

# The Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in March 2021

Brussels Conference Aid Must  
Be Linked to the Extent of  
Respect for and Application of  
Human Rights Principles and  
the Victims Most Affected

Monday 5 April 2021

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.

## Content

I. INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY.....	2
II. SUMMARY OF THE MOST NOTABLE EVENTS IN MARCH .....	3
III. THE MOST NOTABLE HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS IN SYRIA IN MARCH .....	15
IV. THE SYRIAN REGIME BEARS PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE SPREAD OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC .....	23
V. ATTACHMENTS .....	24
VI. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	25

## I. Introduction and Methodology:

Syria has seen an unprecedented number of violations since the start of the popular uprising for democracy in March 2011. Extrajudicial killings, arrests, torture and enforced disappearances are the violations most frequently perpetrated against Syrian citizens. While the Syrian regime and its affiliated militias were the sole perpetrators of these violations for the first seven months or so of the uprising, other parties subsequently joined in, also violating the rights of Syrian citizens. The Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) has continued to document every incident that its team members are able to verify, with these violations escalating very dramatically in 2012 and 2013, prompting us to expand our publication of periodic monthly reports recording and highlighting the continued suffering of the Syrian people, which subsequently grew to eight reports on different issues issued at the beginning of each month. In the course of our work, SNHR has compiled a massive database cataloguing hundreds of thousands of incidents, each of which involves a pattern of violations that we have been able to document.

By the end of 2018, with a reduction in the level of violence compared to previous years, we changed our previous strategy and now compile our reports into a single monthly report featuring the most prominent violations in Syria which we have been able to document in the preceding month.

This month's report focuses on the human rights situation in Syria in March 2021, and catalogues the death toll of civilian victims whom we documented killed by the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces during this period, as well as the record of cases of arrests and enforced disappearance. The report also highlights indiscriminate attacks, as well as the use of outlawed weapons (cluster munitions, chemical weapons, barrel bombs, incendiary weapons), and attacks on civilian objects, which SNHR's team was able to document during this period. To find out more about our working [methodology](#) in documenting and archiving data, please visit the following link that explains this in detail.

This report contains two first-hand accounts that we've collected through speaking directly with eyewitnesses, none of which are cited from any open sources. We explained the purpose of these interviews beforehand to the eyewitnesses, who gave us permission to use the information they provided without us offering or providing them with any incentives. Also, SNHR endeavors always to spare the eyewitnesses the agony of remembering the violations as much as possible, as well as providing assurances that we will conceal the identity of any witness who prefers to use an alias.

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

## II. Summary of the Most Notable Events in March:

### In regard to bombardment and military operations:

March saw the Syrian regime's forces and allies continuing their artillery and missile bombardment of cities and towns in [the southern suburbs of Idlib](#), [the western suburbs of Hama](#) and the eastern suburbs of Aleppo near the front lines. Syrian regime forces and allies also bombed areas far from the front lines, such as [Ariha city in Idlib suburbs](#). The front lines of al Fatira, Kafranbel and al Bara in the southern suburbs of Idlib and the outskirts of Bineen village witnessed almost daily clashes throughout the month between factions of the Armed Opposition and Syrian regime forces.

On March 21, the Idlib region saw a military escalation by the Syrian-Russian alliance forces, with SNHR documenting attacks that targeted several civilian areas containing vital installations and facilities, the most prominent of which were the attack on al Atareb Hospital in the suburbs of the Aleppo governorate, and the attack on the Sarmada-Bab al Hawa Road in the northern Idlib governorate, which caused massive material damage to vehicles that transport humanitarian aid, in addition to damaging a relief organization's warehouse. [We issued a special report](#) on the attacks in the Idlib region in northwest Syria that day.

On March 22, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, António Guterres, strongly [condemned](#) the recent wave of attacks in northwest Syria. He reaffirmed the need for a nationwide ceasefire – as called for in Security Council resolution 2254 (2015) – and called on all parties to immediately renew their commitment to a cessation of hostilities.

In March, the areas controlled by Syrian regime forces in the governorates of Hama and Aleppo saw killings at the hands of pro-regime militias targeting shepherds and [farmers](#).

In March, the Russian forces launched raids [on several areas](#), targeting civilian and military areas belonging to Hay'at Tahrir al Sham; among the most prominent of these attacks was the targeting of an out-of-service poultry farm in Ma'aret Misreen on March 5; on March 29, Russian forces also launched several raids that targeted farms and a [poultry farming facility](#), west of Idlib city, killing hundreds of birds.

Al Humran crossing area, located between the areas controlled by Syrian Democratic Forces and those controlled by Syrian National Army in Jarablos suburbs in the eastern suburbs of Aleppo, and the Tarhin area, where dozens of primitive incinerators of raw fuel coming from the areas controlled by Syrian Democratic Forces are located, both saw attacks [on March 5](#) with long-range 9M55K missiles, believed to be fired from the Russian Hmeimim airbase; at least one of these missiles was [loaded with 9n235 cluster munitions](#). The attack caused civilian casualties and significant damage to fuel tanks and burners. This was the first time that we had documented a cluster munition attack since June 2020, with Russian forces subsequently carrying out another attack with long-range missiles on the area [on March 14](#), which caused hundreds of thousands of dollars in losses and created a major fuel crisis.

In recent months, Russian media outlets have reported bombardment operations by Russian forces targeting several sites - within the areas where the Syrian regime regained control with Russian forces' support - as former centers for "terrorists", including the [bombing of al Maghara Central Hospital](#) in the suburbs of Hama governorate, which was previously bombed by the same forces.

On March 24, a [Russian media agency](#) published a video of what it said was live military training for the Syrian regime and Russian forces "to liberate one of the colonies from the terrorists." The video showed the bombing of homes in a village, which the Syrian Network for Human Rights subsequently determined to be the village of Houbar in the southern suburbs of Aleppo. The Syrian regime and its allies not only demolished homes and facilities in order to achieve their objective to reestablish control over the areas, but also destroyed these homes and facilities for the sake of military training which is customarily carried out, at least in civilized countries, in areas free of any population or buildings.

The areas controlled by the Syrian National Army forces in northeast Aleppo governorate saw missile and artillery shelling by both Syrian regime forces and Syrian Democratic Forces. The Syrian Network for Human Rights documented the death of a civilian as a result of the Syrian regime's bombing around [the vicinity of al Bab city](#), while Syrian Democratic Forces launched attacks on the areas of Jarablos, Izaz and Mare'e. Meanwhile, intermittent clashes took place between Syrian Democratic Forces and Syrian National Army factions on the eastern suburbs frontline of al Bab city in the eastern suburbs of Aleppo.

The villages of Ein Eisa district in the northern suburbs of Raqqa also saw violent clashes between Syrian Democratic Forces and Peace Spring forces, without any change in the distribution of zones of control.

Although the frequency of bombings in northern and eastern Syria in areas outside the control of Syrian regime forces decreased, compared to previous months, they did not stop and were concentrated in March in the Afrin and al Bab areas in Aleppo suburbs, and Ras al Ein city in the northwestern suburbs of Hasaka, causing casualties in these areas.

Assassinations continued throughout Syria during this period, particularly in the governorates of Aleppo, Idlib, Daraa and Deir Ez-Zour, killing and injuring dozens of civilians. Meanwhile, the assassinations in Daraa governorate targeted personnel from Syrian regime forces, regime collaborators and former regime opponents.

Mines continue to claim large numbers of civilian lives in different governorates and regions of Syria. In March, we documented the deaths of 51 civilians, including six children and 20 women. One of the incidents caused a [massacre of](#) 18 civilians, including 11 women, as a result of a mine explosion near a vehicle carrying a group of civilians who were out collecting truffles on the outskirts of al Shahatiya village in Wadi al Atheeb area in the eastern suburbs of Hama governorate, on March 7.

