

The Association for Human Rights in Syria

Murdering, Abduction, Militarization, Indoctrination, and Orphaning of Children in Syria

Report Submitted to UNICEF

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Introduction

Following the collapse of the Ba'ath regime in Syria on December 8, 2024, civilians have faced an unprecedented wave of violence. The rise of jihadist factions—particularly those operating under the umbrella of Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS)—has led to systematic targeting of minority communities, including Alawites, Druze, Christians, and others. In addition to widespread violence, these groups have carried out targeted attacks that have disproportionately impacted vulnerable populations, especially women and children.

This report, prepared by the Syria Human Rights Association, aims to document the grave violations committed against children during this period of intensified and systematic violence. Children have not only been victims of killings, abductions, and forced displacement, but have also been subjected to militarization and ideological indoctrination by extremist groups. These groups seek to perpetuate hatred, sectarian divisions, and violent extremism by turning children into instruments of conflict. Many have been forcibly recruited, trained in the use of weapons, and subjected to indoctrination designed to incite hatred toward Alawite, Druze, Christian, and other minority communities. As a result, children are being molded into future agents of violence, reinforcing cycles of intolerance and destruction. The number of orphans continues to rise daily, reflecting the scale of this humanitarian tragedy.

Through extensive survivor testimonies and verifiable data, this report sheds light on the alarming deterioration of children's rights in Syria. It calls upon the international community—particularly UNICEF—to take immediate and decisive action to protect these vulnerable victims and uphold the principles of international law.

The report begins with a description of the methodology used in its compilation, followed by a summary of previously published findings and petitions. It then presents an overview of the current situation, including the historical and ideological context underlying the violence. Subsequent chapters address mass killings of children, the crisis of missing and abducted minors, and the disturbing trend of indoctrinating and militarizing children by HTS-affiliated groups. The final sections focus on the plight of orphaned children, emphasizing the urgent need for protection, shelter, education, and long-term psychological and social support.

In addition to detailed records of abducted and murdered children, the report includes visual documentation of children being used in militant training and exposed to systematic hate indoctrination.

Three annexes are included at the end of the report. Due to ethical and legal considerations, these annexes—which contain sensitive information such as victim identities, testimonies, and visual evidence—will not be made publicly available. They will be shared only with relevant organizations and institutions, under strict conditions that safeguard the victims' dignity, privacy, and safety. This approach reflects our commitment to ethical documentation and to upholding international legal standards in the reporting of human rights violations.

Methodology

This report uses a human rights-based analytical approach, integrating digital verification, remote testimony collection, and qualitative analysis of grave violations committed against

children—including killings, abductions, militarization, indoctrination, and orphaning—since the collapse of the Ba'ath regime in Syria. The objective is to document systematic violations of children's rights and breaches of international humanitarian law, using survivor testimonies, corroborated digital evidence, and comparative analysis within the framework of international legal standards. The methodology is guided by the principles of integrity, objectivity, independence, and adherence to established UN documentation protocols.

The report focuses on Syria's coastal region and the surrounding governorates of Homs, Hama, Tartus, and Latakia—areas that have been disproportionately targeted due to their significant minority populations, particularly Alawite, Christian, and Druze communities. These populations have faced consistent sectarian violence and discriminatory policies under the control of de facto extremist authorities.

The findings presented herein are derived from a broad spectrum of remote sources. These include firsthand testimonies and social media posts by affected families and community members, confirmations from trusted local contacts, and photographic and video material verified through open-source intelligence (OSINT) techniques. Additional data were obtained from reputable international and local human rights organizations, as well as credible journalistic reports. To ensure reliability and accuracy, each documented incident underwent multiple independent verifications.

The preparation of this report faced considerable challenges, including risks to sources' safety, censorship by controlling authorities, internet disruptions, digital surveillance, and the volatile nature of ongoing events. While direct access to affected regions was not possible, the investigative process maintained strict standards of accuracy, transparency, and impartiality. Every effort was made to ensure that the report truthfully represents the scale and urgency of the violations inflicted upon Syria's children.

