

Syria Justice and Accountability Centre

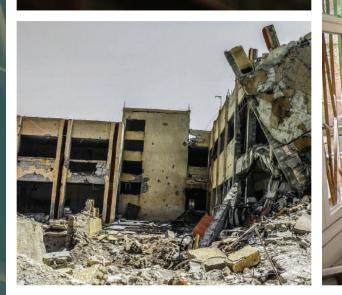


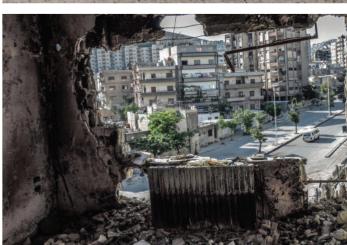
For seven years, SJAC has worked toward a Syria defined by justice, respect for human rights, and rule of law — where all Syrians live in peace. SJAC pursues this goal by focusing on three areas of work: documentation, analysis, and advocacy.











Focus of 2018 Documentation

While SJAC always works to document serious violations of international law, the specific focus of its documentation efforts is constantly shifting depending on events on the ground. In 2018, SJAC's documentation focused on:

- Sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV): This year, SJAC interviewed 31 survivors of SGBV. SJAC also collaborated with an external consultant who provided feedback on the quality of SJAC's SGBV documentation, leading to updates on how SJAC will interview survivors going forward. SJAC's documentation team follows the 'Do No Harm' principle and, when possible, connects survivors to medical and psychosocial services through its dual referral program.
- **Property rights:** After the passing of Law 10, which laid the groundwork for widespread land expropriation by the government, Syrians have become increasingly concerned about their right to maintain ownership of or return to their homes. In order to support research on these issues, SJAC's team collected people's property documents as well as their written interactions with the government regarding property.
- **Deaths in detention:** In the summer of 2018, the Syrian government began notifying families that their detained loved ones had died in government custody. SJAC immediately started obtaining interviews with surviving family members to understand the process of notification, as well as collecting copies of death certificates and updated civil registry forms.
- Reconciliation agreements: As the government continued to retake territory in 2018, it implemented a number of so-called reconciliation agreements. SJAC has monitored the implementation of these agreements by collecting data on individuals detained by the government after they surrendered after "reconciliation" and by visiting IDP camps in Idlib, where those who have fled territory retaken by the government are now living.

In 2018, SJAC's documentation team collected:



86 Interviews

SJAC's team conducts interviews with survivors of human rights violations, and this year spoke with 48 former detainees, as well as 38 individuals who have received death notices for their detained loved ones.



72 Documents

SJAC's team collected documentation to support its current research, including documents related to property confiscations as well as the death certificates of those who died in government detention



34,987 Photos and Videos

SJAC's collection of photos and videos depict serious violations including torture and the use of prohibited weapons.



4,851 Reports on Violations and Victims

SJAC collects information on a wide variety of violations, and this year collected the names of **275 detainees**, **35 people** who were victims of extrajudicial killing, **52 people** who were forcibly disappeared, and **4,443 victims** of other crimes. Additionally, coordinators gathered information on **90 incidences** that resulted in the deaths of **five or more people**.



Training

In order to improve the quality of documentation collected by its team and partners, SJAC produces training videos for Syrian human rights defenders on principles of international law and documentation best practices. In 2018, SJAC adopted a new learning management system where video lectures are combined with written materials, quizzes, discussion boards, and links to outside resources.

SJAC's Current Courses

- An Introduction to International Law
- · An Introduction to Transitional Justice
- The Principle of Impartiality in Human Rights Documentation
- The Dos and Don'ts of Documentation
- Maintaining a Chain of Custody
- · Writing a Post-Interview Reflection
- · The Dual Referral System
- . Documentation of Torture
- Documentation of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence
- Human Trafficking
- Forced Conscription and Child Recruitment





In 2018, SJAC launched an offline version of its database to ensure heightened security for highly sensitive documentation. This achievement allowed SJAC to expand its analysis efforts to government intelligence documents and interviews with survivors of sexual and gender-based violence.