In March, we documented the deaths of 177 civilians, including 28 children and 35 women (adult female), at the hands of the conflict parties and the controlling forces in Syria, which is the highest monthly death toll since the beginning of 2021; among the victims, six were killed at the hands of Russian forces,

the first time that we've documented victims killed at the hand of these forces since November 2020. The vicinity of Damascus city was also subjected to an Israeli attack on March 16, with damage from this airstrike limited to material items, according to [SANA News Agency](#).

### In regard to arrests and enforced disappearances:

Syrian regime forces in March continued to persecute and arrest individuals who had concluded settlements of their security status with the Syrian regime in areas that had previously concluded settlement agreements with the regime; these arrests have been concentrated in Damascus Suburbs and Daraa governorates. We also recorded arrests carried out by the Criminal Security Branch targeting pro-Syrian regime media workers, government employees, lawyers and civilians against the background of their criticism of the difficult living conditions in the areas controlled by the regime. We documented arrests that took place in the context of participation in activities commemorating the popular uprising for democracy in Syria, which were concentrated in Homs governorate. We also recorded arrests of individuals for making phone calls to areas outside the Syrian regime's control, as well as against persons in connection with their movement between and travel to areas outside the control of the Syrian regime.

Meanwhile, we documented in March that Syrian Democratic Forces continued to target teachers for arrest in connection with their teaching educational curricula other than those imposed by SDF or in the context of forced conscription. The Syrian Network for Human Rights documented [teachers launching strike action and suspending](#) work at Mazra'et Maysaloun Primary School and al Yarmouk Primary and Secondary School in the villages of al Yarmouk and Mazra'et Maysaloun in the northern suburbs of Raqqa governorate on March 3 in protest at the forced conscription campaigns. Syrian Democratic Forces also carried out campaigns of mass raids and arrests, targeting many civilians on the pretext of fighting ISIS cells, with some of these campaigns backed by US-led coalition helicopters. We also documented SDF arrests of media activists, with these arrests being concentrated in the governorates of Deir Ez-Zour and Hasaka, as well as documenting assaults on medical personnel and facilities, and arrests of medical personnel; these were concentrated in Deir Ez-Zour governorate. We also recorded arrests of children for the purpose of conscription.

March also saw Hay'at Tahrir al Sham detaining civilians, with these arrests, which were concentrated in Idlib governorate, including media activists and politicians; most of these arrests occurred due to the detainees expressing opinions critical of the HTS's management of areas under its control. These detentions were carried out arbitrarily in the form of raids in which HTS members stormed their victims' homes, often breaking down the doors, or by kidnapping their victims while they were traveling or passing through temporary checkpoints.

The Armed Opposition/ Syrian National Army also continued carrying out arbitrary detentions and kidnappings in March, most of which were carried out on a mass scale, targeting women under the pretext that they were trying to cross the Turkish border illegally, before releasing them later; we also recorded mass arrests targeting those coming from areas under the control of the Syrian regime.

### In regard to the COVID-19 pandemic:

The infections with the COVID-19 pandemic saw a significant increase in March, especially in the areas controlled by the Syrian regime. On March 19, the pro-Syrian regime Sham FM radio, published a [statement](#) by the director of al Mujtahed Hospital, Dr. Ahmad Abbas, in which he confirmed that the region is witnessing the third peak of the virus, which he said is more difficult than its predecessors, adding that there had been a doubling of nearly 200% in hospital isolation units compared to two weeks before, with a 100% occupancy rate in intensive care units since the middle of the previous week. On March 18, the pro-Syrian regime newspaper, al Watan, [quoted](#) the director of the Ministry of Health's Ambulance and Emergency department, Tawfiq Hasaba, as stating that no empty beds were available in Damascus hospitals' intensive care units to receive patients infected with coronavirus.

On March 6, the Syrian regime's Ministry of Health [issued a circular asking public medical bodies](#) with isolation departments to make plans to receive suspected cases of the COVID-19 pandemic, in view of the deterioration of the conditions of those infected with the pandemic. In the last third of March, the [Ministry of Health demanded](#) that directors of public bodies at health directorates in several governorates stop providing treatment for non-urgent medical cases due to the deterioration of the conditions of coronavirus infections, as well as ordering them to dedicate the hospitals' maximum capabilities and energy to the treatment of COVID-19 patients.

Despite statements confirming the increase in the number of COVID-19 pandemic infections, on March 20, the Syrian regime's Ministry of Interior issued a [decision to allow Pakistani tourist delegations](#) to enter Syria "to visit the holy shrines" through the Syrian Transport and Tourism Company, provided that the number of visitors of Iraqi and Pakistani nationalities does not exceed 500 visitors per day; this decision is consistent with the Syrian regime's overall disastrous mismanagement of the COVID-19 pandemic crisis.

On March 24, Dr. Hasan al Ghabbash, the Syrian regime's Minister of Health, [announced](#) that the regime would supply Lebanon with 75 tons of oxygen cylinders over a period of three days. It is noteworthy that Syrian citizens are suffering from critical shortages of oxygen as a result of the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, with oxygen cylinders being sold at greatly inflated prices.

The Syrian regime's Ministry of Health in March officially announced 3,321 cases of COVID-19 infection and 238 deaths, the highest monthly record since December 2020, bringing the official total announced to [18,909 cases of infection with 1,265 deaths, as of March 31.](#)

We at the SNHR believe that the figures publicly announced by the Syrian regime are grossly inaccurate due to the weak capabilities of the collapsed health sector and to the security services' control of state ministries and of the statements issued by them; we fear that the Syrian regime will use the COVID-19 pandemic for political purposes related to the upcoming presidential elections in light of international pressure being exerted on it, especially by Russia, to seriously engage in the constitutional committee discussions that are taking place in Geneva, or to launch a new political process to end the current political deadlock.

In northwestern Syria as well, more infections and deaths due to coronavirus were recorded in March, with the Early Warning Alert and Response Network (EWARN) announcing the documentation of 143 infections and 229 deaths related to COVID-19 for the month. We note that the death toll recorded in March is the highest monthly toll since the announcement of the first case in northwest Syria in July 2020; this brought [the total number](#) of infections and deaths announced by EWARN as of March 31, to 21,318 cases of infection and 637 deaths.

In northeastern Syria, as of March 31, a total of 10,059 coronavirus infection cases, including 378 deaths, had been announced by [the Health Authority in the Self-Management Authority of Northern and Eastern Syria](#). We note that 1,451 cases of infection and 57 deaths were recorded in March, the highest monthly record since December 2020.

### Regarding living conditions:

The suffering of Syrian citizens continued to worsen in March due to the repercussions of the ongoing economic collapse and exorbitant prices. On March 5, [Reuters](#) quoted a statement by the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Peter Maurer, who said that “Close to three-quarters of the population now need humanitarian assistance, an increase of 20% compared to 12 months ago.”

[On March 15](#), the Syrian regime government’s Ministry of Internal Trade and Consumer Protection issued decisions numbered 854, 855 and 856, respectively, to increase the retail price of 95 octane gasoline to the consumer to 2,000 Syrian pounds per liter, and to raise the retail price of premium 90 octane gasoline, whether subsidized or unsupported, for the quantities allocated on the electronic card, increasing the price per liter to 750 Syrian pounds, with the last of these decisions increasing the retail price of a 10 kg cylinder of household butane gas by 850 Syrian pounds, bringing the new price to 3,850 Syrian pounds.

