

Statement

**On the International Day of Innocent
Children Victims of Aggression:**

30,228 children
Have Been Documented Killed in Syria Since
March 2011, including 199 who died due to
torture, while at least 5,263 children are still under
arrest and/or forcibly disappeared



Tuesday 4 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.

The Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) today released a detailed annual statement outlining the numerous serious violations that were committed in a widespread and direct manner against children in Syria since March 2011. This statement, released to mark the International Day of Innocent Children Victims of Aggression¹ which is observed annually on June 4, is intended to give a sense of the magnitude of child victims in Syria, their terrible suffering amid the ongoing conflict, and the continued aggression against children's rights for over 13 years.

Children in Syria have faced repeated and wide-ranging violations, including extrajudicial killing, abduction, arbitrary arrest, enforced disappearance and torture, including sexual violence, recruitment, siege and starvation, targeting of facilities that provide basic services such as education and healthcare, denial or obstruction of the delivery of humanitarian assistance, and the risk of child labor in its worst forms. This interconnected, ongoing, vicious, and threatening series of violations against children has led to ramifications that will only grow more difficult to rectify as time passes for as long as the abysmal status quo in terms of the terrible crises afflicting security, human rights, the economy and society, continues.

As SNHR's database attests, the Syrian regime bears by far the greatest responsibility in terms of the number and comprehensiveness of the crimes perpetrated in a manner which exhibits a clear pattern and demonstrates the deliberate and systematic character of the regime's violations of children's rights, particularly the inherent right to life, prohibition of torture, and deprivation of liberty, which amount to crimes against humanity.

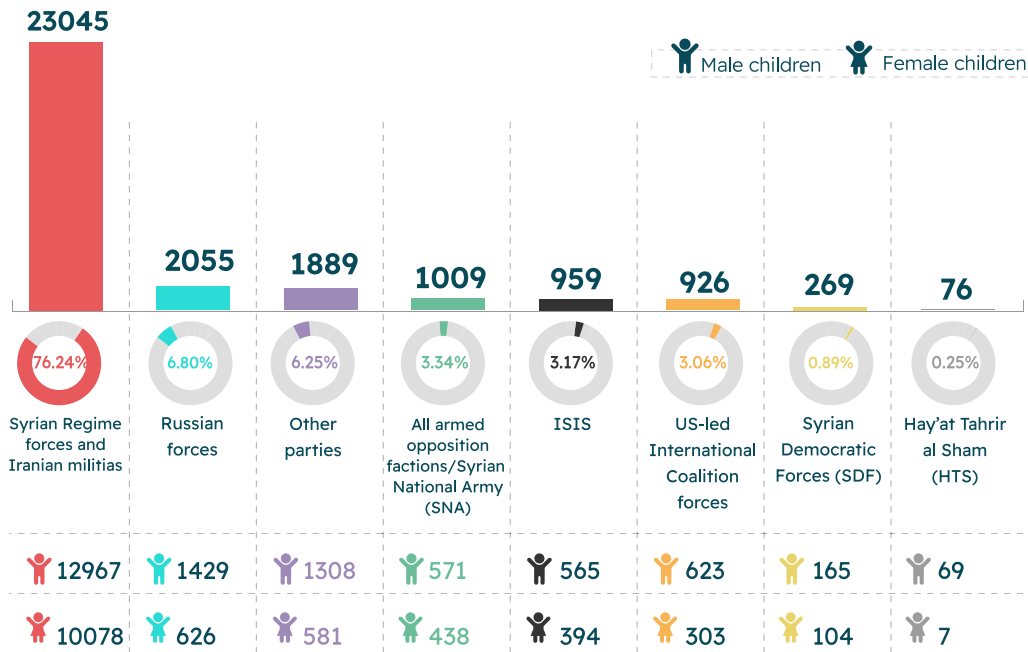
In fact, as SNHR has documented, children have been among those subject to almost every atrocity perpetrated against the Syrian people. Most of these violations have had a terribly destructive impact on children, depriving them of their most fundamental rights, while creating an unsuitable, life-threatening, and hostile environment in which to grow up. Needless to say, such circumstances are absolutely irreconcilable with instilling any sense of human dignity or meeting children's needs. Furthermore, those effects have been consistently compounded by the massive scale of the aggression directed against children for over 13 years. In this statement, we provide an update of the toll of most notable serious violations perpetrated against children in Syria between March 2011 and June 2024 as documented on SNHR's database (specifically crimes committed as part of the armed conflict or which constitute a violation of international human rights law).

