On International Women’s Day

the Devastating Earthquake that Hit Northwestern Syria Has

Exacerbated the Dire Situation of Women, With No Fewer

than 35,000 Women Losing Their Homes in the Earthquake

The parties to the conflict are still committing violations against women working in the public sphere

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
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I. Background and Methodology

Every year, the Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) publishes two special reports that shed light on the most prominent violations perpetrated against women and girls. The first of the two is released on International Woman’s Day, March 8, and the second on the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, November 25. Both reports draw upon our regular and daily monitoring since March 2011. In relation to women, we have monitored an extensive range of violations against Syrian women, which compelled us to create a dedicated database specifically for cataloguing those violations, listing details include the perpetrator party, and the date and place of any violation, as well other relevant details. As this database shows, the Syrian regime and its two primary allies, Russia and Iran, are by far the most prolific perpetrators of violations against Syrian women, especially killings, arbitrary arrests, enforced disappearance, torture, and sexual violence. At SNHR, we regularly maintain and update our data to release comprehensive figures, in order to highlight the massive loss Syria has suffered due to the huge number of violations against women. In this report, we will summarize our most recent data on the most notable serious violations committed by the parties to the conflict and controlling forces against women - adult females - between March 2011 and March 2023 that we have been able to document.

In addition to the most serious violations against women, this report sheds light on the patterns of violence and assaults against women and activists due to their activism in the areas under the control of Hay’at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), Syrian National Army (SNA), and the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). Indeed, we have consistently catalogued and reported not only on the violations committed by the Syrian regime, but on the patterns of violations by the other parties, their respective types and kinds, and the similarities and differences among the different parties. To that end, in this report we will be summarizing the statistics gathered on seven specific forms of violence against women due to their activism, as well as gender-based killings. Since this is an annual report, we will mention the violations we have been able to document in the year from March 2022 until the current period, March 2023.

This report also draws upon the accounts and interviews we conducted with activist and female worker in various fields who were subjected to the types of violations covered in this report. As mentioned earlier, those violations took place in territories under the control of, variously, the SDF, HTS, or the SNA/armed opposition factions. These interviews were conducted during personal visits or via use of communication software, which methods we also used to collect the accounts of women who provided humanitarian assistance in response to the earthquake that hit northwestern Syria on February 6, 2023. In total, this report contains nine first-hand accounts that we obtained by talking directly with the female workers and eyewitnesses, none of which are taken from any second-hand sources. In most of these accounts, we use a pseudonym for the interviewee, in addition to concealing any information that might pose a security risk to them, such as the groups with which they’re affiliated or their place of residence; this is done at their request and in order to avoid any potential security persecution. The eyewitnesses received no financial compensation or promises of any payment of any kind in return for the interviews. We informed all the interviewees of the purpose of the report before conducting the interviews or documenting their accounts, receiving their permission to use the information they provided in serving the report’s goals and our documentation efforts, in accordance with our internal protocols which we have abided by since SNHR’s foundation and which we strive constantly to revise whenever suitable in order to maintain the optimal levels of psychological care for the victims.

This report only covers the bare minimum of the information we have been able to document, given the vast magnitude and immensity of the violations that have occurred, and does not analyze the social, economic, or psychological ramifications.
II. Brief Details on the Most Notable Violations Against Women According to SNHR’s Database (as part of the Armed Conflict or as a Violation of the International Human Rights Law)

A. Extrajudicial killing

SNHR has documented the killing of no fewer than 16,298 women (adult females) at the hands of the parties to the conflict and controlling forces in Syria between March 2011 and March 2023, distributed as follows:

16,298 women (adult females)

Were killed at the hands of the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in Syria

- Syrian regime forces and Iranian militias: 11,957 women.
- Russian forces: 977 women.
- ISIS: 587 women.
- HTS²: 79 women
- All armed opposition factions/SNA³: 885 women.
- SDF: 169 women.
- International coalition forces: 658 women.
- Other parties: 986 women.

1. We generally use the term ‘the Syrian regime’ rather than ‘the Syrian government’, because the nature of the ruling power in Syria is that of 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, having no real decision-making power or active role of their own. In reality, Syria is under autocratic/hereditary rule, with no independent decision-making structure of governance. Rather, the government is an empty façade created merely for show. Thus, the Minister of Interior receives orders from the security branches over which he supposedly presides, while 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 who answer to 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.

2. Was designated as a terrorist group by the UN.

3. The various armed opposition factions/SNA since 2011 in all of their territories during that period.
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As shown on the graph above, the Syrian regime was responsible for nearly 74 percent of all cases of extrajudicial killing of women in relation to the other parties to the conflict. Such a high figure suggests that the Syrian regime’s killing of women is wholly deliberate.

