



## The Ninth Annual Report on Enforced Disappearance in Syria on the International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances; There Is No Political Solution without the Disappeared

Enforced Disappearance Pandemic Ravages Syrian Society  
with Nearly 100,000 Disappeared Syrians since March 2011,  
Most of Whom by the Syrian Regime

Sunday 30 August 2020

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

**SNHR**  
SYRIAN NETWORK FOR HUMAN RIGHTS  
الشبكة السورية لحقوق الإنسان



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## **I. Nearly Nine years and the Percentage of Forcibly Disappeared Persons Is Increasing, with the Syrian Regime Being Responsible for Approximately 85% of the Cases**

Although arresting and then disappearing dissidents who call for political change, democracy and human rights is a common and typically brutal strategy for all authoritarian regimes, Syria's regime has reached an exceptional level even by these standards, given the massive numbers of citizens forcibly disappeared; at least 100,000 Syrian citizens from a population of 23 million prior to the start of the popular uprising for freedom in March 2011 are still classified as forcibly disappeared. We should also emphasize that this figure includes only those cases that the Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) team has been able to catalogue according to the rigorous criteria described in our methodology, over nine years of continuous work.

Enforced disappearance has been used as a weapon of suppression, war and terrorism since the first days of the start of the popular uprising for democracy in 2011, and it has continued to be used in an escalating fashion throughout the subsequent nine years and up to the current day. The data confirms that the Syrian regime is the party primarily responsible for using this crime in a systematic and widespread manner, being responsible for nearly 85% of the total record of forcibly disappeared persons, while the other parties to the conflict (Syrian Democratic Forces / the Kurdish Democratic Union Party, the Armed Opposition factions / the Syrian National Army, extremist groups / ISIS / Hay'at Tahrir al Sham) are collectively responsible for approximately 15% of the remaining cases.

Enforced disappearance automatically implies the violation of a number of basic human rights for victims. The security forces of the regime's four main intelligence services are often responsible for these extra-judicial arrests, adding to the illegality of these detentions. Each detainee is also prevented from informing his or her family, appointing a lawyer, or contacting anyone in the outside world, with the arrest of a Syrian citizen usually being accompanied by the use of physical and verbal abuse in a deliberate effort to instill terror and fear in the detainee and others present. When a family or a lawyer asks about a detainee, the security branches / authorities deny his/her arrest, and more than 65% of all arrests are subsequently classified as enforced disappearances. This policy is carefully and strictly followed by the Syrian regime, with the other parties to the conflict imitating and following it.

This sense of helplessness, suffering and terror is not limited to the detainees themselves, but is also transmitted to each detainee's family and friends who live in a cycle of anxiety, fear and confusion due to their ignorance of the fate of their loved one and their inability to take any official and legal action that could help them reveal their missing family member's fate as long as the disappeared person is still confined in the regime's detention centers, where families have no power to intervene or take any action; adding insult to injury for traumatized family members, those who repeatedly make enquiries about missing loved ones are themselves subjected to threats, persecution and probable arrest.

The strategy of enforced disappearance aims to terrify and terrorize society by exposing some of its members to an unknown fate, turning them into mere question marks. Meanwhile, the ensuing social and economic repercussions, as with the repercussions of the crime of enforced disappearance itself, are not limited to the victims alone, but extend to their families who suffer under the weight of loss, the long waiting and their impotence in light of the absence of any legal measures that they can take to help the victim due to the security services' primacy over all aspects of life, being the ones responsible for arrests and enforced disappearances, along with the constant psychological suffering of not knowing the fate of their loved ones.

The Syrian Network for Human Rights' (SNHR) database dedicated for registering victims of enforced disappearance shows that the majority of victims of enforced disappearance were arrested during the first three years of the popular uprising (2011 - 2012 - 2013). The wave of enforced disappearances during these years, which witnessed the largest numbers of arrests, aimed to break and destroy the popular movement and to terrorize those supporting freedom into silence and submission; the victims' families have still not obtained any information about their loved ones' whereabouts and fate except what they were told by detention survivors and others released from the Syrian regime detention centers, with most of these disappeared victims being arrested in connection with their various activities in the popular uprising. Most of these individuals have been forcibly disappeared in the Syrian regime detention centers for nearly nine years, with the regime refusing to reveal any details of their fate.



“The negotiation sessions must be preceded by some positive measures, foremost of which is the disclosure of the fate of 100,000 forcibly disappeared Syrian citizens. The entire international community has failed to secure the release or reveal the fate of one forcibly disappeared Syrian citizen over nine years, so how could it succeed in completing a political transition process towards democracy and human rights? Instead of revealing the fate of the already disappeared persons, additional numbers of Syrian citizens are being forcibly disappeared, mainly by Syrian regime forces; this, without any doubt, constitutes a crime against humanity.”



**Fadel Abdul Ghany**  
Chairman of the Syrian  
Network for Human Rights

International law prohibits the use of enforced disappearance under any circumstances, and states that emergency conditions such as conflicts and wars may not be invoked to allow its practice. There are numerous international norms and instruments related to the crime of enforced disappearance, such as [the Rome Statute](#), Article 7 of which describes enforced disappearance as a crime against humanity when committed as part of a widespread and systematic attack, with Article 5 of the [International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance](#) also stressing the same point. Similarly, Article VII of the [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#) states that no-one shall be subjected to torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, and Article 14 of the same Covenant criminalizes the coercion of any person to testify against himself or admit to an offense he has not committed. In addition, enforced disappearance violates the set of rights included in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, such as the right to recognition of legal personality and to the freedom and security of the person, to access to judicial guarantees and to a fair trial, as well as the right of victims' families to know the truth about the fate of the disappeared and the circumstances of their disappearance. In addition, enforced disappearance violates the fundamental rights guaranteed by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

#### **Methodology:**

Every year on the International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances, which falls annually on August 30, SNHR publishes its annual report, which documents violations related to enforced disappearances by all perpetrator parties in Syria. [In our 2019 report](#), we outlined the record of victims of enforced disappearance, which was higher than that recorded in the previous year, 2018, with most of the detainees going on to be categorized as forcibly disappeared. In this report, we document the record of enforced disappearance at the hands of the main perpetrator parties since the beginning of the popular uprising in Syria in March 2011 up to August 2019. This report also focuses mainly on the violations that we've documented since the last report, between August 30, 2019 and August 30, 2020, as well as outlining incidents that we documented previously which we had not included in our previous reports.

We also issue [a monthly report](#) documenting arbitrary arrests and enforced disappearances, and monitoring the incidents and cases documented each month. We have been able to build a strong network of relations in recent years with local activists and families of victims, as well as survivors and witnesses, both inside and outside Syria, and we have provided all means of communication to facilitate access and documentation such as e-mail, dedicated telephone numbers for documentation and forms on our website. All of this has helped us in the continuous accumulated documentation process in accordance with [our methodology](#) based on the provisions of international laws and the set of principles relating to arbitrary detention and enforced disappearance.

Enforced disappearance is defined in accordance with the Declaration on the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance adopted by the UN General Assembly in [its resolution 47/133 of December 18, 1992](#), as a set of principles applicable to all States; this declaration states that enforced disappearance occurs “in the sense that persons are arrested, detained or abducted against their will or otherwise deprived of their liberty by officials of different branches or levels of Government, or by organized groups or private individuals acting on behalf of, or with the support, direct or indirect, consent or acquiescence of the Government, followed by a refusal to disclose the fate or whereabouts of the persons concerned or a refusal to acknowledge the deprivation of their liberty, which places such persons outside the protection of the law.”. In our methodology, we classify an individual as being within the enforced disappearance category after they have been detained for 20 days with their family unable to obtain any information about their detention or whereabouts from the official authorities and when the authorities which arrested him or her refuse to acknowledge that detention.

This report relies mainly on SNHR’s archive of detainees and enforced disappearances, resulting from the daily monitoring and documentation that we have carried out continuously since 2011 up to the current moment concerning incidents of arbitrary arrest and enforced disappearance. We also constantly update these records, with all statistics included being registered by name, date, place and conditions of detention, the party responsible for the arrest and enforced disappearance, the latest observations and documents, and other details. SNHR’s Information Technology department has built a dedicated program for the database for each party to the conflict, providing information on detainees’ original governorate, gender, marital and academic status, age group and place of arrest, with all data being entered automatically. Using the SNHR database, we can distribute the cases of arrests according to the governorate in which the incident took place, and the governorate which the detainee comes from. In this report, we distribute the cases of arrests according to the place where the arrest took place, rather than the governorate which the detainee comes from because, in most cases, the governorate where the incident took place is the same one he or she is from. We further note that we sometimes distribute cases of arrests according to the governorate which the detainee comes from in order to show the extent of the loss and violence suffered by the people of that governorate compared to other governorates, and that we refer to this in the report when doing so. The data added to the SNHR’s database is retained securely, and we store several backup copies in different places.

Given the exceptional difficulties and the magnitude of the violations, the cases mentioned in this report represent the bare minimum of violations which we have been able to document, and we confirm that the real figures are far higher.

