

At least 131,469 detainees or forcibly disappeared persons have been held by the Syrian regime since March 2011, according to the database of the Syrian Network for Human Rights

The Russian special envoy to Syria's statement aims to misrepresent the issue of detainees and forcibly disappeared persons by his ally, the Syrian regime

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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.

SNHR
SYRIAN NETWORK FOR HUMAN RIGHTS
الشبكة السورية لحقوق الإنسان

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First: Documentation of Arrest Cases is an Exhausting and Complex Process Because of the Syrian Regime's Barbaric Practices:

On December 22, 2021, Russia's Special Envoy to Syria, Alexander Lavrentiev, [stated](#), in an interview with a reporter from the Syria TV channel during the 17th round of the Astana Talks, that: "The number of detainees in Syria, which is allegedly 980,000, is unrealistic compared to the number of prisons in Syria". We, at SNHR, believe that the statement is meant to cast doubt on the credibility of the documented information on those detained and forcibly disappeared by the Syrian regime, continuing Russia's customary role of devil's advocate as it persists in defending the Syrian regime and justifying or denying its crimes.

If he were interested in the truth, the Russian envoy would be aware that he and everyone else can rely fully on the statistics issued by the United Nations and human rights organizations which have created databases built on a strict methodology of documentation for over 11 years. Every disappeared individual has a family and friends awaiting any information revealing his or her fate, and longing for their release. SNHR's team has worked tirelessly for over a decade on documenting arbitrary arrests by the Syrian regime and its militias, which usually take place without any arrest warrant. In most cases, the security forces carrying out the arrests are from the four main intelligence branches, which are responsible for arrests with no oversight from any judicial authorities. These bodies automatically deny their responsibility for carrying out these arrests, regardless of the evidence against them, and most detainees go on to be categorized as forcibly disappeared. It would be more helpful of the Russian envoy to demand that the Syrian regime and its Ministry of Interior publish lists of the names of the Syrian citizens they have detained, since the Syrian regime and its institutions currently issue no statistics or lists detailing these cases, complicating the SNHR's work in documenting these arrests, that are, in reality, more like abductions.

Since 2011, SNHR has built a detailed database documenting arrests and enforced disappearances using a dedicated program designed especially by our IT Department, which our staff work constantly to update and develop. Within this database, we have allocated several essential categories to document each case/incident of detention, such as the basic personal information about the victim, information on the arrest procedure in their case, and updated whenever fresh data becomes available with any further information on the fate of the detainee (such as whether their case is classified as an enforced disappearance, whether they go on to become a torture victim, or are released, whether their details are simply unknown, any court rulings against them, etc.) and any other information that we can obtain about each case/incident. Using this database, we can categorize the arrest cases according to the governorate in which the arrest incident occurred, and according to the governorate from which the detainee originates, as well as gender, profession and specialization, the party responsible for carrying out the arrest, and many other classifications that enable us to sort and analyze the data according to the requirements of the reports we issue.

Over the past 10 years, we have issued a monthly report of the arbitrary arrests recorded during the previous

month by the parties to the conflict and controlling forces in Syria. Each report includes the most notable cases and incidents of arbitrary arrest and detention, documented by the SNHR. The cases are distributed in accordance with the location of the incident. We have issued at least 100 reports ([monthly](#) or [thematic](#)), in addition to hundreds of [daily news](#) articles on arrest incidents.

