



**SNHR**

SYRIAN NETWORK FOR HUMAN RIGHTS  
الشبكة السورية لحقوق الإنسان

## On the International Day in Support of Victims of Torture

SNHR Has Documented the Death of

**15,383** Syrians Under Torture

Since March 2011

with **157,287** Still Detained  
and/or Forcibly Disappeared

**Wednesday 26 June 2024**

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. Over 13 Years of Ongoing Torture in Detention Centers in Syria

On June 26 each year, [the Syrian Network for Human Rights \(SNHR\) releases its extensive annual report on torture in Syria](#) to mark the International Day in Support of Victims of Torture which falls on this date. In these annual reports, our objective is to shed light on the brutal torture practices inflicted in Syria, primarily by the Syrian regime, which have only grown worse since 2011, achieving the threshold of becoming what might at this point be called a customary phenomenon. That is to say that torture is practiced in a systematic, methodical and centrally coordinated manner at the various detention centers scattered across the country, whether these facilities are security, military, or civilian in nature. We also aim to give readers some idea of the massive loss and devastation that have befallen the survivors who are still grappling with the traumatic effects of torture to this day.

Since the popular uprising began in March 2011, SNHR has worked on documenting violations related to unlawful detention and arbitrary arrests, including torture, enforced disappearance, and unjust exceptional trials. These interconnected violations have been taking place in detention centers across the country for over 13 years, with no signs of slowing down. As a natural result, the number of deaths due to torture and medical negligence have increased at escalating rates throughout this period.

Arbitrary arrests and deaths due to torture are still taking place right now in the numerous detention centers in Syria, primarily in those operated by Syrian regime forces. In this, regime forces have used torture as a means of retaliation, as well as to extract confessions, consolidate control and power, and eliminate opponents, all as part of a broader, centralized, and regime-wide policy. That is to say that regime security personnel, from the most junior to most senior officers at the vast majority of regime detention centers have been implicated in the use of torture. Meanwhile, other parties to the conflict have also adopted a wide range of those practices. We documented those practices in [our monthly reports](#) on arrest and torture in Syria, as well as in other statement we have released.

It should be noted that all detainees have been subjected to one or multiple form(s) of torture for years. There is no time limit or other limit placed on the torture inflicted on detainees, beginning from the very first moment after the victim's arrest, which itself is carried out without any parameters that can even remotely be described as 'legal'. What follows is open-ended torture, [using as many as 72 methods](#) of physical, psychological, and sexual torture that have all been used in a deliberate and widespread manner in the various detention centers. Moreover, torture is inflicted on all categories of detainees, including women, children, invalids, the elderly, and individuals with special needs.

Arguably the most terrible aspect of the sheer large number of deaths due to torture, which will be summarized in this report through use of several charts, is the fact that it has persisted without any accountability for any of the perpetrators even the lowest-ranking ones. This impunity has only led to rising numbers of deaths due to torture over the past 13 years, emboldening the perpetrators to increase and even flaunt the level and scope of violence in detention centers. On another level, this impunity has generated a morbid and pervasive sense of hopelessness among the Syrian people about any form of justice or accountability for the primary perpetrators while they remain in power, or in the ability to put an end to their violations against Syrians.

As Fadel Abdulghany, SNHR Executive Director, says:

**“The Syrian regime has failed to uphold even one of the UN Security Council resolutions on the issue of detainees since 2012, and continues to carry out arbitrary arrests, enforced disappearance, torture, and killings under torture. The Syrian regime has shown an utter disregard for the ICJ order. In light of these facts, the UN Security Council must act swiftly and decisively to end the ongoing loss of lives due to torture in regime prisons, which is happening at rates that are the worst worldwide. Allowing the Syrian regime's barbaric torture practices to continue unopposed is the most effective tool for extremist groups to recruit more people into their ranks.”**