The report's methodology is also based on the interviews we conducted with families of victims who were forcibly disappeared from different Syrian governorates, carrying out these interviews either by telephone or various online communication programs or by visiting them in their homes inside and outside Syria. In this report, we provide 14 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 this is in accordance with our internal protocols, which we have worked on for years, and we strive constantly to develop this to keep pace with the best practices in maximizing psychological care and minimizing potential trauma for the victims.

## **II. Syrian Network for Human Rights' Cooperation with the United Nations Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances, the Special Rapporteur on Torture, the Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms While Countering Terrorism, and the Special Rapporteur on the Right of Everyone to the Enjoyment of the Highest Attainable Standard of Physical and Mental Health**

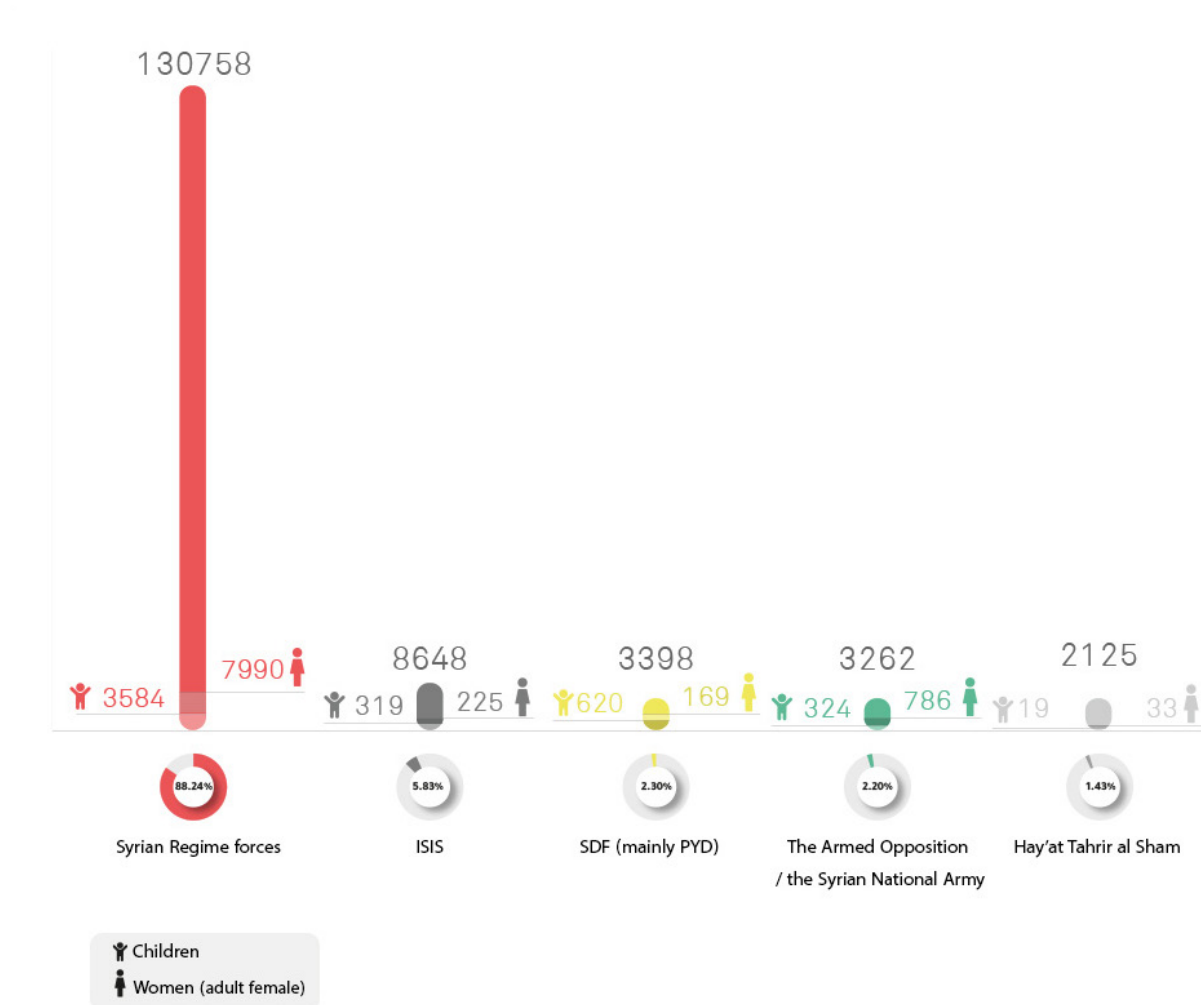
The SNHR team conducts regular [periodic correspondence](#) with the UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances (WGEID) and we have received many official responses about the cases we have submitted to them, via letters showing the cases that the WGEID sent to the Syrian regime from among the cases we shared with the WGEID, which are listed in the special annex on the report prepared by the WGEID in Syria.

We have devoted [a form](#) on our official website that families can fill out which are sent automatically to the team at the Detainees and Forcibly Disappeared Persons Department that follows up on each case and communicates with the families to complete the documentation and registration process. We periodically receive documents from the WGEID on a number of cases provided by the SNHR, with the Syrian regime asked to disclose and report on their fate.

In this regard, the SNHR is requesting further cooperation from the families in order to submit as many cases as possible to the UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances. Our team works continuously to build broad relations with the families of the forcibly disappeared, to obtain as much data as possible which is stored within our database of enforced disappearances. We have also made available every possible safe method of communication via communication applications and have allocated special phone numbers for our team's work to facilitate access for victims' families.

### III. The Record of Victims of Arbitrary Arrest/ Detention and Enforced Disappearance and Its Distribution in Syria since March 2011

Between March 2011 and August 2020, at least 148,191 individuals are still detained or forcibly disappeared at the hands of the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in Syria, according to the SNHR's database, distributed according to the perpetrator parties as follows:





**A. Syrian Regime forces (army, security, local militias, and Shiite foreign militias):** 130,758 individuals, including 3,584 children and 7,990 women (adult female).

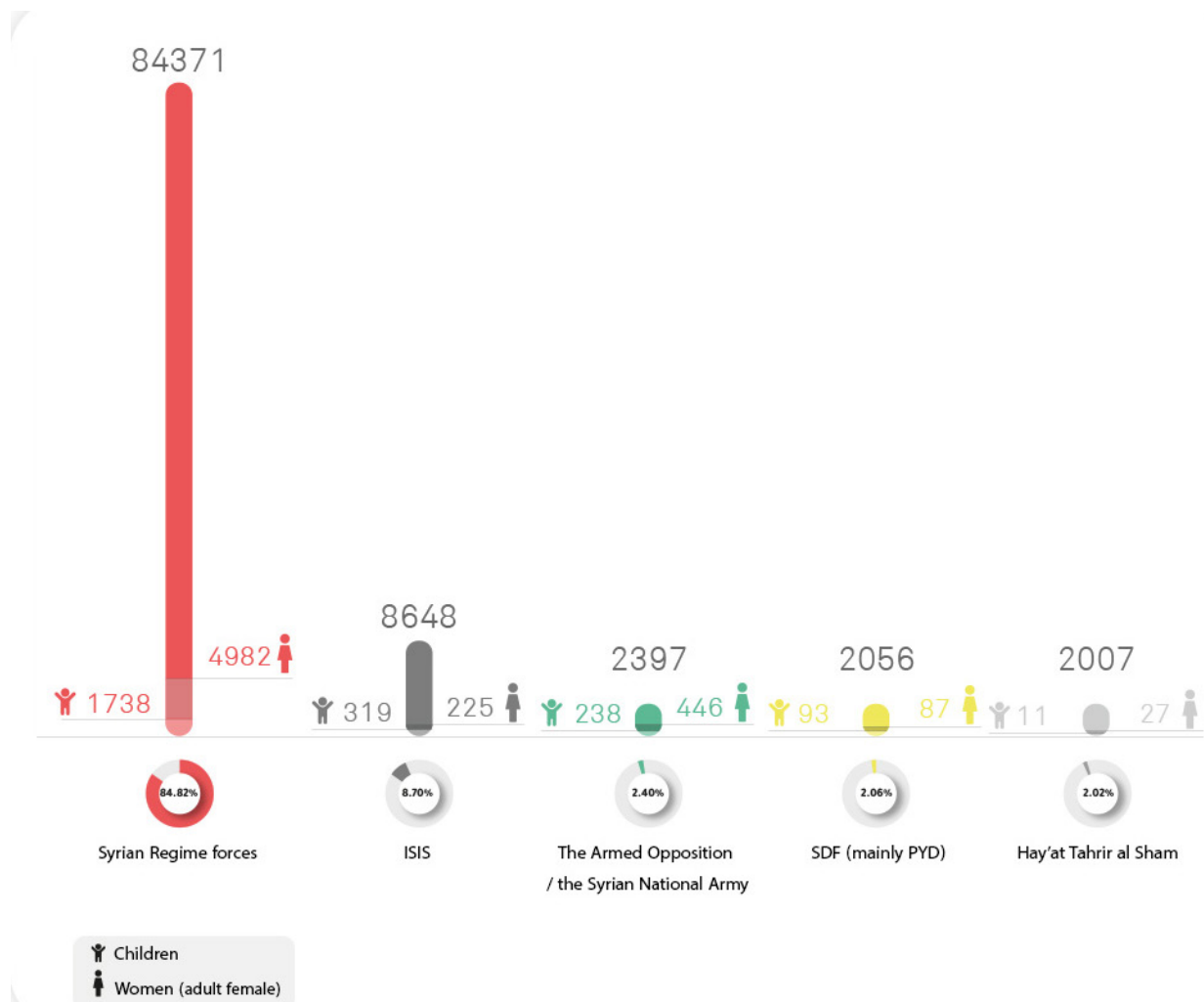
**B. ISIS (the self-proclaimed 'Islamic State'):** 8,648 individuals, including 319 children and 225 women (adult female).

