



## Russia and China's Arbitrary Veto Use 16 Times Contributed to Killing Nearly a Quarter of a Million Syrians, the Arrest of Nearly 150,000 Others, and the Spread of Impunity

The Timeline of the 16 Vetoes Shows the  
Extent of the UNSC's Terrible Failure to  
Protect Civilians and Establish Peace and  
Security in Syria

Friday 17 July 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. Russia and China Are Grossly Arbitrary in Their Veto Use, Despite the Syrian Regime's Crimes against Humanity, Use of Weapons of Mass Destruction, and Withholding of UN Aid**

The Syrian regime has perpetrated many types of terrible violations since the early days of the popular uprising in March 2011. With the passage of time, many of these violations have escalated and increased, coming to constitute massive attacks against civilians and reaching the level of crimes against humanity. The widespread and systematic scale of those crimes which have also been detailed in reports by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Independent International Commission of Inquiry, as well as reports by other international and local organizations, prompted the Security Council to take decisions that should guarantee the achievement of security and stability; however, the Security Council's most serious and potentially effective draft resolutions in deterring the Syrian regime have been thwarted by Russia and China with the use of their veto power in defense of the Syrian regime. This assurance of impunity for the regime regardless of its crimes has contributed to an alarming increase in the extent of its atrocities, reaching lethal torture, the 'disappearance' of tens of thousands of citizens, the dropping barrel bombs, the use of Scud missiles, chemical weapons and other internationally outlawed weapons of mass destruction, the displacement of millions of Syrians, and other grotesque violations. This impunity also paved the way for the emergence of many other actors from different movements and backgrounds. Russia has used its UNSC veto in favor of the Syrian regime 16 times, including 10 occasions on which it voted jointly with China.

Since its inception, the Security Council has not undertaken any actual reform process to date that could contribute to, at a minimum, setting limits and standards for egregious cases in which no country should have the right to veto, involving crimes against humanity, war crimes, extermination, and the use of weapons of mass destruction. UN aid should be at the forefront of issues in such cases on which the right to use the veto in contravention of victims' rights should be withheld, since such action leads to a grave lack of confidence amongst victims and the wider public in the Security Council's credibility and trustworthiness; this harms the image and standing of the United Nations in general, making it clear that all resolutions issued by it are based solely on bargaining and reaching consensus based on the national interests of the five permanent member states whose unanimous approval is required for any resolution to be effective rather than on the wellbeing of the victims. This means that such resolutions are not issued, as they should be, based on the victims' needs or on international law, but on the self-interest of these five permanent UNSC members, and therefore that the Security Council, however inadvertently, has dictatorial characteristics which con-

tradict the principles of human rights and democracy, with its voting system allowing the creation of a state of paralysis and redundancy in the event that the interests of any permanent member are not met, which is what has happened in Syria. As a result, the Syrian people are left defenseless and abandoned to bear the full weight of one of the ugliest and most monstrous and devastating catastrophes in the modern age since World War Two, and since the establishment of the United Nations and the Security Council.

It should be emphasized that this paralysis and the shortcomings in the UNSC's operations are not only limited to its failure to adopt draft resolutions in favor of the victims, but also extend to resolutions issued by the Security Council in cases where the state against which the resolution in question was issued fails to comply, as seen with the Syrian regime which has consistently disregarded all of the resolutions issued by the Security Council, starting with Resolution 2042 and Resolution 2043 related to Kofi Annan's plan, continuing through Resolution No. 2139 to stop indiscriminate attacks, including barrel bombs, and end enforced disappearance, and following the same pattern with resolutions related to the prohibition of the use of chemical weapons, namely 2118, 2209, and 2235, all of which the Syrian regime has violated hundreds of times. Despite the regime's flagrant contempt for all UN resolutions, the Security Council has taken no action and has failed to protect peace and security in Syria, including the displacement of 13 million Syrian citizens to date, and the forcible 'disappearance' of more than 100,000.

Without a doubt, this failure to protect the rights of millions of victims and the complete impunity that the Syrian regime enjoys due to Russian and Chinese support have caused and bolstered the spread and promotion of terrorist and other extremist ideologies, for which oppression, injustice and instability are fuel, in Syria and internationally.

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

**"The time has come, more urgently than ever before, for a restructuring of the Security Council, and looking into its permanent membership system, under which the main criterion for membership must be the level of each member states' provision in the service of humanity, international law and the defense of human rights; until such time, it is necessary to reassess permanent members' use of veto, which must be strictly prohibited for use in any defense of the perpetrators of crimes against humanity and war crimes, in any denial of humanitarian aid, or in actions which contradict the main principles of international law. The law must be kept sacrosanct above veto power, with the common good of mankind placed before the private interests of any permanent member, and the states parties to the conflict must not vote to the resolutions related to this conflict."**

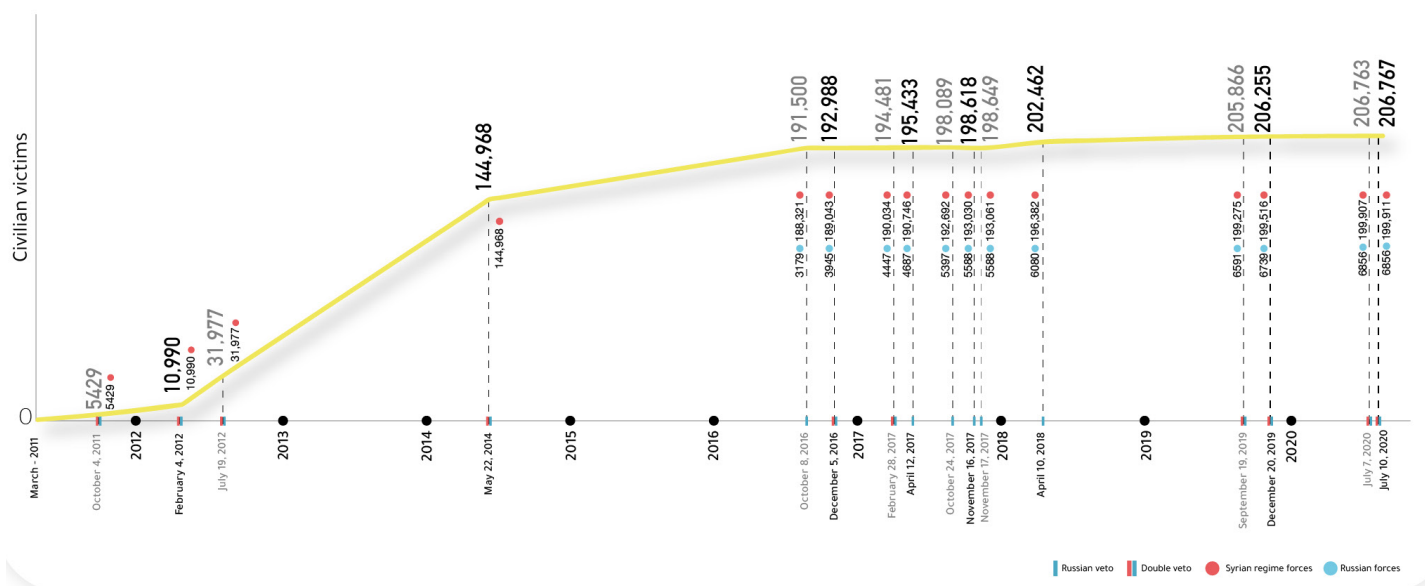
In this report, we aim to outline the timeline of Russia's and China's use of their veto power in favor of their ally the Syrian regime, and to link each use of this veto with the death toll of civilian victims

killed by the Syrian regime with the date of the veto, according to the database of the Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR), whose [methodology](#) can be read on our official website. We also attempt to show the scale of the escalation of the level of killing, in the context of Russia's and China's continuous assurance of full impunity for the Syrian regime from any form of punishment. We would like to emphasize that while various types of violations have escalated across the board, we have focused on the most significant violation.

