

On World Children's Day: Ninth Annual Report on Violations against Children in Syria

**At Least 29,375 Children Have Been Killed
in Syria Since March 2011, Including 179
Due to Torture, 4,261 Forcibly Disappeared,
Hundreds of Recruits, and Hundreds of
Thousands of Forcibly Displaced**

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I. The Ninth Annual Report: Violations Still Continuing and a Risk Threatening the Generations of Syria for Decades to Come:

Over the past nine years, children in Syria have been subjected to the same wide variety of horrendous violations as adults, without any concern or consideration of their vulnerability, despite the vast range of provisions in international law which insist on the need to respect the rights of the child. According to the Syrian Network of Human Rights' (SNHR) database, children have barely been spared any of the violations inflicted on Syrian society, with the SNHR attaching a pivotal importance to documenting crimes perpetrated against children on our database, and referring in particular to these in all reports, statements and news items we issue. We also issue dedicated reports and news on crimes against children, with part of the database specifically reserved for cataloguing violations against the children of Syria by all parties to the conflict since 2011 to date, which includes all the crimes we have been able to document; it should be emphasized that the crimes which have been documented represent, beyond a doubt, only a small fraction of the crimes perpetrated.

On the occasion of the World Children's Day every year, we issue an extensive report that includes the most notable violations against the children of Syria during the past year (since World Children's Day the previous year up to the same date in the present year), focusing particularly on the broader, more harmful violations, such as extrajudicial killing, arbitrary arrest/ detention, torture, sexual violence, forced conscription, displacement, and deprivation of education; these reports do not address the profound psychological trauma suffered by children as a result of the violations perpetrated against them and its effects on their lives, with this issue requiring a special report, as do other types of violations such as forced marriage of minors, forced labor and exploitation of children in violation of the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention.

Syria's leadership has ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1993¹, as well as ratifying the two Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution, child pornography and involvement in armed conflict in 2002². Whilst it's true that all the parties to the conflict have violated the rights of the child, the Syrian regime has far exceeded all other parties, individually or collectively, in terms of the amount of

¹ The United Nations, List of Countries party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, <https://treaties.un.org/pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=IND&mtdsg_no=IV-11&chapter=4&lang=en>

² The United Nations, Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict <<https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/opaccrc.aspx>>

The United Nations, Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, <<https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/opscrcr.aspx>>

crimes the regime perpetrated in a regular and systematic manner, in particular those violating the rights defined in Articles 6, 37 and 38³ of the inherent right to life and survival, the prohibition of torture and deprivation of liberty, and the ensuring of respect for the rules of international humanitarian law relevant to the child, which amount to crimes against humanity. The United Nations' Committee on the Rights of the Child, established by the Treaty Body for the Convention on the Rights of the Child, bears legal and ethical responsibilities to follow up on the situation of children's rights in Syria and to help in bringing an end the violations perpetrated by the Syrian regime.

The report is based on the Syrian Network for Human Rights' archive, which has grown steadily since March 2011 through daily monitoring and documentation of violations, including extrajudicial killings, arbitrary arrest, enforced disappearance, torture, conscription, sexual violence, attacks with various types of weapons, and attacks on vital civilian facilities, with all the statistics included in the archive being documented in accordance with our [methodology](#) and with all the information and details that we have been able to access and verify.

This report outlines the record of violations against children by the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in Syria between March 2011 and November 20, 2020 which SNHR's team has been able to document, highlighting the most notable of these violations, particularly those which took place between November 20, 2019, and November 20, 2020.

Our investigations confirm that all of the attacks included in this report that were carried out by the parties to the conflict in Syria targeted civilian areas where we documented no military presence or armories before or during the attacks, and where the perpetrators failed to issue any warnings to civilians prior to any of the attacks as required by international humanitarian law.

This report also draws on the accounts and interviews we conducted with eyewitnesses or child survivors in different areas of Syria, or with victims' families, either by visiting them directly or through communication platforms. In this report, we provide 10 accounts, which we obtained directly rather than from open sources. In some cases, we used aliases to protect witnesses' privacy and prevent them from being harassed or prosecuted. Witnesses received no financial compensation or promises in exchange for interviews. We explained the purpose of the report beforehand to all the interviewees we spoke with, and obtained their consent to use the information they provided to serve the purposes of the report and the documentation processes. All these procedures are carried out in accordance with our internal protocols, which we have worked on for years, and we strive constantly to develop these to keep pace with the best practices in maximizing psychological care and minimizing potential trauma for the victims.

³ The United Nations, Convention on the Rights of the Child,
<<https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>>

The violations documented in this report represent only the bare minimum of the actual severity and magnitude of the violations that have occurred and that we were able to document. Also, the report doesn't include any analysis of the profound social, economic, and psychological ramifications.

Finally, in June 2020, [the report](#) of the United Nations Secretary-General to the UN Security Council on 'Children and Armed Conflict' for the year 2019 was issued. We noted that the report has classified Syria according to patterns of violations as:

1. The worst country in the world in terms of killings and attacks on schools.
2. The second worst country in the world in terms of the recruitment of children and attacks on hospitals.
3. The fourth worst country in the world in terms of detentions and denial of humanitarian access.

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



Violations against the children of Syria continue up to the current date, with some of these amounting to crimes against humanity. This is particularly devastating for coming generations and for the future of the Syrian people for decades to come. These violations are a branch of a continuation of the ongoing armed conflict that has extended for nine years, with the Security Council and the international community failing to find any political solution for it yet. The dictatorial Syrian regime will not transfer power peacefully, no matter how many Syrian children are killed or displaced, since the regime itself is the main culprit and the most prolific perpetrator of violations.

II. SNHR Cooperation with the UNICEF Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM):

Since 2014, UNICEF's Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism in Syria has documented grave violations of the rights of children in the context of the armed conflict which it has methodically investigated. The Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism in Syria is mandated by the Security Council in accordance with [Resolution 1612 \(2005\)](#) and subsequent resolutions, having been activated after the annual report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict listed the parties to conflict that commit grave violations against children.

The SNHR cooperates with the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism in Syria through a constant monthly sharing of the SNHR's data, which our team has been able to document showing multiple types of violations against children, such as killing and maiming of children, recruitment, kidnapping, arrest/ detention, attacks on schools, hospitals, health or educational personnel, sexual violence, and denial of humanitarian access to children.

The Syrian Network for Human Rights stresses the vital importance and the essential nature of the work of the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism in Syria, and adds that the SNHR will continue to cooperate and share data with this body, as we do with a number of other United Nations bodies operating in Syria, which we consider to be an essential component in the course of attaining justice by exposing the perpetrators of violations and putting pressure on them and on their backers, as a basis for holding them accountable; this will pave the way for progress in leading the way to a transitional justice process moving towards long-awaited stability, democracy and human rights, and thus ensuring that these horrific violations against Syria's children are not repeated in the future.

III. SNHR Successfully Nominates Syrian Child Enar for International Children's Peace Prize:

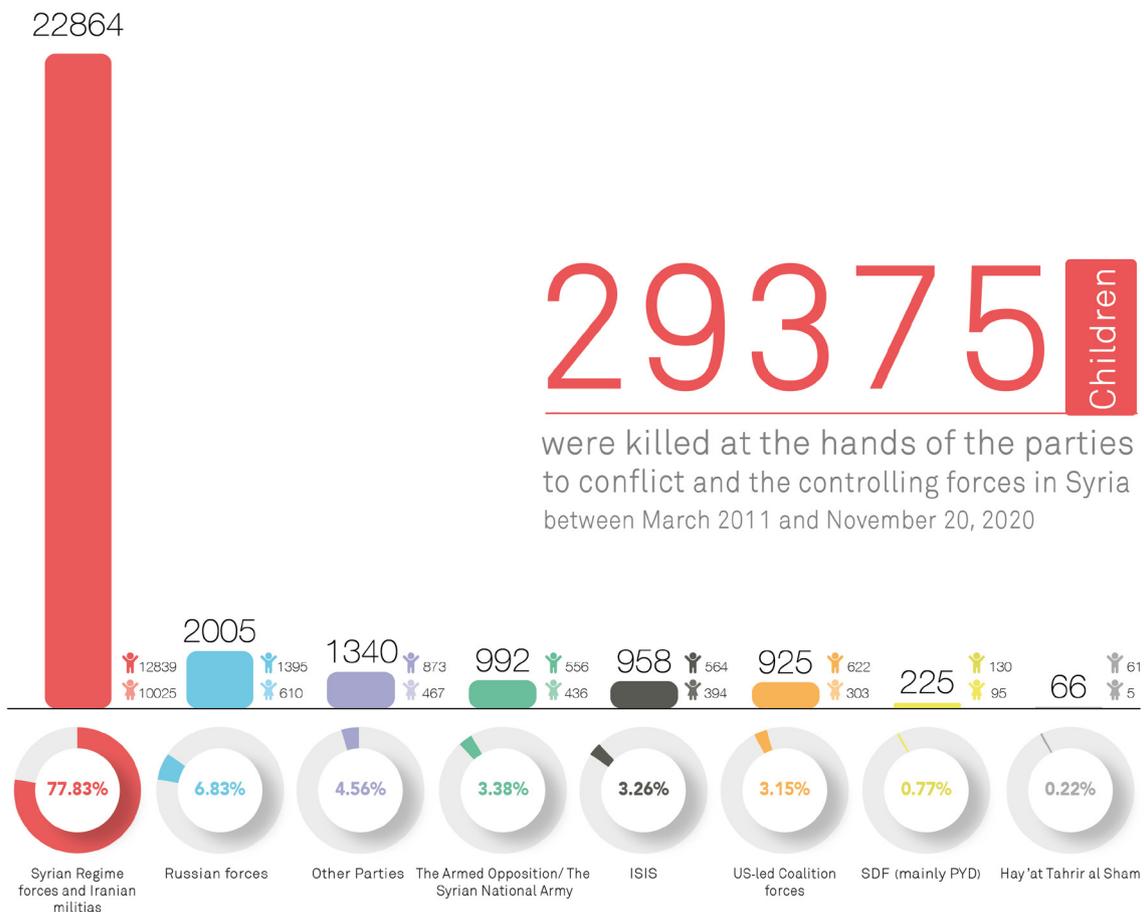
Based on the years-long coordination and the cooperative relationship between the international [KidsRights Foundation](#) and the Syrian Network for Human Rights, the SNHR this year nominated the remarkable young Syrian girl [Enar al Hamrawi](#) for the [International Children's Peace Prize](#) for the year 2020, in appreciation of her exceptional efforts in conveying the suffering of the Syrian community, especially its children, to the wider world, showing the terrible violations children have been exposed to by the Syrian regime and its Iranian and Russian allies. Several months after the initial nomination, Enar was accepted on the shortlist for the prize along with 142 children from around the world, although she did not reach the final stage which features three children from Mexico, Ireland, and Bangladesh. Despite this, however, Enar's nomination itself is an important achievement in representing Syria's children internationally, with Enar being an inspirational figure and a living symbol of the awesome capabilities of the heroic children of Syria who are its future, showing vast courage and resilience even in the face of unimaginable adversity and injustice and despite all the violations and brutal conditions which they have endured and are still being subjected to, of which this report outlines the bare minimum. In October 2020, we issued [a detailed statement](#) reporting on the award and supporting Enar's nomination.

