On The Sixth Anniversary of the Syrian Regime’s Chemical Attack on Khan Sheikhoun and the Fifth Anniversary of The Syrian Regime’s Chemical Attack on Douma City, We Condemn Normalizing Relations With a Regime That Used a Weapon of Mass Destruction

The Syrian Regime and Russia Killed 91 Civilians in Khan Sheikhoun and 43 in Douma, Over Half of Whom Were Women and Children

91 civilians were killed

Idlib governorate
Khan Sheikhoun

including 32 children and 23 women (adult female), died of suffocation while nearly 520 others were injured

43 civilians were killed

Damascus Suburbs
Douma

including 19 children and 17 women (adult female) died of suffocation while nearly 550 others were injured.

Friday 07 April 2023

The Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR), founded in June 2011, is a non-governmental, independent group that is considered a primary source for the OHCHR on all death toll-related analyzes in Syria.
This week marks the sixth anniversary of the Syrian regime’s chemical weapons attack on Khan Sheikhoun city on April 4, 2017, and the fifth anniversary of the Syrian regime’s chemical attack on Douma city on April 7, 2018. Regarding the attack on Khan Sheikhoun city in Idlib governorate, the Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) documented that 91 civilians, including 32 children and 23 women (adult female), died of suffocation, while nearly 520 others were injured. In the attack on Douma in the Damascus Suburbs governorate, SNHR documented that 43 civilians, including 19 children and 17 women (adult female) died of suffocation, while nearly 550 others were injured.

The Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (COI) concluded that the Syrian regime was responsible for the two attacks on Khan Sheikhoun and Douma city, while the OPCW proved that chemical weapons were used in Khan Sheikhoun and Douma by the Syrian regime forces. The OPCW-UN Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM), established in accordance with Security Council resolution 2235 in August 2015, proved that the Syrian regime was responsible for the Khan Sheikhoun attack, with its mandate coming to an end by the way of a Russian veto before the Douma attack.

222 chemical attacks are documented in SNHR’s database. The Commander-in-Chief of the Syrian Armed Forces Bashar Assad bears direct responsibility for all these attacks.


United Nations Security Council, S/PV.8107, Vote on Renewing the Mandate of the JIM for additional 30 days. https://undocs.org/S/PV.8107
We can also divide the attacks according to the UN Security Council resolutions that addressed the use of chemical weapons in Syria:

A. The Syrian regime has carried out 217 chemical attacks, divided according to Security Council resolution as follows:

1. Before UN Security Council resolution 2118, adopted on September 27, 2013
   - 33 attacks

2. Since UN Security Council resolution 2118 was adopted on September 27, 2013
   - 184 attacks

3. After UN Security Council resolution 2209, adopted on March 6, 2015
   - 115 attacks

4. After the UN Mechanism was established as per UN Security Council resolution 2235, adopted on August 7
   - 59 attacks

B. ISIS has carried out five chemical attacks, all of which were in Aleppo governorate, all of which constituted violations of Security Council resolutions 2118, 2209, and 2235.

A task such as carrying out attacks involving the use of chemical weapons is one of great complexity. The Syrian regime is a highly centralized apparatus. As such, none of these attacks could have been carried out without the knowledge and approval of regime head Bashar al Assad. Using chemical weapons is a calculated policy for the Syrian regime based on a central decision, in which the institutions of the military and intelligence are incriminated, in particular the leaderships of the General Military Intelligence Directorate, Air Force Intelligence Directorate, the National Security Bureau, and the Syrian Scientific Studies and Research Center (especially Institute 1000 and Branch 450). Our data shows that no fewer than 387 individuals, all high-ranking military officers, as well as security officials and civil and military workers, were involved. All of these individuals have rightfully earned their place on the US and EU sanction lists.

