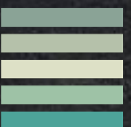


The State of Justice in Syria 2025



About the Syria Justice and Accountability Centre

The Syria Justice and Accountability Centre (SJAC) strives to prevent impunity, promote redress, and facilitate principled reform. SJAC works to ensure that human rights violations in Syria are comprehensively documented and preserved for use in transitional justice and peace-building. SJAC collects documentation of violations from all available sources, stores it in a secure database, catalogues it according to human rights standards, and analyzes it using legal expertise and big data methodologies. SJAC also supports documenters inside Syria, providing them with resources and technical guidance, and coordinates with other actors working toward similar aims: a Syria defined by justice, respect for human rights, and rule of law.

Learn more at syriaaccountability.org

The State of Justice in Syria, 2025

March 2025, Washington, D.C.

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Cover: December 13, 2024 - Syrians Unfurl the New Syrian Flag in Celebration of the Fall of Assad.

Credit: SJAC's Documentation Team

Acronyms

AANES	Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria
ADMSP	Association for the Missing and Detained in Sednaya Prison
AI	Artificial intelligence
CJA	Center for Justice and Accountability
COI	Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic
CSO	Civil society organization
DNA	Deoxyribonucleic acid
EU	European Union
FAFG	Guatemalan Forensic Anthropology Foundation
FPV	First-person view
HLP	Housing, land and property
HTS	Hayat Tahrir al-Sham
HUDERIA	Human Rights, Democracy, and the Rule of Law Impact Assessment for AI Systems
ICC	International Criminal Court
IDP	Internally displaced person
IED	Improvised explosive devices
IHL	International Humanitarian Law
IIIM	International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism
IIMP	Independent Institution on Missing Persons in the Syrian Arab Republic
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
IT	Information technology
NDF	National Defense Forces
NGO	Nongovernmental organization
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
OHCHR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
OPCW	Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons
SDF	Syrian Democratic Forces
SJAC	Syria Justice and Accountability Centre
SMFT	Syrian Missing Persons and Forensic Team
SNA	Syrian National Army
TOR	Terms of reference
U.S.	United States
UI	User interface
UJ	Universal jurisdiction
UN	United Nations
UNITAD	United Nations Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Daesh/ISIL

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Memorialization and Truth-Seeking

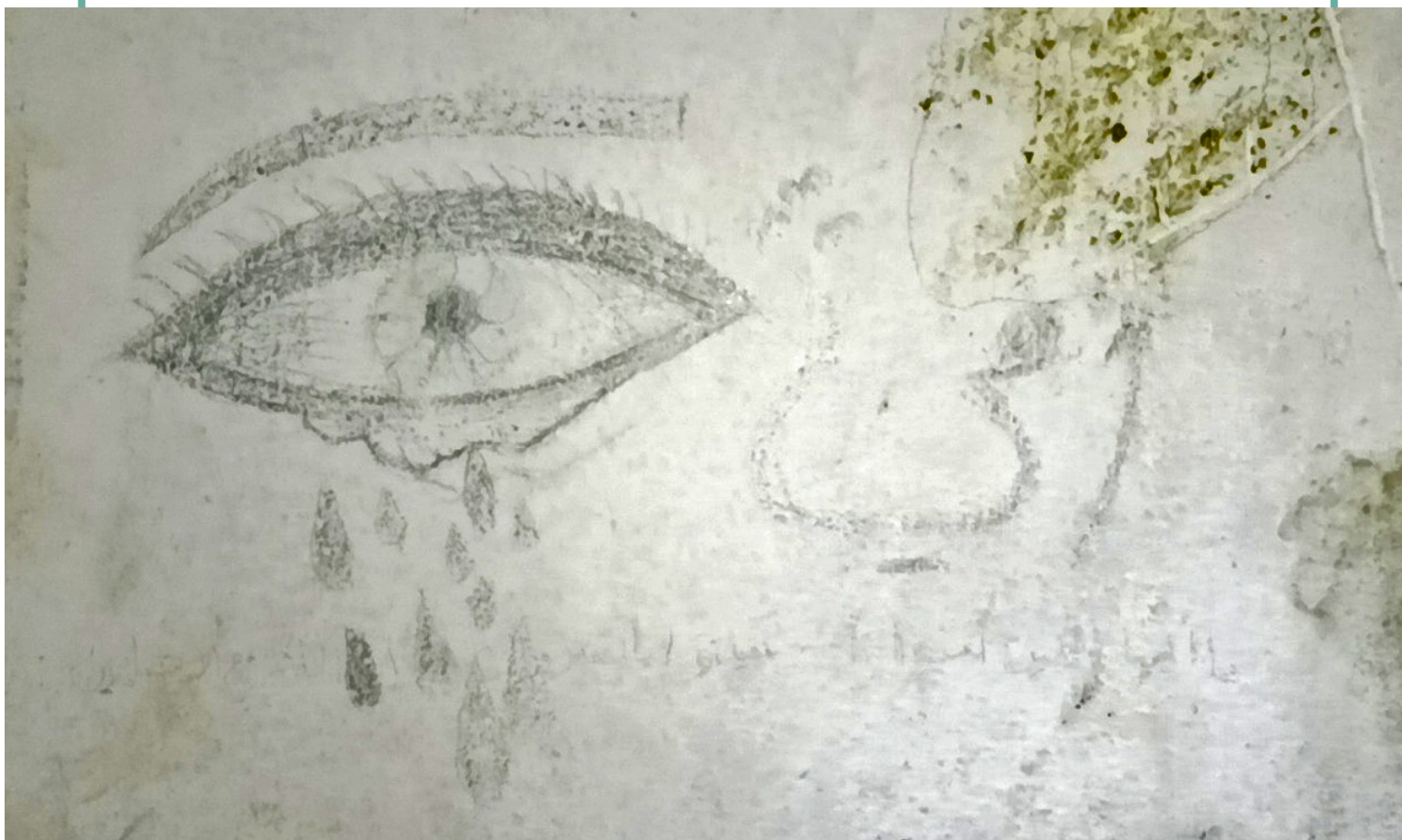
Throughout this report, SJAC will share art from Syrian artists who work to preserve the experience of the Syrian conflict through visual storytelling. This process can be a therapeutic means to share not just the artist's story with the world, but that of thousands Syrians whose experiences risk being erased after over a decade of conflict. Artwork helps build a collective memory of the Syrian conflict which will be essential for future transitional justice efforts.

Prisoner Wall Art

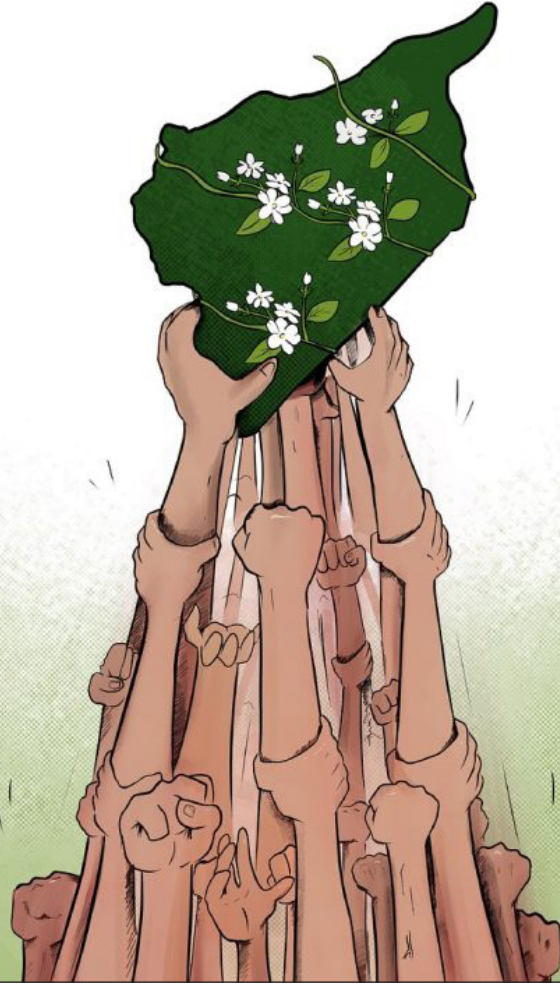
SJAC will also be highlighting art made by Syrian detainees while they were held in government prisons. The pictures throughout the report were taken by SJAC staff, who photographed the art while searching detention and intelligence centers for evidence of human rights violations after the fall of the Assad government.

It was a common practice for Syrians to write their names on a cell wall in case they were taken to a different facility or executed without their families being informed. Released detainees would track down families named on walls to inform them about the fate of their loved one. Detainees often created panels of artwork on their cell walls using any medium at their disposal, including at times their own blood.

The artists who created this art are unknown, but experiences captured on these prison walls serve as a memorial to the importance of a society based on justice and the rule of law.



A crying eye appears next to Arabic text that translates to, “my mother.”
Security Square Prison, Damascus (SJAC’s Documentation Team).



Hand in Hand, We Will Rebuild It

Artist: Abdul Muhaymen Badawi

Description: On December 8, 2024, the former Syrian government collapsed and former president Bashar Al-Assad fled Syria, leaving behind the legacy of 50 years of Assad family rule. Badawi drew this piece less than one week after the fall of the government, in an attempt to represent the hope and strength of Syrians. The piece depicts several hands working together, both to hold up each other and elevate the new Syria; which is depicted sprouting flowers that symbolize a flourishing Syria, free from the terror of Assad.



Flyers from families looking for missing loved ones after the fall of Assad, Damascus (SJAC's Documentation Team).

Introduction

The “State of Justice in Syria, 2025” is the Syria Justice and Accountability Centre’s (SJAC) sixth annual report focusing on human rights violations and justice efforts in Syria in 2024. This year, Syrians continued to experience human rights violations as multiple governing bodies and armed groups carried out unlawful attacks, arbitrary detentions, and property violations. The collapse of the former Syrian government, following an offensive by Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham (HTS), renewed hopes for a transitional justice process. However, human rights violations continued to occur, albeit on a smaller scale.

Throughout 2024, airstrikes, artillery bombardments, targeted assassinations, and the use of first-person view (FPV) drones by various actors continued to occur across Syria. Civilians bore the brunt of these attacks, as Assad government forces, Russian and Turkish military forces, and other armed groups indiscriminately bombed residential areas. In January 2024, for example, an incendiary attack by the former Syrian government targeted a camp for internally displaced persons in Idlib, displaying blatant disregard for civilian life.

Israeli airstrikes targeted Syria throughout 2024 and intensified after Israel’s invasion of Lebanon and Gaza. These attacks included the unprecedented bombing of the Iranian consulate in Damascus, violating international law. Targeted assassinations and internal clashes between government-allied forces across southern Syria further destabilized the area and led to civilian deaths, including children.

In addition, housing, land and property (HLP) rights were repeatedly violated. The former Syrian government prevented displaced residents from returning to their homes and reclaiming their properties, particularly in areas such as Jobar and Al-Yarmouk camp. Syrian National Army (SNA) factions supported by Türkiye in the North also looted, seized and sold civilian property and detained civilians attempting to recover their homes. In areas controlled by the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES), allegations surfaced of property theft through document forgery. After the fall of the Assad government, many of those returning to Syria were unable to reclaim their property due to destroyed property records, landmines, and the illegal occupation of their homes.

