

Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in December 2022

**Reviving Relations With a Regime Involved in Crimes Against
Humanity and War Crimes is a Violation of International Law**

Thursday 05 January 2023

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 analyzes in Syria.

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I. Introduction and Methodology:

Syria has seen an unprecedented number of violations since the start of the popular uprising for democracy in March 2011. Extrajudicial killings, arrests, torture, and enforced disappearances are at the forefront of the violations which the Syrian people have endured for over a decade. While the Syrian regime and its affiliated militias were the sole perpetrators of these violations for the first seven months or so of the uprising, other parties subsequently joined in, perpetrating their share of human rights violations against Syrians. The Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) has been documenting human rights violations, to the best of our abilities since the earliest days in 2011. In 2012 and 2013, as the numbers of human rights violations rose sharply, our team was confronted with the need to release periodic monthly reports, in order to highlight the continued suffering of the Syrian people. We started releasing eight reports each month, and, in tandem with this, created a large database containing hundreds of thousands of incidents sorted into the various categories of violations that emerged during our documentation work.

By the end of 2018, however, the level of violence had fallen to some degree, prompting another change in our reporting strategy. At this point, we opted for releasing one monthly report detailing the most notable human rights violations in Syria that we were able to document in the previous month. As such, this report focuses on the human rights situation in Syria for 2022, including December. In the report we summarize the civilian deaths we have documented in the past month at the hands of the parties to the conflict and the controlling parties, as well as providing details of the numbers of arrests and enforced disappearances for the same period. The report also sheds light on the attacks on vital facilities that our team was able to document this month. For a detailed explanation of our [methodology](#), please visit the following link.

This report only represents the bare minimum of the actual severity and magnitude of the violations that occurred. Also, it doesn't include any analysis of the profound social, economic, and psychological ramifications of these events.

II. Brief on December's Most Notable Developments

Bombings and military operations

December saw a relative decline in the frequency of artillery attacks by Syrian regime forces on the Idlib region in northwestern Syria. We documented sporadic attacks targeting the villages and towns of Jabal al-Zawiya in the southern Idlib suburbs and western Aleppo suburbs, as well as in Sahl al-Ghab in the western Hama suburbs and in the northern Latakia suburbs, which are in close proximity to the dividing lines with the armed opposition's territories. Furthermore, we documented attacks on villages and towns in the western Idlib suburbs far from the dividing lines, in one of which a guided missile hit a home housing an IDP family in the village of Obinin, western Idlib, killing [three civilians, including one child](#), on December 2. In another guided missile attack, on December 27, the perpetrators targeted a group of civilians collecting firewood in agricultural land near al-Tuffahiya village, northern Latakia, killing [one civilian](#).

In Southern Syria, protesters held a demonstration on December 4 in Suwayda city condemning the poor living conditions, with some protesters called for the ousting of the regime. On arriving at the building housing the governorate administration, which is affiliated with the Syrian regime government, the protesters were confronted by regime troops firing guns in the air to scare and intimidate those participating in the demonstration. Despite this effort to subjugate them, the protestors stormed the building and destroyed pictures of the head of the Syrian regime, Bashar Assad. In response, the regime security forces fired directly at the protestors, [killing one civilian](#), and injuring 18 others. The Syrian regime's Ministry of Interior released [a statement](#) on the same day that was published on its official Facebook page, in which it accused 'outlaws' of breaking into the government building and opening fire, killing one police officer, and injuring several civilians. The Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor released [a statement](#) addressing the incident on December 6, in which the group stressed that "Syria's security forces and army, as well as allied militia, have used brutal methods to suppress the popular protests that began in March 2011, resulting in thousands of deaths and injuries among unarmed peaceful protestors." The statement noted that the Syrian regime and its apparatuses classify all forms of protests and expressions of dissent as acts of treason and dishonor in attempt to legitimize and rationalize the regime's own acts of violent repression.

In Daraa governorate, the last week of December saw multiple demonstrations in the cities of Dael, Sanamayn, and Jasim in northern Daraa, and the towns of Tal Shehab and Mzayreeb in western Daraa in the aftermath of the Syrian regime's arrest of a woman in al-N'iema town, with the protestors calling for her release.

Since the beginning of December, the Syrian regime's Fourth Division has been deploying reinforcements in the vicinity of the neighborhoods of al-Ashrafiya and al-Sheikh Maqsoud in Aleppo city, as well as in the areas of al-Shahba in northern Aleppo, which are under the control of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), effectively enforcing a siege on the area. The regime forces have blocked the passage of food and fuels, and imposed fees on civilians, while also seizing sums of money from civilians and merchants over disputes concerning the transfer of fuel from the SDF-controlled territories to those controlled by the Syrian regime¹, causing a price hike for heating materials on the local 'black market',¹ which is operated by smugglers from the Syrian regime-controlled areas. One liter of black market diesel costs as much as 9,000 S.P. (approximately \$3.60), while one ton of firewood costs about 800,000 S.P. (approximately \$318.40)

In December, the SDF continued their ground-based attacks on the northern and eastern Aleppo suburbs, with no civilian deaths documented. The same area was also the target of ground-based attacks by Syrian regime forces. [A girl was killed](#) on December 14 in one of the regime's artillery attacks by when forces stationed in the area of Jabal al-Sheikh Aqil in western Aleppo, fired multiple shells at Fafertin village, which is administratively affiliated with Afrin city in northern Aleppo.

On December 29, the SDF's [official website](#) announced the launch of a new security operation code-named, 'Al Jazira Thunderbolt', which involves the group's internal security forces in northern and eastern Syria coordinating with international coalition forces, to eliminate ISIS cells responsible for carrying out attacks against al-Hawl Camp, Hasaka, and southern Qameshli over the past few months. Dozens of ISIS affiliates have been arrested in connection with the operation, with these forces announcing [a state of emergency](#) and imposing a curfew in Raqqa city since December 26, in response to an attack on the same day by unidentified gunmen believed to be ISIS affiliates that targeted an SDF center in Raqqa city, killing six SDF personnel.

Also in December, there were a number of ground-based attacks by Turkish forces and armed opposition factions/Syrian National Army (SNA) on the different areas under the control of the SDF in northern Aleppo suburbs, and the areas of Manbej and Ein al-Arab in eastern Aleppo suburbs. On the subject of explosions, in December we documented explosions of IED and remnants from previous bombardment in the governorates of Daraa, Hasaka, and Deir Ez-Zour. In one of these cases, munitions from previous bombardment whose source we have so far been unable to identify exploded in agricultural land near al-Karak village in eastern Daraa on December 14, [killing one child](#) and wounding four others. On December 30, [10 civilian workers were killed](#) by the the explosion of a number of IEDs, followed by shooting by gunmen who we have so far been unable to identify, who fired on two busses transporting workers to the al-Taym Oil Field in Deir Ez-Zour suburbs.