**C. Hay'at Tahrir al Sham (an alliance composed of Fateh al Sham Front and a number of factions of the Armed Opposition):** 2,125 individuals, including 19 children and 33 women (adult female).

**D. The Armed Opposition/ Syrian National Army:** 3,262 individuals, including 324 children and 786 women (adult female).

**E. Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (the Democratic Union Party):** 3,398 individuals, including 620 children and 169 women (adult female).

Between March 2011 and August 2020, at least 99,479 individuals have been forcibly disappeared at the hands of the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in Syria, according to the SNHR's database, distributed according to the perpetrator parties as follows:



**A. Syrian Regime forces (army, security, local militias, and Shiite foreign militias):** 84,371 individuals, including 1,738 children and 4,982 women (adult female).

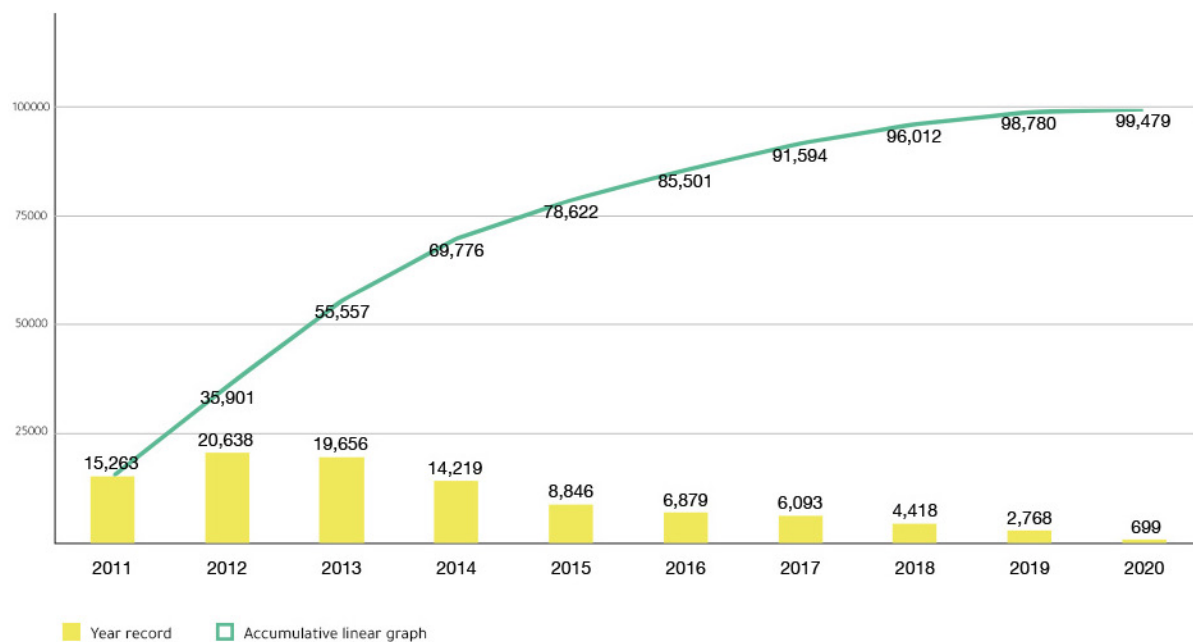
**B. ISIS (the self-proclaimed 'Islamic State'):** 8,648 individuals, including 319 children and 225 women (adult female).

**C. Hay'at Tahrir al Sham (an alliance composed of Fateh al Sham Front and a number of factions of the Armed Opposition):** 2,007 individuals, including 11 children and 27 women (adult female).

**D. The Armed Opposition/ Syrian National Army:** 2,397 individuals, including 238 children and 446 women (adult female).

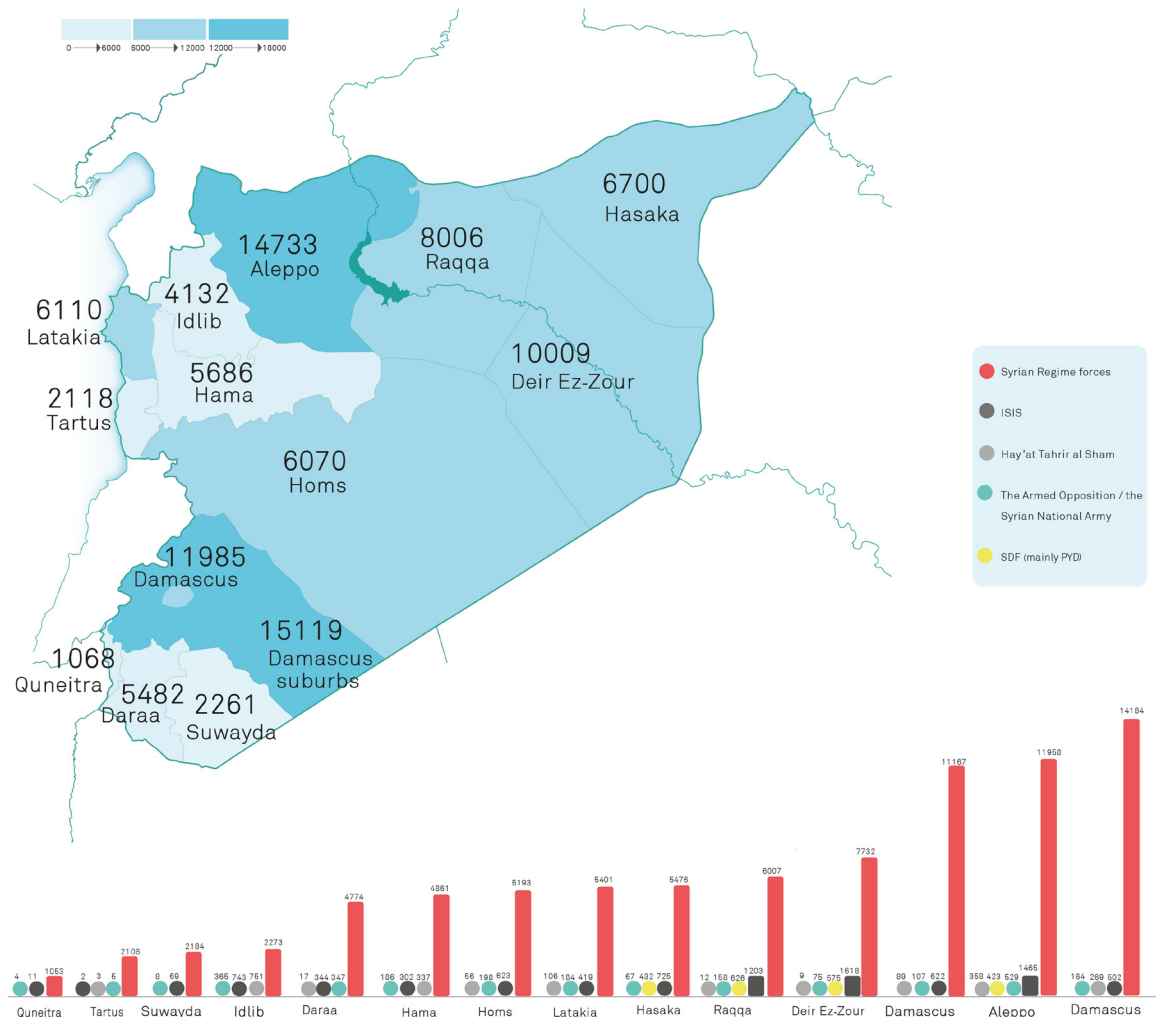
**E. Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (the Democratic Union Party):** 2,056 individuals, including 93 children and 87 women (adult female).

Chart showing the distribution of the record of the forcibly disappeared in Syria since 2011 by year, and the accumulative linear graph of that record:



The previous chart shows that 2012 was the worst year to date in terms of the record of the forcibly disappeared, followed by 2013.

