



Annual Report 2017-2018
Syrian for Truth and Justice-STJ





Annual report

[Syrians for Truth and Justice-STJ](#) works on documenting the abuses committed in Syria to inform and ensure, eventually, accountability for the crimes committed.

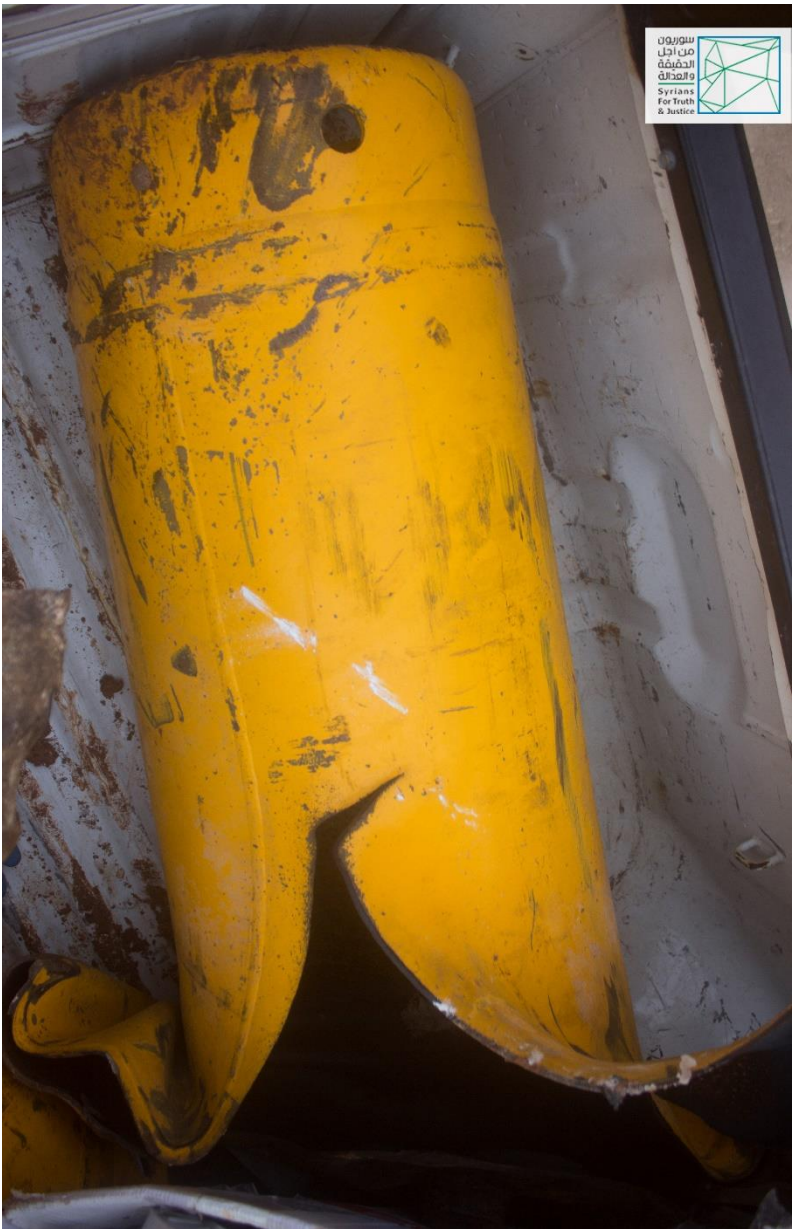
2017-2018 did not see any progress towards an end to the conflict in Syria. Two processes, supported respectively by the United Nations and Russia, are ongoing in order to seek a political solution, with little results. Every day, international humanitarian law is breached, at the expense of civilians, who are the first victims of the war.

The main and most encouraging event of the year was certainly the take-off of the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism's mission, that will, hopefully, pave the way to future local and international prosecutions.

Established by a December 2016 resolution adopted by the United Nations General Assembly, in order to address the impotence of the Security Council, whose resolution regarding Syria were incessantly vetoed by Russia, the mechanism started its work over the course of 2017. At its head, experienced lawyers and investigators guide its team with the aim to collect evidence gathered by local organisations over the past seven years of conflict.

This is a first major step towards future prosecutions and Syrians for Truth and Justice is honoured to collaborate with the IIIM and is determined to participate to its mission.