In an attempt to polish the image of the Syrian regime, its president on March 16 issued two legislative decrees related to salaries paid to state employees. [The first](#) (Decree 2 of 2021) stipulates that a one-time grant will be disbursed in a lump sum of 50,000 Syrian pounds (about \$ 12.20) for all civil and military workers, with a one-time grant of 40,000 Syrian pounds (about \$ 9.75) paid to civilian and military pensioners, for the benefit of the families of pensioners. [The second](#) decree (Decree 88 of 2021) stipulated an increase in the hourly pay rate for teachers at schools of basic and secondary education, and in all schools and vocational training centers in all state public authorities, whether or not they are formal employees, according to the certificate they hold; the highest pay rate reached 600 Syrian pounds per hour (about \$ 0.15).

Human Rights Watch said in a [report](#) issued on March 22 that “The Syrian government’s failure to fairly and adequately address a bread crisis brought on by a decade of armed conflict is forcing millions of Syrians to go hungry.”

On March 22, [Russia Today published](#) a report on its website, which stated that the extent of damage to the public and private industrial sector in Syria, according to the Syrian regime government’s Ministry of Industry, exceeds 600 trillion Syrian pounds, quoting the Minister of Industry, Ziad Sabbagh, as saying that human resources are the most prominent asset that Syria’s industrial sector has lost during the past ten years.

### In regard to displacement and forced displacement:

The camps in north and east Syria continue to suffer from deteriorating humanitarian conditions, which are exacerbated by the harsh climatic conditions; the rainstorms that hit northwest Syria in March caused massive material damage to dozens of IDP camps in the western and northern suburbs of Idlib and the northern suburbs of Aleppo, especially [on March 11](#) and [March 24](#), with humanitarian organizations unable to provide a full response to the needs of the IDPs there.

In al Hawl Camp<sup>1</sup>, [we documented in March the deaths of 26 civilians, including eight children and eight women, most of whom were Iraqis, at the hands of unknown gunmen believed to be affiliated with ISIS cells, the highest death toll in the camp since it was established](#), bringing the death toll in the camp since the beginning of this year to 43 civilians, including 10 children and 11 women. Meanwhile, Syrian Democratic Forces allowed two groups to leave the camp with both groups heading to the suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour; [the first](#) was on March 4 and included about 265 people, while [the second](#) was on March 18 and included about 260 people.

On March 2, Doctors Without Borders issued a [statement](#) expressing its profound concerns about the insecurity facing camp residents, two-thirds of whom are children.

On March 20, Al Arabiya Channel published a [video](#) showing an attempt by its correspondent, Rola al Khatib, to conduct interviews with women and children in al Hawl Camp in the sector housing ISIS families. In her report, the correspondent did not comply with the standards of journalistic work with children, with the report failing to conceal the children’s faces to disguise their identity. We call on all journalists to respect children’s rights when preparing any report on children or interviewing them.

---

<sup>1</sup> A camp located east of Hasaka city, near the Iraqi-Syrian border, which houses nearly 60,000 people

On March 29, the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Peter Maurer, said [in a press release](#) after his visit to Syria about al Hawl Camp: “This is really the place where hope is going to die. It is one of the largest, if not the largest, child protection crisis with which we are confronted today.” He called on all states to take responsibility for their nationals in the camp, and to make all efforts to repatriate residents lawfully, respecting family unity and fully supporting reintegration.

Residents of al Rukban Camp, in the eastern suburbs of Homs near the Syrian-Jordanian border, continue to face many problems and challenges, with the poor security conditions in the camp likely adding to their suffering.

In Lebanon, the tragedy of the Syrian refugees has doubled in conjunction with the economic collapse that the state is witnessing, especially in light of refugees being erroneously held responsible by some political entities for contributing to this collapse.

On March 11, the General Directorate of Lebanese Security issued a [decision](#) to resolve the situation of Syrians resident in Lebanon illegally, but the decision included only Syrians who entered the country through the official crossings and did not address the settlement of the conditions of Syrians who were forced by the circumstances of the conflict in Syria to enter Lebanese territory illegally. We note, however, that the latter group represents the largest segment of Syrians on Lebanese soil.

On March 26, the Governor of Baalbek in Lebanon, Bashir Khoder, announced [in a tweet](#) that the bodies of four Syrian refugees (two women and two children) had been found - three days after they went missing - having died due to the bitter cold. He added that an investigation would be carried out to determine whether their deaths were related to people smuggling.

On March 8, the Norwegian Refugee Council issued a [report](#) warning of additional displacement in the event of continuing conflict, insecurity and economic deterioration. The report stated that the total number of people displaced inside Syria stands at 6.5 million, with around 70 per cent of these having now been displaced for over five years. Nearly a quarter of the IDPs have been displaced at least four times. The report read: “In 2020, only 467,000 returned home, while 1.8 million were newly displaced inside Syria. This means that for every person who managed to return home, nearly four more people were displaced.”

On March 12, [the United Nations confirmed](#) that “As the Syrian conflict enters its second decade, instead of getting easier, daily life for the 5.6 million refugees living in neighbouring countries in the region is tougher than ever. Poverty and food insecurity are on the rise, school enrollment and access to health care are shrinking, and the COVID-19 pandemic has wiped out much of the informal work that refugees rely on.”

On March 22, a Higher Administrative Court in North Rhine-Westphalia in Germany issued a non-appealable [decision](#) denying the granting of political asylum status to asylum seekers fleeing military service in Syria, provided that they retain secondary protection status.

On March 23, the Russian regime [renewed](#) its previous call<sup>2</sup> for the opening of three humanitarian crossings between the areas controlled by Syrian regime forces and the Idlib region, namely the Saraqeb and Miznaz crossings in Idlib governorate and Abu Zaidin corridor in the Aleppo governorate, starting from March 25, under the pretext of improving the humanitarian situation in the region. This call was issued on the sidelines of the Brussels V Conference and came after Russian forces bombed relief vehicles and a relief warehouse at the Bab al Hawa crossing area (the only crossing available for the entry of humanitarian aid based on Resolution No. 2533) in an attempt to limit the delivery of humanitarian aid to northwest Syria through the Syrian regime. We have reported several times on the looting of humanitarian aid by the Syrian regime government.

On March 29, [the Russia Today Agency](#) reported that the deputy head of the Russian Center for Reconciliation in Syria, Rear Adm. Alexander Karpov, had announced a decision to close the three crossings in the Idlib and Aleppo governorates as of the next day, under the pretext of their being bombed by militants.

#### In regard to political and human rights issues:

On March 1, the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (COI) released a [report](#) entitled “Disappearance and detention to suppress dissent a hallmark of a decade of conflict in Syria” based on over 2,500 interviews conducted over 10 years and investigations into more than 100 specific detention facilities. Commissioner Karen Koning AbuZayd explained, “The wealth of evidence collected over a decade is staggering, yet the parties to the conflict, with very few exceptions, have failed to investigate their own forces.” adding, “The focus appears to be on concealing, rather than investigating crimes committed in the detention facilities.”

On March 2, the Syrian regime’s [city council of Aleppo](#) transferred the remains of the victims buried in the garden located next to the Salah al Din Mosque in the Salah al Din neighborhood in Aleppo city. This garden is one of many in the city that the people turned into cemeteries to bury their civilian or military relatives or neighbors, who were killed by the intense indiscriminate bombing carried out by the Syrian regime and its Russian ally on the neighborhoods of Aleppo city that were outside the control of the Syrian regime. The regime took this action under the pretext that the victims’ families did not attend and transfer their loved ones’ remains in compliance with a circular issued by the council via Facebook on February 23. The Syrian Network for Human Rights issued a [statement](#) on the incident.

On March 2, the United Nations General Assembly held [an event focusing on the human rights situation](#) in Syria, during which it emphasized the need for justice, no matter how late, as it is an essential element for peace and justice for the victims.

