The Identification of Bodies in Mass Graves in Raqqa Governorate is an International Responsibility

Nearly 4,247 Forcibly Disappeared Persons in Raqqa Governorate Whose Fate Needs to Be Disclosed

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.

Contents
I. Introduction and Methodology
II. The Prospects of the Bodies of Mass Graves and a Comparison with the Toll of Victims and the Disappeared According to SNHR’s Database
III. The most Notable Mass Graves That were Dealt with in Raqqa Governorate
IV. The Initial Response Team Needs Expertise and Logistical Support
V. Legal Conclusions

I. Introduction and Methodology
After the defeat of ISIS and its withdrawal from Raqqa governorate in October 2017, some families gradually began returning to their homes; this return is still very limited, however, for many reasons, most notably the continued lack of services, the lack of political stability and local democratic elections, and the fact that most of the everyday operations of civil society are still managed by the military forces, which control most of the governorate, that is the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces formed by the Democratic Union Party (the Syrian branch of the Kurdistan Workers Party or PKK). As people began trickling back to their homes after the defeat of ISIS, they made horrific discoveries, as mass graves were found scattered across several areas in the governorate. These gruesome discoveries put further pressure on the Civil Council of Raqqa, already struggling to restore normal services, prompting it in early 2018, several months after the ‘Syrian Democratic Forces’ took control of the city, to form the initial response team to set about investigating this sensitive and distressing issue.

Prior to ISIS seizing control over Raqqa governorate in January 2014, the people of Raqqa used to bury their victims in two main cemeteries in Raqqa city, the ‘Tal al Bay’a’ cemetery in northeast of the city, and the smaller ‘Hittin’ cemetery next to the polyclinics building. Among those who were buried in these cemeteries were the victims of attacks by Syrian Regime forces on the governorate after the Armed Opposition forces took control of it from March 2013 to January 2014, in addition to the bodies of local people who died naturally. After ISIS seized control of the governorate, however, especially following the beginning of
the battle of ‘Euphrates Anger’ in November 2016, the Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) documented the deaths of approximately 2,323 civilians in Raqqa governorate, including 543 children and 346 women (adult female) between November 2016 and October 2017, with most of these people killed as a result of the artillery bombardment by Syrian Democratic Forces and airstrikes by US-led International Coalition forces. At this point, the local people needed to find graves to bury their loved ones, but the military siege imposed by Syrian Democratic Forces, specifically on Raqqa city, made it extremely dangerous and practically all but impossible for people to transport bodies to the Tal al Baya’a cemetery on the city’s outskirts without being targeted, especially since the cemetery is located in an open desert area, making the mourners vulnerable to being targeted by International Coalition forces and Syrian Democratic Forces; all of the above prompted the families to develop new gravesites in local gardens and playgrounds, as well as within the yards of houses, purely from necessity.

It should be noted that Rule 113 of Customary Humanitarian Law provides that “Each party to the conflict must take all possible measures to prevent the dead from being despoiled. Mutilation of dead bodies is prohibited “, while Rule 115 states that “ The dead must be disposed of in a respectful manner and their graves respected and properly maintained “. It is vital in all cases to ensure that the remains of the deceased can be identified, which is simultaneously a humanitarian, judicial and social issue.

Methodology:
The preparation of this report took almost seven months. This report includes four accounts obtained through speaking directly with eyewitnesses, in addition to speaking with members of the initial response team - a team formed by the Civil Council of Raqqa, one of whose tasks is the exhumation of mass graves – rather than being cited from open sources. We explained to the witnesses the purpose of the interviews beforehand, and obtained their consent to use the information they provided in this report without giving or offering any incentives.

This report records only the civilian casualties killed in Raqqa governorate rather than those who belong to it. The methodology adopted by the Syrian Network for Human Rights in documenting the victims can be seen at this link 1.

In addition, SNHR also analyzed videos and pictures that were published online, or sent to us by local activists via e-mail, Skype or social network platforms, as well as comparing satellite images of the sites of these mass graves taken at the end of 2017 with similar im-

ages taken in 2013 or 2014. The comparison shows the excavation of trenches where the victims were buried.

We retain copies of all the videos and photographs included in this report in a confidential electronic database, as well as holding hard disk backup copies. We do not claim, however, that we have documented all cases, given the severe prohibitions, restrictions and persecution by the Syrian Regime forces and some other armed groups.

