

Statement

SNHR Calls on the New Syrian Government to Destroy the Chemical Weapons Stockpile Left by the Assad Regime

The OPCW Team Must be Granted Immediate Access to Syria



Tuesday 17 December 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 December 9, the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) noted in a statement that it is closely monitoring the situation in Syria following the fall of the Assad regime. The statement also reaffirms the OPCW's commitment to revealing and destroying all sites of prohibited chemical weapons. Furthermore, the OPCW noted that, while its team has spent over a decade trying to identify the types of chemical weapons possessed by the deposed Assad regime, its progress was extremely limited due to the obstacles placed in its path by the Assad regime.

The Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) underlines the vital importance of the OPCW's efforts and our continued partnership with the organization. We also welcome these latest statements by the OPCW, and stress the critical importance of destroying the internationally outlawed chemical weapons in Syria, which remain a horrifying symbol of the Assad regime's criminality, in order to ensure that they will never again be used in the future.

These weapons have posed a lethal threat to civilians across Syria, killing or injuring thousands over the past 13 years. As SNHR's database attests, **222 attacks** involving the use of chemical weapons were carried out in Syria during that period, from the first documented use of chemical weapons in the country on December 23, 2012, up until November 30, 2024. The Assad regime was responsible for **98 percent** of these attacks, **killing 1,514 individuals**, including **214 women** and **262 children**, and injuring over **12,000** others.

THE NEW SYRIAN GOVERNMENT MUST COMPLY WITH INTERNATIONAL LAWS AND COOPERATE WITH THE OPCW

SNHR must stress the urgent need for the new Syrian government to comply with the international legal frameworks prohibiting the use of chemical weapons, and dispose of them completely. The new government must also reveal all chemical weapons sites in order to ensure they are completely and conclusively destroyed.

The possession and use of chemical weapons is a blatant violation of many international laws and instruments, including:

1. Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC)

The CWC is one of the most prominent international treaties that prohibit the use, production, and stockpiling of chemical weapons. Syria ratified the Convention in 2013 following the Ghouta chemical attack, pledging to destroy its chemical weapons stockpile. However, the Assad regime violated the CWC 184 times through its use of chemical weapons, and by continuing to produce and possess these weapons.

2. International humanitarian law

The First Protocol Additional to the 1949 Geneva Conventions prohibits the use of chemical weapons against civilians. Moreover, the use of chemical weapons is considered a war crime under the International Criminal Court (ICC) laws and international human rights law.

3. UN Security Council resolutions

The UN Security Council has adopted several resolutions demanding the destruction of Syria's chemical weapons, most notably resolution 2118 (2013).

RECOMMENDATIONS

Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW)

- Promote coordination with the new Syrian government to ensure access to suspected chemical weapons sites, and immediately launch the process of destroying all remaining chemical weapons stockpiles.
- Ensure full and complete transparency in inspection and assessment processes with regard to chemical weapons in Syria. This should include issuing periodic reports outlining the progress made and challenges faced.

New Syrian government

- Fully comply with the international legal frameworks that prohibit the use of chemical weapons, including the CWC.
- Fully cooperate with the OPCW to facilitate access to suspected chemical weapons site for the OPCW's inspection teams, and ensure the full disposal of the remaining stockpile.

Promote national transparency

- Release periodic reports outlining the steps taken to dispose of chemical weapons and ensure that the Syrian people and international community are aware of the progress being made.

Cooperate with Syrian civil society

- Involve civil society groups in monitoring and documenting the stages of the disposal of chemical weapons to ensure transparency and credibility, and build trust with the people.

Provide support for affected families and societies

- Commit to developing plans to compensate and rehabilitate those affected from chemical attacks, which should include long-term medical and psychological support programs, and the rehabilitation of the areas affected from an environmental and public health perspective.

International community

- Support the efforts of the OPCW in monitoring the issue of chemical weapons disposal in Syria, and ensure full and complete transparency in all implementation stages.
- Call on the new Syrian government to swiftly act to destroy all prohibited chemical weapons as part of its international obligations.
- Establish comprehensive reparation mechanisms that ensure justice for victims of chemical weapons attacks, including offering financial compensation, and psychological and physical support for the victims and their families.



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