On March 3, the International Rescue Committee issued a [report](#) on attacks on health care in Syria during the previous ten years, stating that only 64% of hospitals and 52% of primary health care centers across Syria are currently functioning, with 70% of the health workforce having fled the country during the past ten years.

<sup>2</sup> The Russian regime called for the opening of these crossings last February

On March 4, democracy watchdog organization Freedom House [released](#) its annual ranking of the world's most free and most oppressed nations in 2020; and according to this classification, Syria was among the worst oppressed nations for their peoples.

On March 4, [a joint report](#) by the World Vision and Frontier Economics to develop economic findings, estimated the economic cost of the conflict in Syria, after 10 years, to stand at about \$ 1.2 trillion. The report showed that 4.8 million Syrian children were born during the past ten years, who have only ever known war.

On March 10, the International Committee of the Red Cross published a [survey](#) to shed light on the tremendous cost that Syrian youth have incurred during the years of conflict; the survey stated that one in two young people (47%) said a close relative or friend had been killed in the conflict. One in six young Syrians said at least one of their parents has been killed or seriously injured (16%), while 12% of young people had themselves been injured in the Syrian conflict.

On March 10, UNICEF issued a [press release](#) stating that 90 percent of children in Syria are in need of humanitarian assistance, a 20 per cent increase in the past year alone, with more than half a million children under the age of five in the country suffer from stunted growth as a result of chronic malnutrition.

On March 10, the Russian Foreign Ministry issued a [statement marking the tenth anniversary of the start of the popular uprising in Syria](#), in which it said that due to outside interference, the domestic political process rapidly turned into an armed conflict; Moscow affirmed its support for a political settlement, asserting that there cannot be a military solution to the Syrian conflict; the statement stressed that the provision of assistance for the voluntary and safe return home of Syrian refugees and internally displaced persons would be a major step towards restoring "national unity" in Syria.

On March 10, the European Parliament issued a [resolution](#) on the Syrian conflict 10 years after the start of the popular uprising for democracy, in which it expressed its support for UN Security Council Resolution 2254 (2015), which establishes a Syrian-led constitutional reform process, and opposed any normalization of diplomatic relations with the Syrian regime without clear, sustained and credible engagement in an inclusive political process, and stated that it considers the upcoming 2021 Syrian Presidential elections to lack any form of credibility in the eyes of the international community in the current context. We issued a [statement](#) on the resolution, which was mainly based on data from the Syrian Network for Human Rights, with 10 statistics from SNHR cited in five places in the resolution.

On March 11, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, [Michelle Bachelet](#), said on the tenth anniversary of the start of the popular uprising towards democracy in Syria, that "Enforced disappearance is a continuous crime that has an appalling impact on the individual whose fate is unknown and on their family, causing continuing trauma for them and severely curtailing the enjoyment of their human rights."

On March 12, the President of the Syrian regime, Bashar al Assad, issued a legislative decree ([No. 1 of 2021](#)), providing for a general amnesty for the full penalty for the crimes committed by those mandated for the military service before the date of March 12, 2021, with the intention of evading conscription temporarily or permanently. We at the Syrian Network for Human Rights believe that this step was taken solely to polish the image of the ruling regime before the presidential elections.

On March 12, Reporters Without Borders issued a [report](#) documenting the violations committed against journalists in Syria during the past ten years. The report stated that between 300 and 700 journalists were killed, while 300 were arrested and 100 others were abducted. The report emphasized that one-third of Syria's journalists have been forced into exile for fear of arrest or death.

On March 18, the Syrian regime's People's Assembly approved a [Law on Non-Smuggling of Persons](#) and the Protection of Migrants, which consists of 22 articles. The new law penalizes those who carry out operations to smuggle people out of Syria by land or sea.

On March 23, Amnesty International issued a [report](#) entitled "Lebanon: Torture of Syrian refugees arbitrarily detained on counter-terror charges" in which it reported that "Lebanese security forces have committed shocking violations against Syrian refugees who have been arrested, often arbitrarily, on terrorism-related charges, employing some of the same atrocious torture techniques that are used in Syria's most notorious prisons."

On March 24, the Human Rights Council [announced](#) the extension of the mandate of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry in the Syrian Arab Republic for a year.

On March 24, [the US Department of State](#) called on the Syrian regime to release the detainees in its prisons, obtain information about the whereabouts of the missing, and hold the Syrian regime accountable for its systematic violations of human rights.

On March 29, the Security Council held a [briefing on the humanitarian situation](#) in Syria headed by US Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken, who said in his intervention: "While today's session is focused on the humanitarian crisis in Syria, it's important to note that the only long-term solution to this suffering is through a political settlement and permanent resolution to the conflict, as outlined in UN Security Council Resolution 2254. Together with our allies and partners, the United States continues to support UN Special Envoy Pedersen's efforts toward this end."

On the 29th and 30th of March, [the Brussels V Conference](#) on "Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region", chaired by the European Union and the United Nations, was held in the presence of more than 80 states and international organizations. At its conclusion, the assembled states pledged [to provide](#)

[3.6 billion euros in 2021](#), a decrease on the 4.9 billion euros raised in 2020 at the [Brussels IV Conference](#) for Syria and for the neighboring countries that host the largest number of Syrian refugees. We at the SNHR believe that the donations collected are less than the sum hoped for in light of the deteriorating economic conditions and the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, with the value of the European Union's donations at this conference decreasing by about 1.2 billion euros, and the value of the UK's donations decreasing by nearly one hundred million euros. Likewise, the value of the donations from the United States of America decreased by approximately 120 million euros. We have expressed our regret on several occasions that, while the purpose of holding the conference was to raise funds for the Syrian people, in reality it overlooked the political and human rights failures for which solutions were among the goals of the conference in its early stages, with no serious measures taken at the conference in order to achieve safety for civilians and put pressure on the actor parties in order to achieve the political transition process or to achieve steps on the path of accountability.

#### On the course of the pursuit of accountability:

On Thursday, March 25, the Syrian Network for Human Rights hosted an event marking the tenth anniversary of the start of the popular uprising for democracy in Syria, with participants from a number of leading nations, on the sidelines of the Brussels V Conference, entitled "[Syria: A Decade of Impunity and The Need for Accountability for Ongoing Human Rights Violations](#)". We issued a [statement](#) about this event.

In a statement issued on March 2, three Syrian human rights organizations (the Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression, the Open Society Justice Initiative and the Syrian Archive) filed a [complaint before the judges of a special unit for war crimes](#) at the French Palace of Justice to open a criminal investigation into the head of the Syrian regime Bashar al Assad, his brother Maher al Assad and a number of senior advisors and military officials regarding the chemical weapons attack on Eastern Ghouta in August 2013.

On March 4, Marc Garneau, [Canada's Minister of Foreign Affairs, announced](#) that his country had requested formal negotiations, under the United Nations Convention Against Torture, to hold the Syrian regime accountable for the countless human rights violations it has inflicted on the Syrian people since 2011.

On March 12, [the Dutch government](#) announced, through its Minister of Foreign Affairs, Stef Blok, that the Syrian regime is willing to engage in dialogue with the Netherlands about the latter's decision to hold Syria to account for gross human rights violations he committed in Syria. The statement welcomed Canada's decision to hold the Syrian regime accountable and expressed its desire for Canada to hold talks with Syria. The statement affirmed that if the talks fail to lead to justice for the victims, the Netherlands and Canada will not hesitate to take the matter to an international court.