Arbitrary detention and enforced disappearances also continued throughout 2024. Prior to December,

the former Syrian government regularly arrested and disappeared scores of people, including political opponents and Syrian refugees forcibly returned from Lebanon. After the ousting of Assad, the interim government launched security crackdowns against former government officials and civilians; however, security operations often lacked clear legal justifications and bordered on reprisals. The SNA also detained political opponents, targeting journalists, Kurdish residents, and individuals accused of evading forced conscription. Conditions in prisons and detention centers also remained dire across Syria, with many recently released detainees reporting instances of torture and mistreatment to SJAC’s documenters.

Moreover, Syrian refugees in neighboring countries and the European Union continued to face increasingly dangerous environments and tenuous legal status in 2024, particularly after December when states in Europe paused the processing of asylum claims in response to the fall of Assad. The evolving situation in Syria and the implications for the future of Syrian refugees remains in question.

New opportunities for justice also emerged in 2024. After the fall of the Syrian government, the UN’s International, Impartial, and Independent Mechanism (IIIM) gained access to Syria for the first time. Syrian civil society groups, including SJAC, worked to preserve thousands of government documents abandoned in former detention centers, hoping they could be used for future accountability efforts. SJAC immediately mobilized its staff on the ground to begin collecting and scanning documents at key intelligence branches and detention centers, digitizing over 400,000 relevant documents.

The fall of the former Syrian government also changed the landscape for missing persons investigations. While thousands of detainees were freed, many more remain missing, and the path to accountability depends on sustained efforts on the local, national, and international levels.

Advancements in the field of technology and human rights, particularly regarding the integration of innovations in artificial intelligence (AI), will also be crucial to streamlining the analysis of large quantities of documentation and enhancing accountability efforts.

Syrians also pursued justice via universal jurisdiction cases in Europe, which played a valuable role in prosecuting former regime officials, members of pro-government militias, and ISIS fighters for crimes against humanity and war crimes. Such mechanisms will remain relevant until a functioning legal system can be rebuilt in Syria.

In addition to highlighting human rights violations and progress towards justice, this year's report also includes an annual overview of SJAC's work in 2024 in documentation, investigations and case-building, missing persons, trial monitoring, justice policy,

technology and human rights, and capacity building. Major SJAC accomplishments included the collection of over 400 interviews, monitoring of seven universal jurisdiction trials, and analysis of almost 20,000 pieces of documentation, contributing to dozens of cases throughout Europe and numerous cases in the US.

Finally, the report concludes with a list of recommendations on how the interim government and international actors can leverage this historic moment to support a comprehensive and Syrian-led transitional justice process in 2025.



A ripped photo of former president Bashar Al-Assad in Damascus (SJAC's Documentation Team).

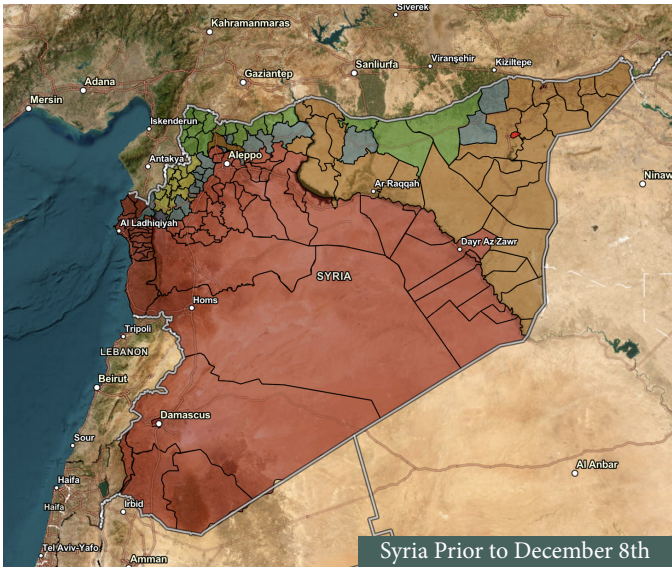


Military Intelligence Branch 235 (Palestine Branch), Damascus (SJAC's Documentation Team).

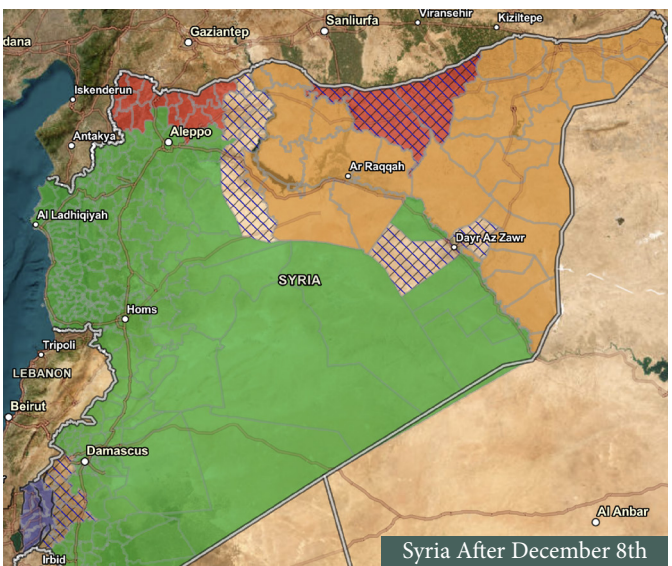
Violations

Overview of Operative Groups

For most of 2024, four separate governing bodies ruled Syria. The Assad government controlled most of the territory, consisting of the southern governorates of Daraa, Suwayda and Quneitra, the capital Damascus and its suburbs, the coast including Latakia and Tartous, the central governorates of Homs and Hama, and parts of Idlib, Aleppo, Raqqa, and Deir Ezzor governorates.



However, in late November, HTS, which operated politically as the Syrian Salvation Government and governed most of Idlib, launched a 10-day offensive against the Assad government. HTS-led forces quickly reached Damascus, prompting Assad to flee on December 8.



As of December 31, 2024, the interim government led by Ahmed Al-Sharaa, formerly known by his nom de guerre Mohammad al-Jolani, controlled the areas previously held by the Assad government, along with the entirety of Idlib governorate. While most armed groups have agreed to integrate with the new government, some groups, such as the Druze in Suwayda, have refused to surrender their weapons and are demanding greater autonomy in Syria's future political system.¹

Two governing entities in the northern part of the country remained relatively constant following the Assad government's fall. The AANES and its armed group the SDF continued to govern parts of Aleppo, Deir Ezzor, Al-Hasakeh, and Raqqa governorates. The Turkish-supported SNA factions continued to control much of northern Aleppo and parts of Raqqa and Al-Hasakeh governorates. In late 2024, clashes between SNA factions and the SDF were ongoing, particularly in and around Manbij in the Aleppo governorate.²

Unlawful Attacks

Syrians were subjected to consistent, unlawful attacks carried out by local, regional, and international powers throughout 2024. These attacks included airstrikes, artillery bombardment, targeted assassinations, FPV and conventional drone attacks, and the use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs).

Artillery bombardment contributed to a large portion of civilian deaths in 2024. The former Syrian government, its allies, HTS, AANES/SDF, SNA, and the Turkish military all conducted artillery bombardments that killed civilians with no defined military objective. A more complete investigation is needed to determine whether the attacks were lawful; however, SJAC has noted that at least two incidents clearly violated IHL. In the first, the former Syrian government bombed an IDP shelter in Idlib governorate on January 6 using incendiary rocket artillery, which was under the control of HTS during that time.³ Second, former Syrian government forces, in conjunction with Hezbollah, killed multiple civilians during artillery attacks in September which targeted homes and public facilities in Idlib.⁴

Targeted assassinations and internal clashes between various government-allied forces increased in southern

Syria this year, specifically in and around Daraa governorate. Assassinations were often attributed to ‘unknown militants’ and frequently targeted Syrian government or military officials, many of whom were associated with the drug trade. SJAC’s documenters also [reported](#) targeted killings of civilians in Daraa governorate on an almost weekly basis throughout the year. Internal clashes often occurred between rival armed groups loyal to the government, and these clashes frequently led to civilian casualties. In Al-Sanamayn, also in the Daraa governorate, clashes between local factions of the Syrian military and state security groups led to several house fires that killed 18 individuals, including civilians and children.⁵ All of these attacks may violate the principles of distinction and proportionality.

A new development in unlawful attacks in Syria this year was the widespread use of cheaply produced FPV drones laden with explosives. Popularized following Russia’s 2022 invasion of Ukraine, FPV drones were used by Assad’s government forces in 2023 and 2024 to target civilian vehicles and critical infrastructure such as farm equipment. In July 2024, Russian forces were documented training Assad government forces in the [use of FPV drones](#), and nearly 200 attacks were recorded by September. While representing a small portion of overall attacks, FPV drones allowed the Assad government to further disrupt civilian life and terrorize the populace using a weapon system that is more cost-effective than conventional airstrikes.

International actors, including Türkiye, Israel, and Russia, carried out some of the most notable airstrikes in Syria this year. Türkiye conducted numerous airstrikes in the Northeast, purportedly targeting PKK military targets. These airstrikes resulted in the deaths of civilians and the destruction of civilian infrastructure, such as the January 15 attack on Hassakeh.⁶

Alongside their invasion of Gaza and Lebanon, Israel repeatedly bombed Syria throughout 2024, often resulting in civilian casualties. This included the unprecedented bombing of the Iranian consulate in Damascus, a specially protected object under IHL, that resulted in the deaths of two civilians and senior Iranian military officials.⁷ Another Israeli attack in September targeted Syria’s Scientific Studies and Research Center in Masyaf and killed several civilians.

In January, Jordanian aircraft also bombed the town of Arman in Suwayda in southern Syria to target cross-border drug dealers, killing ten civilians, including two children, in a scene described as a “massacre.”⁸

Finally, Russian airstrikes targeted critical civilian infrastructure in the northwest of the country, which destroyed a furniture workshop, killed a civilian, and wounded five others.⁹

Housing, Land, and Property Violations

In 2024, significant violations of housing, land, and property (HLP) rights occurred across Syria’s various governing authorities.

Following the Assad government’s recapture of Damascus and the Damascus countryside in 2018, the government prohibited residents of specific areas from returning to or rebuilding their homes—a practice that kept residents away from their property until December 8, 2024. Additionally, in 2024, it was announced that residents of the Jobar neighborhood, located in East Damascus, would be permanently barred from returning by the former government, and those that still lived there would need to leave the area to allow for rezoning and reconstruction stipulated by Development Plan 106 (2022).¹⁰

In neighborhoods such as [Al-Yarmouk Camp](#) and the adjacent Hajar Al-Aswad area in southern Damascus, civilians were required to obtain “security approval” from the Assad government to return or visit. This process involved leveraging government connections, paying bribes, and demonstrating a family’s disassociation from opposition factions or activism. The Al-Yarmouk Camp also remained inaccessible to Syrian-Palestinian refugees who had fled to Lebanon during the conflict. Many of these refugees crossed back into Syria in September 2024 after Israeli bombings in Lebanon intensified.¹¹

The Assad government continued to seize movable and immovable assets from citizens residing in previously opposition-held areas under the Counterterrorism Law of 2012 and Legislative Decree 63 of 2012. In 2024, the Syrian Ministry of Finance unlawfully froze the assets of hundreds of individuals and their families in Zakia,

Arbitrary Detention and Enforced Disappearances

a town located south of Damascus.¹² In Suwayda, the government carried out precautionary seizures of the properties and funds of 15 activists. These actions, ordered by the General Intelligence Directorate, were retaliatory measures against protests in the city.¹³

In Northwest Syria, the SNA and affiliated armed groups frequently committed HLP violations, particularly in Afrin.¹⁴ Specifically, the SNA extorted displaced residents attempting to return to [SNA-controlled areas](#) and reclaim their homes. [Many](#) residents were detained, beaten, or kidnapped while trying to recover their property. Furthermore, SNA and affiliated groups reportedly looted civilian homes, stealing furniture, livestock, and goods such as solar panels and gas canisters. Seasonal thefts of olives and the cutting down of olive trees for firewood were also documented.

