

Sexual and Other Forms of Violence Against Women and Children in the Context of the Syrian Crisis

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Received: 10/04/2026

Accepted: 31/05/2026

Published: 11/06/2026

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Abstract:

Since the beginning of the Syrian crisis in March 2011, human rights conditions have steadily deteriorated. Arbitrary arrests and detentions, extrajudicial executions, rape, kidnappings, other forms of sexual violence, enforced disappearances, and the practice of torture by the Syrian authorities and pro-government militias (referred to as “Chabbiha”) have been extensively documented. Most allegations of rape and other forms of sexual violence are reported to have occurred during house searches, at checkpoints, and in detention. In some cases, women have been targeted in public or in front of members of their families.

In Syria, children are also the victims of tragic human rights violations, mainly killings and maiming, sexual violence, acts of torture, arbitrary detention, as well as recruitment and exploitation by armed groups and forces.

Keywords: Syrian Crisis; Sexual Violence; Raped Women; Regime Forces; Stigmatization.

1. INTRODUCTION

Sexual violence as a means of warfare, with women affected in a monstrous way. According to the Commission of Inquiry on Syria established by the United Nations Human Rights Council (HRC, March 2018), sexual violence has been used in Syria consistently since the beginning of the conflict. With the growing increase over the years in the number of armed actors involved, forms of gender-based violence have also intensified and diversified.

The initial forms of gender-based and sexual violence were perpetrated by government troops during ground operations, at checkpoints, and during the detention of victims. The report notes that citizens from all religions, ethnicities, tribes, and

political affiliations have been victims of sexual violence. However, women and girls have been disproportionately affected, regardless of the perpetrators or geographic area.

Numerous sources [(HRGJ, March 2016), (CEDAW, July 2014), (MADRE¹, March 2013), and (HRC, March 2018)] state in their reports that sexual violence has been used as a weapon of war by both government forces and armed opposition groups in order to destabilize the enemy camp and break its identity, honor, and the social structures of families and communities.²

2. Sexual violence perpetrated by pro-regime forces

Rape and sexual abuse perpetrated during house searches, in captivity, and at armed checkpoints against women accused of supporting the opposition. As early as 2013, MADRE reported the systematic use of multiple forms of violence—particularly rape and gang rape—against women by the Syrian government and pro-regime militias during house searches, at checkpoints, and in detention facilities.

According to the report of the UN Commission of Inquiry on Syria (HRC, March 2018), women suspected of collaborating with the opposition were arbitrarily detained, and in some cases even imprisoned in place of family members who were being pursued but remained at large. Female relatives and close associates of fugitives, of real or alleged government defectors, and of supporters of armed opposition groups—as well as women who provided medical assistance or sustenance to opposition members—were imprisoned or abducted.

They were apprehended during house searches, in the context of demonstrations, at checkpoints, or in state institutions, particularly when they sought to collect their salaries or renew official documents. Others were abducted in the street and then transferred to detention centers, including abandoned houses, construction sites, workshops, or sports facilities converted into places of arbitrary detention.

The affront endured through various forms of gender-based violence. The United Nations Commission of Inquiry on Syria (HRC, March 2018) reports that supporters of Syrian regime forces similarly employed other forms of gender-based violence with the intent to humiliate and degrade women. Reports describe women being arrested and forced to dance naked in the presence of regime officials and to serve them drinks. In other testimonies, regime forces terrorized women by coercing them to appear in videos without their veils or dressed in ways considered inappropriate and inconsistent with Muslim conventions. (MADRE, March 2013) notes that in the streets of Karm al-

¹ MADRE is an international women's human rights organization that works in partnership with community-based women's organizations worldwide to address issues of health and reproductive rights, economic development, education, and other human rights.

² Swiss Refugee Council (OSAR), "Syria: Sexual and Gender-Based Violence", *Quick Country Analysis*, Bern, 19 April 2018, P. 3, (Online, <https://www.osar.ch>).