On March 13, the Guernica 37 International Justice Chambers in the UK announced in a [press release](#) that it had submitted two confidential filings with the War Crimes Unit of the UK Metropolitan Police Service Counter-Terrorism Command (SO15) to open an investigation into Asma al Assad, a dual British-Syrian national, looking into allegations of incitement and encouragement to commit acts of terrorism in the Syrian Arab Republic. The [statement](#) called for prosecuting her rather than merely stripping her of her citizenship.

On March 14, the European Union announced in a [statement](#) marking the tenth anniversary of the start of the popular uprising that the EU sanctions targeting leading members and entities of the Syrian regime would be renewed at the end of May. The EU affirmed that it supports free and fair elections in Syria in accordance with UN Security Council Resolution 2254 and under the UN's supervision and satisfactory governance, and in compliance with the highest international standards of transparency and accountability, with all Syrians, including members of the diaspora, eligible to participate.

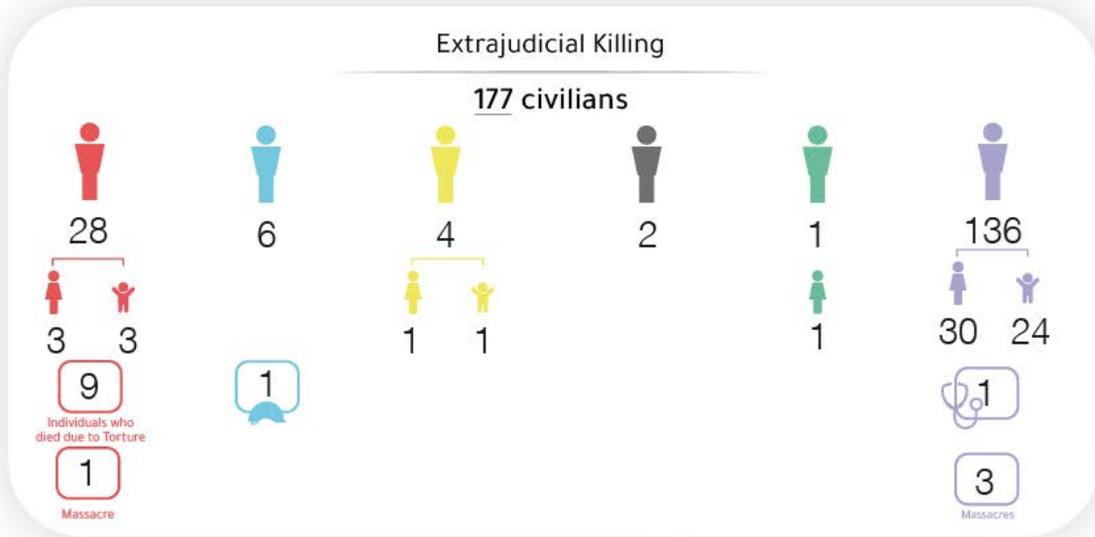
On March 15, the United Kingdom announced [a new round of sanctions](#) against the Syrian regime, including travel bans and asset freezes for six senior figures of the Syrian regime, namely Faisal al Miqdad, Minister of Foreign Affairs; Luna al Shibl, advisor to the president of the Syrian regime; Yasser Ibrahim, a prominent businessman who finances the Syrian regime; Muhammad Baraa al Qatirji, a prominent businessman operating across multiple sectors of Syria's economy, most notably the trade in petroleum products; Major General Malik Alia, Commander of the Republican Guard, and Major General Zaid Salah, Commander of the Syrian Army's Fifth Corps.

On March 15, the family of a man who was tortured and beheaded by members of the Russian Wagner Group's forces in Syria, with the support of three human rights organizations (the Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression, the International Federation for Human Rights, and the Russian Human Rights Centre MEMORIAL), filed a lawsuit [before the Russian judiciary](#), the first of its kind, to hold the suspects accountable for torturing and killing the victim.

On March 31, the foreign ministers of 18 European states issued a [joint op-ed](#) calling on everyone to take responsibility for fighting impunity and to demand accountability for crimes committed in Syria, regardless of the perpetrator.

### III. The Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in March:

This report outlines the most notable human rights violations that were documented by the SNHR in March 2021 at the hands of the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in Syria.



- Syrian Regime forces
- Russian forces
- ISIS
- Hay'at Tahrir al Sham
- The Armed Opposition\ The Syrian National Army
- SDF (mainly PYD)
- Other parties

- Civilians
- Women (adult female)
- Children
- Civil Defense Personnel
- Medical Personnel
- Medical facilities
- Educational facilities
- Cluster Munition attacks

**A. Extrajudicial killing:**

In March 2021, SNHR documented the deaths of 177 civilians, including 28 children and 35 women (adult female), the largest percentage of whom were killed at the hands of other parties; among the victims were one medical worker and one Civil Defense worker, as well as nine individuals who died due to torture. We also recorded at least four massacres. We issued a report on the first of this month detailing the civilian victims documented killed in March at the hands of the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in Syria.

The death toll of civilian victims was distributed according to the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in Syria as follows:

**A. The main parties:**

- **Syrian Regime forces (army, security, local militias, and Shiite foreign militias)<sup>3</sup>:** 28 civilians, including three children and three women.
- **Russian forces:** Six civilians.
- **ISIS (the self-proclaimed 'Islamic State'):** Two civilians.
- **The Armed Opposition/ Syrian National Army:** One woman.
- **Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (the Democratic Union Party):** Four civilians, including one child and one woman.

**B. Other parties:**

We documented the deaths of 136 civilians, including 24 children and 30 women, at the hands of other parties, distributed as follows:

- Landmines of unknown source: 51 civilians, including six children and 20 women.
- Gunfire of unknown source: 22 civilians, including one child and two women.
- Bombings whose perpetrators have not yet been identified: 20 civilians, including seven children.
- Killings by unknown persons: 41 civilians, including nine children and eight women.
- Turkish border guards: Two civilians, including one child.

---

<sup>3</sup> 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 independent decision-making structure. Rather, the government is an empty façade there for show; the Minister of Interior receives orders from the security branches over which he nominally presides which are in turn under the command of the President, while the Minister of Justice cannot summon a civilian-level security agent other than the head of a security branch; the security branches, along with the president, are the true power and the governing regime in Syria. Although we acknowledge that the United Nations and its agencies use the term 'the Syrian government' in general, we believe that this is a completely inaccurate and misleading term in the Syrian context.

**B. Arbitrary arrest and enforced disappearance:**

In March 2021, SNHR documented at least 143 cases of arbitrary arrests, including two children and nine women (adult female), at the hands of the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in Syria. The largest number of arrests was carried out by Syrian regime forces in the governorate of Damascus Suburbs, then Damascus governorate. We issued a report on the second of this month detailing the record of cases of arrests and enforced disappearances which we documented in March at the hands of the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in Syria.

The record of cases of arbitrary arrests was distributed according to the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces as follows:

- **Syrian Regime forces:** 58, including two women.
- **Hay'at Tahrir al Sham:** Seven.
- **The Armed Opposition/ Syrian National Army:** 26, including seven women.
- **Syrian Democratic Forces:** 52, including two children.

**C. Attacks on vital civilian facilities:**

In March 2021, SNHR documented at least 13 incidents of attacks on vital civilian facilities, 10 of which were at the hands of Syrian-Russian alliance forces, with these incidents concentrated in Idlib and Aleppo governorates.

Among these attacks, we documented two attacks on educational facilities, and three attacks on medical facilities.

These attacks were distributed according to the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces as follows:

**A. The main parties:**

- Syrian Regime forces: Five.
- Russian forces: Five.
- Syrian Democratic Forces: One.