IV. Record of the Most Notable Violations against Children according to SNHR's Database:

Violations against children in Syria have been numerous, and given that there are many and varied patterns in their severity and detrimental impact, we at the SNHR focus particularly on categories of serious and grave life-threatening violations that have been identified by the United Nations Security Council, working to document these according to our methodology; the killing of children is at the forefront of these violations and is the most severe atrocity in Syria, given the high percentage of victims among children, secondly comes arrest/ kidnapping, which in the vast majority of cases turn into enforced disappearance, and then torture. We also focus on child conscription, attacks on educational facilities and the consequent abandonment and failure in the educational process. The Syrian regime is the most prolific offender in this category as in all the other categories of violations compared to the other parties to the conflict.

Extrajudicial killing

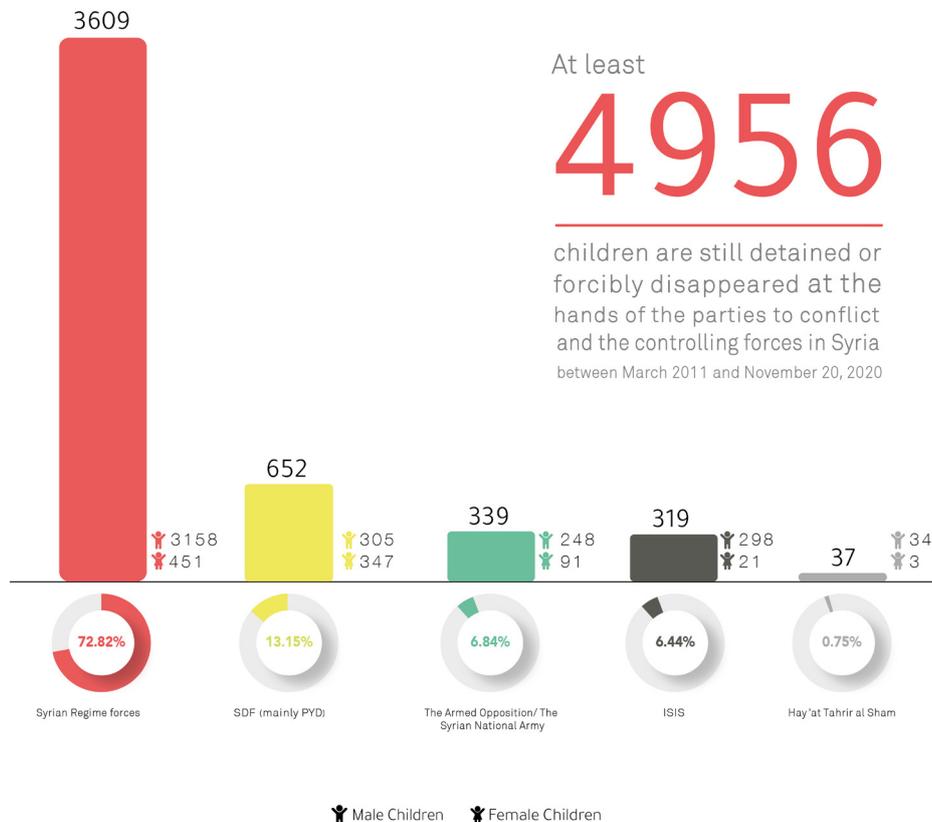
SNHR documented the deaths of 29,375 children at the hands of the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in Syria between March 2011 and November 20, 2020, distributed as follows:



- **Syrian Regime forces (army, security, local militias, and Shiite foreign militias⁴):** 22,864 children, including 12,839 male children and 10,025 female children.
- **Russian forces:** 2,005 children, including 1,395 male children and 610 female children.
- **ISIS (the self-proclaimed 'Islamic State'):** 958 children, including 564 male children and 394 female children.
- **Hay'at Tahrir al Sham⁵(an alliance composed of Fateh al Sham Front and a number of factions of the Armed Opposition):** 66 children, including 61 male children and five female children.
- **Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (the Democratic Union Party):** 225 children, including 130 male children and 95 female children
- **The Armed Opposition/ the Syrian National Army:** 992 children, including 556 male children and 436 female children.
- **US-led coalition:** 925 children, including 622 male children and 303 female children.
- **Other parties:** 1,340 children, including 873 male children and 467 female children

Arbitrary arrest and enforced disappearance

SNHR has documented that, as of November 20, 2020, at least 4,956 of the children arrested/ detained or forcibly disappeared at the hands of the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in Syria since March 2011 are still arrested/ detained or forcibly disappeared, distributed as follows:



⁴ We generally use the term 'the Syrian regime' rather than 'the Syrian government', because the nature of the ruling power in Syria is 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 implementation 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.

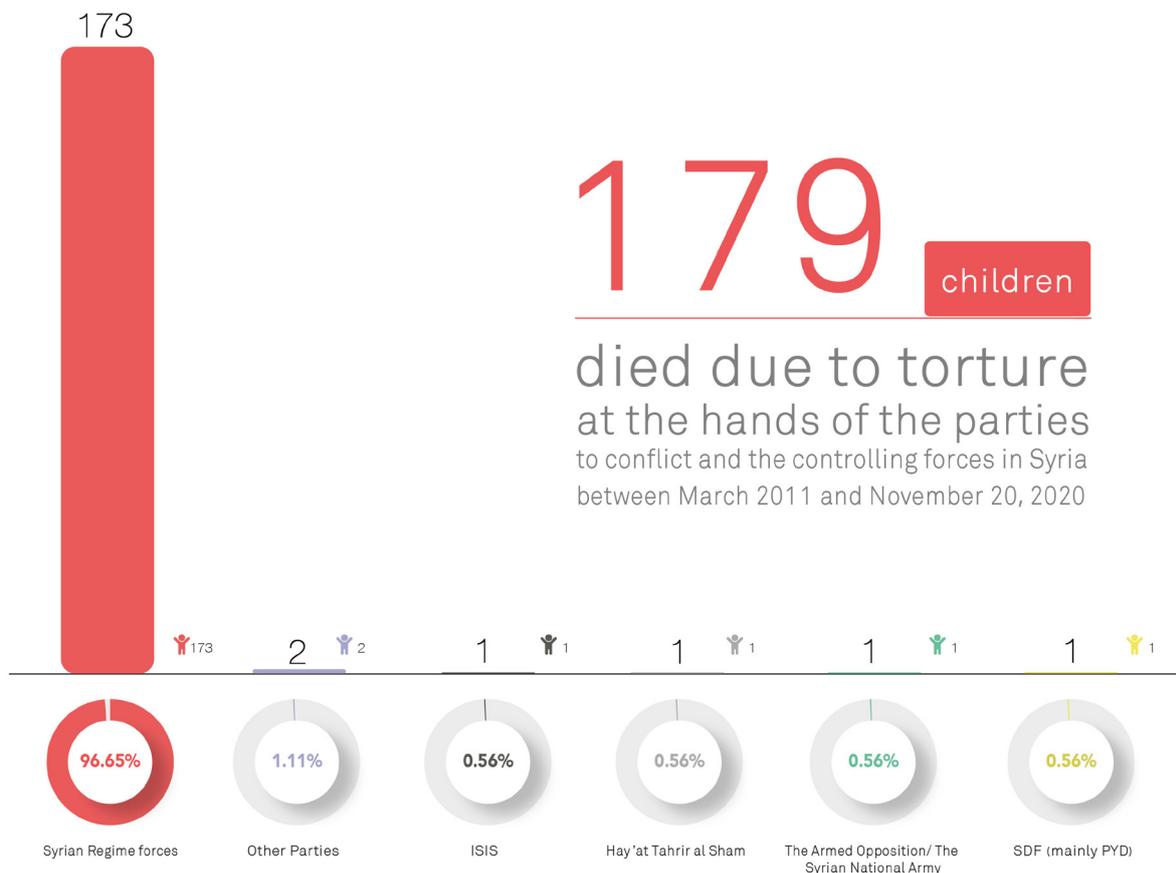
Although we acknowledge that the United Nations and its agencies use the term 'the Syrian government' in general, we believe that this is a completely inaccurate and misleading term in the Syrian context.

⁵ The United Nations has designated it as a terrorist organization

- **Syrian Regime forces:** 3,609 children, including 3,158 male children and 451 female children.
- **ISIS:** 319 children, including 298 male children and 21 female children.
- **Hay'at Tahrir al Sham:** 37 children, including 34 male children and three female children.
- **Syrian Democratic Forces:** 652 children, including 305 male children and 347 female children
- **The Armed Opposition/ the Syrian National Army:** 339 children, including 248 male children and 91 female children.

Victims who died due to torture

SNHR documented the deaths of at least 179 children due to torture at the hands of the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in Syria between March 2011 and November 20, 2020, distributed as follows:



- **Syrian Regime forces:** 173.
- **ISIS:** One.
- **Hay'at Tahrir al Sham:** One.
- **Syrian Democratic Forces:** One.
- **The Armed Opposition/ the Syrian National Army:** One.
- **Other parties:** Two.

V. Details and Incidents on the Most Notable Patterns of Violations against Children in the Year Since the Last Annual Report:

1. Syrian Regime forces (army, security, local militias, and Shiite foreign militias)

A. Extrajudicial killing

The Syrian regime's killing machine has operated continuously since the beginning of the popular uprising in March 2011. Regime forces began with indiscriminate gunfire targeting residential buildings, streets and entire neighborhoods with the specific objective of spreading terror and dread in all the areas that witnessed anti-regime protests or during their suppression of protests by directly firing bullets at the protesters, including children. Subsequently, the rate and brutality of the killings escalated, becoming more deadly after whole areas broke free of the control of Syrian Regime forces, with the regime retaliating by targeting densely populated areas, markets and vital facilities through indiscriminate air and ground bombardment using shells, missiles, cluster bombs, poison gases, and barrel bombs, amongst other weapons, all of which resulted in the deaths of children, who have been killed in every conceivable setting, including in their homes or schools, while they were playing or even as they received treatment in medical centers; in many cases, children died under the rubble of their homes after they were bombed, or due to the explosion of the remnants of bombs left by earlier bombardment while they were playing or simply walking past.

This bombardment, both indiscriminate and targeted, has caused horrific massacres among children. We have also documented many massacres that bore characteristics of sectarian cleansing and revenge, with the killers in some of these using bladed weapons such as knives and machetes, targeting children for slaughter.