Zeitoun¹, women were forced to walk naked in front of tanks.²

3. Sexual Crimes

Multiple UN agencies, as well as international and national NGOs, have documented sexual acts perpetrated during the Syrian conflict. In its 2013 report, the International Rescue Committee³ noted: “*Rape [as] a significant and alarming feature of the Syrian civil war*”.⁴

In August 2012, the International Commission of Inquiry on Syria assessed that “*there are reasonable grounds to believe that men, women, and children have been victims of rape and sexual assault committed by members of government forces and the Chabbiha*”.⁵ *Rape and sexual assault are also among the methods of torture used in official and unofficial detention centers*”.⁶

On January 18, 2013, AMOS Valérie⁷ expressed particular concern over “*the indiscriminate nature of the ongoing violence and the increasing number of cases of sexual violence against women*” in Syria.⁸

Sexual crimes perpetrated by armed opposition forces have also been reported. The International Commission of Inquiry on Syria stated that, given the limited intelligence gathered, it was not possible to reach definitive conclusions regarding rapes and other sexual abuses committed by anti-government armed forces.⁹ Nevertheless, BANGURA Zainab Hawa¹⁰ reported that: “*Not only are civilians caught in a vicious cycle of violence, but they are also targeted with sexual violence by all parties to the*

¹ Karm al-Zeitoun is a neighborhood in the Syrian city of Homs.

² Swiss Refugee Council (OSAR), “Syria: Sexual and Gender-Based Violence”, Op. Cit., P. 4 and 5.

³ The International Rescue Committee (IRC) was created in 1933 at the suggestion of Albert Einstein with the aim of supporting opponents of Adolf Hitler. The IRC assists people who are victims of racial, ethnic, and religious oppression, as well as those affected by violence and war.

⁴ International Rescue Committee (IRC), “Syria: A Regional Crisis”, January 2013, (Online, <https://www.rescue.uk.org>).

⁵ The term “Chabbiha” literally means “a depraved person”. This word commonly refers to armed groups and militias considered pro-government fighters.

⁶ Third Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, 15 August 2012, (Online, <https://www.ohchr.org>).

⁷ Valerie Ann Amos, Baroness Amos, is a British Labour Party politician and diplomat who served as the eighth United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator. Prior to her appointment at the UN, she was the British High Commissioner to Australia.

⁸ UN News Centre, “Syria: Pillay and Amos warn that civilians are systematically targeted by violence”, 18 January 2013, (Online, <https://www.un.org>).

⁹ Fourth Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, February 2013, P. 19 and 80, (Online, <https://www.ohchr.org>).

¹⁰ Zainab Hawa Bangura is a Sierra Leonean politician. From 2012 to 2017, she served as the United Nations Special Representative in the context of the campaign against sexual violence in conflict. On 1 January 2020, she was appointed Director-General of the United Nations Office at Nairobi by UN Secretary-General António Guterres.

conflict”.¹

Under International Law, such acts can be treated as crimes against humanity, forming part of widespread assaults against civilian populations. The International Commission of Inquiry on Syria reported: “*Having previously established that military operations carried out, notably in Homs in February and March [2012] and in Al Haffe in June [2012], were conducted as part of a widespread or systematic attack against the civilian population, the Commission considers that rapes committed during and with knowledge of these attacks are prosecutable as crimes against humanity*”.²

When committed within the context of an armed conflict, these acts of violence may also constitute war crimes.³

4. Rape and Other Forms of Sexual Abuse

Psychologists and doctors from the Association Syria’s Bright Future, who work with displaced Syrian women, have similarly reported assisting women who had endured rape and other forms of sexual abuse.⁴ One doctor specified that he treated a young Syrian girl whose brother had been forced by regime security services to rape her.