Map showing the distribution of the record of the forcibly disappeared by the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in Syria according to the Syrian governorates:



**The previous map shows that Damascus Suburbs governorate led the other governorates in terms of the number of victims of enforced disappearance, followed by Aleppo then Damascus.**

Enforced disappearances have been carried out in the context of a widespread assault against all civilian population groups. The Syrian regime was the first party to introduce the violation of enforced disappearances as an unofficial policy, and is by far the most prolific perpetrator of this crime, with other parties left far behind in terms of the number of enforced disappearances, to such a degree that there is no serious comparison with any of the other parties engaged in the conflict.

Enforced disappearance committed by the Syrian regime amounts to a crime against humanity under Article 7 of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. This crime is, therefore, not subject to the statute of limitations, with the same article giving the victims' families the right to reparation and to know the fate of their disappeared loved ones. It is also considered a war crime under Article 8 of the Rome Statute itself due to its being practiced as part of a systematic and public policy in the effort to crush the popular uprising for democracy, overwhelmingly by the Syrian regime.

## IV. The Syrian Regime Continues to Register Some of the Disappeared Persons as Dead Through the Civil Registry Departments, with the Total of Documented Cases Reaching 991 Cases

In early 2018, when some families visited the Civil Registry Departments to conduct routine transactions, they were shocked when the civil registry employee informed them that their spouses or children - who had in fact been 'disappeared' by Syrian Regime forces – had been registered at the Civil Registry Department as dead. This caused further devastating trauma to these families who had hoped that their loved ones' fate might be revealed, and that they might be alive.

After the news of these discoveries spread widely throughout Syrian society and among other families of forcibly disappeared citizens, the Civil Registry Departments in the various Syrian governorates put up copies of lists of names of those they had registered as dead among the forcibly disappeared on the walls of the departments, in order to alleviate the overcrowding among visitors to the departments searching for any information on the fate of their disappeared loved ones. We issued [two separate reports](#) on this emotionally devastating phenomenon which clearly shows the extent to which the Syrian regime has harnessed state institutions to serve it in a barbaric way, and confirms the extent to which the Syrian regime has tampered with the data of the civil registry of the forcibly disappeared, registering them as dead without giving families any information about the circumstances and location of their deaths and with the heartbroken families aware of the impossibility of investigating the circumstances of the death incident, able only to discover the documented date of death and a reference to the governorate in which the death occurred; most of these were registered as taking place in Damascus, the location of the largest number of the regime's main detention centers. This also proves that large numbers of the employees, senior officials, and other state employees were aware of this particular Syrian regime policy, as well as of the true cause of death and the brutal acts of torture perpetrated. It is clear that some of these officials possess knowledge of the location of the dead bodies and the mass graves where these were disposed of, particularly given the appallingly large number of forcibly-disappeared persons and the number of cases of death by torture, which we recorded which is estimated at nearly 14,000 deaths of Syrian citizens.

The SNHR team has documented at least 991 cases of forcibly disappeared persons, in which the Syrian regime revealed the fate of the disappeared, all of whom had died in detention, including nine children and two women, since the beginning of 2018 until August 2020. The regime didn't disclose the cause of death, with the families not being given their loved ones' bodies or being informed of the place of their burial. It also didn't announce the deaths when they occurred, and according to this mechanism, through which the Syrian regime has not definitively clarified the fate of the forcibly disappeared, we at the SNHR confirm that the regime is still practicing the crime of enforced



disappearance, and according to international law, these people will remain classified as forcibly disappeared, with the main party held responsible for their disappearance being the Syrian regime. We emphasize that this total represents the bare minimum of cases which we have been able to document, and that the real number of cases of those individuals forcibly disappeared by the Syrian regime whom it registered as dead is likely to be far greater, but the regime is now only announcing this limited number. We believe that there are some cases about which we have been unable to obtain information, but they remain limited, and our real fear is that the Syrian regime will register tens of thousands of forcibly disappeared persons as dead in the Civil Registry Departments, and begin publicly announcing these gradually when families visit Civil Registry Departments or through lists that are published from time to time.

The Syrian regime is certainly responsible for revealing the fate of those whom it forcibly disappeared, and for informing the Syrian people how they were killed, who killed them, and the whereabouts of their remains, more especially since the Syrian regime has always denied their detention; based on all of this, these lists constitute indictment evidence of the Syrian regime's involvement in the killing of these people who we believe were killed as a result of torture.

## V. Enforced Disappearance by the Four Main Parties in Syria

### A. Syrian Regime forces (army, security, local militias, and Shiite foreign militias):

The vast majority of detainees held by the Syrian regime are subsequently classified as forcibly disappeared persons, at a ratio of approximately 65%, with the largest proportion of these having also been disappeared for eight or nine years to date, mostly in 2011, 2012, and 2013. In a previous report we detailed [the most notable cases of arbitrary arrest and enforced disappearance in Syria](#), confirming that the crime of enforced disappearance by Syrian Regime forces last indefinitely. Syrian Regime forces have practiced systematic enforced disappearances against detainees since the early days of the popular uprising for democracy in March 2011; from the first moment of the arrest of each victim, he/she is held in isolation from the outside world and deprived of communication with his/her family, and from any rights to receive visits in the detention center, or to appoint a lawyer. All branches of the regime's security division, which is the main party involved in carrying out arrests, follow the policy of denial towards the families of those they have arrested and detained, straightforwardly lying to deny any knowledge of detainees' arrest or whereabouts when relatives inquire about their detained loved ones, with the desperately worried family members threatened with arrest themselves if they repeatedly make enquiries about their detained or disappeared family member. All of the released detainees we met confirmed to us that they were held in the security branches whose personnel had previously denied their arrest to family members.

Syrian Regime forces have used enforced disappearance in a widespread manner against all groups of society, particularly against activists involved in the popular uprising, media workers, human rights activists, academics, and political dissidents, as well as against individual or multiple members of these individuals' families, such as parents, spouses, siblings or children, with all the members of many families being subjected to collective enforced disappearance. Enforced disappearance is employed as a tool to terrorize the people, crush and silence dissent, dispose of dissidents, and take revenge against them for their participation in the popular uprising, their support for freedom and human rights, their influence in society, and their opposition to the authorities.

Enforced disappearances have not been limited to the detainees imprisoned in the detention centers of the regime's four main security branches or in its military and secret prisons, but also to those detainees held in the central prisons in the Syrian governorates who are subject to sham 'trials' held at the military courts, the Military Field Courts and the Counter-Terrorism Court; those being tried in these courts are allowed to have lawyers and even regular visits from family members. Even in these cases, however, regime forces may suddenly transfer detainees from their places of detention in central prisons to undisclosed locations, without informing the detainee, his/her lawyer or his/her family about the reason for the transfer or of the destination. We have noticed an increase in the number of detainees who have been disappeared from central prisons since the beginning of 2018 to this day. There are fears that regime forces have implemented secret rulings issued against these detainees by the Military Field Courts, or that security decisions will be issued ordering them to be returned to the security branches responsible for their arrest, suspending their trials and keeping them under enforced disappearance there.

In some cases, we receive news that one of the forcibly disappeared persons has passed away, with the cause of death most often being torture, mainly due to medical negligence, or we find out that the person was executed as a result of a death sentence issued by one of the illegitimate courts, which flout the most basic rules of legality, or that families have discovered their loved ones' fate through the Civil Registry Departments by chance.

According to the SNHR's database, at least 130,758 of the individuals detained by Syrian regime forces since March 2011, including 3,584 children and 7,990 women, are still arbitrarily detained as of August 2020. Of this total, at least 84,371 individuals, including 1,738 children and 4,982 women, have been classified as forcibly disappeared persons. The Syrian regime is responsible for 84.82% of the total number of enforced disappearance cases.

### **Testimonies of families of victims and cases of forcibly disappeared persons by Syrian Regime forces:**

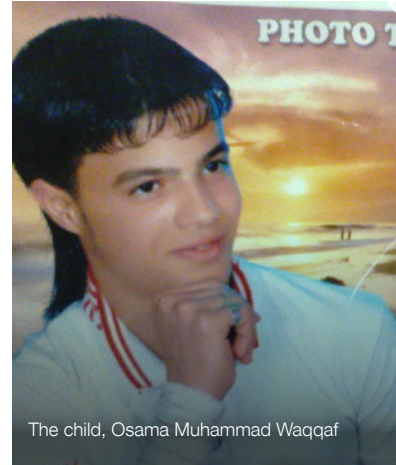
Prior to his arrest in 2011, Jamal Khaled al Khatib from Mu'adamiyet al Sham town in Damascus Suburbs governorate, was a fourth year university student at Damascus University's Faculty of Law. Jamal, who was born in 1970, was arrested by members of the Syrian regime's Air Security Forces on Wednesday, November 23, 2011, in a raid on al Rawda Street in Mu'adamiyet al Sham town, and was taken to an undisclosed location.