The repercussions of bombardment with various types of weapons weren't limited to killing children, mutilating their bodies and dismembering them in an unimaginably horrific way, but also left tens of thousands with injuries, severe burns, disabilities and deformities, in addition to having a severe and exceptionally traumatic psychological impact on hundreds of thousands of Syrian children.

From March 2011 to November 20, 2020, the SNHR documented the deaths of at least 22,864 children at the hands of Syrian Regime forces, with 12,839 of these being male children and 10,025 female; all of these cases are registered in the SNHR's database, with SNHR retaining photos and documents detailing the attacks in most of these cases, as well as photos of the children after and before they were killed.

Victims killed in a massacre perpetrated in an attack by the Syrian regime air force on al Gharbi neighborhood in Ariha city, Idlib – January 5, 2020



On Sunday, January 5, 2020, at around 13:00, fixed-wing Syrian regime (Su-24) warplanes fired some six missiles in succession targeting three sites within al Gharbi neighborhood in Ariha city in the eastern suburbs of Idlib governorate; two of these missiles landed in front of 'al Muhdatha' [Khaled Bashir al Halabiya School](#), while two other missiles landed around 200 meters from the front of [al Hadidi Prayer Place](#) known as al Imam Malik Mosque, and the last two missiles fell 300 meters from the Prayer Place in [the area of the Aleppo-Latakia International Road, where there is a residential complex and an open yard used as a car park](#). [The bombardment](#) resulted in [the deaths](#) of [13 civilians](#) (two near al Hadidi Prayer Place and 11 in the area of the International Road), [including three male](#) children and [one woman](#), and injured about 30 others. Ariha city was under the joint control of the Armed Opposition/ the Syrian National Army and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.

B. Arrest, enforced disappearance, and torture

In carrying out arrests, Syrian Regime forces have not distinguished between children and adults, subjecting juvenile detainees to the same horrendous conditions of arrest and detention as adults, and usually detaining them in the same rooms/ dormitory cells as adults, whether in the security branches or military and central prisons. The regime also transferred some child detainees to its exceptional and security courts, which try civilians, military personnel, and juveniles alike, such as the Military Field Court and the [Counter-Terrorism Court](#). We have documented that approximately 16 children have been tried by the Counter-Terrorism Court only since its establishment in August 2012 until October 2020.

Syrian Regime forces also resorted to arresting/ detaining children during campaigns of raids, arrests and inspections of areas, and while the children were passing through checkpoints, as well as seizing them from their homes, or while they were traveling through areas controlled by the different parties to the conflict. It seems that many of these arrests were carried out with the specific objective of pressuring the children's families to surrender or make false confessions, or to extort money from the children's parents or other family members, or as a way of punishing their families due to their participation in activities calling for political change of the ruling regime. Other children were detained for use as hostages or to be used in prisoner exchanges, whilst many were detained for no apparent reason.

In many incidents, we have recorded the detention of children along with their mothers. These children often remain detained for the entire duration of their mothers' detention, and are used as a way to pressure their mothers to make specific false confessions through threatening the mothers with the torture or murder of their children detained with them, or by separating them from each other and taking the children to an undisclosed location if their mothers refuse to make the specific confessions demanded of them. The severity of conditions of detention increases when children are born in detention centers, with these mothers and babies deprived of all forms of essential postnatal and infant health care. We have documented at least 86 births in detention centers, with all these babies suffering from a severe lack of any post-natal health care and essential medical requirements, resulting in the deaths of seven of the babies, since March 2011 to date.

Children are often subjected to the same types of torture as adult detainees from the very first moment of their arrest. We have documented and detailed the most notable methods of torture that detainees are subjected to in [a special report](#). Torture, including neglect of health care, has caused numerous detainees' deaths, including those of children.

In some cases, we have documented regime forces transferring children who were arrested with their mothers or were born in detention centers to orphanages/ social care centers without obtaining the consent of either parent or even informing the detained mothers of the destination to which their children were being transferred, in order to keep them in a state of constant anxiety and fear for their children's fate and to put further pressure on them by threatening to kill their children. Regime forces forcibly seize children from their mothers under many pretexts, such as having them vaccinated, for example, after which the children disappear and remain in the orphanage/ care center for the entire duration of their mothers' arrest, with the regime forces not allowing the children's guardians or other family members to remove them from the orphanage, and usually denying the children visits from their families and leaving them in environments similar to detention centers.

The Syrian regime's arrests and abuse of children and its exploitation of them as tools for taking revenge, punishing dissidents and putting pressure on Syrian society has had a devastating impact on the fabric of society, particularly on the detained children themselves, with their psychological and physical vulnerability meaning that their suffering is greater than that of their adult peers, leaving those who are released not just with physical injuries but deep-seated mental and emotional traumas.

Up to November 2020, SNHR's team has documented that at least 3,609 of the children arbitrarily detained or forcibly disappeared by Syrian Regime forces since March 2011 are still classified as arbitrarily detained or forcibly disappeared, with 3,158 of these being male children and the remaining 451 being female. In the same period, we have documented the deaths of at least 173 children as a result of torture in the regime's detention centers.

The child, Ahmad Ayman al Khatib, a secondary school student from Idlib city, was born in 1996. He was arrested by Syrian Regime forces on Wednesday, September 26, 2012, in a raid on his home in al Nakhla Square neighborhood in the center of Idlib city, and was taken to an undisclosed location.

The SNHR spoke with Ahmad's mother, Ms. Abir⁶, who told us that the family has received no news about Ahmad since he was arrested at the family's home. She added, **"I learned later that Ahmad was seen in December 2012 in the Syrian regime's State Security Branch in Idlib, and this was the last news I ever heard about my son."**

Suleiman Ali al Zaid, from al Bseira village in the suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate, was a resident of al Bardeh village in Damascus Suburbs governorate where he worked. Suleiman, who was born in 1965, was arrested by Syrian regime personnel at the regime's al Van checkpoint near al Bardeh village on Tuesday, March 5, 2013, along with his three daughters, Marwa, Suzan and Ula, born in 1994, 1998, and 2000 respectively, with the father and daughters being taken to an undisclosed location.



The child, Ahmad Ayman al Khatib

⁶ Via phone on June 4, 2020

The SNHR spoke with Ms. Nour⁷, another of Suleiman Ali al Zaid's daughters, who recounted the details of the arrest incident: "My father and sisters worked in a factory that manufactures detergents. The bus they were taking to the factory stopped at the al Van Checkpoint near al Bardeh village, with the personnel at the checkpoint asking them to disembark from the bus, under the pretext that my sisters didn't have ID cards, and they were taken to an undisclosed location." Nour and her family have received no information about her father and sisters since their arrest. Nour adds, "We tried to ask about them at Adra Central Prison, but we were beaten and threatened by regime forces personnel there."



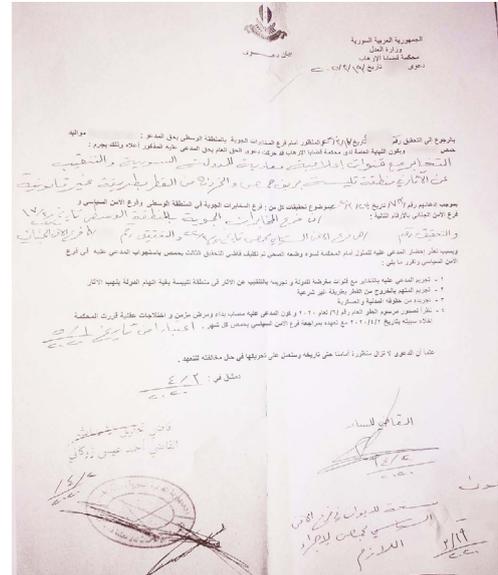
We also spoke with Mr. Ahmad al Ahmad⁸, a 17-year-old media activist from Talbisa town in the northern suburbs of Homs governorate, who was arrested by Syrian Regime forces on March 16, 2020, while he was trying to travel illicitly from Talbisa to Lebanon for medical treatment. He was subjected to interrogation and torture in the Air Security Branch and the Criminal Security Branch in Homs city, then he was interrogated by the (Third) Juvenile Investigative Judge assigned by the Counter-Terrorism Court in the Political Security Branch in Homs city, because of the difficulty in transporting him to Damascus, due to previous injuries he sustained, and because he suffers from diabetes, in addition to being afflicted with constant epileptic seizures and convulsions during the period of his detention. The court released him on April 2, 2020, after his family paid five million Syrian pounds for his release.

⁷ Via phone on June 20, 2020

⁸ An alias; we contacted him via phone on May 2, 2020

We note that Ahmad left Talbisa in mid-2018 heading for northern Syria among the forced displacement convoys, but after his repeated attempts to enter Turkey for treatment were unsuccessful, he returned to his city Talbisa again to try to reach Lebanon from there. Ahmad's case statement (we concealed his personal data) issued by the Counter-Terrorism Court, indicating that Ahmad was interrogated inside the Political Security Branch in Homs city by the (Third) Juvenile Investigative Judge on April 2, 2020, and released on the same day on the condition of undergoing a monthly review at the Political Security Branch.

Ahmad's case statement (we concealed his personal data) issued by the Counter-Terrorism Court, indicating that Ahmad was interrogated inside the Political Security Branch in Homs city by the (Third) Juvenile Investigative Judge on April 2, 2020, and released on the same day on the condition of undergoing a monthly review at the Political Security Branch.



Ahmad recalled, “I was arrested while I was trying to flee towards Lebanon because I was being persecuted despite previously settling my situation. I was moved between the Air, Political and Criminal Security branches in Homs city, and in all of them the same charges were brought against me, namely communicating with malicious TV channels, excavating antiquities, and leaving the country illegally. In every branch, during the interrogation, I was subjected to torture and beatings until my health condition worsened. I had epileptic seizures, convulsions and suffocation several times a day. When I was in the Political Security branch, the Juvenile Investigative Judge came and brought the same charges against me, and did not give me an opportunity to speak or to deny what he said, but it was a formal session. He asked me to put my fingerprint on my confessions, which I had not made, and he told me: “I will get you released and we will ignore you for now, but I will re-arrest you if you stop visiting the Political Security Branch and cooperating with it.” Ahmad told us that he fled to Lebanon again for fear of being re-arrested after being forced to visit the Political Security Branch on a monthly basis and after being stripped of his civil and military rights.

Two children, Muhammad Khair al Salem and Munther Mahmoud al Salem, both 16 years old, from al Sanamayn city in the northern suburbs of Daraa, were arrested by Syrian Regime forces on Wednesday, April 29, 2020, in al Sharqi neighborhood near the Criminal Security Branch in al Sanamayn city, and taken to an undisclosed location.