We have included a list providing details of some of the individuals involved in the Syrian regime’s use of chemical weapon in two previous reports, which we hope will be a precursor for exposing these individuals’ crimes more widely and adding them to international sanction lists.
SNHR notes that the repeated use of chemical weapons by the Syrian regime in hundreds of individual criminal attacks, all perpetrated with total impunity, over the past 12 years have taken place with the full blessing and protection of Russia. In fact, Russia is directly involved in the Syrian regime’s concealment of large quantities of chemical weapons on the basis of its being a party to the Russian-US agreement in September 2013, in which Russia guaranteed that the Syrian regime would fully destroy its chemical weapon stockpile. Furthermore, Russia has failed to take any punitive action at all after any new use of chemical weapons by the Syrian regime, instead continuously denying that these attacks even took place, and slandering the OPCW, as it did after the release of the second report by the IIT, which determined that the Syrian regime was responsible for the Saraqeb attack on February 4, 2018, particularly the Nemer Tiger forces for leading the attack. Russia did the same after the third report, which also cited both the Nemer ‘Tiger’ forces and Russia by name, making it clear that Russia was a full partner in both these chemical weapons attacks, rather than playing its previous role of providing logistical and military support, along with political cover and full protection at the UN Security Council. This explains why Russia seemed desirous of the OPCW DAT obstructing the dossier’s closure, which he claimed was being done to serve the agenda of Western states, adding, “They want to achieve their goal of changing the Syrian regime one way or another.”

Fadel Abdul Ghany, SNHR Executive Director, at the event, ‘Countering Disinformation: A Shared Responsibility,’ held at the Germany Embassy in The Hague - February 23, 2023

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In light of the findings of the three OPCW IIT reports, released on April 8, 2020, April 12, 2021, and January 27, 2023, we can declare with certainty that the Syrian regime has not disclosed its full chemical stockpile, neither it has disclosed all the facilities used to produce or store chemical weapons, or its new chemical weapon production and storage facilities planned or already built following the destruction of the older ones at the time of the regime’s ratification of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC). We have serious concerns that the Syrian regime will again use chemical weapons against the Syrian people in the future.
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Responsibility should be swiftly ascribed to the UN Security Council, which should be called on to implement the relevant resolutions and to intervene in accordance with Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations, considering that a state member has used weapons of mass destruction in a way that poses a serious threat to international peace and security, and to implement the resolutions it adopted in relation to this issue.

The member states, especially those which pride themselves on being civilized nations, must invoke their rights enshrined in Article IX, Paragraph 8 of the CWC to request an on-site challenge inspection in the Syrian territories “for the sole purpose of clarifying and resolving any questions concerning possible non-compliance with the provisions of this Convention” by the Syrian government. We also recommend the invocation of the rights established in Paragraph 12 (a) of the same article, by which a representative is sent to “observe the conduct of the challenge inspection” and to ensure the inspection is being carried out with no stalling.

In the wake of the investigations by the UN and the highly credible OPCW, the Security Council needs to take action and use every measure available, including economic, political, and military sanctions, against the Syrian regime which has repeatedly violated every single relevant resolution: resolution 2118 adopted on September 27, 2013, resolution 2209 adopted on March 6, 2015, and resolution 2235 adopted on August 7, 2015. However, none of these actions have been taken even after the passage of six years since any of the reports by the COI, the reports by Human Rights Watch, and the reports by SNHR, all of which conclusively prove the repeated use of chemical weapons by the Syrian regime, and in accordance with Article XII, Paragraph 3 of the CWC, we at SNHR call on the 28th Session of the Conference of the State Parties to take collective measures in accordance with international law. Moreover, this issue, and all of the reports by the OPCW’s Investigation and Identification Team.

Based on all the above facts, and specifically the reports by the OPCW’s Investigation and Identification Team.


5. We at SNHR call on the 28th Session of the Conference of the State Parties to request an on-site challenge inspection in the Syrian territories “for the sole purpose of clarifying and resolving any questions concerning possible non-compliance with the provisions of this Convention” by the Syrian government.

6. The Conference shall, in cases of particular gravity, bring the issue, including relevant information and conclusions, to the attention of the Security Council. In cases where serious damage to the object and purpose of this Convention may result from activities prohibited under this Convention, in particular by Article I, the Conference may recommend collective measures to States Parties in conformity with international law.

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