In Northeast Syria, civilians reported several HLP violations committed in early 2024 by AANES officials. In one notable case [covered by SJAC](#), a group of lawyers allegedly forged property documents and titles in exchange for bribes or portions of the stolen land. These forged documents essentially allowed AANES officials to steal land and property from their rightful owners.

With the fall of the Syrian government on December 8, HLP violations regained attention as many Syrian refugees encountered numerous obstacles upon attempting to return to their homes. Throughout the conflict, the Assad government engaged in systematic looting and pillage, leaving many properties uninhabitable. Furthermore, many returnees found their houses occupied by new residents, often the result of the Assad government's systematic property seizures, rezoning laws, and demographic engineering. Moreover, the government deliberately destroyed many property records,¹⁵ complicating ownership verification and restitution processes.

Remaining challenges include the total devastation of neighborhoods that prevent some returnees from identifying their properties; the return of displaced Syrians who lack proper documentation to assert their HLP rights; and the persistent threat of unexploded landmines which were planted in farmland and inside homes.¹⁶ There are also reports of violence arising from property disputes involving multiple claimants.

All parties to the conflict continued to carry out arbitrary detention and enforced disappearances in Syria in 2024.

Prior to its fall, the Assad government continued to be the primary perpetrator of these crimes, routinely arresting and disappearing perceived political opponents.¹⁷ The government also arrested and detained Syrians fleeing the conflict in Lebanon between Israel and Hezbollah,¹⁸ as well as those forcibly deported by the Lebanese government,¹⁹ in some cases resulting in the death of the detainee.

In September, the Syrian government issued Legislative Decree No. 27, granting amnesty for military desertions and several minor criminal offenses.²⁰ As with past amnesties disguised as reforms, Decree No. 27 failed to account for political detainees held in government facilities throughout Syria.²¹

In Idlib governate, HTS, which has since become the interim government, arrested several activists and protestors who were demanding reforms from the HTS-backed Salvation Government.²² Following the fall of Assad, HTS launched widespread security campaigns that targeted remaining members of the former government. These raids resulted in arrests of civilians, reconciled government supporters, and members of minority groups, without clarity as to the basis of the charges.²³

SNA factions in the Northwest arrested demonstrators protesting SNA abuses as well as journalists covering these protests, refusing to share information on their whereabouts.²⁴ The SNA also continued to arbitrarily arrest Kurdish people in the Afrin region and those accused of involvement with the AANES. Some of these detainees were then transferred to Türkiye.²⁵ Detainees held by the SNA are frequently exposed to physical abuse, including torture and sexual violence, during their detention.²⁶

In Northeast Syria, the SDF continued to arrest and detain civilians, including activists and journalists, and individuals evading forced conscription campaigns without legal justification.²⁷ Separately, the SDF also

continued to detain over 56,000 people accused of being former ISIS fighters and their family members in facilities and camps across the Northeast, most notably in Al Hol and Roj camps.²⁸ Detainees, which likely include civilians kidnapped by ISIS that were arrested alongside their captors, faced torture and harsh living conditions.

In 2024, the SDF released a limited number of Syrian detainees and their families from these camps to their homes in Deir ez-Zor province.²⁹ In addition, many of the detainees in Al Hol and Roj camps are foreign nationals, with reports in 2024 emerging that almost 50% fewer foreign children and women were repatriated from camps in Syria compared to the same time period last year.³⁰ Thousands of foreign nationals, including children, remain in these camps, and their fate remains unclear as the SDF announced all detainees would be released after the fall of Assad.

Refugee and Forced Returns

In 2024, Syrian refugees faced a dangerous environment and tenuous legal status as their right to seek asylum was attacked. Despite the ongoing lack of security in Syria, numerous states declared their intention to consider Syria safe prior to the fall of Assad. The eventual change of governance in Syria created an even more uncertain future for Syrian refugees, as EU states announced a pause on the processing of asylum claims.

Before the fall of the Assad government, states in the EU encouraged the bloc to review and reassess its policy towards Syria, signaling a readiness to normalize relations with the Assad government for the purpose of facilitating refugee returns.³¹ Italy, for example, appointed an ambassador to Syria and became the first G7 nation to re-establish its diplomatic mission in Syria. This decision reflected the growing normalization of relations with the Assad government and the increasing willingness to ignore ongoing rights violations carried out in the country.³²

Syrian refugees in neighboring states also faced growing anti-refugee sentiment throughout the year. In Türkiye, anti-Syrian riots erupted in Kayseri and spread to areas as far as Hatay in June 2024. Rioters attacked Syrian-owned shops and property and demanded that Syrians

be kicked out of the country.³³ These tensions spilled over into Syria, where hundreds of Syrian civilians in Turkish-controlled regions held counter-protests and at least seven people were killed in clashes with Turkish troops. Meanwhile, forcible returns from Türkiye to Syria continued to be recorded.

Israel also bombed Lebanon in 2024, displacing Lebanese nationals and Syrian refugees and forcing them to cross into Syria to escape immediate danger. By October 2024, over 400,000 individuals had crossed back into Syria, many of them Syrian refugees.³⁴ SJAC also received credible reports that Syrians forcibly returned were subjected to arbitrary arrest, maltreatment, and sometimes death upon return to Syria. In July 2024, for example, [SJAC interviewed a friend of Ahmed Al-Hilli](#), a Syrian man deported from Lebanon earlier in 2024 who was detained, tortured, and left paralyzed from the waist down by the time he was released. He died of a stroke shortly thereafter.

Although the government of Bashar Al-Assad fell at the end of 2024, it remained unclear if Syria can be classified as safe [due to ongoing violence](#), attacks, rights violations, and continuous changes to the political landscape. Despite this lack of clarity, EU states responded by immediately pausing the processing of asylum procedures for Syrian refugees, issuing little guidance and creating an even more hostile environment for Syrians within Europe.³⁵



A Cell in the Mezzeh Military Airport Prison, Damascus (SJAC's Missing Persons Team).

Sanctions

Throughout the Syrian conflict, the U.S., EU, and UN imposed economic sanctions against the Assad government as a response to human rights abuses and mass atrocities committed since 2011. Sanctions broadly froze the property of senior government officials, prohibited financial transactions with the government, and included widespread prohibitions on trade and investment, which impacted the operations of the former Syrian government and had a collateral impact on Syrian citizens.³⁶

States introduced new sanctions schemes as the conflict progressed. In 2019, for example, the Caesar Syria Civilian Protection Act (Caesar Act)³⁷ enhanced sanctions by tightening loopholes that were being

exploited by the Assad government. The act placed secondary sanctions on non-U.S. groups investing in Syria and restricted any U.S. or non-U.S. entity from engaging in reconstruction efforts. Despite the fall of Assad on December 8, the Caesar Act was extended for five additional years on December 23, 2024.

After the fall of Assad, the international community began to reconsider and reframe the rationale for sanctions, conditioning sanctions relief on the new interim government's ability and willingness to abide by certain human rights standards, such as forming a representative government inclusive of minorities, preventing terrorism, and ensuring humanitarian aid reaches those in need.³⁸



Syrian Intelligence Branch 300, Damascus. Each group of files corresponds to an individual who was under surveillance (SJAC's Documentation Team).



Courtroom where the Alaa M. trial is being held, Frankfurt am Main (SJAC's Trial Monitoring Team).

Justice Efforts

The year 2024 marked a significant turning point for justice efforts in Syria. Prior to the fall of Assad in December, most civil society efforts to advance justice were organized outside the country due to the immense barriers and dangers created by the Assad government. Missing persons investigations, for example, remained largely remote as the main perpetrator – Bashar Al-Assad – remained in power for the majority of the year. Criminal accountability took the form of universal jurisdiction cases across Europe, implicating a variety of actors involved in crimes, including members of Syria's National Defense Forces, ISIS, and Hezbollah, among others.

The fall of the Assad government in December, however, opened the door to pursuing more comprehensive justice efforts as groups gained access to areas that were previously impenetrable. Civil society began collecting and preserving government documents left behind in various government facilities and detention centers, while UN mechanisms, such as the IIIM, entered the country for the first time. In the coming year, SJAC looks forward to supporting justice efforts in Syria that are in line with SJAC's longstanding goal of achieving accountability for past crimes while fostering a Syria defined by justice, respect for human rights, and rule of law.

Documentation

Throughout 2024, Syrian civil society organizations continued to document crimes, conduct interviews with victims, survivors, and insider witnesses, and preserve open-source videos. However, the fall of the Assad government on December 8, 2024 transformed documentation efforts. Overnight, civil society actors gained access to government facilities that housed millions of intelligence documents. Additionally, Syrians who were previously afraid to speak about their experiences rushed to provide interviews, particularly to report their missing loved ones.

SJAC immediately mobilized its staff on the ground to begin collecting and scanning documents at key intelligence branches and detention centers. In the weeks after the fall of the government, the security situation at branches was often chaotic, placing many documents at risk of damage. In one instance, SJAC's team spent a day preserving documents in an Air Force Intelligence branch in Harasta, only to return the next

day to find that the room where they were working had been completely burned. In other cases, well-meaning journalists or civilians searching for evidence moved documents without recording where they were first recovered, impacting the chain of custody. By the end of the year, most of these facilities were secured, and the interim government issued an order requesting documents to be returned.

By the end of 2024, SJAC preserved and digitized over 400,000 documents. Initial analysis suggests that these documents include evidence on the fates and whereabouts of missing persons as well as documentation of crimes committed by the Assad government. However, these documents represent a fraction of the millions of documents left behind by the Assad government. A transitional justice process will need to include the creation of a national archive to preserve and analyze these documents for justice, accountability, and memorialization purposes.

This year also saw the closure of UNITAD, the UN mechanism mandated with investigating crimes committed by ISIS in neighboring Iraq. While UNITAD's mandate was limited to Iraq, it possessed extensive interviews and documents likely relevant to Syria, particularly related to the thousands of Yazidi women and children who were kidnapped in Iraq and are still missing in Syria. Unfortunately, the closure of the mechanism meant that this documentation would no longer be accessible to justice actors.

As Syria embarks on its own justice processes, UNITAD's closure offers a sobering reminder that actors on the ground need to plan for long-term sustainability without relying solely on UN mechanisms, which will likely be at the center of the nascent Syrian justice processes tasked with preserving documentation.