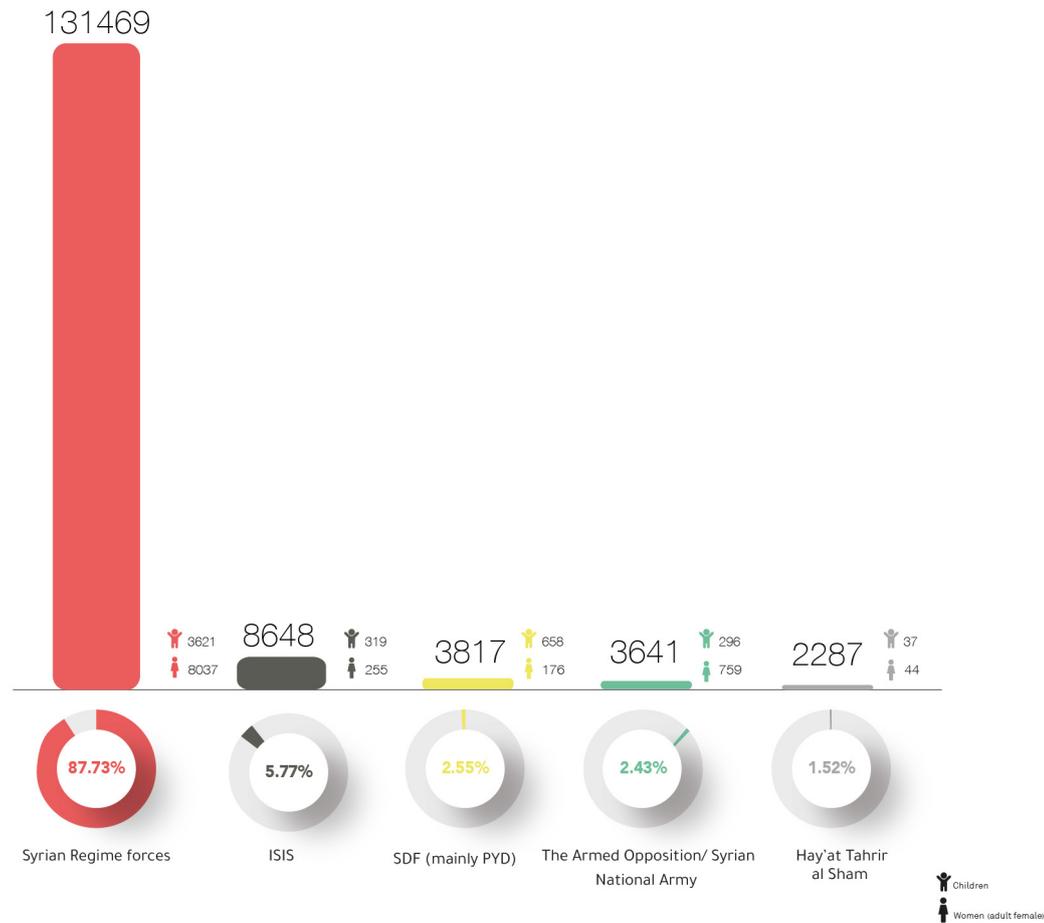
The SNHR team implements strict standards in evaluating and assessing any incident of arbitrary arrest, all of which are classified as such under the principles of international law and those on arbitrary arrest and enforced disappearance. The SNHR's Detainee and Forcibly-Disappeared Department daily:

- 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, in the case of receiving verified information on individuals' condition, before diligently working to contact the families of the detainees and forcibly disappeared persons, and those close to them, for the purpose of collecting as much information and data as possible, bearing in mind the extraordinary and extremely complex challenges involved in carrying out the
- This information, once received, is then registered on the database after being verified and 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 noting their recollections of those whom they saw within the detention centers.

The Detainee Department team constantly updates the database of detainees who were released as and when such 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. We have also created on our website a special form [to document a detainee](#) in order to facilitate access and contact with victims' families.

Second: Toll of arbitrary arrests/detention and enforced disappearance in Syria since March 2011:

At least 149,862 of the individuals, detained or forcibly disappeared at the hands of the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in Syria between March 2011 and August 2021 are still detained or forcibly disappeared, including 4,931 children and 9,271 women, as documented on the SNHR's database, [distributed according to the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces as follows:](#)



A. Syrian Regime forces (army, security, local militias, and Shiite foreign militias)¹ : 131,469 individuals, including 3,621 children and 8,037 women (adult female).

B. ISIS (the self-proclaimed 'Islamic State'): 8,648 individuals, including 319 children and 225 women (adult female).

C. Hay'at Tahrir al Sham (an alliance composed of Fateh al Sham Front and a number of factions of the Armed Opposition)² : 2,287 individuals, including 37 children and 44 women (adult female).

D. All Armed Opposition factions/ Syrian National Army³ : 3,641 individuals, including 296 children and 759 women (adult female).

E. Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (the Democratic Union Party)³: 3,817 individuals, including 658 children and 176 women (adult female).

