

# Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in March 2023

**Rainstorms and Windstorms Kill Two IDPs and Further Devastate IDP  
Camps and Traumatize Earthquake Victims in Northwestern Syria**

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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 of the uprising in 2011. In 2012 and 2013, as the numbers of human rights violations rose sharply, our team was confronted by the need to release periodic monthly reports, in order to highlight the continued suffering of the Syrian people. We began 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, which prompted another change in our reporting strategy. At this point, we opted for releasing one monthly report summarizing 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 March 2023. In this report, we summarize the civilian deaths we've 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. The report also sheds light on the attacks on civilian objects documented by SNHR team 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 March's Most Notable Developments

### Bombings and military operations

In March, we recorded an increase in the rates of artillery bombardments by Syrian regime forces on northwestern Syria. To that end, we documented separate attacks focusing on the villages and towns of Jabal al-Zawiya in the southern suburbs of Idlib and western suburbs of Aleppo, as well as in Sahl al-Ghab in the western suburbs of Hama and the northern suburbs of Latakia, all of which areas are close to the dividing lines with armed opposition factions, with shelling by Syrian regime force also targeting the villages and towns of the western suburbs of Aleppo that are far from the dividing lines, where regime artillery fired multiples shells at [Kafr Ta'al village](#) in the western suburbs of Aleppo on March 19. One of these shells landed on the Omar ben al-Khattab Mosque in the town center, partially destroying the mosque building, in addition to causing moderate damage to the furnishings. On March 23, [a man and woman were wounded](#) in an attack by Syrian regime artillery forces who fired multiple shells at the popular market in the center of al-Atareb city in western Aleppo, in addition to inflicting moderate damages and partial destruction on the market street and shops. On March 24, [a civilian was killed](#) in a ground-based regime artillery attack that targeted residential neighborhoods and a popular market in the center of al-Abzemou in western Aleppo. On March 30, regime artillery fired a shell at [an irregular encampment of tents housing internally displaced persons \(IDPs\)](#) on the western outskirts of Termanein town in northern Idlib. The shell landed on a bus that one of the displaced people was using as a shelter, injuring one civilian.

March also saw more ground-based attacks by Turkish forces and armed opposition factions/Syrian National Army (SNA) on the areas controlled by the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) in the northern suburbs of Aleppo, as well as on the areas of Manbej and Ein al-Arab in the eastern suburbs of Aleppo, and Ein Eisa in the northern suburbs of Raqqa.

On March 20, 2023, [four Kurdish civilians](#) from the same family, including one child, were killed, while others were injured, by members of the SNA's 'Jaish al-Sharqiya' (The Army of the East) who opened fire at a group of civilians near al-Sena'iya district 'Industrial District' in Jendeires town in the suburbs of Afrin in northwestern Aleppo. The victims were killed while they were trying to build a fire for the celebration of the Kurdish New Year, known as Nowruz.

Meanwhile, [more civilians were killed by landmines across Syria](#), mostly in Deir Ez-Zour governorate. In March, a total of 32 civilians, including six children and three women, were killed by landmines across Syria.

March also saw more [assassinations of civilians at the hands of unidentified gunmen](#) across Syria. On March 4, we recorded the killing of [a woman](#) in Hasaka governorate, whose mutilated body was found handcuffed inside her home in al-Qdaa Street in the al-Muraba' al-Amni area of Hasaka governorate; her body bore stab wounds and signs of torture, while her skull was shattered and her facial features had been so pulverized that she was unrecognizable.

Also in March, we recorded the killing of 42 civilians, including one child and one woman, while they were collecting desert truffles, bringing the total number of civilians killed while collecting desert truffles since the beginning of 2023 to 92 civilians, including five children and one woman. These victims were all killed either by the explosion of landmines planted by parties we have been unable to identify or shot dead by parties we have been unable to identify, with the gunmen responsible being either members of Syrian regime forces or pro-regime Iranian militias, or ISIS affiliates. One of the most prominent incidents of this type which we documented this month was discovered on March 2, when the [bodies of four civilians](#) were found in Dwezien in southeastern al-Salamiya city in the eastern suburbs of Hama governorate, bearing gunshot wounds. The families of the victims had lost contact with their loved ones in the same area a few days previously when they went out to collect desert truffles. A similarly grim discovery took place on March 23, when the [dead bodies of seven civilians were found by local residents](#) in the area between Jarf Marina and Hariba in eastern Athriya in the suburbs of Salmaiya in the eastern badiya or desert area of Hama in the eastern suburbs of Hama governorate. The seven victims had been shot dead by pro-regime Iranian militias over disputes concerning monopolizing the desert truffle harvest.