## II. The Timeline of Sixteen Occasions on Which Russia and China Used Their Veto in Favor of the Syrian Regime Since the Outbreak of the Popular Uprising in March 2011 Until July 10, 2020

Russia, either alone or with China, has repeatedly used its veto against draft resolutions submitted by other countries, most of which condemned the practices of the Syrian regime that amount to crimes against humanity and war crimes; below, we outline all the draft resolutions according to their timeline with a brief analysis of their context and will link them primarily with the most notable violation, namely extrajudicial killing. They can also be linked to a far greater number and range of violations committed by the Syrian regime after it felt assured that it enjoyed absolute impunity through the protection of two permanent members of the UN Security Council.

Cumulative chart showing the civilian death toll of those killed by Syrian-Russian alliance forces in Syria, and the reality of the veto use by Russia and China in the UN Security Council from March 2011 to July 10, 2020:





### **The first veto on October 4, 2011:**

On September 15, 2011, the High Commissioner for Human Rights issued an [extensive report](#) in which it discussed violations committed by the Syrian regime, many of which amount to crimes against humanity, and demanded in its first recommendation that the international community step in by taking protective action in a collective, timely and decisive manner in the event of a state manifestly failing to protect its population from serious international crimes. It also called on the UN Human Rights Council to urge the Security Council to address the issue of the killing of peaceful protesters, and other grave human rights violations, to call for an immediate cessation of attacks against the civilian population, and to consider referring the situation in the Syrian Arab Republic to the International Criminal Court.

Nearly two weeks later, a session of the Security Council was held on October 4, 2011, during which France, Germany, Portugal and UK submitted Draft Resolution No. [S/2011/612](#), with the death toll of the civilian victims killed by Syrian Regime forces between March 2011 and October 4, 2011, reaching at least 5,429, including 672 children and 323 women, according to the SNHR's database.

This draft resolution called for imposing sanctions on the Syrian regime and condemned the violations committed by its government forces. The draft resolution was endorsed by nine countries, while Lebanon, Brazil, South Africa and India abstained from voting, and Russia and China vetoed and aborted the draft resolution.

This veto pitted the Security Council directly against the law; more precisely, through this veto the Security Council hampered the implementation of international law, including the duty to protect civilians from grave crimes. Matters did not end there, however, but rather escalated, with this protection for the Syrian regime opening the door for it to perpetrate further and more outrageous atrocities and to expand to other types of violations, as it felt completely shielded from any adverse consequences. With this green light from the UNSC for crimes against humanity, the Syrian regime went to perpetrate the most brutal atrocities yet seen in the modern age.

### **The second veto on February 4, 2012:**

With the Syrian regime extending the number and range of its violations, the [first report](#) of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic was issued on November 23, 2011, in which the commission condemned these violations and labeled many of them as crimes against humanity. Other reports were also issued by international human rights organizations including [Human Rights Watch](#) and [Amnesty International](#), as well as by local human rights organizations. Based on all of this, nearly four months after the first veto, the Security Council met again on February 4, 2012 - that is, nearly a year after the popular uprising began - with Morocco, Egypt, Jordan, Libya, Tunisia, Turkey, the United States of America, Portugal, Togo, France, Germany, Colombia, and the states of the Gulf Cooperation Council submitting Draft Resolution No. [\(S/2012/77\)](#), in which they condemned the Syrian regime's continuing systematic and grave violations of human rights, and its use of force against civilians, and called on the Syrian authorities

to fully cooperate with the Arab League's observer mission, which began its duties in November 2011. Once again, Russia and China used their veto power, for the second time, to abort the draft resolution.

Thereafter, the death toll of civilian victims killed by Syrian Regime forces increased; between March 2011 and February 4, 2012, it reached at least 10,990 civilians, including 905 children and 488 women, according to the SNHR's database.

### **The third veto on July 19, 2012:**

After Russia's second use of its veto in February 2012, and the resulting abortion of a draft resolution that was unanimously agreed upon by Arab and European countries and the USA, on February 23, 2012, the United Nations appointed Mr. Kofi Annan as a Joint UN-Arab League Special Envoy with the aim of bringing an end to all violence in Syria and promoting a peaceful political solution. On March 27, 2012, Mr. Annan submitted a six-point plan, whose most prominent demands were for the immediate cessation of hostilities, the release of detainees, and assurances that humanitarian assistance would be provided to all areas affected by the fighting.

The SNHR's team [documented the violations](#) committed by the parties to the conflict following the approval of the six-point plan in April, May and June 2012 through daily reports; this plan subsequently proved to be a complete failure since the Syrian regime continued to commit crimes amounting to crimes against humanity and war crimes without any accountability or deterrence.

As a result of this ongoing failure to protect civilians and the complete failure to implement a cease-fire and reach a political solution, Germany, Portugal, France, UK, and the United States of America submitted Draft Resolution No. [S/2012/538](#), on July 19, 2012, condemning the Syrian regime's use of heavy weapons and indiscriminate shelling of population centers, determining that the scale of violations committed in Syria constitutes a threat to international peace and security, with the draft resolution therefore calling on the Security Council to act under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations.

The draft resolution stipulated the necessity for the Syrian authorities to pursue urgent, comprehensive, and immediate implementation of all elements of the UN envoy's six-point proposal, leading to the establishment of a democratic, pluralist political system, indicating that all those responsible for human rights violations and abuses must be held accountable. The draft resolution also called on the Syrian regime to fully implement all the obligations stipulated in resolutions [2042 \(2012\)](#) and [2043 \(2012\)](#), which include ending the movement of forces toward population centers, stopping the use of heavy weapons and withdrawing military bodies in and around population centers, as well as withdrawing their forces and heavy weapons from population centers and ensuring that they returned to their barracks. The draft resolution also affirmed that in the event of non-compliance with these points within ten days, the UN Security Council should impose these measures under [Article 41](#) of the Charter of the United Nations.

Eleven countries supported the draft resolution, while Pakistan and South Africa abstained from voting, and Russia and China used their veto for the third time, again aborting any attempt to deter the Syrian regime from military escalation and from perpetrating multiple violations against the Syrian people in a widespread manner.

The death toll of civilian victims killed by Syrian Regime forces again increased, reaching, between March 2011 and July 19, 2012, at least 31,977 civilians, including 3,148 children and 1,950 women, according to the SNHR's database.

