

Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in April 2023

**Lebanese Authorities Must Stop the Refoulment of
Syrian Refugees: Syria is Wholly Unsafe for the Return
of Refugees and IDPs**

Friday 05 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 analyses in Syria.

Contents

I. Introduction and Methodology	1
II. Brief on April's Most Notable Developments	1
III. Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in April	12
IV. Attachments	16
V. Conclusions and Recommendations	16
Acknowledgment	20

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 April 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 April's Most Notable Developments

Bombings and military operations

April saw Syrian regime forces continuing to carry out artillery attacks on the region of northwestern Syria, where we documented separate attacks focusing on the villages and towns of Jabal al-Zawiya in the southern suburbs of Idlib and the 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 these areas are close to the dividing lines with armed opposition factions, with regime force also shelling villages and towns in the eastern and southern suburbs of Idlib, as well as in the western suburbs of Aleppo that are far from the dividing line. One of the attacks on April 9 saw Syrian regime artillery forces shelling an area [near the medical dispensary](#) in the center of Sarmin city in eastern Idlib, killing one child and injured four others. The attack also caused slight damage to the dispensary building. Another attack by the same forces on April 17 [injured five civilians](#), including a girl, when Syrian regime forces fired multiple shells that hit a house in al-Abzemou town. On a related note, [SNHR](#) noted in a previous report that the Syrian regime bombarded the areas affected by the February 6 earthquake in the region of northwestern Syria 132 times, including 29 attacks on areas far from the dividing lines. The same report stresses that attacks by the regime and its allies on the region of northwestern Syria continued in the nine weeks following the earthquake (February 6, 2023-April 10, 2023), with some of the attacks targeting areas close to camps housing victims displaced due to the earthquake, who then had to flee and be displaced once again by the bombardment.



Meanwhile, [more civilians were killed by landmines across Syria](#) in April, mostly in the governorates of Aleppo, Hama, and Deir Ez-Zour, with a total of 32 civilians, including three children and four women, killed by landmines across the country in this period.

April also saw more [assassinations of civilians at the hands of unidentified gunmen](#) across Syria. SNHR recorded the killing of 37 civilians, including one child and one woman, by unidentified gunmen. Of these, 15 were killed in Daraa governorate alone, including media worker [Ahmad Fa'our al-Saa'di](#) who was shot dead on April 3 near his home in western Daraa governorate. On April 16, we documented [the killing of six civilians](#) by gunmen we have so far been unable to identify while they were herding sheep in the badiya 'desert' of Buqrus in eastern Deir Ez-Zour governorate. On the same day, pro-regime sources reported that al-Salamiya Hospital in eastern Hama suburbs [received 26 bodies](#) (12 combatants and 14 civilians, including one child and one woman) who were shot dead by parties we have so far been unable to identify. The victims' bodies were found in the Dwezein area in the Syriab badiya, eastern Hama suburbs where they had been searching for desert truffles.

More civilians were killed while searching for desert truffles this month. In April, we recorded the killing of 64 civilians, including one child and five women, while they were collecting desert truffles, bringing the total number of civilians killed while collecting desert truffles since the beginning of 2023 to 156 in total, including six children and six women. These victims were all killed either by the explosion of landmines planted by parties we have so far been unable to identify or shot dead by parties we have also so far 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 April 7, [when the bodies of 13 civilians](#) were found bearing gunshot wounds in the Jabal al-Ammour area near al-Sakhna city in eastern Homs where they had been collecting desert truffles.

In April, the Israeli Air Force intensified its airstrikes in Syria, targeting multiple areas in the country for a second consecutive month. On April 2, [the Syrian regime's Syrian Arab News Agency \(SANA\)](#) reported that Israeli warplanes targeted multiple locations in Homs city and its suburbs. On the same day, [Reuters](#) cited Western intelligence sources who said that the sites targeted were the T4 Airbase and al-Dab'a Airport, where Iranian officers and Hezbollah members are stationed. On April 4, [SANA](#) reported that Israeli airstrikes targeted sites in the vicinity of Damascus city, killing two civilians. SANA also reported on April 9 that Israeli warplanes targeted multiple points in [southern Syria](#), causing material damages. On the same day, [Israel's Channel 13](#) reported that the attack targeted the headquarters of forces affiliated with Maher Assad, commander of the regime army's Fourth Division and the brother of regime head Bashar Assad. On April 29, SANA reported that Israeli warplanes targeted multiple points [in the vicinity of Homs city](#), injuring three civilians, and causing material damage.

Living and Security Conditions

In April, economic, living, services, and security conditions continued to decline across all sectors in areas under the Syrian regime's control, which saw a particularly sharp deterioration in the services sector. Regarding the power crisis specifically, the Syrian regime's government is still implementing a rationing policy, exacerbating the suffering of the residents in regime areas.