On March 23, the [US Department of Defense](#) release a statement revealing that an American contractor was killed, while five American service members and another contractor were injured, by a one-way unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) which hit a maintenance facility in an international coalition base near Hasaka in northeastern Syria. According to an intelligence assessment, the statement adds, the UAV in question was of Iranian origin. On March 24, the [US Central Command](#) revealed in a tweet that it had carried out retaliatory attacks on facilities used by groups affiliated with the Iranian regime's so-called Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC).

In March, the Israeli Air Force intensified their airstrikes targeting multiple areas in Syria. Two Israeli airstrikes targeted Aleppo International Airport - the first of these, carried out on March 7, put the airport out of commission. According to a report by the Israel-based [Alma Research and Education Center](#), the airport may have been targeted because of "specific and focused" intelligence suggesting that it contained advanced weapons. The second Israeli airstrike, on March 22, [resulted in material damages](#), according to the Syrian regime's [Syrian Arab News Agency \(SANA\)](#). Moreover, on March 12, [SANA](#) reported that Israeli jets fired missiles at multiple points in the suburbs of Tartus and Hama, injuring three Syrian regime military personnel. On March 30, the Israeli Air Force targeted different locations in the [vicinity of Damascus city](#), injuring two Syrian regime military personnel and causing material damage according to SANA.

### Living and Security Conditions

In March, economic, living, service, and security conditions continued to decline across all sectors in the Syrian regime's areas of control. Regime areas saw a sharp deterioration in the service sector. Regarding the power crisis, more particularly, the Syrian regime's government is still implementing a rationing policy, [with power being cut in many areas for over 20 hours per day versus four hours of electricity and in two phases](#). Even worse, the state of insecurity has led to a complete power outage in some areas. On March 21, for instance, the pro-regime [al-Watan Newspaper](#) reported that some areas in Suwayda governorate have seen a three-day power outage due to "breaching and theft of a high-voltage power line."

Meanwhile, residents in regime areas are struggling with rising prices of all goods, especially food, groceries, and fuel. The rate of price increases intensified even further with the start of the Holy Month of Ramadan in the last third of March. The pro-regime [Tishreen Newspaper](#) reported on March 21 that food prices increased by 15-20 percent as Ramadan approached, in light of the absence of most food supplies from the shelves of regime-subsidized supermarkets. In some areas, text messages from regime authorities notifying citizens to come and receive their rations of those commodities, as part of a government subsidy program, [came five months late](#) in some areas. Moreover, fuel shortage and sharp increase of fuel prices are still affecting all aspects of life in regime-held areas.

Furthermore, the windstorm that hit the area on March 29 caused heavy damage, mostly resulting from the collapse of already damaged buildings, while some windows were shattered and electricity pylons were blown over. All of this resulted in civilian injuries, and complete power outages in some areas.

In **northwestern Syria**, civilians' already severe suffering continues to worsen under deteriorating economic and living conditions in parallel with rising prices for food and grocery supplies, all intensified by the people's waning purchasing power due to rampant unemployment and poverty rates, especially in areas housing IDPs camps, while wages also have been in decline. Moreover, the service and health sectors are both grappling with funding crises intensified by the mounting humanitarian needs.

On March 23, the [UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs \(OCHA\)](#) said in a report on the situation in the region of northwestern Syria in the aftermath of the earthquake that no fewer than three million people have been affected by the earthquake in Idlib governorate, which reportedly resulted in over 4,500 deaths and 8,700 injuries in northwestern Syria as of March 13. In addition, no fewer than 148 cities and towns in the area have been affected. As of March 14, OCHA further revealed, a total of 1,869 buildings have been completely destroyed, and 8,731 others partially destroyed by the earthquake.



Meanwhile, the situation in Northeastern Syria remains dire, with worsening living and security conditions. Prices of food, fuel and other essential commodities in the region continue to rise due to the controlling forces' failure to regulate the market, not to mention the state of rampant insecurity in the area that has been going on for a few months. In March, a number of towns and villages in SDF-held areas saw protests over poor living conditions and widespread corruption, with protesters demanding the release of detainees. On March 14, teachers held demonstrations in Theyban town in the eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate calling for improving education and better wages, with similar demonstrations also held on March 26.

## Forced displacement

In March, the suffering of IDPs in northwestern Syria continued in relation to both living conditions and the humanitarian crisis, especially in the wake of the February 6 earthquake. Additionally, two rainstorms hit the region of northwestern Syria on [March 6](#) and [March 18](#), uprooting hundreds of tents, and flooding dozens of them; some of these tents had only been erected recently before to house dispossessed earthquake victims. On March 23, the [OCHA](#) stated that the rainstorm that hit the camps of northwestern area had destroyed and damaged 1,500 tents. [On March 29](#), a severe windstorm hit the area and killed two IDPs (a man and a girl), as well as causing heavy damage to the local camps.



