

**Statement**

**SNHR Is the Second Most Cited Information Source in the European Asylum Support Office's May 2020 Report on the Security Situation in Syria**

**SNHR**

SYRIAN NETWORK FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

الشبكة السورية لحقوق الإنسان

Monday, June 15, 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.

On Tuesday, May 5, 2020, the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) released a report on the security situation in Syria to assess international protection and the situation of refugees.

The report relies on several human rights sources, including most notably, in order of the number of quotes:

United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA): 315 quotes.

Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR): 307 quotes.

Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED): 203 quotes.

The report also cites other sources such as the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the Violations Documentation Center in Syria, the Syria Study Group of the U.S. Institute of Peace, and Human Rights Watch. We have reviewed the 329-page report, and here will briefly summarize the most prominent of its contents.

The report is divided into two main parts; the first of which focuses on political developments, an overview of the armed conflict in Syria and the security situation throughout Syria during 2019 and the first two months of 2020, particularly analyzing the nature of the violence and its impact on civilians.

The second part of the report provides a governorate-level description of the security situation, the death toll, the security situation, armed confrontations, forced displacement, the return of the displaced people, and the damage to infrastructure.

The report begins by talking about the political developments in the armed conflict in Syria, before moving on to talk about the changing areas of control under the parties to the conflict, referring to the government forces regaining control of most of the country, including the major cities (Damascus, Aleppo, Homs, and Hama) and most of the governorate capitals. The report notes that although government forces regained control of most of the



opposition's areas of control with the support of its Russian and Iranian allies, government control outside Damascus is considered tenuous, in part because the regime lacks the forces to secure the areas it retakes, and also because it pursues punitive policies against the local populations. The report adds that the conflict weakened the ability of government forces to maintain security control over the areas after regaining control of them, which has led to it outsourcing these efforts to multiple groups in the form of pro-regime paramilitaries, foreign powers, and local militias.

The report also notes that clashes between pro-government militia factions have occurred frequently throughout the armed conflict with the aim of gaining access to and control over territories, with the report suggesting that the main driver of this is the crimes committed by these gang factions (confiscating property, corruption, gun-smuggling, drug-smuggling, kidnapping, extortion and committing other violations against civilians). The report also indicates that there have been civilian casualties due to these clashes in the governorates of Aleppo, Homs and Hama.

The report talks about the fragility of the security situation in the areas where government forces regained control through 'reconciliation' agreements such as Daraa governorate, the Eastern Ghouta and Quneitra, due to the plethora of parties involved in each agreement and the competing approaches of these parties.

The report also refers to violations by other parties in addition to the Syrian regime, noting the occurrence of civilian casualties as a result of clashes between different factions of the Armed Opposition, in addition to cases of kidnapping, abductions, detention, torture, extortion and killing of civilians by factions of the Armed Opposition. The report further notes that several violations have been committed by the Kurdish People's Protection Units forces (YPG), such as IED attacks, ambushes, kidnappings and executions.

The report reveals that despite that fact that ISIS lost its last areas under its control, explosions and assassinations have been recorded against the Syrian Democratic Forces or affiliated civilians.

The report also analyzes the military escalation in northwest Syria since April 2019, which has led to a significant increase in the civilian death toll in addition to causing extensive destruction to infrastructure, as well as referring to the escalation in the frequency of these military operations since December 2019, explaining that between December 2019 and February 2020, around one million people were forcibly displaced, with the report attributing 93% of the total death toll to the Syrian regime and its affiliated forces.



The report further notes that Syria was ranked as the country worst impacted globally by explosive violence in 2018, despite a decrease in casualties and incidents of explosive violence from 2017. The report emphasizes the responsibility of government forces for about 77% of the total civilian death toll, explaining that 53% of the total recorded death toll were killed as a result of air strikes.

The report analyzes the direct targeting of vital civilian facilities, noting that in 2019, government forces and affiliated forces carried out indiscriminate and direct attacks against civilians and civilian facilities using air and artillery bombardment, killing and injuring hundreds of people in Idlib and Hama in northwest Syria. The report emphasizes the use of internationally prohibited weapons in these attacks such as cluster and incendiary weapons. The report further adds that government forces and affiliated forces targeted civilian infrastructure in the armed groups' control areas in the northwest, including medical facilities, schools, markets, bakeries, relief operations and civilian homes, in addition to cases in which direct targeting of IDP camps were documented in 2019, resulting in many civilian casualties.

On the subject of the use of prohibited weapons in Syria, the report notes that government forces are responsible for 98% of all reported chemical weapons attacks in Syria.

The report further adds that all Syrian governorates, except Tartus, have been subject to cluster weapons attacks since 2012, noting that most of the documented cluster weapon attacks in 2018 and the first half of 2019 occurred in Idlib governorate.

The report notes that government forces are the primary users of cluster weapons in opposition-controlled areas, noting that there is strong evidence of the presence of Russian stockpiles of cluster munitions in Syria at the Hmeimim Airbase, affirming that the Russian forces have used these munitions, at a minimum, in joint operations with Syrian government forces since September 30, 2015, with the report citing a statement by Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov that cluster weapons are “a legal means of warfare” adding that “[the] Russian military unflinchingly adhere[s] to the norms of international humanitarian law.”

The report also records ISIS' use of cluster munitions in 2014, noting that no evidence was found of the US-led coalition or Israel having used cluster munitions in Syria. The report also adds that no comprehensive information was available on whether other armed groups used cluster munitions.