Documentation

Documentation is at the core of our mission, and serves our two objectives: inform and prevent impunity.

Syrians for Truth and Justice's field researchers and investigators have worked tirelessly to provide the public and decisions-makers with facts and analysis of abuses committed by all parties to the conflict. Our reporters are based in all major areas of Syria, benefitting of an access to a wide range of locations.

During the year 2017-2018, STJ published 94 reports documenting abuses such as indiscriminate attacks, child recruitment, use of chemical weapons or targeting of medical facilities, amounting to the collection of a set of evidence that not only serve the interest of information, but also aim at serving local and, in the future, international prosecutions.

Impartiality

Syrians for Truth and Justice works for a Syria, where all citizens, regardless of their gender, religion, ethnicity and political background, have dignity, equality, justice and equal human rights. To this aim, it is essential that our work lays the foundation to hold accountable perpetrators of crimes from all sides to the conflict.

This objective drives our work and is at the foundation of a constant effort to deliver impartial reports and address violations committed by all parties to the conflict. Thus, our reporters documented abuses committed by [the Syrian government in their detention facilities](#), as well as its [use of chemical weapons](#).



We also monitored closely the civilian casualties related to military operations, such as the [July 2017 confrontation between Ahrar al-Sham al-Islamiyya on one hand and Hayat Tahrir al-Sham/HTS on the other](#), as well as the repression of demonstrations by factions of the Syrian opposition. Our reporters also gathered the [testimonies of victims of sexual and gender-based violence committed by ISIS](#), and [arbitrary arrests by Kurdish Self Administration against members of the Kurdish National Council](#).

Professionalism

Years of experience have fostered our reporters' skills of the field to provide verified and authenticated evidence. Conscious that our work might reveal useful to local and international prosecutions, we constantly seek to raise our standards with regards to the collection of evidence, the gathering of testimonies, and the verification of our information.

Finally, we attach great importance to collaborating with other NGOs. After seven years of conflict, we have all developed a sound expertise of different aspects of the conflict, or have implemented strong physical presences in particular areas. Thus, [our collaboration with Justice for Life documented the chemical attack on camp Sheikoun in April 2017](#), while [we reported with Bellingcat the use of chlorine gas by the Syrian regime on Idlib province in February 2018](#), and [our work with SLDP shed light on the relationship between business and human rights](#).

We also are part of the [We Exist](#) coalition, committed to ensure that the role of civil society is central to any thinking and planning on Syria.





Legal analysis

Working to ensure accountability for the crimes perpetrated in Syria, we took a step forward in establishing ourselves as a reference in the legal analysis of events taking place in the context of the conflict and created a legal team, dedicated to studying elements documented by our reporters.

Expertise

Our legal team builds on our reporters' work and provides analysis of the documented events with regards to International Criminal and Humanitarian Law. Based on the evidence and testimonies collected in the field, the reports aim at providing practitioners, academics and decisions-makers with an understanding of the events and a framework to situate them.

The team also acts as bridge with the IIIM, and works towards establishing a strategy to enable the mechanism to make the most of the data we have been collecting from the beginning of our mission.

Our legal team also works towards improving the methodology we adopt when it comes to collecting evidence and gathering interviews, in order to ensure that our materials meet the standards for local and international prosecutions, especially with regards to sexual and gender-based violence.



"The Relationship between Business and Human Rights"

A Joint Paper between "Syrians for Truth and Justice-STJ" and the "Syrian Legal Development Programme-SLDP"



Forward-looking

Syrians for Truth and Justice also aims at anticipating the end of the conflict and develops a vision of transitional justice pillars whose implementation will be essential to the future of a prosperous Syria, with a peculiar focus on truth. Our legal team thus researches avenues to ensure that post-conflict Syria will benefit from tools essential to a long-lasting peace.

Advocacy

Spreading our knowledge and materials to relevant stakeholders is an integral part of our mandate. We aim at informing the public by publishing our report online and communicating through social media.

Visibility

We have invested different media to inform the public of the events taking place in Syria. The number of visitors of our website has significantly increased over the months, as has the number of new subscribers to our Facebook, Twitter and Youtube accounts. We have also an essential established a strong presence in traditional media, giving interviews to Arab and international news outlets on topics related to the conflict.

