

Statement

The First Anniversary of the Syrian Regime's Chemical Weapons Attack Against Civilians in Douma City

The United Nations' Failure to Punish the Syrian Regime for Using Weapons of Mass Destruction Allowed It to Repeatedly Use Them

SNHR

SYRIAN NETWORK FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

الشبكة السورية لحقوق الإنسان

Sunday, April 7, 2019

The Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR), founded in June 2011, is a non-governmental, independent group that is considered a primary source for the OHCHR on all death toll-related analyses in Syria.

The seventh of April marks one of the most dreadful and heartbreaking tragedies suffered by the Syrian people in the country's modern history. On this date in 2018, the Syrian regime under the leadership of its current president, Bashar al Assad, used chemical weapons against civilians who were already suffering terribly after almost five years of brutal siege in Douma city in the Eastern Ghouta region of Damascus Suburbs governorate. One of the most horrifying aspects of this atrocity was that the civilians were hiding at the time in the cellars of buildings in a desperate effort to escape ongoing regime bombing by the war-planes of the Syrian regime and the Russian regime led by its president, Vladimir Putin, which were heavily and indiscriminately bombing the city with dozens of missiles daily.

We will never be able to forget the photos and videos we received from the places where the chemical attacks took place. The images showed the bodies of the children and women stacked on top of each other, their faces blue from asphyxia, their eyes staring in sightless horror and foam extruding from their mouths. These terrible images reminded us again and again of the photos of victims of previous chemical attacks carried out by the Syrian regime, such as the attack on the Eastern and Western Ghouta in August 2013, as well as the Khan Sheikhoun attack on April 4, 2017, whose second anniversary we, at the Syrian Network for Human Rights, commemorated a few days ago.

On Saturday, April 7, 2018, the Syrian regime launched two chemical attacks in the north of Douma city. The first attack took place around 15:00 pm near the Sa'da Bakery building, injuring at least 15 individuals who suffered from respiratory distress symptoms, while the second attack, the larger of the two, took place five hours later at around 20:00 pm when the Syrian regime's helicopters dropped two barrel bombs containing poison gas on two residential buildings near al Shuhada Square in the Nu'man area; 39 civilians, including 10 children and 15 women (adult female), died as a result of this attack, and nearly 550 others were injured, exhibiting respiratory and neurological symptoms.



The Douma attack was part of a massive military campaign launched by Syrian-Russian alliance forces on the Eastern Ghouta, beginning in February 2018, which ultimately resulted in Syrian Regime forces and Iranian militias taking control of most of the towns in the area. A few days before the attack, an agreement had been reached whereby some civilians and some opposition fighters would leave Douma city, with the fighters taking only light weapons, while those who wished to remain would settle their situation. Our investigations, which were included [in our detailed report on the attack](#), indicated that the chemical attacks appeared to have been a retaliatory move by the regime against the backdrop of obstructing negotiations with factions of the Armed Opposition, with these attacks carried out as a means of putting pressure on the popular base in Douma city to coerce factions of the Armed Opposition to agree to the agreement and its clauses requiring the displacement of the city's residents, which was what eventually happened.

The Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) confirmed the events of the Douma chemical weapon attack in a number of reports, the last of which was issued on March 1, 2019, without identifying the perpetrator; the OPCW was restricted at the time since its investigations were carried out in the period before its mandate allowed it to ascribe responsibility. However, the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Syria documented the Syrian regime's responsibility for the Douma attack. It was widely assumed that after these accurate and highly credible investigations, the Security Council would move to implement its relevant resolutions - Resolution No. 2118 of September 27, 2013, Resolution No. 2209 of March 6, 2015 and Resolution No. 2235 of August 7, 2015 - to militarily penalize the Syrian regime, or at least to impose economic sanctions on the Syrian regime, including organs and individuals involved in the use of chemical weapons; unfortunately, it has failed to achieve any of these objectives or to take any action at all.

According to the Syrian Human Rights Network's database documenting chemical attacks carried out in Syria, the latest two attacks on Douma came after 214 previous chemical attacks carried out by Syrian Regime forces in various governorates across Syrian territory. Up to April 7, 2019, the total number of chemical weapons attacks documented on the Syrian Network for Human Rights' database now amounts to at least 221 since December 23, 2012, the date of the first use of chemical weapons in Syria we documented. These attacks are distributed according to the perpetrator party as follows:

- The Syrian regime: 216 chemical attacks, mostly in the governorates of Damascus Suburbs and Idlib.
- ISIS: Five attacks, all in Aleppo governorate.



These attacks resulted in the deaths of at least 1,461 individuals, identified on our files by name and in detail; all of the victims who died in attacks carried out by the Syrian regime are distributed as follows:

- 1,397 civilians, including 185 children and 252 women (adult female).
- 57 Armed Opposition fighters.
- Seven prisoners of Syrian Regime forces who were being held in a prison run by the opposition.

A further 9,885 individuals were injured in these attacks, with these cases distributed as follows:

- 9,753 were injured as a result of attacks carried out by the Syrian regime.
- 132 were injured as a result of attacks carried out by ISIS.