Damages in al-Iman IDP Camp in Kafr Ruhin village in Idlib following a severe windstorm that hit the region of northwestern Syria on March 29, 2023

We also documented more fires in IDPs tents in northwestern Syria in March. On March 2, [a fire broke out](#) in al-Salama IDP Camp, located near Bab al-Salama border crossing with Turkey in the northern suburbs of Aleppo governorate, completely burning six IDP tents, and partially destroying four others. Five civilians also sustained suffocation and burns of varying degrees as a result of the fire whose cause we have so far been unable to identify.

On the subject of UN humanitarian assistance, on March 9, the World Food Programme (WFP) sent out an e-mail to humanitarian organizations operating in northwestern Syria, revealing that, [as of April 2023](#), the already meagre amounts of food in the food basket allocated for each family had been further reduced, as follows: five kilograms of red lentil was reduced to three, five kilograms of chickpea was reduced to two, five kilograms of sugar was reduced to four, although the quantities of other food supplies remained the same. Assuming an average family size of five members, the reduced food ratio provides 991 calories for each individual; the World Health Organization's recommended minimum daily calorie intake is 2000 for women and 2500 for men. It should be noted that this was the third time food rations have been reduced in the past year (first in [May 2022](#) and then in [January 2023](#)). SNHR stresses that the support provided for civilians must be increased by the donor states and international organizations in light of the dire economic situation and the mounting needs in the wake of the recent earthquake.

**In the camps of northeast Syria**, and on the subject of foreign countries repatriating their nationals, the Russian state news agency Tass cited Maria Lvova-Belova, Russia's children's rights ombudswoman, as saying that 56 Russian children had arrived in Russia from northeastern Syria. [Tass](#) added that an agreement has been reached between Russia and the Kurdish Self-Administration to repatriate 200 Russian children.

**On the subject of Syrian refugees and asylum seekers**, [the Danish newspaper](#) Belingske reported on March 2 that the Danish Immigration Service had listed Latakia and Tartus as safe areas. Accordingly, Syrians coming from those two areas will not be temporary protection status, and will be deported from Denmark. In response, [Human Rights Watch \(HRW\)](#) released a statement on March 13 entitled, 'Syrian Refugees in Denmark at Risk of Forced Return, Syria Not Safe for Returnees Despite Recent Danish Claims.' The statement notes that "Denmark should refrain from playing into the regime's hands by announcing Tartous and Latakia 'safe.'". Even if active hostilities may have declined in recent years, the statement adds, the Syrian regime continues to perpetrate the same violations that drove civilians to flee in the first place.

## Political and human rights situation

On February 28, [HRW](#) said in a statement that many Arab states have rushed to normalize relations with the Syrian regime since the earthquakes hit Turkey and Syria on February 6, without putting any pressure on the regime for the sake of holding it accountable for the crimes it perpetrated, or to force it to carry out the crucial necessary reforms essential to achieve a sustained peace and bring about prosperity to Syria in the postwar period. The statement adds that those states should be aware that the Syrian government in power today is the same one that has forcibly disappeared tens of thousands of individuals and committed other serious human rights violations against its citizens, even dating back to before the uprising. The statement also notes that the Syrian regime continues to weaponize humanitarian assistance, diverting it from areas that oppose the regime's rule.

On March 1, [the Security Council](#) published the 113th report by the Director General of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) on the elimination of the chemical weapon programme in Syria. The report notes that the efforts by the OPCW's Secretariat to arrange the next round of consultations between the OPCW's Declaration Assessment Team (DAT) and the Syrian regime continue to yield no results, adding that the Secretariat concluded that the deceleration by the Syrian regime of work on its chemical weapon programme cannot be considered accurate and complete in accordance with the Chemical Weapon Convention (CWC).

On March 2, Catherine Russell, the CEO of [UNICEF](#), revealed that 3.7 million children in Syria's affected area are facing "growing and potentially catastrophic dangers", following the devastating earthquakes that hit southern Turkey and northern Syria on February 6. She added that the psychological impact the earthquake had on children, as well as the threat of contagious, contact-transmitted, and waterborne diseases faced by displaced families, all while the most vulnerable families have no access to basic services following 12 years of the conflict, pose a danger of inflicting continued and exacerbated catastrophes on the children affected.

On March 6, Izumi Nakamitsu, Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, said in [her briefing](#) to the Security Council that since the last session held by the Security Council on the issue of chemical weapons in Syria, the efforts made by the OPCW's DAT has failed to make any progress in clarifying the outstanding issues with regard to the initial and subsequent declarations made by the Syrian regime on its chemical weapon program.

On March 6, [the International Committee of the Red Cross \(ICRC\)](#) released a press release that reads, "Survivors of the massive earthquake that struck northwest Syria one month ago face the prospect of devastating public health challenges after the quake further damaged the region's aging water system..." The statement warns of the potential collapse of the water system, with only 50 percent of the water and sanitation systems now functioning properly across Syria.