¹ A term referring to business transactions that evade tax laws and trade regulations. Goods sold on the black market are often smuggled, meaning they reach the market without being registered by official agencies, such as customs authorities.

[Landmines claimed more civilians lives across Syria in December](#), mostly in Hama governorate. On December 28, a landmine exploded near shepherds in eastern Hama, [killing four civilians](#) and injuring three others. In December, a total of six civilians, including two children, were killed by landmines, bringing 2022's total civilian death toll from landmines to 128, including 69 children and nine women.

December also saw more [assassinations of civilians](#) at the hands of gunmen we have so far been unable to identify in various governorates and areas across Syria. The assassinations documented in December were concentrated in the governorates of Daraa and Deir Ez-Zour. On December 17, [two women's bodies](#) were found on the outskirts of Soor city in northern Deir Ez-Zour, with both bearing gunshot wounds and signs of torture.

On December 19, the [Syrian Arab News Agency \(SANA\)](#), the official Syrian regime state news agency, reported that the Israel Air Force had targeted multiple points in the vicinity of Damascus in a missile attack, injuring two Syrian regime servicemen, and causing material damage.

Living and Security Conditions

December saw unprecedented deterioration across the economic, living, and service sectors in the Syrian regime's territories. [Fuel prices](#) increased again, with the [regime's Tishreen Newspaper](#) reporting on December 5 that the regime's Ministry of Internal Trade and consumer Protection has further increased the prices per liter of industrial and commercial diesel, and petrol intended for commercial activities, which are sold through the state BS to 5,400 S.P. and 4,900 S.P. respectively. The price hike of the already-scarce fuel resources, [along with the Syrian regime's government reductions in subsidies](#) on those resources in its territories, [have affected](#) all aspects of life and exacerbated the burdens on civilians in those areas. For instance, rising transportation costs led to a 100 percent increase in vegetable prices in the first week of December according to a report published by the [pro-regime al-Watan Newspaper](#) on December 11. Furthermore, public and private transport services effectively stopped working, with some companies reducing the frequency of their trips, while other suspended operations altogether in light of the shortage of fuel, with the travel network coming to an almost complete halt. On December 12, the [pro-regime al-Watan Newspaper](#) reported that many bakeries selling bread in Damascus city had ceased working due to the lack of fuel needed for their operations. The newspaper reported that, as of December 12, the bakeries had not received any diesel since the start of December. The same also applies to pastry shops and confectionery bakeries, the report added, with one liter of diesel costing over 12,000 S.P..

On December 6, meanwhile, the [Syrian regime government](#) declared December 11 and December 18 to be official holidays due to the situation of the petroleum market in the country, which the government claimed are caused by the “siege and unfair economic situation imposed on the country.”

Also in December, the Syrian Pound exchange rate saw an unprecedented decrease. As of the last week of December, \$1 was equal to 7,100 S.P. in selling or 6,950 S.P. in buying, according to the ‘[Lira al-Yaum](#)’ ([Syrian Pound Today](#)),² compared to 5,650 S.P. in selling and 5,600 in buying at the end of November. Naturally, this has led to further price hikes for most foodstuff and food supplies.

In northwestern Syria, civilians are still grappling with the increasing prices for foodstuff and food supplies in light of the sharp drop of the currency’s purchasing power, brought about by rampant unemployment and poverty rates, especially in areas housing IDP camps. Moreover, labor wages are in decline, while the service and health sectors are going through a crisis, caused by a lack of funds worsened by the mounting increase in humanitarian needs. Naturally, the winter season and the drop in temperature, along with the increasingly expensive fuel and heating costs, have only exacerbated the suffering of civilians.

On December 12, the World Food Programme (WFP) [notified](#) its partner humanitarian organization in northwestern Syria of a decision to reduce the value of its cash coupons and food baskets from \$60 to \$40 as of January 2023.

In December, we also documented SNA persecution targeting owners of olive groves in the Afrin area and its suburbs, who are mostly of Kurdish ethnicity. The SNA has been imposing taxes and fees on olive groves and the olive harvest at olive presses.

In northeastern Syria the living situation is also worsening. As with other Syrian regions, civilians in north-east Syria are grappling with price hikes for foodstuff, food supplies, and fuels, as the Syrian Pound’s value declines sharply, with local authorities failing to regulate the market. Despite the cholera outbreak, there has been no tangible efforts by the authorities in the region to improve the dangerously unsanitary drinking water supply, with civilians forced to drink untreated water pumped directly from the Euphrates River without going through any purification process. In December, a number of water purification facilities in the villages and towns of Theyban, al-Shaheil, al-Zer, and al-Bseira in eastern Deir Ez-Zour suburbs were put out of commission by a power outage, as the SDF’s committees in charge of the area failed to supply diesel to operate the facilities temporarily, with over 300,000 people deprived of water as a result.

Cholera outbreak

On December 18, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) released [a report](#) on the cholera outbreak in Syria, in which it noted that between August 25 and December 10, a total of 61,671 suspected cholera cases and 100 deaths due to cholera were reported across Syria’s 14 governorates. The

² A website that tracks the exchange rates for the Syrian Pound in the Free Market.

report added that the IDPs camps in northeastern and northwestern Syria recorded 5,037 suspected cases and seven deaths due to cholera. As the report revealed, the worst affected governorates have been: Deir Ez-Zour with 20,103 suspected cases, Idlib with 14,142 cases, Raqqa with 12,818 cases, and Aleppo with 11,617 cases as of the date of the report.

In northwestern Syria, the [Early Warning Responses and Network Program \(EWARN\)](#) noted that as of December 31, northwestern Syria had seen 539 cholera cases and 17 deaths from cholera.

Enforced displacement

The suffering of IDPs in northwestern Syria continued in December, both in relation to the humanitarian situation and provision of services, especially in light of the worsening economic conditions and mounting needs that have reached unprecedented levels, as the amount of aid from relief organizations has been shrinking. Further exacerbating this crisis, there has been an almost complete lack of job opportunities and waning purchasing power especially for IDPs living in camps. We also documented [multiple fires](#) in the camps of northwestern Syria. On December 15, a fire broke out in an IDP housing unit (a caravan) in Mohammad Mursi Widows Camp in northern Idlib due to the misuse of a space heater. [A girl and her father](#) sustained varying burn injuries in the blaze, while the residence's contents were moderately damaged. On December 7, [a worker in the relief field](#) suffocated to death along with his wife as they were sleeping in their place of residence in the Ihtmeylat Camp near Izaz city in northern Aleppo. The fire was caused by the use of harmful materials for heating. We also recorded In December that a number of camps sustained slight damage due to the heavy rains which created watercourses in areas near the IDPs camps in the Salqin area, southern Idlib suburbs and Izaz in northern Aleppo suburbs.

