Syrian Network for Human Rights Working Methodology

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- Faith -

For the Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR), the main goal in documenting human rights violations in Syria is to preserve the rights of all victims, to hold the perpetrators of crimes against them accountable in order to ensure justice, and to deter anyone considering perpetrating similar acts, as well as to support the path of transitional justice and memorialization, and to contribute to the political and social advocacy process. Moreover, SNHR believes that all of these goals represent a way to challenge the decades-long policy of impunity that Syria has experienced, which has intensified the cycle of violence and oppression and impeded the establishment of a new government founded on the values of justice, equality, and democracy.

- Clarity and Commitment -

The SNHR team is committed to ensuring that survivors, eyewitnesses, and victims' families and friends are fully informed about the working methodology used by SNHR, and of the purpose of their testimonies, and about their right to conceal their identities or to use an alias to preserve their privacy and to prevent them from being harassed or persecuted by the security forces, as well as reassuring them that the information they provide will not be made publicly available in case they fear that doing so might endanger their own lives. All of these objectives are in accordance with our internal principles and protocols under which we have worked for years, and which we strive constantly to develop in order to keep pace with the high levels of psychological care required for the various types of victims. SNHR possesses an exhaustive archive of eyewitnesses' names, contact information, and testimonies, as well as the photos and videos included in all our reports and research features. We incorporate high-level security measures to maintain the security of all this information.

- Credibility and Expansion -

Since the establishment of SNHR in June 2011, all of its staff members in Syria, who are spread across the country, have worked to create and ensure trust and cooperation within their local communities in order to document the increasing violations of human rights through collecting as much detailed information as possible on incidents of violation and the human and material losses incurred by these incidents, in addition to documenting testimonies from survivors, victims' family members, others close to them, and eyewitnesses who were present at the time when these incidents occurred. Over years of daily cumulative work, SNHR has built up an extensive network of contacts of thousands of field sources, who have been a constant source of information. The daily and weekly news reports and other reports SNHR has issued, which are considered a form of advocacy and a way of accurately dating and cataloguing events for future reference, have contributed to building a positive and principled reputation for SNHR and a strong network of relations based on mutual respect and trust with field sources, with SNHR's widely respected status on social media, through its officially verified accounts, and in local, regional and international media coverage, playing a major role in increasing Syrians' familiarity with SNHR and the work it does, thus encouraging more citizens to communicate with us and expanding our network of relations. These relations are based on reciprocity and mutual respect, with SNHR actively reaching out to build relations, while many citizens equally actively initiate communication with us; SNHR's large and diverse range of contacts and this constant communication help greatly in contributing to documenting and verifying as many violations as possible; we are engaged in an ongoing quest to develop the network of relations across all Syrian governorates.

- Definitions and Classifications -

SNHR is committed throughout all aspects of its work to scrupulous adherence to the definitions and classifications included in International Human Rights Law and International Humanitarian Law, as well as to the definitions and classifications used by international bodies such as the International Committee of the Red Cross. The following are the most notable terms used in our reports and news.

Massacre:

As a result of the existence of several varying definitions as to what might classify a certain incident as a massacre according to the number of the victims who were killed at the same time and location, we define a massacre as: any incident in which five or more peaceful individuals are killed.

Detainee / unlawful arrest / detention:

The arrest of a person without a legitimate reason or without legal process, because of a political opinion or in connection with freedom of expression or because of the exercise of any of the rights guaranteed by the Syrian constitution and International Human Rights Law, with the deprivation of a person's liberty constituting a violation of International Human Rights Law or International Humanitarian Law.

Forcibly Disappeared Person:

This refers to any detainee who has been held for at least 20 days following their arrest / detention, in cases where the party that arrested the individual denies this individual's detention and denies any knowledge of his/her fate.

Men:

We use this term to refer to any adult male aged 18 years or over.

Women:

We use this term to refer to any adult female aged 18 years or over.

Children:

We use this term to refer to male and female juveniles aged under 18. These are divided into male children and female children.

Elder:

Any individual of either sex aged 60 years or over.

Infant:

Any infant of either sex from newborn up to two years of age.

Females:

These are divided into adult females (women), who are aged over 18, and female children aged under 18.

Males:

These are divided into adult males (men), who are over 18, and male children aged under 18.