B. Arbitrary arrest/detention and/or enforced disappearances

According to SNHR’s database, no fewer than 10,169 of the people detained between March 2011 and March 2023 are still under arrest and/or forcibly disappeared at the hands of the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in Syria, with the adult female detainees still detained or forcibly disappeared distributed as follows:

**At least 10,169 women**

are still detained or forcibly disappeared at the hands of the parties to conflict and the governing forces

- **Syrian regime forces**: 8,473 women.
- **ISIS**: 255 women.
- **HTS**: 44 women.
- **All armed opposition factions/SNA**: 873 women.
- **SDF**: 524 women.

As shown on the graph above, the Syrian regime is responsible for nearly 83 percent of all cases of arrest and enforced disappearance involving women in relation to the other parties to the conflict. Such high figure suggests that the Syrian regime has been persecuting, arresting, and detaining females for various reasons in a deliberate and calculated manner.
C. Death due to torture

SNHR has documented that no fewer than 113 women have died due to torture at the hands of the parties to the conflict and controlling forces between March 2011 and March 2023, distributed as follows:

### 113 women (adult females)

Died due to torture at the hands of the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in Syria

- **Syrian regime forces**: 94 women.
- **ISIS**: 14 women.
- **SDF**: two women.
- **All armed opposition factions/SNA**: two women.
- **Other parties**: one woman.

SNHR’s database show that among the women who died due to torture at the hands of Syrian regime forces was one woman whose photo appeared in what are known as the Caesar photos, with 21 of the women detained by the regime registered as dead in the state’s civil registry.

As shown on the graph above, the Syrian regime is responsible for nearly 83 percent of all cases of women who died due to torture in relation to the other parties to the conflict.
D. Sexual violence

We have documented no fewer than 11,532 incidents of sexual violence against females at the hands of the parties to the conflict and controlling forces in Syria between March 2011 and March 2023, distributed as follows:

At least 11,532 incidents of sexual assault by the main parties to the conflict

- **Syrian regime forces**: 8,016 incidents of sexual violence.
- **ISIS**: 3,487 incidents of sexual violence.
- **SDF**: 13 incidents of sexual violence.
- **All armed opposition factions/SNA**: 16 incidents of sexual violence.

As shown on the graph above, the Syrian regime is responsible for nearly 70 percent of all cases of sexual violence documented on our database, followed by ISIS. Both parties have used sexual violence as a strategic weapon of war and a tool of torture and retaliation against Syrian society.
III. Syrian Women Played an Integral Role in Responding to the February 6 Earthquake, Despite Themselves Being Affected by the Earthquake and Facing Displacement Multiple Times

The earthquake that hit multiple areas in Syria and Southern Turkey on the dawn of Monday February 6, 2023, has cost no fewer than 35,000 women their homes in Syria. These women’s houses were either damaged and/or destroyed in the earthquake and are now completely uninhabitable. Even worse, most of these women have already previously experienced displacement on multiple occasions. Most of the displacements were concentrated in the region of northwestern Syria outside the Syrian regime’s control and nearby areas. We also documented the deaths of 1,524 women as a result of the earthquake and of the late arrival of UN and international aid between February 6 and February 27, 2023. The victims included 13 female staff with humanitarian groups, 22 female medical personnel, and one female Civil Defense (White Helmets) rescue worker. On February 28, we have released a report documenting the deaths resulting from the earthquake up to that point.

According to the monitoring by our teams on the ground, the areas worst affected by the earthquake were those that had already been subjected to bombardment, especially by the Syrian-Russian alliance forces, which were consequently even less resilient and less equipped to deal with the earthquake and its consequences than they would otherwise have been. Moreover, the areas affected in northwestern Syria were already immensely overpopulated by IDPs who were displaced from their homes and suffering from dire living and psychological conditions, 27 percent of whom are women.

Needless to say, the fallout of the earthquake exacerbated the existing suffering of the women affected, who found themselves facing additional challenges due to the late arrival of UN humanitarian aid. This was manifested mainly in these women being forced to live in the open air with no shelter for days with their families under cold and harsh weather conditions, with no access to emergency supplies of blankets, food, and clothes, or of personal women’s items.

These displaced women struggled to secure a shelter due to the increased scarcity and high cost of tents, forcing many of them to return to live in unsafe or partially destroyed residences without any privacy or sanitary facilities, such as showers, toilets, or usable water. The lack of proper sanitary supplies also affected the general state of personal hygiene, leading to the spread of diseases.

Additional factors that further intensified the suffering of women affected by the earthquake included:

- Women who were the main providers for their families faced greater burdens in the wake of the earthquake, as did those who found themselves in camps far away from their male relatives, which left them as the primary caretakers of children and elders in their families.
- Psychological traumas caused by the unimaginable grief of losing many family members, and the loss (once again) of their homes and personal belongings.
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- The limited number of women working with relief groups made it difficult for women to access their personal and sanitary supply requirements, since asking for such things from male workers might be considered too embarrassing.