In northeastern Syria, the cholera outbreak has exacerbated the already severe suffering of IDPs, along with the severe shortage of drinking water, as well as the relief organizations' shrinking efforts in providing support for IDPs and improving their food security and health care. We also documented a fire caused by the explosion of a space heater at a tent in al-Areisha IDPs Camp, in al-Areisha town in southern Hasaka on December 26. The fire killed [two children, siblings](#) who were displaced from Deir Ez-Zour governorate. [The Save the Children organization](#) released a statement on the same day concerning the incident, in which it noted that a total of 17 children had died or been injured in similar incidents in the previous five months, adding that this highlights the daily threats facing children living in IDPs camps in Syria, where many families have to make do with unsafe means to protect themselves from the freezing winter cold.

On December 22, the SDF's Foreign Relationship Directorate at the affiliated Self Administration of northern and eastern Syria revealed in a [statement](#) that 315 children and women who are family members of ISIS affiliates had been returned to 13 states in 2022. According to the statement, the states that repatriated most nationals from Syria are: Tajikistan with 146, the Russian Federation with 68, France with 109, Germany with 53, and the Netherlands with 60.

In al-Rukban IDP Camp on the Syrian-Jordanian borders in eastern Homs governorate, which houses around 7,500 individuals, IDPs are still grappling with extremely difficult living conditions and a severe shortage of food and medical supplies, worsened by the freezing cold winter weather, due to the siege imposed by Syrian regime forces and their blocking the entry of humanitarian assistances for five years to date, since the start of 2018. On December 27, we recorded [the death of a newborn infant](#) due to the lack of medical services and necessary post-natal care at the camp.

On December 20, the Syrian regime allowed some families to return to Ein al-Feja village after they had obtained security clearance from the regime's Military Security division and the National Guard Security Office. As a condition for the residents' return, however, the regime requires that they do not do carry out any repairs or modifications to their houses. Some of the residents we have contacted told us that living in their houses in their current condition is effectively impossible after they were bombed and looted. The Syrian regime took advantage of these returns to promote its supposed efforts to return IDPs to their original areas. [SANA](#) reported that the residents "held popular celebrations in the town square with popular and official participation" on being allowed to return to their homes and lands after "they were displaced for years because of terrorism." It should be noted that the residents and local fighters were forcibly displaced from the Wadi Barada area in Western Ghouta, Damascus suburbs by regime forces back in January 2017.

On the subject of refugees and asylum seekers, the [Lighthouse Reports](#) Website published an investigative report on December 5 in collaboration with a number of European media outlets which revealed that Bulgarian Border Guard used live bullets to fire on a group of asylum seekers who tried to cross into Bulgaria via the border crossing with Turkey. Video footage published by the website show a Syrian asylum seeker injured after he was shot. The website notes that this is the first visual evidence of the use of live ammunition against asylum seekers trying to reach Bulgaria, which raises serious questions of the EU's policy regarding border control.

On December 7, the [Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor](#) released a statement expressing its concern over the Danish government sending threatening letters to Syrian child refugees younger than 15 years of age, whose parents are going through the asylum procedures, in an effort to convince or intimidate them into voluntarily leaving Denmark or risk facing the fate of deportation or indefinite detention. This was revealed in a documentary aired by the public service broadcaster DR. The group stressed that the Danish government has placed Syrian refugees in a stage of legal uncertainty. The continued threats of deportation coupled with their unwillingness to return to a war-torn country has forced hundreds of Syrians to leave Denmark in the past few years in search of a safe haven elsewhere in Europe.

In Lebanon, the Lebanese government is still issuing statements and calls demanding that Syrian refugees return to Syria. On December 1, Prime Minister Najib Azmi Mikati renewed its pledges to the international community to help end the “Syrian displacement crisis” in a meeting with Filippo Grandi, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, according to [Lebanon’s National News Agency](#).

On December 8, the [Access Center for Human Rights \(ACHR\)](#) said in a report that the Lebanese government is carrying out a plan to return Syrian refugees which the government announced it would be resuming back in October. The report stresses that raids on refugees’ camps and homes are still being documented in a widespread and systematic manner. A total of 1,871 forced evictions of Syrian refugees were recorded between the start of 2022 and last October.

On December 16, the UN Refugee Agency, World Food Programme, and UN International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF) released [a joint statement](#), revealing the initial findings of the Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon ([VASyR](#)), which showed a sharp and continued deterioration in the living conditions of all Syrian refugees in Lebanon. The statement goes on to reveal that 90 percent of Syrian refugees need humanitarian assistance to stay alive, adding that the assessment had found that lack of food security is one of the most alarming issues for Syrian refugee families, with the report further noting that Syrian refugees reduce their already inadequate food intake to feed family members, with adults eating less in order to allow their children to eat, and spending less on healthcare and education in order to prioritize buying food.

Political and human rights situation

On November 30, the UN Refugee Agency released [an operational update](#) on Syria, revealing that over 14.6 million people, includes 6.9 million IDPs, need humanitarian assistance across Syria according to the Humanitarian Needs Overview (HNO) report for 2022. This marks a nine percent increase over last year. The report adds that around 9.6 million people in Syria are in severe need of humanitarian assistance.

On December 1, Mr. Stéphane Dujarric, the UN Spokesperson for the Secretary-General, revealed in his [daily briefing at](#) the UN headquarters in New York that 4.1 million people in Syria rely on humanitarian assistance to meet their daily needs, with 80 percent of these being women and children. Mr. Dujarric adds that cross-line aid delivery is currently insufficient to cover the huge scale of the UN’s operations in delivering cross-border aid, which reaches only 2.7 million Syrian each month.

On December 2, the UN OCHA said in [a situation report](#) on northwestern Syria that the funding gap for winter preparedness had reached 82 percent, which puts the lives of 2.5 million people targeted at risk.

On December 5, Ms. Izumi Nakamitsu, the UN High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, reported in [a briefing](#) held during a UN Security Council meeting on chemical weapons in Syria that the Syrian regime is still avoiding full cooperation with the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) to settle all outstanding issues regarding the regime’s declaration on chemical weapons.

On December 11, [Jordan's Anti-Narcotics Department](#) revealed that Jordanian authorities had thwarted an attempt to smuggle large quantities of narcotics from Syria. The Department added that a total of 8,873 kaf of cannabis and 3,141,000 captagon pills had been seized in the operation.

On December 12, [the International Rescue Committee](#) released its '2023 Emergency Watchlist' report, an annual report that assesses the which countries are at the greatest risk of facing new humanitarian crises each year. The report placed Syria among the top 10 most at-risk countries, noting that the conflict that has been going on for over a decade has destroyed Syria's health system and left the country on the verge of economic collapse. The report adds that 75 percent of all Syrians are unable to meet their basic needs, with million relying on humanitarian aid. The report warns that millions in northwestern Syria face serious threat to their lives in early to mid-2023 when humanitarian needs are at their most intense.

On December 14, [the Reporters Without Borders \(RSF\)](#) organization released its annual round-up report for the year 2022 on violence and abuses against journalists. The report named Syria as one of the world's six most dangerous countries for journalists, accounting for the highest number of journalists being held hostage globally, with 42 of the 65 journalists currently held hostage worldwide being held hostage in Syria.