The child, Muhammad Bassam al Sharif, aged 17, from al Sanamayn city in the northern suburbs of Daraa, was arrested by Syrian Regime forces on Wednesday, April 29, 2020, while he was passing through one of the regime's checkpoints – Al Souq Checkpoint - in the center of al Sanamayn city, and taken to an undisclosed location.

The child, Yahya Hreidin, and his mother Salam Hreidin, from Tafas city in the western suburbs of Daraa governorate, were arrested by members of the Syrian regime's Air Security Force division on Sunday, October 18, 2020, in al Sharqi Garage in Daraa al Mahatta area in Daraa city, and taken to the Air Security Branch in the city.

C. Sexual violence

Syrian Regime forces have routinely used sexual violence as a weapon of war and a tool of revenge against all groups within Syrian society to force dissidents and protesters to surrender or flee, with children being more vulnerable to sexual violence than adults, particularly in view of the ease with which they are exploited and terrorized by the consequences of disclosing the violence they are exposed to. Syrian Regime forces regularly commit sexual violence against children in detention centers and during raids and inspections. We have also documented several cases of sexual violence committed by irregular forces within or outside their headquarters, some of which ended with the killing of the child victim after he/she was raped.

Sexual violence has been inflicted against children in many patterns, broadly harassment during searches, forced nudity and sexual extortion, beating the genitals, and verbal sexual violence, such as sexual insults or accusations of sexual promiscuity. In many cases, we have documented official media affiliated with the Syrian regime broadcasting interviews with female child detainees who made very obviously forced confessions claiming to have had sex with members of Armed Opposition factions; these children have been forcibly disappeared after their media appearances.

Sexual violence has caused long-term physical and psychological repercussions among the child victims who often refuse to disclose the violence they have been subjected to, even to their families, for fear of being stigmatized as a result or of retaliation by the violation perpetrators, with children often isolating themselves from their communities as a result of their trauma. From March 2011 to November 20, 2020, the Syrian Network for Human Rights documented at least 539 incidents of sexual violence against children.

D. Deprivation of education and child labor

The Syrian regime's and its Russian ally's bombardment of areas outside its control has caused destruction and damage to hundreds of schools and kindergartens, and created a state of terror across Syrian society, prompting many families to stop sending their children to school for fear of the schools being bombed.

The forced displacement of nearly five million Syrian citizens due to attacks and violations committed by the Syrian regime and its allies has also led to widespread poverty, because the IDPs are the most vulnerable groups in society, and many children have lost their family breadwinners due to the spread of extrajudicial killings, arbitrary arrest and enforced disappearance; as a result, many children have become breadwinners for their families, with these children moving to the workplace instead of studying. As a result of all these factors, hundreds of thousands of Syrian children are illiterate.

Destruction caused by a ground attack by the Syrian regime on the Martyr Yaser Da'boul School in Hayyan town, Aleppo – December 16, 2019



The bombardment that has continued since March 2011 has caused the total or partial destruction of at least 1,189 schools and 29 kindergartens, putting the majority of them out of service.

On Monday, December 16, 2019, Syrian regime forces used artillery to fire shells at the Martyr Yaser Da'boul School in [Hayyan](#) town in the northern suburbs of Aleppo governorate, [partially destroying the school's building](#) and perimeter wall, as well as causing [moderate material](#) damage to its furniture. Hayyan town was under the joint control of factions of the Armed Opposition and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.

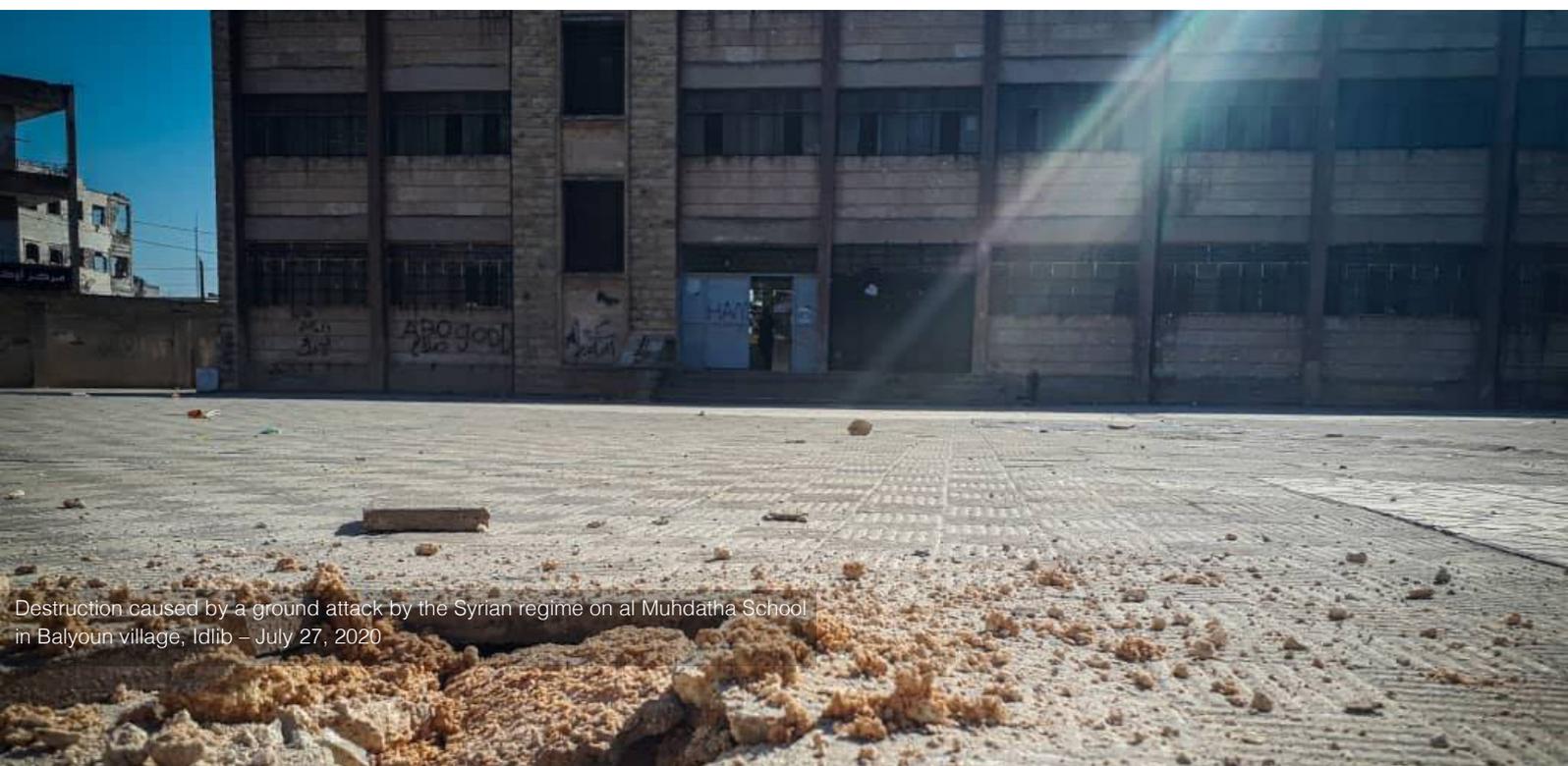
On Wednesday, January 1, 2020, at around 11:45, Syrian Regime forces, which we believe were stationed in Jabal Azan area in the southern suburbs of Aleppo, fired a Tochka 9M79 missile loaded with 9N24 cluster munitions, which fell near [the Martyr Abdo Salameh Basic School](#) – consisting of two buildings in which pre-school pupils were being taught - in al Sharqi neighborhood of Sarmin city in the eastern suburbs of Idlib a Sharia institute; the shelling caused a massacre, with four school pupils and two female teachers among the victims, [in addition](#) to causing [moderate material](#) damage to [the buildings](#), perimeter wall and [furniture](#) of [the school](#). Sarmin city was under the joint control of faction of the Armed Opposition and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident. The SNHR issued [a report](#) in February 2020 giving details of the attack.



On Tuesday, February 25, 2020, Syrian Regime forces used artillery and missile launchers to [fire several shells and missiles](#), targeting Idlib city, the capital of the governorate. Among these missiles, we were able to verify the presence of at least [one missile](#) loaded with [cluster munitions](#). The [cluster missiles](#) fell on [al Thawra School](#), known as al Baraem Model School, [resulting in the death of a teacher, and injuring five other people](#). The city was under the joint control of Hay'at Tahrir al Sham and the Armed Opposition/ the Syrian National Army at the time of the incident. The SNHR issued [a statement](#) condemning the attack.

The SNHR spoke with Firas al Khalifa⁹, member of the Civil Defense Office in Idlib city, who told us: “On February 25, at around 09:30, Syrian Regime forces - stationed in Saraqeb area and its suburbs east of Idlib city - fired four cluster munition missiles and about 12 artillery shells at Idlib city. The bombing targeted schools and residential neighborhoods. I went immediately with the Civil Defense team to Khaled al Sha’ar School on the southern outskirts of the city. We found a cluster missile and its warhead, where it had caused a hole in the schoolyard. The incubator had emptied the submunitions in the vicinity of the school, and a submunition exploded within the school campus. Luckily, the school was empty after the students were dismissed half an hour before the bombing.” Firas told us that he went to al Manahel Kindergarten, in al Dabbeit neighborhood, where another cluster missile fell near the wall in the yard of kindergarten. Firas described the hole it caused as being more than 20 cm deep, adding that although he found the incubator and the head of the missile, he did not find munitions in the place. Firas added: **“The bombing also targeted the al Thawra School ‘al Baraem Model School’ with a missile carrying cluster bombs, whose incubator fell in the center of the school and resulted in the deaths of two teachers and caused injuries among the teaching staff. Also, the Civil Defense Teams found an unexploded cluster bomb in the school yard.”**

⁹ Via WhatsApp on February 25, 2020



Destruction caused by a ground attack by the Syrian regime on al Muhdatha School in Balyoun village, Idlib – July 27, 2020

On Tuesday, February 25, 2020, Syrian Regime forces used artillery to fire a number of shells at al Yarmouk School in Kafrantin village located near Darat Ezza city in the western suburbs of Aleppo governorate, [partially destroying](#) the [school building](#), and causing [moderate material](#) damage to its furniture. The village was under the joint control of factions of the Armed Opposition and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.

On Monday, July 27, 2020, Syrian Regime forces used a missile launcher and artillery to fire a number of shells on Balyoun village in Jabal al Zaweya in the southern suburbs of Idlib governorate, targeting al Muhdatha School, partially destroying the school's perimeter wall. The village was under the joint control of factions of the Armed Opposition and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.

The destruction of schools, the deterioration of the educational system, instability, repeated waves of displacement, the loss of one or both parents, and the spread of poverty, have all led to children leaving education and joining the labor market, where they work in poor conditions performing jobs not commensurate with their age or physical size and strength, in order to secure their basic needs and help their families to attain essential sustenance, often acting as the family breadwinners; this also means they are deprived of their right to education as guaranteed by the Convention on the Rights of the Child, international human rights law and the provisions of international humanitarian law, the articles of which provide for the protection of the education system, students and educational facilities, prohibit targeting them and ensure the continuation of their work.