Meanwhile, residents in regime areas are struggling with rising prices of all goods, especially food, groceries, and fuel. The Holy Month of Ramadan saw prices rise by as much as 15 percent according to a report by the [pro-regime Tishreen Newspaper](#) published on April 17.

The service sector was also hit by additional crises, with the communication sector in particular seeing a steep price rise in the rates of mobile and landline phone services which were increased by 30-35 percent and 35-50 percent respectively. The new rates were set to take effect from May 1, according to a news article published on April 26 by the pro-regime [al-Watan Newspaper](#).

In early-April, we recorded an incident in al-Rastan city, northern Homs in which heavy construction equipment escorted by armed Syrian regime forces, was used to demolish a number of schools that were damaged in previous bombardment by Syrian regime forces and in various regime military operations in the area over the past 12 years. Five schools were demolished in the regime-held city, namely the Mohammad Saeed Ayoub School, Mohammad Tayseer Farazat Vocational School, al-Oula School for Girls, 16 Tishreen School, and Mohammad Qasem Tlas School. It is worth noting that these schools had not been repaired or renovated since Syrian regime forces took back control of the city in May 2018.

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 IDP camps, while wages also have been in decline.

In April, residents of Manbij and Ein al-Aran city in northeastern Aleppo governorate continued to suffer under the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), as the group dealt brutally with protests against their policies. As we have recorded, some grocery supplies are scarce, most importantly flour, leading to low levels of bread production, and, in turn, rising bread prices.

Meanwhile, Syrian regime forces tightened their blockade on the SDF-held al-Shahba area in Aleppo city. Under the siege, which has been imposed by regime forces since 2018, fuel and food supplies have been blocked from entering in April, reducing the working capacity of hospitals in the area amid fears that they will be completely put out of commission, while the camps in the area suffered power outages.

The situation in Northeastern Syria also 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.

Forced displacement

In April, the suffering of IDPs in northwestern Syria continued in relation to both living conditions and the humanitarian crisis, with the region still coping with the aftermath of the February 6 earthquake that adversely affected all aspects of life in light of rampant unemployment and virtually non-existent purchasing powers among residents in the area, especially those in IDP camps, during a period characterized by a severe shortages and humanitarian crisis, in which humanitarian needs have reached unprecedented levels.

We also documented more fires in IDPs' tents in northwestern Syria in April. On April 28, a fire, caused by a malfunction in a cooking oven, completely destroyed four tents and partially burnt two others in [Samidoun IDPs Camp](#) in eastern Heir Jamous village in northwestern Idlib.

In the camps in northeastern Syria, on the subject of foreign states repatriating their nationals, [the Canadian government](#) released an official statement on April 6, revealing that it has repatriated 10 Canadian children and six Canadian women, and stating that "amidst reports of deteriorating conditions in the camp, we have been particularly concerned about the health and wellbeing of Canadian children." On April 7, [the Associated Press \(AP\)](#) reported that the Canadian authorities had arrested two of the "four women" who had been repatriated without leveling charges. On April 18, the [Canadian Broadcasting Corporation \(CBC\)](#) reported that two Canadian women and three female adolescents had been missing for 10 days, after they were set to be repatriated from a camp in northeastern Syria, as the airplane carrying the other women had taken off without them, adding that the missing women and children had been subjected to detention and mistreatment by the guards of the camps rather than being taken to the designated pick-up point.

With regard to Syrian refugees and asylum seekers, April saw more provocative statements by Lebanese officials against Syrian refugees. For instance, on April 4, the [al-Jadeed TV](#) website cited Hector Hajjar, Lebanon's Minister of Social Affairs in the caretaker cabinet, as saying that now is the time to focus on the speedy return of Syrian refugees en masse to certain governorates in Syria. He stressed that he is "ready to visit Syria and do all that is necessary to address this issue."

On April 28, we documented the death of a young man in a fire of unidentified cause in [Zaatari refugee camp](#) in northern Jordan. The victim's wife and three children also sustained varying burn injuries in the blaze.