Another service provider assisted a woman who stated that she had been detained by Syrian regime forces along with about twenty other women for several days inside a private residence. She recounted that the detainees were given a substance that weakened them and left them unable to resist sexual abuse. She revealed that she had been raped by soldiers and subsequently taken to the “Palestinian Section” within the Syrian Military Intelligence Detention Center in the capital, Damascus.⁵

While most of the claims collected by FIDH⁶ concern rape and other forms of

¹ BANGURA, Zainab Hawa, “UN envoy calls on all parties in Syria conflict to cease acts of sexual violence”, *UN News Centre*, 15 February 2013, (Online, <https://www.un.org>).

² Third Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, Op. Cit.

³ FIDH, “Violence Against Women in Syria: Breaking the Silence”, Situation Note following an FIDH Assessment Mission in Jordan in December 2012, No. 606f, Paris, April 2013, P. 10 and 11, (Online, www.fidh.org).

⁴ FIDH interview with members of the Syria’s Bright Future Association, Amman (Jordan), 14 December 2012.

⁵ FIDH interview, Amman (Jordan), 21 December 2012.

⁶ The International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) is a federative NGO whose mission is to actively promote the respect of all rights proclaimed in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (civil and political rights, as well as social, economic, and cultural rights). Its headquarters are located in Paris. Composed of around ten national associations at its founding in 1922, FIDH comprised, in 2018, more than 180 member leagues in 112 countries. From 2009 to 2012, FIDH conducted approximately 300 international missions, including investigations, solidarity actions, judicial observations, and advocacy in nearly 80 countries. FIDH holds consultative status with the UN, UNESCO, and the Council of Europe, as well as observer status with the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights.

sexual violence perpetrated by pro-regime forces, instances of crimes committed by armed opposition groups have also been reported. A witness interviewed by FIDH stated that they personally witnessed cases of violence committed by supporters of the Free Syrian Army (FSA)¹: *“I saw a case where FSA members kidnapped a young woman known to be involved with a young man. Her abductors from the FSA raped her and then killed her so that she could not report them. They threw her body in front of her house and made it appear that the Syrian army was responsible for this act of barbarity”*.²

According to the International Commission of Inquiry on Syria: *“Indirect accounts indicate that women who were detained at checkpoints or in intelligence service centers, regardless of the duration, are likely to have been raped or subjected to sexual assault”*.³

The notion that women who are imprisoned are routinely the targets of sexual violence is widely held. A Syrian activist interviewed by FIDH in January 2012 stated: *“In Syria, traditionally, just for a woman to enter a police station or precinct is a disgrace. It is therefore even worse if they are arrested or held in detention for a longer period! It is assumed that women are sexually abused in these places”*.⁴

5. Shame and Honor

A shocking stigmatization of sexual violence victims. Sources referenced in OSAR⁵'s country analysis [(SNHR⁶, November 2017), (MADRE, March 2013), (LSE⁷, March 2017), (HRC, March 2018), (HRGJ, March 2016), and (CEDAW, July 2014)] unanimously report that cases of rape and sexual abuse are intensely condemned by the Syrian population and by the victims' own families. According to the Centre for Women, Peace and Security at the London School of Economics and Political Science

¹ The Free Syrian Army (FSA) is an opposition forces coalition formed on 29 July 2011 during the Syrian crisis. At the beginning of the war, it constituted the main armed group opposing Bashar al-Assad's government, before being replaced in some areas by jihadist armed groups. Composed of former Syrian army officers, it is distinguished, in principle, by its nationalism and democratic objectives. Throughout its existence, the FSA has brought together dozens of factions. Since 2017, most FSA factions have merged into the Syrian Arab Army (SAA).

² FIDH, “Violence Against Women in Syria: Breaking the Silence”, Op. Cit., P. 12 and 13.

³ International Independent Commission of Inquiry on Syria, 11 March 2013, (Online, <https://www.ohchr.org>).

⁴ FIDH, “Arab World: What Spring for Women?”, Report, March 2012, (Online, <https://arabwomenspring.fidh.net>).

⁵ OSAR is a non-governmental organization (NGO), politically and religiously independent, that is legally active in the field of asylum and refugees. The organization was called “Central Office for Aid to Refugees” until 1991.