Criminal Accountability

In 2024, European countries such as Germany, France, and the Netherlands continued to advance criminal accountability for war crimes and crimes against humanity committed in Syria by employing universal jurisdiction to prosecute Syrian nationals. These included former regime officials and members of extremist groups such as ISIS. After the overthrow of the former Syrian government in December 2024, the Syrian interim government stated its commitment to

prosecuting individuals who committed criminal acts under the orders of Assad, and some states like Germany reiterated their support for universal jurisdiction trials on the international stage.

Universal jurisdiction (UJ) enables national courts to prosecute individuals for grave international crimes—such as genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity, and torture—irrespective of where the crime occurred, the perpetrator's nationality, or the victim's nationality. In Europe, numerous countries have integrated UJ into their domestic legal systems, which has made it possible to prosecute crimes committed during the Syrian conflict and hold perpetrators accountable.

Several Syria-related criminal trials began or continued in 2024 and prosecuted a variety of actors, including pro-government militia members, intelligence officers, a Syrian doctor, and ISIS fighters. At the end of 2024, the [SJAC case tracker database](#) included over 350 cases of Syria-related criminal trials, many of which are ongoing.³⁹

In light of the recent government overthrow in Syria and the increased access to documentation of the atrocities committed by the former Syrian government,

this number will likely continue to increase in 2025 as more witnesses may feel empowered to testify.⁴⁰

Among the trials that began in 2024 was the first ever [trial against a Hezbollah member](#) for crimes committed in the Syrian conflict. The trial began on October 15 at the Higher Regional Court Stuttgart, Germany, in which Syrian national Ammar A. was accused of war crimes and crimes against humanity.⁴¹ Prosecutors allege that he led a Shia, pro-Assad militia that was later integrated with Hezbollah and involved in violent operations targeting civilians in Busra al-Sham. The trial offers a significant chance to uncover evidence about Hezbollah's role in bolstering the Syrian government during the conflict.

Several other trials against Syrian nationals accused of war crimes also took place in 2024. On December 18, Ahmad H., a former affiliate of the NDF, was sentenced to 10 years in prison at the Higher Regional Court of Hamburg, Germany for war crimes and crimes against humanity. The charges included acts of torture, deprivation of liberty, and enslavement committed during the Syrian conflict.⁴² A series of trials involving former affiliates of Syria's NDF are scheduled to take place in the coming years.

With reference to ISIS-related crimes, a trial commenced against two Syrian nationals on April 30 at the Higher Regional Court of Düsseldorf, Germany. Mohammad A. and Asmael K. faced charges of membership in one or more foreign terrorist organizations, including ISIS. They were also charged with war crimes, including hostage-taking resulting in death and murder allegedly committed during the Syrian conflict.⁴³ In September 2024, a criminal trial commenced at the Munich Higher Regional Court in which Amer A., Basel O., and Sohail A. were accused of membership in foreign terrorist organizations, including ISIS.

On May 24, a French court delivered a landmark verdict convicting three senior Syrian officials, [Ali Mamlouk](#), [Jamil Hassan](#), and [Abdel Salam Mahmoud](#), in absentia for crimes against humanity and war crimes. The officials were sentenced to life imprisonment for their roles in the 2013 arrests, torture, and deaths of Mazen Dabbagh, a French-Syrian father, and his son Patrick.⁴⁴

In June 2024, the Paris Court of Appeal confirmed the validity of an international arrest warrant against



Higher Regional Court of Stuttgart
(SJAC's Trial Monitoring Team).

Assad, citing complicity in war crimes. This landmark decision challenges the principle of absolute immunity for a sitting head of state, asserting that accountability for international crimes takes precedence.⁴⁵ It is to be seen whether the case will move forward as Assad is no longer protected by this type of immunity. If the issue is not an obstacle, Assad could be tried in absentia by the French judicial system.

Although the majority of Syria-related trials in 2024 involved males as defendants, an increasing number of trials against women emerged, including a Dutch woman in the Netherlands charged with keeping two Yazidi women as slaves. [Hasna A.](#) was charged with crimes against humanity, membership in a terrorist organization, and endangering the life of a child. The 32-year-old had left the Netherlands in 2015 with her four-year-old son and married a Moroccan fighter in ISIS-controlled Syria. She was sentenced to 10 years imprisonment in December; however, the court acquitted her of aiding and abetting slavery as a crime against humanity.⁴⁶

Looking forward, the current Syrian President Al-Sharaa has called on the international community to provide assistance in prosecuting individuals who committed criminal acts under the orders of Bashar al-Assad. Al-Sharaa emphasized that these prosecutions would be conducted through domestic tribunals to ensure justice and accountability within the country.⁴⁷ However, to ensure criminal accountability and deliver retrospective justice for the victims, establishing a functioning judicial system in Syria is essential.⁴⁸

On the international stage, Germany reiterated its support for universal jurisdiction trials after the fall of Assad, in which Germany's Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock issued a strong warning: "If any of Assad's torturers is thinking of fleeing to Germany, to them I will make one thing clear: we will use the full force of the law to hold all the regime's henchmen to account for their despicable crimes."⁴⁹

Syria, however, has not ratified the Rome Statute and remains outside the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court (ICC), limiting the court's ability to directly prosecute individuals from Syria for war crimes. Ukraine's recent signing and ratification of the Rome Statute, which has now officially entered into force, could serve as a potential model for Syria to

follow in the future. This step could pave the way for greater international accountability and cooperation in addressing war crimes and crimes against humanity.⁵⁰

Finally, in December 2024, IIIM representatives traveled to Damascus to meet with the interim government, which was reportedly open to cooperating on investigations into war crimes committed during the conflict.⁵¹

Missing Persons Investigations

For the first eleven months of 2024, missing persons investigations in Syria were disjointed and largely conducted remotely, as the perpetrator responsible for the majority of enforced disappearances – Bashar al-Assad – remained in power. The fall of the former Syrian government in December, however, drastically changed the landscape for missing persons investigations. While thousands of detainees were freed, many more remained missing, with significant work needed to help families understand the fates and whereabouts of their loved ones.

The primary international institution mandated to investigate the fate of the missing in Syria, the new UN IIMP, formally began its work in April and had a staff of over twenty people by the end of the year. Most of the mechanism's efforts in 2024 were preparatory in nature: designing a data management system, mapping and understanding existing missing persons efforts, and connecting with and briefing families.⁵² Larger strategic questions, such as which cases the mechanism will prioritize and whether it will operate within the country, remained unanswered while the staff awaited the delayed appointment of a Head. On December 19, the Secretary General appointed Karla Quintana, who brings a wealth of missing persons expertise from her work in Mexico and Colombia.⁵³ The selection of a Head from Latin America, the birthplace of forensic anthropology where efforts have historically been community-led and based on local capacity, was an encouraging signal that the mechanism will support a Syrian-led, victim-centered process.

Meanwhile, SJAC continued its own missing persons investigations in Northeast Syria, focused on searching for the fates and whereabouts of those disappeared by

ISIS. By focusing on areas controlled by AANES, SJAC and its partner, the [Syrian Missing Persons and Forensic Team](#) (SMFT), could work openly and make tangible progress. In February, SJAC [brought](#) two experts from the Guatemalan Forensic Anthropology Foundation (FAFG) to Raqqa and Qamishli, the first time that international forensic experts have visited mass graves in Syria. That trip led to the creation of a detailed plan for the identification of human remains in Northeast Syria, which will require the re-exhumation of previously exhumed remains for the purpose of forensic analysis and DNA testing. Ahead of such efforts, the team conducted preparatory contextual investigations into ISIS prisons and grave sites, including an expanded focus on the search for the Yazidi women and children still missing inside Syria.

SJAC continues to use a combination of documentation, including satellite imagery, ISIS documents, and survivor and family interviews, to investigate the missing. In November 2024, after over two years of efforts, including filing a civil complaint against the Defense Intelligence Agency for non-response, SJAC successfully utilized the U.S. Freedom of Information Act to obtain ISIS records originally collected by U.S. and coalition forces in Syria. Records include lists of those imprisoned by ISIS and will be invaluable to ongoing investigations.

SJAC's team also collaborated with the Association for the Missing and Detained in Sednaya Prison (ADMSP) to apply SJAC's investigative methodology outside the

post-ISIS context, focusing, for the first time, on former Syrian government detention facilities. In an in-depth [study of the Mezzeh military airport](#) in Damascus, SJAC and ADMSP utilized interviews from survivors and inside witnesses, along with open-source data, to understand how the Air Force Intelligence Directorate detained, tortured, and, in some cases, executed detainees at the airport. This ultimately allowed SJAC and ADMSP to link the prison complex to three suspected gravesites that likely hold the remains of former detainees. In the aftermath of the fall of the former Syrian government, SJAC's missing persons team entered the Mezzeh Airport facility and photographed tens of thousands of additional documents, which included prisoner lists and information on prospective gravesites.

The coming months represent a historic opportunity to create a centralized, Syrian-led missing persons process that could provide answers to tens of thousands of families. The interim government should take immediate steps to preserve mass graves and government documents left behind by the Assad government, appoint an official responsible for missing persons processes within the Ministry of Justice, and begin meeting with civil society organizations and families of the missing. The IIMP will need to pivot quickly to meet this moment, including hiring staff inside Syria. While the IIMP's resources and expertise will be invaluable, the mechanism should aim to play a capacity-building role in support of an official process



Majdal Shams

Artist: Ibrahim Barghoud

Material: Painting

On July 27th, 2024, a rocket hit a football field in Majdal Shams, in the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights, killing 12 children and injuring many more, all between 10-14 years old. Barghoud's painting depicts the chaotic scene immediately after the attack. Children, still dressed in their football uniforms lay dead and injured on the field as their friends and family stand around them shrouded in black. It is unclear who launched the missile, with both Hezbollah and Israel accusing the other. What is clear is this was yet another senseless attack against civilians.

housed within the Ministry of Justice. Whether such a government-led process succeeds will depend on the ability of the new government to win the full trust and support of the families.

Technology and Human Rights

The most notable development in 2024 in the field of technology and human rights was the advancement of digital human rights tools that incorporated artificial intelligence (AI), which offered new opportunities to enhance human rights protections. For instance, AI-driven tools have the potential to improve search functions, increase access to information, streamline heavy tasks such as the analysis of large datasets, and shorten the time needed for the delivery of essential services. These new tools have the capacity to benefit human rights defenders, NGOs, and the public sector. However, these technological strides also introduced complex dilemmas, underscoring the need for human rights-based technology policies.

With regards to human rights documentation, automated systems can rapidly process and analyze large datasets, including social media posts, satellite imagery, and official records, which might prove essential for a post-Assad Syria. These AI-driven tools can also automate data collections from diverse sources, identify relevant information, and verify the authenticity of multimedia content. However, challenges persist, including ensuring data accuracy, preventing algorithmic biases, and maintaining the

privacy and security of sensitive information. Other AI tools have also produced several challenges of their own, such as the proliferation of deepfakes that can deceive viewers and undermine the credibility of genuine documentation.