The SNHR spoke with Jamal's wife, Ms. Qamar<sup>1</sup>, who told us, **"At around 9:30 at night, after he left his workplace on al Rawda Street in al Mu'adamiyeh heading towards the house, Air Force personnel arrested him and took him to an undisclosed location. In 2012, some of the released from Mu'adamiyet al Sham told us that they saw him in al Mazza Military Prison in Damascus city. Since that time, we have not been able to see him or obtain any information about him."**



The child, Osama Muhammad Waqqaf, from Salah al Din neighborhood in Aleppo city, was 17 years old when he was arrested. Syrian Regime forces arrested him on Sunday, January 1, 2012, at the University Hospital in Aleppo city, and took him to an undisclosed location.

The SNHR spoke with Mr. Amir<sup>2</sup>, Osama's brother, and he told us, **"Osama was at the University Hospital to donate blood for our sick mother, where he was arrested by members of the Syrian regime."** Amir said that his family has been unable to take any action or appoint a lawyer to help his brother, for fear of security prosecution.

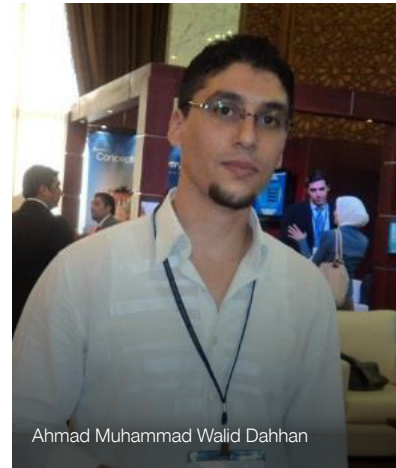


<sup>1</sup> Via phone on March 18, 2020

<sup>2</sup> Via phone on May 3, 2020

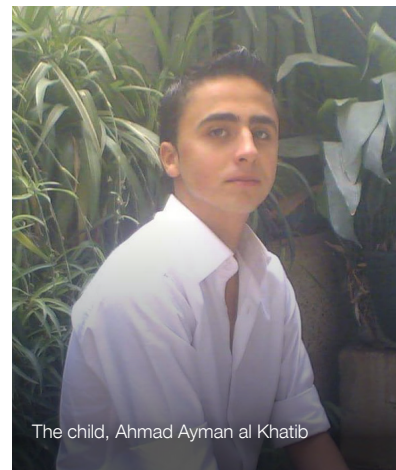
Ahmad Muhammad Walid Dahhan from al Qadam neighborhood in the south of Damascus city, who was a doctor specializing in gynecology at the time of his arrest, was born in 1981. He was arrested by gunmen affiliated with the Syrian regime's Palestine Branch on Wednesday, March 7, 2012, in al Salehiya neighborhood of Damascus city, and taken to an undisclosed location.

Dr. Dahhan's sister, Lama<sup>3</sup>, told us, **"Ahmad was arrested in al Salehiya neighborhood, near al Sehhi Restaurant in Damascus. Personnel affiliated with Palestine Branch arrested him. We watched the arrest through one of the cameras in the area that witnessed the incident."** Lama added that Muhammad's family has not received any information about him since then.



Ahmad Muhammad Walid Dahhan

The child, Ahmad Ayman al Khatib, a secondary school student from Idlib city, who was born in 1996, 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. Abir<sup>4</sup>, who told us that the family has received no news about Ahmad since he was arrested at his 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."**



The child, Ahmad Ayman al Khatib

Yaser Bassam Shashit, from al Midan neighborhood in Damascus city, holds a diploma in Information Technology from Damascus University. Yaser, who was born in 1990, was arrested by Syrian Regime forces on Thursday, February 28, 2013, while he was on his way from al Baramkeh neighborhood to Nahr Aisha neighborhood in Damascus city, and taken to an undisclosed location.



Yaser Bassam Shashit

<sup>3</sup> Via WhatsApp on June 14, 2020

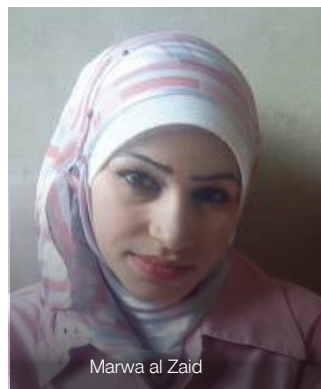
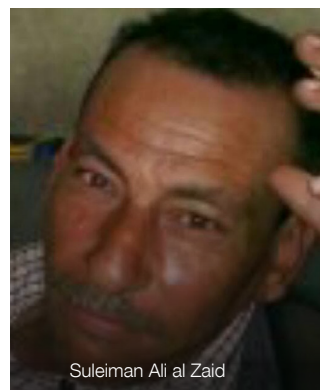
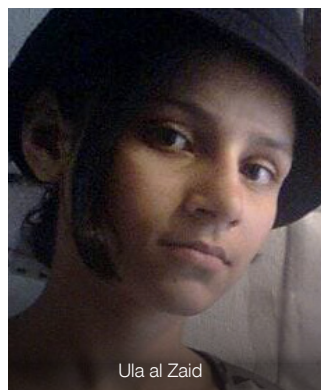
<sup>4</sup> Via phone on June 4, 2020



The SNHR spoke with Yaser's mother, Ms. Ibtisam<sup>5</sup>, who told us, **"Ahmad was returning from Damascus University, and while he was on his way from al Baramka neighborhood to his home in the Nahr Aisha neighborhood, he was arrested by members of Syrian Regime forces. Since that time, we do not know the reason for his arrest, and we have not obtained any information about him or his place of detention."**

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 on Tuesday, March 5, 2013, with his three daughters, Marwa, Suzan and Ula, born in 1994, 1998, and 2000 respectively, by Syrian regime personnel at the regime's al Van checkpoint near al Bardeh village, and they were taken to an undisclosed location.

The SNHR spoke with Ms. Nour<sup>6</sup>, another of Suleiman Ali al Zaid's daughters, who recounted the details of the arrest incident: **"My father and sisters work in a factory that produces 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."**



<sup>5</sup> Via phone on June 17, 2020

<sup>6</sup> Via phone on June 20, 2020

Muhammad Obaidah Myassar Shukri from Hama city, was a fourth-year university student at the College of Business Administration in al Wataniya Private University at the time of his arrest. Muhammad, born in 1992, was arrested by the Syrian regime's Military Security Forces on Monday, December 23, 2013, in Janoub al Thakana neighborhood in Hama city, and taken to an undisclosed location.

The SNHR spoke with Jafar al Hamwi<sup>7</sup>, a relative of Muhammad's, who told us, **"Members of the Military Security Branch arrested Muhammad in the Janoub al Thakana neighborhood. Muhammad's fate remained unknown to us since the moment he was arrested until one of the released detainees told us that he was with Muhammad in Branch 215 in Damascus, and that Muhammad was then transferred to Seydnaya Military Prison in Damascus Suburbs; this was the last news we heard about Muhammad several months after his arrest."** Jafar added that they tried many times to ask about Muhammad in the security branches but to no avail, and they had not been able to obtain any information about him.



Muhammad Obaidah Myassar Shukri

Ms. Huda Bahaa al Din Idlibi was arrested by Syrian Regime forces in February 2014 in Damascus city. Her son, Muhammad Haitham Yatqan, had also been arrested by gunmen affiliated with Syrian regime forces nearly two years before her arrest, on Sunday, July 15, 2012, in al Abbasiyyin Square also in Damascus city. Both mother and son were taken to undisclosed locations, with their fates remaining unknown to the SNHR.

Huda Bahaa al Din Idlibi, from Damascus city, was born in 1968.

Her son, Muhammad Haitham Yatqan, from Damascus city, and a resident of Nahr Aisha neighborhood in the same city, was born in 1992.

SNHR contacted Ms. Huda's daughter, Ms. Heyam<sup>8</sup>, who told us, **"On July 15, 2012, personnel affiliated with the regime arrested my brother Haitham. Since the moment of his arrest, we haven't known where he was taken or any information about his fate. In February 2014, personnel affiliated with the Syrian regime also arrested my mother, Huda, and it's the same as for my brother - I do not know where she was taken or any information about her fate since the moment she was arrested."**

Heyam said that she has not asked about her mother and brother at the regime's security branches for fear of being arrested.



Muhammad Haitham Yatqan

<sup>7</sup> Via phone on July 7, 2020

<sup>8</sup> Via phone on July 1, 2020

## **B. ISIS (the self-proclaimed 'Islamic State'):**

ISIS lost control of the areas it controlled in northeastern Syria in March 2019, with its presence subsequently limited to narrow enclaves in the Syrian Badiya and scattered cells, and there are, therefore, no longer any detention centers affiliated with it. According to the data the SNHR team was able to collect, we note that ISIS previously had at least 54 main detention centers and many secret detention centers, whose locations are difficult to determine. The largest number of the group's detention centers was located in Raqqa governorate which had 26 such centers in total, followed by Deir Ez-zour governorate with 20, then Aleppo governorate with eight detention centers. In a previous report, entitled [The Black Bottom](#), we talked about the 19 most notable ISIS detention centers.