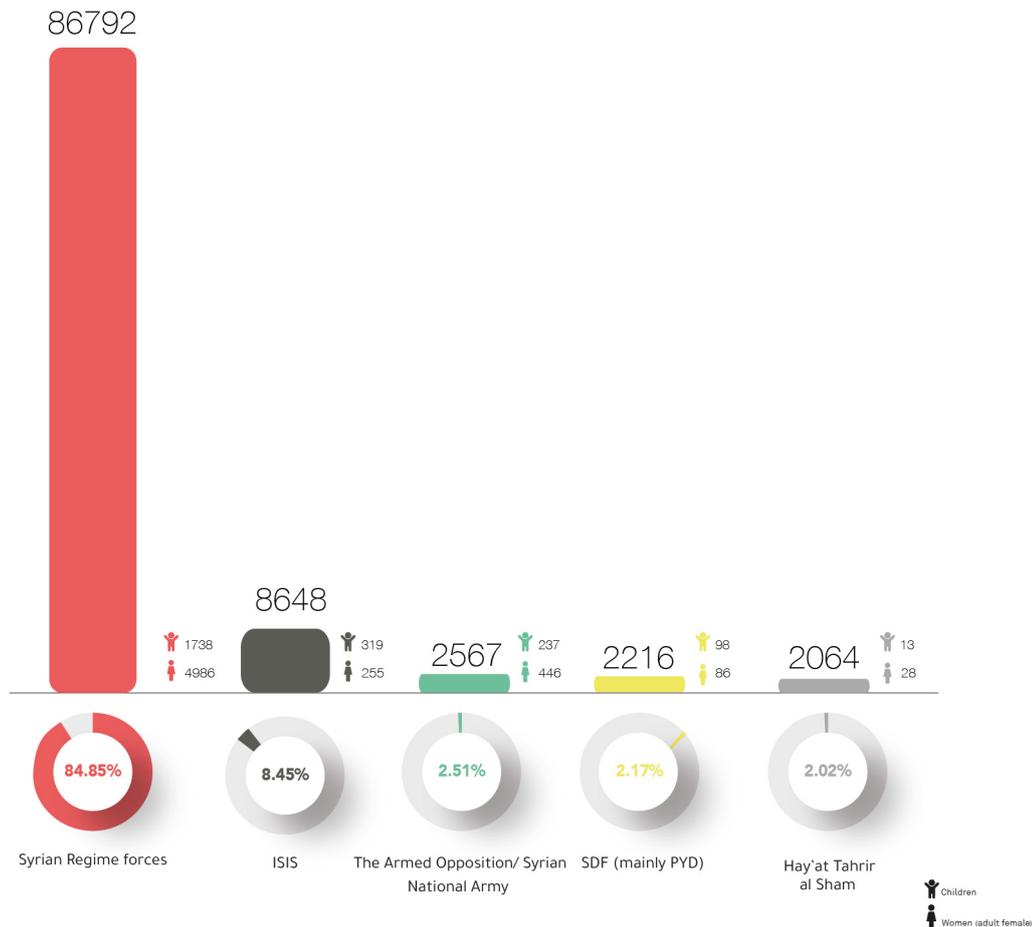
¹ We generally use the term 'the Syrian regime' rather than 'the Syrian government', because the nature of the ruling power in Syria is that of a totalitarian dictatorship based on ruling the nation in an authoritarian fashion through a very limited group of individuals, primarily the President of the Republic and his selected leaders of the security services, while the ministers, including the Prime Minister and the Minister of Interior, play a restricted, largely ceremonial role, which is limited to implementing precisely what the ruling regime orders, without any decision-making power or active role; this means that the government's role is wholly subordinate and limited to serving the regime, with all the main powers being concentrated in the hands of the President of the Republic and the security services. Governance in Syria is wholly decided by the autocratic authority of the ruling family and there is no independent decision-making structure. Rather, the government is an empty façade there for show; the Minister of Interior receives orders from the security branches over which he nominally presides which are in turn under the command of the President, while the Minister of Justice cannot summon a civilian-level security agent other than the head of a security branch; the security branches, along with the president, are the true power and the governing regime in Syria.

Although we acknowledge that the United Nations and its agencies use the term 'the Syrian government' in general, we believe that this is a completely inaccurate and misleading term in the Syrian context.

² The United Nations has designated it as a terrorist organization

³ All armed opposition factions: This refers to all the factions that have emerged since 2011 in various neighborhoods and regions in Syria, many of which no longer exist, and many of which did not follow a central command. At the end of 2017, the Syrian National Army was established and the remaining armed opposition factions gathered under its umbrella.

Between March 2011 and August 2021, at least 102,287 individuals, including 2,405 children and 5,801 women, have been forcibly disappeared at the hands of the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in Syria, according to the SNHR's database, distributed according to the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces as follows:



A. Syrian Regime forces (army, security, local militias, and Shiite foreign militias): 86,792 individuals, including 1,738 children and 4,986 women (adult female).

B. ISIS (the self-proclaimed 'Islamic State'): 8,648 individuals, including 319 children and 225 women (adult female).

C. Hay'at Tahrir al Sham (an alliance composed of Fateh al Sham Front and a number of factions of the Armed Opposition): 2,064 individuals, including 13 children and 28 women (adult female).