Refoulment of Syrian refugees in Lebanon

On April 17, the Lebanese military launched a crackdown on areas in the country with a large Syrian population, resulting in the mass detention of dozens of Syrian refugees who had been unable to obtain official documents establishing their legal presence in Lebanon, principally those who had entered Lebanon in 2019 and since then illegally. The raids, however, also targeted Syrian residents of the country who have been unable to renew their residence. SNHR has documented the refoulment of no fewer than 168 Syrian refugees from Lebanon since the beginning of April 2023, with almost one-third of this total total being children and women. Personnel from the Syrian regime's Military Security division in the al-Masna border area arrested two individuals from the same family from among those forcibly returned. We released [a statement](#) on this issue on April 27, in which we stressed that any refoulment of Syrian refugees while the current Syrian regime remains in power, with its current leadership and the structure of its brutal security apparatus intact, is a violation of the customary laws which is binding on all world states, including those states that have not ratified the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees. In the same context, the [Agence France-Presse \(AFP\)](#) news agency reported on April 21 that repatriation of Syrian refugees is being carried out amid escalating hostility against Syrians intensified by the economic crisis. On April 25, [Amnesty International](#) released a statement stating: "Lebanese authorities must immediately stop forcibly deporting refugees back to Syria, Amnesty International said today, amid fears that these individuals are at risk of torture or persecution at the hands of the Syrian government upon return." On a related note, the [Access Center for Human Rights \(ACHR\)](#) on April 18 issued an urgent statement strongly condemning the recent mass refoulment of Syrian refugees by Lebanese authorities. The statement adds that these operations are being carried out in an arbitrary manner without consideration for the legal and political situation of refugees in Syria, in what constitutes a blatant violation of international human rights law. The ACHR released [a second statement](#) on April 28 documenting approximately 542 arbitrary arrests of Syrian refugees that had been carried out in the course of at least 13 security crackdowns. The statement calls on the Lebanese government to stop those campaigns and the forced deportation of Syrian refugees.

Political and human rights situation

On March 31, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child and Fionnuala Ní Aoláin, UN Special Rapporteur on the protection and promotion of human rights while countering terrorism, released a joint statement that stressed that approximately 56,000 women, girls, and children are still imprisoned in al-Hawl and al-Roj Camps, including 37,000 foreigners. Experts, the statement notes, have warned that the mass detention of children in the area for the actions of their parents is an “egregious” violation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The statement also stresses that the detained children are living in extremely dire conditions, with many suffering from tuberculosis and untreated injuries, as well as malnutrition.

On April 1, the UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) posted [a tweet](#) revealing that Rola Dashti, the Executive Secretary of the ESCWA, has visited Asma Assad, wife of the head of the Syrian regime, to discuss the support the ESCWA can provide to promote entrepreneurship opportunities for youngsters. It must be noted that Asma Assad is one of the most prominent figures involved in pillaging humanitarian relief directed to Syria and re-channeling it to fund the Syrian regime. Asma Assad is involved in crimes against humanity, and is on the US and EU sanction lists.

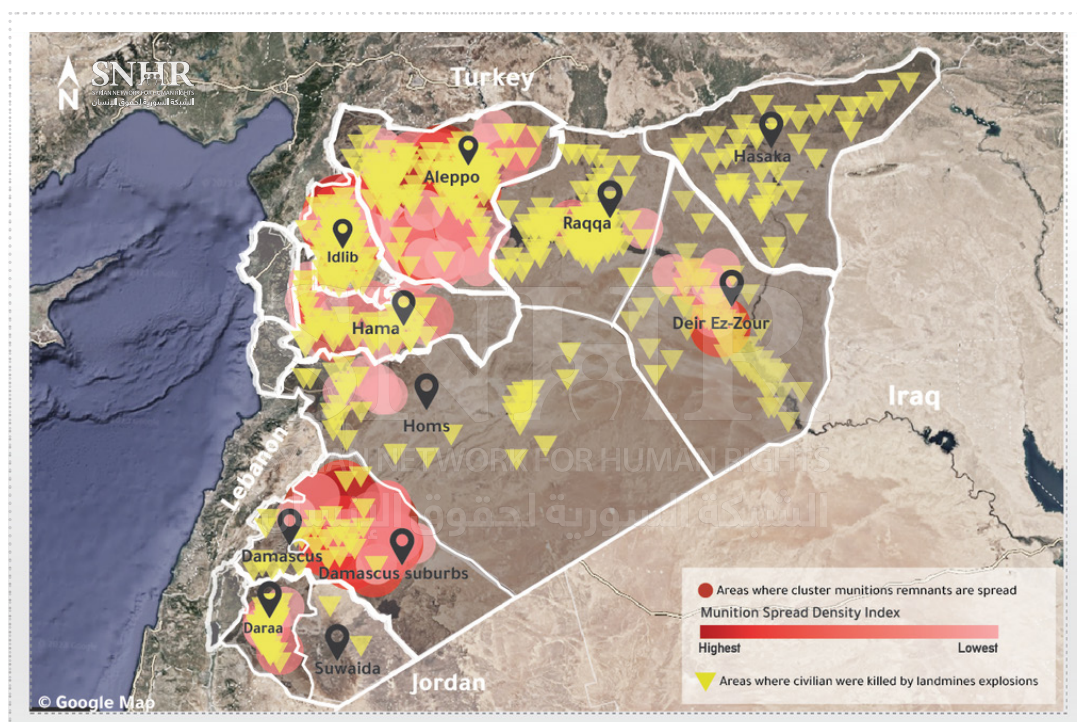
On April 4, the Human Rights Council adopted resolution [A/HRC/52/L.16](#) on the human rights situation in Syria. A total of 26 states voted in favor of the resolution, while China, Eritrea, Bolivia, Cuba, and Algeria voted against, with 16 countries abstaining from casting their votes. The resolution provided for the renewal of the mandate of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (COI) for a year and condemned the serious violation of basic human rights and international humanitarian law across Syria, including the use of chemical weapons in the country, demanding that those responsible must be held accountable. [SNHR welcomed](#) the decision to renew the COI’s mandate in its report released on April 11, with the report underscoring the important role played by the COI in documenting the violations committed in Syria and SNHR’s continued collaboration with the COI.