AI-driven tools can also play an instrumental role in post-Assad Syria, specifically in determining the fate of missing persons. AI algorithms can analyze satellite images to identify evidence of mass graves,⁵⁴ and predictive analytics and data mining techniques can improve the efficiency of sorting information related to missing people. However, these technologies raise concerns about privacy and the need to ensure AI models do not retain and reuse raw personal information about missing persons and their families.⁵⁶

The recognition of these challenges has led to broad efforts to establish guidelines and methodologies that ensure AI applications are designed and implemented in ways that respect and promote human rights. The Council of Europe introduced the Human Rights, Democracy, and Rule of Law Impact Assessment (HUDERIA) methodology, providing a structured approach to assess AI systems' impact on human rights throughout their lifecycle.⁵⁷ The U.S. Department of State also released a "Risk Management Profile for Artificial Intelligence and Human Rights," serving as a practical guide for organizations to develop and govern AI in a manner consistent with international human rights standards.⁵⁸ Similarly, the OECD AI Principles⁵⁹ promote innovative, trustworthy AI that respects human rights and democratic values, providing flexible guidance for policymakers and AI actors.



December 13th, 2024.

Syrians celebrate the fall of Assad in the Umayyad Mosque, Damascus (SJAC's Documentation Team).



SJAC's documentation team scans Assad government intelligence files, Damascus 2024.

SJAC's Impacts and Achievements in 2024

Documentation Updates

For over 10 years, SJAC has documented violations of human rights and international humanitarian law in Syria with the aim of facilitating current and future transitional justice efforts. SJAC's team of documenters is non-partisan, ethnically diverse, and includes both men and women inside Syria and neighboring countries who work to preserve evidence of violations, regardless of the affiliation or identity of the victim or perpetrators. SJAC uses its documentation to inform the public, support UN mechanisms, and [assist prosecutors](#) pursuing criminal investigations across Europe.

Throughout the year, SJAC's documentation team collected 357 interviews with 271 men and 86 women. SJAC recorded instances of detention (166), torture (93), bombardment (71), SGBV (54), enforced disappearance (43), killing (43), property violations (41), forced deportation (30), chemical attacks (16), child recruitment (3), attack on non-military facilities (2), and other violations (10, mostly regarding use of civilians as human shields).

In addition, SJAC collected 57 insider witness interviews with former members of the Syrian military, police, intelligence agencies, and other facilities such as military hospitals, as well as interviews with members of opposition forces. These are essential for proving command responsibility and bringing senior leaders to justice.

After the fall of the Assad government, SJAC collected 400,000+ Syrian government documents from abandoned military and intelligence facilities. The documents contain vital evidence on the fates of detainees as well as the criminal actions of the Assad government. SJAC's team scanned and photographed documents in place when possible and physically collected documents that were at risk of tampering or destruction. All physical documents have since been returned to the interim government, with SJAC retaining digital copies for future analysis.

SJAC also identified, downloaded, and preserved 122,843 open-source videos. By the end of the year, SJAC's Bayanat database contained over two million discrete pieces of documentation on the Syrian conflict.

Finally, SJAC debuted a new [human rights map](#) in 2024, which provides up-to-date information from the ground on the most significant human rights violations occurring in Syria. Intended as a resource for policymakers to have updated information about ongoing violations, this report successfully reached major policy organizations in Europe in 2024, communicating updates on major issues such as child recruitment, unlawful attacks, and arbitrary detention.

Investigations and Case-Building Updates

SJAC's data analysis team processes all incoming documentation to ensure that it is labeled, searchable, and linked to related evidence. SJAC's investigative team then utilizes this analyzed documentation, along with supplementary documentation like satellite imagery, to investigate and expose patterns of crimes committed in Syria. This year, the team analyzed almost 20,000 pieces of documentation, including interviews, documents, and videos.

In 2024, SJAC published its first documentary and three investigative reports, revealing widespread and systematic violations in Syria primarily perpetrated by the former Syrian government:

- [“They Spared No One”](#) analyzed over 10,000 videos of barrel bomb attacks in a documentary format.
- [“With God’s Help, Nothing will Remain”](#) focused on the pillaging of civilian property in Darayya, Harasta, and Al-Yarmouk camp.
- [“The Paper ‘Trail of Terror’](#) analyzed Syrian intelligence documents that demonstrated how the Assad government ordered or deliberately misrepresented the nature of attacks that killed multiple civilians.
- [“Voices of Survival”](#) centered around interviews from twelve survivors of chemical attacks perpetrated by the Assad government and ISIS.

Case Building

SJAC's case building team contributed to dozens of cases throughout Europe as well as numerous cases in the United States in 2024.

Under the direction of the Case Building Team Lead, SJAC's team of Syrian community advocates based in Belgium, France, Germany, and the Netherlands worked to identify victims and witnesses who had knowledge of Syrian perpetrators present in these countries. In addition to making proactive submissions when the team identified suspects independently, SJAC responded to requests from war crimes units and police in several European countries. These authorities regularly reach out to SJAC's case building team, requesting additional information about suspects and potential witnesses who are willing to testify.

One of the major successes for SJAC's case building efforts in 2024 was the trial and sentencing of Ahmad H. in Hamburg, Germany. A former leader in the NDF, Ahmad H. was accused of 21 counts of war crimes and crimes against humanity and suspected of being involved in the 2012 Tadamon Massacre. In 2023, SJAC [provided](#) critical information to the German authorities regarding the perpetrator, which led to the case being brought to trial. SJAC [monitored](#) the trial in 2024, which ended with the accused being found guilty of several charges, including torture, deprivation of liberty, and enslavement. He was sentenced to 10 years in prison.⁶⁰

SJAC made another substantial contribution to a case that the Center for Justice and Accountability (CJA) filed with the U.S. District Court in Washington, DC in December 2024. This case sought justice for a Syrian American who was tortured at the Air Force Intelligence Branch at the Mezzeh Military Airport during Assad's rule. SJAC submitted 10 witness statements and 10 government documents to CJA in support of this case, which detailed torture, arbitrary detention, and execution.

[SJAC also provided](#) crucial testimony to the authorities in the case against Samir al-Sheikh in the U.S., the former head of Adra prison in Damascus.⁶¹

Missing Persons Updates

SJAC's missing persons team utilizes forensic methods to investigate missing persons and mass graves in Northeast Syria with the goal of supporting accountability processes and identifying those who were disappeared by ISIS. SJAC's project consists of three main areas: working with families to document missing persons cases, investigating sites of detention and burial, and building the forensic capacity of local partners. Taken together, these activities lay the groundwork for SJAC and its partners, the Raqqa-based SMFT and the FAFG, to identify human remains in Northeast Syria.

In 2024, SJAC's team documented 170+ new missing persons cases. In each case, SJAC conducted an in-depth interview with the family of the missing person and documented the nature of their disappearance as well as relevant physical features that could assist with identification. This information was then uploaded to SJAC's Bayanat software, where the person's case is searchable and linked to other relevant cases, locations, and perpetrators.

SJAC and the SMFT also conducted contextual investigations into several key detention centers and grave sites, visiting and photographing sites, analyzing satellite imagery, and conducting over 50 interviews with survivors and witnesses. To date, SJAC has identified 246 ISIS prisons and 63 grave sites, all of which can be viewed [online](#).



The FAFG Visits the SMFT's Samples Lab, Raqqa.
(SMFT)

Finally, in February 2024, [SJAC brought](#) two FAFG forensic experts to Syria to assess current efforts and provide in-person training to the SMFT. FAFG experts trained the SMFT identification team in forensic analysis, including how to assess biological sex and age in skeletal human remains. Additionally, FAFG trained SJAC’s team on the collection of DNA reference samples from families. At the end of the training, FAFG brought four postmortem skeletal samples back to Guatemala for DNA testing. Based on their time in Raqqa, FAFG also provided detailed recommendations for future training, exhumation, and identification processes in Northeast Syria, which will guide SJAC’s work in the coming years.

Trial Monitoring Updates

In 2024, SJAC expanded its trial monitoring to include multiple jurisdictions and perpetrators — providing regular updates on seven proceedings that spanned four countries. In France, SJAC followed the in absentia [trial of Ali Mamlouk, Jamil Hassan, and Abdel Salam Mahmoud](#), who were convicted of crimes against humanity and war crimes on May 27, 2024.

In Frankfurt, Germany, SJAC entered its 3rd year monitoring the [trial of Alaa M.](#), who is accused of crimes against humanity linked to his role as a civilian doctor in Syrian military hospitals. Trials of ISIS affiliates [Mohammad A. and Asmael K.](#) for war crimes and terrorism are ongoing in Düsseldorf. SJAC has been attending the hearings and, for the first time, gained [access to the Arabic language interpretation](#) provided to the accused. In Hamburg, [Ahmad H.](#) was sentenced to 10 years in December 2024 for crimes committed as an NDF affiliate; however, his involvement in the Tadamon massacre could not be ascertained. In [Stuttgart](#), the first trial examining Hezbollah’s role in Syria is underway, and SJAC is pursuing access to audio recordings due to its [historic significance](#).

In the Netherlands, the District Court of The Hague convicted [Hasna A.](#),⁶² an ISIS affiliate, of crimes against humanity for enslaving a Yazidi survivor, participating in a terrorist organization, and child endangerment. Charges related to another survivor were dismissed for lack of evidence. SJAC is also monitoring the U.S. [trial of Samir Al Sheikh](#), who was initially charged with immigration fraud. In December 2024, a superseding indictment added torture charges linked to his role as head of Adra Prison from 2005 to 2008.⁶³

Recurring issues across these trials include the absence of cultural mediators and Syrian expert witnesses, witness intimidation and inadequate protection, and uncertainty around using [asylum hearing protocols as evidence](#), all of which potentially impact witness credibility. To address these challenges, SJAC will publish a “Universal Jurisdiction Comparative Report” in early 2025, providing recommendations for authorities. Additionally, SJAC is currently developing [witness protection guides](#) tailored to four EU jurisdictions, offering clarity on witness rights and fostering protective measures.

Lastly, the fall of the Syrian government has enabled some witnesses to speak openly for the [first time](#), though the broader impact of this development remains to be assessed.

Justice Policy Updates

In 2024, SJAC’s justice policy team leveraged its expertise to recommend and advance practical and actionable policies to achieve meaningful justice and accountability for Syrians.

SJAC expanded its presence among policy makers in the EU and U.S., holding private briefings with a range of stakeholders to discuss topics like pressuring the SDF to [cease child recruitment](#) in the Northeast and [addressing the detention centers](#) housing alleged ISIS fighters. Given the pressing nature of the topic of forced refugee returns throughout 2024, SJAC also [held a public facing event](#) in October alongside the Special Envoy for Syria from France, Jean-François Guillaume, on why Syria was not safe for returns.

SJAC also published a variety of publications in English and Arabic to advance SJAC’s policy portfolio in 2024. These included an extensive report that [documented Syrian survivors’ testimonies](#) of chemical attacks carried out by the Assad government and ISIS, in addition to short-form articles on topics such as the risks Syrian journalists faced in Türkiye. These publications were accompanied by SJAC’s annual recommendations issued ahead of the [Brussels Conference](#) and the [UN General Assembly](#).

After the fall of the Assad government in 2024, SJAC responded swiftly to events and shared [recommendations](#) on pertinent issues with policy

makers, including the need to preserve mass graves and newly accessible documents.