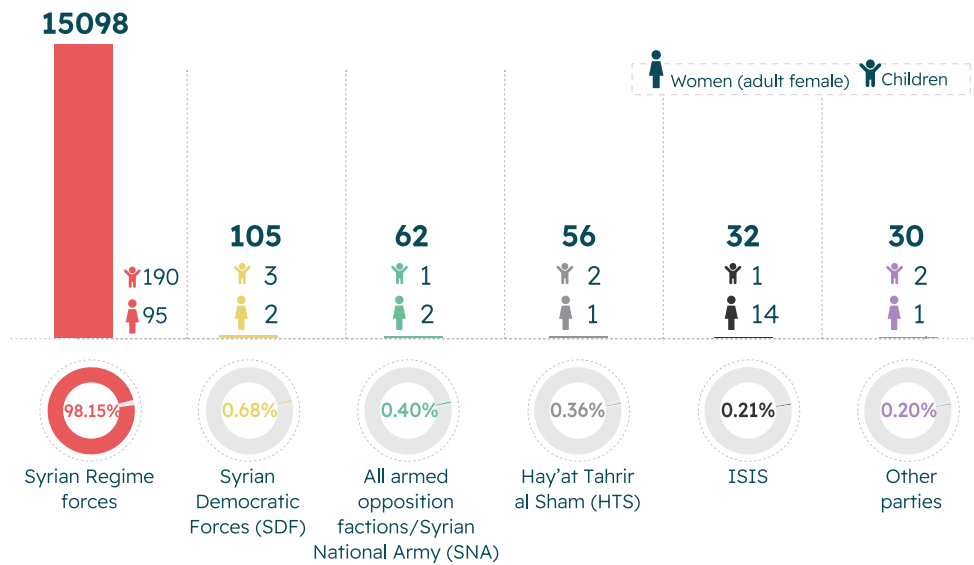
## II. Deaths due to Torture Since March 2011 and Their Distribution as Documented on SNHR's Database

As SNHR's database attests, no fewer than **157,287** of the people arrested between March 2011 and June 2024, including 5,264 children and 10,221 women, are still imprisoned and/or forcibly disappeared in the various detention centers operated by the parties to the conflict and controlling forces in Syria. Of this total, at least **112,713**, including 1,305 children and 6,698 women, of those arrested between March 2011 and June 2024, are categorized as forcibly disappeared persons. The Syrian regime is responsible for about 86 percent of the total number of enforced disappearance cases, with SNHR's database confirming that the overwhelming majority of these detainees are political prisoners who have been arrested in connection with the popular uprising, while the remaining 14 percent have been arbitrarily arrested for various motives in the context of the conflict.

As SNHR's database also shows, we have documented at least **15,383 deaths** due to torture at the hands of the parties to the conflict and controlling forces in Syria since March 2011 up until June 2024, with the victims including 199 children and 115 women (adult female), These are distributed as follows:

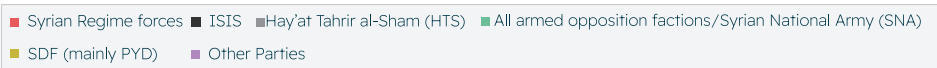
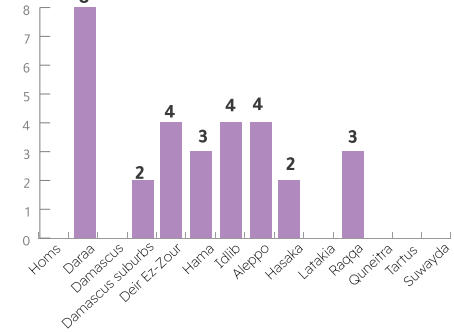
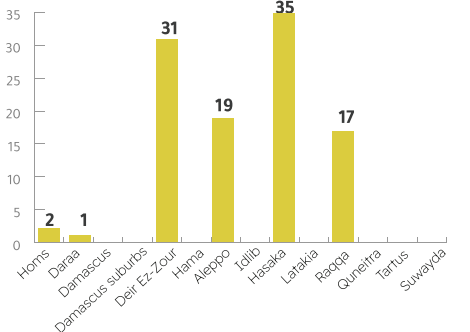
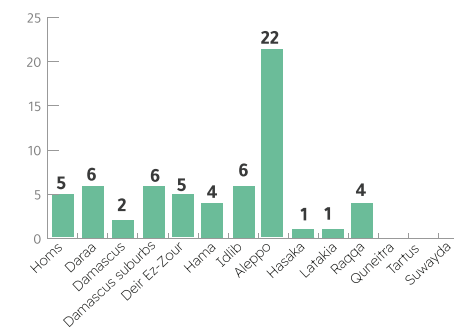
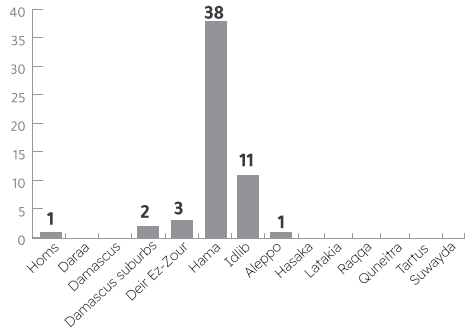
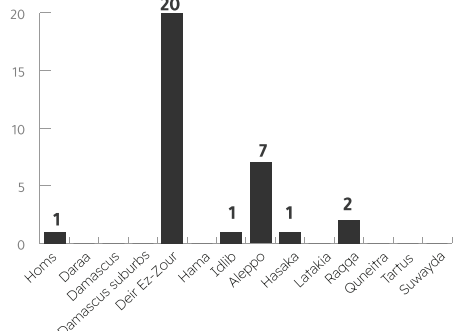
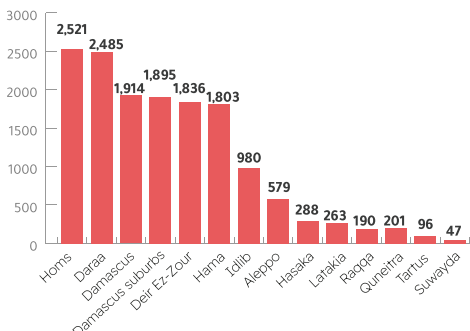
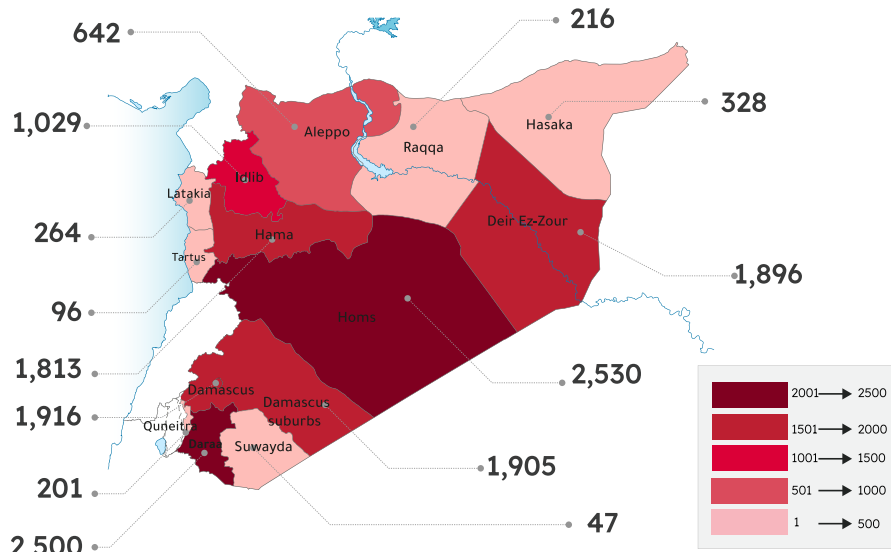
- **Syrian regime forces:** 15,098 individuals, including 190 children and 95 women.
- **ISIS:** 32 individuals, including one child and 14 women.
- **Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS):** 56 individuals, including two children and one woman.
- **Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF):** 105 individuals, including three children and two women.
- **All armed opposition factions/Syrian National Army (SNA):** 62 individuals, including one child and two women.
- **Other parties:** 30 individuals, including two children and one woman.

