

Press Release

**New York: SNHR Takes Part in
a Meeting on the Issue of
Accountability and Justice on
the Sidelines of the UN General
Assembly's 74th Session**

SNHR

SYRIAN NETWORK FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

الشبكة السورية لحقوق الإنسان

Sunday, October 6, 2019

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 analyses in Syria.



New York, September 25, 2019: The Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) participated in an event on the sidelines of the 74th session of the UN General Assembly, entitled “Justice and Accountability in Syria”, sponsored by the United States of America, the United Kingdom, Germany, France and the Netherlands.

The session was chaired by Joel Rayburn, the US Deputy Assistant Secretary for Levant Affairs and Special Envoy to Syria, with the participation of James Jeffrey the US Special Representative for Syria Engagement and the Special Envoy for the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIL; HE Matthijs van Der Plas, the Netherlands’ Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs; the UK’s Envoy to Syria Dr. Martin Longden; Ambassador François S n maud the Representative of the French President and Envoy to Syria, and Germany’s Susanne Baumann, Commissioner and Head of the Federal Foreign Office’s Directorate-General for International Order, the United Nations and Arms Control.

Representatives of several Syrian civil society organizations, including Mr. Raed al Saleh, Head of the Syrian Civil Defense Organization better known as ‘the White Helmets’; Ms. Raja al Talli, Co-Founder and Co-Director of Center for Civil Society and Democracy; Mr. Mohammed al Abdullah, Executive Director of the Syrian Justice and Accountability Center; Amina Khawlani, Co-Founder of Families for Freedom Organization, and Mr. Wael Sawah Executive Director of the Pro-Justice Organization, also participated in the event.

The session opened at 1:30 am with an exhibition of paintings commissioned by the SNHR, which includes paintings of 35 of the Syrian citizens forcibly disappeared at the hands of the parties to the conflict in Syria. Along with the portraits of the disappeared are thumbnail descriptions providing the most notable information about each individual and their arrest; the exhibition aims to humanize and focus on the unique attributes of each of the forcibly disappeared people rather than portraying them as an indistinguishable mass, as well as to commemorate the victims of enforced disappearance in Syria at the hands of all parties to the conflict, especially by the Syrian regime which is responsible for around 86 percent of the total number of enforced disappearances there. The SNHR will display these paintings at several events in various capitals around the world.



Mr. Fadel Abdul Ghany, Chairman of SNHR, said in his speech at the event that civilized states should not only respect the Geneva Conventions but also take the necessary steps to demonstrate this respect. Therefore, he noted, even if states are not participating in international or internal armed conflict, they have obligations to protect civilians and civilian objects in Syria. He stressed that while the political and economic sanctions that have been implemented to date by some countries against the Syrian regime are a step towards meeting these commitments, they are not enough by themselves, emphasizing that more severe actions must be taken to ensure the Syrian regime's commitment to implementing the Geneva Conventions.

Abdul Ghany added that in light of the Security Council's continued failure to deal effectively with the Syrian situation, there is a need for a civilized alliance which excludes and transcends Russia and China to intervene to protect civilians in Syria and impose a safe zone in northwestern Syria protected from the aerial bombardment like that in northeast Syria, noting that aerial bombardment is the cause of about 75 percent of the total deaths and of about 85 percent of the total destruction in Syria.

Abdul Ghany also called for increased economic and political sanctions against the Russian regime and a total boycott of Russian arms companies. He recommended that Astana track should be rejected, emphasizing the need to push for a revival of the political process previously decided on in Geneva and to put pressure on those involved to establish a timetable for the completion of that political transition.

Abdul Ghany called for the implementation of an emergency plan to supply urgent material and relief support for an estimated 1.2 million forcibly displaced individuals in north-west Syria who are in critical need of essential living requirements, such as drinking water and water for sanitary use, as well as of medical assistance, after Russia bombed most of the medical facilities in north-west Syria.