Citizen journalist:

We define the citizen journalist as any individual who has played an important role in reporting and disseminating news. This is not necessarily a neutral person, as is supposed to be the case of a journalist in normal circumstances. However, when an individual takes up arms and participates directly in offensive combat operations, he or she is no longer categorized as a citizen journalist; this categorization can be restored, however, if the individual abstains completely from any involvement in military action.

Media workers:

This category includes journalists, citizen journalists, and other workers in the media field, all of whom play an important role in the reporting and dissemination of news, as well as students at communications faculties. Again, when anyone classified as belonging within this category takes up arms and participates directly in offensive combat operations, they are no longer categorized as media workers; however, this categorization can be restored once they abstain completely from any involvement in military action.

Medical personnel:

This category includes all personnel working in the medical field, including doctors, nurses, paramedics, pharmacists, lab technicians, and administrative staff, as well as those working in the operation and transport of medical supplies, and students of medicine studying at university or medical institutes. Again, inclusion in this category is suspended if any of these individuals take up arms and participate directly in offensive combat operations, but is restored once the individuals abstain completely from any involvement in military action.

Combatant:

This category includes any individual who takes up arms and engages in combat activities as defined by International Humanitarian Law. When we encounter documentation of an incident of bombardment in which civilians and military operatives are killed, we refer to any victims whose status is uncertain as "an individual" until their status can be correctly defined later.
Cases of uncertainty in deciding whether an individual is classified as a civilian or a combatant: In case of the absence of conclusive evidence of the victim's status and of resulting uncertainty over his/her classification as a civilian or a combatant, we register him/her as a civilian.

Timing:

We use the 24-hour clock in recording the times of incidents, using the local time in the area where the incident took place to record the times of incidents.

Changes in areas of control:

As a result of combat operations between multiple parties in Syria, the various parties' control of areas is subject to constant fluctuation and change. Since some reports and studies require lengthy periods of research, verification and analysis to ensure accurate documentation, the identity of the forces that are in control of a given area at the time of these report's release might be different from those forces who were controlling the area at the time of the incidents covered in these reports. Therefore, SNHR always prioritizes the dates on which the violations in question took place.

- Classification of the Parties Involved in Perpetrating Violations -

As a human rights organization which is independent from all parties to the conflict and controlling forces, SNHR is not involved in subjective analysis or justification of attacks, or in speculation on reactions or motives, focusing instead solely on the violations that result from these attacks or those which result from retaliatory counter-attacks.

At the start of the Syrian uprising in 2011, the Syrian regime was the sole party responsible for perpetrating violations of human rights in Syria, and remains by far the largest perpetrator of the vast majority of violations. However, as the situation deteriorated, various groups emerged on the Syrian scene, committing multiple violations; many of these groups have worked under various and changeable titles. One common goal unites these groups or their actions, however; they are directed to serve the interest of a certain side. Thus, SNHR distinguishes parties who commit violations in Syria on the basis of their objectives, allegiance, overwhelmingly distinctive traits, and the way in which they operate, after carrying out extensive work to determine and identify the parties responsible for these violations, with many similar groups being derivatives or offshoots of those parties, which are as follows:

The first party:

Syrian Regime forces;

This includes the army, security forces, affiliated forces, local militias, and foreign militias, who are mostly Iranian or Iranian-backed, and have a Shiite political / ideological orientation. Syrian Regime forces began committing violations since the first day of the popular uprising for democracy in 2011 and have continued ever since up to the current day.

The second party:

Democratic Union Party forces;

This is the Syrian branch of the Kurdistan Workers' Party and its affiliated forces. These forces were never previously distinguishable from Syrian Regime forces until 2012 when we began to distinguish differences between the two parties. At the beginning of 2014, the party formed what was called the 'Self-Management' division, whose primary unit is the Democratic Union Party forces, which is divided between the 'People's Protection Units' and 'Al Asayesh Forces'. From the end of 2015, these forces united to form the 'Syrian Democratic Forces', incorporating a largely symbolic presence of other components of Syrian society.