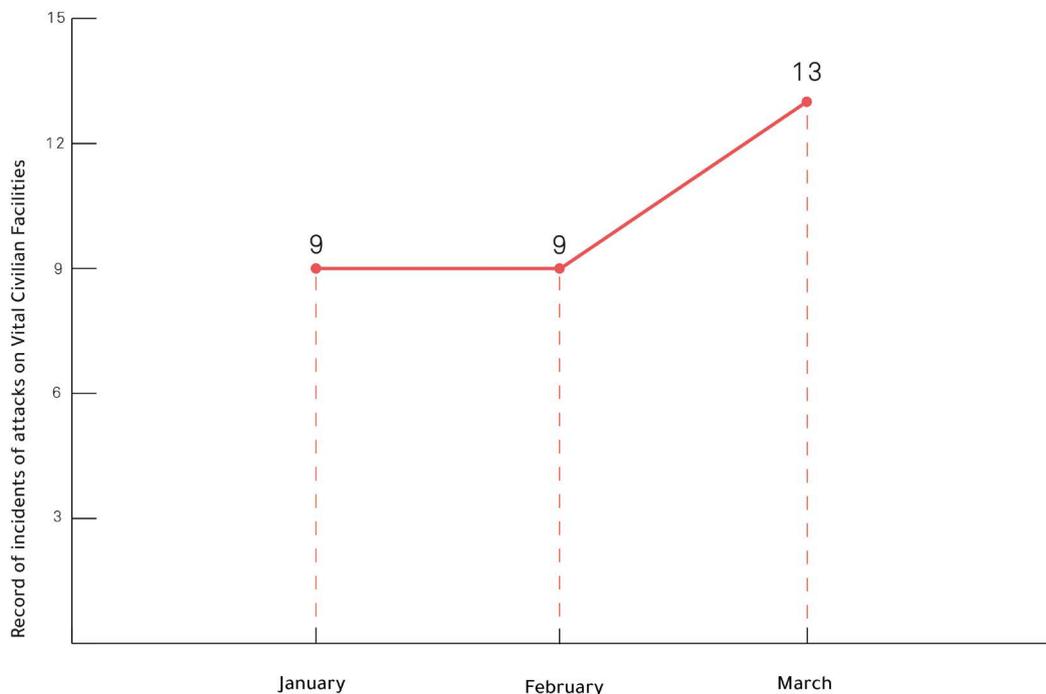
**B. Other parties:**

- Bombings whose perpetrators have not yet been identified: Two.

The record of attacks documented in March 2021 on vital civilian facilities was distributed according to the perpetrator parties as follows:

Attacked Facility	Perpetrator Party			Other parties
	Syrian Regime forces	Russian forces	Syrian Democratic Forces	Bombings whose perpetrators have not yet been identified
<b>Vital Educational Facilities</b>				
Schools	2			
<b>Vital Medical Facilities</b>				
Medical facilities	1		1	1
Ambulances	1			
<b>Communal Facilities</b>				
Markets		1		
<b>Infrastructure</b>				
Power stations and energy facilities		1		1
Civil Society Organizations		2		
Industrial facilities	1	1		
<b>Total</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>

Thus, the record of attacks on vital civilian facilities documented since the start of 2021 up to April of the same year at the hands of the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in Syria has now reached 31 in total, distributed monthly as follows:



The previous chart shows an increase in the number of incidents of attacks on vital civilian facilities in March, compared to the previous two months, with the sudden escalation by the Syrian-Russian alliance through bombing vital civilian areas far from the front lines with Armed Opposition factions and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham, having had an effect on this, despite the ceasefire agreement that entered into force on March 6, 2020.

**The most notable attacks on vital civilian facilities in March:**

On Friday, March 5, 2021, at around 19:05 local time, forces which we believe were Russian fired [a number of long-range missiles](#) at al Humran crossing - which is located at the dividing line between the territories controlled by Syrian Democratic Forces and the Syrian National Army - in the eastern suburbs of Aleppo governorate, with the missiles targeting [the fuel market](#) at the crossing, resulting in casualties, as well as [causing massive fires as a result of the explosion of a number of tanks loaded with fuel at the market there; the explosions and fires resulted in significant material damage and losses in the area.](#) The area was under the control of Syrian National Army at the time of the incident.



Fires and significant material damage caused by a Russian ground attack on the fuel market at al Humran crossing, eastern Aleppo - March 5, 2021



Photo shows remnants of one of the missiles fired by Russian forces at al Humran crossing, eastern Aleppo - March 5, 2021

The Syrian Network for Human Rights spoke with Faisal Muhammad Ali<sup>4</sup>, Director of the Civil Defense Sector in Jarablos area in Aleppo suburbs, who told us that they had received a report that al Humran area, which contains a large fuel market, had been subjected to missile strikes. He added: “A number of our teams from several areas and I headed to the site after we learned that the fires were very large. When we arrived, the fires were huge and the flames were everywhere. We started the process of extinguishing it; during our work, there were several explosions, after which the fires spread to other tanks, which prompted us to request support from al Bab, Afrin and Izaz sectors, which arrived two hours later. Nevertheless, we requested support from the Idlib sectors. After 20 hours of work, we managed to control the fires with more than 30 vehicles and 100 personnel taking part in the work.” Faisal also noted that the bombing killed three people and injured more than 23 others, in addition to burning more than 200 tankers.

On Friday, March 5, 2021, at around 23:00, Syrian Democratic Forces personnel carried out a raid on the [Public Surgical Hospital](#) in [al Sh-heil](#) city in the eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate, firing guns randomly inside the hospital building, [causing holes in a wall, sabotaging some medical equipment and furniture there](#), and arresting eight civilians present in the hospital, including a doctor and three nurses. The arrests were accompanied by verbal and physical assaults against the hospital staff by the SDF personnel, who also burnt cars and motorcycles belonging to hospital personnel. Al Sh-heil city was under the control of Syrian Democratic Forces at the time of the incident.

On Sunday, March 21, 2021, at around 08:20 local time, artillery forces we believe were stationed at a site controlled by the Lebanese Hezbollah militias near Majbal al Zeft in Urm al Sughra village in the western suburbs of Aleppo fired three Krasnopol shells (laser-guided mortar shells by a drone that draws a laser circle on the target to direct the shell towards the circle drawn)<sup>5</sup> [at al Atareb Surgical Hospital](#) (Al Maghara Hospital)<sup>6</sup> - supported by the Syrian American Medical Society (SAMS) - located [in al Atareb](#) city in the western suburbs of Aleppo governorate, which was established within a cave in a mountainous area on the Abzemou Road in the north of the city; [one of the shells fell at the hospital's entrance directly, causing significant material damage to the external hospital structure](#), as well as [damaging the orthopedic clinics in the ambulance department, the patient waiting hall inside the hospital building, a tent for isolating COVID-19 patients](#), a generator, and a [maintenance caravan outside the building](#), putting the hospital out of service; [an ambulance belonging to the hospital also sustained significant material damage](#). Up to the time of issuing this report, the Syrian Network for Human Rights' Victim Department team documented [the deaths of eight civilians in this attack, including one child and one woman, and the injury of about 17 others, including five of the hospital's medical staff](#). Al Atareb city was under the joint control of factions of the Armed Opposition and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident. The Syrian American Medical Society issued a [statement](#) about the incident on its official website, in which it indicated that the hospital was put out of service as a result of the targeting.