Technology and Human Rights Updates

SJAC's open-source database [Bayanat](#) allows for the secure storage and analysis of large amounts of human rights documentation. The software is used by SJAC's team, as well as 20+ organizations across the Middle East, Africa, and Europe, including Syria, Iraq, Türkiye, Sudan, and Ethiopia.



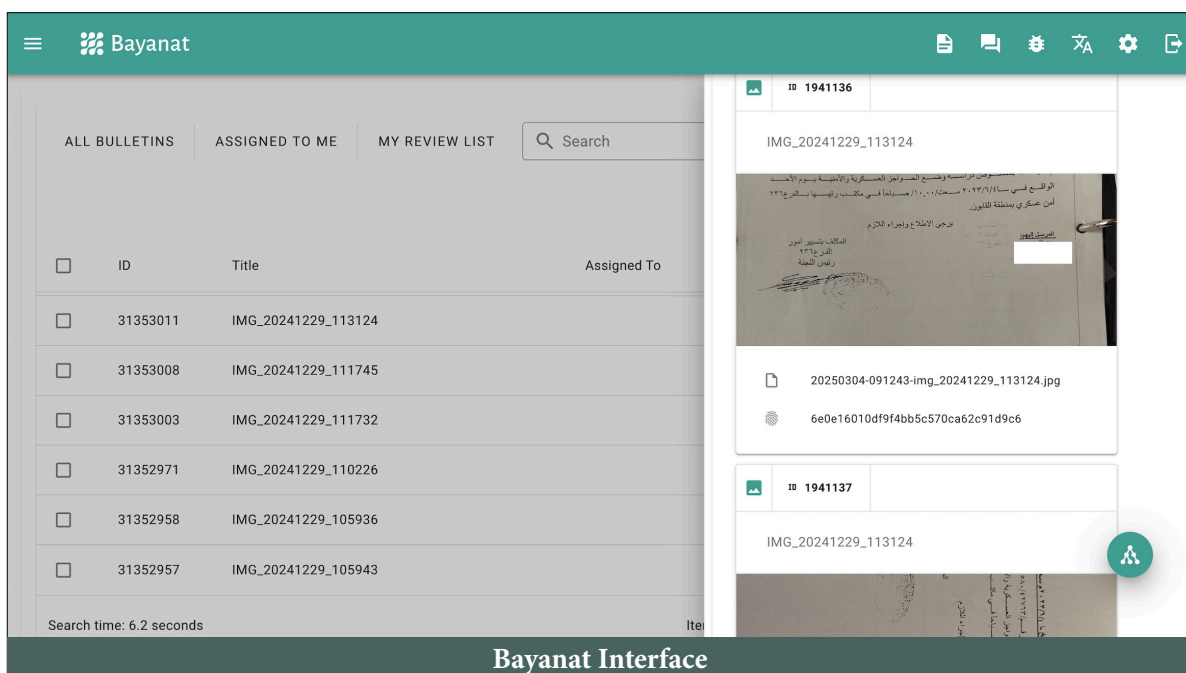
In 2024, SJAC introduced Bayanat v2.0, which included substantial improvements to the user interface and experience, several security enhancements, and new features. Bayanat v2.0 added session management capabilities to Bayanat, allowing administrators to track and manage users' sessions. The update also introduced validations to user input, improving security and data consistency. Additionally, the update added a System Log dashboard where administrators can track errors in their instances and easily report them to the IT team.

This year, SJAC also introduced a new feature to Bayanat called Actor Profiles, which enhances the Actor feature of the database. The Actor Profile feature allows analysts

to store information about the same individual coming from multiple sources in one Actor page. Previously, conflicting or new data about the same person had to be stored in multiple Actor pages. This new feature cuts down on duplication within the database and improves efficiency while continuing to allow information from different sources to remain clearly separated and easily tracked for chain of custody purposes.

Bayanat updates always prioritize data security as a cornerstone of the platform. This year's updates further enhanced the system settings dashboard that was introduced in 2023, providing administrators with more options to tweak security-related settings. The updates also included a restrictive access control mode; if activated by the admin, all items will be restricted in the database by default, and users will be only able to access items to which they are explicitly given access. The updates also allowed non-admin users to restrict items they create to their own access groups. Furthermore, Bayanat upgraded its dependencies to incorporate the latest security patches and improvements, a proactive measure that ensures the platform remains resilient against potential attacks.

Lastly, Bayanat now comes with a User Interface Setup Wizard that assists with installing Bayanat before first use. The wizard allows the installer to seamlessly create the first admin account, customize settings, set security policies, and enable or disable important features, making it easier than ever for administrators to set up and customize Bayanat.



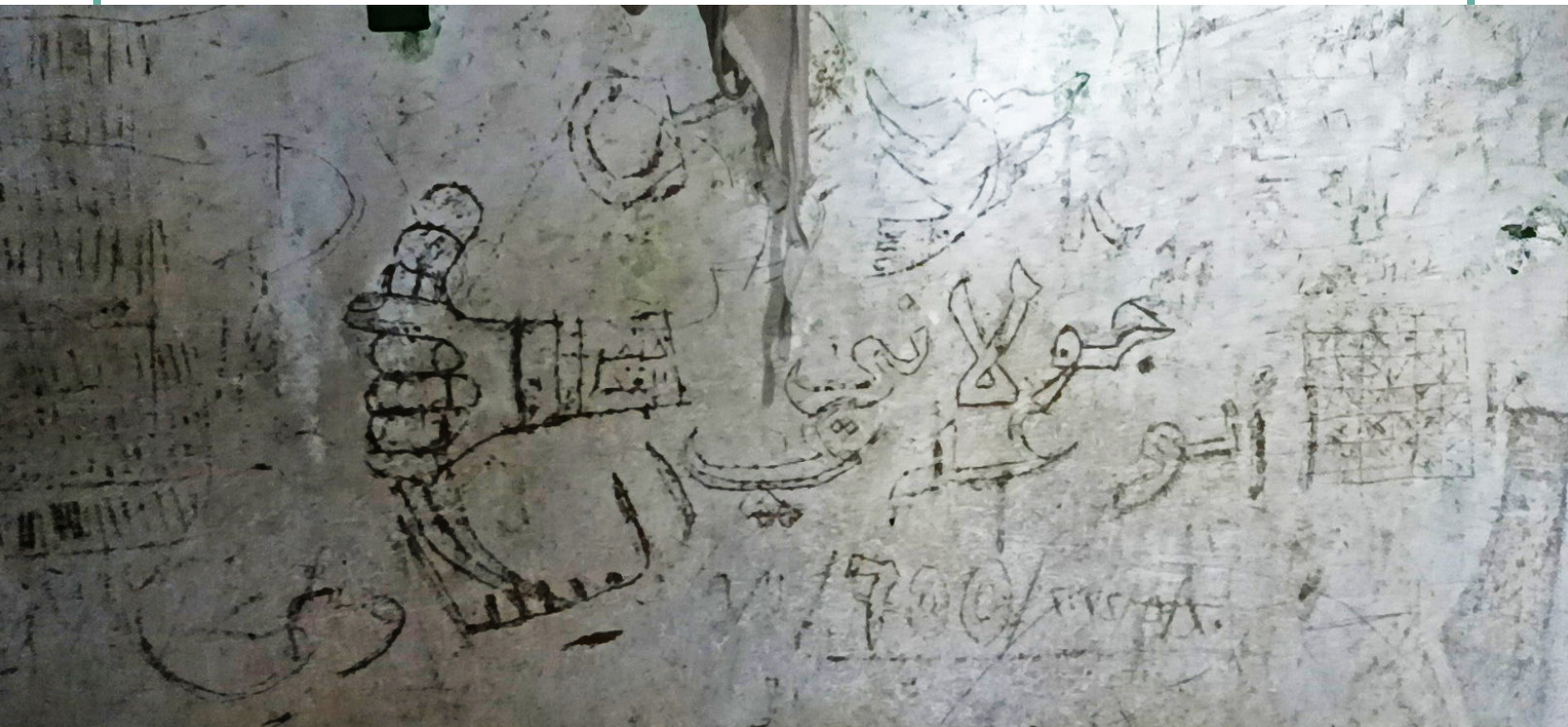
Capacity Building Updates

Over the past decade, SJAC has developed extensive expertise in a broad range of areas essential to promoting justice and accountability. Recognizing the value of these skills, SJAC expanded its reach in 2024 by offering comprehensive training and support to civil society organizations across the Middle East, Africa, and Asia.

This year, SJAC provided technological, documentation, and data analysis training to a non-governmental organization (NGO) in Tigray so that the group could effectively document and preserve evidence of atrocities. SJAC also provided legal training to a human rights organization in Yemen and facilitated a training for an Afghan human rights NGO which covered operational practices for conducting remote documentation of violations, with a focus on safe data transfer methods and data management solutions.

In 2024, SJAC also held two workshops for members of Libyan civil society organizations on utilizing universal jurisdiction to pursue accountability for serious international crimes committed in Libya. The workshops focused on best practices for ensuring the confidentiality and protection of victims and witnesses, as well as strategies for engaging with diaspora communities and their members. SJAC also worked with a Sudanese human rights organization and its members by providing an in-person training on universal jurisdiction and case-building to support their efforts in seeking justice for victims of crimes under international law.

Looking ahead, SJAC is focused on expanding its training inside Syria, both to independent activists as well as to professionals who may support future justice processes.



The art from several detainees appears in this panel. The central image depicts what is likely the name of a detainee, “Jolani Abu Uday” Other imagery (from right to left) includes a map of Palestine, a calendar, a dove, handcuffs, and a hand wielding a knife, as well as a large section of tick marks counting each day of detention.

Security Square Prison, Damascus (SJAC’s Documentation Team).



Burnt out office belonging to Airforce Intelligence, Damascus. The fire was likely set by government officials to destroy the documents within (SJAC's Documentation Team).

Conclusion and Recommendations

2024 marked a defining moment for justice and accountability in Syria, as the fall of the former Syrian government and the ousting of Bashar Al-Assad, whose family had ruled Syria since 1970, provided new opportunities for documentation, investigations, and greater accountability. This report outlines advancements in justice efforts in Syria over the past year, including the expansion of universal jurisdiction cases, and the recovery and preservation of critical government documents, as well as challenges, including securing justice for victims and establishing a framework for accountability in Syria.

While some progress has been made in collecting evidence and identifying perpetrators of crimes against humanity, the path towards accountability requires sustained commitments from Syrian civil society, international actors, and the interim government. Accountability must not be limited to members of the former Syrian government but should extend to all parties that committed human rights violations throughout the conflict.

To work towards a just future, SJAC provides the following recommendations to the interim Syrian government, relevant states, and international mechanisms:

Strengthening Transitional Justice Mechanisms

The interim government should:

- Establish a Syrian-led transitional justice process that ensures victim participation and transparency.
- Implement a national dialogue that is transparent and inclusive of all Syrians, as well as sponsored and organized by the UN. The dialogue must include political parties, provide space for victims to express their needs and demands, and allow civil society to meaningfully participate and offer expertise.
- Secure detention facilities, related military and security branches, and associated Assad government documents which will be the backbone of a transitional justice process. The sites should be protected from physical changes (such as painting) until they are thoroughly investigated, as some sites may contain evidence, such as the names of prisoners etched on the walls. A national archive

should be established to preserve and analyze documents collected from these sites.