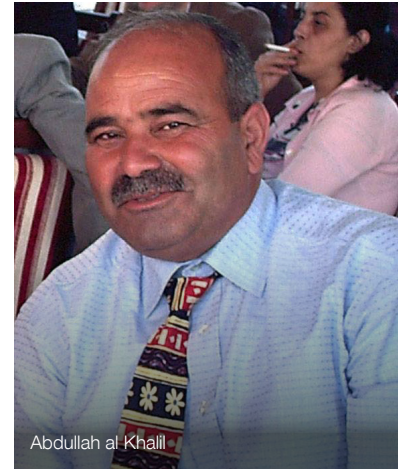
Following the end of the group's presence in the main areas that were under its control, this led to complications in the process of tracking the detainees' and abductees' fate; we believe that ISIS evacuated its detention centers and took those who were still alive among the detainees to unknown areas, making tracking the fate of the abductees/ detainees in its custody extremely difficult and complex, especially in the cases of those who had disappeared or been held hostage after being kidnapped years before, whose families have not received any information about them since the moment of their arrest/ detention, and we also fear that ISIS killed whoever they were unable to transfer, either individually or collectively. In addition to this, in light of the lack of serious cooperation or actual investigation by the forces currently in control on the ground in the areas controlled by ISIS, which are Syrian Democratic Forces, whose backbone is the PYD, which, in cooperation with the US-led Coalition against ISIS, took control over all areas that were under the control of ISIS, the fate of thousands of Syrian citizens forcibly disappeared by ISIS remains unknown to date.

Following the announcement of its establishment in April 2013, ISIS used a strategy of kidnapping, arrest and enforced disappearance on a large scale against the civilian population in all the areas it controlled or during its attacks on other areas, targeting in particular media activists, humanitarian organizations' workers, and foreigners, with the aim of terrorizing society and deterring violators of its doctrines. ISIS used an exact copy of the Syrian regime's strategy in using enforced disappearance as a tool of war against all its opponents.

Since the announcement of the establishment of ISIS up until August 2020, the SNHR team documented at least 8,648 individuals, including 319 children and 225 women, who are still forcibly disappeared by ISIS, which is responsible for 8.7% of the total number of the forcibly disappeared in Syria.

### **Cases of individuals forcibly disappeared by ISIS:**

Abdullah al Khalil, a lawyer from Raqqa city born in 1961, was detained by gunmen affiliated with ISIS on Saturday, May 18, 2013, in Raqqa city. His fate remains unknown to the SNHR.



Abdullah al Khalil

Abdul Qader Rateb Haddad, nicknamed 'Abboud', a journalist and photographer from Damascus city, and a former regime conscript who had defected from the Syrian regime's Military Police, was born in 1992. He was detained by gunmen affiliated with ISIS on Wednesday, June 26, 2013, at nine p.m., along with two friends as they were passing through an ISIS checkpoint in the Atma area in the suburbs of Idlib governorate, while he was on his way back from Turkey. One of his friends was released after several hours of detention, while the other was released three days after. The detention of Abdul



Abdul Qader Rateb Haddad

Qader continued, however, with the group confiscating his equipment and ISIS' operatives using Abdul Qader's account on Facebook social media network and the Viber application to communicate with his mother, identifying themselves as being from ISIS and saying that they had detained Abboud. Since that time, his fate remains unknown to the SNHR, as well as to his family.

Firas al Haj Saleh, a political and human rights activist from Raqqa city, was born in 1972, and was married with one child. He was detained by gunmen affiliated with ISIS on Saturday, July 20, 2013, while he was near al Mouasa Hospital in Raqqa city. His fate remains unknown to the SNHR.



Firas al Haj Saleh



Osama Ali Hasan, a university student at the Civil Engineering College, from Raqqa city, was born in 1990. Osama was a founding member of the 'Thawree Ana' Newspaper in Raqqa governorate, a spokesman for the local coordination committees in the governorate, and a member of their media office, who also worked as a reporter at Radio Rozana. Osama was detained by gunmen affiliated with ISIS in early 2014, and his fate remains unknown.

We note that Syrian Regime forces had previously detained Osama for two months in 2012.



Osama Ali Hasan

Roua Thyab, a dentist from Deir Ez-Zour, born in 1989, was detained by gunmen affiliated with ISIS on Saturday, August 16, 2014, after she was summoned by the elements of the ISIS affiliated 'al Hisbah', in al Mayadeen city in the eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate, in order to investigate her in the context of her having provided dental treatment for men in her clinic. She was taken to one of the group's detention centers in al Shaddadi city in the southern suburbs of Hasaka governorate. When her father visited one of ISIS's detention centers in al Shaddadi city, he was informed that his daughter had been executed on charges of intelligence cooperation with Syrian Regime forces. We note that the group's members did not hand over her body to Roua's family, and therefore she remains classified as forcibly disappeared.



Roua Thyab

Farhad Hamo, born in 1989, is a Rudaw Media Network correspondent from Hasaka city. He was detained by gunmen affiliated with ISIS on Monday, December 15, 2014, while travelling along the road linking Qameshli city and al Ya'rubiya town in the suburbs of Hasaka governorate. His fate remains unknown to the SNHR.



Farhad Hamo

### **C. Hay'at Tahrir al Sham (an alliance composed of Fateh al Sham Front and a number of factions of the Armed Opposition):**

Hay'at Tahrir al Sham has pursued a policy of enforced disappearance in areas under its control to terrorize the community and warn the public of the consequences of opposing the group and criticizing its policies, mainly targeting media activists, journalists, human rights activists, foreigners, humanitarian organizations' workers, local council personnel, dignitaries, and military personnel belonging to the Armed Opposition/ Syrian National Army, who launched attacks against HTS, as well as targeting their families. Hay'at Tahrir al Sham followed in the footsteps of ISIS in not disclosing the fate of its detainees, and resorted to incarcerating them in secret prisons directly connected to it, despite the establishment of a judicial body affiliated with the 'Salvation Government'. HTS subjected its detainees to formalistic secret trials called 'Sharia Sessions' by HTS, with the judgments being issued by its Sharia and security officials (clerics with leadership positions in the group who perform the functions of issuing Fatwas and Judgments). The HTS often releases foreign detainees after negotiations with parties they work for in return for large sums of money, while holding the rest of its detainees in its secret prisons where they are prevented from receiving visits, having any communication with their families, or hiring a lawyer. HTS disappears them in its secret prisons, which were established through its security apparatus.

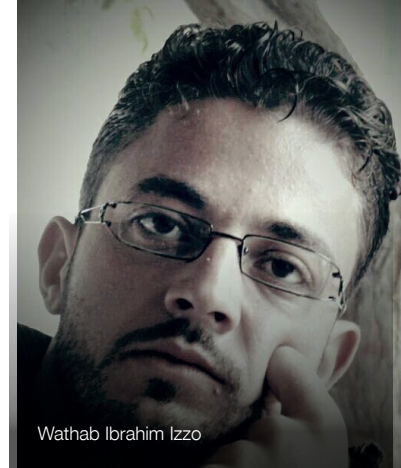
Enforced disappearance by HTS often lasts for years, and the group denies its responsibility for the detention, and does not disclose the fates of those who it has summarily executed in order to avoid public outrage over these crimes, to keep victims' families in a traumatic state of uncertainty and pain in retaliation against them, and to spread fear in society, and warn of the consequences of criticizing or rejecting its policies and teachings in areas under its control.

The enforced disappearances carried out by HTS have resulted in many activists and their families being displaced, often fleeing to other areas outside the group's control for fear of arrest and an unknown fate.

According to the SNHR's database, at least 2,125 individuals, including 19 children and 33 women are still being detained by HTS, since the announcement of the establishment of Hay'at Tahrir al Sham in early 2012 up until August 2020. At least 2,007 of these individuals, including 11 children and 27 women, have been forcibly disappeared.

### **Testimonies of families of victims and cases of forcibly disappeared persons by Hay'at Tahrir al Sham:**

Wathab Ibrahim Izzo from Saraqeb city in the northern suburbs of Idlib governorate, was an activist in the popular uprising for democracy, working in the relief field, who was born in 1990. Gunmen affiliated with Hay'at Tahrir al Sham detained him on Monday, January 5, 2015, as he was passing through one of the group's checkpoints, accompanied by his colleagues, Maad Barish, Mahmoud Anwar Hardan and Wasim al Qayyem (the last being a Lebanese national born in 1983), while they were on their way from Bab al Hawa crossing in the northern suburbs of Idlib governorate to Saraqeb city. Maad Barish and Mahmoud Anwar Hardan were released on Friday, January 30, 2015, while the fate of Wathab Izzo and Wasim al Qayyem remains unknown to the SNHR, as well as to their families.