- The poor aid response to the needs of pregnant women, breastfeeding women, elder women, and women with special needs, all of whom require special medical and nutritional care. We have serious concerns that pregnant women and women suffering from chronic diseases might face life-threatening complications as a result of the earthquake, with no access to healthcare. Due to the earthquake, the ability to access healthcare became even more limited, with medical facilities, which had already faced a severe shortage of medical resources and supplies, working at full capacity to provide treatment to the earthquake victims. The BBC cited Dr. Himyar Abdulmoghni, the UN Population Fund's (UNFPA) representative in Syria, who said on February 18 that of the six million-plus individuals affected by the earthquake in Syria, 1.5 million were women of childbearing age. Abdulmoghni added that these women don’t receive the same medical care and attention in Syria due to their limited access, since women’s needs are not considered a priority.

The UNFPA stated in a press release issued on February 18, that among the earthquake survivors in Syria were 130,000 pregnant women who are in dire need of obstetric and antenatal medical care.

Despite all the challenges and persecution facing women, which we tried to detail in this report, we documented a vital and active response by many women who worked tirelessly to provide some of the requirements we’ve highlighted here. This only affirms the centrality of women’s active role in all facets of daily life even under the harshest of circumstances. Below are some of the accounts by some of the women we spoke with:

- **Fatima al-Hassan**, a Civil Defense (White Helmets) volunteer since June 1, 2022, and a mother of two daughters, from Afrin city in the northern suburbs of Aleppo, lived in Jendeires in the northern suburbs of Aleppo governorate. She died under the rubble of the building where she and her family were living, along with her husband and two daughters, after the building collapsed as a result of the February 6 earthquake.
SNHR spoke to Aisha al-Masri⁴, the head of the civil defense center in Jendeires town in the northern suburbs of Aleppo governorate and a colleague of Fatima’s. She told us about Fatima:

“I was introduced to Fatima when she volunteered at our center. She is a mother of two daughters: Sara and Lelas. She was so happy with the house she was able to buy on the fifth floor of a building located in a market in Jendeires town, and the fact that her husband found a job after he had been jobless due to the prevailing conditions in the area, as she’d been the one providing for the family. The moment when the earthquake hit was horrifying because one does not know what to do as they fear for the lives of their children and family. Everything else becomes worthless, except making sure they are safe. I felt that it was Armageddon on that day. I secured my children at my brother’s house in an area close to Jendeires and immediately went back to work to check on the volunteers. I was particularly immensely afraid for Fatima because her apartment was on the fifth floor. When we got to where she lived, dead bodies were scattered on the sidewalks. The building where Fatima lived collapsed completely, but everyone else managed to get out before it collapsed. I went with a female volunteer called Samah, despite how risky it was, and started calling for her and her family, but we heard nothing back. We texted her on her mobile phone and we got no reply, but we figured she might have forgotten it at home. I went to her mother to ask if Fatima had been able to get out of the building, but Fatima’s mother told us she did not know. I immediately contacted the rescue teams to rescue her from the rubble. We did not expect to lose her, and we did not lose hope for one second during the rescue operations. Unfortunately, we found out that Fatima, her husband, and her children all died. In the meantime, we had to continue our rescue operations in other building. We could not remove her body until the day after, February 7. The operation to pull her out with her husband and children lasted for 12 hours due to the limited equipment. It was such a painful shock to us, losing her.”

⁴ Via phone on February 22, 2023

- Thurayya Tamr, another Syrian Civil Defense volunteer, who’s been working with the White Helmets since August 12, 2018, is the sole provider for her family of six. Thurayya, from Sahl al-Ghab area in the western suburbs of Hama governorate, lives in Salqin town in the northern suburbs of Idlib governorate. Her family's house was seriously damaged in the earthquake that hit northwestern Syria on Monday, February 6, 2023
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SNHR spoke to Thurayya Tamr5:

“When the earthquake occurred, I was at home with my mother, siblings, and nephew. We live on the second floor of an apartment building in Salqin town in Idlib suburbs. We fled there as IDPs eight years ago. We had barely fled the house and we were searching for each other, as the power had gone out, and we could not see which of us managed to get out. At that time the building started to collapse, and people were screaming in panic on the streets. Some buildings collapsed completely, and there was a rainstorm. When I became aware of the situation, I felt I was bound by my duty to help in the response efforts and immediately join the search and rescue teams. I went to the closest Civil Defense point and helped with the search and rescue efforts. The first situation to which we responded was a four-story building, where we managed to rescue four children that were trapped under the rubble. As time went by, the search and rescue efforts became more and more daunting due to the limited equipment, where it took us time to rescue people form under the rubble even though we could hear them. While I was involved in the rescue efforts, I was thinking of my family. I did not know what happened to them, or whether or not they were alive, with more and more aftershocks taking place, and especially since my mom has hypertension. I could not get in touch with her until 24 hours later. They took shelter in a camp nearby, where my brother lives. In the first 24 hours of the disaster, all I was thinking about was if they were alive. I did not think about if I could secure a shelter or residence for them, because at the time I was still helping with the search and rescue efforts. People trapped under the rubble still needed me more, I thought,