Distribution of deaths due to torture that have been recorded since March 2011 up until June 2024 according to the parties to the conflict and controlling forces in Syria:



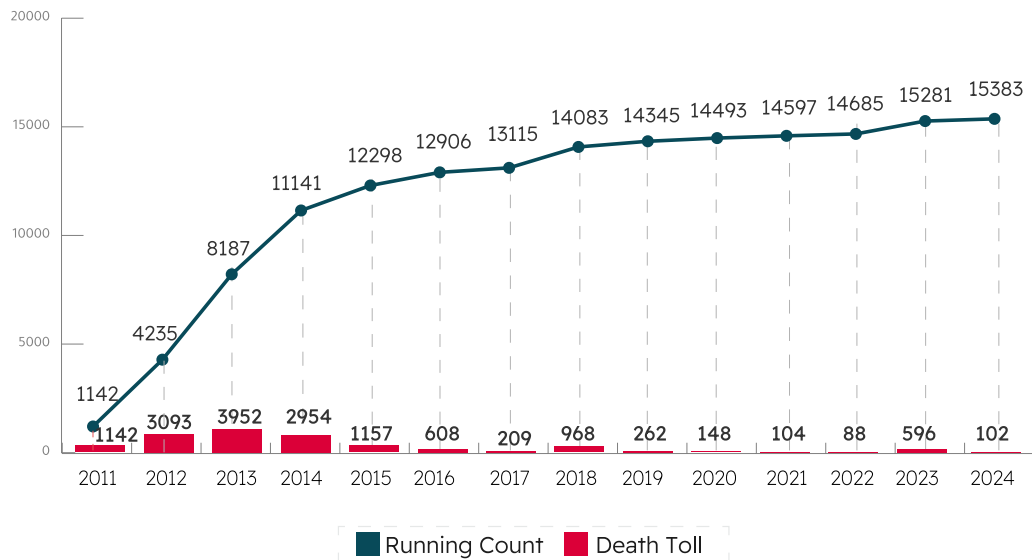
As the graph shows, the Syrian regime is responsible for the arrest of the largest proportion of detained Syrian citizens, with all detainees in regime detention tortures being subjected to one or more forms of torture. Correspondingly, the Syrian regime has been responsible for by far the largest number of deaths due to torture. As the second graph shows, the Syrian regime has been responsible for at least 98 percent of all deaths due to torture recorded. This staggeringly high number suggests that torture is a systematic, recurring, and widespread practice in regime detention centers which is used against tens of thousands of detainees. As such, it amounts to a crime against humanity.