HRC 52					
A/HRC/52/L.16 - Situation of human rights in the Syrian Arab Republic					
YES	ALGERIA	YES	GABON	ABST	NEPAL
YES	ARGENTINA	YES	GAMBIA	ABST	PAKISTAN
ABST	BANGLADESH	YES	GEORGIA	YES	PARAGUAY
YES	BELGIUM	YES	GERMANY	YES	QATAR
YES	BENIN	YES	HONDURAS	YES	ROMANIA
YES	BOLIVIA (PLURINATIONAL STATE OF)	ABST	INDIA	ABST	SENEGAL
ABST	CAMEROON	ABST	KAZAKHSTAN	ABST	SOMALIA
YES	CHILE	ABST	KYRGYZSTAN	ABST	SOUTH AFRICA
YES	CHINA	YES	LITHUANIA	ABST	SUDAN
YES	COSTA RICA	YES	LUXEMBOURG	YES	UKRAINE
YES	COTE D'IVOIRE	YES	MALAWI	ABST	UNITED ARAB EMIRATES
YES	CUBA	ABST	MALAYSIA	YES	UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND
YES	CZECHIA	ABST	MALDIVES	YES	UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
YES	ERITREA	YES	MEXICO	ABST	UZBEKISTAN
YES	FINLAND	YES	MONTENEGRO	ABST	VIET NAM
YES	FRANCE	YES	MOROCCO		
YES		26	ABST		16
			NO		5

Vote outcome on the resolution on the human rights situation in Syria at the Human Rights Council - April 4, 2023

On April 4, SNHR released [a report](#) marking the International Day for Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action, in which it documented the extensive presence of active landmines across wide areas of Syria, which threatens the lives of millions. The report also includes maps illustrating the spread of landmines in many Syrian governorates. Moreover, the report stresses that the various parties to the conflict have used landmines, and that many areas remain contaminated by landmines that have yet to be detected.

Map illustrating areas polluted with anti-personnel landmines in Syria



On April 7, [SNHR](#) released a statement marking 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. The statement underlines the Syrian regime's repeated use of chemical weapons in hundreds of attacks with impunity over the past 12 years, all of which have taken place with the full blessing and protection of Russia, which, the statement adds, has itself been directly involved in the Syrian regime's concealment of large quantities of chemical weapons.

On April 5, [Amnesty International](#) and [Human Rights Watch \(HRW\)](#) released a joint statement revealing that Turkey's police and Gendarmerie forces (the police service responsible for rural areas) have committed violations against individuals suspected of committing crimes. Those violations include brutal and prolonged beating and arbitrary and informal detention. In many cases, the victims were Syrian refugees, with these attacks exhibiting signs suggesting the existence of additional xenophobic motivation.

On April 10, [the New York Times](#) published an investigative report revealing that no fewer than 84 individuals have been killed this year so far while searching for desert truffles in the desert in middle and eastern Syria. According to the report, Syrian regime forces are forcing truffle collectors to 'request' the help of regime forces to protect them from attacks as they collect desert truffles. In this context, Syrian regime forces would disclose information about the locations of landmines in exchange for receiving the larger share of profits from selling the desert truffles harvested. The investigation also revealed that those who refuse the 'protection' of regime forces and refuse to split the profits with them face the risk of being killed by landmines, abductions, or being the victims of attacks by unidentified gunmen. The newspaper suspected that those gunmen are regime forces and regime militias who attack truffle collectors who refuse to share profits to deter others from making the same decision.

On April 12, [Jordan's Anti-Narcotics Department](#) said that Jordanian authorities had thwarted an attempt to smuggle narcotics from Syrian territory. The government agency added that after a rigorous search of the area, narcotics, an AK-47, and ammunition were also recovered.

On April 12, [Reuters](#) published a report revealing that Iran's regime had taken advantage of humanitarian assistance missions in Syria to supply weapons and military equipment. According to the report, hundreds of air flights from Iran landed in the airports of Aleppo, Damascus, and Latakia carrying these supplies for seven weeks following the earthquake, which included weapons, advanced communication devices, radar batteries, and spare parts. SNHR has warned in previous reports of the Syrian regime's allies using the earthquake as a cover to attain political and military gains in the regime's favor.