⁶ The Syrian Network for Human Rights is a Syrian human rights NGO, founded in June 2011.

⁷ The London School of Economics, or LSE, is a British university specialized in scientific research and academic teaching in economics, politics, social sciences, law, and international relations. As for the LSE Conflict and Civil Society Research Unit (LSE-CCSR), it aims to understand how ordinary people seek to influence the decisions that affect their lives during conflicts.

(LSE, March 2014), family dignity is closely tied to women in patriarchal Syrian society. Consequently, the physical rape of a woman, under this patriarchal perception, brings dishonor upon the entire family and community.

The repercussions for survivors of sexual violence are severe, leading, according to the UN Commission of Inquiry (HRC, March 2018), to risks of divorce and expulsion from their own family homes for honor-related offenses in highly conservative areas. For unmarried women and girls, the prospects of future marriage may be affected. Many survivors (both women and men) conceal the reality out of fear of such consequences. As a result, it becomes difficult for them to benefit from necessary medical care and psychosocial support, even when such services are provided. In some cases, female survivors exhibit suicidal tendencies; according to HRC (March 2016), several cases have indeed ended in self-inflicted death.

Planned or presumed rape can also have tragic consequences. According to CEDAW (July 2014), there is a widespread belief within Syrian society that all women detained by armed actors are likely to be raped, which represents a significant problem. As a result, women are often ostracized by their families after release from prison and are considered “unmarriageable.” In some cases, even mere suspicions of rape lead to forced divorces or, in extreme situations, murder. The report refers to an instance of a father who killed his family while they were being attacked by armed men to avoid the “shame” that would follow an alleged rape. In another case, a man divorced his wife, who had been detained by officials for two hours at a checkpoint, because he believed she had been raped and therefore considered her to have lost her former respectability. LSE (March 2014) similarly notes that women who were detained have been rejected by their families, whether or not they were actually raped.¹

The public stigmatization of victims of sexual abuse and other forms of sexual violence is very high in Syria. In the rural southern regions of Syria, where religious and cultural conservatism is strongly upheld, young girls and women are not allowed to openly discuss private or intimate matters, particularly physical violence and any other form of abuse against women.

From the interviews conducted, the Commission observed that these attitudes are also strongly present among Syrian refugee communities in Jordan. Doctors working with the Association Syria's Bright Future note that “*it is difficult to identify cases of rape due to the prevailing culture and the refusal to speak publicly about these issues*”.²

The Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Syria indicated that the religious beliefs of Syrian society, along with the nation's social and cultural norms, lead victims of sexual acts to experience feelings of shame, moral shock, or fear of

¹ Swiss Refugee Council (OSAR), “Syria: Sexual and Gender-Based Violence”, Op. Cit., P. 3 and 4.

² FIDH interview with members of the Syria's Bright Future Association, Amman (Jordan), 14 December 2012.

being stigmatized. This situation discourages them from reporting the violence they have endured and makes efforts to document these cases almost impossible.¹

Cases of women who were victims of rape and subsequently rejected by their families or spouses have also been reported. One woman, returning home after being imprisoned and released, found that her husband and family had gathered her belongings. They expelled her along with her son, and her husband later demanded a divorce.² Other reports, such as that of a rape survivor whose spouse abandoned her after the assault, further corroborate these accounts.³

Public stigmatization and family pressure can contribute to the feelings of shame experienced by women who are victims of rape and other sexual abuses, sometimes leading to suicide. One woman recounted the stories of two other women she knew, including a 17-year-old girl, who had been raped by pro-regime armed forces. She stated that both victims committed suicide shortly after the assaults, with one setting herself on fire.⁴

A Syrian refugee from the Cyber City camp told FIDH that one of his friends from Damascus had been raped by government forces who stormed her home while claiming to be searching for a young man. When they found her alone, they raped her and then fled. She ultimately took her own life.⁵