Database Improvements

In 2018, SJAC's Technology Director oversaw the creation of eleven new features in the database. The most significant of these was the integration of a new video player that allows analysts to screenshot, crop, and tag frames. Using the new player, an analyst can now screenshot the face of a perpetrator, label the image, and easily create a linked actor profile for that individual.

Tech partnerships

SJAC is always seeking to build its team's technical expertise through partnering with cutting-edge tech organizations and research institutes. In 2018, SJAC collaborated with the Human Rights Lab at Berkeley University on a digital verification project. Berkeley students used a clone version of SJAC's database to verify a sample set of videos, and Berkley faculty then trained SJAC's team on verification and geolocation techniques. SJAC has since written its own methodology for reliability scoring and is making updates to the database to enable implementation in 2019.

In 2018, SJAC data analysts processed:



72, 236 Videos



4, 150 Actors



5,003 Documents



91 Interviews



Collaborating with Justice Mechanisms

SJAC is a strong supporter of the UN's International, Impartial, and Independent Mechanism (IIIM), and in 2018 joined 17 other Syrian organizations in Lausanne, Switzerland to sign a Protocol of Cooperation with the IIIM, laying the groundwork for local Syrian organizations to play an important role in providing both data and expertise to the IIIM. In November, SJAC built on this agreement by signing a memorandum of understanding and began preparing to transfer analyzed data to the IIIM.

In 2018, SJAC also collaborated closely with a European national prosecutors' office to support an ongoing investigation.

Providing Expertise

SJAC staff participate at high-level events worldwide. In 2018, SJAC's Executive Director spoke twice at the United Nations, advocating for continued support of the IIIM and explaining that such criminal accountability efforts must be seen as part of a larger pursuit of transitional justice. SJAC staff also spoke on panels as part of the Paris Peace Forum, the Genocide Network Meeting, and events at several universities, including Stanford and Georgetown. Overall, SJAC hosted three events in 2018, and staff spoke at nineteen others.

In 2018, SJAC published two major reports:

Return is a Dream: Options for Post-Conflict Property Restitution in Syria provides background on Syrian property law and how the Syrian government has used its powers of expropriation and zoning prior to and during the conflict. Ultimately, Syria's future depends on how over 12 million refugees and internally displaced people will return after the conflict and what they will find when they go home. The report provides recommendations for how a property restitution program could be designed and implemented to address property loss and the resulting disputes that could threaten Syria's long-term stability.

International Criminal Tribunals and Civil Society: Impediments and Opportunities for Engagement explores how international criminal justice mechanisms (ICJMs) and CSOs can learn to better cooperate and how such cooperation can improve criminal accountability efforts. SJAC launched the report with a roundtable event hosted in The Hague, bringing together more than twenty practitioners from civil society organizations and international criminal tribunals to discuss concrete steps for strengthening CSO-ICJM cooperation.