#### **The fourth veto on May 22, 2014:**

After more than three years, during which the Syrian regime committed thousands of violations, many of which constitute crimes against humanity and war crimes, with these falling within the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court (ICC), and since the Syrian state has not ratified the ICC Charter (it is impossible for a dictatorial ruling regime, such as the Assad family's, to ratify the ICC Charter), there had to be a referral from the UN Security Council, in order for the court to have a mandate to consider crimes committed in Syria; this, in SNHR's opinion, is one of the most prominent and damaging aspects of the imbalance in the work of the International Criminal Court, which shows the extent of the UN Security Council's expansion and dominance over various legal and humanitarian aspects.

Consequently, on May 22, 2014, France submitted Draft Resolution No. [S/2014/348](#), calling for the Syrian issue to be referred to the International Criminal Court. The draft resolution won the support of 13 countries, but Russia and China again used their veto for the fourth time to prevent the passing of the draft resolution, which provided for holding all perpetrators of violations accountable rather than being dedicated to holding the Syrian regime solely responsible.

This veto embodied the extent of the Security Council's failure by veto to ensure any accountability, or independent, impartial and objective prosecution by the International Criminal Court, constituting an affront to the International Criminal Court, undermining its powers, and contributing to encouraging all parties to the conflict, foremost among them the Syrian regime, to commit more crimes against humanity and war crimes.

As on previous occasions, following this veto the death toll of civilian victims killed by Syrian Regime forces once again increased, with the number documented killed between March 2011 and May 22, 2014 totaling least 144,968 civilians, including 12,826 children and 8,291 women, according to the SNHR's database.

#### **The fifth veto on October 8, 2016:**

In early September 2016, Syrian Regime forces imposed a horrendous complete siege on the eastern neighborhoods of Aleppo, after which, in coordination with the Russian Air Force, they escalated their ferocious, indiscriminate shelling, which was accompanied by ground advance operations by the Syrian regime military supported by affiliated Shiite militias.



The deteriorating situation in Aleppo and the grave violations of human rights pushed France and Spain to submit Draft Resolution No. [S/2016/846](#), which called on all parties to end to all air strikes and military overflights of Aleppo city, and to implement a complete and immediate cessation of attacks on residential neighborhoods, as well as to deliver humanitarian aid to the population; the draft resolution was supported by 11 countries, with China and Venezuela abstaining from voting, while Russia used its veto to block the passage of the draft resolution.

The failure of the Security Council to bring about a ceasefire due to this latest Russian veto, and the lack of any action by the General Assembly and the international community all allowed the Russian and Syrian regime forces to continue their bombardment of Aleppo city with airstrikes targeting civilian neighborhoods and deliberately bombing hospitals, bakeries, schools, places of worship, with [even IDP convoys](#) not being spared from these military operations.

As with the previous vetoes, the death toll of civilian victims killed by Syrian Regime forces subsequently increased again, with the total number documented killed between March 2011 and October 8, 2016 totaling at least 191,500 civilians, including 21,771 children and 10,807 women, according to the SNHR's database, distributed as follows:

Syrian Regime forces: 188,321 civilians, including 20,691 children and 10,386 women.

Russian forces: 3,179 civilians, including 1,152 children and 421 women.

#### **The sixth veto on December 5, 2016:**

By the beginning of December 2016, Syrian Regime forces, backed by the Russian Air Force, had taken control of 95% of the eastern neighborhoods of Aleppo, resulting in the displacement of tens of thousands of residents, with some of them heading towards the areas controlled by the Syrian regime and others towards areas controlled by the Kurdish-majority Syrian Democratic Forces, while at least 50,000 people remained trapped in the neighborhoods of al Zebdiyeh, al Mash-had and al Sukkari.

At this point, New Zealand, Egypt, and Spain submitted Draft Resolution No. [S/2016/1026](#), which called for ceasing attacks between all parties in Aleppo city, establishing a 7-day, potentially renewable truce, and allowing the passage of humanitarian aid for those trapped in the eastern neighborhoods of Aleppo city. The draft resolution was supported by 11 countries, with Russia and China using their veto for the sixth time to abort any resolution that could stop the massacre of the people of Aleppo city.

We in the SNHR confirm that the military attacks against civilians in Aleppo city did not end until December 13, 2016, following a Russian-Turkish agreement to cease fire in the neighborhoods of Aleppo, and to start the process of evacuating civilians, injured persons and armed personnel to the western suburbs of Aleppo.

Between the first and the second vetoes related to Aleppo city, the SNHR documented the deaths of at least 254 civilians in Aleppo city alone, including 59 children and 35 women, at the hands of Syrian-Russian alliance forces, with 55 of those casualties killed by Syrian regime forces, including 15 children and six women, while 199 other were killed by Russian forces, including 44 children and 29 women. Meanwhile, the total death toll of civilians killed by the Syrian and Russian regimes between March 2011 and December 5, 2016, reached at least 192,988 civilians, including 22,039 children and 10,958 women, according to the SNHR's database, distributed as follows:

Syrian Regime forces: 189,043 civilians, including 20,798 children and 10,480 women.

Russian forces: 3,945 civilians, including 1,241 children and 478 women.

### **The seventh veto on February 28, 2017:**

By the time of the issuance of Resolution No. 2235 in August 2015, the UN Security Council had established the Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM) of the United Nations and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), the mandate of which provides for the identification of those responsible for chemical weapons attacks in Syria. This body had issued five reports as of February 28, 2017, with the third and fourth reports conclusively proving the responsibility of the Syrian regime for three chemical attacks, in Talmennes (April 21, 2014), Sarmin (March 16, 2015), Qmainas (March 16, 2015) respectively, as well as ISIS's responsibility for one attack in Marea on August 21, 2014.

On February 28, 2017, France and UK submitted Draft Resolution No. [S/2017/172](#) under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations, which stipulated that individuals responsible for the use of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic should be thoroughly investigated, and prosecuted as appropriate before a competent tribunal which is both independent and impartial, and called for all parties in Syria to cease any use of toxic chemicals as weapons immediately and permanently; the draft resolution included an annex containing 21 names of individuals and entities allegedly responsible for, engaged in or otherwise involved in the use, transfer, acquisition, proliferation, development, manufacture or production of chemical weapons. The draft resolution also called for the freezing of these individuals' assets and property.

Nine countries supported the draft resolution, with Kazakhstan, Ethiopia, and Egypt abstaining, while Russia and China once again vetoed and blocked the passage of the draft resolution.

The death toll of civilian victims killed by Syrian Regime forces again increased, with the total number documented killed between March 2011 and February 28, 2017, reaching at least 194,481 civilians, including 22,219 children and 11,116 women, according to the SNHR's database, distributed as follows:

Syrian Regime forces: 190,034 civilians, including 20,918 children and 10,575 women.

Russian forces: 4,447 civilians, including 1,301 children and 541 women.

### **The eighth veto on April 12, 2017:**

After the [Khan Sheikhoun chemical attack](#) carried out by the Syrian regime on April 4, 2017, which killed at least 91 civilians by suffocation, including 32 children and 23 women (adult female), France, the UK, and the United States of America submitted Draft Resolution No. [S/2017/315](#) under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations, which condemned the Khan Sheikhoun chemical attack and called on the Joint Investigative Mechanism to expeditiously investigate the attack, as well as calling on the Syrian government to provide the JIM with a range of information regarding the Khan Sheikhoun attack, including data such as flights logs and names of all individuals in command of any aircraft, and to provide access to the relevant air bases, from which the Joint Investigation Mechanism or the Fact-Finding Mission believe attacks involving chemicals as weapons may have been launched.