6. Forced Marriage

Syrian refugee women reported to FIDH that, on occasion, families forcibly marry off women who have been raped, often to relatives, in order to “settle the matter.” According to representatives of the Syrian Women Association: *“When we, as a women’s association, tried to intervene to help a young girl visibly traumatized by her ordeal, we were brutally turned away by her parents, who married her off the next day”*.⁶

In interviews with FIDH, doctors affiliated with the Association Syria’s Bright Future reported the existence of two shelters in Amman housing 21 Syrian women aged 14 to 25 who had survived sexual abuse: *“These women, who were raped, are cared for by two families who provide them with food and basic needs, but the guardians’*

¹ First Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, 23 November 2011, (Online, <https://daccess-ods.un.org>).

² FIDH interview, Amman (Jordan), 21 December 2012.

³ Report of a focus group meeting prepared by FIDH, Amman (Jordan), 19 December 2012.

⁴ FIDH interview with a Syrian refugee, Russeifa (Zarqa Governorate, Jordan), 15 December 2012.

⁵ FIDH interview with a Palestinian refugee who left Syria, Cyber City Camp, 18 December 2012.

⁶ FIDH interview with members of the Syrian Women Association, Amman (Jordan), 19 December 2012.

intention is to marry them off. When we were able to contact these women through an intermediary, we asked them what they wanted. They told us that they just wanted to be underground. Since then, four of them have been married off".¹

7. Lack of Access to Information and Documentation

Public condemnation of victims of this type of crime generally translates into a lack of access to appropriate support services for them.²

Gender-based violence is a taboo subject, making documentation and record-keeping difficult. According to LSE (March 2017), sexual abuse against women in Syria is insufficiently reported, as many victims do not dare to speak out due to the ongoing war, the risk of stigmatization, or fear of retaliation. The UN Commission of Inquiry on Syria report (HRC, March 2018), based on over 450 interviews with sexual violence survivors, their family members, communities, legal representatives, and health experts, also concludes that the silence is largely driven by public and cultural stigma. The report further emphasizes that it often takes victims months or even years to disclose what they have endured, and some may never speak at all.

According to Amnesty International (June 2017)³, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights⁴ recorded over 7,600 cases of sexual violence against women, including nearly 450 cases involving underage girls. Human Rights and Gender Justice Clinic at New York School of Law (HRGJ, March 2016) notes that the number of unreported cases is likely much higher, as the subject is extremely taboo.⁵

A doctor testified to FIDH representatives about the account of one of his female relatives, who was raped in Homs and became pregnant as a result of the crime. He reported that hotel owners in Damascus, having learned of the incident, refused to accommodate her. She was also unable to find any hospital willing to perform an abortion.⁶

According to representatives of the Syrian Women Association who met with

¹ FIDH interview with members of the Syria's Bright Future Association, Amman (Jordan), 14 December 2012.

² FIDH, "Violence Against Women in Syria: Breaking the Silence", Op. Cit., P. 14.

³ Amnesty International is an international NGO that promotes respect for the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the defense of human rights. The organization primarily advocates for the abolition of the death penalty and torture, the cessation of political crimes, the right to freedom of expression, the release of prisoners of conscience, as well as respect for all social, political, economic, civil, and cultural rights.

⁴ The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) is a Syrian human rights NGO that, through a network of on-the-ground sources, provides numerical assessments of victims of the Syrian civil war. During this armed conflict, the three major global news agencies [AFP (Agence France-Presse), Reuters, and Associated Press] rely on SOHR's reports. However, the reliability and neutrality of this organization are disputed by some conflict experts.

⁵ Swiss Refugee Council (OSAR), "Syria: Sexual and Gender-Based Violence", Op. Cit., P. 4.

⁶ FIDH interview with members of the Syria's Bright Future Association, Amman (Jordan), 14 December 2012.