The map below shows the distribution of deaths due to torture according to the victims' governorate of origin



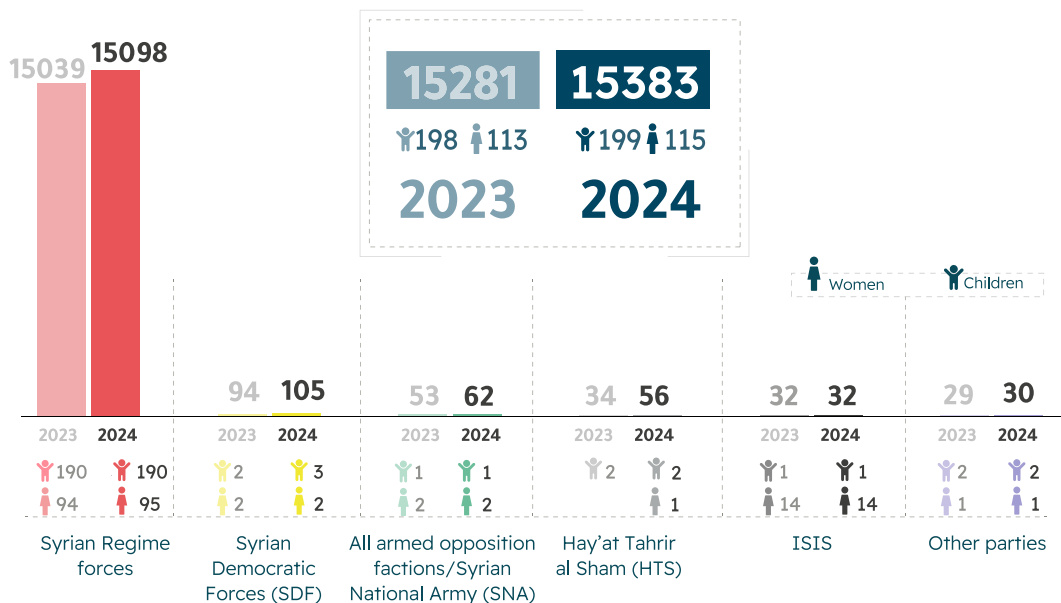
As the map shows, Homs and Daraa governorate are ranked first and second respectively as the two governorates from which the largest number of victims of death due to torture originally came. We have documented that the Syrian regime has directed torture against specific victims over their affiliation with anti-regime individuals or groups as a form of collective retaliation.

Distribution of deaths due to torture by year since March 2011



As the chart shows, the year 2013 saw the largest number of deaths due to torture in one year, followed by 2012, and then 2014.

Comparison between the deaths due to torture at the hands of the parties to the conflict and controlling forces in Syria documented up until last year’s report, released in June 2023, and those documented up until this year’s report, released in June 2024

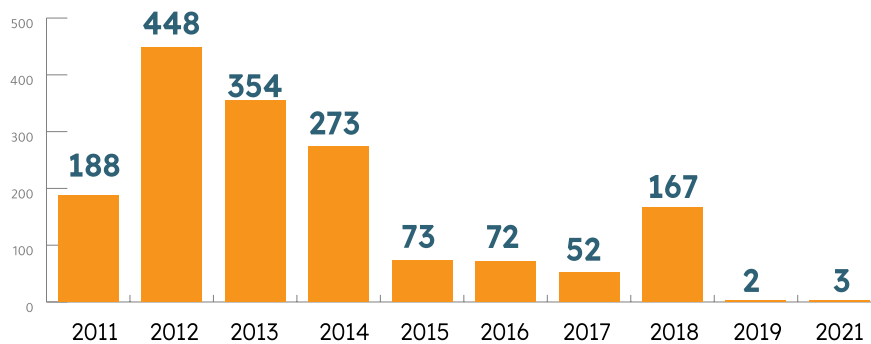




As the chart shows, the number of deaths due to torture has increased over the last year, mainly in regime detention centers, with regime forces continuing their practices of torture and of registering forcibly disappeared persons as dead in the civil registry records, which has been reflected in the increase seen in the number of deaths due to torture documented.