Destruction caused by a ground attack by the Syrian regime on al Muhdatha School in Balyoun village, Idlib – July 27, 2020

E. Conscription

Syrian Regime forces have routinely conscripted children, establishing special training camps for them, usually in schools, sport halls, or in the headquarters of the regime's irregular forces and militias that fight alongside its troops, with the children used to compensate for the losses among their adult ranks. Children join irregular groups such as the National Defense Forces¹⁰, as well as the battalions and brigades of foreign and local militias, after undergoing short training courses on carrying weapons, and sometimes being enlisted directly without training.

After being conscripted, children work in various combat and non-combat roles, usually being assigned the tasks of transporting ammunition, cleaning, fortification and guarding within the group they join; in battles and attacks, they participate alongside adults in the fighting, with most of the conscripted children whose deaths we recorded being among the ranks of Syrian Regime forces, who put them directly into hostilities.

The Syrian regime has facilitated the conscription of children, and has not conducted any investigations or accepted accountability for any case of child conscription. Instead, the regime has turned a blind eye to advertisements published by the local militias affiliated with it encouraging the public to volunteer and fight and in their ranks; these advertisements often attract children, due to the children's and their families' material needs and the children's own desire to be recruited and bear arms to give them sense of authority and seniority over their peers. Syrian regime media also routinely broadcast and publish militaristic propaganda about revenge and retaliation in order to indoctrinate children, influence their beliefs and encourage them to choose conscription to "defend their homeland" and "fight terrorism".

The conscription of children by the regime forces has resulted in the deaths of at least 57 children on Syria's battlefields since the March 2011 until November 20, 2020.

F. IDP children are most at risk, especially from weapons remnants

Children are the most vulnerable group among IDPs, with nearly a million children living in the camps spread across Syria suffering from the worst living conditions, and lacking the most basic elements of hygiene, privacy, housing, medical and health care, along with a total absence of safety measures. These conditions increase in severity in summer and winter, and with the occurrence of severe heat waves, with all these factors having a negative effect on the wellbeing of the forcibly displaced persons, especially those living in camps and informal tent settlements, due to the vast majority of these lacking thermal insulation materials.

We have received several reports confirming that dozens of people in these camps have suffered symptoms of heat stroke, with the vast majority of those afflicted being children. Meanwhile, in winter, factors such as low temperatures, precipitation and increased winds lead to

¹⁰ The National Defense Forces: irregular forces fighting alongside Syrian Regime forces, which were formed in January 2013, with many additional groups and brigades emerging from these forces in all Syrian governorates, including the Popular Committees and others, which have enlisted volunteers of different ages, including children and young men.

flooding of the camps, damage to tents, and additional suffering and displacement of the population. Even worse than this, we have documented the death of children as a result of the bitter cold, as well as many incidents of tents being burnt in fires and others collapsing as a result of severe weather conditions and lack of facilities, with some of these incidents causing deaths among children. Despite the presence of humanitarian and relief organizations, such tragedies are seen on an annual basis in the camps. We recently issued [a detailed report](#) on one example of the camps, al Hawl Camp, in which we indicated the extent of the suffering of children there, with the camp becoming more like a detention center.

The remnants of weapons, particularly cluster munitions which have been used exclusively by the Syrian regime and its Russian ally on a large scale and indiscriminately, are among the greatest dangers facing IDP children, as cluster munitions spread over large areas after their initial deployment and explosion, with approximately 10-40% of them remaining as unexploded bombs, which may explode at any time, constituting a threat.

Being indiscriminate by their nature, cluster munitions have caused numerous casualties and injuries among civilians, especially amputations, with their impact extending to this day as their remnants remain as life-threatening landmines, which are especially dangerous to children, as their submunitions often have bright, shiny colors that can attract children, making them the most vulnerable group.

Since the first documented use of cluster munitions in Syria in July 2012 up until November 20, 2020, the SNHR team has documented at least 250 cluster munition attacks carried out by Syrian Regime forces. These attacks, or incidents involving the explosion of old remnants of cluster munitions, resulted in the deaths of at least 427 children.

The landmines planted by all parties to the conflict come as a second threat after cluster munitions, and once again the children of Syria, more especially those displaced in agricultural areas, will suffer in the coming years from these lethal devices, because there are not yet any comprehensive maps showing the locations of minefields and the spread of cluster munitions, with SNHR seeking to work on creating such detailed maps in the coming year to help save lives.

On Wednesday, November 20, 2019, between 19:45 and 20:00, Syrian Regime forces and Iranian militias, which we believe were stationed in Jabal Azan area in the southern suburbs of Aleppo, used a missile platform to fire a Tochka 9M79 missile loaded with 9N24 cluster submunitions that fell on Qahh IDP Camp, resulting in [the deaths of 16 civilians, including 11 children and three women \(adult female\)](#), and [injuring](#) at least 50 others.

We issued [a special report](#) documenting the details of the attack.

On Wednesday, January 1, 2020, at around 11:43, Syrian Regime forces used a missile platform, which we believe was stationed in Jabal Azan area in the southern suburbs of Aleppo, to launch a Tochka 9M79 missile loaded with 9N24 cluster submunitions, which fell on al Sharqi neighborhood of Sarmin city in the eastern suburbs of Idlib; most of the submunitions spread across a civilian residential area that includes a school, a Sharia institute, and a shelter center housing displaced families from the southern suburbs of Idlib; the shelling resulted in the deaths of 12 civilians, including seven children and three women (adult female), and injured at least 20 others.

Other submunitions also spread in the main market of Sarmin city and near al Ferdous Mosque and [Othman bin Affan Mosque](#), with their explosion causing [various instances](#) of material damage to the market facilities and the two mosque buildings there. The city was under the joint control of faction of the Armed Opposition and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.

[Iman Mahmoud Laila, a female child](#) displaced from Hamouriya town in Eastern Ghouta east of Damascus suburbs governorate, lived with her family in a center sheltering IDPs which was unequipped for housing purposes, near Ma'rata village in west of Afrin city in the northwestern suburbs of Aleppo governorate. When she fell ill due to the severe cold, her father walked for two hours carrying her to al Shefaa Hospital in Afrin city. Iman was dead on arrival at the hospital at dawn on Thursday, February 13, 2020.

[Mustafa Abdul Razzaq Hammadi](#), his wife Ammoun al Salim and their two girls Huda and Hour Hammadi, who had been displaced from Kfarrouma village in Idlib governorate southern suburbs, died as a result of suffocation on February 11, 2020, while they were sleeping inside their tent in al Deyaa- 3 Camp in the Kelli area in the northern suburbs of Idlib governorate, due to the use of unhealthy heating materials.

[Three children, all brothers, Hussein, Ahmad, and Hasan Bashar al Hussein](#), who were displaced from Tal Hadya village in the southern suburbs of Aleppo governorate, died on September 6, 2020, when a fire broke out in their family's tent in Kafr Nouran IDPs Camp near Barish village in the northern suburbs of Idlib governorate. We note that the fire resulted from the explosion of a battery used to generate electricity which was located near the cooker.

2. Russian forces

A. Extrajudicial killing

Since the first day of their military intervention in Syria on September 30, 2020, Russian forces have followed the same military strategy as the Syrian regime, which is based on the use of overwhelming lethal military force with the aim of controlling areas outside the control of the Syrian regime through indiscriminate bombardment and targeting civilians and vital facilities. However, Russia has used weapons even more lethal than those used by the regime in its air attacks on

populated areas, neighborhoods, markets, city centers and gatherings, with Russian forces in many cases resorting to use of the double-tap strike tactic¹¹. We have monitored through [our reports](#) the most notable types of weapons deployed by Russian forces since the start of their military intervention in Syria, with these munitions including cluster munitions, incendiary munitions, [fortified piercing missiles](#), [Caliber missiles](#), and Toshka-style missiles. According to the SNHR database, since the beginning of Russia's military intervention up to November 20, 2020, at least 2,005 children, distributed to 1,395 male children and 610 female children, have been documented killed in Russian forces' bombardment with various types of weapons.

With regard to cluster munitions as a model of the Russian brutal use of indiscriminate weapons, the SNHR team recorded at least 236 cluster munition attacks launched by Russian forces since the start of their military intervention on September 30, 2015, up until November 20, 2020. These attacks resulted in the deaths of 67 children.

On Wednesday, January 29, 2020, at around 17:00, fixed-wing warplanes, which we believe were Russian, fired missiles at the main street, located between al Gharbi Mosque and Nouri Hamesho Mosque, in the middle of [Kafr Lata](#) village in Jabal al Arba'in area in the southern suburbs of Idlib governorate, [resulting in the deaths of 19 civilians](#) including [four children](#) (three males and one female) and two women, in addition to injuring 30 others. Kafr Lata village was under the joint control of the Armed Opposition/ the Syrian National Army and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.

On Sunday, February 2, 2020, at around 09:20, fixed-wing warplanes, which we believe were Russian, fired missiles at a residential building located on al Nayrab Road in the southern outskirts of [Sarmin](#) city in the northern suburbs of Idlib governorate, [resulting in](#) the deaths of a family of [eight civilians](#), [including five children](#) ([three males](#) and [two females](#)) and two women. Sarmin city was under the joint control of the Armed Opposition/ the Syrian National Army and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.

B. Schools and kindergartens are a central target of Russian bombardment

In their attacks, Russian forces have specifically targeted numerous schools and kindergartens, partially or completely destroying them, resulting in many child victims. We have documented that at least 220 schools were attacked by forces which we believe were Russian between the start of the Russian intervention in Syria on September 30, 2015, and November 20, 2020.

¹¹ A tactic used by the Syrian-Russian alliance forces, based on the principle of bombing a previously targeted site within a short period, allowing sufficient time for concerned local people and paramedics to gather at the location before the second bombing, in order to inflict the greatest possible human and material losses.

On Tuesday, December 24, 2019, at around 09:29, fixed-wing warplanes, which we believe were Russian, fired two missiles, one of which hit the preparatory school in the southern outskirts of Joubas village, south of Saraqeb city in the eastern suburbs of Idlib governorate, while the second missile hit a random IDP camp adjacent to the school, resulting in a massacre, [in addition](#) to [destroying part](#) of the [school perimeter](#) wall, and caused significant material damage to the school cladding materials and furniture. Joubas village was under the joint control of factions of the Armed Opposition and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.