Impact

The conflict now involves a number of actors, directly taking part to it, or acting more distantly. It is our role to inform stakeholders of the ongoing events we document and convince them to take action. We have developed with governments, institutions and international NGOs relationships based on trust and respect with the objectives to make a difference in the lives of civilians

Digital security

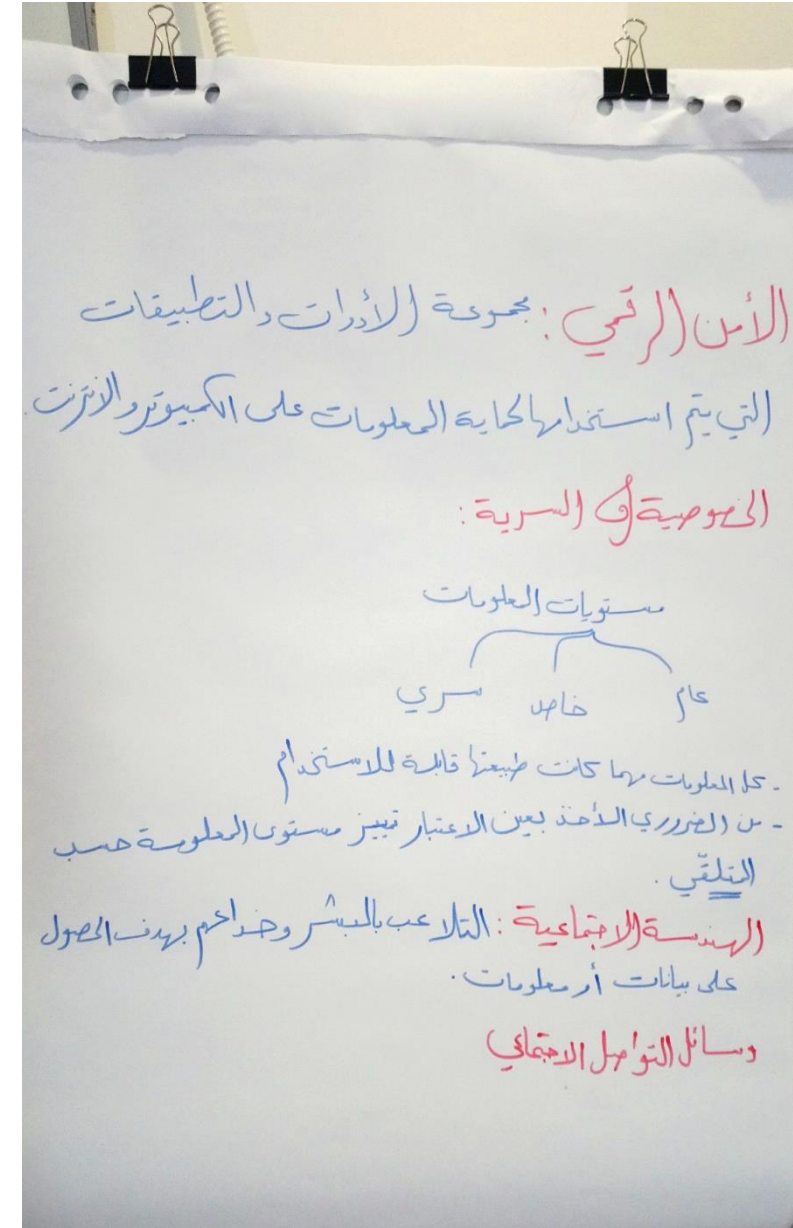
Our work requires our team to constantly seek to improve the safety of our members, our sources and our materials. In 2017-2018 we took an essential first step in this regard by preparing and implementing a project funded by *Lifeline: Embattled CSO Assistance Fund* aimed at training our team on digital security in order to improve the organisation's safety. We also take pride in giving access to this knowledge to external actors, and invited external participants such as media outlets to join us during the trainings.

Skills Transmission

The project aims not only at improving the organisation's own security, but also at training our team and external guests with regards to digital security. A set of workshops provides participants, including within Syria, with sound skills on digital security that they will, in turn, be able to transmit to their network.

Inclusiveness

We take the opportunity of this project to align our actions on our principles and made a conscious effort to convey a number of women participants to the training. Although we still work towards an egalitarian representation of female participants, we are able to include 30% of female participants on average.