The third party:

Syrian Opposition forces;

This includes all Armed Opposition factions, the 'Free Syrian Army', and 'Non-Extremist Islamist Factions', who began their operations in August 2011 sporadically before expanding gradually up until March 2012, when the International Committee of the Red Cross declared that the conflict in Syria is a non-international armed conflict.
In December 2019, the Syrian Interim Government announced the expansion of an inclusive armed force under the name of the 'Syrian National Army', with the vast majority of the Armed Opposition factions and the Free Syrian Army gradually joining the Syrian National Army, which has thus become the body essentially representing Armed Opposition factions.

The fourth party:

Al Nusra Front;

This is a branch of the 'Al-Qaeda Organization' in Syria, whose establishment was announced in January 2012. The group continued to use this name until July 2016 when it announced its separation from Al-Qaeda, renaming itself Hay'at Tahrir al Sham.

The fifth party:

The 'Islamic State Organization - ISIS';

whose establishment was announced in April 2013, **the 'Jund al Aqsa' group, and the 'Hurras al Din' (Guardians of Religion) group**, which was announced on February 27, 2018.

The sixth party:

US-led Coalition forces;

This is a coalition of a group of countries led by the USA, who share the goal of fighting the 'Islamic State Organization - ISIS'. This coalition commenced its operations in September 2014.

The seventh party:

Russian forces;

The Russian Federation's official armed forces, which formally declared their entrance into Syria in September 2015.

The eighth party:

Turkish forces;

These forces entered the Syrian conflict since mid-2016 with Operation Euphrates Shield, and back the Syrian National Army.

Other parties;

This category includes all incidents whose perpetrators we've been unable to identify, such as fires of unknown source, landmines of unknown origin, and most of the explosions carried out via remote detonations. This category also includes victims who were killed by border guard forces of neighboring countries.

It should be emphasized that, in the context of SNHR's work, terms used, such as 'Islamist', 'Shiite', 'Kurdish', etc. carry no discriminatory religious or ethnic undertones, as we respect every individual's human rights to his or her nationality, religion and sect, with these characteristics used as terms of reference solely to determine the main characteristic defining or uniting a certain group of combatants.

– Documentation and Classification of Victims –

SNHR's Victim Documentation Department works constantly to follow up on incidents that result in extrajudicial killings on a daily basis, with the work of this department mainly focusing on:

1. Following up on daily incidents that result in casualties, which constitute extrajudicial killings.
2. Trying to reach the location of the incident, communicate with first-hand sources, including victims' family members and eyewitnesses, as well as taking or obtaining photos / videos of the victim and incident location.
3. Daily archiving of the victims' data that has been verified.
4. These stages are subject to continuous follow-up, collection and updating of victims' data.

These stages become more difficult and complicated when a massacre occurs or a large number of victims are killed in close proximity bombings at one time, with additional factors entering into consideration, increasing the difficulty of the documentation process, such as the use of several types of weapons, the use of the double-tap airstrike policy, or the destruction and damage of buildings, which lead to major changes in the form or appearance of the location.

In addition to the previous stages, our technical team has developed an electronic archiving program that registers data automatically rather than manually, with this program enabling us to more rapidly categorize victims' names according to the governorate from which each victim comes, their gender, age, the date and place of death, method of killing used, perpetrator party, type of weapon used, and other detailed information, which can be more or less detailed depending on the circumstances surrounding each incident, as well as archiving an image of each victim. SNHR's Victim Documentation Department team constantly updates its comprehensive database, with all

the data added to the SNHR's main databases being retained securely, and several backup copies being stored in different locations.

This program enables us to allocate the death toll of victims according to place where the killing violation occurred, as well as according to the governorate from which each victim came; this, consequently, contributes to determining the human losses sustained by each governorate, and enables us to accurately ascertain the highest rates of violence documented in the case of each violation.

The death toll of victims detailed on SNHR's database includes extrajudicial killings by the controlling forces which occurred as a violation of either international human rights law or international humanitarian law or both, but does not include cases of natural deaths or those which occurred because of disputes between members of society.