This report only represents the bare minimum of the actual severity and magnitude of the violations that occurred. Also, it doesn’t include any analysis of the profound social, economic, and psychological ramifications.

**Fadel Abdul Ghany, Chairman of the Syrian Network for Human Rights, states:**

“The Central Tracing Agency, run by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), should begin to assist in the search for thousands of missing persons in Syria, try to identify their fate, and provide expertise and logistical support to the Syrian community and local organizations in this field, particularly in northeaster Syria after the defeat of ISIS. It is possible that the contribution of international actors in this field can help Syrian society to determine the fate of tens of thousands of disappeared people.”

**II. The Prospects of the Bodies of Mass Graves and a Comparison with the Toll of Victims and the Disappeared According to SNHR’s Database**

While it’s true that most of the bodies in the mass graves mentioned above belong to victims who were killed as a result of the air and artillery bombardments by Syrian Democratic Forces and International Coalition forces following ISIS’ seizing control over Raqqa governorate, there is also a possibility that the mass graves also contain the bodies of other kinds of victims who were killed or disappeared. The most notable of these possibilities can be summarized in the following options:

1. People killed as a result of air strikes by International Coalition forces or as a result of artillery or mortar shelling by Syrian Democratic Forces.
2. People killed by ISIS forces, who buried their bodies in these mass graves.
3. Victims among the hostages who were arrested by ISIS during its battles with factions of the Armed Opposition in areas such as the cities of al Bab, Manbej and Ein al Arab town; we believe that ISIS transferred some of these bodies after killing these individuals and buried them in these mass graves.
4. Members of ISIS who were killed during clashes with Syrian Democratic Forces or as a result of air raids by International Coalition forces. We believe that most of these individuals have been buried in al Panorama mass grave.

5. Members of Syrian Regime forces who were arrested by ISIS and then executed.

6. Civilians or fighters arrested by Syrian Regime forces or subsequently by factions of the Armed Opposition during the consecutive periods when each controlled the area one after the other, or others arrested by ISIS, who subsequently disappeared and whose fate has not been revealed to date.

In addition to the above, the mass graves have included bodies of civilians who died of natural death, and also include the bodies of premature children who died after birth. Detailed comparative studies must be conducted to assess these possibilities and to analyze the evidence that we have been able to document in SNHR so that we can give some insight into the magnitude of the human catastrophe suffered by Raqqa governorate.

A. The toll of civilian victims killed in Raqqa governorate by the parties to the conflict from March 2011 to March 2019 according to the SNHR’s database of victims reached 4,823 civilians in total, including 922 children, and 679 women (adult female), distributed by the main parties as follows:

A. Syrian Regime forces (army, security, local militias, and Shiite foreign militias): 1,829, including 204 children and 169 women.

B. Russian forces: 241, including 41 children and 22 women.

C. Extremist Islamist groups:
   • ISIS (the self-proclaimed ‘Islamic State’): 942, including 151 children and 83 women.

D. Factions of the Armed Opposition: Three

E. Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (the Democratic Union Party): 308, including 42 children and 41 women.

F. International Coalition forces: 1,133, including 441 children and 302 women.

G. Other parties: 367, including 43 children and 62 women.

B. The record of enforced disappearances in Raqqa governorate according to the SNHR’s database of the forcibly disappeared reached at least 4,247 persons, including 219 children, and 81 women (adult female), who are still forcibly disappeared at the hands of the main parties in Syria from March 2011 to March 2019, distributed as follows:

A. Syrian Regime forces: 1,712, including 174 children and 58 women.

B. Extremist Islamist groups:
   • ISIS (the self-proclaimed ‘Islamic State’): 2,125, including 36 children and 12 women.

C. Syrian Democratic Forces: 288, including nine children and 11 women.

D. Factions of the Armed Opposition: 122
It should be noted that most of the mass graves that we have investigated, a number of which are included in this report, were created during the last year of ISIS’s control over the province of Raqqa (ie, between 2016 and October 2017). We therefore rule out a little that these graves include the remains of people who were lost by the Syrian regime or factions of the armed opposition, and we firmly believe that there are many other mass graves in the military centers of the Syrian regime or in other areas and that needs another level of investigation and research.

We believe, through our investigations, that the bodies of many of those disappeared by members of ISIS may be in these graves and that carrying out the exhumation process provides a great opportunity to identify these bodies.