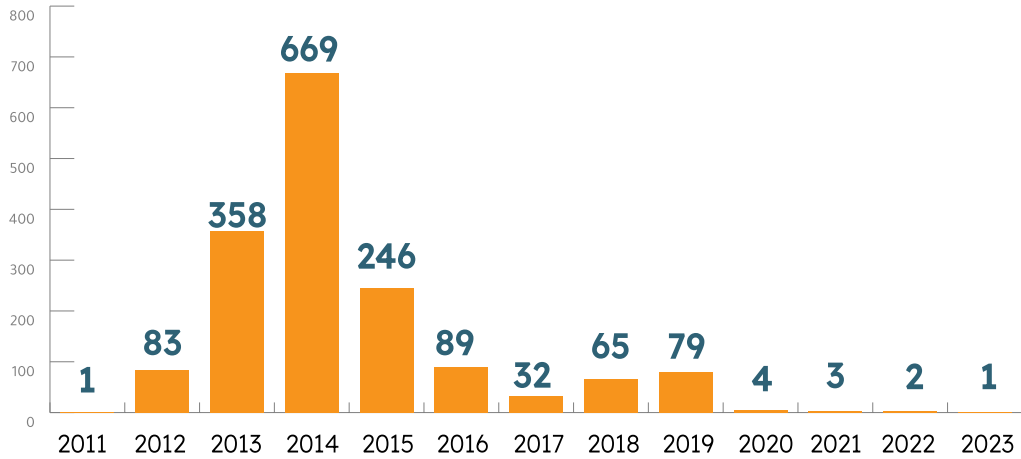
In addition to the death certificates we have obtained, SNHR has documented that no fewer than **1,632** of the people forcibly disappeared by the regime; including 24 children and 21 women as well as 16 medical personnel, [have been registered as dead in the civil registry records](#) since the start of 2018 up until June 2024. In all these cases, the causes of the victims' death have not been disclosed, their bodies have not been returned to their families, and the deaths were not announced at the times they took place. Included among this number are four of the people who had been identified from the 'Caesar' photos leaked from regime military hospitals.

Distribution of the forcibly disappeared persons registered as dead in the civil registry's records according to the year in which they were arrested by Syrian regime forces



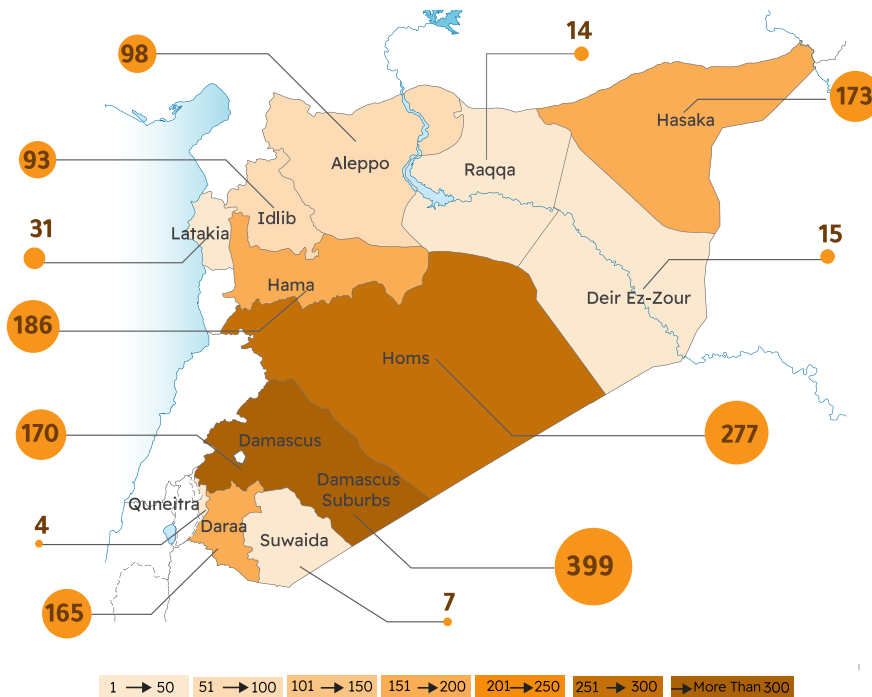
As the chart shows, the largest proportion of the 1,632 victims recorded were arrested by regime forces in 2012, followed by 2013, then 2014. This corresponds with the fact that those years saw the largest waves of enforced disappearances in regime detention centers.