Between December 14 to 18, [photos and video footage showing regime military forces moving to northern Aleppo governorate](#) were circulated online by activists. Some of the photos showed the regime military vehicles covered with tarpaulins branded with the UN Refugee Agency's logo. SNHR has warned in numerous reports that the Syrian regime must not be trusted with aid supplied by international organizations. The Syrian regime exploits such aid and distributes it as it sees fit. SNHR has also warned that Russia's and the Syrian regime's efforts to block cross-border aids stem from their wishes to seize and control the largest amounts of aid to further their own interests, rather than to distribute that aid fairly, according to the areas and people that need it the most.



Military vehicles for the Syrian regime covered with fabrics showing the UN Refugee Agency's logo - December 2022

On December 15, Human Rights Watch (HRW) said in [a report](#) that over 42,400 foreigners accused of having ties with ISIS are still abandoned by their home countries in camps and jails in northeastern Syria. The report adds that the Self-Administration forces are holding those foreigners, most of them children, along with 23,200 Syrians, in life-threatening conditions. "The foreigners are held in northeast Syria with the tacit or explicit consent of their countries of nationality," the report stressed. Some states, such as the UK and Denmark, have revoked the citizenship of many or some of their nationals, leaving them stateless, which constitutes a violation of their right to nationality. The group adds that the governments that contribute knowingly and significantly to this abusive confinement may be complicit in the foreigners' unlawful detention.

On December 19, [SANA](#) reported that the Syrian regime's Ministry of Foreign Affairs Faisal Mekdad has held a meeting with Adele Khodr, Regional director of UNICEF's office in the Middle East and North Africa.

In the meeting, SANA reported, Mekdad had expressed "his gratitude for the efforts made by the organization in collaboration with Syrian national agencies and relevant ministries to support children in Syria, as he underlined the importance of increasing the work on early recovery programs." Through such meetings, the Syrian regime is trying to exploit the early recovery and reconstruction issue to promote itself and use the funds allocated for such projects to support its nosediving economy. The Syrian regime is also trying to use the aid provided by international organizations and distribute it as it suits the regime's needs to do. We, at SNHR, believe that Ms. Khodr should not have attended this meeting, which sends a wholly negative message to millions of Syrians who have suffered and continue to suffer the agony of the Syrian regime's numerous violations, since doing so demonstrates an implicit reconciliation between the UN and the Syrian regime and suggests a desire for reproachment, despite [the most recent report by the UN Human Rights Office](#) and the numerous reports by international groups confirming that the Syrian regime is still committing widespread violations.

On December 21, the Save the Children organization said, [in a statement](#), that there is far more work to be done to help repatriation efforts from the camps in northeastern Syria, in order to help the children living in those camps. The statement highlights that unprecedented levels of violence had been documented in al-Hawl Camp throughout the preceding year. The organization added that while some states have already repatriated their nationals from these camps, other states have yet to take any action in this regard.

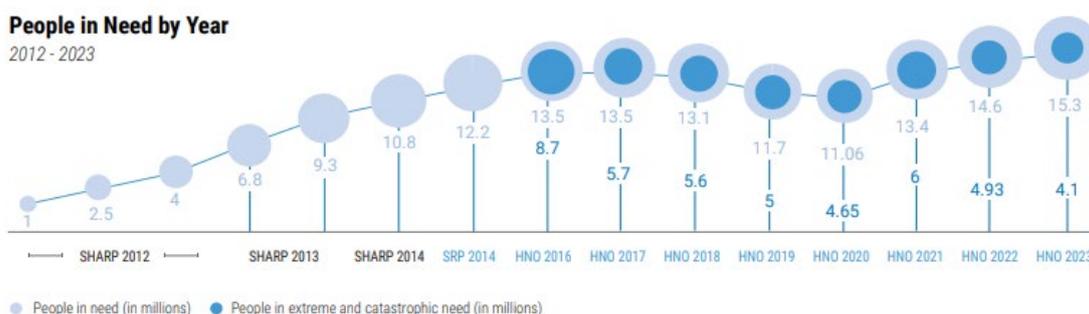
On December 21, Mr. Martin Griffiths, the UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, said, in [a briefing](#) on the situation in Syria for the UN Security Council, that the number of people who need humanitarian assistance has risen to 14.6 million, with an increase of 1.2 million from 2021. Mr. Griffiths stressed that this number will rise again in 2023 to reach a record 15.3 million people who will need humanitarian assistance, adding that over half of Syria's population

are struggling to find food. Mr. Griffiths also stressed how important it is to maintain a lifeline for millions of people in northwestern Syria. Failing to renew the mechanism to deliver humanitarian aids to northwestern Syria, he warned, will jeopardize the delivery of aid when people need it the most amid a cholera outbreak and the winter season.

On December 21, Mr. Geir Otto Pedersen, the UN Special Envoy for Syria, said, in [a briefing](#) to the UN Security Council on Syria, that Syrians across the country are facing a humanitarian and economic crisis. Mr. Pedersen added that the areas housing IDPs camp are the worst affected by such crises, noting that the Security Council should act to bring about unfettered humanitarian access to all Syrians in need throughout the country. With regard to the meetings of the constitutional committee, Mr. Pedersen noted that no progress has been made, especially in light of Russia’s position on holding these meetings in Geneva city.

On December 21, the Russian state [Russia Today](#) news agency reported on a speech delivered by Mr. Vasily Alekseyevich Nebenzya, Russia’s Permanent Representative of Russia to the United Nations, during a session held by the UN Security Council to discuss the situation in Syria, in which he claimed the UN “does not provide an appropriate context for discussions about extending the mechanism for delivering aid across the borders,” adding that “the arguments for extending the mechanism is unconvincing, because the lack of alternative is made up.”