The draft resolution was supported by 11 countries, with China, Ethiopia and Kazakhstan abstaining from voting, while Russia used its veto for the eighth time, justifying this by claiming that the text had pre-determined that the Syrian government was responsible for the chemical attack in Khan Sheikhoun.

The death toll of civilian victims killed by Syrian-Russian alliance forces increased, with the total number documented killed between March 2011 and April 12, 2017, reaching at least 195,433 civilians, including 22,461 children and 11,269 women, according to the SNHR's database, distributed as follows:

Syrian Regime forces: 190,746 civilians, including 21,082 children and 10,680 women.

Russian forces: 4,687 civilians, including 1,379 children and 589 women.

### **The ninth veto on October 24, 2017:**

On October 24, 2017, the United States of America submitted Draft Resolution No. [S/2017/884](#) aiming to extend the work of the Joint Investigative Mechanism established by UN Security Council Resolution No. [2235](#) in August 2015 for a year, whose mandate was set to expire in November 2017.

Eleven countries voted in favor of the draft resolution, with China abstaining from voting, while Russia again used its veto, for the ninth time, and thwarted the task of extending the JIM's work; In an effort to justify this veto, Russia claimed that it wanted to see the JIM's seventh report which dealt with the Khan Sheikhoun chemical attack, which was expected to be issued on October 26, 2017. The death toll of civilian victims killed by Syrian-Russian alliance forces again increased, with the total documented killed between March 2011 and October 24, 2017, reaching at least 198,089 civilians, including 23,091 children and 11,650 women, according to the SNHR's database, distributed as follows:

Syrian Regime forces: 192,692 civilians, including 21,511 children and 10,936 women.

Russian forces: 5,397 civilians, including 1,580 children and 714 women.

### **The tenth veto on November 16, 2017:**

The Joint Investigation Mechanism issued [its own report on Khan Sheikhoun](#) in which it demonstrated the responsibility of the Syrian regime for the attack; this prompted the United States of America to submit Draft Resolution No. [S/2017/962](#) on November 16, 2017, in which it called on the UN Security Council to extend the work of the Joint Investigation Mechanism for an additional year.

Eleven countries supported the draft resolution, with China and Egypt abstaining, while Russia and Bolivia opposed it. Thus, Russia used its veto for the tenth time, with many remarking on the Egyptian government's choice to abstain from voting.

The death toll of civilian victims killed by Syrian-Russian alliance forces again increased, with the number killed between March 2011 and November 16, 2017, reaching at least 198,618 civilians, including 23,225 children and 11,758 women, according to the SNHR's database, distributed as follows:

Syrian Regime forces: 193,030 civilians, including 21,590 children and 11,015 women.

Russian forces: 5,588 civilians, including 1,635 children and 743 women.

### **The 11th veto on November 17, 2017:**

Less than 24 hours later, Russia used its second veto in under a day to abort Draft Resolution No. [\(S/2017/970\)](#), which was submitted by the State of Japan and called for the extension of the work of the Joint Investigative Mechanism for one month only.

Twelve countries supported this draft resolution, with both Russia and Bolivia opposing it. In doing so, Russia terminated the work of an international body tasked with identifying those parties responsible for the use of chemical weapons.

The death toll of civilian victims killed by Syrian-Russian alliance forces again increased, with the total number killed between March 2011 and November 17, 2017, reaching at least 198,649 civilians, including 23,235 children and 11,759 women, according to the SNHR's database, distributed as follows:

Syrian Regime forces: 193,061 civilians, including 21,600 children and 11,016 women.

Russian forces: 5,588 civilians, including 1,635 children and 743 women.

### **The 12th veto on April 10, 2018:**

The Syrian regime carried out [the chemical attack on Douma city](#) on April 7, 2018, which killed at least 39 civilians by suffocation, including 10 children and 15 women (adult female). With Russia having ended the work of the Joint Investigative Mechanism in November 2017, there was at this stage no credible international body capable of officially identifying those responsible for chemical attacks in Syria, which prompted the United States of America to submit Draft Resolution No.

[S/2018/321](#), in which it condemned the use of chemical weapons by the Syrian regime in Douma city, calling for the establishment of a body to be known as the United Nations Independent Mechanism of Investigation (UNIM), for a period of one year with a possibility of further extension.

Twelve of the 15 UNSC countries supported the US draft resolution, while Bolivia again joined Russia in opposing it, with Russia again using its veto to vote against the draft resolution, and China abstaining.

The death toll of civilian victims killed by Syrian-Russian alliance forces increased, with the number documented killed between March 2011 and April 10, 2018, increasing to at least 202,462 civilians, including 24,070 children and 12,360 women, according to the SNHR's database, distributed as follows:

Syrian Regime forces: 196,382 civilians, including 22,254 children and 11,520 women.

Russian forces: 6,080 civilians, including 1,816 children and 840 women.

#### **The 13th veto on September 19, 2019:**

After the Syrian regime tightened its control over most of the areas that were formerly controlled by factions of the Armed Opposition, it focused its military operations on and around the Idlib region, the last of the de-escalation zones which were agreed upon in May 2017.

On September 19, 2019, Germany, Belgium and Kuwait submitted Draft Resolution No. [S/2019/756](#) calling for an immediate cessation of hostilities in the Idlib region.

Twelve countries supported this draft resolution, while Russia and China used a double veto to prevent its passage, thus allowing Russian aircraft to continue bombing civilians in Idlib in partnership with Syrian Regime forces.

The death toll of civilian victims killed by Syrian-Russian alliance forces again increased, with the total number documented killed between March 2011 and September 19, 2019, totaling at least 205,866 civilians, including 24,687 children and 12,779 women, according to the SNHR's database, distributed as follows:

Syrian Regime forces: 199,275 civilians, including 22,742 children and 11,861 women.

Russian forces: 6,591 civilians, including 1,945 children and 918 women.

#### **The 14th veto on December 20, 2019:**

Prior to July 2014, all UN aid was first taken to the Syrian regime in Damascus, before being distributed to the areas under its control and to the areas outside its control. After dozens of reports demonstrated the Syrian regime's large-scale involvement in looting the vast majority of aid, deliberately delaying the aid convoys, and directing the majority of this stolen aid to regime-loyalist areas, the Security Council passed Resolution No. 2165, which allowed the United Nations to deliver cross-border aid without the Syrian regime's permission. Although this resolution was extended on five consecutive occasions, on December 20, 2019, when the time came for the annual renewal of



the UN humanitarian aid delivery's resolution, Belgium, Germany and Kuwait submitted a [draft resolution](#) calling for extending work to deliver UN cross-border aid for an initial period of six months, to be followed by an additional six months. Although the draft resolution stated that it would include all crossings except for al Ramtha border crossing, Russia and China used their vetoes against this draft resolution.

This formed a frightening precedent in international law, allowing a veto to be used in opposition to the delivery of neutral UN humanitarian aid meant for forcibly displaced persons already left destitute by Russia and the Syrian regime through the bombing and destruction of their homes. Given all these factors and since such veto action means that, if this aid is instead redirected for distribution through the Syrian regime, less than 15% of the total would reach those who need deserve it, the SNHR [called for](#) restraining the UN Security Council from influencing the issue of delivering UN aid, and asserted that such aid should be delivered even if the state in question arbitrarily refuses or in any case where the Security Council does not agree to it.