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She added: “I faced additional burdens after the earthquake. I am the sole provider in my family of six, including my seven-year-old nephew who lost his father in a previous bombing by the Syrian regime. We found ourselves with no shelter or any living requirements. The thought of restarting our lives one more time, especially after we had been displaced 10 times now because of the bombardment of the Syrian regime... However, right now we do not have anything but a tent that gives us shelter. No place was safe from the earthquake. Even though we live in a tent, we are still afraid. When an aftershock happened on February 20, my mother had a nervous breakdown. Right now, I am not thinking of finding a new home or about what to do. All I can think about is to find a tent and a place for us to take shelter even though there is no access to healthcare despite the spread of COVID-19 and the cholera outbreak.”

Marwa Abdul Rahman Hseniou, a Syrian Civil Defense (White Helmets) volunteer since December 27, 2020, is a mother of four and the main provider for her family, from Kafr Nbouda town in the northern suburbs of Hama, who now live in Kafr Lousin town in the northern suburbs of Idlib governorate. She took part in the search and rescue efforts in the areas affected by the February 6 earthquake.
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SNHR spoke with Marwa Abdul Rahman Hseniou⁶, who told us:

“When the earthquake hit, I was asleep with my husband and my children. Suddenly, the house started shaking violently. I woke up and carried my young daughter and left the house. Then, I remembered that my older daughter was asleep, so I went back to get her, all while rain was pouring. We stayed under the rain and in the cold for half an hour, and the children started crying from the fear and the cold, so I took them back to the house, which was on ground level, after making sure there were no cracks, even though I was afraid another quake would happen and would destroy the house with them inside. Afterwards, I called my family and friends in al-Bab city in eastern Aleppo to check on them. I was shocked by the reports on social media about buildings falling down and the human losses. I left my children with their father and joined the response teams to start the search and rescue efforts, even though my children were afraid and asked me to stay with them. Once I got to the Civil Defense center, we started forming teams and headed for Bsenya village in the Harem area in northern suburbs of Idlib, which was affected by the earthquake. On the way here, we were shocked by the scale of the destruction in Haerm. I never thought it would be this much. Families started helping us with the search efforts, especially those who had families and relatives [under the rubble]. Most of the bodies we were able to pull out had already died unfortunately. It was such a heartbreaking and painful situation for us and the families alike. We had to calm them down. The situation was too tragic.”

“As I was working, I was very much worried about my children, with more and more earthquakes. At the same time, I was trying with all my might to rescue the people trapped under the rubble, which gave me the strength to continue as much as I could despite all the pain I have witnessed. One of the situation that particularly affected me was on our second day in Bsenya. There was a man calling for me and crying and begging me to save his sister and her children. After some search, we were able to rescue them. It made me happy in the midst of the destruction. I felt I was holding the world in my hands when I was carrying that one girl.”

⁶ Via the phone on February 18, 2023.
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SNHR spoke with Haneen al-Sayyed, who told us:

“I was working on my laptop when the earthquake hit. My mom was praying. My husband and I carried out children and rushed outside the house, at which point the electricity went out. When my husband reached the entrance of the building, the last floor collapsed and parts of it fell on the ground, so my husband stepped back. We managed to leave the building where we lived on the first floor. We were in a great state of panic. Dust was everywhere and electricity cables were on the ground, and people were screaming. It was rainy and cold. We stepped away from the buildings and took shelter under a tin-roofed structure in the street to shield ourselves from the rain. My husband went to get his car to get us out of the area. Some rocks from the fifth floor had fallen on the car and shattered the glass windows. When we got into the car, we were too afraid to notice the glass there, which caused wounds. We headed for the outskirts of Afrin, where we stayed in an Arabian house belonging to one of the residents. The aftershocks continued but they were mild. We learned that the earthquake’s epicenter was Turkey, so I called my brothers who live in Antakya. My mother and I were very concerned for them, because we knew nothing about their fate and there was no communication at the time. When the communication and internet came back, we tried calling them, but they did not have access to a phone until the afternoon of the next day. We could not check on them until we got hold of a person who headed there from Reyhanlı to check on them. We learned that one of my brothers was trapped under the rubble, but my other brother, who was living in another building, managed to save him. We headed afterwards for the suburbs of Idlib where my family live in an Arabian house (ground-level house). My children and I had some fever and heavy coughing from the cold at the time of the earthquake. We were transferred to a hospital.”

She adds: “Even though it’s all passed now, my two-year-old daughter still gets really frightened by any loud noises. I am in a very poor psychological state myself to the point that I cannot sleep and I have no power to work. I feel like I am dead, and I need long periods of time to start functioning. We are looking for a tent to live in after losing our house. There is no safe house with the continued aftershocks.”

