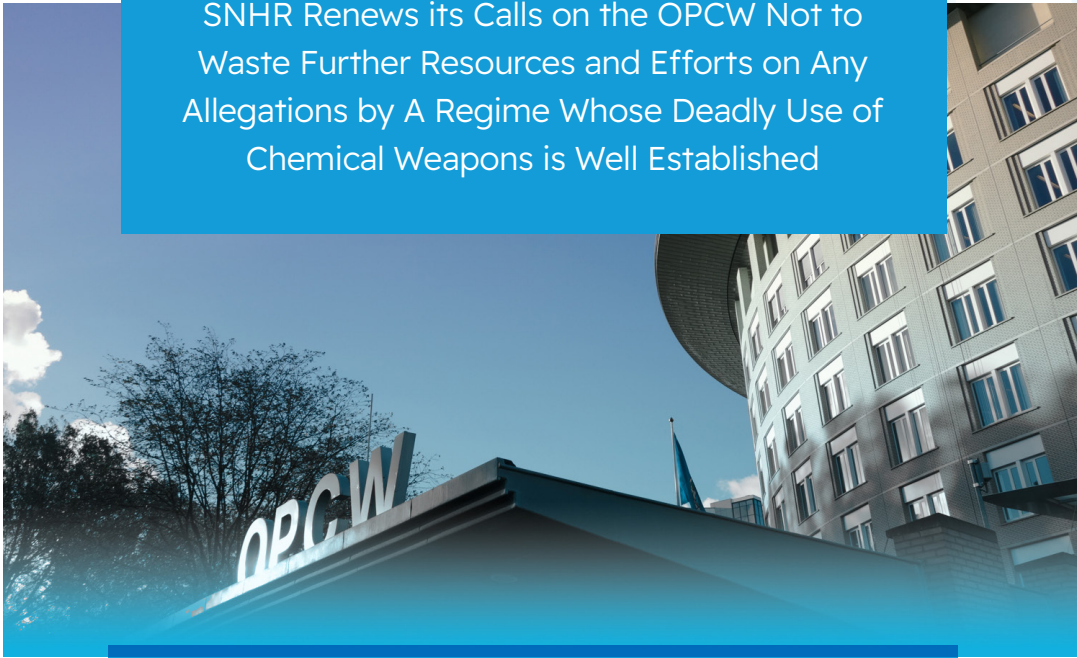


Statement

The OPCW Disproves the Syrian Regime's Allegations About Two Incidents Which the Regime Requested Investigation Of

With the OPCW Having Disproven the Regime's Allegations About Five Attacks to Date, SNHR Renews its Calls on the OPCW Not to Waste Further Resources and Efforts on Any Allegations by A Regime Whose Deadly Use of Chemical Weapons is Well Established



Monday 24 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.

On Tuesday, June 11, 2024, [the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons' \(OPCW\) Fact-Finding Mission \(FFM\) released its report](#) summarizing the findings of an investigation into two alleged attacks reported by the Syrian regime's government to the OPCW's Technical Secretariat, which requested that they be investigated. The regime's allegations are outlined below:

- On September 21, 2017, the Syrian regime's government reported that ISIS had carried out an attack involving the use of munitions carrying unidentified toxic gases on August 9, 2017, near Qalib al-Thawr village east of al-Salamiya city in rural Hama. The regime claimed that, as a result of the attack, a number of regime soldiers exhibited symptoms such as suffocation and loss of consciousness.
- On November 24, 2017, the Syrian regime reported that an attack involving the use of mortar shells containing toxic gases had been carried out a few weeks earlier on November 8, 2017, targeting a regime army location in al-Bulbul area in the vicinity of Souran city in Hama governorate.

In this latest report, the FFM, whose mandate includes responsibility for determining whether or not toxic chemicals have been used as a weapon of war in Syria but not assigning culpability in any alleged attacks involving their use, summarized the findings of their investigations into the alleged two attacks. The FFM noted that as part of their investigations, the investigators had conducted field visits to sites related to the alleged incidents reported by the regime, and interviewed supposed eyewitnesses and victims, as well as reviewing and analyzing photos, video footage, and documents provided by the Syrian regime's government, as well as reviewing open-source materials.

After collecting and examining all the information, as well as documentation provided by medical personnel, "...the FFM cannot confidently provide a toxicological assessment of the reported exposure." More importantly, the FFM report concludes, "The information obtained and analysed as a whole, in accordance with the FFM's mandate to gather facts relevant to the alleged use of toxic chemicals as a weapon in the Syrian Arab Republic, is not sufficient to provide reasonable grounds for the FFM to determine that toxic chemicals were used as a weapon in the reported incidents that occurred on 9 August 2017 in Qalib al-Thawr and 8 November 2017 in al-Balil, Hama Governorate, the Syrian Arab Republic."