1. Declared by the UN General Assembly in accordance with resolution ES-7/8, adopted on August 19, 1982.

First: Extrajudicial Killing

Naturally, killing children is the primary and most dangerous violation taking place in Syria, as the growing number of child deaths in Syria attests. SNHR has documented the killing of **30,228 children** at the hands of the parties to the conflict and controlling forces in Syria since March 2011 up until June 2024. These are distributed as follows:

- **Syrian regime forces** (army, security, local militias, and Shiite foreign militias)²: 23,045 children, divided into 12,967 males and 10,078 females.
- **Russian forces**: 2,055 children, divided into 1,429 males and 626 females.
- **ISIS** (self-proclaimed the Islamic State): 959 children, divided into 565 males and 394 females.
- **Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham/HTS³** (an alliance composed of Fateh al-Sham Front and a number of armed opposition factions): 76 children, divided into 69 males and seven females.
- **Kurdish-Led Syrian Democratic Forces/SDF** (Democratic Union Party/PYD): 269 children, divided into 165 males and 104 females.
- **All armed opposition factions/Syrian National Army (SNA)⁴**: 1,009 children, divided into 571 males and 438 females.



2. 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. As a result, 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 autocratic/family rule, with no independent decision-making structure. Rather, the government is an empty façade that exists 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 president assisted by the heads of the security branches.

While we are aware that the United Nations and its agencies use the term 'the Syrian government', we believe that this is a completely inaccurate and misleading term in the Syrian context.

3. Designated as a terrorist group by the UN.

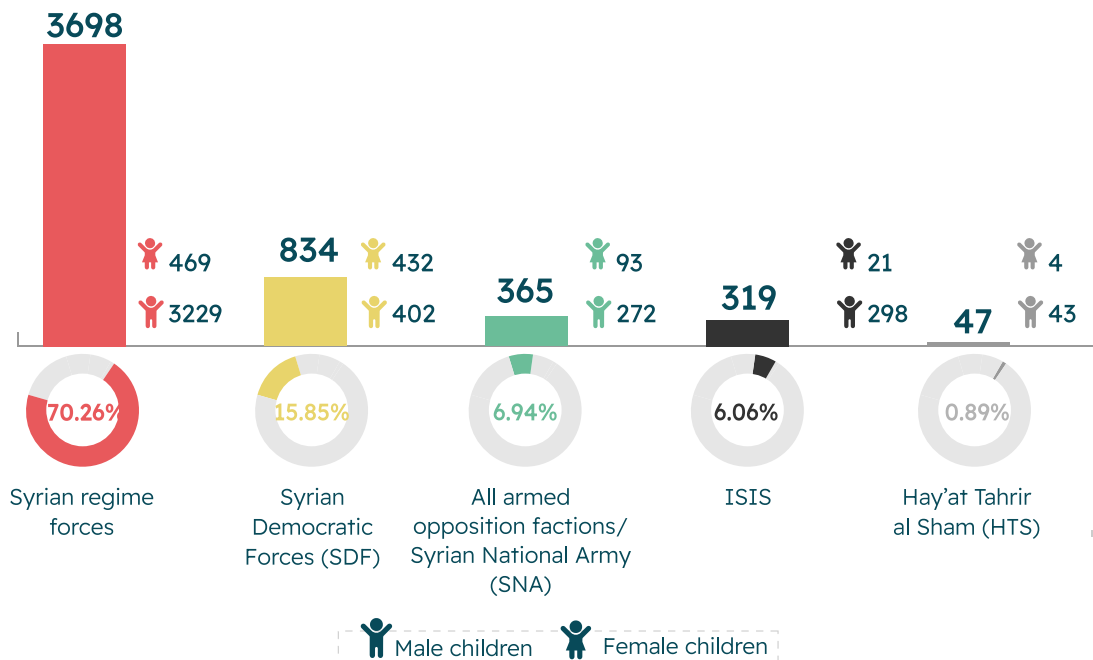
4. All armed opposition and/or SNA factions formed since 2011 in all the areas that are and/or were under their control.