SNHR's methodology and primary focus is the documentation of civilian victims

The SNHR's work focuses on documenting civilians who were killed in extrajudicial operations. In the case of the documentation of militants and fighters among the parties to the conflict listed earlier, it is in many cases impossible to communicate with, for example, Syrian Regime forces or their families, or with the forces of ISIS, the Lebanese Hezbollah party, the Kurdish Democratic Union Party, or Hay'at Tahrir al Sham. We believe that the statistics issued by some media outlets citing death tolls for members of these parties are not credible due to being inaccurate or methodologically unsound, with the means used to determine these death tolls being far from even the most basic criteria for objective assessment. Documenting victims amongst Armed Opposition factions' members may be the easiest such task in relation to all the armed parties, since the vast majority of these victims were civilians who subsequently took up arms, or civilians who later joined the Syrian National Army, but even in this case, the accuracy of the information remains within the minimum limits, due to the difficulty in reaching the battlefronts, the failure of these groups to publish lists of victims' names, and the groups' efforts to prevent such news from being disseminated.

Finally, SNHR provides a [special form](#) on its website which members of the public can complete with the name and details of any victim; this is then submitted to the Victim Documentation Department, which, in turn, follows up the information with the individuals who submitted it, and in the event of verification, adds the details to the SNHR database.

- Documentation of Arrest/ Enforced Disappearance/ Torture -

The SNHR team implements strict standards in evaluating and assessing any incident of arbitrary arrest in accordance with the principles of international laws and the set of principles on arbitrary arrest and enforced disappearance. The SNHR's Detainee and Forcibly-Disappeared Department daily:

- Records cases of arrest/ detention/ torture which departmental personnel collect from various sources, such as: victims' families, SNHR members in Syrian governorates, cooperating local activists, and former detainees (survivors of detention), conducting daily updates of data on cases of arrest/ detention, enforced disappearance and release, according to verified information on the person's condition, before diligently working to contact the families of the detainees and forcibly disappeared persons, for the purpose of collecting as much information and data as possible, in light of the extraordinary and extremely complex challenges.

- This information, once received, is then registered on the database after being cross-checked with several sources. The Detainee Department also constantly works to pursue any new leads or information about each detainee, the place of detention, and his or her current conditions via continuous interaction with the detainees' families and those close to them, as well as meeting with survivors of arrest/ detention and documenting their testimonies about the circumstances and experience of their detention and the violations they were subject to, along with those who they saw within the detention centers.

The Detainee Department team constantly updates the database of detainees who were released as and when information becomes available; this data is added to the SNHR's databases which are retained securely, with several backup copies being stored in different locations.

The detainee figures which SNHR has been able to document on its database do not include prisoners with a criminal background; we believe that the number of arrests documented is far smaller than the actual number of detainees, with the SNHR unable to access information on many or even most detainees in light of the severe challenges we face. In addition, the detainee figures do not include cases of those kidnapped, abducted or missing in which we were unable to identify the responsible party, or determine the exact circumstances of the individual going missing or being kidnapped, abducted or 'disappeared'.

SNHR encounters additional challenges in documenting the daily arrests/ enforced disappearances/ torture, which have been constant since 2011. The most notable challenges amongst these are:

- The reluctance of victims' families to cooperate and reveal or provide details of any information on their family members' arrest, even confidentially, more especially if the arrested individual is female, due to a well-founded fear still prevalent in Syrian society that being discovered doing so would result in more torture and further danger for their loved ones and themselves. Instead, families try to negotiate with security forces which usually blackmail these families and demand cash payments, effectively ransoms, that can amount to thousands of dollars in some cases.
- Much of Syrian society has lost faith in the idea of the usefulness of cooperation in the documentation process, with the main reason behind this being the failure of the international community and of all the organs of the United Nations to apply pressure on the Syrian regime authorities to release even one individual (including those whose sentences are completed). Instead, most of those released by the regime have been released as part of exchange deals with the armed opposition, or through paying bribes or ransoms to influential officials.

The Syrian government adamantly denies carrying out any abductions or arrests. Most of the arrests in Syria are carried out without any judicial warrant while the victims are passing through checkpoints or during raids. Based on the interviews we have conducted with thousands of detainees since 2011, most of the arrests are made either by means of violent raids in which regime personnel break down the doors of the detainees' homes before detaining them, or through detaining individuals at checkpoints in the street. SNHR believes that government forces use these methods in order not to leave any evidence that could be used to hold the regime to account for these arrests and the torture, sexual violence, extrajudicial killing, and other violations that follow.

The security forces of the regime's four main intelligence services are often responsible for arrests/ disappearances/ torture, which are wholly unconnected with any judicial process. Every detainee is tortured from the very first moment of his or her arrest and denied any opportunity to contact his or her family or to have access to a lawyer. The authorities also flatly deny the arbitrary arrests they have carried out, with most of the detainees subsequently classified as forcibly disappeared.