On Monday, February 3, 2020, at around 04:30, fixed-wing warplanes, which we believe were Russian, fired missiles at a compound containing three adjacent schools in Binnesh city in the northern suburbs of Idlib governorate, namely, Binnesh High School for girls, Mustafa Farhat School, and al Reefiyah School. The missiles directly targeted Binnesh High School for girls, [severely destroying](#) the [school building](#), and [causing moderate material damage](#) to [its furniture](#), in addition to inflicting moderate material damage to the two other school buildings, Binnesh city was under the joint control of factions of the Armed Opposition and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.

On Monday, March 2, 2020, fixed-wing warplanes, which we believe were Russian, fired missiles at Odwan Preparatory School, known as the Erri School, in Odwan village in Sahl al Rouj in the western suburbs of Idlib governorate, partially destroying the school building, and causing moderate material damage to its furniture. We note that a random camp for IDPs from Hama governorate is located near the school. The bombardment caused moderate material damage to several tents. Odwan village was under the joint control of factions of the Armed Opposition and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.

3. Hay'at Tahrir al Sham (a coalition group composed of Fateh al Sham -formerly al Nusra Front- and factions of the Armed Opposition)

A. Extrajudicial killing

According to the SNHR database, indiscriminate shelling operations carried out by Hay'at Tahrir al Sham (HTS) during their attacks which have mainly targeted areas under the control of the Armed Opposition as well as clashes in populated residential areas involving the group, have resulted in the deaths of at least 66 children, with 61 of these being male children and the remaining five being female, since the emergence of al Nusra Front (currently known as Hay'at Tahrir al Sham) in January 2012 up until November 20, 2020.

B. Arrest, enforced disappearance and torture

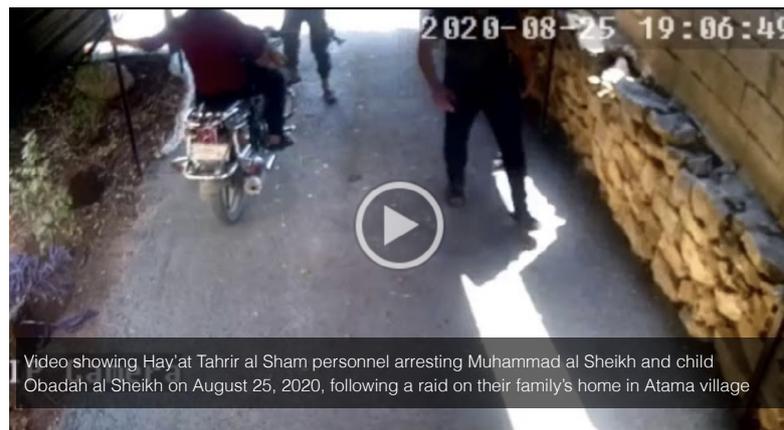
HTS has carried out arbitrary detentions/ kidnapping of children in the areas under its control through its Hisbah apparatus, on several pretexts, including, for violating the teachings imposed by the HTS, such as preventing gender-mixing in certain areas. In addition to this, we have documented several incidents in which HTS detained children following their participation in protests against HTS, or at checkpoints while the children were traveling from areas under the control of other parties, especially those coming from the areas controlled by the Syrian regime. We also recorded cases of arbitrary detention/ kidnapping of children who HTS claimed were associated with ISIS elements.

We also documented several instances of children being kidnapped for ransom by groups, which we believe were mostly affiliated with HTS, then being released in exchange for large sums of money paid by their families.

During the period of their detention and kidnapping by HTS, children are subjected to severe beating, whipping and falqa (foot-whipping). Children detained along with their mothers are also separated from and deprived of contact with them during their imprisonment. HTS members shave children's hair and humiliate their human dignity in front of crowds of people as a punishment for violating HTS' teachings.

From January 2012 to November 20, 2020, the SNHR team documented at least 37 children, including 34 male children and three female children, who are still detained or forcibly disappeared by HTS.

Muhammad al Sheikh, and child Obadah al Sheikh, aged 22 and 15 respectively, from Atama town in the northern suburbs of Idlib governorate, were detained by Hay'at Tahrir al Sham personnel on August 25, 2020, in a raid on their family's home in the town, before being released on September 3, 2020.



Video showing Hay'at Tahrir al Sham personnel arresting Muhammad al Sheikh and child Obadah al Sheikh on August 25, 2020, following a raid on their family's home in Atama village

Safwan al Adel¹², a media activist from Madaya town in Damascus Suburbs governorate, is an architect, who was forcibly displaced to Idlib on April 14, 2017, where he continued his political and human rights activism. On December 19, 2017, Hay'at Tahrir al Sham personnel arrested him from his workplace in Idlib city and took him to Shaheen Prison in Idlib Central Prison in the city, transferring him to several HTS detention centers before releasing him in mid-2019. We spoke with Safwan who told us that he saw children detained in most of the detention centers to which he was transferred. He recalled, "The prison is monitored 24 hours a day with a big, modern network of surveillance cameras, with women and children among the prisoners. We used to hear the voices of women, and we saw children under the age of three, in the corridor in front of the cells, who were used by HTS in forced labor during the distribution of food. I remember a Tunisian immigrant who had a number of children with her who used to get out of the cell and walk between the dormitories."

C. Conscription

Emulating ISIS' strategy in child conscription, HTS established training camps for children, enrolling them in sharia courses in an effort to influence their beliefs and direct them to take up arms and fight, then putting them on the front lines; in other cases, HTS entrusted children with guard duties or sentry positions at checkpoints, and exploited the desperate poverty suffered by the people in the areas under its control, providing pitiful financial salaries for those children who join their ranks.

¹² Via phone on February 13, 2020



Children gathering as part of the 'Infiru Khifafan wa Thiqalan' (Go Forth, whether Light or Heavy) campaign, launched by Hay'at Tahrir al Sham for the purpose of recruitment in Idlib governorate - January 2020

D. Targeting schools and kindergartens

HTS has also taken control over many schools in areas under its control, and converted them to affiliated civilian and military headquarters; we have documented a number of instances of the group halting the educational process in these schools and converting them to sharia institutes. According to the SNHR database, as of November 20, 2020, HTS had attacked three schools.

4. Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (the Democratic Union Party)

A. Extrajudicial killing

From the first days following the establishment of the PYD's Self-Management forces in January 2014, the Syrian Democratic Forces have carried out indiscriminate shelling of areas outside their control, as well as planting mines in and around homes and on agricultural land before withdrawing from areas under its control. We have also documented child victims killed by SDF sniping operations, and in many cases the group has been responsible for the siege of areas by targeting streets with sniper fire. Also, on many occasions, Syrian Democratic Forces patrols fired randomly from checkpoints, in markets or during raids; collectively, these incidents have resulted in the deaths of at least 225 children, of whom 130 were male and 95 female, with these cases documented on the SNHR database taking place between January 2014 and November 20, 2020.

On Wednesday, March 18, 2020, Syrian Democratic Forces fired artillery shells at Afrin city in the northern suburbs of Aleppo governorate, with some of the shells targeting Villas Street in the city center, resulting in [the deaths of five civilians](#) simultaneously, including two children. Afrin city was under the control of the Armed Opposition/ the Syrian National Army at the time of the incident.

B. Arrest and enforced disappearance

The SDF has targeted children for kidnapping and arrest/ detention in areas under its control in a widespread manner, primarily with the aim of forcibly conscripting them into its forces and taking them to military training camps, kidnapping them from roads, schools and even while they were playing in front of their families' homes. The group has also kidnapped/ detained children during raids to pressure their parents to surrender or to take these children as hostages in tribal negotiations. We have documented a number of detentions carried out under the pretext that the children were supposedly affiliated with ISIS in areas controlled by the SDF after the withdrawal of ISIS. We have also documented the SDF carrying out detentions of children with the participation of US-led coalition forces through airdrops and support operations assisting the SDF. In many incidents, we have recorded the detention of children at the group's checkpoints while the children were traveling from areas controlled by other parties to the conflict, with a number of them being released in exchange for money.



As of November 20, 2020, the SNHR team has documented that at least 652 of the children detained or forcibly disappeared by the Syrian Democratic Forces since January 2014 are still detained or forcibly disappeared in Syrian Democratic Forces' detention centers, with 305 of these children being male and 347 female.

The child, [Muhammad Eid al Jadi](#), age 17, from al Sh-heil city in the eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour, was detained by Syrian Democratic Forces in his hometown in 2018 and taken to an undisclosed location.



The child, Abdullah Faisal Haji Muhammad, from al Tabaqa city in the western suburbs of Raqqa governorate, born in 2004, was detained by Syrian Democratic Forces members on Wednesday, January 8, 2020, in al Tabaqa city, and was taken to an undisclosed location.

The SNHR spoke with Abdullah's father, Faisal¹³, who informed us: **“SDF members kidnapped Abdullah in al Tabaqa city, and his fate remained unknown until June 2020; after several attempts and putting pressure on Syrian Democratic Forces, they confessed that they had detained him without allowing us to see or visit him.”** Faisal says that the SDF justified the child's detention by citing his visit to Jarablos city in the suburbs of Aleppo. His father added, **“He went to visit his 75-year-old grandfather, who lives in a small village near Jarablos city. He is a civilian and does not belong to any military or political party in Syria.”** Faisal added that he still doesn't know the fate of his son Abdullah, and has received no information about his medical and psychological condition.

The child, Majed Muhammad al Medad, aged 17, from al Sh-heil city in the eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate, was detained on Monday, May 18, 2020, by Syrian Democratic Forces in a raid on al Medad neighborhood in al Sh-heil city, and was taken to an undisclosed location.



The child, Saed Hamdan al Ghafel, from al Sh-heil city in the eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate, was detained by Syrian Democratic Forces, backed by a US-led coalition warplane, on Tuesday, June 16, 2020, in a raid on al Khayasa neighborhood in al Sh-heil city. We documented that he was released on Sunday, July 12, 2020.

¹³ Via phone on July 20, 2020



Child, Nawaf Khaled al Abeid al Hbeirah

The child, Nawaf Khaled al Abeid al Hbeirah, aged 16, from Theyban city in the eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour, was detained on Tuesday, June 23, 2020, by Syrian Democratic Forces while he was on the main road in Theyban city, and was taken to an undisclosed location.

Two children, Omar Muhammad al Ahmad al Afain, and Yousef Khleif al Ahmad al Afain, from al Sh-hail city in the eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour, both 16 years old, were detained by Syrian Democratic Forces on Saturday, July 4, 2020, while passing through one of the SDF's checkpoints in al Bseira city in the eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate, and taken to an undisclosed location.

The child, Ayham Bassam Khalaf al Noufal, aged 16, from al Noufal neighborhood in al Sh-heil city in the eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate, was detained by Syrian Democratic Forces on Thursday, September 17, 2020, in a raid on his family's home in the neighborhood, and taken to an undisclosed location.

The child, Mus'ab Musa al Khalil, from al Sh-heil city in the eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate, was detained by Syrian Democratic Forces on Friday, October 23, 2020, in a raid on his family's home in al Sh-heil city, and taken to an undisclosed location.