Moreover, the FFM noted that it had faced challenges in confirming the information gathered about the incident. For one example, the FFM noted that no photos or video recordings of the incident were found. Similarly, no inspection documentation, photos, or videos of the munitions purportedly used in the alleged attacks were included in the documents and correspondence provided by the Syrian regime's government. Furthermore, no environmental samples had been collected, including items of clothing worn by the victims at the time of the incident. While blood samples were taken from the alleged victims at the time of the attack, the report noted, no analyses of these samples were conducted, nor were they made available to the FFM investigators. There were also contradictions in the accounts provided by eyewitnesses and in the medical records detailing the occurrence of traumatic injuries resulting from bullets and shrapnel. As mentioned above, there was no sufficiently accurate description of the "toxic gases" that were allegedly used in this attack. As such, the FFM was not able to provide a toxicological assessment of the alleged exposure to any such gases.

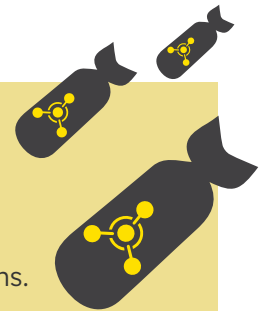
It should be noted that this latest report comes after the FFM released two similar reports previously, [on June 28, 2023](#), and [February 22, 2024](#), respectively which outlined the findings of investigations into other alleged attacks reported by the Syrian regime's government. Back then, the regime alleged that two chemical weapons attacks had taken place in Kharbit Massasneh village in rural Hama, and one attack in al-Yarmouk Camp, south of the capital Damascus respectively. Together with the two allegations addressed in the latest report, this means the regime has reported a total of five alleged attacks to the OPCW's Technical Secretariat. Following investigation of all of these five alleged attacks, the FFM, in line with its mandate, concluded that the information made available and its analyses provided no sufficient grounds to determine that toxic chemicals had been used as a weapon in the alleged incidents. We have released [two statements](#) on the previous two reports, in which we called on the OPCW not to waste any of its further valuable limited time, resources, and efforts on investigating any of the allegations made by the Syrian regime. The Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) renews these calls, following the publication of the latest FFM report, which has again proven the well-established fact that the Syrian regime is trying to deceive the OPCW and to waste its efforts, time, and resources.

Meanwhile, the OPCW's Investigation and Identification Team (IIT), whose mandate includes identifying those responsible for the use of chemical weapons in the attacks in which the FFM established their presence, has released four reports to date. On April 8, 2020, the team released its first report confirming that the Syrian regime had used chemical weapons in three separate incidents in al-Latamina city in Hama governorate. SNHR [released a statement on that report](#). On April 12, 2021, the IIT released its second report confirming that the Syrian regime had used chemical weapons in its attack on Saraqeb city on February 4, 2018. SNHR also [released a statement on that report](#). On January 27, 2023, the IIT released its third report concluding that the Syrian regime was responsible for the Douma chemical attack on April 7, 2018, about which SNHR [released a statement](#). Finally, on February 23, 2024, the IIT released its fourth report, which concluded that ISIS carried out attack involving the use of chemical weapons on Marea city in Aleppo governorate on September 1, 2015, with SNHR also [releasing a statement on this report](#).

In January 2020, SNHR [signed a Principles of Cooperation Agreement with the OPCW's IIT](#). SNHR is also sharing data to contribute to the team's current and future investigations. SNHR's data is a primary source in all of the IIT's reports, with the group possessing an extensive database on the use of chemical weapons in Syria.

SNHR has documented **217 chemical weapons** attacks carried out by the Syrian regime across Syria since the first CW attack we documented, which took place on December 23, 2012, up until June 2024, killing a total of **1,514 individuals**, divided between:

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



These attacks also injured **11,080 individuals**, including five regime soldiers who were being held captive in opposition prisons.

Meanwhile, ISIS has carried out **five chemical weapons** attacks since the group emerged in Syria on April 9, 2013, up until June 2024. All five of ISIS' CW attacks took place in Aleppo governorate, injuring a total of 132 individuals.

Based on the reports issued by the OPCW's IIT and those by the UN and the OPCW Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM), as well as SNHR's database, we further recommend that the OPCW stop wasting any further limited resources, especially after its funds have been reduced, on the investigation of allegations made by a regime that, as has been extremely well established, has killed its citizens using chemical weapons in a repeated and systematic manner, constituting crimes against humanity and war crimes. Perpetrating such crimes would strip any elected government of any legitimacy, let alone a totalitarian regime that has clung to power through blatantly illegitimate elections, brutality, and coercion by its draconian security apparatus.



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No justice without accountability

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