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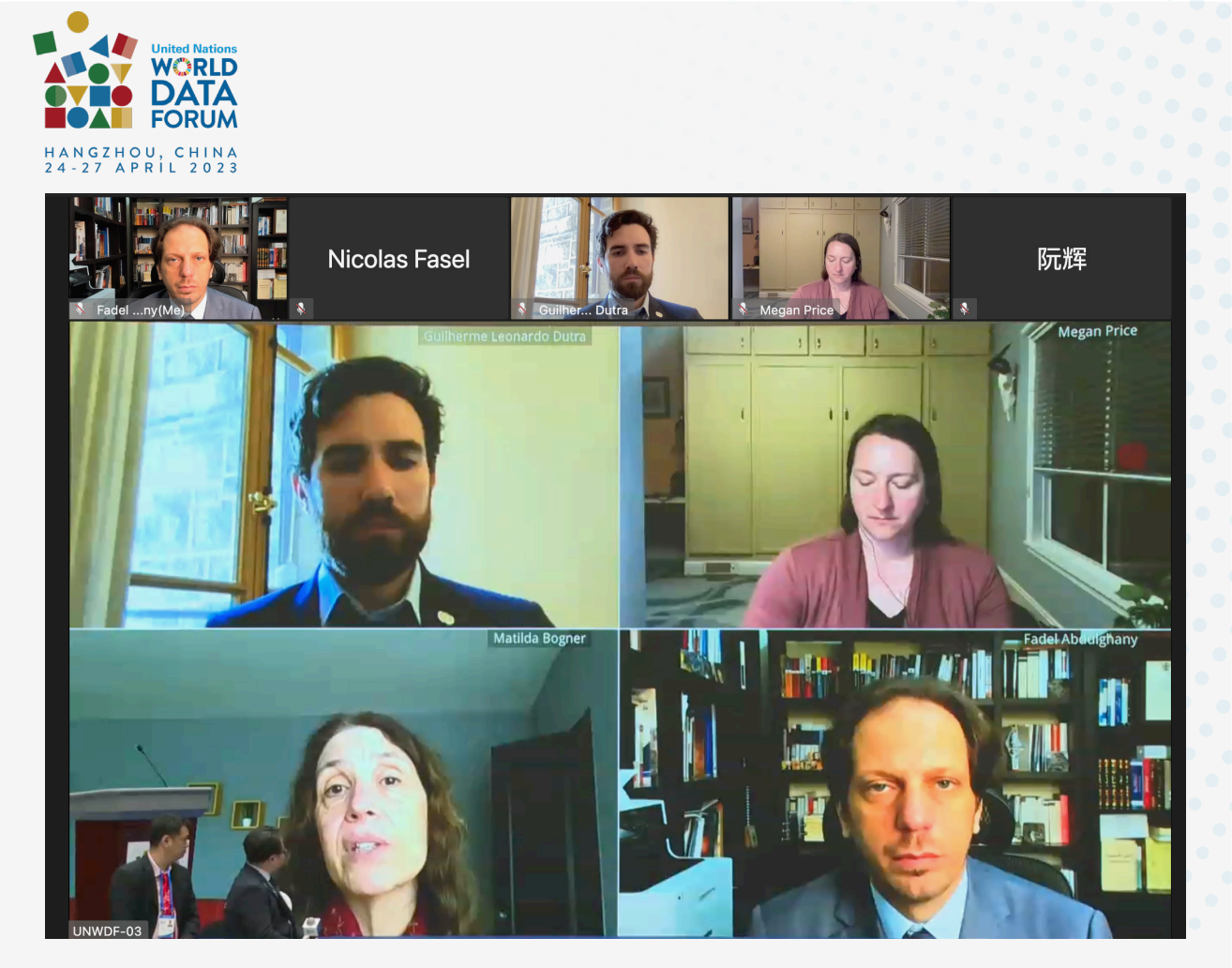

SNHR Participates in the UN World Data Forum 2023

Wednesday , April 26, 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 analyses in Syria.

