

Statement



The 10th Anniversary of Two Ghoutas Attack:

**The Largest Chemical Weapons Attack
by the Syrian Regime on Syrian Citizens**

**Although a Decade Has Passed Since the Largest
Chemical Weapon Attack in the Modern Age, the
Criminal Regime is Still Protected by its Impunity**

Sunday 20 August 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.

Monday, August 21, 2023, marks a decade since the Syrian regime carried out its infamous and abominable chemical attack on the Eastern and Western Ghoutas in Rural Damascus (Rif Dimshaq) on August 21, 2013. Even though an entire decade has passed since that terrible day, time has not eased the horrific memories of that monstrous and barbaric attack. Many of the survivors, especially those who were children at the time, are still suffering the agonizing results in pain and trauma, all of which are made even more horrendous and heartbreaking by the fact that, despite the passage of so many years, the Syrian regime's leadership and others involved have still not been held accountable for perpetrating such unimaginable evil.

What happened on August 21, 2013?

[On the night of Wednesday, August 21, 2013](#), the Syrian regime carried out four separate attacks using chemical weapons against densely populated areas in the Eastern Ghouta and the Western Ghouta (Muxadamiyet Al Sham town) in Rural Damascus. In these coordinated attacks, the Syrian regime used 10 rockets loaded with poison gases, with each rocket having an estimated capacity of 20 liters, making a total of 200 liters. The rockets, all loaded with large quantities of internationally outlawed Sarin gas, were fired using a rocket launcher after midnight as the civilian targets slept. Both of these factors signal that the Syrian regime had a premeditated and deliberate objective of killing as many residents as possible, with the calculated aim of silently, fatally gassing them in their sleep, thereby minimizing any chance of survival. Additionally, the weather in the region had been forecast to be relatively cool and calm between 02:00 and 05:00 that night, meaning those responsible knew that the air would be still and the heavy poison gas would naturally drift downwards rather than blowing away and would remain close to the ground, further increasing its lethality and providing an opportunity for the regime to kill and injure as many victims as possible. All of these factors lead us at the Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) to believe that the Syrian regime had conceived a deliberate and meticulously orchestrated plan before that night to exterminate as many of the Syrian people as possible in one coordinated attack, and that the only 'crime' committed by those targeted was to have called for freedom and for an end to the regime's despotic hereditary rule, and to have dared to reject its iron-fisted control and to disobey the orders of its security apparatus.

It is also important to remember that the area of the two Ghoutas was at that time under a crippling siege that had been imposed by the Syrian regime since the end of the 2012, which blocked the entry of fuel and medical supplies. The resulting severe shortages of medicine and medical equipment also contributed to the massive casualty numbers from the chemical weapons attack.

SNHR documented the killing of **1,144** individuals in that night's attack, all of whom were asphyxiated by the chemical weapons used. The victims, whose names and personal details we have recorded, are divided into:



1119

Civilians

including 99 children and 194 women (adult female).

25

Armed opposition fighters.

We also documented that

5935

Survivors

of these unspeakable attacks, suffered severe respiratory problems and suffocation.

The death toll from the Two Ghoutas attack accounts for 76 percent of all the victims killed in the chemical weapons attacks carried out by the Syrian regime between December 2012 and the last documented chemical weapons attack on SNHR's database, which took place in May 2019 in al-Kbeina in rural Latakia.

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

SNHR has worked extensively on the chemical weapons attacks dossier, releasing approximately 48 reports on this subject to date. [SNHR has also signed a Principles of Cooperation Agreement with the Investigation and Identification Team \(IIT\) of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons \(OPCW\)](#), and has been cited as a reference in all of the IIT's reports on Syria.

As SNHR's database attests, a total of 222 chemical attacks have been documented in Syria since the first documented use of chemical weapons on December 23, 2012, up until August 20, 2023. Approximately 98 percent of all these attacks have been carried out by Syrian regime forces, while approximately two percent were by ISIS. These attacks and their resultant death toll are distributed by the perpetrator party as follows:

A. The Syrian regime carried out **217** chemical attacks across Syria between the first documented use of chemical weapons in Syria on December 23, 2012, and August 20, in which a total of **1,514** individuals were killed. The death toll of the chemical attacks carried out by Syrian regime forces are divided into:

- 1,413 civilians, including 214 children and 262 women (adult female).
- 94 armed opposition fighters.
- Seven Syrian regime troops who were being held in armed opposition prisons.



B. ISIS carried out **five** chemical attacks between April 9, 2013, when the group first emerged in Syria, and August 20, 2023, all of which took place in Aleppo governorate. A total of 132 individuals were injured in the chemical attacks carried out by ISIS.



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 UN Security Council resolution as follows:

- Before Security Council Resolution 2118, issued on September 27, 2013: 33 attacks.
- Since Security Council Resolution 2118, issued on September 27, 2013: 184 attacks.
- Since Security Council Resolution 2209, issued on March 6, 2015: 115 attacks.
- Since the establishment of the OPCW-UN Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM) and Security Council Resolution 2235, issued on August 7, 2015: 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, while the Syrian regime has a highly centralized operational structure. 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, executive 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, who are high-ranking military officers, security officials, and civilian and military personnel, 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 most notable individuals involved in the Syrian regime's use of chemical weapon in [two previous reports](#), which we hope will be precursors for exposing these individuals' crimes more widely and ensuring they're added to international sanction lists.

As confirmed by our database and in light of the findings of the three exhaustive reports released by the OPCW's IIT ([the first of which was released on April 8, 2020, the second on April 12, 2021, and the third and most recent on January 27, 2023](#)), it can be conclusively stated that the Syrian regime is responsible for five chemical weapons attacks. These findings are also supported by the reports on the 'Progress in the Elimination of the Syrian Chemical Weapons Programme' by the OPCW's Executive Council, [the most recent of which, released on July 20, 2023](#), stated that "Considering the identified gaps, inconsistencies, and discrepancies that remain unresolved, the Secretariat assesses that the declaration submitted by the Syrian Arab Republic still cannot be considered accurate and complete." SNHR can state with absolute certainty that the Syrian regime has not disclosed its full chemical stockpile, nor has it disclosed all the facilities used to produce or store chemical weapons, while it's possible that it has planned or built new facilities since destroying those which it disclosed when joining the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) in September 2013. Therefore, we remain gravely concerned that the Syrian regime may again use chemical weapons against the Syrian people in the future.

Finally, on the 10th anniversary of the Syrian regime's chemical attack on the Two Ghoutas of Damascus, SNHR calls on the UN Security Council and the UN to impose economic, political, and military sanctions on the Syrian regime under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations, which would serve as a symbolic compensation for the families of the victims. SNHR also calls on the UN Security Council and the UN to prosecute the individuals whose names and details we published, and investigate the extent of their involvement in the use of chemical weapons and add them to the lists of sanctioned figures and terror sponsors.

We also reiterate that the Syrian case must be referred to the International Criminal Court (ICC), and that all those involved must be held accountable. An alternative option would be to establish a special tribunal to try those involved in war crimes and crimes against humanity against the Syrian people, to help put an end to the shameful impunity that has now been going on for over a decade.



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