The report goes on to analyze the security situation in Syria, noting that 17,655 incidents recorded according to ACLED in 2019, distributed by type into: 2,814 cases recorded as battles, 13,674 explosions / remote violence, 1,167 cases of violence against civilians; most of these incidents were recorded in Idlib (6,447), followed by Hama (5,119), Aleppo (2,370), then Deir Ez-Zour (1,029), while the lowest number of incidents was recorded in Tartous (2), followed by Quneitra (25), then Damascus (38).

In a crucial part of the report, the report lists the civilian death toll in Syria, stating that at least 500,000 civilians have been killed to date since the events in Syria began in 2011. In compiling the statistics on fatalities, the report mainly relies on the documentation of both the Syrian Network for Human Rights and the Violations Documentation Center in Syria.

The report moves on to talk about the human rights situation in Syria since the end of 2018, indicating that there are 11.7 million people currently in need of humanitarian assistance in Syria, 5 million of whom have acute need; according to UNICEF figures, out of the 11.7 million people, there are about 4.7 million children and 1.3 million people with special disabilities and pregnant and lactating women.

The report refers to what was stated in a report by the Security Council in December 2019 about the deterioration of the already dreadful humanitarian situation facing civilians in all of Syria. Estimates indicate that 7.2 million people are currently in need of humanitarian assistance in areas controlled by government forces. The report notes that there are restrictions by government forces on the access of humanitarian organizations to reach civilians or receipt of aid to civilians in need, a practice designed to control relief support to achieve the greatest benefit for the abusive regime authorities at the cost of preventing aid from reaching civilians unimpeded. Other impediments to humanitarian aid delivery included security risks to humanitarian workers, contamination of goods, and explosive hazards.

The report states that in 2019, nearly 2 million Syrian internally displaced people were recorded, 68% of whom were displaced within the same governorate, most of them in Idlib governorate. The report adds that the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, UNOCHA, recorded the voluntary return of about half a million IDPs, 77% of whom returned from the displacement areas to their original areas within the same governorate, with most of these returns recorded in Daraa governorate.



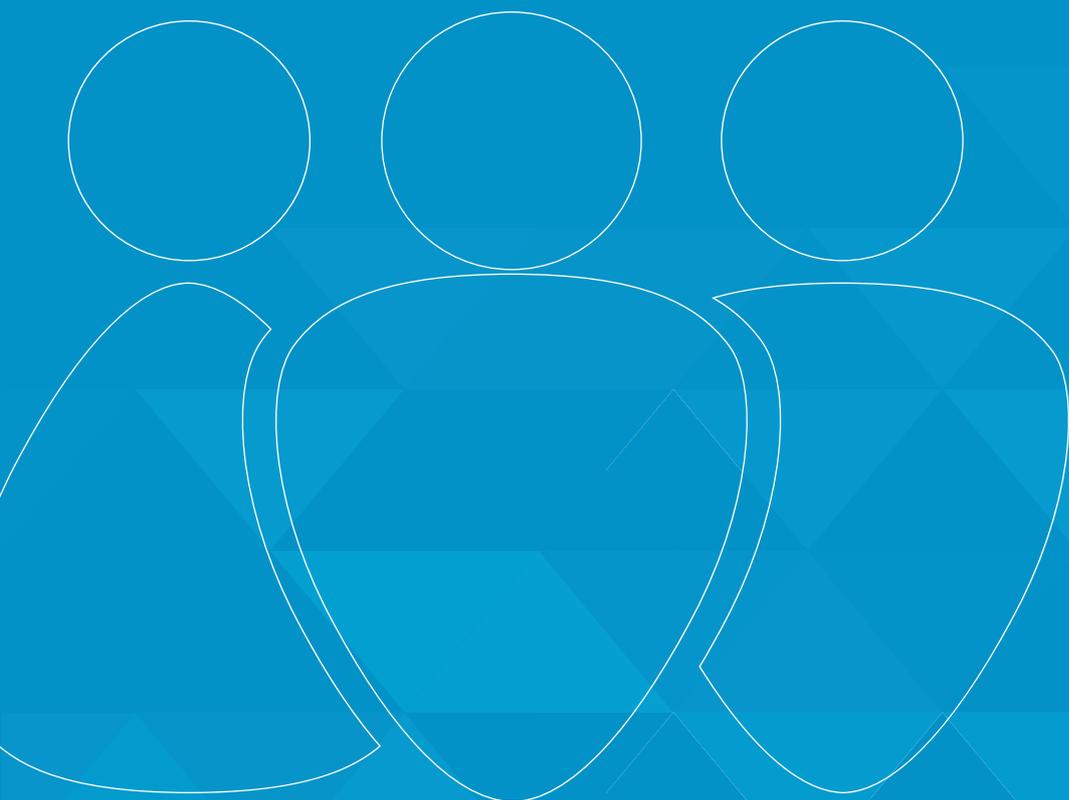
The Syrian Network for Human Rights stresses its willingness to contribute to all international reports on the human rights situation in Syria, and places its database and the extensive information it contains, compiled over the past nine years at the service of all who wish to show the truth of what is happening against the Syrian citizens and state, in the hope that this will provide a service in documenting the history and chronicling what has happened in Syria objectively, helping to thwart the vigorous attempts by the perpetrators of violations, the foremost of which are the Syrian regime, Russia and Iran, from establishing affiliated organizations which aim to change the narrative of events, and to deny or justify heinous violations. We also stress that we will make the greatest possible effort to document violations and incidents objectively and credibly to achieve the goal of protecting civilians in Syria, holding all perpetrators accountable, and helping to start the country along the path of positive change towards democracy, with our maxim being: “No Justice without Accountability”.

To read the full report by the European Asylum Support Office, please visit this [link](#)<sup>1</sup> :

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<sup>1</sup> Note: The report is only available in English.





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