D. All Armed Opposition factions/ Syrian National Army: 2,567 individuals, including 237 children and 446 women (adult female).

E. Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (the Democratic Union Party): 2,216 individuals, including 98 children and 86 women (adult female).

As we have stated repeatedly, these statistics represents the bare minimum of the incidents of arbitrary arrest and enforced disappearance that have taken place, which the SNHR's team have been able to document according to set criteria. In reality, there are thousands more cases and incidents which we were unable to include, due to difficulties and complications, we have faced since 2011 and up to the present day. Most notable among these are:

1. 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 for help with securing their loved ones' release, that can amount to thousands of dollars in some cases.
2. 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), has affirmed the conviction of many in Syrian society that it is useless to cooperate in the documentation process.
3. None of the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces makes any public record available to the community showing the whereabouts of detainees and the reasons for their arrest, or what judicial rulings were issued against them, including the death penalty, with the vast majority of families left not knowing the fate of their family members. The vast majority, as we have indicated in all our reports on detainees, have been forcibly disappeared. We have discussed in detail the issue of enforced disappearance and the suffering of the families of the forcibly disappeared, especially the children, in [many reports](#).

Finally, the detainee figures included in this report don't include prisoners with a criminal background, but do include cases of arrest that are based on the internal armed conflict, mainly due to opposition activity against the ruling authorities, as well as cases of detention intended to suppress freedom of opinion and expression.

Third: Conclusions and Recommendations:

- The issue of detainees and forcibly disappeared persons is one of the most crucial human rights issues in Syria which there has been no progress in resolving despite its inclusion in several resolutions of the UN Security Council, as well as in UN General Assembly resolutions, in Kofi Annan's plan, and finally in the statement of cessation of hostilities issued in February 2016, which states that "all parties undertake to work for an early release of any arbitrarily detained persons, particularly women and children", and in Security Council resolution 2254 of December 2015, article 12, which states that all detainees, especially women and children, must be released immediately. Despite all these resolutions and other official statements, no progress has been made on the issue of securing the release of detainees in any of the rounds of negotiations sponsored by international parties regarding the conflict in Syria. The International Committee of the Red Cross has been unable to conduct any periodic visits to any of these detention centers, constituting a violation of International Humanitarian Law.

- The SNHR believes that the Syrian regime has not fulfilled any of its obligations under any of the international treaties and conventions which it has ratified. We refer specifically to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. The regime has also violated several articles of the Syrian Constitution itself, with thousands of detainees arrested without any arrest warrant, imprisoned for many years, without charges, and prevented from appointing a lawyer and from receiving family visits. 68.25 percent of all detentions documented have subsequently been categorized as cases of enforced disappearance, with detainees' families being denied any information on their loved ones' whereabouts, while anyone making inquiries about the detainees faces the risk of being arrested themselves for doing so. The Syrian regime has also violated the right to liberty enshrined in article 9 of the ICCPR through the widespread practice of arbitrary and unlawful detentions.

Recommendations:

The Russian regime:

- Must demand that its ally, the Syrian regime, disclose the fate of nearly 87,000 forcibly disappeared persons and immediately release tens of thousands of arbitrarily detained persons and detainees whose sentences ended, before demanding that those states which imposed sanctions on the Syrian regime lift them.

United Nations, the international community, and the guarantors of the Astana talks:

- An impartial special committee should be formed to monitor cases of enforced disappearance, and to make progress in revealing the fate of the nearly 102,000 documented missing persons in Syria, approximately 85 percent of whom are detained by the Syrian regime.
- Immediately begin applying pressure on all parties to ensure that they immediately reveal their detention records according to a timetable. In the meantime, detention places should be revealed immediately, and humanitarian organizations and the International Committee of the Red Cross should be allowed to visit them directly.
- We call on the official appointed to take charge of the detainee file at the UN Special Envoy's office to include the issue of the detainees during the upcoming round of Geneva talks, as this issue is of far greater importance to the Syrian people than other longer-term issues which can be jointly addressed later by the parties after a political settlement is reached, such as the constitution.
- Support organizations working to document cases of arbitrary arrest, enforced disappearance, and torture, support the course of accountability and its mechanisms, and support organizations working in victim rehabilitation programs.

UN Security Council:

- The Security Council should monitor the implementation of Resolution 2042, adopted on April 14, 2012, Resolution 2043, adopted on April 21, 2012, and Resolution 2139, adopted on February 22, 2014, all of which demand the immediate cessation of the crime of enforced disappearance.



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