As a result of these latest vetoes, the death toll of civilian victims killed by Syrian-Russian alliance forces again increased, with the total number documented killed between March 2011 and December 20, 2019, reaching at least 206,255 civilians, including 24,768 children and 12,828 women, according to the SNHR's database, distributed as follows:

Syrian Regime forces: 199,516 civilians, including 22,789 children and 11,889 women.

Russian forces: 6,739 civilians, including 1,979 children and 939 women.

### **The 15th veto on July 7, 2020:**

On July 7, 2020, Belgium and Germany submitted [a draft resolution](#) providing for cross-border aid delivery for a full year, excluding al Ramtha and al Ya'rubiya border crossings. Although this draft resolution was an extension of Resolution No. [2504](#), which Russia and China had allowed to pass on January 10, 2020, with its work lasting for six months, Russia and China once again resorted to their veto power on this occasion, aborting the draft resolution.

The death toll of civilian victims killed by Syrian-Russian alliance forces again increased, with the total number documented killed between March 2011 and July 7, 2020, reaching at least 206,763 civilians, including 24,865 children and 11,884 women, according to the SNHR's database, distributed as follows:

Syrian Regime forces: 199,907 civilians, including 22,860 children and 11,915 women.

Russian forces: 6,856 civilians, including 2,005 children and 969 women.

### **The 16th Veto on July 10, 2020:**

On July 10, 2020, Germany and Belgium returned, submitting [a draft resolution](#) on extending the mechanism for delivering cross-border humanitarian aid for a period of six months through Bab al Salam and Bab al Hawa crossings on the Turkish-Syrian border. The draft resolution met with a dual Chinese-Russian [veto](#), while 13 countries approved it.

The death toll of civilian victims killed by Syrian-Russian alliance forces again increased, with the total number documented killed between March 2011 and July 10, 2020, reaching at least 206,767 civilians, including 24,866 children and 12,884 women, according to the SNHR's database, distributed as follows:

Syrian Regime forces: 199,911 civilians, including 22,861 children and 11,915 women.

Russian forces: 6,856 civilians, including 2,005 children and 969 women.

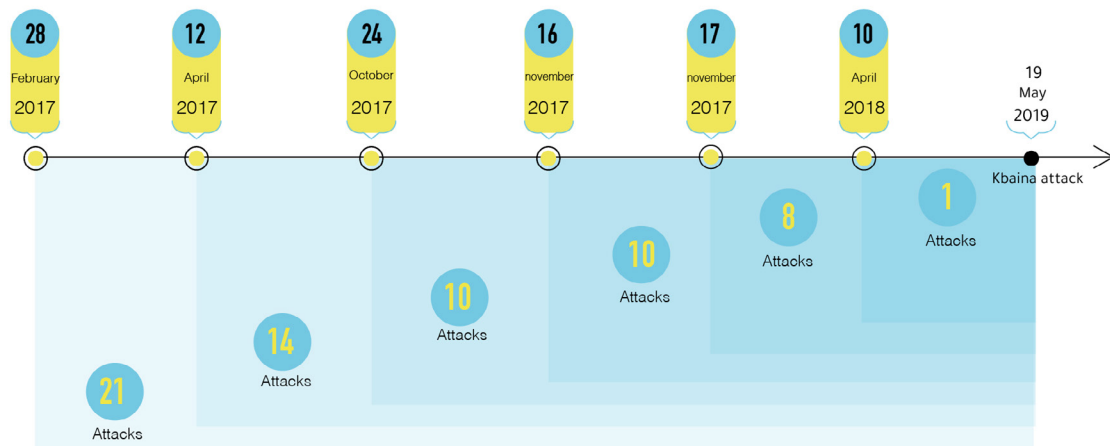
## **III. Russia and China Have Used Their Veto Six Times to Protect the Syrian Regime in Its Repeated Use of Chemical Weapons:**

Of the 16 arbitrary use of the veto by Russia and China in favor of the Syrian regime, we at SNHR believe that the most egregious use was in order to protect the Syrian regime over the issue of its use of chemical weapons, which was conclusive evidence of both superpowers' support for the Syrian regime's use of weapons of mass destruction. In addition to the alarming ramifications of this in Syria, this means, in practice, a far wider and complete undermining of the mission for which the Security Council claims to have been established, which is to protect international peace and security. We do not believe that there is any risk equivalent to the use of weapons of mass destruction; instead of the Security Council assuming a leadership role in deterring the use of these heinous weapons and holding the Syrian regime to account, however, we find that it failed completely to impose any decisive punishment or even penalties that might dissuade the regime from further use of these internationally outlawed weapons, including the imposition of economic or military sanctions. Indeed, China's and Russia's frequent use of their veto power has encouraged the Syrian regime to use chemical weapons repeatedly. All of these issues and their potential effects far beyond Syria should lead all the world's nations to seriously rethink the role of the Security Council and to prioritize its essential restructuring for the good of humankind after having completely failed on a grave and major subject of global concern such as the issue of weapons of mass destruction.

The following is a breakdown of the Syrian regime's use of chemical weapons according to the SNHR's database, chronologically listed from the first veto protecting and enabling the Syrian regime in the issue of the use of chemical weapons on February 28, 2017, up until the last [attack on al Kbai-na village in Latakia suburbs](#) on May 19, 2019. The total number of documented cases in which the Syrian regime used chemical weapons after the first veto until the last chemical attack reached 21 cases, is distributed as follows:

- Since the first veto - February 28, 2017, until al Kbaina attack: 21
- Since the second veto - April 12, 2017, until al Kbaina attack: 14
- Since the third veto - October 24, 2017, until al Kbaina attack: 10
- Since the fourth veto - November 16, 2017, until al Kbaina attack: 10
- Since the fifth veto - November 17, 2017, until al Kbaina attack: Eight.
- Since the sixth veto - April 10, 2018, until al Kbaina attack: One.

Timeline showing the distribution of 21 chemical weapons attacks carried out by the Syrian regime amid six Russian vetoes against UN draft resolutions regarding CW use in Syria:



## IV. The Veto Has Been Used Three Times to Prevent the Delivery of UN Aid Provided for More Than Four Million IDPs

Since 2011, the Syrian regime has repeatedly used a deliberate starvation policy to besiege areas outside its control. Throughout the past nine years, we have witnessed the most horrific cases in modern history of the Syrian regime deliberately and blatantly preventing the entry of humanitarian aid into the areas of Syria besieged by its forces, violating customary international humanitarian law, with the regime using a starvation strategy that amounts to a form of collective punishment; we have documented these sieges since 2011 in an [extensive series of reports](#).

In July 2014, the Security Council passed Resolution [No. 2165](#), which allows the United Nations to deliver cross-border aid without the permission of the Syrian regime. This resolution has been extended on five consecutive occasions through the following Security Council resolutions: [\(2191\) of 2014](#), [\(2258\) of 2015](#), [\(2332\) of 2016](#), [\(2393\) of 2017](#), [\(2449\) of 2018](#).

When the time came in December 2019 for the resolution's annual renewal, Russia and China opposed this, as noted above, by using their veto powers against the extension of the draft resolution submitted by Germany, Kuwait and Belgium, which called for extending the resolution for a period of six months, followed by an additional six months. Although the draft resolution stated that it would include all crossings except for al Ramtha border crossing, Russia and China refused to extend it.