[The following link](#) includes reports documenting 221 chemical weapons attacks, including details of all the incidents we were able to document, such as the time and location of the attack, weather conditions at the time, the death toll of victims; the deaths and injuries, the type of weapon used, and interviews with eyewitnesses and survivors of these attacks, as well as a wide range of images and videos that we received, checked and verified, in addition to other evidence. It is, therefore, proven beyond doubt that the Syrian regime's use of chemical weapons constitutes a recurring pattern amounting to crimes against humanity, as well as war crimes.

Whilst it is true that we, at the Syrian Network for Human Rights, have recorded no chemical attacks since the two chemical attacks on Douma on April 7, 2018, we have, however, recorded continuing extensive violations perpetrated by the Syrian regime, which also constitute war crimes and crimes against humanity through the use of improvised explosive devices, cluster munitions, and even torture to death in detention centers.

Recommendations:

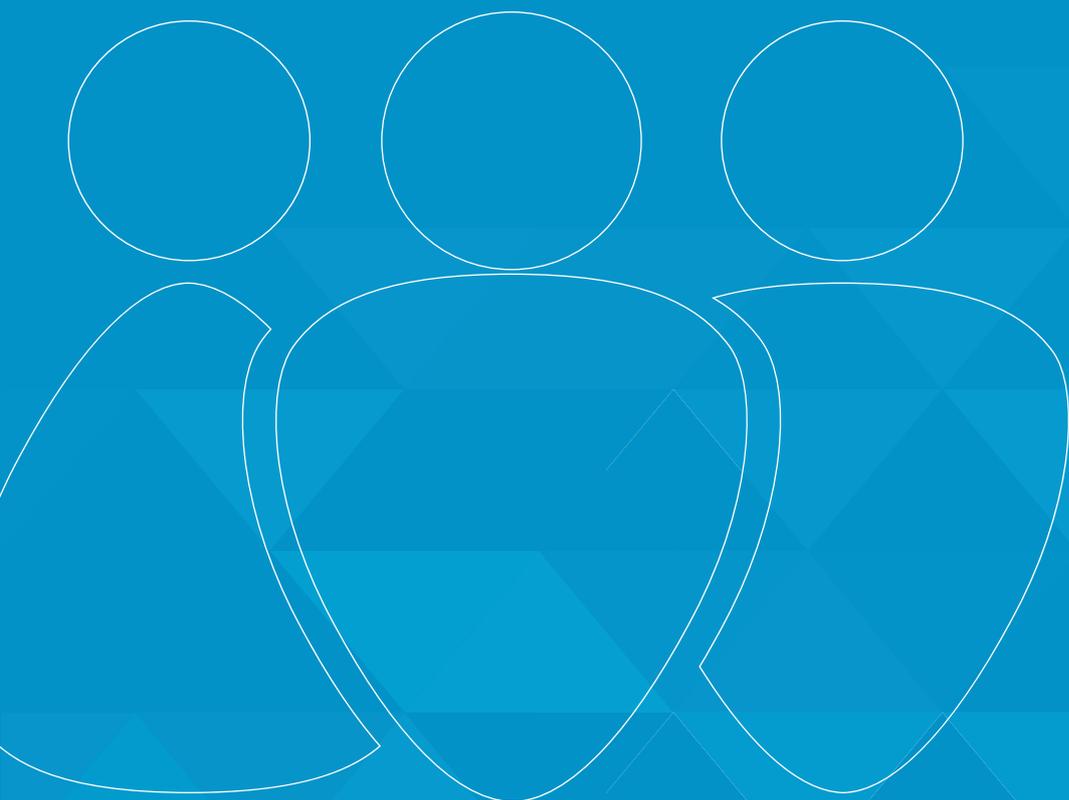
Given its new mandate, the OPCW must identify those responsible for the Douma chemical attack and other chemical attacks, and thus hold the Security Council and the international community, including the Syrian regime's allies, fully responsible; such action may prompt these entities to reconsider any kind of relationship with a regime that has repeatedly deployed internationally outlawed weapons of mass destruction against civilians in the modern age before the eyes of the whole world.



The memory of the Syrian regime's use of weapons of mass destruction against Douma city in the modern age will remain a black stain tarnishing the reputation of the international community throughout history due to its failure to punish the perpetrator of the attack, even by economic sanctions, with the United Nations failing to impose even this weak penalty against the Syrian regime for these crimes against humanity. This demonstrates the magnitude of the dangerous deterioration of the international system; the international system must rectify this imbalance by imposing economic and military sanctions against this regime, which is determined to continue with committing crimes amounting to crimes against humanity.

There is an imperative need to form an alliance of a group of civilized countries that rejects the Syrian regime's barbaric use of weapons of mass destruction and opposes the tyrannical states that support the regime. This civilized alliance must launch an immediate humanitarian intervention to protect the Syrian people, along the lines of NATO's intervention to protect civilians from killings and ethnic cleansing in Yugoslavia, as approved by the International Court of Justice which did not see this as being contrary to international law, or UN Security Council Resolution 1244 in 1999. This is especially essential in the case of egregious violations that constitute crimes against humanity and war crimes committed by the ruling power against the people.





@snhr



Info@sn4hr.org

www.sn4hr.org