Expanding Criminal Accountability Efforts

The interim government should:

- Become a State Party to the Rome Statute, or, if unwilling, follow the example of Ukraine by filing a declaration with the ICC that accepts the jurisdiction of the court to investigate and prosecute crimes committed by the former Syrian government from 2011 to 2024. Assad and his top lieutenants should be tried by the ICC to avoid the destabilizing impact of returning them to Syria.
- Respect and enforce the current Syrian penal code and criminal procedural code, including by prosecuting acts of torture, until a functioning judicial system can be established in Syria. The interim government should investigate and prosecute those responsible for alleged reprisal killings and other violence against perceived enemies.

States that use universal jurisdiction, including EU states, should:

- Continue supporting universal jurisdiction cases against war criminals in Europe and other jurisdictions.

Discovering the Fates and Whereabouts of Missing Persons

The interim government should:

- Create a centralized, Syrian-led missing persons process and take immediate steps to preserve mass graves throughout the country by guarding sites where there have been reports of tampering. The government should also provide clear communication to communities about the importance of preservation and should not approve any exhumations until a comprehensive forensic strategy is in place.
- Appoint an official within the Ministry of Justice to act as the point of contact for missing persons efforts during the transition period. This official should begin building relationships with families to understand their needs and priorities, as well as

various international and civil society organizations likely to be involved in future investigations.

Enhance Collaboration with International Mechanisms

The interim government:

- Continue to meet with the UN IIMP, as well as relevant Syrian civil society organizations, to have initial discussions about the prospects for missing persons processes. The government should ensure the IIMP staff have the right to travel freely to Syria and operate throughout the country, including establishing permanent offices. While the process must be Syrian-led, the government will need extensive international resources as well as specialized forensic expertise to succeed, which the IIMP could help secure.
- Provide unhindered access, including approval to establish offices inside Syria, to other relevant UN mechanisms such as the IIM, COI, OHCHR, and OPCW.

International mechanisms, such as the IIMP and IIM, should:

- Pivot to meet this moment, including by hiring staff inside Syria, and aim to play a capacity-building role in support of an official process housed within the Ministry of Justice. To that end, the UN should ensure all relevant mechanisms are authorized to establish a presence inside Syria and amend TORs as needed to allow for capacity building activities.

Supporting Refugees

The interim government should:

- Provide adequate support mechanisms to ensure voluntary, safe and dignified refugee returns from host countries and unhindered access to relevant agencies such as the UNHCR and IOM. Relevant agencies should be granted full institutional support to effectively implement their operational plans, conduct monitoring and evaluation, and undertake comprehensive needs and risk assessments. Returnees suspected of serious crimes should receive due process and fair trials.

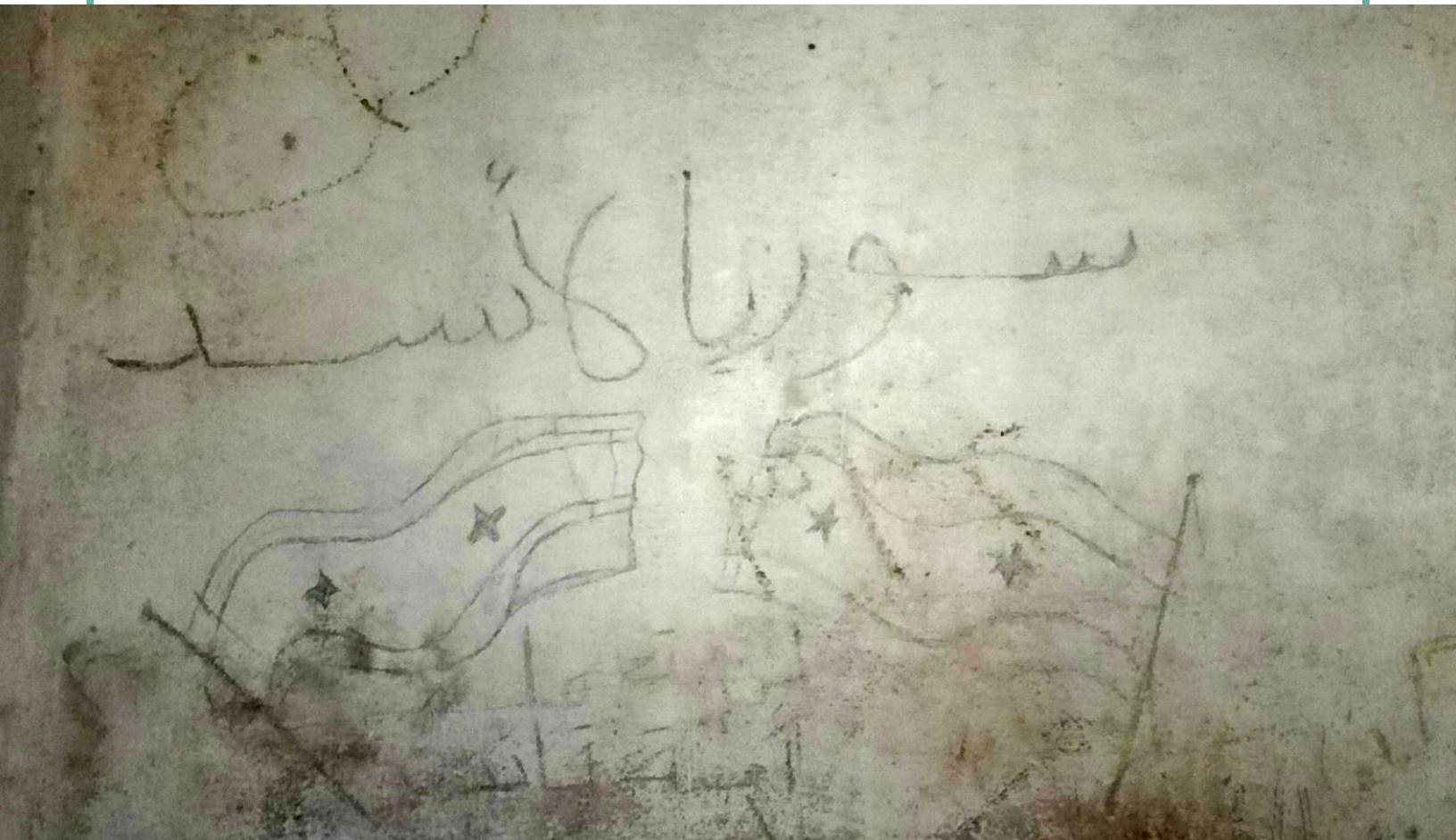
- Formulate clear guidelines on obtaining formal travel documents for voluntary returns, such as Syrian passports or laissez-passer, and maintain the issuance free of charge or at reasonable cost. The interim government should provide the necessary resources to the Syrian Embassies and swiftly issue the travel documents.

States hosting refugees, including EU states, should:

- Firmly reject rhetoric advocating for the forcible returns of refugees to Syria to respect the principle of non-refoulement. States must wait until durable assessments are able to be conducted based on reliable, accurate, and relevant country of origin information to understand whether new risks may emerge that impact asylum claims. Host countries should also allow Syrians within their territory to visit Syria temporarily and assess the viability of a safe and dignified return without risking the loss of their refugee status.
- EU states should continue to guarantee Syrians fleeing Syria the right to seek asylum and an individualized assessment of their claim once country of origin information is available. Moreover, the conclusion of asylum claims independent of the factual circumstances on the ground should immediately be resumed to grant international protection to eligible applicants.

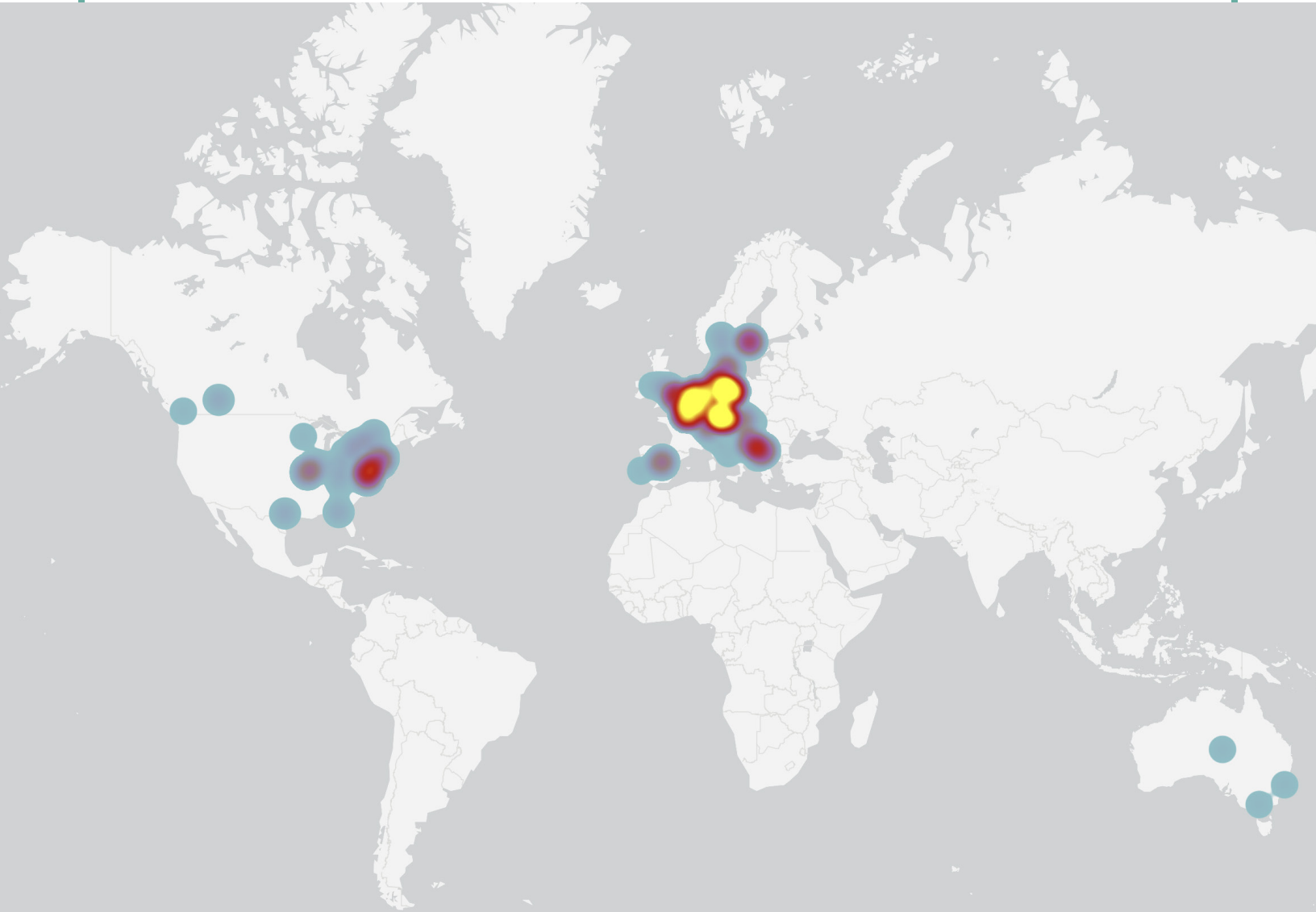
The pursuit of justice and accountability for Syria will continue to be a long-term effort that requires engagement from local, national, and international actors. The fall of the Assad government presents a unique opportunity to address past atrocities; however, meaningful progress will depend on sustained efforts to preserve and analyze evidence, establish a legal framework that prioritizes human rights, and actively involve Syrians in shaping the justice process.