On January 10, 2020, another draft resolution, [No. 2504](#), which included additional amendments in favor of Russia, was submitted, with the extension being limited to six months, excluding al Ramtha and al Ya'rubiya border crossings, at which time Russia and China abstained and the aid delivery was extended until July 10, 2020.

On July 7, 2020, the resolution of delivering humanitarian aid again returned to the corridors of the UN Security Council, with different countries presenting various draft resolutions. Germany and Belgium submitted a draft resolution extending the implementation of Resolution No. 2504 for a full year. This draft resolution was met by another Russian-Chinese veto; on July 10, both Germany and Belgium again submitted a similar draft resolution, for only six months, with Russia and China again returning to vetoing for the third time.

Meanwhile, Russia has submitted two draft resolutions, [the first on July 9, 2020](#), calling for the delivery of humanitarian aid through one crossing rather than two, namely the Bab al Hawa crossing, for a period of only six months. This was not adopted due to insufficient votes. [On July 10](#), Russia submitted a draft resolution, in which it called for the delivery of humanitarian aid through the Bab al Hawa crossing for a period of 12 months, with the draft resolution calling on the Secretary-General to provide a report by the end of August on the “direct and indirect impact of unilateral coercive measures imposed on Syria on its socio-economic situation and humanitarian deliveries from outside Syria”. The draft resolution was suspended after seven members, including three permanent members, objected.

The Security Council has subjected the process of delivering cross-border aid to its hegemony, but this assistance is humanitarian, neutral, and provided by the OCHA, and is not considered interference in the conflict, being provided to people who have been forcibly displaced, with widespread forced displacement being classified as a crime against humanity. There is no question that the Syrian regime will, as usual, steal nearly 85% of all aid provided. The process of delivering aid must return to being decided by a resolution taken by the majority of UN member states through the General Assembly, and should not at all be subject to any Security Council resolution that grotesquely and unacceptably politicizes humanitarian aid. The Security Council has failed abjectly and completely to achieve security, wellbeing or safety for more than four million displaced people, with Russia, through its repeated use of its veto power, being the major culprit, according to [the latest International Commission of Inquiry report](#) issued on July 7, in committing massive displacement that constitutes a crime against humanity.

## V. The Most Notable Human Rights Implications of the Repeated Arbitrary Use of the Veto

For nine years to date, the Syrian regime has committed heinous crimes and violations against Syrian civilians on a daily basis. It has also consistently failed to comply with any of the demands of the International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, or those of the High Commission for Human Rights, or even Security Council resolutions. The Security Council, which is supposed to take collective measures and action under Article 41 and 42 of the Charter of the United Nations, has also failed because of the immunity granted by Russia to the Syrian regime, with Russia routinely using its veto to protect the Syrian regime, which has not only failed to abide by its responsibility to protect civilians, but has committed and continues to commit the most egregious violations against them, reaching the level of crimes against humanity.

In a report issued in December 2001, the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty stressed that: “The Security Council should take into account in all its deliberations that, if it fails to discharge its responsibility to protect in conscience-shocking situations crying out for action, concerned states may not rule out other means to meet the gravity and urgency of that situation.”



Such conscience-shocking situations are exactly what have continued to happen routinely in Syria, not only in the form of one massacre or one violation but in constant, industrial-scale killings and torture, sexual violence, enforced disappearances, the use of chemical weapons and barrel bombs, and sieges against civilians. The list of crimes against humanity perpetrated by the Syrian regime and its allies is long, exhaustive and ongoing. The Security Council has signally failed to assume its responsibilities in the Syrian case, despite the Syrian Network for Human Rights, international organizations and UN commissions of inquiry crying out for action by the Security Council many thousands of times. In this context, the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty also affirmed in the aforementioned report: “it would be impossible to find consensus, in the Commission’s view, around any set of proposals for military intervention which acknowledged the validity of any intervention not authorized by the Security Council or General Assembly. But that may still leave circumstances when the Security Council fails to discharge what this Commission would regard as its responsibility to protect, in a conscience-shocking situation crying out for action. It is a real question in these circumstances where lies the most harm: **in the damage to international order if the Security Council is bypassed or in the damage to that order if human beings are slaughtered while the Security Council stands by.**”

The failure of the UN Security Council has caused the prolonging of the conflict, as well as enabling the emergence of extremist forces, movements and armed factions with diverse religious and ethnic goals, with the Syrian state having been torn apart and more than half of the Syrian people displaced as a result. It was initially and, it appears, wrongly, believed that the Security Council, including Russia and China, would do their duty in playing a vital role in bringing security and peace to Syria, and would impose pressure on the Syrian regime to accept a political transition process since the first weeks of the popular uprising. The following are the most prominent losses suffered by the Syrian people as a result:

Chart showing the distribution of the death toll of civilian victims killed at the hands of the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in Syria from March 2011 to July 2020

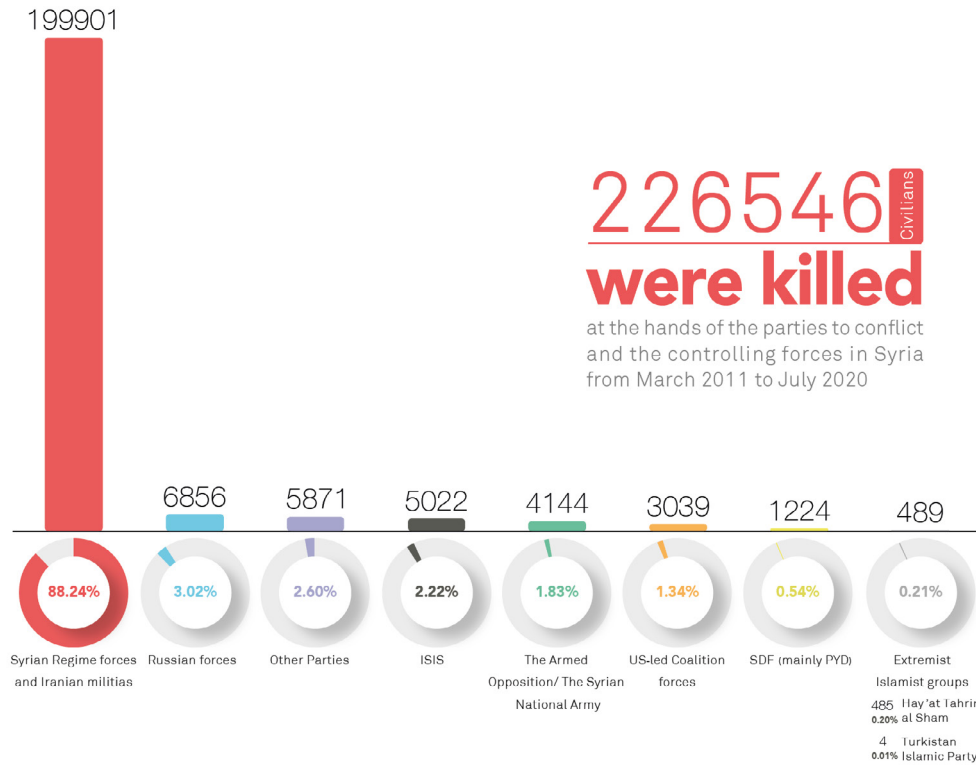


Chart showing the distribution of the death toll of children killed at the hands of the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in Syria from March 2011 to July 2020