The other parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in Syria, such as the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces, extremist Islamist groups, and various Armed Opposition factions, take similar measures to those of the Syrian regime, albeit at a lower rate and in a less systematic manner than those practiced by Syrian Regime forces; these constitute violations of International Human Rights Law, and, if they took place on the basis of the armed conflict, they constitute violations of International Humanitarian Law.

None of the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces provide any public record for the community showing the whereabouts of the arrested / detainees and the reasons for their arrest, nor do they provide any documentation on the

judicial sentences issued against these individuals, including the death penalty, with the vast majority of the families not knowing the fate of their loved ones.

Since 2011, the SNHR has created complex electronic programs to archive and categorize the detainees' data, which the team collects and verifies; this enables us to categorize the detainees according to gender, the location where each was arrested, the governorate from which each detainee originally came, and the party responsible for their arrest. These programs also enable us to make comparisons between these parties, as well as identifying the governorates from which the largest proportion of residents have been arrested and disappeared. We note that when we categorize the record of arrests on the SNHR's database, we can categorize cases of arrest according to the governorate in which the incident occurred, and according to the governorate from which the detainee originally came. In most of our reports, we outline the categorization of the record of arrests according to the place where the arrest took place, not according to the governorate from which the detainee originally came. It should also be noted that sometimes we categorize the cases of arrest according to the governorate from which the detainee originally came in order to show the magnitude of loss and violence suffered by the people of that governorate compared to other governorates, in which case we refer to this in the report.

SNHR also notes in all of its reports that the Syrian regime has ended its short-lived policy of supplying a limited amount of evidence to the families of detainees via official notification of their loved ones' deaths in regime detention centers; this admission by the regime of these detainees' deaths was itself only a recent development adopted in mid-2018 when the regime began officially revealing that a number of the forcibly disappeared persons detained previously had died; in most cases, prior to these notifications, the regime had denied any knowledge of these detainees' whereabouts. Those

revelations were made by means of death notices published at civil registry departments. Even in these cases, the Syrian regime has failed to provide the bereaved families with any solid evidence proving that their loved ones are dead aside from brusque phone calls in some cases or a certificate from civil registry departments. As such, the Syrian regime hasn't conclusively revealed the fate of the disappeared; consequently, SNHR stresses that the status and the crime of enforced disappearance in these case remains unchanged, despite these notifications, and that this status will continue to be applied so long as the person in question remains physically missing, whether dead or alive. In accordance with the relevant international law in this regard, we shall continue to classify these individuals as being forcibly disappeared persons, with the primary suspect accused in connection with their disappearance being the Syrian regime. The Syrian regime has perpetrated a string of crimes and indignities, from warrantless arrests and denying detainees their right to an attorney, to extremely brutal conditions of detention in which detainees are subjected to torture, with 85 percent of the detainees documented going on to be registered as cases of enforced disappearances; in those cases, where detainees' families are informed of their loved ones' demise, they receive no body or any remains for burial.

SNHR provides a [special form] available to the public that can be filled with the name and details of any detainee, with the Detainee Department following up each case and verifying the information provided before adding it to the database.

- Documentation of Vital Facilities -

SNHR works on a daily basis to document the targeting of vital civilian facilities. In the event that a vital facility is subjected to more than one attack, we document each attack as a separate violation, and continue to consider attacks on vital facilities as a violation of these facilities, even if they have stopped operating due to bombardment or destruction.

The investigation team working on investigating the targeting of vital facilities faces exceptional challenges, such as ascertaining the status of the vital facility before and after it was targeted, estimating the extent of damage and the type of weapon used, with these vital facilities often being subject to more than one attack at the same time or multiple attacks within short periods of time, as seen at a number of hospitals and Civil Defense headquarters buildings; they are also routinely attacked by more than one party, such as being bombed by the Syrian regime's warplanes and then by Russian forces' warplanes.