III. The Most Notable Mass Graves That Were Dealt with in Raqqa Governorate:

Investigations conducted by the SNHR’s team into the mass graves in Raqqa, based on field visits by our associates, exclusive photos and videos we have obtained, direct contact with residents of the affected regions and relatives of victims or forcibly disappeared persons, and consulting the initial response team, indicate that approximately 97 percent of the bodies in the mass graves belong to civilians, while the bodies of ISIS fighters account for the remaining 3 percent.

SNHR contacted Mr. Abu Sham2, a local activist in Raqqa city. He told us that during the period of the city being under ISIS’ control, families continued to bury the victims in Tal al Bay’a cemetery up until the military campaign on the city led by Syrian Democratic Forces and International Coalition Forces, was launched, besieging the city and making access to this cemetery difficult, explaining: “The families began burying the victims who were killed by the bombing of the city in public places, such as ‘al Taj Grave’, ‘al Baydaa Garden’ and ‘al Panorama’, which were created in the context of the military campaign against Raqqa. Most of the bodies belonged to the victims of the bombing of the city by International Coalition forces and Syrian Democratic Forces. ISIS also used the same graves to bury its members as in al Panorama Grave.”

SNHR also spoke with Mr. Emad3, a lawyer who lives in Raqqa city. He told us his testimony: “The graves that the initial response team is working on have been known to us since the beginning of the military campaign against the city because the residents had to bury victims inside the city, given the inability to reach the main cemetery. We have

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2 We contacted him via his personal account on Facebook on January 30, 2019
3 We contacted him via his personal account on Facebook
called on the Civil Council to transfer the bodies to ‘Tal al Bay’a’ cemetery. The staff of the response team calls families before the opening of any grave in order to collect the victims’ remains in the event of them providing evidence to confirm the identity of the body buried. Most of the bodies in the graves are of civilians; 99 percent of the bodies in ‘al Jame’ al Qadim’ Grave belonged to civilians, while ISIS was burying its victims in ‘al Panorama’ Grave.”

An interactive map showing the sites of the most notable mass graves that have been dealt with in Raqqa governorate:

The most notable of those mass graves:

**Al Rasheed Mass Grave:**
The initial response team discovered this mass grave at al Rasheed High School’s football stadium on Adnan al Maliki Street in the center of Raqqa city, which was discovered on Tuesday April 17, 2018. The exhumations were completed on Saturday, June 9, 2018. According to the Initial response team, 553 bodies, including 25 women and 33 children, were recovered.
The people we have been able to communicate with have told us that bodies had been buried in this grave since the beginning of 2015, with the largest number of bodies interred there being those of victims of the recent battle of Raqqa. 153 bodies have been identified and handed over to their families.

SNHR contacted Mr. Jernas, a local activist who accompanied the initial response team in its work and told us about the difficulties facing the team: “Among the bodies found by the team were bodies belonging to ISIS fighters. I was able to distinguish them by their clothes and the military chest pouches of weapons on them, but the bodies of ISIS members constitute the smallest proportion of the bodies in the grave.” Jernas said he saw other bodies dressed in hospital gowns which were likely those of the injured who died of their wounds: “I do not rule out that the grave also includes the bodies of detainees who were detained by ISIS who killed them at various times throughout the period of its control over Raqqa. The grave is located near the judicial palace, which was taken by ISIS as a security center before being bombed by International Coalition forces several times in 2016 and 2017.”

We received a video of the forensic doctor with the initial response team speaking about the mass grave, and another video showing some of the bodies disinterred from the grave after their exhumation.
Two satellite images showing the site of “al Rasheed High School Stadium” in Adnan al Maliki Street in the center of Raqqa city.

The excavation of soil in the area highlighted in the satellite image from 2017 indicates the existence of mass graves there.
The initial response team began working on this grave on Thursday, June 21, 2018. The grave covers roughly four square kilometers of agricultural land adjacent to the former zoo near al Jisr al Qadim south of Raqqa city. The exhumation continued until Thursday, July 27, 2018. According to the response team, the total number of bodies exhumed from this mass grave was 402 bodies, including 62 children and 36 women, as well as six bodies whose sex has not yet been identified. Thirty-one of the victims’ bodies have been identified and handed over to their families.