By implementing the above recommendations, Syria can take steps toward transitional justice. It is critical that the international community, the interim government, and civil society organizations work together at this moment to ensure that justice can be accomplished.



“Syria for Assad,” appears above two Syrian flags. Although we don’t know the exact intention of the artist, some prisoners would write pro-government messages to gain favor with the prison guards and reduce the regular abuse and torture they experienced.

Security Square Prison, Damascus (SJAC’s Documentation Team).

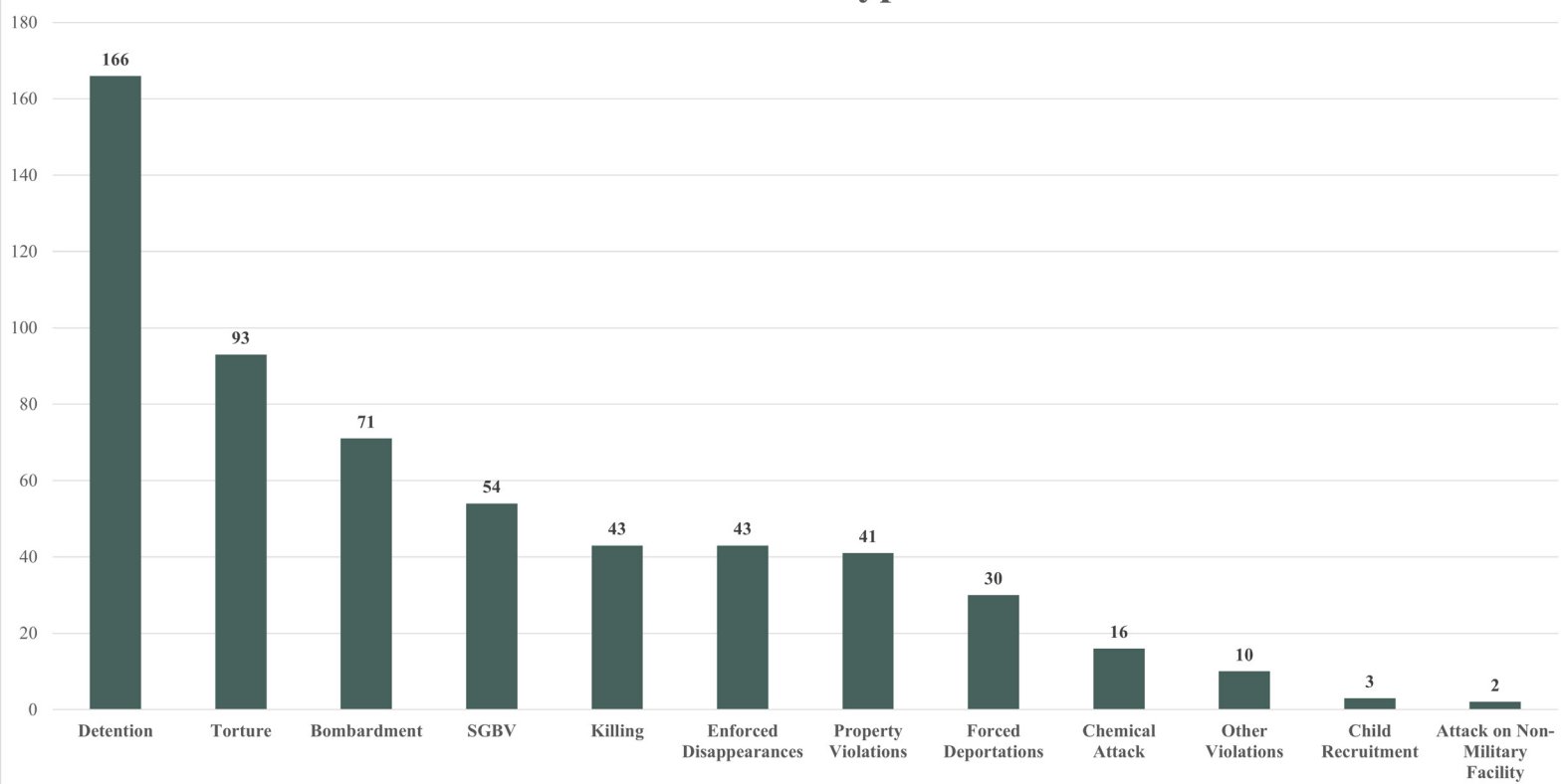


SJAC's online tracker of Syria-related criminal cases ([available here](#)).

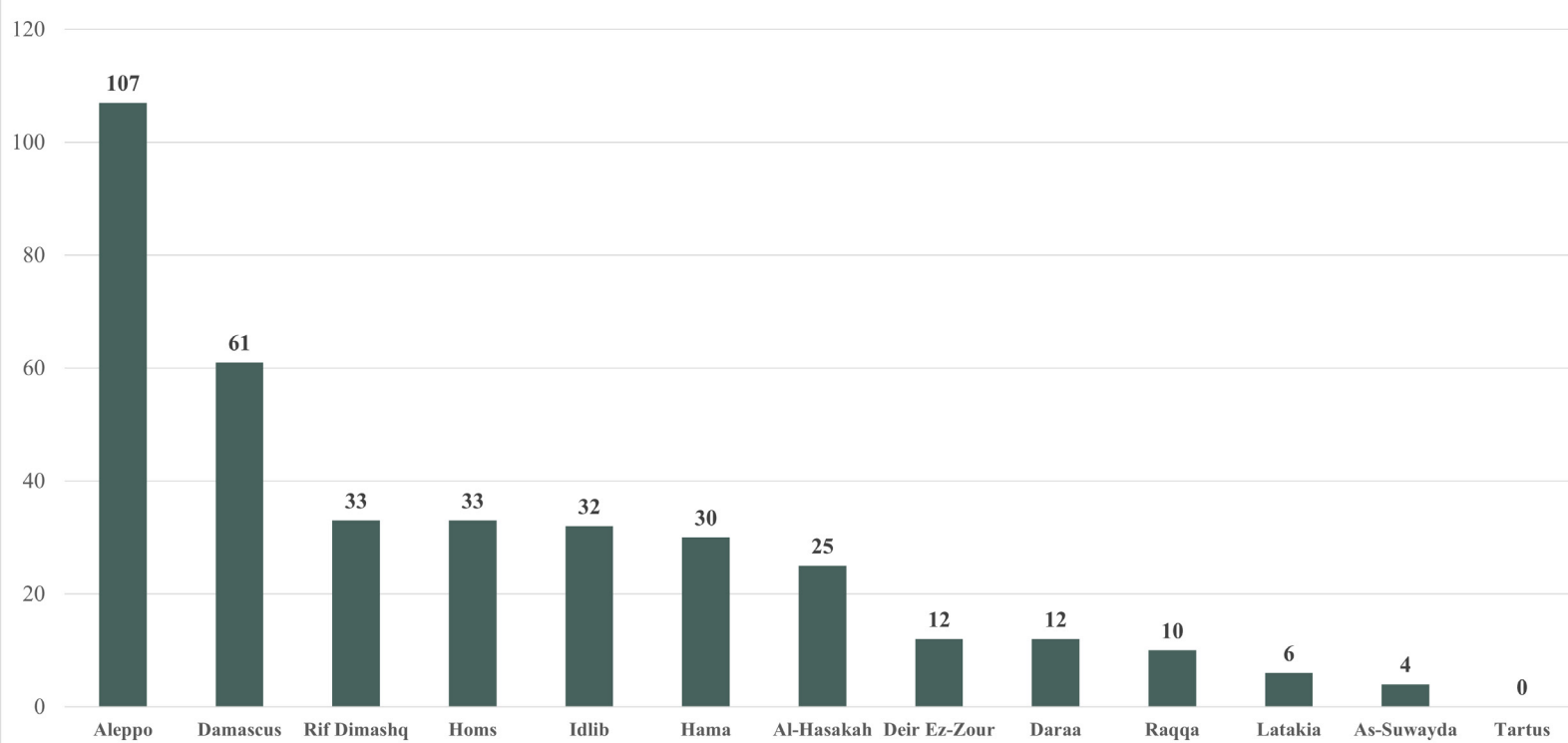
Annexes

Annex I: Charts

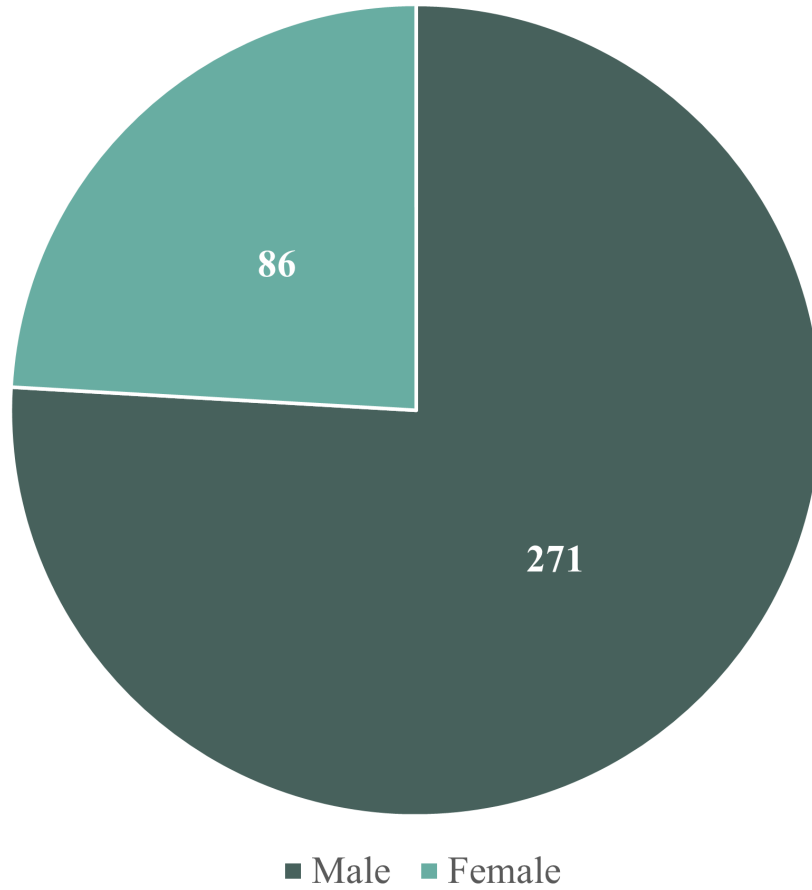
2024 Interview Data - Type of Violation



2024 Interview Data - Location of Violation



2024 Interview Data - Gender of Interviewees



Annex II: Endnotes

- 1 Mateo Nelson, “Can Suwayda’s Factions Enforce Security and Stop the Spread of Weapons?,” Syria Direct (blog), February 6, 2025, <https://syriadirect.org/can-suwaydas-factions-enforce-security-stop-spread-of-weapons/>.
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