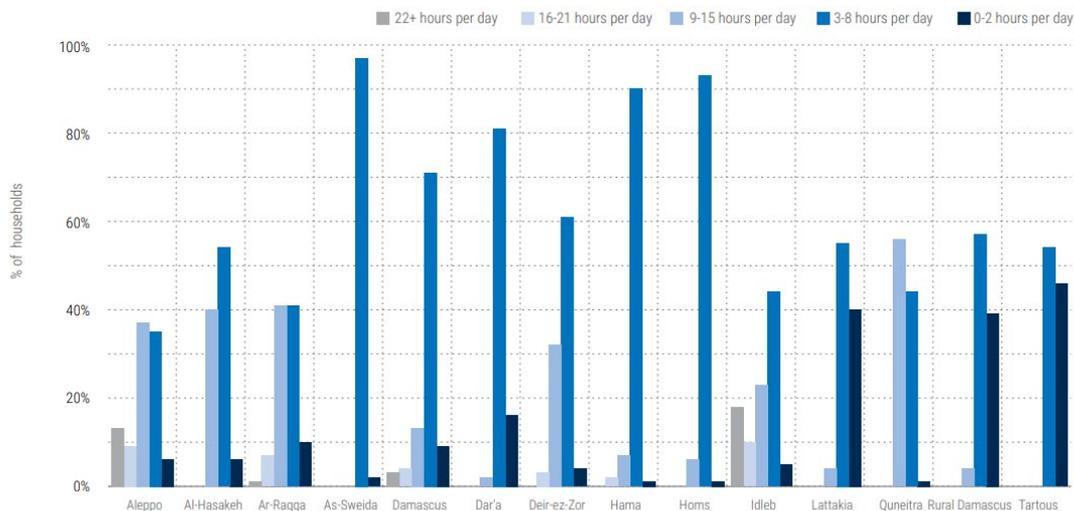
On December 22, the UN OCHA released [a report](#) on humanitarian needs in Syria for the year 2023, which noted that Syria houses the highest number of IDPs worldwide with 6.8 million. The report adds that as a result of those challenges, 2023 will see 15.3 million people in Syria in need of humanitarian assistance, including 2.1 IDPs living in IDPs camps, and a continuing increase of needs in all types, with the report warning that the system to meet basic needs and vital infrastructure in the country are set to collapse. The report notes that the widespread and repeated power outages have forced over half of Syria’s population to use candles for light. According to a report by the OCHA, electricity access was the second most unmet need in Syria for 2022.



Number of people in need of humanitarian assistance in Syria from 2011 until 2023 (Source: The Humanitarian Needs Overview Syrian Arab Republic report released on December 22, 2022 by the UN OCHA).

Hours of Electricity per Day

by Governorate



Source: MSNA 2022

Number of hours of electricity provided by day by the Syrian regime's government across Syrian governorates (Source: The Humanitarian Needs Overview for the Syrian Arab Republic report released on December 22, 2022 by the UN OCHA).

On December 28, the Turkish Ministry of Defense released [a statement](#) on its official website, in which it revealed that Hulusi Akar, Turkey's Minister of Defense, and Hakan Fidan, the head of Turkey's National Intelligence Organization, had met with Sergei Shoigu, Russia's Minister of Defense, and Ali Mahmoud Abbas, Syria's Minister of Defense, as well as with the heads of the Russian and Syrian intelligence apparatuses. The statement said that the meeting discussed the Syrian crisis and the refugees issue, as well as the joint efforts to combat all terrorist organizations in Syria. On December 29, [Russia Today](#) reported Hulusi Akar, Turkey's Minister of Defense, as saying, "We affirmed that a resolution must be reached for the Syrian crisis that involves all parties in accordance with UN Resolution 2254."

On December 30, the Reporters Without Borders (RSF) organization released [a report](#) on the toll of journalists killed in the last two decades. The report notes that the annual global death toll reached its height in 2012 and 2013 when 144 and 142 journalists respectively were killed. This death toll, the report added, was largely due to the conflict in Syria, with 80 percent of media fatalities in the past two decades occurring in only 15 countries. Overall, Syria accounted for the second-highest number of journalists killed in the past two decades the report revealed.

In December 2022, Denmark's Ministry of Refugees, Immigration and Integration Affairs released [a report](#) on the recruitment practices of Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) and armed opposition factions in Syria, in which SNHR was the most cited source with 52 citations in total. On December 29, we released [a statement](#) regarding the report.

Accountability and advocacy

On December 7, SNHR released [a statement](#) revealing that Mr. Fadel Abdul Ghany, Executive Director of SNHR, took part in two events held on the sidelines of the 27th session of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons' Conference of the States Parties (CSP), held from November 28 - December 2, 2022. Mr. Abdul Ghany took part in the first of these side events, entitled, '**Civil Society and the Chemical Weapon Convention**', on November 1. Held at the Royal Norwegian Embassy in the Hague, the event was cosponsored by the Permanent Representatives of Canada, the European Union, Germany, Norway, and the United States of America to the OPCW. The second event Mr. Abdul Ghany attended, on December 2, entitled '**Dialogue With the Civil Society**', was also organized by the organized by the Permanent Representatives of Canada, Germany, Norway, the United States of America, and the European Union to the OPCW, together with the French Presidency of the Partnership Against Impunity for the Use of Chemical Weapons.

On December 10, SNHR released [a statement](#) revealing that Mr. Fadel Abdul Ghany, Executive Director of SNHR, held meetings with officials from several departments of the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) in London on December 5, with the discussions focusing on potential opportunities for increased cooperation. On the sidelines of this visit, Mr. Abdul Ghany also participated in an event entitled, 'The Future of Accountability in Syria'. Organized by the [Syrian British Consortium \(SCB\)](#), the event was held at King's College London on the day of the visit, with Mr. Abdul Ghany shedding light during the event on the failures of accountability mechanisms over the course of the past 11 years, which were caused by reasons beyond the control of the Syrian people and human rights organizations. Mr. Abdul Ghany stressed that the world states and the UN Security Council should be held collectively responsible for the impunity enjoyed by the perpetrators of these violations.

On December 20, SNHR released [a report](#) entitled, 'SNHR Obtains Hundreds of Death Certificates for People Forcibly Disappeared by the Syrian Regime, Whose Families Have Not been Notified of Their Deaths, Which Have Not Been Announced by Civil Register Offices', in which it revealed that the Syrian regime has registered hundreds of forcibly disappeared persons at regime detention centers as dead, including prominent activist in the popular uprising against the regime. The report noted that SNHR stores numerous death certificates of detainees and forcibly disappeared people, archiving a total of approximately 1,062 death certificates between 2018 and the end of 2021. The report also revealed that SNHR has obtained 547 new death certificates (at time of the report) that have not yet been announced by the civil register offices, as the families of the deceased have not been notified of their death.