Abdul Ghany said that the Syrian regime should immediately stop violating international customary law, as well as violating the current Syrian constitution, with the 2012 constitution prohibiting torture and enforced disappearance, stressing that any current constitution or constitutional committee is worthless in light of the survival of the existing regime and security services. Abdul Ghany further stressed the additional need for the regime to stop using Syrian state institutions, their funds and resources to bomb, terrorize and kill Syrian society, as well as to stop looting and robbing the property of IDPs and refugees through terrorism and threats. Abdul Ghany demanded that the regime disclose the fate of around 84,000 persons forcibly disappeared at its hands, whose families continue to suffer the years-long trauma and torment of not knowing their loved ones' fate.



In regard to the International Commission of Inquiry, Abdul Ghany stated that the core of the commission's mandate is to identify the perpetrators of violations, noting that it has not done so properly for nearly two years, unlike previous years. He called on the Commission to correct its course and to determine and remedy the problems that have prevented it from properly carrying out this function in the last two years, noting that the Commission hasn't clearly accused Russian forces of any of the crimes of which they are unarguably guilty except in only two incidents since the start of Russian intervention in Syria in September 2015 to date.

The full statement is as follows:

New York: Address by the Chairman of the SNHR in a meeting on the sidelines of the activities of the 74th session of the United Nations General Assembly

In most meetings, we are continuously asked the question: 'What's new?' Usually, we answer by talking about the latest developments, which is a logical response. However, I believe there is another side to this since 'what's new' in the Syrian crisis is that the same horrendous crimes are still being committed, and that is the most important update. These various types of atrocities have been committed since 2011 and are still being committed up to the current moment. Extrajudicial killings by bombings and other means are still continuing. Arbitrary arrests and enforced disappearances are still continuing. Deaths due to torture are also still continuing, in addition to forced displacement, destruction of houses and properties and seizing them, bombing hospitals, halting education, and other violations are still continuing. The details of the staggering tolls of violations might differ from month to month, but all are still being committed as part of a widespread policy of targeting civilians, with some of these atrocities being classifiable as crimes against humanity and others as war crimes.



We, at the Syrian Network for Human Rights, have monitored and documented violations daily for approximately eight years to date, and based on the data gathered, we publish a daily newsletter consisting of the most notable incidents, as well as issuing monthly reports and special reports, all of which underline two essential points;

First: Crimes against humanity and war crimes are still continuing and their overall toll is rising; meaning a horrific estimated human loss for the state and the Syrian community.

Second: The continuing nature of the crimes being committed in Syria is a clear indication of the continuous failure of the International Community to stop them.

I will quickly mention some statistics since the start of 2019 and up to the present moment. You have the overall statistics: About 98,000 enforced disappearances, 14,200 deaths due to torture.

As for the data on the continuing violations in 2019, the numbers documented by SNHR are: 2,600 died, 270 of these in the last month of August.

3,618 cases of arrest, 569 of these in the last month of August.

619 attacks on vital civilian facilities, 62 of these in the last month of August.

212 deaths due to torture, 25 of these in the last month of August.

2,420 barrel bombs dropped by the Syrian regime's helicopters and fixed-wing warplanes, 1,167 of these in the last month of August.

22 medical personnel, 9 media workers, and 12 Civil Defense members were killed since the beginning of 2019.

These harrowing statistics show that what is happening in Syria is the worst crisis in the world on several levels, and based on this fact I will move directly to a number of recommendations:

First: To the Civilized countries that respect international law, especially those present here:

1- Based on Article 1 of Geneva Conventions, the contracting parties undertake to respect and to ensure respect for the present Convention in all circumstances and to take all necessary steps to implement its provisions. Other countries that are not part of the international or internal armed conflict have committed to the protection of civilians and civil objects in Syria, and there have been political and economic sanctions implemented, but these are not enough. There must be more severe actions to ensure the Syrian regime's commitment to implementing the Geneva Conventions.



2- The Security Council has failed to even implement economic sanctions against the Syrian regime, even failing to implement any block on supplying the Syrian regime with weapons; a few days ago, Russia used its veto for the 13th time against a draft resolution to protect civilians.