On April 12, [French newspaper Le Monde](#) reported that Saudi Arabia is still seeking to restore relations with the Syrian regime despite the latter's control of captagon production and smuggling to KSA in particular. The report adds that the head of the Syrian regime, Bashar Assad, has managed to find a workaround to evade the effects of international sanctions through the methodological development of captagon production and trade. According to the report, the Syrian regime has enlisted pharmaceutical experts in Syria to manufacture and produce captagon, establishing a wide network of secret pharmaceutical laboratories to manufacture these amphetamine pills.

On April 12, SNHR revealed in [a statement](#) that the General Committee of the Conference of the State Parties (CSP) organized by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) had rejected SNHR's application to attend the CSP that is held annually in the Hague to review and assess the OPCW's work, where human rights groups usually hold side-events on the sidelines of the main conference to which state parties are invited as part of the efforts to combat chemical weapons. These events feature groups from all around the world, except for Syria, the country worst affected by chemical weapons in light of the Syrian regime's repeated use of these weapons.

On April 18, [the UNICEF](#) released a humanitarian situation report on northwestern Syria, revealing that a total of 97,400 households have been displaced since the earthquake on February 6. The report also notes that Syria now has over 2.6 million internally displaced persons (IDPs), including both those who were displaced the earthquake, and those recently displaced, while over 10,600 buildings have been damaged or destroyed by the earthquakes in northwestern Syria, with the issues of removing rubble and securing shelter remaining a priority to support the communities there.

On April 24, the [Action on Armed Violence \(AOAV\) charity](#) released its annual Explosive Violence Monitor, documenting violence resulting from explosions for the year 2022. The report confirms that Syria was the third worst country globally in terms of the number of documented cases of explosives-related violence against civilians in the year 2022. In 2021, Syria was ranked in second place, a year-on-year decrease of 35 percent. On April 28, SNHR released [a statement](#) noting that it had contributed to the report by providing the AOAV with large amounts of data. However, SNHR said, with regard to the decrease in the cases of explosive violence in 2022 compared to 2021, it is possible that the AOAV's data has been affected by the dwindling interest shown in the Syrian conflict by media outlets and international organizations.

On April 27, [HRW](#) released a report which noted that "Turkish border guards are indiscriminately shooting at Syrian civilians on the border with Syria, as well as torturing and using excessive force against asylum seekers and migrants trying to cross into Turkey." HRW's statement stressed that Turkey's government should launch an investigation and hold the individual border guards responsible for these violations accountable, and put an end to the long-standing impunity for such violations.

On April 27, Geir Pedersen, UN special envoy for Syria, said in [a briefing](#) before the Security Council on the situation in Syria, that a political resolution requires a realistic approach from all parties, noting that the rates of incidents of violence are increasing in different parts of the country. Mr. Pedersen warned that the brief calm that followed the earthquake is eroding gradually. In the same session, Russia leveraged humanitarian assistance for its political exploitation, with Vassily Nebenzia, Russia's Permanent Representative to the UN, stating that "if Western countries continue to disregard the fact that Security Council resolutions are being sabotaged by terrorists," then Russia will "draw the necessary conclusion" in crafting its position regarding the forthcoming extension of the cross-border mechanism in July.

Restoring relations with the Syrian regime

On April 1, [Reuters](#) reported that Faisal al-Mekdad, Minister of Foreign Affairs in the Syrian regime's government, had arrived in the Egyptian capital Cairo in the first visit of its kind since the start of the popular uprising in Syria.

On April 12, Faisal al-Mekdad, the Minister of Foreign Affairs in the Syrian regime's government, began an official visit to [Saudi Arabia](#) during which he met with Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al-Furhan Al-Saud, Saudi Arabia's Minister of Foreign Affairs, according to the state's Saudi Press Agency. This was followed by a visit by Prince Faisal bin Farhan to Damascus, marking the first official visit in 12 years, during which he met head of the Syrian regime Bashar Assad. The [Saudi Ministry of Foreign Affairs](#) said, in an official statement, that during this meeting, the two sides "went over the necessary steps to achieve a comprehensive political settlement of the Syrian crisis that would end all its repercussions, achieve national reconciliation, and contribute to the return of Syria to its Arab fold and the resumption of its natural role in the Arab world."

On April 15, the [Saudi Ministry of Foreign Affairs](#) released a statement following a meeting held by the Gulf foreign ministers, and their Jordanian, Egyptian, and Iraqi counterparts. On Syria the statement said that “the ministers agreed on the importance of bringing about a resolution to the humanitarian crisis, fostering a suitable environment to deliver humanitarian assistance to all parts of Syria, creating the necessary conditions for the return of Syrian refugees and IDPs to their areas, ending their suffering, and enabling them to return safely to their home country, and taking more action towards stabilizing the situation in all of Syria.” The statement said that a political solution is the only viable solution to the crisis in Syria.