• Haneen al-Sayyed, from Ma’aret Harma village in the southern suburbs of Idlib governorate, has been living in Afrin city in the northern suburbs of Aleppo governorate for three years. His house was damaged in the earthquake that hit northwestern Syria on Monday, February 6, 2023.

• Marwa al-Sarmini, a housewife, from Teir Ma’la in the northern suburbs of Homs governorate, lives in Jendeires in the western suburbs of Aleppo governorate. Her home there was damaged in the February 6 earthquake.

7 Via phone on February 18, 2023.
SNHR spoke with Marwa al-Samrini, who told us:

“I just started sleeping when the earthquake happened. I took my daughter into my arms, and my husband took our son. We did not know what to do; the earthquake was strong and the power went out. The building was collapsing over our heads and we started screaming for help, but everyone was shocked and doing the same. We were barely able to get out. The wall behind us fell on to the other side instead of over our heads, while the wall beside us hit us and we sustained mild wounds. We lived on the first floor. When the earthquake happened, the whole building collapsed into the ground, so our floor became the ground floor. My husband used the flashlight on his phone to get us out. Once we got out, a second quake happened. We stayed in the cold and I hugged my frightened son. We took shelter in a tent near the building. A woman was living in the tent. In the morning, we left the tent and were shocked by the sight of destruction in Jendeires town. Even though the earthquake ended, my two children still get afraid of any movement or loud noises. I lost my friend and her children, who were my children’s friends, in the earthquake. They lived on the ground floor that fell on their heads. The search for them lasted for three days and then they pulled them from under the rubble, while the search for her husband lasted for a week before they were able to find his body, in addition to two children and their mother, but one girl survived while her mother and two brothers died. As for her father, he was not in the building at the time of the earthquake. In the same building, two children died under the rubble. I am still in shock at what I saw and experienced. The injured everywhere and people screaming. It felt like we were in a nightmare. I still wake up suddenly at night.”

She added: “I lost My friends, with whom I lived for years away from my family, and my children lost their friends at school. We lost our home and went to al-Dana town in the northern suburbs of Idlib, a new place and new people. I do not know if I can cope with this situation, even though we experienced displacement three times before.”

IV. No Fewer than 86 Incidents of Attack and intimidation Against Women Mostly due to their Activism in Northeastern and Northwestern Syria

Women, particularly activist and workers, suffer various types of violence in northeastern and northwestern Syria due to their activism and during the performance of their work, whether this is in the service, humanitarian, political, media, or specialist women-oriented fields, or even during raids and military operations. We have noticed that these violations differ in their scale and severity from one area to another, depending on the controlling force in these areas. Those violations have caused serious physical and psychological harm to women, driving some to leave their areas or give up work altogether. Some of the most notable patterns of abusive behavior and violations we have documented between March 2022 and March 2023, which we and continue to document, are:

8. Via the phone on February 18, 2023.
9. It should be noted that the patterns of abuse documented in this report don’t include the defamation campaigns against women workers and activists on the various social media platforms. Many of those violations have taken place in tandem with targeted defamation campaigns which aim to tarnish the image and dignity of those women, in which slanderous claims are posted online about these women with the aim of damaging their image in their local communities, and thereby eliminating them.
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- Physical assaults and evicting women from places of shelter.
- Repeated summons to security services under the pretext of ongoing investigations, where women face fabricated charges.
- Threats, intimidation, and raids, during which the content of women’s homes are vandalized by the parties to the conflict as a way to force them to give up their activism work.
- Ethnic-based discrimination in work and with respect to distributing relief aid.
- Using women as hostages to apply pressure to fugitives or interrogating women over cases related to their relatives, rather than anything regarding themselves.
- Armed assaults on judicial officials who issue rulings in women’s favor in cases such as child custody disputes.

These violations have been mainly perpetrated by the HTS, armed opposition factions under the banner of the SNA, the SDF, and extremist cells which we believe are affiliated with ISIS. In most cases, the controlling forces have taken no action to ensure the protection of women and hold the perpetrators accountable. On the contrary, we have documented many instances in which women have gone to the judiciary or the police to file complaints, but been faced with tardiness and indifference, and even been blamed for their abusers’ actions due to their own activism.

By analyzing those incidents and studying the interviews we’ve conducted, we noticed that most of these instances have been intended to deter women and drive them away from involvement in certain activities, especially in covering developments on the ground. Also, women feel that their freedom of expression, including on social media, is restricted by this treatment.

Instances of this intimidation and abuse include women being threatened with death, abduction, or assault during their work, with these threats directed at themselves, their place of work, or their families. Other abusive practices include the judiciary fabricating charges to summon or justify the persecution of women, applying pressure on their families to force them to stop working, dismissing them from their jobs or forcing the local entities of which they’re members to withdraw their membership, and tarnishing their image in their local communities and on social media. In some cases, we documented that women were forced to sign a pledge to give up their activism work and abstain from revealing any details about their interrogation.