We have created partial databases of the various vital facilities that we document, with the following being the most notable vital facilities in the SNHR's database:

Places of Worship:

- Mosques
- Churches and monasteries

Vital Educational Facilities:

- Schools
- Universities
- Educational Institutions
- Nurseries
- University Campuses
- Orphanages

Vital Medical Facilities:

- Medical facilities (Hospitals, dispensaries, medical clinics, and field hospitals etc.)
- Ambulances

Vital Cultural Facilities:

- Archeological sites (citadels, forts, ancient cemeteries, temples, amphitheaters and theaters etc.)
- Museums

Communal Facilities:

- Gardens
- Markets
- Malls and commercial centers
- Hotels
- Care homes for the elderly
- Playgrounds and stadiums

International Humanitarian Insignia:

- International Red Cross (facilities and vehicles)
- Red Crescent (facilities and vehicles)

Infrastructure:

- Power stations and energy facilities (Power grids, electricity generation and transmission stations, fuel stations, oil wells and stations, gas wells and stations, oil and gas pipelines etc.)
- Civil Defense centers (facilities and vehicles)
- Fire stations (facilities and vehicles)
- Water facilities and related

resources (water pipes, wells, water pumping and treatment stations, irrigation canals, dams, water tanks, sewage treatment plants, sewage systems).
- Official Headquarters (Institutions and ministries etc.)
- Transport features (bridges, water crossings, highways, railroads, garages, car parks, bus and railway stations, civil airports, border crossings and

associated offices etc.)
- Bakeries
- Banks
- Livestock farms
- Grain silos
- Industrial facilities (industrial factories, facilities and zones etc.)
- International headquarters and organizations' offices and other assets.
- Pharmacies
- Civil society organizations
- Media

Diplomatic missions:

- Embassies, consulates, foreign representatives, diplomatic centers and offices.

IDP Camps:

- Regular camps - random camps - shelter centers - IDP villages.

- Documentation of the Use of Different Types of Weapons, Particularly Indiscriminate and Outlawed Weapons -

At the SNHR, we focus on documenting the crime weapon used in each incident, categorizing incidents on the database according to the type of weapon used, going into greater detail concerning special types of weapons in which we have shown greater interest, such as weapons prohibited for use, or against which the UN Security Council and the General Assembly issued resolutions, such as: chemical weapons, cluster munitions, barrel bombs, incendiary weapons, etc. We have built partial databases dedicated to these, on which we try to ensure that each incident catalogued includes the following details:

- Time of the attack

- The targeted location

- Weather conditions at the time of the attack

- The death toll and the injured

- The type of weapon used

- Photos and videos of the conditions of those injured and killed, the location of the violation incident, and the remnants of weapons, if any.

- The SNHR's team may be unable to visit the locations of attacks, given current conditions, meaning they haven't yet had the opportunity of taking blood or soil samples and having these tested, in which case we rely on first-hand accounts obtained from survivors and eyewitnesses, doctors who have treated injured persons as a result of chemical attacks or attacks using cluster munitions or incendiary weapons, and from Civil Defense personnel who responded early to the rescue of the bombed and targeted areas.

- Analyze the videos and photos that we obtained or which were published online, after verifying their authenticity.

- In many incidents, we analyze how the attack occurred and provide a visualization of the form and pattern of the attack, as well as often including detailed satellite and ground-level photos showing the locations where the shells landed in each attack and their impact, as well as providing other details.

- Forced Displacement -

This is of the main types of violations that the SNHR is concerned with documenting, which has affected nearly 13 million Syrian citizens, including internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees, as it is a widespread violation. We are working to document the most prominent cases of areas whose people have been forcibly displaced, through adopting standard procedures as detailed in these stages:

- Study and analyze the timeline of events that have affected the area since March 2011, particularly in the time period prior to the forced displacement.
- Studying the reality of the military control imposed by the parties to the conflict on the ground, and analyzing the implications of changes in this control over displacement movements.
- Monitoring and following up operations concerning all the truces or ceasefire agreements that the area in question has witnessed and their repercussions, and analyzing their impacts and consequences on the situation of displacement and forced displacement.
- Communicating with the displaced people, collecting data on them, listening to their testimonies, and trying to obtain photos of the displacement.
- Analyzing the impact of targeting the infrastructure and vital civilian facilities that provide the basic amenities essential for the everyday life of the population, by consulting the SNHR's detailed database providing documentation of attacks on civilian vital facilities, and cross-checking to what extent this destruction is related to the displacement that took place.
- Monitoring and documenting the sieges, including starvation sieges, practiced by the parties to the conflict on the area in cases where these are present, and the accompanying violations of International Humanitarian Law and International Human Rights Law, and analyzing their implications and impact on displacements.
- Obtaining high-resolution satellite imagery of the area in question over a period of time, and analyzing the extent of the destruction of homes, shops and other structures caused by the violent bombardment, which played a major role in the displacement.
- Documenting the Syrian regime's and its allies' use of internationally prohibited weapons such as chemical weapons of mass destruction, which has contributed to the displacement of entire areas and the surrender of their people, as well as the widespread use of barrel bombs and cluster munitions.
- Finally, we monitor the looting and confiscation operations of housing, land and property (HLP) that follow displacements, which the Syrian regime has increased through enacting laws that violate International Human Rights Law, violate the most basic rights of the Syrian citizen to property, and constitute a major obstacle to the return of refugees and IDPs, and an attempt to a geometrical change of the social and demographic structure.

- Violations against Children -

The SNHR is concerned with documenting multiple types of violations against children in Syria, and there is hardly a report or a statistic on our databases that does not include violations against children; we have built a database specifically dedicated to documenting violations against children, which mainly includes: killing, arrest, enforced disappearance, torture, sexual violence, conscription, displacement, targeting schools and nurseries and thus deprivation of education, and we follow the steps previously mentioned in documenting each type of violation.

- Violations against Women -

The SNHR is concerned with documenting multiple types of violations against women in Syria, and there is hardly a report or a statistic on our databases that does not include violations against women; we have built a database specifically dedicated to documenting violations against women, which mainly includes: killing, arrest, enforced disappearance, torture, conscription, displacement, forced marriage and sexual violence, and we follow the steps previously mentioned in documenting each type of violation.

- Reliance on Open Sources -

We at the SNHR use open sources, and rely on these as an additional information source that enhances the stages of investigating the incident, given that we monitor events on a daily basis, and we obtain many of these materials   through:
- Our staff or volunteers.
- Internet.

In view of our continuous work over nearly 10 years, during which time we have built up hundreds of contacts with local activists, through which we were able to ascertain which sources provide the greatest reliability, we monitor the reports issued for each incident, then we work to assemble the materials and to categorize and verify their credibility and relevance to the incident; in general, the photos and videos we archive contain many details that may constitute evidence of one or more violations, for example:
- Corpses or body parts of victims
- People receiving treatment in hospitals or medical points
- Evacuations of casualties or retrieving bodies
- Remnants of weapons and munitions, yellow smoke indicating the use of gas, or ash indicating the use of incendiary weapons
- Destruction and material damage
- Animals or plants affected by chemical or incendiary weapons
- Preparation and equipping of ammunition for launch
- Confessions to or bragging about committing crimes
- The impact of fires on homes or other buildings
- Mass displacements
- Eyewitness accounts / whether general accounts or personal interviews
- Bad humanitarian conditions in camps or places of displacement

- Burials in mass graves
- The impact of bulldozing indicating mass graves
- Details indicating the geographical location of the incident

Next comes the verification phase, during which each video passes through several audits, especially in the event that the meta data is not obtained, such as:

- Verifying that video footage was filmed in Syria, the date and time the video was filmed, and the geographical location.
- Verifying the date the video was uploaded for the first time, and the first source that uploaded it, via a specific search engine
- Comparing visual references (such as buildings, mountains, trees, minarets, and crossroads) with satellite imagery from Google Earth as well as specific geographical images from Google Maps.

Next comes the stage of visual analysis of the sources, cross-checking between these, and linking them with the direct witness accounts that we have obtained, and with other available details about the incident, such as satellite images if we purchased these for some incidents.

- Documentation of the Individuals Involved in Committing Violations -

At SNHR, we exert the greatest possible effort to identify the perpetrators of violations, in order to eventually convict them and hold them responsible, expose their crimes and hold them accountable; as part of this process, we also try to search more deeply and attain more details by identifying the following information:

Names and other information on individuals who contributed to carrying out the violation, their rank, the length of time during which they have worked in the position in question, details on the chain of command, and other particulars.