On April 15, [Faisal al-Mekdad](#), the Minister of Foreign Affairs in the Syrian regime’s government, began a two-day official visit to Algeria, during which he met with Algerian President Abdelmadjid Tebboune and other Algerian officials. During the visit, al-Mekdad hailed the way in which Algeria, at both the public and leadership levels, had stood with Syria’s regime during all the challenges that the country faced in the past period.

On April 17, Faisal al-Mekdad, the Minister of Foreign Affairs in the Syrian regime’s government, [arrived in Tunisia](#) on an official visit, during which he met with Tunisian President Kais Saied and a number of ministers. This visit followed the release of [a joint statement](#) by the two sides on April 12 revealing that, in reciprocating the Tunisian President’s initiative to name an ambassador to Damascus, Syria had decided to reopen its embassy 12 years after the severance of diplomatic ties between Damascus and Tunis.

On April 20, SNHR released [a statement](#) stressing that restoring relations with the Syrian regime which continues to commit crimes against humanity against the Syrian people is a violation of international law and of the rights of its millions of victims. The statement added that attempts by some Arab states, or any other states for that matter, to reestablish any form of relations with the Syrian regime are grievously insulting, first and foremost to those states deciding to take such action, which choose to side with said regime atop the backs and skulls of its millions of victims.

Accountability and advocacy

On April 4, the [International Federation for Human Rights \(FIDH\)](#) released a statement revealing that, on March 29, 2023, the judges affiliated with the war crimes unit of the Paris Judicial Court ordered the indictment before the Paris Criminal Court of three senior Syrian regime officials: Ali Mamlouk, Advisor to the head of the Syrian regime on security affairs, Jamil Hassan, Director of the Syrian regime’s Air Force Intelligence Directorate, and Abdel Salam Mahmoud, head of the Interrogation department at the Air Force Intelligence Directorate’s branch in Damascus, for their complicity in war crimes and crimes against humanity in the ‘Dabbagh’ case. The case refers to the arrest of two French nationals, Mazzen Dabbagh and his son Patrick Abdelkader Dabbagh, on November 3, 2013, by members of the Syrian regime’s Air Force Intelligence Directorate, after which Mazzen and his son were detained at al-Mazza Military Airbase in Damascus city. Subsequently, the Dabbagh family received official notification that Mazzen and his son had died on November 25, 2017, and January 21, 2014, respectively.

On April 11, the US Department of State released [a statement](#) revealing that Sami Mahmud Mohammed al-Uraydi has been designated on the global terrorism list for his leadership role with the group 'Hurras al-Din' (Guardians of the Faith). The statement adds that the group has been responsible for "killings, kidnappings, and violence targeting members of religious minority groups."

On April 13, [SNHR](#) revealed in a statement that it has assisted in building a case against the Syrian regime in a US court, through its partnership with the Center for Justice & Accountability (CJA), in relation to the case of US citizen Obada Mzaik who was subjected to torture at the hands of Syrian regime forces while he was in Syria in 2012. Obada was arrested and tortured at the Air Force branch in al-Mazza Military Airbase. SNHR supplied the CJA with a large quantity of data and evidence on the torture practices at the Air Force Intelligence Directorate's branch in al-Mazza Military Airbase in 2012, as well as other information.

On April 17, the [New York Times](#) reported that the US Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) is building a case against top Syrian regime officials over committing war crimes. The case is in relation to the killing of Layla Shweikani, a US national and airline worker, under torture on December 28, 2016, at the Syrian regime's notorious Sednaya Prison. The New York Times noted that the case aims to ensure accountability for top officials who are known to be in charge of the regime's brutal arrest and torture machinery, namely Jamil al-Hassan, Director of the Syrian regime's Air Force Intelligence Directorate and Ali Mamlouk who was the head of the Syrian regime's National Security Intelligence Directorate at the time.