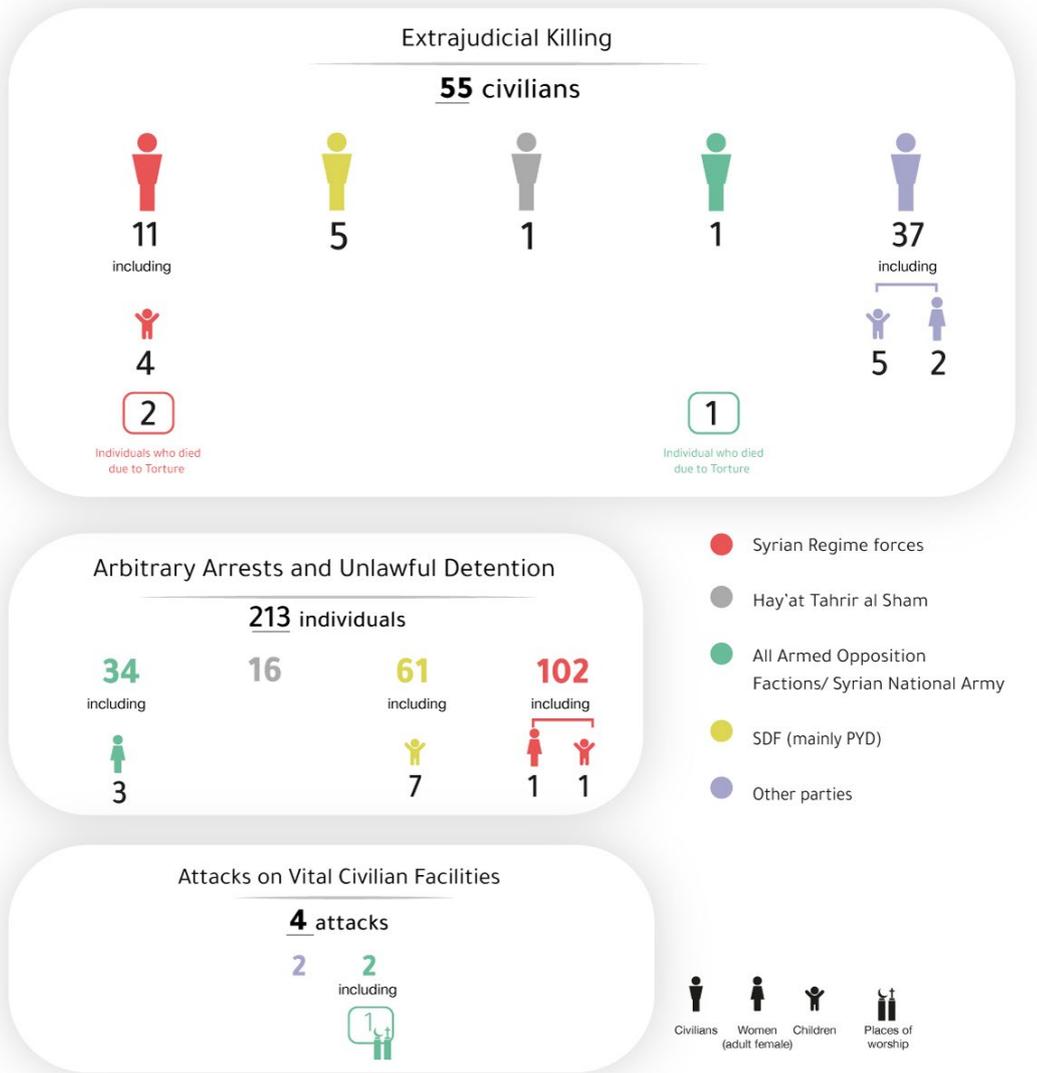
On December 24, SNHR released [a statement](#) revealing that the [Aid Worker Security Database \(AWSD\)](#) project had released [a report](#) in December that shed light on the violence taking place in al-Hawl Camp in northeastern Syria, which has noticeably affected the provision of humanitarian services there. The information provided by the reports draws upon several local sources accessed thanks to the project's partnership with SNHR, as well as the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) and Doctors Without Borders (MSF).

On December 27, [SNHR](#) released a statement revealing that in November 2022 it had formally joined the [Chemical Weapons Convention Coalition](#), which is an independent, international civil society network committed to supporting the aims of the CWC and complementing the work of the OPCW's member states through focused civil society efforts aimed at attaining full membership of the CWC, as well as the safely and timely elimination of all chemical weapons, preventing the misuse of chemicals for hostile purposes, and promoting their peaceful use.

In December, SNHR briefed the UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances, the UN Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, the UN Special Rapporteur on Promotion and Protection of Human Rights while Countering Terrorism- Specific work on victims of terrorism, and the UN Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, on one case of enforced disappearance.

III. Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in 2022 and in December

This report summarizes the most notable human rights violations committed by the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in Syria that were documented by the SNHR in December.



A. Extrajudicial killing

In December, SNHR documented the death of 55 civilians, including nine children and two women (adult female), most of whom were killed at the hands of other parties. We also documented the death of three individuals due to torture. We issued a report on the first of this month detailing the civilian victims documented killed at the hands of the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in Syria.

The death toll of civilian victims was distributed according to the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in Syria as follows:

A. The main parties:

- **Syrian regime forces (army, security, local militias, and Shiite foreign militias):**³ 11 civilians, including four children.
- **HTS**⁴: one civilian.
- **All armed opposition factions/SNA**: one civilian.
- **Kurdish-led SDF (Democratic Union Party)**: five civilians.

B. Other parties:

We documented the deaths of 37 civilians, including five children and two women at the hands of other parties, distributed as follows:

- **Gunfire whose source we have been unable to identify**: 12 civilians, including one child.
- **Landmines whose source we have not been able to identify**: Six civilians, including two children.
- **Killings by parties we have been unable to identify**: 15 civilians, including two children and one woman.
- **Bombings whose perpetrators we have been unable to identify**: four civilians, including one woman.

B. Arbitrary arrest and enforced disappearance

In December 2022, SNHR documented at least 213 cases of arbitrary arrest, including eight children and four women (adult female), at the hands of the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in Syria. Most of these arrests were carried out by Syrian regime forces in the governorates of Damascus suburbs, then Damascus, and then Daraa. We issued a report on the third of this month detailing the cases of arbitrary arrest and enforced disappearances which we documented in December at the hands of the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in Syria.

³ 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 where power is concentrated in the hands of a small circle of individuals, namely the President of the Republic and the heads of the security apparatus. Conversely, 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, with no real decision-making power or active role of their own. Syria is under a personalist/family rule, with no independent decision-making structure. Rather, the government is an empty façade merely for show. The Minister of Interior receives orders from the security branches over which he supposedly presides. The Minister of Justice cannot even summon a low-ranking security officer, let alone a security branch head. Syria is ruled by the heads of the security branches with the president.

We are aware that the United Nations and its agencies use the term 'the Syrian government', however, we believe that this is a completely inaccurate and misleading term in the Syrian context.

⁴ Was designated as a terrorist group by the UN.

Cases of arbitrary arrests were distributed according to the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces as follows:

- **Syrian regime forces:** 102 civilians, including one child and one woman.
- **HTS:** 16 civilians.
- **All Armed Opposition factions/SNA:** 34 civilians, including three women.
- **SDF:** 61 civilians, including seven children.

C. Attacks on vital civilian facilities

1- In 2022

In 2022, SNHR documented no fewer than 92 attacks on vital civilian facilities, including 22 at the hands of the Syrian-Russian alliance.

Among the 92 attacks, we documented 14 attacks on educational facilities, six attacks on medical facilities, and seven attacks on places of worship.

These attacks were distributed according to the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces as follows:

A. Main parties

- **Syrian regime forces:** 14 attacks.
- **Russian forces:** eight attacks.
- **HTS:** one attack.
- **All armed opposition factions/SNA:** 10 attacks.
- **SDF:** 22 attacks.