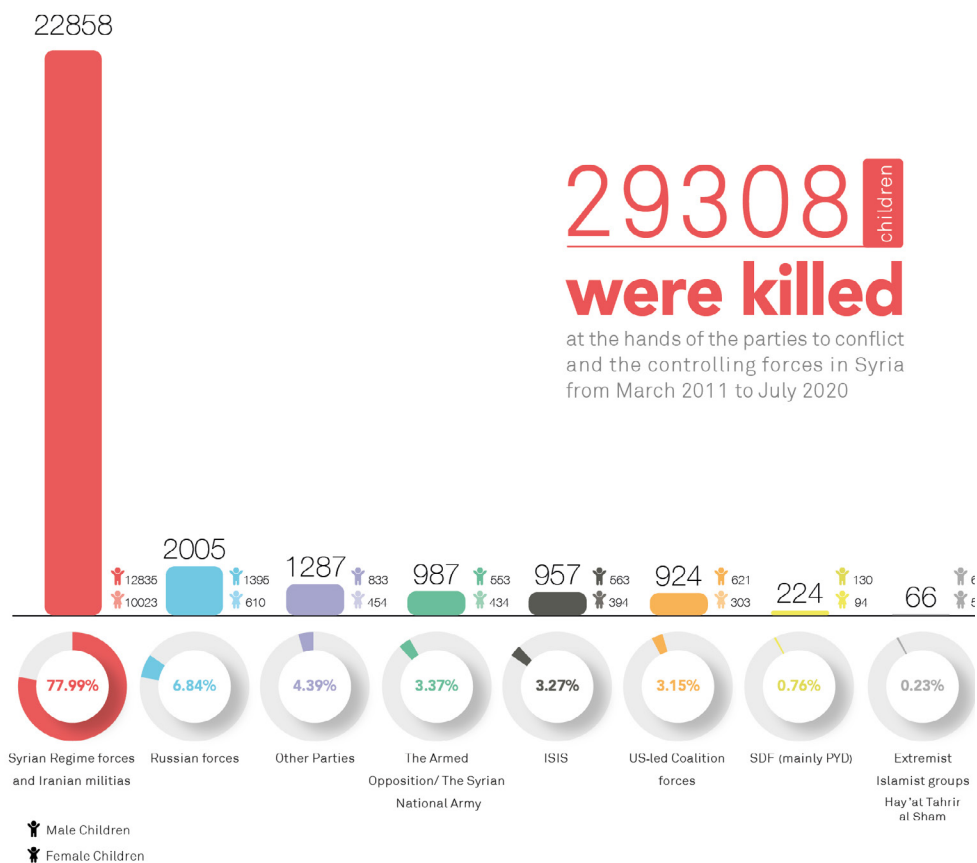


Chart showing the distribution of the death toll of females killed at the hands of the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in Syria from March 2011 to July 2020

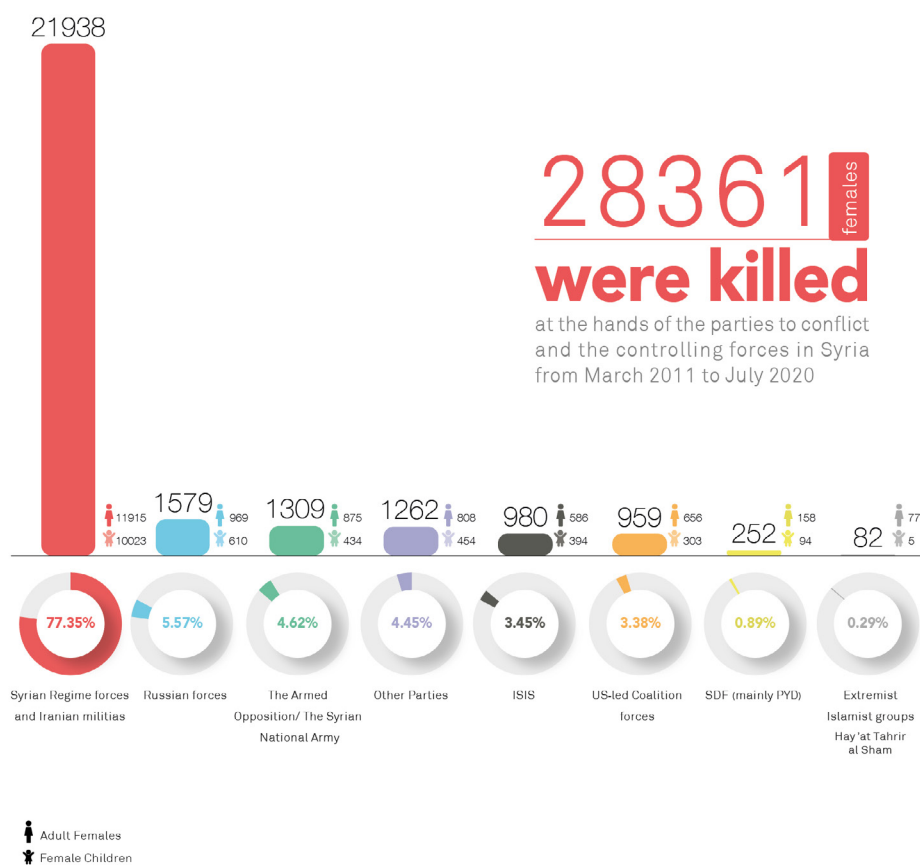


Chart showing that at least 148,034 individuals are still detained or forcibly disappeared at the hands of the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in Syria from March 2011 to July 2020