---

<sup>4</sup> Via WhatsApp on March 7, 2021

<sup>5</sup> It is owned by Syrian regime forces and pro-regime militias. Russian media sources reported for the first time that it was used by Syrian regime forces in February 2020, [https://www.undefense.info/threads/%D9%82%D8%B0%D9%8A%D9%81%D8%A9-%D9%83%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%B3%D9%86%D9%88%D8%A8%D9%88%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%84%D9%8A%D8%B2%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A9.8494/?fbclid=IwAR14RLvnBlwYA5CPlwJ7vmlkBW0EBlj4Nz-VF6iK5OzqXRh3SgiaUK\\_zfZ6M](https://www.undefense.info/threads/%D9%82%D8%B0%D9%8A%D9%81%D8%A9-%D9%83%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%B3%D9%86%D9%88%D8%A8%D9%88%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%84%D9%8A%D8%B2%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A9.8494/?fbclid=IwAR14RLvnBlwYA5CPlwJ7vmlkBW0EBlj4Nz-VF6iK5OzqXRh3SgiaUK_zfZ6M)

<sup>6</sup> The hospital consists of two blocks, one of them inside a cave, which is the block that was attacked

We at the Syrian Network for Human Rights believe that the Syrian regime and Russian forces bear responsibility for this attack, as some witnesses who were at the site of the attack confirmed that Russian reconnaissance aircraft had flown over the site before and during the bombing, and later Russian media outlets published a video of the moment the hospital was targeted.

**Destruction caused in a ground attack on al Atareb Surgical Hospital in al Atareb city  
Aleppo, - March 21, 2021 - Ibrahim al Khatib**



**The laser guidance circuit for the Krasnopol shells used in bombing al Maghara Hospital - March 21, 2021**



The Syrian Network for Human Rights spoke with Muhammad Hallaq<sup>7</sup>, the head of the Civil Defense team in al Atareb city, who told us that on the morning of Sunday, March 21, they received a report about artillery shelling by Syrian regime forces targeting al Maghara Hospital in the northeast of the city: “The hospital was 4 km away from our center. We headed there directly, and upon our arrival we found more than 15 wounded men, women and children, some of them hospital staff, on the ground at the entrance to the hospital. We began aiding the wounded - some of them had been transferred to the hospital and their aid operations began before our arrival - and retrieving the victims.” Muhammad also explained that most of the victims died while receiving medical treatment for their wounds.

On Sunday, March 21, 2021, at around 20:35 local time, Syrian regime artillery forces fired a number of shells at the northern and western outskirts of Ariha city in the southern suburbs of Idlib governorate; one of the shells landed in the yard of the [Jeel al Ghad School](#) (formerly al Imam Malik School), which is adjacent to [Abdul Ghani Sayyadi High School](#), located in the north of the city. [The shelling caused moderate material damage to the school yard and its perimeter wall](#), with no material damage was recorded in the high school building. The city is under joint control between factions of the armed opposition and the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham at the time of the incident. The city was under the joint control of factions of the Armed Opposition and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.

#### **D. Record of indiscriminate attacks and attacks using outlawed weapons:**

In March 2021, SNHR documented at least one cluster munition attack, in a ground attack by Russian forces in Idlib governorate. This attack resulted in the death of a Civil Defense worker.

On Friday, March 5, 2021, at around 20:00 local time, a number of [long-range 9M55K missiles](#), which were believed to have been fired from the Russian Hmeimim airbase, with at least one of these missiles [loaded with 9n235 cluster munitions](#) -, targeted the fuel refining burners in Tarhin area near al Bab city in the eastern suburbs of Aleppo governorate, [causing massive fires in the burners](#); during the firefighting operation by Syrian Civil Defense personnel, one of the fuel tanks exploded, resulting in the death of Ahmad al Waki, a Civil Defense member, with the blaze also burning heavy 'excavator' type machinery, and gutting a [fire engine](#), both belonging to the Civil Defense. The area was under the control of the Syrian National Army at the time of the incident.

---

<sup>7</sup> Via WhatsApp on March 21, 2021

## IV. The Syrian Regime Bears Primary Responsibility for the Spread of the COVID-19 Pandemic:

The COVID-19 pandemic has swept across most of the world, and caused massive numbers of infections and deaths, with most of the world's stable countries worldwide dealing with it seriously and taking exceptional measures to protect the population; many countries have announced their desire to attract and employ more medical personnel, and some governments have released large numbers of imprisoned people and detainees as a precautionary measure to stop the disease from spreading.

By contrast, since the beginning of the global pandemic outbreak, the Syrian regime has dealt with it with callous, total and extreme disregard and absolute negligence, with several countries announcing the arrival of infected cases from Syria since the beginning of March 2020. Despite this, the Syrian regime continued to deny the existence of any infections in Syria until March 22.

The COVID-19 coronavirus does not distinguish between one person or another or between one region and another, and all the regions of Syria, particularly Idlib and surrounding areas, that have witnessed bombings, destruction and forced displacement are suffering from further challenges in addition to the usual ones, which cannot be compared to those in any other location; at the forefront of these challenges are the nearly 3 million Syrian IDPs, who have been unable to return to their homes. A number of factors make them more vulnerable than others to infection with COVID-19, most notably:

- The Idlib region and the northwestern suburbs of Aleppo and its environs are already experiencing massive overcrowding due to the earlier displacement of tens of thousands of Syrians to these places from several areas such as the Eastern Ghouta, the northern suburbs of Homs, southern Syria, and recently the suburbs of Idlib and Hama, which has caused a drastic increase in the existing overcrowding, making the process of social physical distancing virtually impossible.
- Most of these people live in hastily constructed camps or structures which are wholly inadequate and unsuitable for housing (such as schools, shops, unfinished apartments, demolished buildings, caves, etc.), which lack the most basic sanitary infrastructure such as toilets, functioning sewage networks, or clean water, which makes the available water allocations necessary for periodic personal hygiene for each person far less than would be available in normal conditions or in other areas in Syria. The IDPs are struggling to obtain enough tents, and are sometimes forced to live in a tent collectively, which particularly negatively affects women due to their special needs.
- The healthcare system in and around Idlib continues to suffer from the repercussions of violent and focused targeting by the Syrian and Russian regimes' forces, which has contributed to a large number of health centers being put out of service.

The Syrian Jazira region (Deir Ez-Zour, Hasaka, Raqqa), which is controlled by the Kurdish-majority Syrian Democratic Forces, suffers from a similar situation, and also includes large numbers of IDPs living in camps. Russia's use of its United Nations veto has caused the cancellation of three of the four crossings, with al Ya'rubiya crossing with Iraq being one of the crossings canceled; this caused the region to be denied direct UN aid, which is now provided exclusively through the Syrian regime that deliberately creates obstacles to aid provision and systematically carries out large-scale extortion, which we addressed extensively in our report: [Sanctions Are Linked to the Syrian Regime's Continuing Violations and Don't Include Medical Supplies and Food, Which Shouldn't Be Delivered Through the Regime](#), with the United Nations Secretary-General speaking about this in [his report issued on February 21, 2020](#). [Human Rights Watch also issued a report](#) on the crisis facing the medical sector in that region and the complex difficulties it faces due to the closure of al Ya'rubiya crossing.

As for the areas under the control of the Syrian regime, whilst these are better off than the Idlib region, its environs, and the Syrian Jazira region, they suffer mainly from the exodus of medical personnel, and from the massive corruption in all the regime's organs, as well as from the depletion of the Syrian state's monetary reserves, which are spent on bombings, military operations, and security services at the expense of supporting the medical sector and services. Although more than a year has passed since the announcement of the first case of the COVID-19 pandemic in these areas, the Syrian regime has not taken any serious step to support the medical sector, even by releasing health sector workers imprisoned in its detention centers. We issued a [report](#) in this regard.

SNHR has also demanded that Russia, a massively wealthy country, help its ally, the Syrian regime, given the circumstances of the spread of the COVID-19, as this would be far better and less costly than air strikes on medical facilities, cities and towns in and around Idlib. We have also indicated, in a wide range of [news reports](#) issued over the past months, that no serious measures have been taken to prevent overcrowding of civilians or to demonstrate any commitment to impose or follow preventive measures to prevent the spread of the pandemic in various regions of Syria.