B. other parties

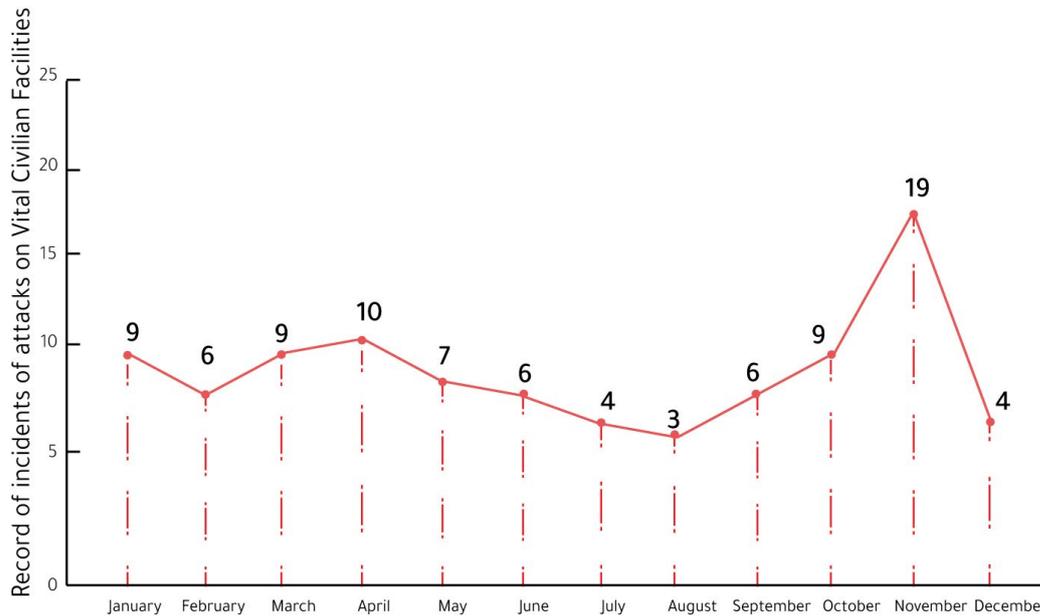
Other parties were responsible for 37 attacks, as follows:

- **Explosions whose sources we have been unable to identify:** 13 attacks.
- **Bombings whose perpetrators we have been unable to identify:** three attacks.
- **Shells whose sources we have been unable to identify:** six attacks.
- **Attacks whose perpetrators we have been unable to identify:** three attacks.
- **Gunfire whose sources we have been unable to identify:** one attack.
- **Turkish forces:** 11 attacks

Attacks on vital civilian facilities in 2022 are distributed by the perpetrator party as follows:

Perpetrator Party Facility Attacked	Perpetrator Party					Other Parties					
	Syrian Regime Forces	Russian Forces	HTS	All Armed Opposition Factions/SNA	SDF	Bombings Whose Perpetrators We Have been Unable to Identify	Explosions Whose Sources We Have been Unable to Identify	Shells Whose Sources We Have been Unable to Identify	Bombings Whose Perpetrators We Have been Unable to Identify	Gunfire Whose Sources We Have been Unable to Identify	Turkish Forces
Places of Worship											
Mosques	2			3	1				1		
Vital Educational Facilities											
Schools	2	1		1	5		1		2		2
Vital Medical Facilities											
Medical Facilities	1				2		2	1			
Ambulances				1							
Vital Cultural Facilities											
Archeological Sites	1										
Communal Facilities											
Markets	2				2	1	3		2		
Parks					1						
Stadiums					1		1				
Infrastructures											
Power Stations and Energy Sources				1							6
Civil Defense Centers					1						
Water Systems		1					1	1			1
Bakeries				1	1		1				
Silos											1
Industrial Facilities											1
Official Service Headquarters	1			1	3		4	1			
Domestic Animal Farms		5									
Transportation Systems						1					
Forcibly Displaced Camps/Gatherings											
Formal Camps	3		1	2	5	1			1	1	
Random Camps	2										
Shelters		1									
Total	14	8	1	10	22	3	13	3	6	1	11

Attacks on vital civilian facilities in 2022 were distributed by month as follows:



The table above shows that November saw the highest number of attacks on vital civilian facilities documented in 2022, accounting for 21 percent of all attacks on vital civilian facilities in 2022, followed by April with 11 percent.

2- In December 2022

In December 2022, SNHR documented at least four incidents of attacks on vital civilian facilities. Among these attacks, we documented one attack on a place of worship.

These attacks were distributed according to the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces as follows:

A. The main parties

- **All armed opposition factions/SNA: two attacks.**

B. Other parties

- **Explosions whose source we have been unable to identify: two attacks.**

Attacks on vital civil facilities documented in December 2022 were distributed according to the perpetrator parties as follows:

Perpetrator Party Facility Attacked	All Armed Opposition Factions/SNA	Other Parties
		Explosions Whose Sources We Have been Unable to Identify
Places of Worship		
Mosques	1	
Infrastructures		
Official Service Headquarters		2
Bakeries	1	
Total	2	2

Most notable attacks on vital civilian facilities documented in December:

On Wednesday, November 30, 2022, artillery forces stationed in an SNA-held area fired shells that landed near a bakery in al-Rbei'at village, administratively affiliated with Abu Rasin village in the northwestern suburbs of Hasaka governorate. The bakery building was heavily damaged and as a result went out of commission. The village was under the control of the SDF at the time of the incident.

On Thursday, December 1, 2022, artillery forces stationed in an SNA-held area fired mortar shells that landed near Abu Bakr al-Siddeeq Mosque in al-Trowaziya village, which is administratively affiliated with Ein Eisa area in the northern suburbs of Raqqa governorate. The mosque's building was heavily destroyed, and [its furniture was heavily damaged](#). As a result, the mosque went out of commission. The area was under the control of the SDF at the time of the incident.



Destruction in the aftermath of a ground-based attack originating from an SNA-held area on Abu Bakr al-Siddeeq Mosque in al-Trowaziya village - December 1, 2022

On Monday, December 5, 2022, an IED whose source we have been unable to identify, which was planted inside a car, exploded outside the al-Urouba School, which is located in al-Quwatli Street in al-Qameshli city in the northeastern suburbs of Hasaka governorate. [The school building's yard was slightly damaged](#), while some of the glass panes in the school's windows were shattered. SNHR is still trying to locate eye-witnesses to obtain more information about the incident. Al-Qameshli city was under the control of the SDF at the time of the incident.

D. Indiscriminate attacks and attacks using prohibited weapons

SNHR recorded no indiscriminate attacks or use of prohibited weapons in December.

