

JOINT STATEMENT

July 8, 2019

Syria: Access Must be Given to UN Chemical Weapons Investigators

As Syrian and Russian forces continue their assault on the civilian population in Idlib, the undersigned organizations urgently call on the United Nations Security Council to demand the OPCW¹ Investigation and Identification Team be given access to investigate the use of toxic chemicals and chemical weapons. The Syrian government and its Russian allies should not be able to block independent investigation of reports on the use of illegal weapons in and around Idlib.

We further appeal to the international community to advocate for an immediate ceasefire by all parties to the conflict and to concurrently exert pressure on the Syrian and Russian governments to allow and facilitate the unrestricted access of international humanitarian agencies to affected areas, in accordance with their international obligations to protect civilians and international law.

The international community's repeated failure to take meaningful action to protect the civilian population has emboldened the Syrian and Russian forces in perpetuating systematic crimes against humanity and violations of international law, which include targeted attacks against civilian infrastructure and medical centers, widespread indiscriminate attacks in populated areas, and the use of internationally banned weapons that terrorize the population and result in large-scale forced displacement. The Syrian government has perpetrated 32 of the 37 chemical attacks [documented](#) by the United Nations' Independent Commission of Inquiry on Syria; afflicted areas include [Eastern Ghouta](#), [Aleppo](#), and now Idlib is at high risk. A change of course by the international community is urgently needed to prevent further use of chemical weapons against civilians.

International mechanisms have an important role in ensuring the safety of civilians across Syria; despite the international community's inaction, the [involvement](#) of the OPCW in Syria has served as an important mechanism not only for investigation but also as a deterrent against the use of such weapons in future attacks. The [Syrian government's](#) recent refusal to allow the OPCW team access to investigate the use of banned munitions is a further troubling blow for the protection of civilians in Syria and in contravention of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), to which the Syrian government has been a party since 2013.

¹ Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons.

With the OPCW Fact-Finding Mission ([FFM](#)) established a year later in 2014, under the ongoing mandate to “establish facts surrounding allegations of the use of toxic chemicals... for hostile purposes in the Syrian Arab Republic,” the Syrian government must be held to its [obligations](#) as a signatory of the convention. As the Syrian government attempts to retake areas remaining outside of its control, it is imperative that the OPCW Investigation and Identification Team

be allowed access to Syria to conduct their crucial work.

The majority of the [Idlib province](#) is currently under the control of Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), a former Al-Qaeda affiliate, while various groups maintain control in [other areas](#). As the Syrian and Russian offensive to retake parts of [Idlib](#) continues, the civilian population is facing continued indiscriminate bombing attacks and targeted attacks against civilian infrastructure, including [schools](#) and [hospitals](#). As a result of the Syrian civil war, Idlib’s pre-war population has doubled from 1.5 million to approximately three million, and half of this population has already been [displaced](#) at least once. [HTS and other groups](#) based in Idlib have attacked border villages under Syrian government control, which also puts civilian lives at risk.

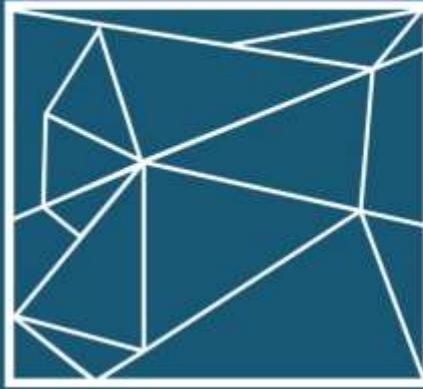
As a result of the ongoing hostilities, an estimated [330,000](#) people have been displaced and [230](#) civilians killed. With Turkey closing its [borders](#), Syrians fleeing the daily airstrikes are trapped without options for safe refuge. As the past eight years have tragically [proven](#), simple condemnation of violations and abuses is not enough. The UNSC must demand access for the OPCW investigation team, and the international community must insist on an immediate cease-fire adhered to by all state and non-state parties to the conflict. The international community must also continue to pressure the Syrian and Russian forces to at long last meet their international obligations and respect international law, including respect for the Sochi Agreement’s de-escalation zone.

Idlib is on the verge of a humanitarian catastrophe, and the time for the international community to act is now.

Signatory organizations:

1. Dawlaty
2. Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression (SCM)
3. Syrians for Truth and Justice
4. The Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS)
5. The Syria Campaign
6. Urnammu Justice and Human Rights
7. Women Now for Development

سوريون
من أجل
الحقيقة
والعدالة
Syrians
For Truth
& Justice



History

Syrians for Truth and Justice was conceived during the participation of its co-founder in the Middle-East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) Leaders for Democracy Fellowship program, who was driven by a will to contribute to Syria's future. Starting as a humble project to tell the stories of Syrians experiencing enforced disappearances and torture, it grew into an established organisation committed to unveiling human rights violations of all sorts.

Convinced that the diversity that has historically defined Syria is a wealth, our team of researchers and volunteers works with dedication at uncovering human rights violations committed in Syria, in order to promote inclusiveness and ensure that all Syrians are represented, and their rights fulfilled.

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