We were unable to determine the date when the burial of the bodies in this grave began.
Two satellite images showing the site of an agricultural land near "al Jisr al Qadim" in southern Raqqa city.
The excavation of soil in the area highlighted in the satellite image from 2017 indicates the existence of mass graves there.
The mass grave in al Baydaa Garden:
on Wednesday, March 14, 2018, the initial response team discovered a mass grave in al Baydaa Garden in al Nahda neighborhood, west of the center of Raqqa city. The exhumation by the response team continued until Saturday, June 12, 2018. A total of 33 bodies were exhumed from the grave, including four children and seven women. None of the exhumed bodies has yet been identified, and SNHR has been unable to determine the date when the burial of the bodies began in this location.
The mass grave in al Najjarin Alley Park:
On Wednesday, August 1, 2018, the initial response team discovered a mass grave in a triangular area of parkland south of al Baydaa Garden in al Nahda neighborhood. The exhumation by the response team continued until Sunday, August 5, 2018. A total of 27 bodies were exhumed from the grave, including six children and nine women, along with another body whose sex hasn’t yet been identified. Nineteen of the bodies exhumed have been positively identified, with the remains handed over to their families. We have not been able to determine the date when the burial of the bodies began in this location.
Several mass graves in “al Badou Alley” neighborhood:
Al Badou Alley neighborhood in the north of Raqqa city is one of the neighborhoods that saw clashes between ISIS and Syrian Democratic Forces. The initial response team discovered four mass graves in this neighborhood. We have not been able to determine the date when the burial of the bodies in this grave began.

The first mass grave: This was discovered in a small garden to the east of the Hawari School building in al Badou Alley neighborhood. A total of 14 bodies were exhumed from the grave, including three children and two women. The initial response team began exhuming bodies from this grave on Friday, May 25, 2018.

The second mass grave: This was discovered in a small triangular garden to the west of al Shuhadaa Mosque. A total of 12 bodies were exhumed from this grave, including two children and one woman. The initial response team began exhuming bodies from this grave on Tuesday, May 29, 2018.

The third mass grave: This was discovered on Tuesday, July 3, 2018, in the internal courtyard of a house owned by a civilian named Fayyad. A total of 41 bodies were exhumed, including the remains of nine children and six women, as well as two bodies whose sex has not yet been positively identified.

Bodies exhumed by the initial response team from a mass grave in al Badou Alley in Raqqa city – July 2018
The fourth mass grave: This was discovered on Tuesday, July 3, 2018, in the internal courtyard of a house owned by Mr. Ahmad al Shehabi. According to the initial response team, 23 bodies were exhumed from this grave, including seven children and three women. Two of the bodies were handed over to the victims’ families after they had been positively identified.

A mass grave in a park in al Nahda neighborhood: This mass grave was discovered in a park in al Nahda neighborhood near Jawad Anzour School. A total of 19 bodies were exhumed from this grave, including five children and three women. The initial response team began exhuming bodies on Saturday, June 16, 2018, completing its search on Wednesday, June 20, 2018. SNHR hasn’t been able to determine the date when the burial of bodies in this grave began.
**A mass grave in al Qadesiya neighborhood:**
Work began on exhuming bodies from this mass grave on Saturday, June 2, 2018, and took one day. The initial response team discovered the grave in a park opposite Bilal Mosque to the east of al Jazara junction. A total of seven bodies were exhumed from this grave, including one child. SNHR hasn’t been able to determine the date when the burial of the bodies in this grave began.

**Al Panorama Park Mass Grave:**
The largest mass grave in of Raqqa city, was discovered in al Panorama Park at the southern entrance of the city, is estimated at 100 dunums or roughly 24 square acres. We have not been able to determine the date when the burial operations in this grave began. The initial response team began working on exhumations in this location on Monday, October 1, 2018, completing its work on Sunday, January 13, 2019. A total of 793 civilians’ bodies were exhumed, including 33 children, and 23 women, in addition to 463 more bodies belonging to ISIS fighters.
Two satellite images showing the site of "al Panorama Park" in southern Raqqa city. The excavation of soil in the area highlighted in the satellite image from 2017 indicates the existence of mass graves there.
**Children’s Garden Mass Grave:**
This mass grave is located in the Children’s Garden, next to al Fardous Mosque in al Fardous neighborhood in the center of Raqqa city. The initial response team began work on exhumations in this location on Monday, April 16, 2018. The exhumation lasted one day, with five bodies, including one child and one woman being exhumed. None of the bodies has yet been positively identified. SNHR has been unable to determine the date when the burial of the bodies in this grave began.