In many cases, women faced repeated threats from more than one party during their activism work and during their movement between different territories, especially between the territories of the SNA/armed opposition factions, and those of the HTS.

Some of these violations have resulted in the death of the victimized woman, while many women have been forced to leave their job or limit their activism work, if not end it altogether. In some cases, women opted to flee or travel to other areas.
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SNHR’s team recorded no fewer than 86 incidents of assault and intimidation against women activists, workers, or women’s centers due to their activism work in northeastern and northwestern Syria between March 2022 and March 2023. These incidents are distributed according to the perpetrator party, as follows:

From March 2022 to March 2023

At least 86 incidents of assault and intimidation against women activists or working women, or centers for women, based on their activities in the northeast and northwest of Syria

Distributed by the party responsible as follows:

- HTS: 31 incidents.
- Extremist cells (believed to be affiliated with ISIS): 12 incidents.
- All armed opposition factions/SNA: 26 incidents.
- SDF: 17 incidents.

The cases are distributed by governorate as follows:

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They are also distributed according to the type of incident as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Incident</th>
<th>Number</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Threat and Intimidation</td>
<td>29</td>
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<tr>
<td>Summoning for interrogation or to a security headquarters</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restrictions on clothes and movement *personal freedom</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical violence/ beatings</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forcing an end to the work or leaving the area of work</td>
<td>8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Attack/vandalizing of centers for women</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Closing of centers for women</td>
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A. HTS’s territories

Through its security and judicial arms, HTS has always tried to maintain its oppressive grip on security in areas under its control and to curb any criticisms or protests against its practices. We have previously released a [detailed report](#) on the violations of the HTS against the Syrian people. Naturally, these violations have been particularly severe against women and perpetuated the blatant discrimination against women that manifested itself in restrictions on their freedom of movement, clothing, work, and freedom of expression. We have also documented many cases in which women have been used as hostages to apply pressure on male detainees or fugitives, while in other cases women were summoned to security facilities for interrogation about their activism work and their contact with human rights or media groups to report violations they have suffered. Moreover, some cases we documented involved women being evicted from shelter centers operated by the HTS for various reasons, with many of these incidents also involving the detention of women who objected to their expulsion. Other cases saw HTS members carrying out raids on homes and in pursuit of fugitives which involved verbal and physical assaults against women.

• HTS personnel raided the home of Huda al-Abdullah, a woman who lives in Ariha city in the southern suburbs of Idlib governorate, in May 2022, while she was alone there with her daughters. During the raid, the HTS members vandalized and inspected the contents of her house, as well as seizing her mobile phone, under the pretext of searching for the belongings of her son, who the group had arrested on April 2022. In June 2022, Huda and her husband were summoned to an HTS detention center in Ariha city over her contacting media outlets to report the incident of her son’s arrest. She was released on the same day after being subjected to verbal and physical abuse during the interrogation along with her husband.

• Ilfat Yasser Hourani, a woman from Binnesh city in the northern suburbs of Idlib governorate, was detained on Tuesday, July 26, 2022, by HTS members in a raid on her house in the city, and taken to an HTS detention center in Idlib city. The detention took place after SNA forces detained her husband in an area under their control on Thursday, June 16, 2022. Ilfat suffered physical assault during her interrogation, as well as the seizure of her jewelry. She was released on the same day.
On International Women’s Day, the Devastating Earthquake that Hit Northwestern Syria Has Exacerbated the Dire Situation of Women, With No Fewer than 35,000 Women Losing Their Homes in the Earthquake

Najmi al-Assfar, a woman from Ma’aret al-Nu’man city in the southern suburbs of Idlib governorate, was detained on Monday, December 26, 2022, along with her son and another civilian, by HTS members in a raid on Sadaqat Tash Camp in the Mash-had Ruhin area of the northern suburbs of Idlib governorate. She was arrested after displaced women from Ma’aret al-Nu’man arrived in the camp which is under the supervision of the Ministry of Development, a body affiliated with the HTS’s so-called Salvation Government, to receive apartment housing. However, these families were subsequently expelled and a large number of those housing units were seized under the pretext that housing priority should go to HTS members and their families. They were released on the same day.

B. Armed opposition factions/SNA’s territories

Many civilian women, including women working with humanitarian and service groups, as well as activists, face multiple forms of violence in the areas under the control of the SNA. We have documented a number of patterns of persecution and intimidation of women over their political, media, or feminist activism. Most of these violations have been by SNA factions or influential individuals within those factions. Those incidents usually involve verbal warnings to those women telling them to put an end to their activism, or summoning them to those factions’ centers for questioning without the involvement of the judiciary, which is the only body authorized to issue summonses and investigation warrants. We also documented many cases of women being persecuted and intimidated which exhibited an ethnically discriminatory character. Those were primarily aimed at women of Kurdish ethnicity.

