

## Brief Report

# On the International Women's Day, a Glimpse at how Syrian Women Have been Targeted

No less than 25,726 Women Have been Killed, and 10,019 are still under Arrest or Forcibly-Disappeared

# SNHR

SYRIAN NETWORK FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

الشبكة السورية لحقوق الإنسان

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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.



The Syrian woman is still struggling to secure the bare minimum of her basic rights, as the pattern of targeting of women in Syria have been worse than any place else in the world with regard to many violations. Most notably, the rising rates of killing, enforced displacement, and enforced-disappearance as we are still losing approximately 300 females, girls and women, each month to a daily average of 10 female deaths. This average reflects a horrifying toll and epitomize that what Syrian women are suffering from is still the worst in the world. The crime of enforced displacement comes second, as approximately 2.5 million women have been displaced from their homes to live as IDPs or refugees. Arbitrary arrest, torture, and enforced-disappearance, on the other hand, have been tools to deliberately targeted women who took part in the popular uprising in order to terrorize and break them, and, consequently, fragmentize the society and submit it into returning to a life of dictatorship. While women have certainly been the subject of other types of violations, the worst was undoubtedly how Syrian women were let down by the international community who has utterly failed to protect their most basic rights, such as the right to life, right of residence, ceasing torture, and releasing women detainees. According to SNHR's database, which contains violations committed by the various parties to the conflict, the Syrian regime and its allies vastly top all parties in terms of violations against women. For instance, the Syrian regime and its allies have been responsible for more than 80% of all violations with respect to killing and torture, while the remaining parties were responsible for 20%. In other regards, ISIS largely trumped all parties, such as imposing restrictions on clothes, travel, freedom of expression, and social involvement. This distinguish is an integral aspect as it reflects the reality on the Syrian grounds.

In light of these violations against the most basic women's rights, calling for making progress with other regards proves very difficult to bring about, as we hope that our report for the next year will expand more on women's involvement in leading roles and political life.

In this brief report, we will outline the most notable violations against Syrian women that we have been able to record in SNHR's database from the start of the popular uprising for democracy in Syria, March 2011, until the start of March 2011. These figures represent the bare minimum in light of the difficulties and challenges we encounter during documentation.



## **1- Extrajudicial killing**

Extrajudicial killing remains the gravest of all violations against women in Syria, as it is practiced on a daily basis in a widespread manner through indiscriminate shelling using missiles, artillery, cluster munitions, poison gases, barrel bombs, in addition to sniping and other kinds of weapons that the Syrian regime and its two allies, the Iranian and Russian regimes, have used to target civilian, heavily-populated areas with complete disregard for the rules of customary humanitarian law.

Between March 2011 and March 2018, we have recorded, at SNHR, the killing of 25,726 females. The Syrian regime and its pro-regime militias were responsible for 84% of the overall death toll compared to other parties. More than 9% of all deaths in Syria were girls and women, which is a considerably high percentage that indicates that Syrian regime forces deliberately target civilians.

## **2- Arbitrary detention and enforced-disappearance**

Since the popular uprising started in March 2011, enforced-disappeared have been practiced in a widespread manner against women and girls. Syrian regime forces deliberately arrested them either because of their activism or for being from areas that are not under the Syrian regime's control through raids or arresting them in neighborhoods, markets, universities, or at checkpoints. Also, there have been mass arrests of women and girls who were used as hostages in prisoner exchange negotiations with factions from the armed opposition.

Women detainees are denied the right to call their families or hire a defense, and no clear charges are filed against them. In most cases, arbitrary arrest turns into enforced-disappearance. We have recorded no less than 8,113 females who are still under arbitrary arrest or enforced-disappearance inside the official and non-official Syrian regime detestation centers.