Distribution of the forcibly disappeared persons who have been registered as dead in the civil registry's records, according to the year of death recorded on their death certificate by Syrian regime forces



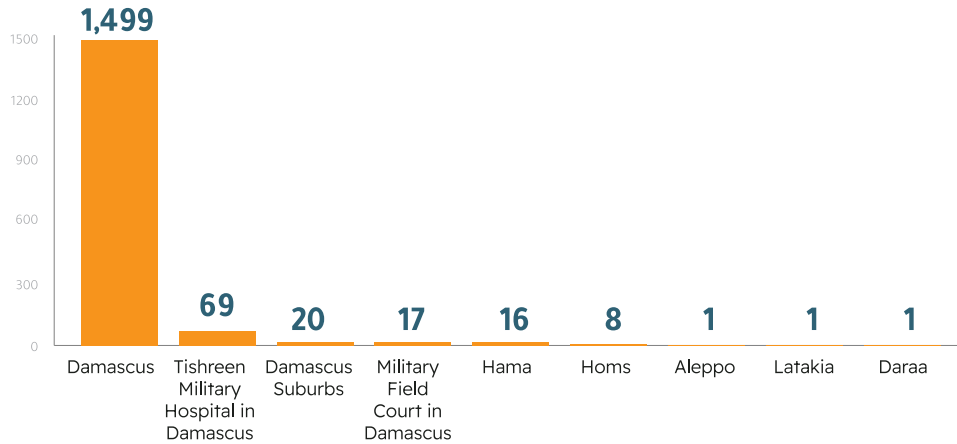
As the chart shows, the largest proportion of the 1,632 victims documented were listed as having died in 2014 according to the death certificates issued by the civil registry offices. The year 2014 was followed by 2013, and then 2015.

Distribution of the forcibly disappeared persons who have been registered as dead in the civil registry's records, according to the victims' governorate of origin



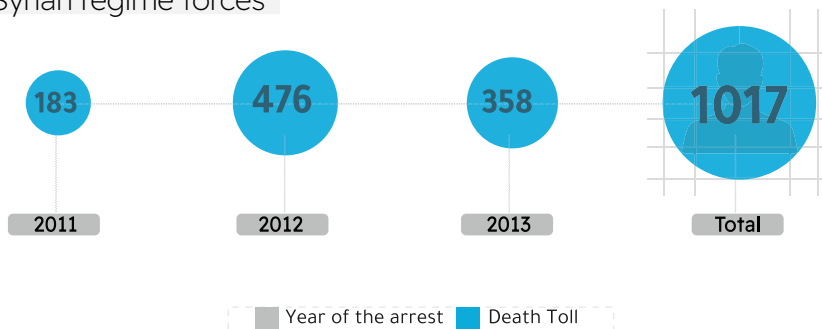
As the map shows, of the 1,632 victims recorded, the largest proportion was from Rural Damascus governorate, followed by Homs, then Hama, and then Hasaka.

Distribution of the forcibly disappeared persons registered as dead in the civil registry's records, according to the place of death recorded on their death certificate by Syrian regime forces



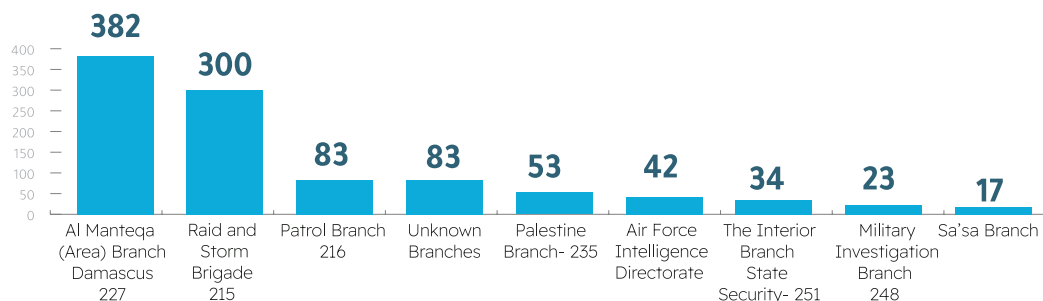
Furthermore, since early-2015, we have identified, to date, 1,017 of about 6,786 victims who appeared in the photos leaked from regime military hospitals, known as 'Caesar Photos'. When cross-checking the 1,017 victims without existing records among the deaths due to torture, we discovered that the deaths of 836 of the victims have already been documented, while the remaining 181 cases have not been previously documented.

Distribution of the victims who died due to torture and were identified by SNHR in the photos leaked from regime military hospitals according to the year in which they were arrested by Syrian regime forces



As the chart shows, the highest proportion of the victims identified in the photos leaked from regime military hospitals were arrested in 2012, followed by 2013, and then 2014. Correspondingly, as SNHR's database confirms, those years saw the largest waves of enforced disappearances in regime detention centers.

Distribution of the victims who died due to torture and were identified by SNHR in the photos leaked from regime military hospitals, according to the security branch where they were killed



As the chart shows, the majority of the victims identified from the photos leaked from regime military hospitals were killed in Branch 227, known as al-Manteqa branch, followed by Branch 215, known as the Raid and Storm Brigade. This corresponds with the details on SNHR's database which shows that these two branches are among the main regime branches where detainees and forcibly disappeared persons are known to have died.