Malak al-Saeed, a housewife, from Homs city, currently lives in Afrin city in the northern suburbs of Aleppo governorate. In November 2022, her house was raided by SNA members. During the raid, she was intimidated and forcibly inspected, without the SNA personnel presenting any judicial warrant or leveling any clear charges against her at any point.

SNHR spoke with Malak al-Saeed, who told us:

“At first, the SNA members surrounded the building where I live. Then, they raided the building in a terrifying way that is similar to the way Syrian regime forces carry out raids. They started screaming, which frightened my children who started to cry. More than one SNA member raided the house and started searching it. A policewoman got near me and inspected me and my phone without my consent. They raided and searched all the apartments in the building, as well as their residents with no regard for children and women, as the children got very afraid and started crying. They also assaulted one of the residents who asked about the cause of the raid and the search. Afterwards, they took pictures of me and my children. They went on for hours, and we had no idea what they wanted or what they were searching for, and the children were in great fear. They arrested a number of residents and left. However, my children remained afraid all night.”
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Asmaa al-Allawi, a divorced housewife with one daughter, lives in al-Bab city in the suburbs of Aleppo governorate. On Tuesday, February 21, 2023, an armed group affiliated with the SNA’s Third Division, raided the court in Izaz city in the northern suburbs of Aleppo governorate, and shot at the perimeter fence surrounding the court building. This attack came about because the court issued a ruling awarding custody of Asmaa’s and her former husband’s daughter to Asmaa following their divorce; her former husband is a member of the Third Division.

C. SDF-controlled territories

We recorded various patterns of violations, abuses and assaults against women by the SDF that are similar to those practiced by the other parties to the conflict. We have documented many such incidents, mainly against women who participated in activities protesting against the SDF’s conscription of children. These incidents involved the physical assault and degradation of women while SDF forces were pursuing fugitives, or against women who are held at the al-Hawl Camp in the suburbs of Hasaka governorate. Some of the women were detained or denied humanitarian assistance, or were separated from their children. We also documented discriminatory practices of ethnic character against Arab women that manifested in the form of denial of job opportunities, dismissal from work, or restrictions on their freedom of movement.

Ghazala Ahmad al-Hussein, an elderly lady from al-Kharnoubi village in the suburbs of Hasaka governorate, lives in al-Qameshli city in northeastern Hasaka governorate. She was arrested on Monday, May 30, 2022, by SDF members in al-Khalij neighborhood in al-Qameshli city who physically assaulted and abused her. We recorded that she was released on June 2, 2022.

SNHR received information confirming that Ghazala, who is aged over 60, suffers from debilitating physical and psychological conditions. We also obtained photos showing her brutal arrest with no consideration for her special health conditions.

Photos of Ghazala Ahmad al-Hussein at the moment of her arrest
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- Fatima Hassan al-Iliwi, a 45-year-old woman from from Tadmur city in the Homs governorate, is currently an IDP living in Ya’rub IDPs Camp in northwestern Raqqa city. She was physically assaulted on Friday, June 17, 2022, by SDF members who prevented her from entering her tent where she lives with her daughters. She suffered moderate bruising to her body in the assault.

- Rujin al-Abdou, a woman from Hasaka city, was physically assaulted in her home on July 5, 2022, by SDF members who vandalized the contents of her house in response to her objecting to the SDF’s abduction and conscription of her 15-year-old niece on February 8, 2022. The assault was also in retaliation for her attempts to locate and rescue her niece.

We spoke to Rujin al-Abdou, who told us:

“Ever since my niece was conscripted, I have been searching for her by going to the general security center in Hasaka and contacting SDF officers but with no results. After this, I started taking part in protests by families of conscripted children in Hasaka and contacting activists to put pressure on officials in the hopes of rescuing my niece, and allowing us to contact her and find out her whereabouts, but again nothing came of that. On the evening of July 5, my house was raided by [SDF] members, who I believe are from the Joanne Schurchkar [the party’s youth wing]. They vandalized my house and assaulted me and threatened me that if I continued my attempts to reach my niece, then I will regret it.”

Rujin added that she felt frightened after the incident and limited her activism in fear of another assault. However, she is still trying to rescue her niece by contacting different local groups.

D. ISIS

Although ISIS effectively lost all of its territories after March 2019, despite the fact that no areas are under its control, we are still documenting many incidents that we believe were perpetrated by ISIS cells. Those attacks are concentrated in the Syrian badiya (desert areas), near the border areas with Iraq, and the al-Hawl Camp and its vicinities. Those violations targeted women for intimidation, assault, and in some cases murder over their activism or work. The controlling parties in the areas that were previously under ISIS’s control bear responsibility for their failure to protect women and communities in their territories.