Reports, Petitions, and Applications Documenting Acts of Targeted Violence

The mass atrocities and human rights violations committed in Syria during the first months of 2025 have not gone unnoticed by the international community. Numerous organizations, civil society initiatives, and human rights advocates have documented these crimes, submitting detailed reports and petitions to various United Nations bodies, the International Criminal Court (ICC), and other international mechanisms. These documents contain critical evidence of systematic violence, sectarian cleansing, forced displacement, and widespread atrocities—primarily targeting Alawite civilians and other vulnerable minority groups.

Several reports were prepared by local sources operating under extreme risk. For their safety, many authors chose to remain anonymous. Despite this necessary anonymity, the documentation is credible, well-substantiated, and essential to understanding the scale and severity of the violence, including the widespread killings, abductions of women, and targeted attacks on children. Collectively, these submissions form a vital foundation for future accountability efforts and the preservation of historical memory. All of these petitions/reports can be accessed via the [this Google drive folder](#).

- **January 28, 2025:** A joint petition was submitted to the UN Security Council by *Alevitische Union Europa e.V. (Alevi Union of Europe)*, *Föderation Arabischer Aleviten in Europa e.V. (Federation of Arab Alevis in Europe)*, and *Alevi Bektaşî Federasyonu (Alevi Bektashi Federation)*, warning of an unfolding genocide against the Alawite community and calling for urgent intervention under the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) doctrine.
- **January 30, 2025:** *Pir Sultan Cultural Associates USA* and the *Midwest Alevi Cultural Center* submitted an urgent petition to the UN Secretary-General, Security Council, OHCHR, and Human Rights Council, highlighting atrocities and demanding immediate protection for Alawite and other religious minorities.
- **February 26–27, 2025:** The “**Ain Al-Shams Raid Report**”, compiled by local sources, documented HTS raids on the Alawite-majority village of Ain Al-Shams, including house-to-house searches, looting, arrests, and extrajudicial executions.
- **February 2025:** The “**Al-Hamidiyah Violations Report**” provided evidence of systematic attacks on Alawite civilians near Tartous, including desecration of graves, grenade attacks, and armed intimidation, with inaction by local authorities.
- **March 14, 2025:** A “**War Criminals Coastal Massacre List**” was submitted to the UN Human Rights Council and ICC, naming HTS-linked individuals responsible for mass killings and presenting digital evidence of incitement and atrocities.
- **March 17, 2025:** A “**Preliminary Census of Massacre Victims**” listed over 230 Alawite civilian deaths in Al-Alamein, Al-Bassa, Al-Hataniya, Al-Mekhtariya, and surrounding areas.
- **March 27, 2025:** Lawyers *Helin Menteşe*, *Cihan Söylemez*, and *Ali Rıza Güder* filed a formal application to the ICC, accusing HTS and affiliated militias of crimes against humanity, including mass killings, torture, and forced displacement between January and March 2025.
- **March 2025:**
 - The independent report “**Six Days of Hell**” documented mass violence carried out by HTS forces along the Syrian coast from March 6–11, using survivor testimony and visual evidence.
 - Amnesty International released a statement titled “**Massacres of civilians in Syria must be investigated as war crimes**”, calling for independent

international investigations.