### III. The Syrian Regime Continues to Violate the ICJ Order, Failing to Take any Measures to Stop Torture in Its Detention Centers

Since the [Hague-based International Court of Justice \(ICJ\) issued its order](#) on November 16, 2023, regarding the indication of provisional measures in the case brought by Canada and the Netherlands against the Syrian regime, entitled the Application of the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, also known as Canada and the Netherlands v. Syrian Arab Republic, SNHR has been conducting detailed daily monitoring of the international human rights violations taking place in regime detention centers, as well as any arrests/detentions carried out by regime forces. In addition, we have been closely following the domestic articles of legislation that have been promulgated, repealed, or amended, and any changes to the regime's security structure, i.e., the bodies primarily responsible for and implicated in committing violations against civilians in Syria. Drawing upon this work, we have released periodic reports to assess the Syrian regime's compliance with the ICJ order, while analyzing the data and results we've found which suggest non-compliance.



## Toll of violations related to regime detention centers since November 16, 2023, up until May 16, 2024

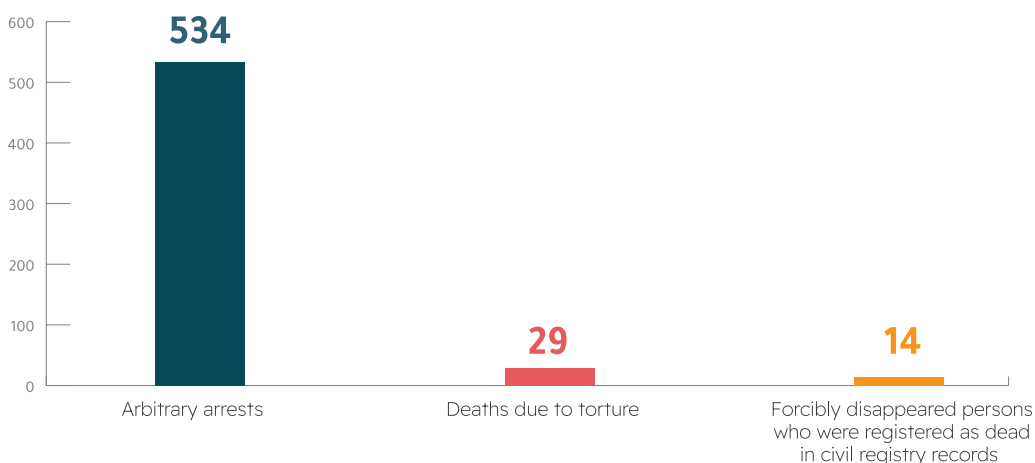
Since the ICJ issued its order on November 16, 2023, up until May 16, 2024, SNHR has documented the following:

**First:** 534 arbitrary arrests, including of eight children and 21 women. Of these detainees who were arrested and placed in various regime detention centers, 63 were released, while the remaining 471 have been subsequently categorized as forcibly disappeared persons.

**Second:** 29 deaths due to torture in regime detention centers. Only one victim's body was returned to their family, while all the other victims' bodies have yet to be returned.

**Third:** 14 persons forcibly disappeared have been registered as dead in the civil registry records. Among these cases were victims from the same families, political activists, and university students. In all the cases, the cause of death was not given, and the Syrian regime has not returned the victims' bodies to their families or notified the families of their loved ones' deaths at the time they took place.

Violations related to regime detention centers since the ICJ order was issued on November 16, 2023, up until May 16, 2024



## IV. Conclusions and Recommendations

### Conclusions

- Torture has left profound and lasting scars on the victims and their communities. Those scars go beyond the excessive physical and psychological damage inflicted, and extend to the social, and even the economic and legal, effects. Torture, after all, is not only a crime against an individual, but against the whole of humanity.
- Despite the fact that torture and other forms of cruel and inhumane, or degrading treatment are completely prohibited internationally, insofar as this prohibition is now treated as a customary rule that is binding to all parties to the conflict, this report shows that all controlling forces in Syria, especially the Syrian regime, have used torture against their opponents, and that those practices continue to this day. We do not believe that these practices will come to an end soon, or for as long as the same status quo persists in the country.
- The data collected by SNHR confirms that the Syrian regime is still committing acts of torture of every variety, beginning with arbitrary arrest, which is, in and of itself, a form of torture since it is carried out in a manner more akin to an abduction than a legitimate arrest with no judicial warrant being presented. The process of arrest itself also involves the use of excessive violence and beatings of various types and degrees, which usually begin from the very first moment of the arrest, and continue throughout the detention period, which also includes subjecting detainees to cruel and inhumane detention conditions, as well as [referring them to exceptional security courts](#), where trials are conducted in a way that is closer to an interrogation at a security facility than a legitimate courtroom trial.
- As proven by our database on cases of arbitrary arrest, torture, and enforced disappearance at the hands of regime forces, no indication can be seen of any willingness on the regime's part to cease torture, or even to undertake the most minimal and basic of measures mentioned above in response to the ICJ's ruling. Furthermore, at least 136,192 people are still arbitrarily detained and/or forcibly disappeared by the regime, and enduring torture in regime detention centers. Despite being responsible for such unimaginably terrible suffering, the Syrian regime has not launched even one investigation into the disappearance or torture of detainees by its personnel. On the contrary, the regime has enacted 'laws' shielding its personnel from accountability.