11. Via the phone on September 8, 2022
On International Women’s Day, the Devastating Earthquake that Hit Northwestern Syria Has Exacerbated the Dire Situation of Women, With No Fewer than 35,000 Women Losing Their Homes in the Earthquake

V. Sixteen Incidents of Gender-Based Killing and Violence Against Women Between March 2022 and March 2023

Incidents of gender-based violence\(^\text{12}\) and domestic violence against women are among the types of violations that have never stopped throughout the duration of the armed conflict. We have recorded an increase in these practices against displaced women affected by conflict and humanitarian crises, especially in those gender-driven murders known as “Honor Killings”\(^\text{13}\). Such crimes are a reflection on the weakness or absence of effective protection mechanisms due to the fragility of the legal and judicial structures regulating women’s rights in all areas controlled by all the parties to the conflict.

We also face some particular difficulties in documenting violations and violence against women in Syria. One of the most complex cases is documenting domestic violence, because it is very rare for such abuse to be reported, and it is often even concealed, with the crime being falsified; despite this, between March 2022 and March 2023, we were able to document 16 incidents of violence against women, including two cases in which women were killed by their families or partners, mostly under the pretext of “honor”, or in connection with the victims’ refusal of a forced marriage, or deaths/homicides resulting from violent assault by men.

- Mrs. Saada Ahmed Al-Za’lan, from al Jawadiya town in the northeastern suburbs of Hasaka governorate, was twenty years old, and four months pregnant, when she died on Monday April 11, 2022, as a result of being severely beaten by her husband in their house in al Jawadiya town, which is under the control of the Syrian Democratic Forces. We note that her husband is a member of the Syrian Democratic Forces.

- Twenty-three-year-old Fatim al Ayed, from al Rumaila neighborhood in Raqqa city, was kidnapped for ransom by unknown armed individuals on Friday, May 27, 2022 in Raqqa city; following her release and her return to her family’s house in al Rumaila neighborhood two days later on Sunday, May 29, 2022, her brother (25-year-old Abdul Rahman al Ayed), shot her dead with a 9 mm pistol. The area is under the control of the Syrian Democratic Forces.

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\(^{12}\) Any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, harm or suffering to women, whether physical, sexual or psychological, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether it occurs in public or private.

\(^{13}\) Homicides in which women and girls are murdered under the pretext of defending the honor of the family or the father, husband or other male family member, which are gender-motivated.
VI. Conclusions and Recommendations

Legal conclusions

- The Syrian regime controlling the Syrian state was the first party to violate international human rights law and international humanitarian law and to practice many types of widespread violations against women, including killing, torture, and enforced disappearance, with the other parties to the conflict following in its footsteps, though never on the same massive scale, to varying degrees; some of these parties have committed violations against Syrian women that were not practiced by the regime itself, including forced marriage, restrictions on clothing, and freedom of movement.

- While it is true that armed groups, as non-state parties, cannot formally affirm international human rights treaties, they are nonetheless bound to respect basic human rights and by customary international law, given their effective control of parts of the state’s territory.

- This report has proven, once again, 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, which stipulates the provisions that states must apply to protect women from the negative effects of discrimination, in addition to violating Security Council Resolution No. 1325.

- This report has detailed many practices 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 emphasizes that most instances of violence and violations against women are aimed at deterring them from engaging in public affairs, particularly political and media activities.

- This report also emphasizes that dozens of the basic rights of women are being violated, foremost among which are the right to life, to not being tortured, arbitrarily arrested, or forcibly disappeared, to 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 to freedom of expression and opinion, will reflect positively on the whole of society, as all of this is essential in the pursuit of equality and development.

15. UNSC Res 1325 (31 October 2000) UN Doc S/RES/1325
On International Women’s Day, the Devastating Earthquake that Hit Northwestern Syria Has Exacerbated the Dire Situation of Women. With No Fewer than 35,000 Women Losing Their Homes in the Earthquake

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**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 appropriate protocols for searching prisoners upon entering custody to allow female detainees to report incidents of sexual violence.

- 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, 1820, 1889, 1960, 2122, 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 or whose fathers were killed.

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16. UNSC Res 1325 (31 October 2000) UN Doc S/RES/1325
17. UNSC Res 2122 (18 November 2013) UN Doc S/RES/2122
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 extended for over a decade in Syria.

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 or to any Syrians, and must intensify its work on individual cases and groups in Syria; 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 participate in committing violations that constitute war crimes and crimes against humanity against women in Syria.
On International Women’s Day, the Devastating Earthquake that Hit Northwestern Syria Has Exacerbated the Dire Situation of Women, With No Fewer than 35,000 Women Losing Their Homes in the Earthquake

- 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 breadwinners, 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, as well as supporting the path of litigation through universal jurisdiction.

**UN Office of the 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.

- 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, rehabilitation and 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.

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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, launch more activities and projects to help 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 UN 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.

Acknowledgment and Condolences

SNHR extends its most heartfelt gratitude to all the women, including female activists, eye-witnesses, and local activists, who have provided their greatly valued contributions to the data and evidence on the incidents included in this report. SNHR stands in full solidarity with women in their quest to attain all of their rights.