On March 6, [Amnesty International](#) issued a press release calling on the Syrian regime and the Turkey-backed armed opposition factions to "stop obstructing and diverting humanitarian aid aimed at alleviating the suffering of tens of thousands of civilians in conflict-torn Aleppo, a month today since the governorate was devastated by earthquakes." The statement notes that Syrian regime forces have blocked the entry of no fewer than 100 trucks carrying essential aid; including food, medical supplies, and tents, into the Kurdish-majority neighborhoods in Aleppo city, while the SNA barred 30 trucks loaded with relief aid from entering Afrin city.

On March 6, [the International Rescue Committee \(IRC\)](#) issued a press release stating that, despite the passage of a among one month = since the earthquake that hit Turkey and Syria on February 6, millions of women and children stil found themselves at risk, particularly in northwestern Syria. The press release revealed that two-thirds of the children surveyed by the IRC showed signs of psychological distress, manifesting in increased crying, sadness, and nightmares. The "rapid protection assessment" conducted by the IRC in northwestern Syria expressed concerns for the safety of women and girls due to the overcrowding situation, and insufficient access to basic services.



On March 7, Volker Türk, [the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights](#), said in a statement read before the 52nd session of the Human Rights Council that Syria is a microcosm of the tragedies that human rights violations can inflict. The earthquakes of the previous month, he added, had also created further tragedies. He also stressed that the only path forward must be through respecting human rights, and ensuring proper accountability for all those who have committed atrocity crimes. Moreover, he expressed his full support for a new institution focused specifically on clarifying the fate and whereabouts of missing persons, and providing support to victims.

On March 8, [SNHR](#) released its annual report on International Women's Day, entitled, '[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](#)', in which the group stressed that the parties to the conflict are still committing violations against women working in the public sphere. The report also outlines the most notable violations by the parties to the conflict and controlling forces in Syria against women (adult females) between March 2011 and March 2023, while highlighting the impact of the earthquake that hit southern Turkey and northern Syria on February 6 on women particularly.

On March 6, Bashar Assad, head of the Syrian regime, hosted a meeting with Filippo Grandi, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees. [SANA](#) reported that Mr. Grandi stated that the UN Refugee Agency will intensify its efforts and work in Syria "to support the humanitarian response of the Syrian state in the face of the earthquake catastrophe and the massive human and material damages resulting from the earthquake." SNHR stresses that sending relief aid through the Syrian regime and the organizations founded by the regime's security agencies might shift the donor states and organizations involved from the status of humanitarian work to that of supporting and funding the terrorism and crimes against humanity that the Syrian regime has and is still committing against its people. [We have released several reports on this matter](#).

On March 10, [António Guterres, the UN Secretary-General](#), released a statement stressing that the 12th anniversary of the beginning of the conflict in Syria comes at a time when humanitarian needs in Syria are at their highest levels since the beginning of the conflict. The statement noted that the February 6 earthquake further exacerbated human suffering, especially in the region of northwestern Syria, while asserting that no progress towards sustainable peace can be made in a climate of impunity for the perpetrators of violations. The statement reiterated SNHR's previous calls for the UN General Assembly to "consider establishing a new international body to clarify the fate and whereabouts of persons reasonably believed to be missing in Syria."

On March 13, [the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic \(COI\)](#) released its periodic report on Syria covering the period between July 2022 and December 2022. The report statement also addressed the February 6 earthquake and the late arrival of humanitarian assistance, calling for launching an investigation to determine the reasons behind this lateness. The report recorded the violations by the different parties to the conflict in Syria, reiterating that refugees return is still unsafe. Moreover, the report calls for taking immediate action to "create an independent mechanism with an international mandate to coordinate and collect all claims regarding missing persons." Additionally, the report documented the increased state of insecurity in the areas under the control of Syrian regime forces, as well as the continuance of arbitrary arrests, torture, ill-treatment, and enforced disappearance.

On March 14, the [WFP](#) reported that 12.1 million people in Syria, over half of the country's population, is now suffering from severe food insecurity, which makes Syria one of six nations with the highest rates of food insecurity in the world, coupled with rising food and fuel prices that hit their highest levels in a decade. The WFP also stressed that it is now facing a funding crisis that threatens to reduce the already meagre aid directed in an unprecedented fashion.

On March 15, SNHR released a report [marking the twelfth anniversary of the popular uprising for freedom in Syria](#). The report outlined the most notable violations committed by the main active parties in Syria since March 2011, and called for ending any refolement of Syrian refugees to Syria, since the situation remains unsafe, calling on the international community to instead bring pressure towards bringing about a political transition that ensures the safe return of millions of refugees.

On March 16, the US Department of State released [a joint statement](#) with the governments of France, Germany, and the UK, marking the twelfth anniversary of the popular uprising in Syria. This year's anniversary comes on the heels of a series of devastating earthquakes that claimed the lives of over 10,000 Syrians in Syria and Turkey, the statement noted, while stressing that the international community should work towards holding the Syrian regime and other perpetrators of violations accountable for their crimes. In closing, the statement reiterated that the signatory states would not normalize relations with the Syrian regime, nor would they fund any reconstruction process until there is real and sustainable progress towards a political resolution.