FIDH, no Syrian woman would dare to disclose or recount the sexual violence she has experienced: “*Women generally do not speak about the abuses they have suffered or are still suffering*”.¹ In January 2012, they affirmed that very few victims file complaints following such sexual abuse and added: “*Today, no one wants to testify. If it is known that a woman has been raped, no one will want to marry her*”.²

8. Kidnapping of Women in Syria: A “Tool of Terror”

Women abducted were often forced to testify under sexual violence. The UN Commission of Inquiry (HRC, March 2018) reports several cases in which regime forces tortured and raped women during interrogations in detention centers to coerce them into admitting alleged support for the opposition or to provide information about the whereabouts of male relatives. In some instances, women were raped in front of other prisoners, and even in front of their children. Sexual violence against women and girls was documented in around twenty government facilities between 2011 and 2016, including those in Damascus, Aleppo, Quneitra, Homs, and Latakia.³

Many informants interviewed by the FIDH delegation recounted instances of Syrian army officers paying women—or coercing them by other means—to help locate other women to be abducted. In an interview with FIDH, one woman reported that pro-regime officers could pay up to 5,000 Syrian pounds per woman that a civilian would bring them. She also noted that some women wore a “niqab” (full-face veil) and went door to door claiming they were seeking a remedy for their sons, in order to more effectively identify women for their commanders to abduct.⁴

Among the reasons cited for abducting women are the pursuit of information about armed opposition groups and, at times, the possibility of using these women as leverage to secure the release of a detainee. Women were also kidnapped to coerce them into revealing the identities of individuals working with the government or, conversely, with the FSA, in exchange for their own release or the release of male family members detained by their abductors.⁵

A Syrian refugee, a former FSA activist, stated that he was aware of numerous cases in which pro-regime forces forced women to identify FSA members or compensated them for doing so, with the intention of mapping the enemy’s areas of activity and positions.⁶

¹ FIDH interview with a member of the Syrian Women Association NGO, Amman (Jordan), 19 December 2012.

² FIDH, “Arab World: What Spring for Women?”, Op. Cit.

³ Swiss Refugee Council (OSAR), “Syria: Sexual and Gender-Based Violence”, Op. Cit., P. 5.

⁴ FIDH interview, Amman (Jordan), 21 December 2012.

⁵ FIDH interview, Amman (Jordan), 21 December 2012.

⁶ FIDH interview with a Syrian refugee, Amman (Jordan), 19 December 2012.

Similar allegations also target the FSA. A man consulted stated: *“The FSA could abduct a woman’s family member to exert additional pressure on her to comply with their demands, in exchange for the release of that family member”*.¹

FIDH is aware of a practice reportedly common among regime forces, which involves detaining or kidnapping women whose sons or husbands are affiliated with the FSA to extract information about these family members.² One woman recounted the case of her *“neighbor, who was detained for two days because her two sons were fighting with the FSA. The regime forces were immediately contacted and threatened with retaliation, stating that if anything happened to this woman, there would be an explosion at the government checkpoint in the presence of all deployed soldiers. She was released shortly thereafter”*.³

Similarly, FIDH has documented cases of women being kidnapped by armed groups with the intention of using them as bargaining tools to negotiate the release of an activist from their own faction. FIDH recorded a testimony about a woman who was publicly arrested by pro-government forces to facilitate the release of one of their officers abducted by the FSA.⁴

A Syrian woman also reported: *“In the building where I live, two Alawite Shia families reside. One day, the FSA came to abduct my Alawite neighbor and her daughter. FSA members held them for two days and then exchanged them for a Sunni hostage detained by pro-government forces. They did not report being mistreated while in detention”*.⁵

9. In Syria, Children Are Not Spared!

According to UNICEF⁶, every day, children face grave risks—they are shot, maimed, or lose their parents as a result of the conflict.

During the first two years of the Syrian crisis, children bore the heaviest toll. According to revealing statistics at the end of 2012, of the four million people affected by the war within the country, approximately half were children, while among the two million refugees, 800,000 were children. Current assessments suggest even higher numbers. Some 500,000 displaced children are now in Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt, and

¹ FIDH, “Violence Against Women in Syria: Breaking the Silence”, Op. Cit., P. 15 and 16.