As the chart shows, the Syrian regime is responsible for approximately 77 percent of all cases of extrajudicial killing involving children, which shows that the Syrian regime has targeted children in a calculated and deliberate manner.

Second: Arbitrary Arrest/Detention and Enforced Disappearance

As SNHR’s database shows, at least 5,263 of the children arrested by Syrian regime forces since March 2011 up until June 2024 are still detained and/or forcibly disappeared at the hands of the parties to the conflict and controlling forces in Syria. These are distributed as follows:

- Syrian regime forces: 3,698 children, divided into 3,229 males and 469 females.
- ISIS: 319 children, divided into 298 males and 21 females.
- HTS: 47 children, divided into 43 males and four females.
- SDF: 834 children, divided into 402 males and 432 females.
- All armed opposition factions/SNA: 365 children, divided into 272 males and 93 females.

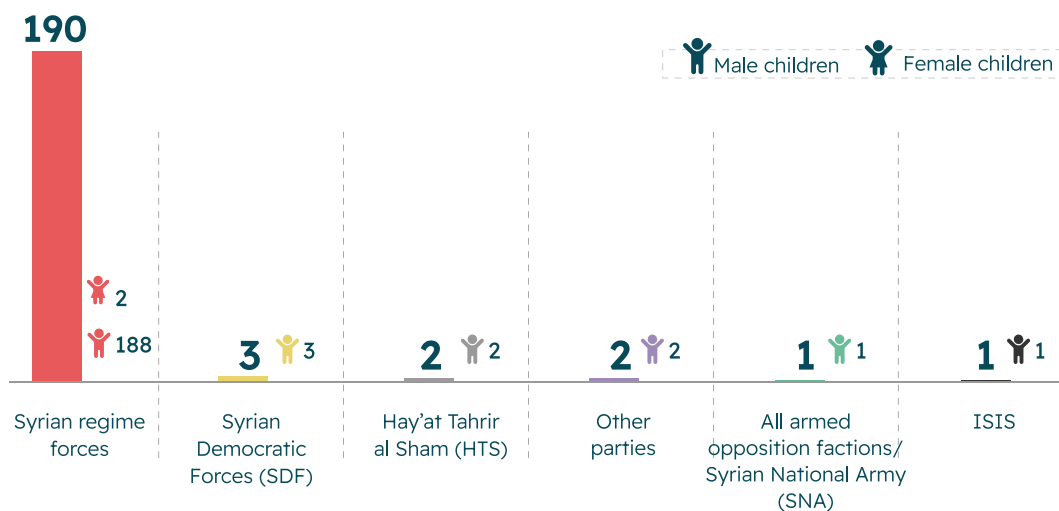


As the chart shows, the Syrian regime is responsible for approximately 71 percent of all cases of arrest and enforced disappearance involving children. This shows that the Syrian regime has prosecuted, arrested, and disappeared children, for various motives, and in a calculated and deliberate manner.

Third: Children victims who died due to torture

We documented the deaths of no fewer than **199 children** due to torture between March 2011 and June 2024 at the hands of the parties to the conflict and controlling forces in Syria. These are distributed as follows:

- Syrian regime forces: 190 children, divided into 188 males and two females.
- ISIS: One child.
- HTS: Two children.
- SDF: Three children.
- All armed opposition factions/SNA: One child.



As the chart shows, Syrian regime forces are responsible for approximately 96 percent of all cases of death due to torture involving children that took place in regime detention centers, which shows that Syrian regime forces have not distinguished between children and adults in arrests and detentions.