**Al Jame’ al Qadim Mosque Mass Grave:**
The initial response team began work on exhuming bodies from this mass grave on Sunday, August 26, 2018, and continued until Monday, September 10, 2018. It was discovered in the compound of al Jame’ al Qadim Mosque north of “Shubat 23” Street in Raqqa city. A total of 94 bodies were exhumed, including 35 children and 13 women. Sixty-eight of the victims’ bodies were handed over to their families after being identified. SNHR has been unable to determine the date when the burial of the bodies in this grave began.
Two satellite images showing the site of "al Jame' al Qadim" north of "Shubat 23" Street in Raqqa city.
The excavation of soil in the area highlighted in the satellite image from 2017 indicates the existence of mass graves there.
Al Fakhikha Mass Grave:
This mass grave is located in al Fakhikha village, near al Tala’e Camp approximately 1.5 kilometers south of Raqqa city, in an area of agricultural land belonging to the former Agricultural Research Institute. The initial response team began working on exhumations from this grave on Monday, January 21, 2019. The exhumation is still ongoing as of the date of publication of this report. As of March 2019, a total of 184 bodies have been exhumed from this mass grave, including 10 children and nine women. We have not been able to determine the date when the burial of the bodies in this grave began.
The initial response team includes about 107 members, including only one forensic doctor and 15 nurses. As we have been told by some of the team members, the work of the Victim Recovery Section is to excavate the trenches and other sites containing bodies, then try to identify the victims’ gender and search for any identification documents or other papers that might help with identifying the dead which may be buried with or near the bodies. In the next stage, the forensic doctor and his assistants create a record (a file) for each body, including all the available information about each body, such as the height, physical features, clothing and distinguishing marks. These files are archived by the initial response team. The third stage is to transfer the bodies to the main cemeteries in the city (Hittin cemetery or Tal al Bay’a cemetery) where they are laid to rest.

The team faces several challenges during its work in research and exhumation, most notably the significant delay in demining operations in various areas in Raqqa governorate, which has severely hampered the ability to have safe access to mass graves. SNHR has documented the deaths of 229 civilians as a result of the explosion of mines in Raqqa governorate between October 2017 and March 2019.

The biggest challenge facing the team is that it has only manual and rudimentary excavation equipment and lacks any expertise in exhumation and transportation of bodies without destroying forensic evidence. In addition to this, there is a severe lack of specialist forensic pathologists, and the more time passes, the more difficult it becomes to assess and identify the bodies. Finally, we noted that there are no specialist laboratory or other facilities available which the working team could use to collect and store samples taken from the exhumed bodies (such as bones, hair and teeth) for documentation in archived records so that matching samples can be taken from families seeking missing lived ones and DNA tests can be conducted for comparison and matching.

SNHR has obtained several copies of the reports written by the initial response team during the exhumation process. These include schedules of working days, and daily records giving the number of exhumed bodies and only provide information about the sex of each body exhumed. Reports are therefore limited, providing no additional information or details of distinguishing marks or even attaching photographs of the victim's clothing and possessions found near his or her body.
Lawyer Ibrahim al Hasan, head of the reconstruction committee in Raqqa governorate, with which the initial response team is affiliated, told us that most of the mass graves that has been worked on are inside the city and had been established following the military campaign by International Coalition forces. He also revealed that the team members distinguish between civilians and military personnel through examining their clothing: “ISIS elements wear ‘Pakistan’ military fatigues, and are distinguished physically by their thick hair and long beards. These items of evidence prove to us that the body of one of the ISIS members.

Mr. Ibrahim added that the method of exhumation is primitive and rudimentary, with the team using a bulldozer and simple excavation equipment, in addition to the manual shovels: “After the body is removed from the hole, it is presented to the forensic team, where all the details of the clothes, descriptions of the body, determination of the cause of death and age of victim are recorded. This information is archived in a special archive by the forensic doctor. “

From our point of view, the process of preparing reports, recording and archiving information in this way lacks professionalism, precision and expertise. It is also difficult to distinguish between male civilians and combatants solely through clothing and beards because as part of its proscriptive rulings, ISIS forced all male civilians to grow beards, and wear clothes similar to those worn by ISIS members.

V. Legal Conclusions

Customary international humanitarian law (IHL), in Rules 112-116, provides for special measures in the processes of searching for dead persons and preventing the pillaging of their bodies and the prohibition of their mutilation. The 1977 (Protocol II) Additional to the four Geneva Conventions notes in Article 8 to the need to search for the dead. There are also binding general rules, such as the prohibition of assault on personal dignity and inhuman treatment.