The SNHR spoke with Mr. Abu Narya<sup>9</sup>, Wathab's brother, who told us: **“Wathab formerly worked in conducting transactions, and with the beginning of the popular uprising in Syria, he had a prominent role in it through his writings on the walls and his activity in the humanitarian relief work. On January 5, 2015, he obtained the approval of the local council in Saraqeb city to bring milk for children due to the infant formula crisis that was at the time in Saraqeb. Wathab got into a private car because the council's car was broken down; he went with Maad Barish and Mahmoud Anwar Hardan to Bab al Hawa crossing to bring a young man called Wasim al Qayyem, who came from Lebanon with milk. Upon their return from the crossing, about 100 meters after Taftanaz airbase towards Saraqeb city, a Kia Rio car was parked at an HTS temporary checkpoint, [with its occupants] kidnapping them. On the same day, the driver of the private ‘van’ car was released. After 25 days, Maad Barish and Mahmoud Hardan were released from the security center in al Zerba town in Idlib suburbs, after they were flogged on charges of keeping bad company, while HTS charged Wathab with secularism.”**

Wathab's brother told us that the family had inquired about him in all HTS' headquarters, but had been unable to obtain any information until June 2017, when one of the released detainees came out and told them that Wathab and his friend were being held in al Obari factory located in al Zerba town in the suburbs of Idlib governorate. Abu Narya added that the family inquired about Wathab again, but none of the HTS officials responded to their complaints about his brother's disappearance.

<sup>9</sup> Via phone on July 3, 2020

Jumah Omar Hammadi, a media activist nicknamed Jumah al Omari from Kafr Hamra village in the western suburbs of Aleppo governorate, who had been a law student before the start of the popular uprising for democracy, was born in 1989. He was detained by gunmen affiliated with Hay'at Tahrir al Sham on Monday, October 29, 2018, along with his uncle Muhammad Jumah Hammadi, while they were in Termanein village in the northern suburbs of Idlib governorate. Their fate remains unknown to the SNHR, as well as to their families.



Muhammad Jumah Hammadi



Media activist Jumah Omar Hammadi,  
nicknamed Jumah al Omari

#### **D. Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (the Democratic Union Party):**

Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) have practiced the policies of kidnapping and detention in the areas under their control, either through campaigns of raids, or through temporary checkpoints that they establish periodically. SDF detain those they arrest in detention centers without putting them on trial and prevent their families from visiting or communicating with them or appointing lawyers. Despite this, no clear charges have been brought against these detainees, with the SDF targeting activists, humanitarian workers, and political opponents criticizing their policies, as well as civilians under different pretexts, such as having kinship relationships with individuals in the Armed Opposition/ the Syrian National Army or having links with ISIS. In many detentions and enforced disappearances, SDF personnel have targeted some individuals on the basis of their ethnic background, with the victims possibly remaining under enforced disappearance for many years, during which time the disappeared individuals spend several months in solitary confinement. We have noted that SDF has released a number of those detained after concluding agreements with the dignitaries and Sheikhs of the tribes of the areas from which the detainees come.



Syrian Democratic Forces have sought to introduce legislation legitimizing all their operations of repression, detention, enforced disappearance, and kidnapping for the purpose of forced conscription and other widespread violations of human rights in the areas under their control under the pretext of ‘fighting terrorism and terrorists’, with this policy being very similar to that of the Syrian regime, which classifies anyone who opposes its policies and demands democratic change in the ruling system and an end to the dynastic dictatorship of the ruling family and the government appointed by it as a terrorist who must be arrested and whose voice must be silenced to make an example of him/her to the rest of society. Many of the children who’ve been detained / abducted for forced conscription by SDF have also been subjected to enforced disappearance, with their families prevented from obtaining any information about them, and their disappearance which, in many cases, lasts up to two years.

According to the SNHR’s database, at least 3,398 individuals, including 620 children and 169 women, are still detained by Syrian Democratic Forces, having been detained at some point since the SDF’s establishment – that is, since the establishment of the Kurdish Democratic Union Party’s Self-Management Forces, as of August 2020. At least 2,056 of these individuals, including 93 children and 87 women, have been forcibly disappeared.

### **Testimonies of families of victims and cases of forcibly disappeared persons by Syrian Democratic Forces:**

Female child, Amina Muhammad Ibrahim, from Afrin city in the northern suburbs of Aleppo governorate, was 13 years old when she was detained. Syrian Democratic Forces detained her in 2013 in Afrin city. We note that her sister, Aishah, was detained by the same forces in 2018 in al Shahbaa village in the suburbs of Aleppo governorate. Their fate remains unknown to the SNHR.

Ameer Hamed, an activist in the peaceful uprising and member of the National Kurdish Youth Organization – SOZ - is from Jatal village, which is administratively a part of al Derbasiya district in the northern suburbs of Hasaka. Born in 1977, Ameer was detained by Syrian Democratic Forces on Saturday, January 11, 2014, in al Derbasiya city. His fate remains unknown to the SNHR.



Ameer Hamed

The SNHR contacted Mr. Ayman al Azzaz<sup>10</sup>, a teacher from Raqqa city, who told us the details of the Syria Democratic Forces' detention of his son, Mutawakkel, on Friday, April 24, 2020, while Mutawakkel was at his workplace - an electronics maintenance store – adding that his son's fate has remained unknown since that time. Ayman says, **“A patrol of the [SDF] personnel came in a car and asked Mutawakkel to go with them directly, and they prevented him from contacting any of us to inform us of that. One of the neighbors witnessed the incident and told me what had happened. The patrol confiscated Mutawakkel's mobile phone, and an amount of money that was in the shop. The next day, I went to the General Security Center to inquire about him, where they told me that he had been transferred for investigation at Hasaka Security Center, while they did not explain to me the reasons for the transfer or arrest, but they only told me that I should wait and not return to them to ask about him again, as they have nothing to do with it, they said. About a month after the incident, one of the tribal Sheikhs in the city put Mutawakkel's name among those to be released in succession; to this day, we still receive promises from the sheikhs and dignitaries about his release.”** Ayman added that he is fearful about making any further enquiries about his son or putting pressure on Syrian Democratic Forces, out of concern that his son may be tortured or that his arrest may be prolonged as a result.

We spoke to Fawaz al Jamil<sup>11</sup> from al Hawayej village in the eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate. Fawaz told us about the conditions of his brother Amer's arrest and disappearance after his detention by Syrian Democratic Forces on Monday, July 20, 2020. Fawaz says, **“Several cars belonging to the SDF raided and searched our house and vandalized its contents in search of weapons - as they claimed. During their search, they stole items of private property, including mobile phones and a sum of money, and then they interrogated family members about our work and whether we had links or knowledge of any person from ISIS cells. We answered them in the negative and said that we are civilians.”** Fawaz added that the personnel tied up his 20-year-old younger brother, and took him with them, claiming that their reason for taking him was security investigations and that he would return to his home within two days. He adds, **“My brother has not been released to this day. We were scheduled to celebrate his wedding in August. We went to al Bseira Prison, and al Omar and al Kasra Oil fields in Deir Ez-Zour suburbs, and all the officials there told us that they did not have Amer, and to this day we do not know any information about him.”**

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<sup>10</sup> Via phone on July 1, 2020

<sup>11</sup> Via phone on August 3, 2020

The SNHR also spoke with Ibrahim Abu Khalil<sup>12</sup>, from al Sh-heil city in the eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour, who informed us of the particulars of his brother Omar's arrest on Tuesday, July 21, 2020. by an SDF' patrol, saying, **"Members of the HAT forces, which are affiliated with SDF, stormed my family's house in al Sh-heil city at around six in the morning; all of them were masked and spoke the Kurdish language between themselves. They searched the rooms of the house without taking into account the privacy of women in it; when they saw my brother Yousef leaning on a crutch - because of a broken foot - they arrested him violently without the slightest consideration of his injury, without any reason mentioned, even though he was a civilian and hadn't left the house for two months because of his injury."** Ibrahim said that the family continued to search for Omar in the Syrian Democratic Forces' prisons where ISIS elements are also held, but to no avail. He added, **"One of the tribal dignitaries in our area told us that Omar was detained in al Shaddadi prison in the southern suburbs of Hasaka, but we were not able to visit him or obtain any official recognition of his detention from Syrian Democratic Forces."**

Khair al Din Muhammad Ibou, a 48-year-old pharmacist, from Midanki town, which is administratively a part of Afrin city in the northern suburbs of Aleppo governorate, was taken into detention by Syrian Democratic Forces members on Monday, December 2, 2019, from al Ashrafiya neighborhood in Aleppo city. His fate remains unknown to the SNHR.



Khair al Din Muhammad Ibou

Female child, Sabah Bashir Hesso, a 17-year-old girl from Kafr Safra village, which is administratively a part of Afrin city in the northern suburbs of Aleppo governorate, was detained by Syrian Democratic Forces with the aim of forced conscription on Saturday, May 23, 2020, from Fafin IDP Camp in al Shah-baa area in the northern suburbs of Aleppo governorate. She was taken to one of the SDF military conscription camps in al Sheikh Maqsoud neighborhood of Aleppo city. Her fate remains unknown to the SNHR.