On March 17, [the UN Office of the Commissioner for Human Rights \(OHCHR\)](#) released a statement noting that, 12 years into the conflict, Syria is still deeply divided, with the people being bombed by the regime, in addition to many other forces and active parties committing violations against the country's people. The statement concluded by stressing that the interests of the Syrian people must be prioritized and every effort should be made to reach a peaceful, negotiated resolution in order to put Syria on a path towards a stable, preposterous, and just future for all Syrians.

On March 19, [SANA](#) reported that Bashar Assad, head of the Syrian regime, and his wife Asmaa had arrived in the UAE on an official visit. SNHR notes that normalizing relations with the Syrian regime is an insult to the state that does so, and constitutes support for the violations being committed by the Syrian regime against the Syrian people under international law, since combating heinous violations that constitute crimes against humanity and war crimes is a fundamental responsibility of all world states as ratifiers of the Geneva Conventions.

On March 20, the [US Department of State's Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor \(DRL\)](#) released its annual Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for the year 2022. With regard to Syria, the report documented multiple patterns of violations of international law, drawing upon several human rights sources, with SNHR being the second most cited principal source with 104 citations. On March 23, [SNHR](#) released a statement stressing that this report is an official and foundational document that accurately describes the state of human rights in Syria, and a principal reference resource for different US government bodies, as well as many congressmen, congresswomen and other US decision-makers. SNHR also asserted its willingness to contribute to reports by states and international organizations on the state of human rights in Syria.

On March 20, under the auspices of the European Union, the International Donors' Conference for the people of Turkey and Syria was held in the Belgian capital, Brussels. The conference was attended by 60 delegations from EU member states, and EU partners, including the UN, international and European financial institutions, but with no Syrian representatives. [In the concluding statement](#), the attendants pledged to raise €911 million for Syria without specifying how those funds would be distributed between the regime-held areas and the areas outside the Syrian regime's control in northwestern Syria. In any case, the statement noted that the funds would be used to "cover humanitarian needs and support early recovery and resilience."

On March 23, [the US Department of State](#) released a joint statement with the governments of Egypt, France, Germany, Jordan, Norway, Qatar, KSA, UAE, the EU, and the League of Arab States, following a meeting held in Amman, Jordan on March 21 to discuss the situation in Syria in the wake of the earthquakes that hit the country. The statement reads, "We encouraged the international community to provide humanitarian assistance - including both emergency response and early recovery projects - to all Syrians in need, especially those in the worst affected areas."

On March 23, Geir Pedersen, UN special envoy to Syria, said, in [his briefing](#) to the Security Council on the situation in Syria, that after the first week following the earthquakes last month, the regions of northwestern Syria and northeastern Syria saw exchanges of rockets across front lines. He further revealed that southern areas of Syria saw more security incidents and attacks by ISIS, in addition to airstrikes by the Israeli Air Force.

On March 28, [António Guterres, the UN Secretary-General](#), called for creating a new body to reveal the fate of missing persons in Syria. Mr. Guterres stressed that Syrians deserve to know what happened to their beloved ones, underscoring the importance of such a mandate for justice and for bringing about peace and reconciliation. Those statements were made during a session held by the UN General Assembly that featured a briefing by the UN Secretary-General on the issue of missing persons in Syria. SNHR also emphasized the importance of creating such mechanism to reveal the fate of forcibly disappeared persons, while reiterating its calls to end torture practices, released detainees, and hold the Syrian regime accountable for the massive numbers of enforced disappearance crimes it's responsible for.

On March 28, [SNHR](#) released its third report on the death toll of Syrians as a result of the earthquake that hit the region of northwestern Syria and southern Turkey on February 6 and the late arrival of humanitarian assistance to northwestern Syria. To that end, the report documented that a total of 10,024 Syrians, one-third of them women and children, died in the earthquake. This death toll from the earthquake was divided by territory as follows: 4,191 Syrians died in non-regime areas, 394 Syrians died in regime-held areas, and 5,439 Syrian refugees died in Turkey. The report called on the UN and donor states to establish an international support platform to handle the responsibility for coordinating humanitarian assistance in northwestern Syria.

## Accountability and advocacy

On March 2, [the US Department of State's DRL](#) announced that it had selected the case of the forcibly disappeared Syrian woman Rania al-Abbasi and her six children for its Without Just Cause Political Prisoners Campaign which sheds light on some of the prominent cases of enforced disappearance from around the world. This choice of a Syrian case was made as part of the coordination and collaboration between the DRL and [SNHR](#) as the group revealed in its statement released the day after the announcement.