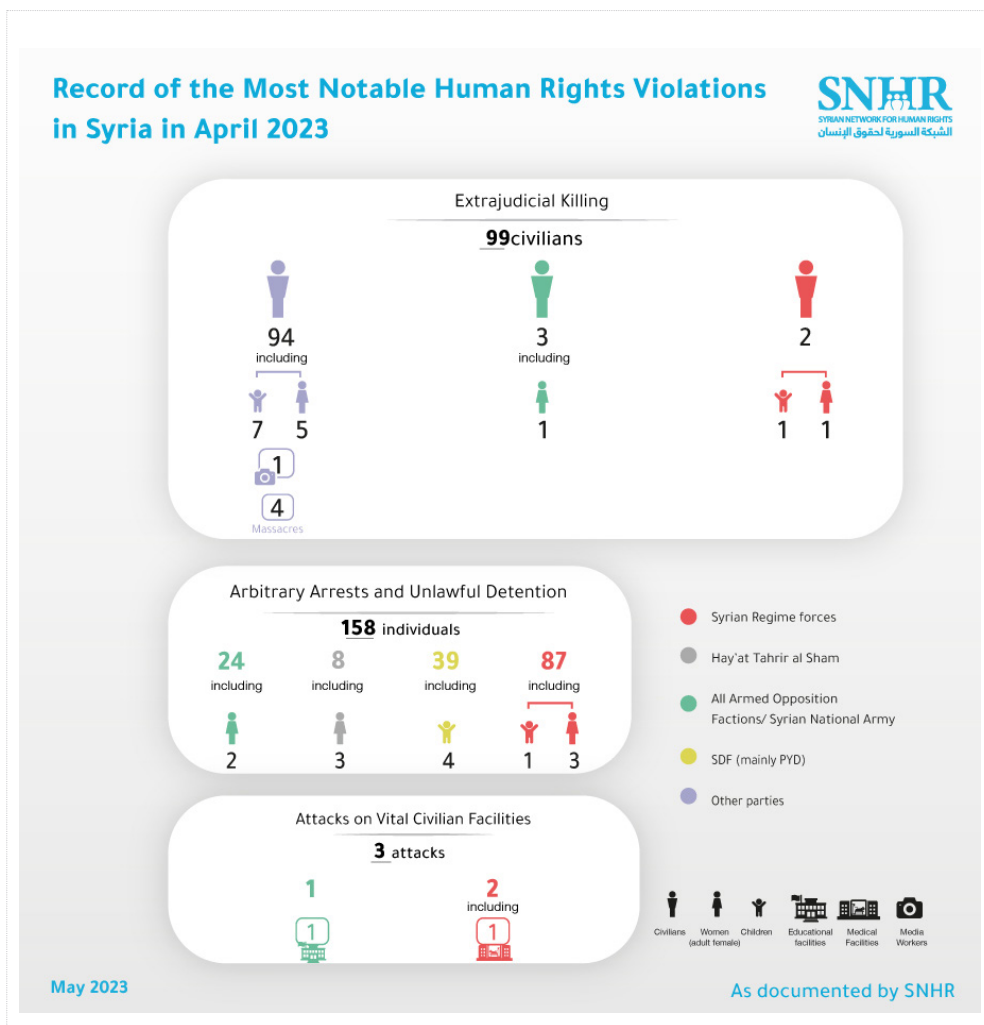
On April 20, SNHR, represented by its Executive Director Fadel Abdul Ghany, participated in an event entitled '[Detainees and Forcibly Disappeared Persons in Syria: Paths to Truth and Accountability](#)', which was organized by the Arab Center in Washington DC. The event discussed the scale of arbitrary arrests and enforced disappearances in Syria, and the procedures put in place to combat these phenomena, while also analyzing the international and legal mechanisms that deal with cases of disappearance and detention in Syria, and the related shortcomings and challenges. The event also proposed new mechanisms to combat this pressing crisis. We released [a statement](#) on this event on April 25.

On April 24, [the Council of the EU](#) revealed in an official statement that it had added 25 individuals and eight entities to its restrictive measures list in view of the situation in Syria. Those individuals and entities, the statement explained, had been added to the list over their responsibility for the production and trafficking of narcotics, notably captagon. The statement adds that those affected by the newly imposed sanctions include members of the family of Syrian regime head Bashar Assad, including his direct cousins, in addition to "leaders and members of regime-affiliated militias and businesspeople with close ties to the Assad family, as well as persons associated with the Syrian army and the Syrian military intelligence", along with private security firms which serve as shell companies for pro-regime militias.

On April 26, [SNHR](#) revealed in a statement that it had participated 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', as part of the UN World Data Forum 2023 event which took place in Hangzhou, China on April 24-27, 2023. The group, which was represented by its Executive Director Fadel Abdul Ghany, clarified that the 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."

III. Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in April

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 April.



A. Extrajudicial killing

In April, SNHR documented the death of 99 civilians, including eight children and seven women (adult female), most of whom were killed at the hands of other parties. We also documented the death of one media worker. Furthermore, we documented no fewer than four massacres in April. We issued a report on the first of May detailing the civilian victims documented killed at the hands of the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in Syria in the previous month.

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

A. Main parties:

- **Syrian regime forces (army, security, local militias, and Shiite foreign militias):**¹ two civilians: one child and one woman.
- **All armed opposition factions/SNA:** three civilians, including one

B. Other parties:

We documented the deaths of 94 civilians, including seven children and five women, at the hands of other parties, distributed as follows:

- **Landmines whose source we have been unable to identify:** 32 civilians, including three children and four women.
- **Gunfire whose source we have been unable to identify:** 37 civilians, including one child and one woman.
- **Bombings whose perpetrators we have been unable to identify:** five civilians, including three children..
- **Killings by parties we have been unable to identify:** 20 civilians.