The International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty stressed that: “The Security Council should take into account in all its deliberations that, if it fails to discharge its responsibility to protect in conscience-shocking situations crying out for action, concerned states may not rule out other means to meet the gravity and urgency of that situation”

Such conscience-shocking situations are exactly what have continued to happen in Syria, not only in the form of one massacre or one violation but in industrial-scale killings and torture, sexual violence, enforced disappearances, the use of chemical weapons and barrel bombs, and besieging civilians.

The list of crimes against humanity perpetrated by the Syrian regime and its allies goes on. The Security Council has signally failed to assume its responsibilities in the Syrian case, despite the Syrian Network for Human Rights, international organizations and UN commissions of inquiry crying out for action by the Security Council many thousands of times. In this context, the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty affirmed in the same report: “it would be impossible to find consensus, in the Commission’s view, around any set of proposals for military intervention which acknowledged the validity of any intervention not authorized by the Security Council or General Assembly. But that may still leave circumstances when the Security Council fails to discharge what this Commission would regard as its responsibility to protect, in a conscience-shocking situation crying out for action. It is a real question in these circumstances where lies the most harm: **in the damage to international order if the Security Council is bypassed or in the damage to that order if human beings are slaughtered while the Security Council stands by.**”

I believe that in light of the ongoing failure of the Security Council, an alliance of civilized states, excluding and superseding Russia and China, must intervene to protect civilians in Syria and to impose a no-flight zone in north-west Syria, and make the region safe from aerial bombing similar to the north-east of Syria.

The aerial bombing is the cause of 75% of all killings, while it is also responsible for 85% of the total destruction in Syria.



3- The Russian regime is involved in hundreds of war crimes in Syria by continuously supplying the Syrian regime with weapons as well as through direct involvement in the bombing and killing of civilians and the targeting of hospitals and Civil Defense centers. Economic and political sanctions for such crimes must be increased and Russian weapons companies must be completely boycotted.

4- We urge an unequivocal rejection of the Astana process that led to the Syrian regime regaining control over many areas and killing at least hundreds of its residents and displacing over 2.5 million more Syrians, while pushing towards a revitalization of the political process in Geneva and applying pressure for the creation of a timetable for political transition.

5- We further call for an emergency plan to supply urgent material and relief for an estimated 1.2 million forcibly displaced individuals in north-west Syria who are in critical need of essential living requirements, such as drinking water, water for sanitary, hygiene and household use, and medical assistance, after Russia bombed most of the medical facilities in north-west Syria.

Second: To the Syrian regime:

- The Syrian regime must immediately stop violating customary international law, as well as violating the current Syrian constitution, with torture and enforced disappearance being prohibited in the 2012 constitution. This means that no value can be placed on any constitution or constitutional committee in light of the survival of the current regime and security services.
- Stop using the institutions, resources, and funds of the Syrian state to bomb and kill the Syrian people who demanded democratic change and an end to dynastic dictatorship.
- Stop looting and robbing the properties of IDPs and refugees through use of state terror and intimidation, and instead compensate victims whose homes have been destroyed and who have suffered often repeated displacement due to barrel bombs.
- Reveal the fate of nearly 84,000 people who have been forcibly disappeared. This is a terrible figure and a dreadful fate that affects millions of Syrians.



Third: To our colleagues in the International Commission of Inquiry:

- The main focus must be on investigating the incidents of violations, avoiding any political characterization as much as possible.
- The perpetrators of the violations should be clearly named. We have noted that the accusations against Russian forces are very limited, with these forces only accused of two incidents in all the reports issued by the commission of inquiry since the Russian intervention began. In reality, however, the Syrian Network for Human Rights has documented hundreds of incidents involving Russian forces. Many of the violations Russian forces have been documented as committing constitute war crimes, in particular, their use of cluster munitions documented by the Landmine and Cluster Munition Monitor, Human Rights Watch, and Amnesty International, as well as Russia's bombing of hospitals and civilian objects, with SNHR submitting a monthly report to you concerning the most notable incidents.

Fourth: To the High Commissioner for Human Rights:

- Reassess the number of victims of the conflict in Syria after assessment of the casualty figures was suspended in April 2014 and has not been renewed since.
- Issue reports and data on the human rights situation in Syria, delivering these to the ears of Syrian society and stand by them, and further intensify efforts to document violations in Syria.
- Clearly identify the perpetrators of violations, especially the Russian forces responsible for committing hundreds of war crimes.