On March 3, [the Swiss government](#) released a statement revealing that it had amended the sanctions imposed with relation to the situation in Syria. Those amendments, according to the statement that was released on its official website, aim to make matters easier for the actors who are active in the humanitarian field in Syria to establish business relationships necessary for their work. "Humanitarian actors in receipt of federal funding, may now provide money and economic resources directly or indirectly to designated persons, entities and businesses, when necessary to provide humanitarian assistance or support to the civilian population," the statement explained.

On March 6, [the US Department of State](#) released a press statement revealing that it has added Amjad Yousef, the Syrian regime's intelligence officer who was behind the al-Tadamun neighborhood massacre that took place in Damascus on April 16, 2023, to the US sanction list for Syria. The statement adds that Amjad Yousef's wife, as well as his first-degree relatives have also all been added to the sanction list. On March 8, [the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office \(FCDO\)](#) released a statement revealing that Amjad Yousef had also been added to the UK sanctions list for Syria, noting that these sanctions include an assets freeze. SNHR has contributed to those efforts by providing the US Department of State with special information on Amjad Yousef.

On March 7, the [EU](#) imposed sanctions and restrictive measures on nine individuals and three entities, including the [Syrian regime's Syrian Republic Guard](#). The statement reveals that many victims reported incidents of rape and torture during their arbitrary detention by those forces. The statement also notes that the practices of the Syrian Republic Guard are part of a systematic approach by the Syrian regime that incorporates the use of sexual violence and gender-based violence to intimidate and oppress the Syrian people, particularly women and girls.

On March 10, [SNHR](#) released a statement on SNHR Executive Director Fadel Abdul Ghany's participation in a panel on humanitarian intervention from the perspective of international law organized by Georgetown University in Qatar and the American Society of International Law (ASIL). In his address, Mr. Abdul Ghany tackled the question, **'Shouldn't humanitarian groups demand an intervention outside the scope of the UN Security Council in order to protect civilians in the event that murder crimes have reached the level of crimes against humanity?'**, with Syria as a case study. Mr. Abdul Ghany noted that Syria has exposed the failing of the UN Security Council, stressing that the body's failure to intervene to protect civilians in Syria has led to vastly compounded losses.

On March 15, SNHR held an event marking the twelfth anniversary of the popular uprising in Syria. Sponsored by the US, Germany, Qatar, and the Netherlands, the event focused on discussion of the ongoing human rights violations that Syrians have been suffering for 12 years, and of how the international community can promote the efforts of justice and accountability in order to hold accountable those responsible for war crimes and crimes against humanity that are still being perpetrated in Syria by the parties to the conflict, most notably by the Syrian regime. SNHR released [a statement](#) on the event.

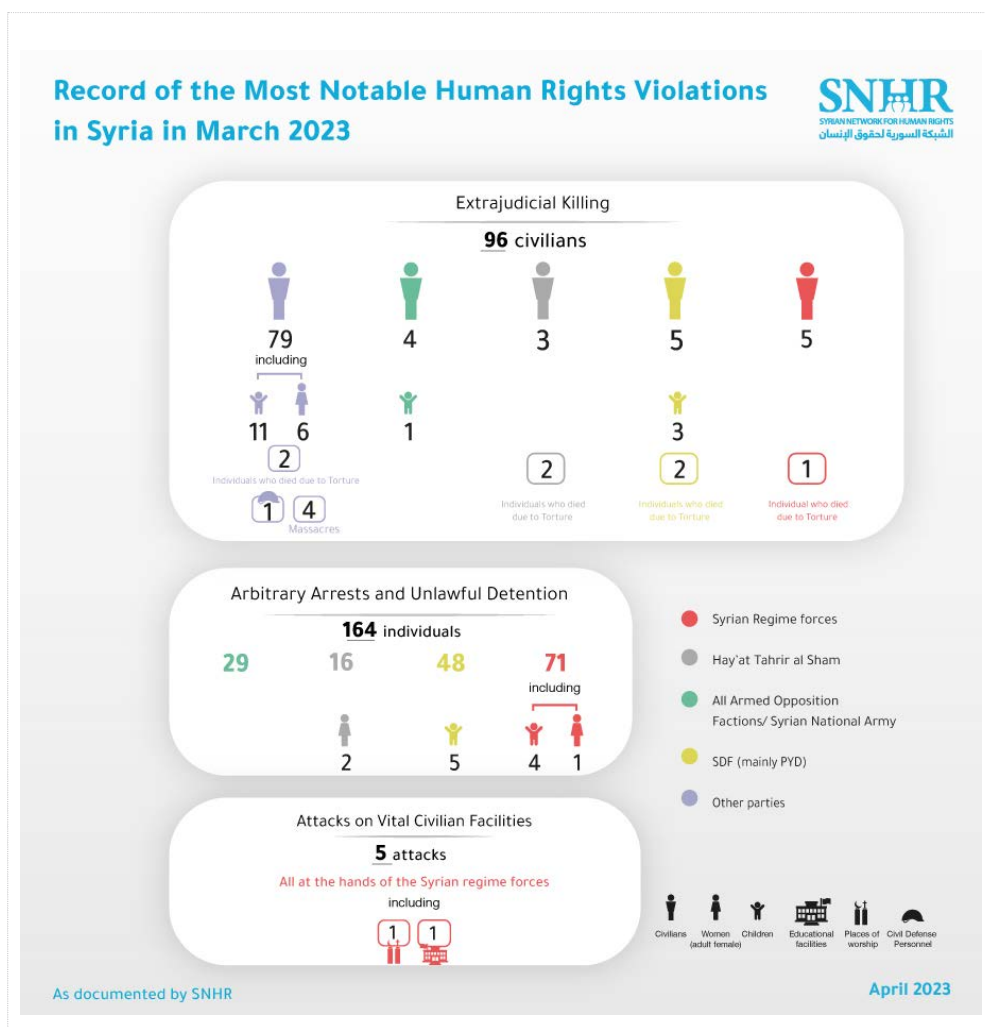
On March 18, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, President of Ukraine, [issued](#) a decree adding 300 individuals and 141 entities to the list of Ukrainian sanctions in relation to the war in Ukraine. The list included Bashar Assad, head of the Syrian regime, Hussein Arnous, head of the Syrian regime's government, and Faisal al-Meqdad, the Minister of Foreign Affairs in the Syrian regime's government. The sanctions include a number of restrictive measures, such as an assets freeze, and a ban on those officials entering Ukraine. Those measures are set to remain in effect for 10 years.