B. Arbitrary arrest and enforced disappearance

In April 2023, SNHR documented at least 158 cases of arbitrary arrest, including five children and eight women (adult female), at the hands of the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in Syria in April. 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 May detailing the cases of arbitrary arrest and enforced disappearances which we documented in April at the hands of the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in Syria.

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

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.

- **Syrian regime forces:** 87 civilians, including one child and three women.
- **HTS²:** eight civilians, including three women.
- **All Armed Opposition factions/SNA:** 24 civilians, including two women.
- **SDF:** 39 civilians, including four children.

C. Attacks on vital civilian facilities

SNHR documented at least three attacks on vital civilian facilities during April 2023, two of which were perpetrated by Syrian regime forces.

One of the attacks targeted an educational facility, while the other targeted a medical facility.

Those attacks were distributed by the parties to the conflict and controlling forces in Syria as follows:

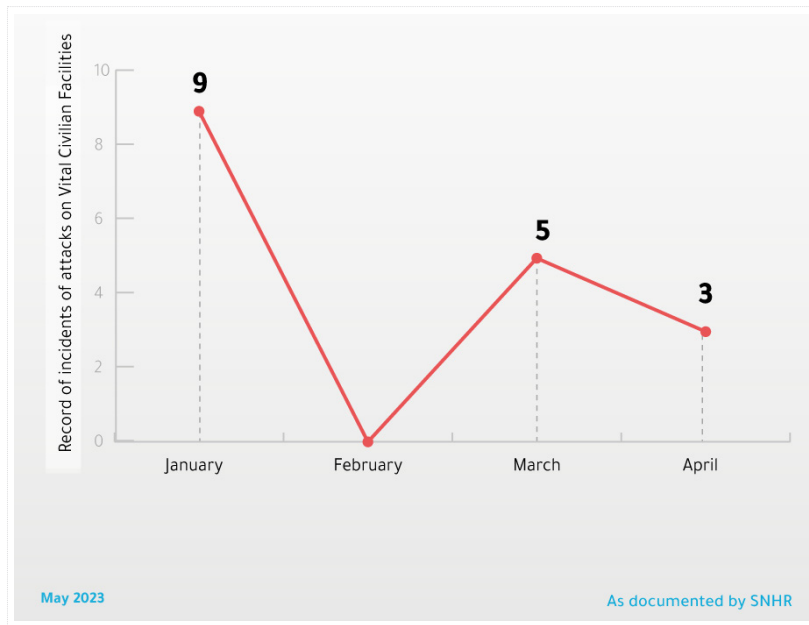
- Syrian regime forces: two attacks.
- All armed opposition factions/SNA: one attack.

The attacks on vital civilian facilities recorded in April were distributed by the parties to the conflict and controlling forces in Syria as follows:

Perpetrator Party	Syrian Regime Forces	All Armed Opposition Factions/SNA
Attacked Facility		
Vital Educational Facilities		
Schools		1
Vital Medical Facilities		
Medical Facilities	1	
IDPs Gatherings/IDPs Camps		
Irregular Camps	1	
Total	2	1

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: Those attacks are distributed by month as follows:

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



As shown on the graph, attacks on vital civilian facilities continued in April which accounted for approximately 18 percent of all attacks on vital civilian facilities in 2023 so far. According to SNHR's database, Syrian regime forces have been responsible for approximately 89 percent of all attacks on vital civilian facilities since the beginning of 2023.

Most notable attacks on vital civilian facilities documented in April:

On Sunday, April 9, 2023, Syrian regime artillery forces fired three shells at Sarmin city in the eastern suburbs of Idlib governorate. One of the shells landed near the medical dispensary in the center of the city, about 10 meters from the building, killing one child, and causing slight damage to the dispensary building. The city was under the joint control of armed opposition factions and HTS at the time of the attack.

On Thursday, April 13, 2023, armed military personnel affiliated with 'Fergat al-Hamza' (Al-Hamza Squad), an SNA faction, raided the Benyan Institution's Private School in the center of al-Bab city in the eastern suburbs of Aleppo governorate to arrest one of the students following a dispute between the student and one of the faction members that occurred before the child entered the school. The fighters waved their weapons in front of the students and teachers and opened fire indiscriminately inside the school, causing slight damage to the school's walls. The area was under the control of the SNA 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 April.

IV. Attachments

1. [99 Civilians, Including Eight Children, and Seven Women Documented Killed in Syria, in April 2023](#)
2. [At Least 158 Arbitrary Arrests/Detentions Documented in Syria in April 2023, Including Five Children and Eight Women](#)

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

Our most sincere gratitude to the victims' families and friends, and the eyewitnesses and local activists for their significant contribution to this report.



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