C. Conscription

Syrian Democratic Forces have forcibly conscripted children in a widespread manner, seeking to recruit children, whether voluntarily or forcibly, in all areas under their control, either by enticing children, encouraging them to join their forces and offering inducements, or through kidnappings targeting children while they were at school or simply in the streets and local neighborhoods. The group has established training camps for child conscripts in areas far from their original districts, preventing the children from communicating with their families and isolating them from the outside world until the end of their training period in order to indoctrinate them and manipulate their beliefs to ensure absolute loyalty to the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK).

The Ciwanên oreger ('Revolutionary Youth') Organization¹⁴ and the Women's Protection Units are among the most prominent parties responsible for child-conscription operations and for placing children in the training camps and in the Syrian Democratic Forces' combat units. We have noted an increase in cases and incidents of kidnapping of female and male children by both these entities since the beginning of 2020. Many of the conscripted children's families told us that they had searched for their children and asked about them at the SDF headquarters, but had received no response to their inquiries, while a number of the desperately worried parents were threatened with violence if they reported that their child had been conscripted. Although the Kurdish Self-Management authority signed a [joint action plan with the United Nations](#) in June 2019 to end the recruitment of children into its ranks and to demobilize those already recruited, while the People's Protection Units and the Women's Protection Units signed a commitment with Geneva Call in June 2014 to prohibit the use of children in fighting, their recruitment of children did not end as a result; on the contrary, it has increased in an unprecedented way over previous years, with the SDF establishing the [Child Protection Office in Armed Conflict](#) on August 30, 2020 to receive complaints about child recruitment in their areas of control; despite this move, however, many families of recruited children have not received any response or information about their children's fate. The [report from the United Nations Secretary-General](#) on 'Children and Armed Conflict' for the year 2019, issued in June 2020, confirmed that the Syrian Democratic Forces were the [worst perpetrator among the parties to the conflict](#) in regard to child recruitment.

The SNHR team has documented at least 113 cases of child conscription carried out by the SDF since its establishment, with approximately 29 of these conscripted children subsequently killed on the battlefields.



Rawan Omran al Alikou

Female child, Rawan Omran al Alikou, from al Derbasiya city in the northwestern suburbs of Hasaka governorate, who was born in 2004, was kidnapped for forced conscription by Syrian Democratic Forces on Thursday, October 8, 2020, in al Qameshli city in the northern suburbs of Hasaka governorate, and taken to an undisclosed location.

¹⁴ The Ciwanên oreger Organization, known as the 'Revolutionary Youth', is an armed organization that operates within the areas controlled by the SDF and under its auspices and receives its instructions from the PKK

The SNHR spoke with the father of the female child Rawan al Sayyed Omran¹⁵, who told us that Rawan, an eleventh-grade student, used to go daily to her school located in al Qameshli city; on October 6, she was late in returning home. He adds, “I called her, and she told me that she was in training (as she is a football player) and she was tired and would not be able to return, so I contacted the coach and he told me that she was safe, and I could come the next day to pick her up. I arrived in al Qameshli the next day around 12:00 noon, with the coach calling me at the time and telling me that a girl named Sahar al Hussein told Rawan that they should meet before Rawan’s return home.” The child’s father adds that he called his daughter on the phone but she told him that she was not able to speak, then her cell phone was switched off, “The next day, on Thursday, I managed to find Sahar al Hussein’s number and called her; she denied her relationship with Rawan, and after several attempts, she said to me: ‘Uncle! Rawan was with me at home and my mother [called Parwen] took her to the Asayish Center.’ I asked Sahar about her mother’s work. She said that she is a member of the Women’s Asayish Center in al Jazira province, and she provided me with her mother’s work address. Sahar said to me: ‘Go now before they take Rawan to another place.’ I went there and asked about my daughter Rawan, but they denied her presence. Until this moment, I have no information about my daughter.”



Female child, Sabah Bashir Hesso, a 17-year-old girl from Kafr Saffra village, which is administratively a part of Afrin city in the northern suburbs of Aleppo governorate, was kidnapped for forced conscription by Syrian Democratic Forces on Saturday, May 23, 2020, from Fafin IDP Camp in al Shahbaa area in the northern suburbs of Aleppo governorate. She was taken to one of the SDF’s military conscription camps in al Sheikh Maqsoud neighborhood of Aleppo city.



The child, Samir Abdul Rahman Zinki, aged 15, from Ma’mal Oshaghi village, which is administratively a part of Afrin city in the northern suburbs of Aleppo governorate, was kidnapped for forced conscription by Syrian Democratic Forces on Monday, May 25, 2020, from an area near al Isteqama Mosque in al AShrafiya neighborhood in Aleppo city. He was taken to one of the SDF’s military conscription camps in al Sheikh Maqsoud neighborhood of Aleppo city.

¹⁵ Via WhatsApp on October 9, 2020



Female child, Jihan Sheikh
Muhammad Suleiman

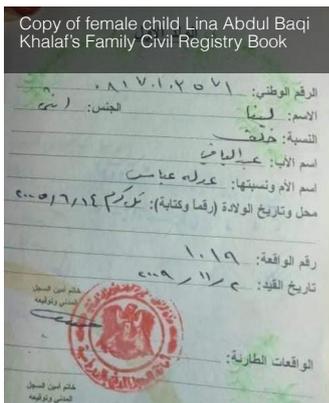
Female child, Jihan Sheikh Muhammad Suleiman, from Afrin city in the northern suburbs of Aleppo governorate, who was born in 2004, was kidnapped by gunmen affiliated with Syrian Democratic Forces on Friday, June 5, 2020, in al Ashrafiya neighborhood in Aleppo city. She was taken to an SDF detention center in al Sheikh Maqsoud neighborhood in Aleppo city.

After several demands from the girl's family to get their daughter back, Syrian Democratic Forces arranged a meeting between them, naming a meeting place in the Sheikh Maqsoud neighborhood in the 'Serok Apo' public park. Three Syrian Democratic Forces personnel were present at the meeting, in addition to a number of guards from the group, with about eight more people remotely monitoring it. The girl's meeting with her family lasted only a few minutes, before the Syrian Democratic Forces personnel re-kidnapped the child in front of her parents' eyes, taking her away in a car belonging to the SDF to an undisclosed location.



Lina Abdul Baqi Khalaf

The female child, Lina Abdul Baqi Khalaf, born in 2005, from Tal Karam village, which is administratively a part al Derbasiya district in the northwestern suburbs of Hasaka governorate, was kidnapped for forced conscription by Syrian Democratic Forces personnel in Tal Karam village on Thursday, July 2, 2020, and taken to an undisclosed location.



Copy of female child Lina Abdul Baqi
Khalaf's Family Civil Registry Book



Female child, Sarab Bashir Muhammad

The female child, Sarab Bashir Muhammad, born in 2003, from al Derbasiya city in the northern suburbs of Hasaka governorate, was kidnapped for forced conscription by Syrian Democratic Forces personnel in al Derbasiya city on Tuesday, September 15, 2020, and taken to an SDF detention center.



Salar Khleif al Khalifah

The child, Salar Khleif al Khalifah, from Seiha village, which is administratively a part of Qameshli area in the northeastern suburbs of Raqqqa governorate, was born in 2005. On Saturday, November 7, 2020, Syrian Democratic Forces personnel forcibly conscripted him and enrolled him in an SDF military training camp in al Rmeilan town in the suburbs of Hasaka governorate.

The SNHR spoke with Mr. Yaser al Khalifah¹⁶, the child Salar's uncle, who told us that his nephew had gone to al Qameshli city to buy groceries, but he did not return to the house and did not answer his family's repeated calls on his phone, prompting his parents to search for him in the village. Yaser says, "The villagers told us that Salar went out on a motorcycle accompanied by a person called Eyad Abeid, who is a member affiliated with the Syrian Democratic Forces. It became clear later that Eyad had coordinated with the Ciwanên ore ger organization, and upon his arrival at a checkpoint in al Qahtaniya town in the suburbs of Hasaka governorate, the Ciwanên ore ger group was waiting for Salar, who went with them; then he was taken to one of the recruitment camps in al Rmeilan town in the suburbs of Hasaka governorate. We had seen Salar's desire to join them long ago." Yaser added that the family learned through a mediator from the checkpoint personnel that the surveillance cameras at the checkpoint showed that Salar had gone with members of the Ciwanên ore ger group of his own free will. He added, "After the media storm and the many questions about Salar, one of the SDF personnel contacted Salar's family and admitted that he was there and that they could visit him; two days after the incident, Salar's family went to al Rmeilan town to visit him, but they could not see him or talk to him by phone, and they did not get any information about him. Instead, one of the SDF personnel met them and told them of the need to stop the media storm about Salar, and to stay away from Eyad Abeid, who had the role in coordinating with the Ciwanên ore ger group."

Salar's fate remained unknown until Saturday, November 14, 2020, when his family received a call from Syrian Democratic Forces in order to hand over the child to his family in the Himo area located on al Qameshli-Amouda road in the suburbs of Hasaka governorate.

¹⁶ Via Facebook Messenger on November 10, 2020

D. Targeting schools and kindergartens

The indiscriminate bombardment inflicted by Syrian Democratic Forces has caused damage to a number of educational facilities' buildings. Also, Syrian Democratic Forces have seized many schools in areas under their control and turned them into military headquarters for their forces. We have documented that at least 10 schools were attacked by Syrian Democratic Forces as of November 20, 2020.

On Tuesday, February 4, 2020, Syrian Democratic Forces simultaneously used heavy artillery and missile launchers to shell the center of Afrin city in the northern suburbs of Aleppo governorate. The shelling targeted al Ittihad al Araby School, while an educational course was underway inside the school, resulting in the death of one of the students participating in the course, and injuring eight others, in addition to causing the partial destruction of the [school building](#), and moderate [material damage](#) to [its furniture](#). Afrin city was under the control of the Syrian National Army at the time of the incident.



Damage caused by an SDF ground attack on al Ittihad al Araby School in the center of Afrin city, Aleppo – February 4, 2020

5. Factions of the Armed Opposition/ the Syrian National Army

A. Extrajudicial killing

The Armed Opposition factions have been responsible for killings through indiscriminate shelling of areas under the control of other parties to the conflict, with the SNHR documenting the deaths of a number of children during clashes between the factions. As of November 20, 2020, the SNHR has documented the deaths of at least 992 children at the hands of factions of the Armed Opposition, with 556 of these children being male and 463 female.

B. Arrest, enforced disappearance and torture

The areas under the control of factions of the Armed Opposition shrank at the end of 2018, being concentrated in the northern suburbs of Aleppo governorate and some areas of Idlib governorate. During 2018, factions of the Armed Opposition targeted children for kidnapping, especially during their attacks on areas outside their control, and while children were passing through their checkpoints. They also resorted to kidnappings, detentions and kidnapping of children in exchange for the payment of large sums of money to secure their release. Factions of the opposition have also been responsible for arrests and enforced disappearances, some of which have been of an ethnic character, particularly in the Afrin region in the northern suburbs of Aleppo governorate.