Fifth: To the Office of the UN Envoy:

- Restore the political process to its logical course and logical sequence according to the Geneva Conference and Security Council Resolution 2254; establish a transitional governing body from which a constitutional committee and election committee emerge. These committees would refer to the transitional governing body, rather than overturning this process on its head as the previous UN envoy have done.
- Include the file of detainees and disappeared in all rounds of talks, as well as stop bombing hospitals, Civil Defense centers and schools, and work on the file of accountability clearly, and not to negotiate granting amnesty to the perpetrators of crimes against humanity.

Sixth: To the humanitarian mechanism to avoid conflict:

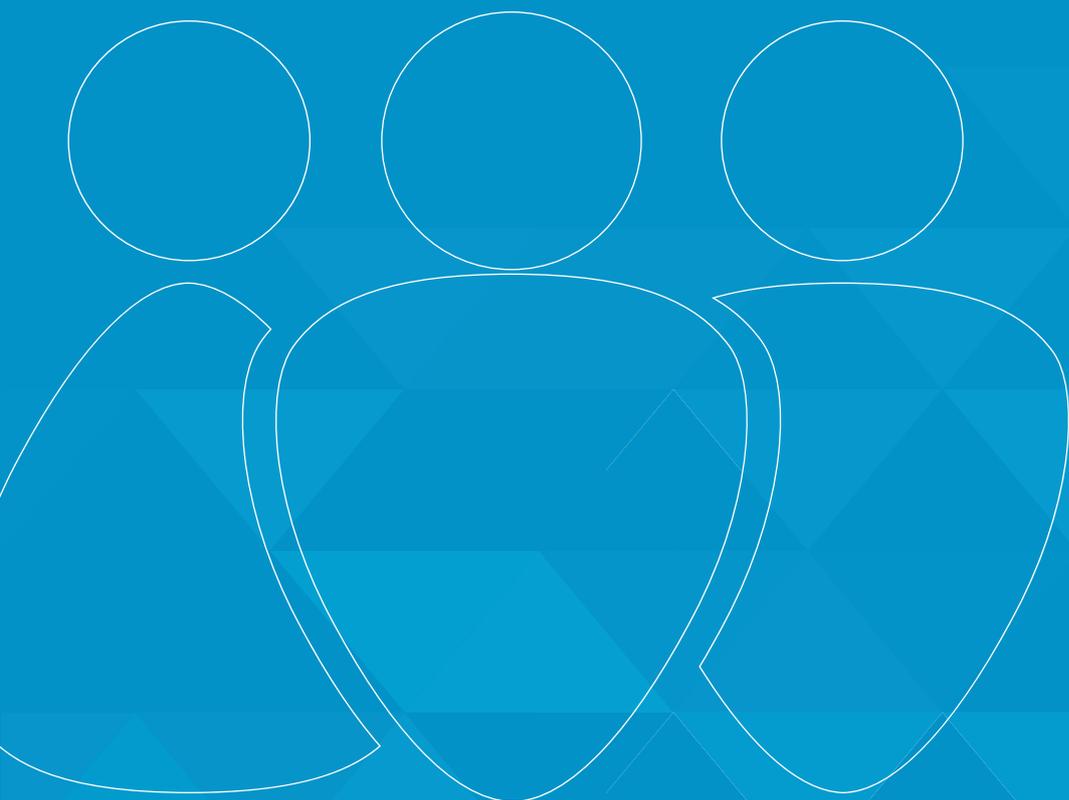
- Create a website that contains a complete database of all the centers registered with the mechanism, indicating the facilities that have been targeted even without necessarily identifying who is responsible for the bombing. This will assist investigators in United Nations agencies, international organizations and relevant and specialized local organizations. Accordingly, the SNHR will cross-check this data with the SNHR's database and be able to identify those responsible for the bombing.



Photos from the exhibition event, which included 35 paintings of forcibly disappeared persons at the hands of the parties to the conflict in Syria:







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