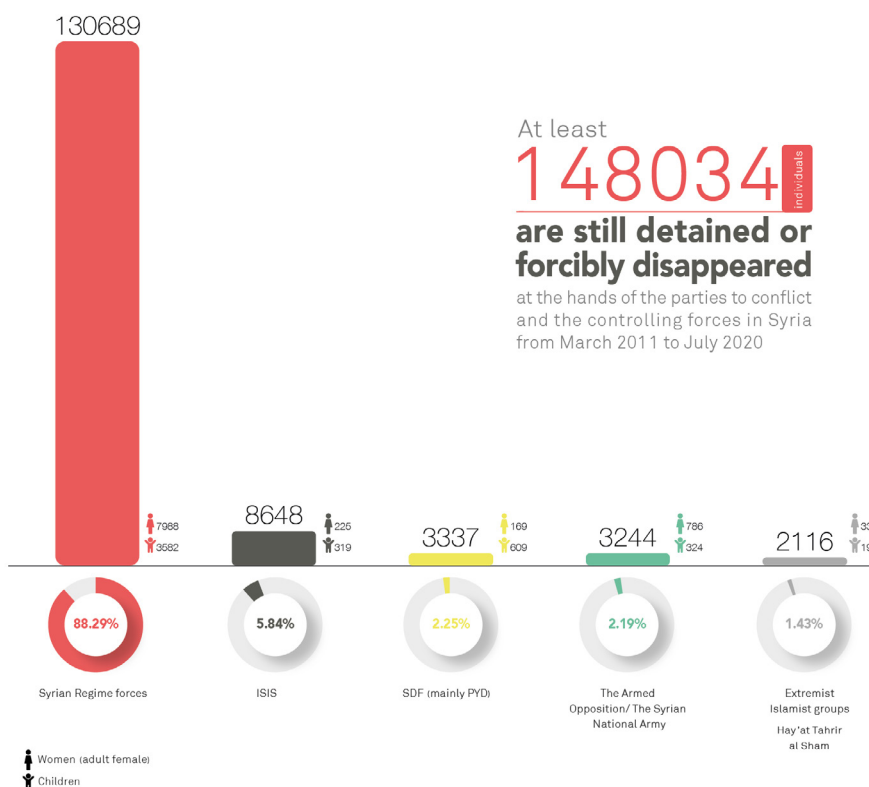
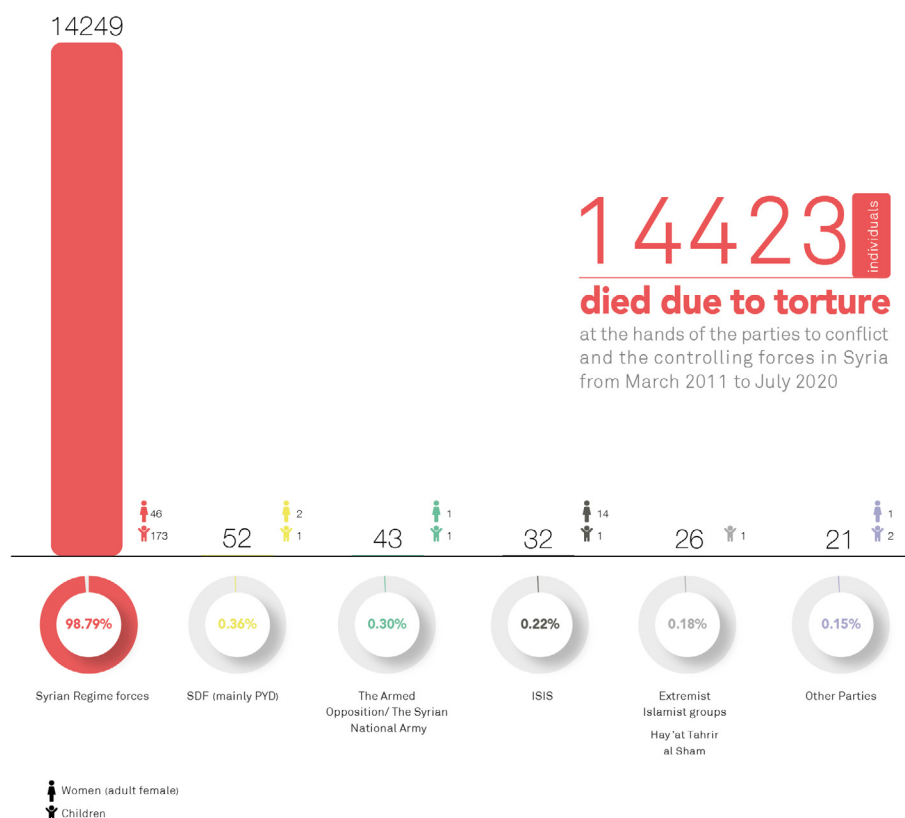


Chart showing the distribution the death toll of victims who died due to torture at the hands of the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in Syria from March 2011 to July 2020



## VI. Conclusions and Recommendations

- The events and facts in Syria over the past nine years have proven the repeated failure of the UN Security Council and have raised serious questions about its competence, effectiveness and impartiality in maintaining international peace and security.
- Russia and China have supported the Syrian regime indefinitely by using the veto in the UN Security Council and through many damaging practices such as voting against UN General Assembly resolutions and the Human Rights Council, aligning themselves publicly and shamefully alongside a regime accused of war crimes and crimes against humanity.
- While the conflict in Syria is an internal armed conflict, it is also in part an international conflict, in which countries have intervened directly; Russia has intervened since September 2015, and Turkey since 2019. While Paragraph 3 of Article 52 of the Charter of the United Nations states that a party to a dispute shall abstain from voting, Russia has not abstained from voting, but has instead arbitrarily interfered in pursuit of serving the interests of the Syrian regime and protecting it in all resolutions related to the Syrian conflict.

- The arbitrary use of veto by Russia and China has contributed to widespread impunity, with the scope of the Syrian regime's heinous violations and crimes against humanity extending to the use of weapons of mass destruction, the killing of hundreds of thousands of Syrian citizens, and the displacement of more than half of Syria's population.

### **Recommendations:**

#### **The Security Council:**

- Initiate fundamental reforms, particularly in the area of the use of the veto in accordance with international law and human rights, and establish strict limitations and standards for the use of the veto.
- Place the public interest, especially that of victims and affected countries and the attainment of just security and peace before the economic and political gains and interests of any permanent member state.
- Create a mechanism to monitor the extent to which Security Council resolutions are compatible with the Charter of the United Nations, with international law, and with the jurisdiction of the Security Council, and monitor compliance with established standards for the use of the veto.

#### **UN General Assembly:**

- Call for a series of serious meetings aimed at achieving substantive and fundamental reforms in the Security Council, including in its voting mechanism and veto powers and use, and include new members in accordance with their contribution to serving humanity and human rights and their opposition to crimes against humanity and war crimes.
- Work to expand the supervisory powers of the General Assembly over the Security Council's performance, in particular over its ability to review draft resolutions against which veto power can be used; in the event that the General Assembly proves that the Security Council has arbitrarily and unjustly used the veto, it should have the ability to transfer it to the General Assembly for approval by a two-thirds majority vote of those present.

#### **Russia and China:**

- Stop the arbitrary use of the veto, as the Syrian regime is involved in crimes against humanity against the Syrian people.
- Compensate the victims materially and morally for the catastrophic suffering caused by the repeated and arbitrary use of the veto.
- Provide reparation for the imbalance incurred through accelerating the political transition process and supporting a path of transitional justice conducive to stability, democracy and human rights.



**The international community:**

- Work to expand the powers of the General Assembly at the expense of the Security Council and to rebuild the relationship between them in favor of the main reference being the General Assembly and not the Security Council.
- In light of the split within the Security Council and its complete ineffectiveness, action should be taken at the national and regional levels to form alliances to support the Syrian people that can protect them from the daily killings, and can lift sieges, and increase support for relief efforts. Additionally, the principle of universal jurisdiction should be applied in local courts regarding these crimes in order to conduct fair trials for all those who were involved.
- In light of the continuous Russian vetoes, despite the Syrian regime continuing to commit crimes against humanity and war crimes, it is imperative that an international civilized coalition be formed outside the Security Council to protect civilians in Syria from Russian and Syrian regime attacks.
- The SNHR has repeatedly called for the implementation of the 'Responsibility to Protect' principle in dozens of studies and reports and as a member of the International Coalition for the Responsibility to Protect (ICRtoP), especially after exhausting all political channels from the Arab League's plan, then Mr. Kofi Annan's plan proved fruitless. Therefore, the steps recommended under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations should be adopted and the norm of the 'Responsibility to Protect', which was established by the United Nations General Assembly, should be implemented. Under the current conditions, the UN Security Council is not helping, but actively hindering, the protection of civilians in Syria.



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