On March 28, the [US Department of Treasury](#) announced that, in collaboration with the UK, the US had imposed sanctions on six Syrian and Lebanese individuals and two Lebanese entities over their involvement in the captagon trade in Syria and Lebanon. On the same day, [the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office \(FCDO\)](#) released a statement noting that it had imposed sanctions on individuals responsible for the illicit captagon trade in Syria, including "senior regime officials facilitating the trade to the manufacturers of the drug and key Hizbollah associates responsible for trafficking it across the Middle East." As the statement noted, 80 percent of the world's captagon supply is produced in Syria, calling this illicit trade "a financial lifeline for the Syrian regime." The statement also noted that the Syrian regime is deeply involved in this trade, with regime strongholds, such as Latakia Port, being used to process "multi-billion dollar shipments."



### III. Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in March

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 March.



#### A. Extrajudicial killing

In March, SNHR documented the death of 96 civilians, including 15 children and six women (adult female), most of whom were killed at the hands of other parties. We also documented the death of one Civil Defense rescue worker and seven individuals who died due to torture. Furthermore, we documented no fewer than four massacres in March. 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):**<sup>1</sup> five civilians.
- **HTS**<sup>2</sup> : three civilians
- **All armed opposition factions/SNA:** four civilians, including one child.
- **Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF):** five civilians, including three children.

#### B. Other parties:

We documented the deaths of 79 civilians, including 11 children and six women, at the hands of other parties, distributed as follows:

- **Landmines whose source we have been unable to identify:** 32 civilians, including six children and three women.
- **Gunfire whose source we have been unable to identify:** eight civilians, including one child and one woman.
- **Bombings whose perpetrators we have been unable to identify:** 31 civilians, including four children and two women.
- **Turkish Border Guard:** four civilians.

## B. Arbitrary arrest and enforced disappearance

In March 2023, SNHR documented at least 164 cases of arbitrary arrest, including nine children and three 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 second of this month detailing the cases of arbitrary arrest and enforced disappearances which we documented in March at the hands of the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in Syria.

1. 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 office, 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.

2. 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:** 71 civilians, including four children and one woman.
- **HTS:** 16 civilians, including two women.
- **All Armed Opposition factions/SNA:** 29 civilians.
- **SDF:** 48 civilians, including four children

### C. Attacks on vital civilian facilities

In March 2023, SNHR documented at least five attacks on vital civilian facilities, all of them at the hands of Syrian regime forces, most of which took place in Aleppo governorate.