² FIDH interview with a Syrian female refugee, Widow’s House, SWA, 20 December 2012; and with members of the Syrian Women Association (SWA), Amman (Jordan), 19 December 2012.

³ FIDH interview with Syrian female refugees, Widow’s House, SWA, 20 December 2012.

⁴ FIDH interview with Syrian women refugees, Widow’s House, SWA, 20 December 2012.

⁵ Report of a focus group meeting prepared by FIDH, Amman (Jordan), 19 December 2012.

⁶ The United Nations Children’s Fund, commonly known by the acronym UNICEF, is a UN agency dedicated to promoting and improving the welfare of children. At the time of its founding (11 December 1946), its original name was the United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund, from which it retained the acronym when adopting its new name in 1953, at the time it became a permanent part of the United Nations system.

Iraq, with thousands more crossing Syrian borders each week. Meanwhile, host communities, already fragile before the crisis, are overwhelmed. The conflict has reached an irreversible threshold, and its impacts on Syria and the broader Middle East will become evident in the long term, particularly with the threat of a “lost generation” of Syrian children.

Around 800,000 children under the age of 14 have been forced to flee their homes, severely compromising their chances of attending school. According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights¹, 700,000 children were killed in Syria during the first two years of the conflict (2011–2013). The number of victims has increased as the crisis has worsened and expanded.²

Many schools have been damaged, destroyed, or occupied by populations seeking shelter after fleeing their homes. Having witnessed relatives or family members killed, being separated from their parents, and traumatized by continuous artillery fire, many children suffer psychological trauma. Young girls and women remain particularly vulnerable to acts of violence.

10- Conclusion

Sexual violence perpetrated by the armed forces of the Syrian regime is systematic. According to a report by the LSE (March 2017), the Syrian regime has deliberately employed sexual violence at both political and military levels to suppress opposition. It is clear that the use of sexual violence by the regime’s security forces serves as a method to eliminate dissent and destroy entire families. The administration of stimulants by armed members of the regime, as well as the provision of contraceptives to detainees, further underscores the political and systematic nature of these abuses, as highlighted by the Human Rights Organization, referencing the work of Franco-British journalist and filmmaker Manon LOIZEAU. Informants interviewed by the UN³ Commission of Inquiry (HRC, March 2018) also reported the distribution of drugs in detention centers intended to stop menstruation or serve as contraceptives. The LSE report (March 2017) notes that the sexual violence committed by the Syrian government exhibits recurring patterns and a degree of planning, indicating the

¹ The United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) is one of the UN’s specialized agencies, with the objective of monitoring, promoting, and reporting on the respect of international human rights law and international humanitarian law worldwide, in accordance with the adoption of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action.

² United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF), “Syrian Children: A Lost Generation?”, Report on the Syria Crisis, Two Years of Conflict in Syria, March 2011 – March 2013, March 2013, P. 2–8, (Online, <https://www.unicef.org>).

³ The United Nations (UN) is an international organization bringing together 193 member states, headquartered in New York (Manhattan). The main objectives of the organization are the maintenance of global peace and security. To achieve these goals, it promotes sustainable development, provides humanitarian aid, protects human rights, and upholds international law.

responsibility of senior state officials.¹

Explanatory list of abbreviations used:

- ANS: Syrian Arab Army
- ASL: Free Syrian Army
- CEDAW: Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
- FIDH: International Federation for Human Rights
- HCDH: Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
- HCR: Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
- HRC: The Human Rights Campaign
- HRGJ: Human Rights and Gender Justice Clinic
- IRC: International Rescue Committee
- LSE: The London School of Economics and Political Science
- NGO: Non-Governmental Organization
- OSAR: Swiss Refugee Council
- SNHR: Syrian Network for Human Rights
- SWA: Syrian Women Association
- UN: United Nations
- UNESCO: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
- UNICEF: United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund

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