## Recommendations

SNHR calls on the international community and the state parties to the UN Convention Against Torture to take the necessary action to establish its jurisdiction over perpetrators of torture, and to enact significant and serious punitive measures against the Syrian regime, in order to deter it from killing more Syrian civilians under torture. Pressure must also be applied on other parties to the conflict, through every avenue possible, to put a definitive end to the use of torture. The state parties to the Geneva Conventions must do far more to fight crimes against humanity and war crimes. Moreover, states that have the ability to invoke universal jurisdiction must make a far greater effort to launch cases against violation perpetrators on Syria on a wider scale. As eight months have passed since the issuance of the ICJ order, we call on the Court to issue a statement assessing the regime's commitment - or lack of commitment - to the provisional measures indicated by the ICJ. We also call on the parties to the conflict to immediately stop using all and any forms of torture, as well as ending the use of torture to extract confessions, and to adhere to the principles of international human rights law. The parties to the conflict must launch investigations into all incidents of torture and death due to torture, and compensate torture survivors, and victims' families, while also ensuring the immediate and unconditional release of all arbitrarily arrested detainees, especially children and women, and revealing the fate of tens of thousands of forcibly disappeared persons.

### International Court of Justice (ICJ)

- This case is a genuine test of the credibility and power of the ICJ. As such, the ICJ must take immediate and effective measures to address these violations and ensure the realization of justice and accountability. All possible measure must be taken against the Syrian regime, including the UN Security Council issuing a binding resolution calling for ending all forms of systematic torture, all of which constitute crimes against humanity, and unequivocally condemning the Syrian regime's breach of the ICJ's order.
- The ICJ must issue a statement assessing the Syrian regime's commitment to the provisional measures indicated by the Court, as eight months have now passed since the order was issued.
- Take far more decisive action against the Syrian regime in light of the abundance of evidence of the regime's lack of commitment to complying with the previous provisional measures.

### International community

- All ICJ members, namely every state in the world, must cut all and any forms of political and military association with the Syrian regime over its blatant breach of the ICJ's order.
- Take additional action against the Syrian regime, and intensify sanctions, in order to ensure compensation for victims and the protection of human rights in Syria.
- More work must be done to ensure the implementation of UN Security Council resolution 2042, adopted on April 14, 2012; UN Security Council resolution 2043, adopted on April 21, 2012; and UN Security Council resolution 2139, adopted on February 22, 2014, which provides for putting an end to enforced disappearance.

- Take action under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations to rescue detainees from impending death in detention centers, and put an end to the nationwide epidemic of enforced disappearance practices, which threatens the foundations of societal security and stability, put an end to torture and deaths due to torture in regime detention centers, and save the remaining detainees as soon as possible.

### **Syrian regime**

- Comply with the ICJ's order and hand over those accused so they can be fairly tried.
- Arbitrary arrests and enforced disappearances, which are still going on as this report shows, must be immediately halted. The fate of all detainees and forcibly disappeared persons must be revealed, and their families must be allowed to visit them immediately, while the bodies of those killed due to torture must be returned to their families.
- Unconditionally release all detainees who have been detained for simply exercising their political and civil rights, and release all women, children, persons with special needs, invalids, and elderly people, as well as ceasing the use of detainees as prisoners of war.
- Stop manipulating the records of forcibly disappeared persons in the civil registry and end the use of state resources in the service of security policies.

### **Other parties to the conflict (SDF, armed opposition factions, and HTS)**

- Abide by the principles of international human rights law, stop using torture against political or military opponents, and launch investigation into such crimes in order to hold their perpetrators accountable.
- Stop extracting confessions under torture, and repeal all sentences and decisions made on the basis of such confessions.
- Grant the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and other human rights groups access to detention centers, with no preconditions.
- Disclose the names of all detainees, publish lists of their names, make the locations of secret detention centers known to the public, and allow families and human rights groups to visit these detention centers.

## **Acknowledgment & Solidarity**

SNHR wishes to thank all victims, their families, eyewitnesses, and local activists for their invaluable contributions to this report. We stand in solidarity with the detainee victims, survivors, forcibly disappeared persons, and their families.





SYRIAN NETWORK  
FOR HUMAN RIGHTS



[info@snhr.org](mailto:info@snhr.org)  
[www.snhr.org](http://www.snhr.org)

*No justice without accountability*

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