In addition, since the first days of obtaining the photos leaked from the regime military hospitals, known as the ‘Caesar photographs’, SNHR has been working on identifying the victims who appear in those photographs, and we have released multiple reports on this issue, which we continue to work on. In our 12th annual report on torture in Syria, we endeavored to summarize the mechanisms which we use in identifying these victims, and we are currently working on releasing a detailed report on this issue. Since the beginning of 2015, we have identified four children from the approximately 6,786 victims appearing in the Caesar photographs. We are also currently verifying and identifying hundreds of other cases.

The parties to the conflict have planted hundreds of thousands of anti-personnel landmines (APLs) in Syria, including cluster munitions remnants. These APLs are densely scattered over large swathes of land in multiple areas of many Syrian governorates, posing an ongoing, lethal threat to the lives of civilians, including children, that will last for years to come; these munitions’ bright primary colors attract the attention and curiosity of younger children who are unaware of their lethal nature, and thus face the greatest danger from them. We have tackled this issue at length in two reports; the first of these, released on January 30, 2023, is entitled, [‘Cluster Munitions Remnants are an Open-Ended Threat to the Lives of Syria’s Future Generations’](#), and the second, released on April 4, 2023, is entitled, [‘On the International Day for Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action: Landmines Continue to Plague Large Areas of Syria and Threaten the Lives of Millions’](#)

SNHR has documented the killing of **795 children** in landmine explosions since March 2011 up until June 2024.

The violations by the Syrian regime have led to the widespread displacement of millions of Syrians. Today, northwestern Syria houses the largest camp population, with children accounting for 46 percent of the entire population of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Syria. Many of those children have been born and raised in camps, where they lack any access to the most basic life essentials, including hygiene, privacy, bathrooms, and safe housing. Every year, the seasonal waves of extreme heat, cold, heavy rainfall, snow and gale-force winds flood, uproot, damage, or destroy camps, resulting in child deaths due to the lack of safety and security measures and the lack of insulation which is an essential component in the process of building camps.

Meanwhile, the camps suffer a severe shortage of healthcare and educational facilities, which also means that children's access to healthcare and education have been dramatically affected. Some children have to travel long distances just to obtain basic healthcare, while others have no access to education, with both these factors leading to increasingly widespread illness, disease and illiteracy among children.

In addition to the harsh living conditions, the IDP camps have also been subjected to bombing on numerous occasions, primarily by regime forces who show no regard for the terrible dangers of such attacks given the high population density in these camps and the lack of any means of protection in the camps' infrastructure.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) is a binding international instrument established to protect and promote child rights and childcare, which obliges all state members to take all necessary measures to protect child rights and fully promote childcare. The rights set forth in the UNCRC are interconnected and indivisible, and denying children some of those rights will certainly affect other rights. In 1993, Syria ratified the UNCRC, as well as ratifying its two optional protocols in 2023. Despite this, however, the Syrian regime has contravened the articles of the UNCRC by perpetrating the worst forms of aggression against children in Syria as part of the armed conflict. Even worse, ratifying the UNCRC⁵ did not stop the Syrian regime from committing violations against children that amount to crimes against humanity, through extrajudicial killing, enforced disappearance, and torture, in addition to war crimes through child conscription.

Despite the abundance of legal instruments on protecting children found in international law, violations against children in Syria have not stopped for 13 years. All parties to the conflict have failed to respect these rules. Many of the violations committed by the other parties to the conflict against children could amount to war crimes if they were committed in the context of the conflict, and also as widespread violations of international human rights law if they were committed against children affiliated with those forces. Arbitrary detention and torture are at the head of these violations, followed by conscription.

SNHR calls on the international community and the UN Security Council to take every possible legal, political, and financial measure against the Syrian regime and its allies, as well as all other perpetrators of violations in the Syrian conflict, to compel them to respect child rights. It must be reiterated that Syria is the world's worst country in terms of many types of violations against children, and therefore the situation in Syria requires more humanitarian assistance compared to other states and regions, especially considering that those violations are ongoing to this day.

5. Abduhany, F. (2021). "The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and Its Committee Are Helpless in Effectively Defending Children Rights in Syria and Around the World". Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR). <https://snhr.org/?p=56576>



SYRIAN NETWORK
FOR HUMAN RIGHTS



info@snhr.org
www.snhr.org

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