemical weapons attacks and the resulting casualties were distributed as follows:

A: The Syrian regime carried out 217 chemical weapons attacks on the Syrian governorates from our first documented use of this weapon on 23 December 2012 until 20 August 2022, killing 1510 people. These victims included:

- 1,409 civilians, including 205 children and 260 women (adult female).
- 94-armed opposition fighters.
- 7 prisoners from the Syrian regime forces who were being held in armed opposition forces' prisons.

These chemical weapons attacks also injured 11,080 people, including 5 Syrian regime prisoners held in armed opposition forces' prisons.

B: ISIS carried out 5 chemical attacks, all in Aleppo governorate, in violation of UNSC Resolutions 2118, 2209, and 2235.

We at the Syrian Network for Human Rights believe that the evidence and data possessed by the OPCW has must be acted upon in order to hold the Syrian regime accountable for the use of weapons of mass destruction. The OPCW is distinguished by the presence of experts and specialists and by following the highest of standards in collecting and analyzing data. We also believe that the reports issued by the OPCW's Investigation and Responsibility Team, the reports of the Joint Investigation Mechanism, and the reports in which the OPCW has proven that a chemical weapon has been used, given the incontrovertible evidence it contains, collectively constitute a solid basis on which to hold the Syrian regime accountable judicially. Most importantly, politically, is a refusal to accept the Syrian regime's return to the fold of the international community and its classification as a rogue state outside the bounds of international law. All the world's nations must take action to combat the regime and deter it from any further use of weapons of mass destruction. We demand that the OPCW's Investigation and Identification Team identify the individuals involved within the Syrian regime as this is considered a form of accountability and a form of support for the victims of chemical attacks.

You can view the full event on SNHR's YouTube channel at the [following link](#), or on our Facebook page at the [following link](#).