Kurdish Self-Management forces enforced conscription on women and minor girls and carried out raids and arrests in their areas of control. Also, these forces resorted to abducting women from the streets and schools in case a woman or a minor refused to be conscripted and, disappeared them training camps while prohibiting them from calling or visiting their families for months, before throwing them into combat. Moreover, Kurdish Self-Management forces made arrests on women activists, media workers, and political figures in part of arrest campaigns that targeted everyone who oppose their policies and the laws they enforce in their areas of control. We have also recorded a number of incidents where women were arrested on the basis of ethnicity or to force their husbands or sons who are associated with factions from the armed opposition to surrender themselves.



We have recorded that no less than 311 females are still under arrest or enforced-disappearance at the hands of Kurdish Self-Management forces from it was founded until March 2018.

On the other hand, extremist Islamic groups, especially ISIS, have enforced binding laws on women in their areas of control such as restricting them to a certain dress code, imposing certain requirements for women who wish to work, and prohibiting women from travel or movement without a legal guardian, where ISIS arrest any women who violate these rules and impose fines on those who are arrested as a price for their release. We have recorded that no less than 412 females are mostly forcibly-disappeared at the hands of ISIS. Hay'at Tahrir al Sham targeted women through its al Hesba apparatus for similar reasons, such as wearing certain clothes, or being present in some places with men, such as transportation, universities, and workplaces. We have recorded that no less than 71 women are still under arbitrary arrest or enforced-disappearance at the hands of Hay'at Tahrir al Sham as of March 2018.

Moreover, factions from the armed opposition arrested women and girls after raiding government forces-held areas, where, in some cases, opposition factions arrested entire families in order to use to released detained women by Syrian regime forces as part of prisoner exchange deals, while such women were used as hostages in some cases. We have recorded that 1,112 females at least are still under arbitrary arrest or forcibly-disappeared at detention centers for factions from the armed opposition as of March 2018.

### **3- Torture**

Methods of torture used with women at the Syrian regime detention centers are largely similar to those used on men, where from the very moment of arrest until a woman detainee arrives at the detention center, as well as during interrogation, she experiences various types of insult, slurs, beating, and systematic, brutal torture. In many cases, the purpose of this torture is not to extract confessions but to promote a culture of fear and terror among women detainees.

Torture have resulted in the death of 43 women (adult female) at Syrian regime forces detention centers between March 2011 and March 2018 according to SNHR archive.

On the other hand, Kurdish Self-Management forces resort often to methods of severe beating on women detainees using sticks, in addition to removing fingernails, deprivation of food and health care for long periods of times that amount to weeks at times. Additionally, women are kept under harsh conditions such as subjecting women to hot weather or bitter cold. We have recorded, as of March 2018, that two women (adult female) died due to torture at Kurdish Self-Management forces dentition centers since it was founded.



Extremist Islamic groups also used methods of torture that included mainly whipping, biting, and beating. In addition, torture was used as a mean of execution such as stoning. We have recorded that 13 women (adult female) died due to torture at the hands of ISIS from when it was founded in April 2013 until March 2018.

Factions from the armed opposition used mainly severe beating against women, in addition to negligent health care and depriving them of food. We have recorded that one woman died due to torture at the hands of factions from the armed opposition as of March 2018.

#### **4- Sexual violence**

Syrian regime forces used sexual violence as a weapon of warfare in order to terrorize and intimidate the Syrian society and warn it of the consequences to continuing with the popular uprising that called for changing the present ruling regime. However, many of the sexual violence incidents, especially rape, have been perpetrated by Syrian regime forces and their allies on sectarian bases during raids on various cities and areas. Also, sexual violence was used inside detention centers during inspection and interrogation with women detainees whether this was to extract confessions or to exact revenge on a woman detainee itself, or to humiliate men detainees by spreading the news of sexual violence against women among them.

Sexual violence has resulted in a number of cases of mental breakdown on some women victims and drove many of them to live in complete isolation away from the society out of fear of stigmatization, which was, very sadly, a norm instead of providing help and care.

SNHR estimates that Syrian regime forces and pro-regime allies have been responsible for 7,699 cases of sexual violence, including 864 incidents that took place inside detention centers, and no less than 432 cases of sexual violence against minors between March 2011 and March 2018.