We have built a database dedicated to cataloguing individuals who we believe are directly or indirectly involved in or contributing to violations, who are among one of the main parties that we referred to previously. This database, which we have worked on since 2011, includes names and details of tens of thousands of these individuals, the vast majority of whom work under some entity of the Syrian regime and its allies.

We have collected this data from dissidents and defectors from the Syrian regime, as well as those who are still employees of the Syrian government, and from civilians, having ascertained the position of these individuals and the nature of their work; we have also relied on reports from pro-Syrian regime websites publish on the Internet, and on activists in the Syrian opposition, as well as on open sources, and on information we receive through the network of contacts that we have built up with the Syrian community and with local activists. During this process, we scrupulously cross-check and analyze all

these data. We have faced additional challenges, especially in building this database, the most notable of which are:

- The parties to the conflict's secrecy regarding this information, even or especially the governmental ones. For example, the Syrian regime's Ministry of Defense's website contains no details of any of the leaders of the army or the heads of brigades and different divisions, or Air Force commanders. Similarly, the Ministry of Interior's website provides no details on the senior officials running the various security branches.

- In the event of the dismissal or killing of one of the individuals amongst the leaders or the execution of personnel, it is difficult to determine the date of the individual's death, and thus determining his level of responsibility or otherwise when the incident occurred, and there is also difficulty in learning details of the new official appointed in his place.

- Civilians' fear of cooperating on such a sensitive topic.

- Challenges -

The documentation of human rights violations in Syria is one of the most difficult and complicated processes in the world in light of the extraordinary and exceptional circumstances under which the documentation process takes place; the security factor is the most prominent of these challenges, because the individual may lose his/her life while documenting a violation or while trying to obtain information, or may be arrested, tortured or disappeared. Other factors include the regime's severance of communication networks, lack of internet access, and the large number of parties responsible for violations (in some cases, this complexity means that it is deemed too difficult to accurately determine the perpetrator party, so we include such incidents alongside other cases in which we couldn't identify the perpetrators). Over the last two years, the Syrian people have understandably lost faith in the documentation processes and their usefulness in exposing and prosecuting the criminals responsible for the violations; this skepticism is wholly understandable after nine years of absolute impunity, which has even enabled some of the criminals to brag about their crimes, a feature most prominently seen among the Syrian regime's supporters.

In this context, all of the incidents documented by the SNHR are subjected to review processes and continuous investigations. In cases in which we find additional or more accurate information, or identify errors, we immediately update the SNHR's database.

- Data Sharing -

The SNHR believes in sharing all the data that it has documented according to the previously detailed working methodology with all those bodies and countries that work in investigations that serve the path of accountability and transitional justice, and we carry out this process according to the standard conditions published on our website.

- Classification of Violations Since Not Everything We Document Is Categorized as a Crime -

In the course of documenting various incidents, SNHR seeks to collect evidence and leads in order to determine the true facts in every case, and to establish the appropriate legal classification for the incident when it is included in reports, research documents, and other studies released by SNHR, despite the differences in the number and types of available evidence and leads from one incident to another in light of the various challenges SNHR encounters in the course of documentation.

Since SNHR continuously monitors and registers any newly discovered items of evidence or leads concerning the incidents already documented, it is possible for such new data to lead to a change in the legal classification of the incident in light of these revelations. Therefore, SNHR works constantly to update its database to reflect any new evidence and leads in its archives, adjusting the legal classification for any incident where appropriate according to new data. It should also be noted, however, that while many incidents documented don't formally constitute violations of International Humanitarian Law or International Human Rights Law, they do involve some degree of collateral damage, with SNHR recording and archiving these incidents in order to maintain a source of historical knowledge and to preserve these incidents as a national record for the future. That said, however, these incidents don't necessarily formally qualify as crimes.

- Reality Is Greater -

Given the exceptional difficulties mentioned, and due to the limited logistical and material resources, we are confident that the SNHR's database contains the bare minimum of violations, and that there are a far greater number of incidents of violations that did not reach us which we were not able to document; accordingly, the statistics issued based on the SNHR's database only expresses the bare minimum of the real data for the multiple violations that we monitor, and we are striving to increase our logistical resources and our network of contacts in order to cover the largest possible number of incidents, and build a national central bank to archive and catalogue them within this context in order to prevent any change to the narrative of events, as well as to build a historical record documenting the greatest possible amount of the extent of suffering of the Syrian people.