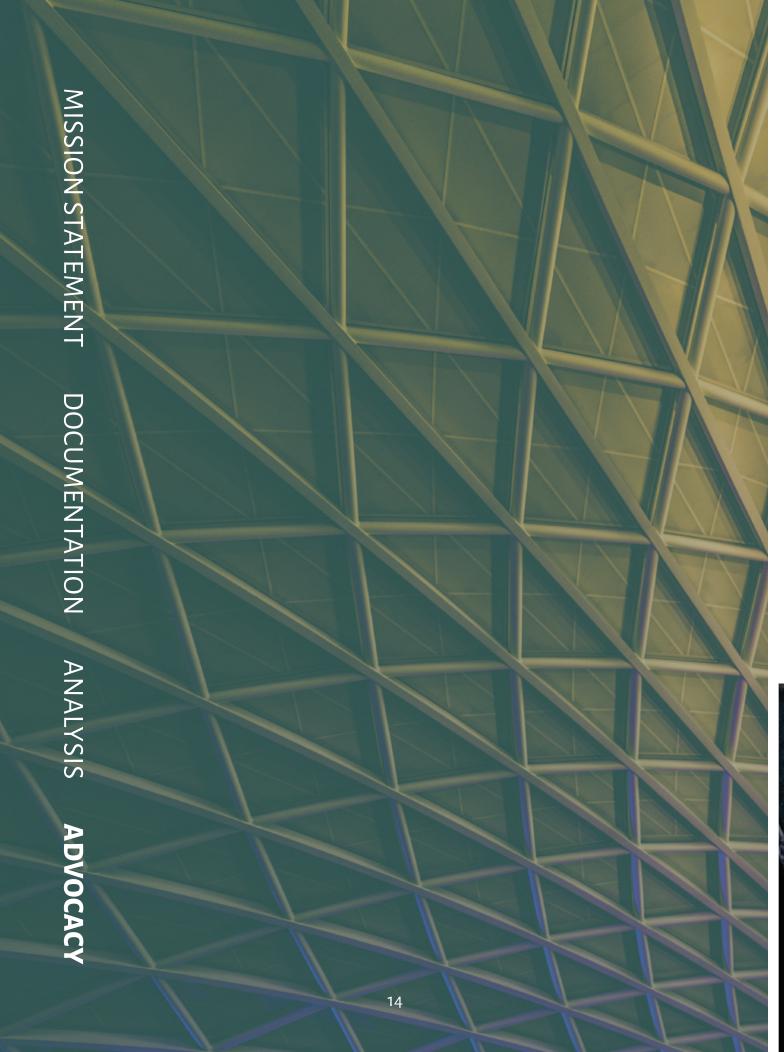
SJAC collaborates with documentation and other human rights organizations in Syria and across the region to lend expertise on a wide range of issues, including best practices regarding documentation, digital security, and analysis methodology. For example, in 2018, SJAC collaborated with a Libyan human rights organization looking to grow its documentation efforts. SJAC provided a demo of the database, expertise on analysis processes, and advice on digital security.

In 2018, SJAC's staff spoke to 22 Arabic and English-language international media outlets and two Syrian media organizations, providing a human rights perspective on the news of the day. This included interviews with the television channels Al Hurra and Al Arabiya, the German newspaper Deutsche Welle, and the independent Syrian news organization, Enab Baladi.

Additionally, SJAC published thirty articles on its website in 2018, covering a wide variety of human rights- and justice-related topics, including:

- The UN Peace Process SJAC published regular articles on the ongoing negotiations, urging the UN Special Envoy to refocus discussions on human rights grievances underpinning the conflict, such as missing persons and detainees.
- Ongoing Atrocities SJAC published articles highlighting human rights abuses, including child recruitment in Northern Syria, the deaths of detainees in government prisons, and the kidnapping of Druze women and children by ISIS.
- Transitional Justice Options SJAC wrote about how transitional justice mechanisms could be adapted to the Syrian context, including how property restitution programs can address looting, DDR can integrate former child soldiers, and truth commissions can investigate the fate of missing persons.





Holistic Security

SJAC's work relies both on survivors who are willing to share their stories and human rights defenders who are willing to work directly with graphic and potentially traumatizing content. SJAC attempts to mitigate the risks to its staff and survivors by offering a comprehensive psychosocial support program to staff, as well as implementing stringent physical and digital security standards.

Psychosocial Support

SJAC's work with graphic interviews and videos carries the risk for secondary trauma. To mitigate these risks, SJAC implemented a psychosocial support system in 2018, which includes trainings on stress and resilience for those who are exposed to graphic material, access to mental health services, and a peer support system for consultants

Digital and Physical Security

Countless survivors and human rights activist have trusted SJAC with their stories and persona information, and SJAC ensures that such materia is stored safely and securely. In 2018, SJAC worked with an outside consultant to review all of its physical and digital security policies and underwent a security test of its website and online database.