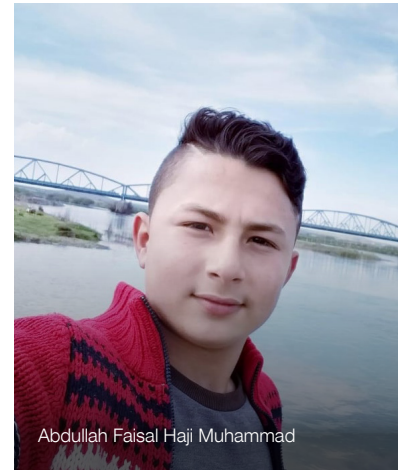


Sabah Bashir Hesso

<sup>12</sup> Via phone on August 6, 2020

Child, Abdullah Faisal Haji Muhammad, from al Tabaqa city in the western suburbs of Raqqqa 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, Mr. Faisal<sup>13</sup>, 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 held 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. He 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 he has no information about his medical and psychological condition.



#### **E. The Armed Opposition/ the Syrian National Army:**

Factions of the Armed Opposition have practiced kidnappings and detentions after storming areas controlled by Syrian Regime forces through mass kidnapping campaigns, as well as targeting activists, human rights activists, and humanitarian workers with enforced disappearances. Areas that were under the control of the Armed Opposition receded by the end of 2018 and have been concentrated in the northern suburbs of Aleppo governorate, and the governorates of Hasaka and Raqqqa. Since the beginning of 2019, we have recorded a significant increase in arrests and enforced disappearances carried out by the Armed Opposition / the Syrian National Army in those areas, some of which have an ethnic and sectarian background, especially in Afrin area and its villages in the northern suburbs of Aleppo governorate. Most of these arrests have occurred without judicial authorization and without the participation of the police force, which is the legitimate administrative authority responsible for arrests and detentions through the judiciary, as well as being carried out without presenting any clear charges against those being detained.

According to the SNHR's database, at least 3,262 individuals, including 324 children and 786 women, are still detained by the Armed Opposition/ the Syrian National Army. At least 2,397 of these individuals, including 238 children and 446 women, have been forcibly disappeared.

<sup>13</sup> Via phone on July 20, 2020

### Testimonies of families of victims and cases of forcibly disappeared persons by the Armed Opposition/ the Syrian National Army:

Muhammad Abdul Karim Manla, from Juwaiq village, which is administratively a part of Afrin city in the northern suburbs of Aleppo governorate, was 43 when he was detained by members of the Armed Opposition/ the Syrian National Army on Tuesday, September 4, 2018, in a raid on his house in Juwaiq village. His fate remains unknown to the SNHR.



Jowan Hussein al Jumah, from Soursourki village, which is administratively a part of al Derbasiya city in the northern suburbs of Hasaka governorate, born in 1995, was arrested by members of the Armed Opposition/ the Syrian National Army on Saturday, October 12, 2019, in Ras al Ein city in the northern suburbs of Hasaka governorate. His fate remains unknown to the SNHR.



We spoke with Mr. Abdul Ghafour Ibou , a farmer from Afrin city in the northern suburbs of Aleppo governorate. Abdul Ghafour was summoned by the Ahrar al Sharqiya faction - an Armed opposition faction - for questioning at the faction's headquarters on Wednesday, February 19, 2020, and remained there for several hours before being released. The next day, members of the same faction came and raided his house and took his son Jadallah to an undisclosed location, with his fate remaining unknown to this day. Abdul Ghafour told us, **“I was demanding the return of my brother’s house that had previously been confiscated by the faction, and due to these demands, they summoned me and ordered me to stop demanding this, under the pretext that my brother was a member of the Asayish - even though he was a forced conscript. The next day, members of the faction raided my house at night, arrested my son, and vandalized the contents of the house. When I went to ask about him, they denied his arrest. To this day, we’re trying to ask about him but to no avail.”** Abdul Ghafour told us that several people close

<sup>14</sup> Via phone on June 14, 2020



to the faction have asked for sums of money from him in exchange for his son's release, but he is unable to pay it, and he believes that the reason behind his son's continuing detention is to obtain a ransom in exchange for his release.

[A video published](#) on social media websites on Friday, May 29, 2020, shows members of the military police and opposition factions raiding the headquarters of another opposition faction, al Hamzah Brigade, which is affiliated with the Syrian National Army, present in Afrin city in the northern suburbs of Aleppo governorate. In the video, detained women appear to be held inside the headquarters building. Going by the content of the video, SNHR estimates that eight women are being detained there; we have managed to identify them as women who were kidnapped between 2018 and 2020 by gunmen whose identities were unknown at that time, with the kidnappers subjecting the women's families to blackmail attempts to secure their release. They detained women are: Nadia Suleiman, Haifaa al Jasem, Lonjin and Roujin Khalil Abdou, Rouken Manla, Arin Dalli, Roushan Amouni, and Nayrouz Anwar Abdou. The SNHR indicates that the Military Police in Afrin city subsequently once again handed over the kidnapped women to al Hamza Brigade, with their fate remaining unknown.

## VI. Conclusions and Recommendations

### **Legal conclusions**

SNHR believes that the Syrian regime has demonstrated a lack of commitment to the international agreements and treaties it has ratified, in particular the International Covenant on Political and Civil Rights. In addition, the Syrian regime has violated a number of articles of the Syrian constitution itself as hundreds of thousands of detainees have been detained for many years with no arrest warrants being issued or any charges brought against them. The Syrian regime has also denied those detainees the right to an attorney and barred their families from visiting them. 64.52% of all detainees have become enforced-disappearance cases as the Syrian regime has never informed their families of their whereabouts. Any attempt by detainees' family members to inquire about the whereabouts of their loved ones may put the families themselves at risk of being arrested.

Enforced disappearance is prohibited by customary international humanitarian law according to rule 98 which prohibits enforced-disappearance in international and non-international armed conflicts. Rule 117 of the same law states, "Each party to the conflict must take all feasible measures to account for persons reported missing as a result of armed conflict and must provide their family members with any information it has on their fate."

Further, the international criminal law prohibits enforced disappearance. According to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, systematic practice of enforced disappearances is by its very nature a crime against humanity (Article 7, paragraph 1-i), which applies to the acts of the Syrian regime.

The rest of the parties involved in Syria also practiced the crime of enforced disappearance, although it without the central and systematic nature as with the Syrian regime as it differs from the quantity and distribution of cases, and the ISIS organization and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham are similar to the Syrian regime in expanding the prevalence of cases and its methodology as indicated by our data.

## **Recommendations**

### **UN Security Council and United Nations**

- Hold an emergency meeting to discuss this critical matter that threatens the fates of nearly 100,000 individuals and terrorizes the whole of Syrian society.
- Work to reveal the fate of the forcibly disappeared persons in parallel with or prior to the start of the political process rounds, and set a strict timetable to reveal their fate.
- Find methods and mechanisms to prevent the Syrian regime from persecuting and tampering with the living and the dead, as this poses a major threat to the security and stability of the Syrian state.
- The Security Council should act to end torture and deaths due to torture inside Syrian regime detention centers, and save whoever is left among the detainees as quickly as possible.
- Take action under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations to protect the detainees from a certain death inside detention centers, and to put an end to the pandemic of enforced disappearance that continues to plague Syria as this poses a threat to the security and stability of the society.
- The Security Council should continue implementing and holding parties responsible for compliance with the resolutions it has adopted, most notably Resolution 2042 and Resolution 2139. The Security Council should follow its resolutions with action.
- Devote more attention to the issue of the forcibly disappeared in Syria given the severity of the numbers of disappeared and the fact that this is a crime against humanity. This issue must be addressed urgently.
- All detainees must be immediately allowed to contact their families, as well as lawyers and doctors. Bindings guarantees must be established to prevent lethal torture inside detention centers.

### **The Syrian regime**

- Stop treating the Syrian state as a private family property.
- Stop terrorizing the Syrian people through enforced disappearances, torture, and death due to torture.
- Stop tampering with and exploiting civil records in service of the goals of the ruling family.
- Take responsibility for all legal and material costs and compensate the victims and their families from the resources of the Syrian state.

### **Human Rights Council**

- Follow up on the issue of the detainees and forcibly disappeared persons in Syria, shed light on this issue at all periodic annual meetings, and dedicate a special session to addressing this horrifying threat.

### **OHCHR**

- Prepare a special and extensive report that sheds light on this catastrophe including all of its psychological, social, and economic ramifications, and support active human rights organizations in Syria.

### **UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances**

- Increase the manpower available to work on the issue of forcibly disappeared persons at the office of the Special Rapporteur on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances in Syria in light of the massive level and extent of cases of enforced disappearance in the country.

## **Solidarity**

We wish to express our complete and constant solidarity with the victims and their families, and to call for a wider human rights and social struggle by Arab and international human rights organizations to stand by the Syrian people and condemn the crimes of the Syrian regime and raise their voices alongside us in a constant demand to disclose the fate of their relatives and secure their release. We extend our sincere thanks and appreciation to the families and local activists, without whose efforts we could not have prepared and completed the report in such an exhaustive way.



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