As of November 20, 2020, the SNHR team has documented that at least 339 children, comprising 248 males and 91 females, are still arrested/ detained by the Armed Opposition/ the Syrian National Army, with most of the arrests we documented amounting to enforced disappearance.



Child, Mahmoud al Jawda, and
Muhammad Abdul Aziz Aqila

Two children, Mahmoud al Jawda and Muhammad Abdul Aziz Aqila, from al Yarmouk camp south of Damascus city, aged 10 and 17 respectively, were detained by members of the Syrian National Army in July 2020 while they were passing through one of the Syrian National Army's checkpoints (Al Awn Checkpoint) in Jarablos city in the suburbs of Aleppo governorate. Both were taken to an undisclosed location.

The SNHR spoke with Mr. Munther Aqila¹⁷, Muhammad's brother, who told us, "My brother Muhammad wanted to travel to Turkey, accompanied by the child Mahmoud al Jawda, a relative of his friend; after coordination with a smuggler, they headed in July 2020 from Damascus city until they reached the areas controlled by opposition factions in the suburbs of Aleppo; while they were at al Awn Checkpoint in Jarablos city, they were arrested and taken to an undisclosed location. Then, the smuggler contacted us and told us what had happened. Their fate remained unknown until November 2020, when one of the people in that area informed us that my brother Muhammad and the child Mahmoud were in a prison of the Military Police in Afrin city."

Factions of the Armed Opposition have practiced torture against children, in which children were mainly subjected to severe beatings, falqa (foot-whipping) and suspension from the ceiling, as well as being forced to carry out menial labor such as transporting food or cleaning within the opposition factions' detention centers.

C. Conscription

Armed Opposition Factions have exploited the poor living conditions children live under, including the loss of their family breadwinners, to conscript children into their forces, entrusting them with guard duties, transporting ammunition, cleaning and carrying out sentry duties at checkpoints, and involving them in battles. We have documented the deaths of five children while participating with Armed Opposition factions in fighting on the battlefield.



Aqil al Salloum, from Qebbasin town in the northeastern suburbs of Aleppo governorate, was a child of 15 when he was recruited by the Sultan Murad faction affiliated with the Armed Opposition factions. On Tuesday, April 21, 2020, people found his body which had been thrown into a stone quarry on al Olshali Road, east of Qebbasin town apparently after he had been shot dead by unidentified killers. The area is under the control of the Syrian National Army factions.

¹⁷ Via WhatsApp on November 9, 2020

D. Targeting schools and kindergartens

SNHR documented that at least 35 schools were attacked by the Armed Opposition/ the Syrian National Army, between March 2011 and November 20, 2020.

VI. Conclusions and Recommendations:

The Convention on the Rights of the Child¹⁸ defines what the rights of the child are and aims to protect children's rights at all times. International humanitarian law provides general protection for children as persons taking no part in hostilities¹⁹, and special protection as persons who are particularly vulnerable and unarmed individuals²⁰. Rule 135²¹ of International Humanitarian Law states that "Children affected by armed conflict are entitled to special respect and protection" in both international and non-international armed conflicts.

The Geneva Conventions of 1949 and the two Additional Protocols of 1977 also recognize that "Children must be the object of special respect and must be protected against any form of indecent assault. The parties to the conflict must provide them with the care and aid they require, whether because of their age or for any other reason²²." Common Article 3²³ states that children, as persons taking no active part in the hostilities shall in all circumstances be treated humanely, without any adverse distinction. The provisions of the agreements focus on protecting children from hostilities, and ensuring that they are provided with the necessary care, relief and protection, especially for children in areas of armed conflict.

The prohibition on the recruitment of children under the age of 15 has attained the status of customary international law, and this prohibition, which was initially stipulated in regard to international armed conflicts, has been expanded to include non-international armed conflicts. The statute of the International Criminal Court clarifies that both in cases of international armed conflict and of non-international armed conflict, forcibly conscripting or recruiting children under the age of 15 and enlisting them in armed forces or armed groups or using them in conflicts is a war crime²⁴.

¹⁸ The United Nations, Convention on the Rights of the Child, <<https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>>

¹⁹ ICRC, Geneva Convention (IV) relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War 1949, Article 3, <<https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/ihl/INTRO/380>>

²⁰ ICRC, Geneva Convention (IV) relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War 1949, Article 14, <<https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/ihl/INTRO/380>>

²¹ ICRC, Customary International Humanitarian Law, Rule 135, <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/customary-ihl/eng/docs/v1_rul_rule135>

²² ICRC, Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions (Protocol I) 1977, Article 77(1), <<https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/ihl/INTRO/470>>

²³ ICRC, Geneva Convention (I) for the Amelioration of the Condition of the Wounded and Sick in Armed Forces in the Field 1949, Article 3, <<https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/applic/ihl/ihl.nsf/INTRO/365>>

²⁴ International Criminal Court, Rome Statute, Article 8-2-b(XXVI) and Article 8-2-e(VII), <<https://www.icc-cpi.int/resource-library/documents/rs-eng.pdf>>

On May 25, 2000, the United Nations General Assembly adopted an Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, raising the age at which participation in the armed forces is permitted from 15 to 18 and placing a ban on compulsory recruitment under the age of 18²⁵, but the criminal trial is still limited to recruiting children under the age of 15.

Non-state armed groups must abide by the rules of international human rights law, including Article 4-1 of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, which states that **“Armed groups that are distinct from the armed forces of a State should not, under any circumstances, recruit or use in hostilities persons under the age of 18 years.”**²⁶

Despite the vast arsenal of aforementioned laws, violations of the right of children in Syria have not stopped for nearly nine years, and none of the parties to the conflict have respected these laws; although the Syrian regime has ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child, it has treated the convention in practice as mere empty words on paper, which failed to deter it from committing violations against children that amount to crimes against humanity through extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, and torture, as well as war crimes through forced conscription, while many of the violations committed by the other parties to the conflict against children may also constitute war crimes in the context of being committed against the background of the conflict, and widespread violations of international human rights law if they are committed against children in areas controlled by these forces; arbitrary detention and torture are at the forefront of these violations, followed by forced conscription.

Recommendations:

All parties to the conflict:

- The regime must fulfill its obligations based on its ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the two International Covenants and the Geneva Conventions.
- The Syrian-Russian alliance and Iranian militias and their affiliates must stop deliberately shelling schools, kindergartens, and residential areas inhabited by children and their families, and killing and maiming children.
- All parties to the conflict should immediately release detained children, particularly those detained in the context of armed conflict, and abide by international laws on the detention of children, especially girls, including providing sufficient and adequate food, as well as providing education by allowing them to attend school either inside or outside the prison.

²⁵ The United Nations, Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/opaccrc.aspx>

²⁶ The United Nations, Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/opaccrc.aspx>

- All parties to the conflict must stop torturing detained children, and must separate children from adults, as stipulated in rules 8-d and 85 of the Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners²⁷, and Article 10-2-b of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights²⁸.
- Adopt the Beijing Rules²⁹ when prosecuting children, which clarify the principles relating to the criminal responsibility of juveniles and the principles governing the penalties imposed against them. These principles have been supplemented by the adoption of the United Nations rules for the protection of juveniles deprived of their liberty³⁰.
- Permanently end the recruitment of children, and release all children under the age of 15 from all military formations and duties.

International community and UN Security Council:

- Provide protection and assistance to forcibly displaced children, including IDPs and refugees, especially girls, and take into account their specific needs, primarily for protection.
- All countries worldwide must ratify the Convention on the Rights of the Child, fulfill their obligations under it to hold the Syrian regime accountable, expose the regime's criminal practices against Syria's children, and make every possible effort to mitigate and stop them.
- Expose all States backing the Syrian regime in their efforts to rehabilitate or support perpetrators of crimes against humanity and war crimes against the children of Syria.
- Take all possible legal, political and financial measures against the Syrian regime and its allies, as well as against all perpetrators of violations in the Syrian conflict to pressure them to commit to respect the rights of children.
- Fulfill the commitment of pledged financial contributions:
- Assist neighboring countries and provide all possible support to increase the level of education and healthcare in these countries which host the largest number of refugee children.
- Establish mechanisms to end the bombing of schools and kindergartens, protect these facilities, and work to create a safe learning environment, which is the least possible level of protection that could be offered for civilians.
- The issue of Syrian children is a global one, and all countries must do their utmost to alleviate its repercussions by supporting schools and the educational and medical systems inside Syria, as well as by caring for refugee children.

²⁷ The United Nations, The United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners, <https://www.unodc.org/documents/justice-and-prison-reform/Nelson_Mandela_Rules-E-book.pdf>

²⁸ The United Nations, International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, <<https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/ccpr.aspx>>

²⁹ The United Nations, United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Administration of Juvenile Justice ("The Beijing Rules"), <<https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/ProfessionalInterest/beijingrules.pdf>>

³⁰ The United Nations, United Nations Rules for the Protection of Juveniles Deprived of their Liberty, <<https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/JuvenilesDeprivedOfLiberty.aspx>>

United Nations:**OCHA:**

- Coordinate humanitarian aid operations according to the areas worst affected and avoid pressure and blackmail by the Syrian regime which is working to harness aid to its advantage.
- Allocate adequate resources for the rehabilitation of children, taking into account the special needs of girls who have been directly affected by violations and who have been sexually exploited, giving priority to the areas worst affected.

International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism (IIIM) and International Commission of Inquiry (COI):

- Investigate the incidents included in this report and further highlight the suffering of Syrian children.

The supporting States and the European Union:

- Syria is one of the worst affected countries in the world in terms of the perpetration of several types of violations against children, and therefore it needs a greater amount of assistance compared to other countries and regions, especially considering that these violations are still ongoing to date.
- Allocate greater resources to UNICEF in general and to the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism in particular, and rely on this database to begin rehabilitating child survivors.

Neighboring countries:

- Ensure that refugees fleeing Syria are able to seek asylum, respect their rights, including the prohibition of refoulement, and expedite reunification. EU states and other countries should alleviate the burden on neighboring countries and receive more Syrian refugees, while donor countries should increase their assistance to the UNHCR and civil societies organizations in countries of asylum.

UNHCR:

- Create a stable and safe environment for Syrian refugee children and intensify work for their reintegration into society through long-term psychological treatment.
- Increase investment in education and health.

Thanks

The Syrian Network for Human Rights extends its sincere thanks to everyone who sent news and information, especially survivor victims, eyewitnesses, and local activists, whose information has contributed to substantiating and strengthening the available data and the evidence in the various incidents included in this report.



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