As part of the UN World Data Forum 2023, taking place in Hangzhou, China on April 24-27, 2023, the Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) participated on Wednesday, April 26, 2023, in an event organized by the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) entitled, 'New possibilities for measuring deaths in conflict settings'.

The UN World Data Forum, which is held twice every three years, aims to "spur data innovation, nurture partnerships, mobilize high-level political and financial support for data and build a better pathway to better data for sustainable development." The first Forum was held in Cape Town, South Africa in 2017, and has grown since to include an active list of over 20,000 interest stakeholders (a varied group of governments, civil society organizations, private sector organizations, donor and philanthropist bodies, international and regional agencies, the geographic information community, media outlets, and academic and professional institutions).

This year's event focused on discussion of the different methods used to measure and estimate data on deaths related to conflict, both from a conceptual and operative standpoint. This includes the innovative methods employed to measure undocumented deaths, assessing, and linking data sources, producing disaggregated data and incorporating statistical findings in decision processes. It is important to note that the number of conflict-related deaths is one of the primary indicators of the level of violence used in it, and is essential for informing policymaking and humanitarian response. The annual process of collecting data on conflict-related deaths also informs the international community of the level of conflict-related violence worldwide, and induces evidence-based procedures to alleviate the humanitarian consequences of conflicts.

Alongside Mr. Abdul Ghany, the other distinguished speakers addressed the event were Guilherme Miranda Dutra, Methodology Officer at the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC); Francesca Marotta of the OHCHR; Megan Price, Executive Director of the Human Rights Data Analysis Group (HRDAG); Matilda Bogner, Head of Mission at the OHCHR's Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine. The event was moderated by Marc Titus Cebreros of the OHCHR.

In his address, Mr. Abdul Ghany delivered a presentation on SNHR's work in documenting extrajudicial killings in Syria since the beginning of the popular uprising in Syria that broke out 12 years ago in March 2011.

The SNHR head also shed light on the methodology and mechanisms incorporated by SNHR in relation to the documentation of extrajudicial killings, noting that SNHR has, for many years, published daily death toll reports and news reports on killings , in addition to a monthly report summarizing the toll of victims documented in the previous month, including those who died due to torture, as well as issuing a bi-annual report and an annual report.

Mr. Abdul Ghany also addressed the most notable challenges faced by the SNHR team in the course of the documentation process. He stressed that documenting human rights violations in Syria is one of the most difficult and most complex processes of is kind worldwide, with the security challenge being the most significant ones He emphasized that any individual working on documenting violations or searching for information faces severe danger for doing so and might lose their life or be arrested, tortured, and forcibly disappeared. He also stressed that losing hope in any potential accountability process has severely undermined the willingness of victims' families and eyewitnesses to cooperate.

On the same topic, Mr. Abdul Ghany also cited an additional challenge posed by the Syrian regime, noting that while hundreds of thousands of Syrian citizens have been killed since the very first days of the Syrian popular uprising in March 2011 the overwhelming majority of those victims have not been officially documented as dead in the official civil registry He further explained that the Syrian regime has issued death certificates for only a small number of its victims, according to criteria dictated by the regime and its security apparatus. On August 19, 2022, SNHR released a report on this very issue entitled, 'The Syrian Regime, Through Its Security Services and State Institutions, Controls the Incidents of Registering the Deaths of Victims Killed/'Disappeared' in the Armed Conflict Since March 2011'.

The second part of Mr. Abdul Ghany's address focused on SNHR's work in assigning culpability in extrajudicial killings. To that end, SNHR has determined that the Syrian regime and its allies Iran and Russia have been responsible for the deaths of approximately 91 percent of all civilian victims killed in Syria since the beginning of the popular uprising in March 2011.

Mr. Abdul Ghany concluded his address by noting that documenting victims is an important step towards compensating victims and their families and exposing the perpetrators of violations and holding them accountable in the course of transitional justice. The only way forward, he stressed, is for the international community to realize the sheer magnitude of the human losses in Syria, and to take decisive steps towards implementing UN Security Council resolutions and bringing about a political transition in order to enable the establishment of a democratic regime that respects and defends the rights of every Syrian citizen and adheres to the principles of international human rights law.

www.snhr.org - info@snhr.org