The process of transporting bodies to the main graves without taking samples of bone or hair remains problematic, and the absence of a specialized team of forensic doctors with extensive experience in practicing the profession may expose the sites of mass graves to unintentional pollution, all of which is considered potentially distorting and damaging to evidence, making it difficult for future identification of the bodies, and leaving tens of thousands of already desperately worried families in a state of fearful suspension about their ’disappeared’ loved ones’ whereabouts. We at SNHR also believe that the de facto local authorities, the Syrian Democratic Forces, have not taken all possible measures to ensure
that this process is carried out in such a way as to ensure the preservation of evidence and the preservation of the victims’ rights and to identify the perpetrators of such violations if they occur, as well as showing little sensitivity to the extent of damage and violence suffered by the governorate. The military forces in control bears the main and direct responsibility for all these acts and their consequences.

It appears to us in this report that the military authorities controlling the land, the Syrian Democratic Forces, which consist mainly of members of the Democratic Union Party, do not care about these highly sensitive and distressing issues, which pose a societal danger. There is a major imbalance and failure in the management of areas liberated from ISIS’ control in the absence of a competent political body, with a military force that represents local communities in a fair manner. This has become even clearer through the negligence shown and the failure to deal with several issues, most notably the matter of bodies and mass graves. This was one of the issues discussed by the Syrian Network for Human Rights with several officials working in the US State Department during the recent visit of the SNHR to Washington on March 8; this is a profound concern in view of the serious repercussions of this issue, and the related threat to the security, stability and identity of the community, and the key role of the US government in the north-east of Syria.

Recommendations:

**US-led International Coalition forces:**

- Provide more logistical and material support to help in the exhumation process and put pressure on Syrian Democratic Forces to allocate a larger proportion of material resources in this regard, so that this process is not later deemed to be mismanagement of the remains and forensic mishandling, in which the Syrian Democratic Forces may be part of the same violations. It is therefore necessary to establish an independent body under the auspices of the International Coalition to carry out this task in cooperation and coordination with the local initial response team to carry out this complex and delicate process.
- Put pressure on Syrian Democratic Forces not to limit their efforts and resources to military issues such as arming and stockpiling ammunition, and to make greater efforts in civilian operations and providing assistance to the local community; the information contained in in this report and others indicates that they have demonstrably failed in this area.
- Take all possible measures to protect bodies and make every effort to identify the dead and provide appropriate burial in clearly marked graves.
• Support the initial response team in material and logistical issues, provide the necessary equipment, and increase the number of specialized forensic doctors.

• Establish a laboratory where samples taken from the bodies can be collected to compare them with samples from the families of missing persons and help to establish a central general register of missing persons.

• Contribute to accelerating the demining process, which has a significant impact on the return of civilians to Raqqa city and the exhumation process.

Syrian Opposition:
• Contribute to providing logistical and other expert support to the initial response team, assume responsibilities in this regard, and form a special committee to visit the graves and follow up the progress of work.

OHCHR:
• Highlight the issue of mass graves, follow up the process of excavation and exhumation of bodies, and issue a report clarifying its position on these operations and make recommendations to the UN Security Council to make progress in this field in order to reveal the identity of tens of thousands of missing Syrians.

International Committee of the Red Cross:
• The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) should visit Raqqa governorate and contribute expertly to the process of assisting in exhumation, preservation of criminal materials and prevention of the exposure of burial sites to pollution.

International Commission on Missing Persons (ICMP):
• Conduct a training workshop for the local initial response team, provide them with the necessary consultation and expertise, and make every effort to help identify the missing and disappeared, which will enhance the process of transitional justice in Syria.

• Assist in the work of the Central Tracing Agency to ensure a greater ability to search for the disappeared in Syria and as soon as possible.

Local Response Team:
• Try to gain the necessary expertise in order to avoid destruction of evidence, and work to coordinate with international committees; the Syrian Network for Human Rights is ready to contribute in this regard.
• Demonstrate a commitment not to bury victims in shared graves and gather all information which could help identify the bodies before burying them.

Acknowledgments
We wish to extend our sincere condolences to all the families of the victims and others affected, and to offer our thanks to people and local activists, the families of the victims and the local initial response team, without whose cooperation we would not have been able to issue this report.