Leaders for change

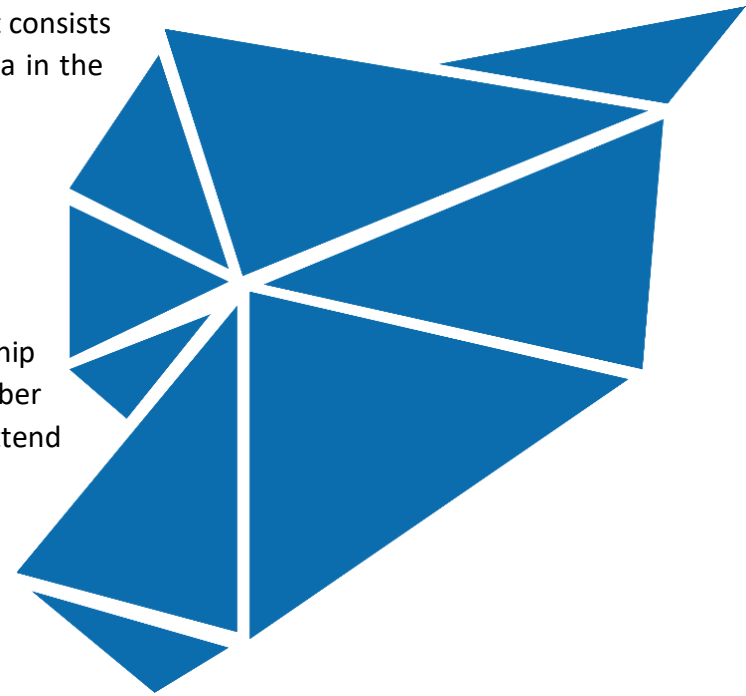
Willing to take our engagement further and to already prepare individuals for a thriving political and civic life, we decided to conduct a project of a new sort and to work with local communities for the first time. The project consists in educating future leaders on topics fundamental to the building of a democratic Syria in the future, by bringing up themes such as tolerance, freedom and equality.

Engagement

In order to respond to the rampant lack of community awareness and culture of citizenship that has played such a significant role in the ongoing conflict, the project gathers a number of young citizens, from a wide variety of communities and religious back-ground to attend workshops on essential aspects of democracy, human rights and transitional justice.

Ownership

In order to have the most significant impact, we guide this project to provide the participants with the full ownership of the new knowledge and experience they have gathered during the workshops. The project coordinators put emphasis on discussion and the objective is, eventually, to give them the tools to build their own awareness campaign, based on their understanding of the workshop and addressing issues that they have identified as fundamental, such as internally displaced people, reconciliation or local representation.





Challenges

Working in a war environment brings along a range of challenges that we have learned to incorporate as inherent to our work.

One of our major challenges is to navigate in the midst of a uniquely political conflict, involving a variety of local, regional and political actors who interfere in the conflict and aim at masking the abuses they commit. Mindful of this factor, we carry our mission with no regards for political agenda, and for a just and open Syria for all. Our main concern is to ensure the physical safety of our team based in and outside of Syria, and of our sources, who most often are also survivors. Our work poses a threat to various actors to the conflict who work to hide the violations they commit. We are aware of the risks involved in the pursuit of our endeavour and constantly seek to improve our safety and security measures.

We also have to deal with logistical issues that working from within a warring country entails, such as difficulties in communications and financial transactions with our members based inside Syria. We have managed to overcome these and adapted a routine that proves efficient.

What's next?

Our prospects are primarily linked to the development of the conflict, and we constantly need to adapt to the events as they unfold. Aside from this imperative, we have developed a road map to guide us in the pursuit of the upcoming year. We will, in 2018-2019, continue our documentation work, that is at the core of our mission, in order to inform the public, our partners and stakeholders of the ongoing events taking place in Syria, by means of our reports.

We will strengthen our relationships with decision-makers, partnering with local and international NGOs, institutions and universities to inform them and convince them to act.

Well established among experts of the field, we now intend to develop our visibility to a broader public, and have, to this aim, created a communications department. We deem necessary to broaden our audience, because we learned the extent of the influence citizens can have on decision-makers, including by their votes.

Hopeful that the IIIM will play a fundamental part in the future of prosecutions, we also plan to invest fully in our collaboration with the mechanism, by sharing evidence and testimonies already collected, and continue our documentation work.

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