## V. Attachments:

[\(1\) Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 177 Civilians, Including 28 Children, 35 Women, One Medical Worker, and Nine Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in March 2021](#)

[\(2\) At least 143 Cases of Arbitrary Arrest/ Detention Documented in Syria in March 2021, Including Two Children and Nine Women](#)

## VI. Conclusions and Recommendations:

### Conclusions:

The evidence we have gathered indicates that attacks continue to be directed against civilians and civilian objects. Syrian-Russian alliance forces have committed various crimes, including extrajudicial killings, arrest, torture, and enforced disappearance. In addition, the indiscriminate bombardment and other attacks carried out caused the destruction of facilities and buildings. There are reasonable grounds to believe that the war crime of attacking civilians has been committed in many cases.

The Syrian government has not only violated international humanitarian law and customary law, but has also breached a number of UN Security Council resolutions, particularly resolution 2139, resolution 2042 on the release of detainees, and resolution 2254, all without any accountability.

- We could find no record of any warnings being issued by the Syrian Regime or Russian forces prior to any attack under the requirements of international humanitarian law. This has been the case since the beginning of the popular uprising for freedom, providing another blatant demonstration of these forces' total disregard for the lives of civilians in Syria.
- The magnitude and frequency of the violations, the disproportionate use of military force, the indiscriminate manner of the bombing, and the coordinated approach of these attacks lead to the inescapable conclusion that these acts are wholly deliberate and based on high-level orders, and as such constitute a part of state policy.
- The indiscriminate and disproportionate bombardment carried out by the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces is considered to be a clear violation of international humanitarian law, with indiscriminate killings amounting to war crimes.
- Hay'at Tahrir al Sham has violated international humanitarian law, causing the death of many civilians, as well as damage to vital civilian facilities.
- The Armed Opposition/ Syrian National Army violated UN Security Council Resolution 2139 through carrying out attacks that are considered to violate customary international humanitarian law, causing civilian casualties or accidental injuries.
- All the attacks documented in this report, particularly bombings, caused massive collateral damage that involved loss of lives, injuries, or significant damage to civilian objects. There are strong indicators suggesting that this damage was excessive compared to the anticipated military benefit.
- The use of explosive arms to target densely populated areas reflects a criminal and wholly deliberate mindset, with the perpetrators clearly intending to inflict the greatest possible number of deaths, which is a clear contravention of international human rights law and a flagrant violation of the Geneva Convention (arts. 27, 31, 32).

## Recommendations:

### UN Security Council

- The Security Council must take additional steps following its adoption of Resolution 2254, which clearly insists that “all parties immediately cease any attacks against civilians and civilian objects as such.”
- The Syrian issue should be referred to the International Criminal Court and all those who are responsible for violations should be held accountable, while Russia must stop using the veto, as it is a party to the Syrian conflict, and the UNSC states’ veto power should be withheld when crimes against humanity and war crimes are committed.
- Ensure peace and security and implement the principle of responsibility to protect civilians’ lives and to save the Syrian people’s heritage and historical artifacts from destruction, looting and vandalism.
- The Security Council should adopt a resolution banning the use of cluster munitions and landmines in Syria, similar to the existing prohibition on the use of chemical weapons, and include advice on how to safely remove the remnants of such dangerous weapons.
- The four other permanent member states should put pressure on the Russian government to end its support for the Syrian regime, which uses chemical weapons, and to expose its involvement in this regard.
- Request that all relevant United Nations agencies make greater efforts to provide food, medical and humanitarian assistance in areas where fighting has ceased, and in internally displaced person camps, and to follow-up with those States that have pledged voluntary contributions.

### International Community

- In light of the split within the Security Council and its utter inability to take any effective action, action should be taken on the national and regional levels to form alliances to support the Syrian people by protecting them from daily killing and by lifting sieges, as well as by increasing support for relief efforts. Additionally, the principle of universal jurisdiction should be enacted in local courts regarding these crimes in order to conduct fair trials for all those who were involved.
- SNHR has repeatedly called for the implementation of the ‘Responsibility to Protect’ in dozens of studies and reports and as a member of the International Coalition for the Responsibility to Protect (ICRtoP) after all political channels through the Arab League’s plan and then Mr. Kofi Annan’s plan have proved fruitless, along with the Cessation of Hostilities statements and Astana agreements that followed. Therefore, steps should be taken under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations, while the norm of the ‘Responsibility to Protect’, which was established by the United Nations General Assembly, should be implemented. The Security Council is still hindering the protection of civilians in Syria.
- Renew pressure on the Security Council to refer the case in Syria to the International Criminal Court.
- Work on fulfilling justice and achieving accountability in Syria through the United Nations General Assembly and the Human Rights Council and to activate the principle of universal jurisdiction.

**OHCHR**

- The OHCHR should submit a report to the Human Rights Council and other organs of the United Nations on the incidents mentioned in this report and previous reports since these attacks were perpetrated by the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces.

**Independent International Commission of Inquiry (COI)**

- Launch investigations into the cases included in this report and previous reports. SNHR is willing to cooperate and provide further evidence and data.
- Focus on the issue of landmines and cluster munitions within the next report.

**International, Impartial, and Independent Mechanism (IIIM)**

- Collect further evidence about the crimes documented in this report.

**The United Nations Special Envoy to Syria**

Condemn the perpetrators of crimes and massacres, and those who were primarily responsible for dooming the de-escalation agreements.

Re-sequence the peace process so that it can resume its natural course despite Russia's attempts to divert and distort it, empowering the Constitutional Committee prior to the establishment of a transitional governing body.

**The Syrian regime**

- Stop indiscriminate shelling and targeting of residential areas, hospitals, schools and markets, and end the use of outlawed weapons and barrel bombs.
- Ensure compliance with UN Security Council resolutions and customary humanitarian law.

**The Russian regime**

- Launch investigations into the incidents included in this report, make the findings of these investigations public for the Syrian people, and hold those responsible accountable.
- Compensate all the damaged centers and facilities, rebuild and rehabilitate them, and compensate all the families of victims who were killed by the current Russian regime, as well as all the wounded.
- Completely cease the bombing of hospitals, protected objects, and civilian areas, and respect customary international law.
- As a guarantor party in Astana talks, the Russian regime must stop thwarting de-escalation agreements, and apply pressure on the Syrian regime in order to end all indiscriminate attacks and to allow unconditional passage of humanitarian aid to besieged areas.

**The Coalition (US-led coalition and Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces)**

- The states supporting the SDF should apply pressure on these forces in order to compel them to cease all of their violations in all the areas and towns under their control.
- Syrian Democratic Forces must immediately stop conscripting children, hold the officers involved in such violations accountable, and pledge to return all children who have been arrested for conscription immediately.

**The Armed Opposition/ Syrian National Army**

- The Armed Opposition/ the Syrian National Army must ensure the protection of civilians in all areas under their control. These forces should also take care to distinguish between civilians and military targets and cease any indiscriminate attacks.
- Take punitive action against those who commit violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law.

**Humanitarian Organizations**

- Develop urgent operational plans to secure decent shelter for internally displaced persons.
- Provide protected facilities and vehicles, such as medical facilities, schools, and ambulances, with distinctive signs that can be distinguished from long distances.

**Acknowledgments**

We wish to extend our sincere thanks to all family members, relatives and friends of the victims, as well as eyewitnesses and local activists whose contributions have enriched this report.



[www.snhr.org](http://www.snhr.org) - [info@sn4hr.org](mailto:info@sn4hr.org)