IV. Attachments

[1, 057 Civilians, Including 251 Children, 94 Women, and 133 Victims Who Died due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria, in 2022](#)

[At Least 2,221 Arbitrary Arrests/Detentions Documented in Syria in 2022, Including 148 Children and 457 Women \(Adult Female\), with 213 Cases Documented in December](#)

V. Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions:

- The evidence we have gathered indicates that attacks continue to be directed against civilians and civilian objects. Syrian-Russian alliance forces have committed various crimes, including extrajudicial killings, arrests, torture, and enforced disappearances. In addition, the indiscriminate bombardment and other attacks carried out caused the destruction of facilities and buildings. There are reasonable grounds to believe that the war crime of attacking civilians has been committed in many cases.
- The Syrian government has not only violated international humanitarian law and customary law, but has also breached a number of UN Security Council resolutions, particularly resolution 2139, resolution 2042 on the release of detainees, and resolution 2254, all without any accountability.
- We could find no record of any warnings being issued by the Syrian Regime or Russian forces prior to any attack under the requirements of international humanitarian law. This has been the case since the beginning of the popular uprising for freedom, providing another blatant demonstration of these forces' total disregard for the lives of civilians in Syria.
- The magnitude and frequency of the violations, the disproportionate use of military force, the indiscriminate manner of the bombing, and the coordinated approach of these attacks lead to the inescapable conclusion that these acts are wholly deliberate and based on high-level orders, and as such constitute a part of state policy.

- The indiscriminate and disproportionate bombardment carried out by the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces is considered to be a clear violation of international humanitarian law, with indiscriminate killings amounting to war crimes.
- Hay'at Tahrir al Sham has violated international humanitarian law, causing the death of many civilians, as well as damage to vital civilian facilities.
- All Armed Opposition factions/SNA violated UN Security Council Resolution 2139 through carrying out attacks that are considered to violate customary international humanitarian law, causing civilian casualties or accidental injuries.
- All the attacks documented in this report, particularly bombings, caused massive collateral damage that involved loss of lives, injuries, or significant damage to civilian objects. There are strong indicators suggesting that this damage was excessive compared to the anticipated military benefit.
- The use of explosive arms to target densely populated areas reflects a criminal and wholly deliberate mindset, with the perpetrators clearly intending to inflict the greatest possible number of deaths, which is a clear contravention of international human rights law and a flagrant violation of the Geneva IV Convention (arts. 27, 31, 32).

Recommendations:

UN Security Council

- The Security Council must take additional steps following its adoption of Resolution 2254, which clearly insists that "all parties immediately cease any attacks against civilians and civilian objects as such."
- The Syrian issue should be referred to the International Criminal Court and all those who are responsible for violations should be held accountable, while Russia must stop using the veto, as it is a party to the Syrian conflict, and the UNSC states' veto power should be withheld when crimes against humanity and war crimes are committed.
- Ensure peace and security and implement the principle of responsibility to protect civilians' lives and to save the Syrian people's heritage and historical artifacts from destruction, looting and vandalism.
- The Security Council should adopt a resolution banning the use of cluster munitions and landmines in Syria, similar to the existing prohibition on the use of chemical weapons, and include advice on how to safely remove the remnants of such dangerous weapons.
- The four other permanent member states should put pressure on the Russian government to end its support for the Syrian regime, which uses chemical weapons, and to expose its involvement in this regard.
- Request that all relevant United Nations agencies make greater efforts to provide food, medical and humanitarian assistance in areas where fighting has ceased, and in internally displaced person camps, and to follow-up with those States that have pledged voluntary contributions.

International Community

- In light of the split within the Security Council and its utter inability to take any effective action, action should be taken on the national and regional levels to form alliances to support the Syrian people by protecting them from daily killing and by lifting sieges, as well as by increasing support for relief efforts. Additionally, the principle of universal jurisdiction should be enacted in local courts regarding these crimes in order to conduct fair trials for all those who were involved.
- SNHR has repeatedly called for the implementation of the 'Responsibility to Protect' in dozens of studies and reports and as a member of the International Coalition for the Responsibility to Protect (ICR2P) after all political channels through the Arab League's plan and then Mr. Kofi Annan's plan have proved fruitless, along with the Cessation of Hostilities statements and Astana agreements that followed. Therefore, steps should be taken under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations, while the norm of the 'Responsibility to Protect (R2P)', which was established by the United Nations General Assembly, should be implemented. The Security Council is still hindering the protection of civilians in Syria.
- Renew pressure on the Security Council to refer the case in Syria to the International Criminal Court.
- Work on fulfilling justice and achieving accountability in Syria through the United Nations General Assembly and the Human Rights Council and to activate the principle of universal jurisdiction.

UN Human Rights Office

- The OHCHR should submit a report to the Human Rights Council and other organs of the United Nations on the incidents mentioned in this report and previous reports since these attacks were perpetrated by the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces.

Independent International Commission of Inquiry (COI)

- Launch investigations into the cases included in this report and previous reports. SNHR is willing to cooperate and provide further evidence and data.
- Focus on the issue of landmines and cluster munitions within the next report.

International, Impartial, and Independent Mechanism (IIIM)

- Collect further evidence about the crimes documented in this report.

The United Nations Special Envoy to Syria

- Condemn the perpetrators of crimes and massacres, and those who were primarily responsible for dooming the de-escalation agreements.
- Re-sequence the peace process so that it can resume its natural course despite Russia's attempts to divert and distort it, empowering the Constitutional Committee prior to the establishment of a transitional governing body.

The Syrian regime

- Stop indiscriminate shelling and targeting of residential areas, hospitals, schools and markets, and end the use of outlawed weapons and barrel bombs.
- Ensure compliance with UN Security Council resolutions and customary humanitarian law.

The Russian regime

- Launch investigations into the incidents included in this report, make the findings of these investigations public for the Syrian people, and hold those responsible accountable.
- Compensate all the damaged centers and facilities, rebuild and rehabilitate them, and compensate all the families of victims who were killed by the current Russian regime, as well as all the wounded.
- Completely cease the bombing of hospitals, protected objects, and civilian areas, and respect customary international law.
- As a guarantor party in Astana talks, the Russian regime must stop thwarting de-escalation agreements, and apply pressure on the Syrian regime in order to end all indiscriminate attacks and to allow unconditional passage of humanitarian assistance to besieged areas.

The Coalition (US-led coalition and Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces)

- The states supporting the SDF should apply pressure on these forces in order to compel them to cease all of their violations in all the areas and towns under their control.
- Syrian Democratic Forces must immediately stop conscripting children, hold the officers involved in such violations accountable, and pledge to return all children who have been arrested for conscription immediately.

All Armed Opposition factions/Syrian National Army

- The Armed Opposition/SNA must ensure the protection of civilians in all areas under their control. These forces should also take care to distinguish between civilians and military targets and cease any indiscriminate attacks.
- Take punitive action against those who commit violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law.

Humanitarian Organizations

- Develop urgent operational plans to secure decent shelter for internally displaced persons.
- Provide protected facilities and vehicles, such as medical facilities, schools, and ambulances, with distinctive signs that can be distinguished from long distances.

Acknowledgments

We extend our most sincere gratitude to the victims' families and friends, and to the eyewitnesses and local activists for their significant contributions to this report.



www.snhr.org - info@snhr.org