ISIS also practiced sexual trafficking by imposing forced marriage on women captives who descend from minor religious and ethnic groups. ISIS had abducted mainly those women during attacks on areas that are out of their control in Iraq and took them to their areas of control in Syria. The group also frequently sold women and girls in slave markets in order to sexually enslave them.



## **Recommendations**

This great and increasing toll of serious violations against women show that women have been, in many cases, targeted directly and exclusively because of their involvement in the popular uprising and the social, humanitarian, political, relief, medical and media roles they play.

### **Security Council and United Nations**

- Issue a binding resolution on the basic rights of the Syrian women to protect them from the indiscriminate killing, ensure the delivery of urgent aids to forcibly displaced women, and immediately release women detainees.
- Take serious action with respect to this horrifying amount of violations that threaten the security and stability of Syria and the region.

### **Sponsor states**

- Increase the pressure on their respective allies to cease all forms of violence against women and hold those who are involved in such crimes accountable.

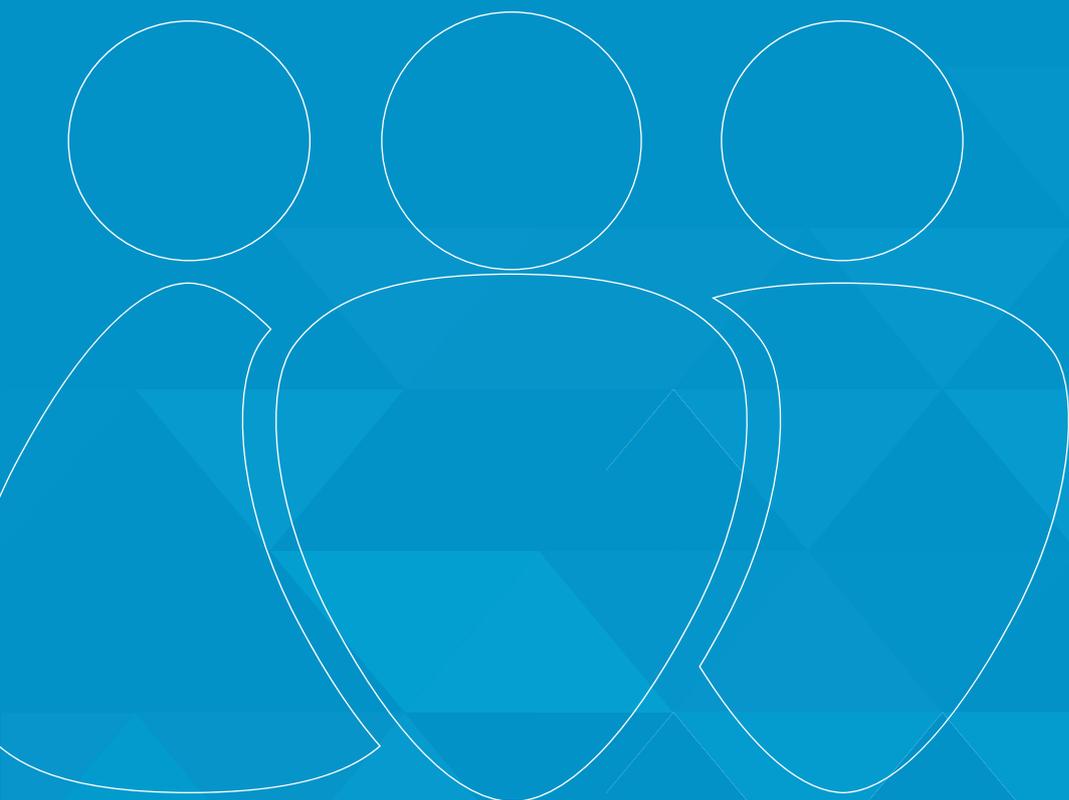
### **Donor parties and relevant organizations**

- Provide medical and psychological services, as well as rehabilitation and other services in the various fields for women and girl victims.

### **Parties to the conflict**

- Women should be spared the woes of the war by making every possible effort to ensure that all forms of violations against woman come to an end.





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