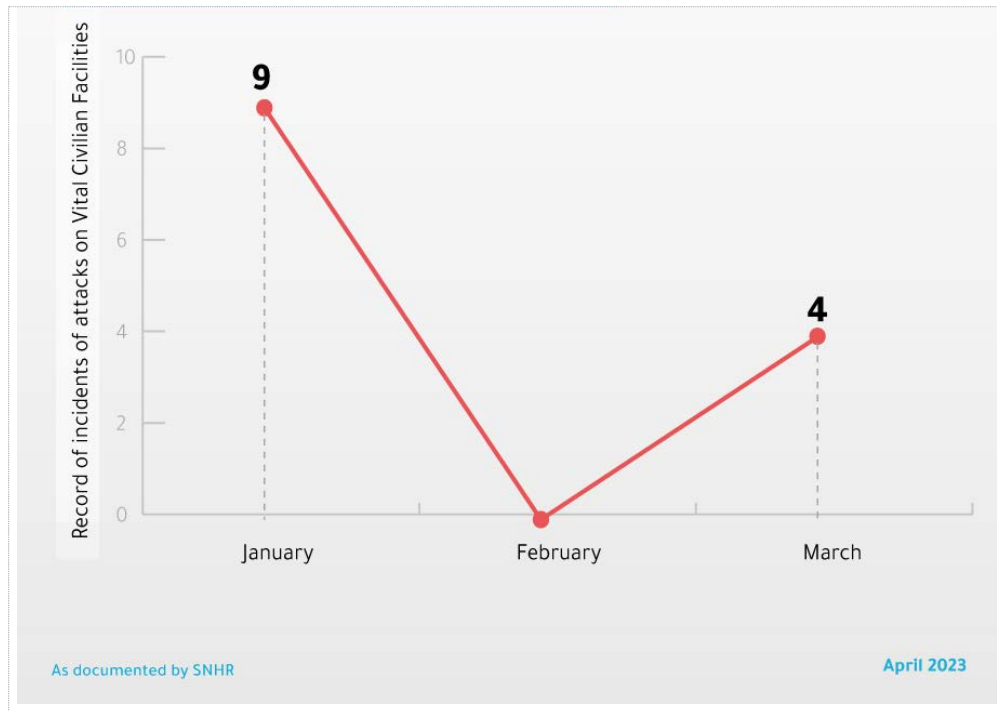
Among these attacks, we documented one attack on a school and one attack on a place of worship.

These attacks, which were all carried out by Syrian regime forces, were as follows:

Perpetrator Party	Syrian Regime Forces
Attacked Facility	
Places of Worship	
Mosques	1
Vital Educational Facilities	
Schools	1
Communal Facilities	
Markets	2
IDPs Gatherings/IDPs Camps	
Irregular Camps	1
Total	5

This brings the total number of attacks on vital civilian facilities since the beginning of 2023 to 14 attacks at the hands of the parties to the conflict and controlling forces in Syria.

Those attacks are distributed by month as follows:



As shown on the graph, January saw the highest documented number of attacks on vital civilian facilities in 2023 so far, with 65 percent of all 2023's attacks to date being against vital civilian facilities.

#### Most notable attacks on vital civilian facilities documented in March:

On Sunday, March 19, 2023, Syrian regime artillery forces fired a mortar shell at the Omar bin al-Khattab Mosque in the center of [Kafr Ta'al](#) village in the western suburbs of Aleppo governorate. [The mosque's minaret and part of its dome were destroyed in the attack, while its interior furniture was moderately damaged.](#) The town was under the joint control of armed opposition factions and HTS at the time of the incident.

SNHR notes that the mosque was previously attacked by the same forces on January 12, 2023.



On the evening of Thursday, March 23, 2023, Syrian regime artillery forces fired shells at the popular market in the center of al-Atareb city in the western suburbs of Aleppo governorate. [The street where the market's located was partially destroyed, along with numerous shops.](#) The city was under the joint control of armed opposition factions and HTS at the time of the incident.

On Friday, March 24, 2023, Syrian regime artillery forces fired shells at the eastern outskirts of al-Jena village in the western suburbs of Aleppo governorate. [Some of the shells landed a few meters from the tents of al-Mal'ab Camp](#) which was designated for the victims of the earthquake that hit the area on February 6. The shelling caused mass fear among the camp's residents, although no physical damage was documented to the camp's facilities. The area was under the joint control of armed opposition factions and HTS at the time of the incident.

#### **D. Indiscriminate attacks and attacks using prohibited weapons**

We documented no indiscriminate attacks or attacks involving the use of prohibited weapons in March

## **IV. Attachments**

1. [96 Civilians, Including 15 Children, Six Women, and Seven Victims Who Died due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria, in March 2023](#)
2. [At Least 164 Arbitrary Arrests/Detentions Documented in Syria in March 2023, Including Nine Children and Three Women \(Adult Females\)](#)



## V. Conclusions and Recommendations

### Conclusions

- SNHR notes that, for the past 12 years, the Syrian regime has been involved in the most horrific patterns of violations against the Syrian people, some of which amount to crimes against humanity. Since the Syrian regime continues to commit such violations up to the present day, as documented in the numerous reports we have released, any normalization of relations with the regime or efforts to rehabilitate it are acts of support for a criminal entity involved in crimes against humanity, which constitute a violation of international law.
- 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 regime 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 as required under 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 such 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 have 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, have caused massive collateral damage involving 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 munitions 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 for 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.

### 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.

### 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 aid 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/SNA**

- 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.

## **Acknowledgment**

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