- A separate report titled “**Ethnic Cleansing Massacres in Syria (Part 1)**” detailed six massacres of Christian and Alawite civilians between March 7–15, emphasizing deliberate ethnic cleansing, mass executions, and destruction of evidence.
- **April 2, 2025:** The *Initiative for Human Rights in Syria (İnsan Hakları İçin Suriye Girişimi)* submitted a dossier to the OHCHR detailing HTS’s leadership structure, forced evacuations, attacks on churches, public executions, and internal displacement campaigns.
- **April 22, 2025:** The *Human Rights and Humanitarian Follow-up Committee (Syria)* published a comprehensive report analyzing sectarian violence, torture, and discrimination against the Alawite minority, supported by field documentation and legal analysis.
- **April 24, 2025:** The *Alawite Association of the United States (AAUS)*, represented by President Dr. Morhaf Ibrahim, submitted a detailed petition to the UN Security Council. The petition urgently called for intervention to halt the ongoing war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide targeting the Alawite community in Syria. It detailed the systematic atrocities committed by Hay’at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) and associated militias, which included mass executions, torture, sexual violence, the abduction of women and children, and the destruction of religious sites. The petition underscored the inability of Syria’s interim authorities to safeguard civilians and to hold the perpetrators accountable, despite previous Security Council resolutions. Citing reports from Amnesty International, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, and the Lemkin Institute for Genocide Prevention, the petition highlighted the grave existential threat to the Alawite minority and called for immediate measures. These included the activation of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) doctrine, the deployment of UN peacekeeping forces, the establishment of humanitarian corridors, independent investigations, the facilitation of refugee protection, and the referral of crimes to the International Criminal Court. The AAUS petition built upon and elaborated earlier appeals from European Alawite organizations, providing essential evidence of the ongoing genocide and urging the international community to respond without delay.
- **January 4, 2025:** A group of activists and academics submitted a petition to the UN and European institutions, warning of escalating mass atrocities under HTS rule and calling for immediate international intervention.

- **Date Unknown:** The “**Hasan Abo Kasrah Alawite Massacres Report**”, compiled by anonymous local sources, linked Sadcop director Hasan Abo Kasrah to coordinated massacres of Alawite civilians through incitement and cooperation with armed factions.
- **January 23, 2025:** The “**Fahel Massacre Report**” detailed a raid on the Alawite village of Fahel near Homs, including arrests, abuse, looting, and executions of civilians and former military personnel.
- **Undated:** The report titled “**The Situation of Minorities in Syria**”, authored by *Feyyaz Kerimo* and submitted to the Swedish Parliament, analyzed the deepening marginalization and persecution of Alawite and Christian minorities post-regime collapse.

Together, these documents provide a critical record of one of the darkest periods in Syria’s recent history. They offer not only sobering testimony to the suffering endured by civilians—particularly Alawite and Christian minorities—but also form the evidentiary backbone for future international justice efforts, truth and reconciliation processes, and the preservation of historical memory. The scale, coordination, and brutality of the documented acts warrant urgent international action to prevent further atrocities and ensure accountability.

Current Humanitarian and Security Situation in Syria

Since early 2025, the security and humanitarian situation in Syria—particularly in the coastal and central regions—has deteriorated drastically. Minority communities, especially Alawites, alongside Christians, Druze, Murshidis, and moderate Sunnis, have been systematically targeted through mass killings, forced displacement, arbitrary arrests, and the destruction of civilian infrastructure. Entire families and villages have suffered collective massacres, resulting in hundreds of civilian deaths in locations such as Jableh, Baniyas, Tartus, Mukhtariyah, and Fahel. In several documented cases, entire family lines were extinguished, and entire villages were depopulated within days.

The concept of personal safety has effectively collapsed for many communities. Civilians live under constant threat of being killed solely on the basis of sectarian identity, subjected to arbitrary home searches, looting, abduction, torture, or execution without due process. Many face threats, harassment, and physical violence in the course of their daily lives. Women, children, and the elderly have not been spared. Numerous cases of mass executions, forced disappearances, and public humiliation have been reported. At checkpoints, civilians are interrogated about their names, sectarian backgrounds, and even regional accents—often leading to summary execution based solely on identity.

Large segments of minority populations—especially Alawites—have been forcibly displaced from their ancestral homes. Many fled under direct threat of death or abduction; others were expelled following the seizure or destruction of their properties. Public services and civilian infrastructure have collapsed in many affected regions. Water and electricity supplies have been cut or destroyed, health facilities and schools closed, and homes and businesses

belonging to minority families looted or burned. The depopulation of these areas has effectively erased centuries-old communities.

Political and civil life in these regions has been eradicated. All political parties have been banned, civil society associations dissolved or absorbed into radical-controlled structures, and independent organizations prohibited. Tens of thousands of public servants—predominantly from minority communities, particularly Alawites—have been dismissed from their roles in administration, education, healthcare, and law enforcement. Many had no political affiliations; their only "offense" was belonging to a particular religious or ethnic group.

Despite overwhelming evidence of systematic violence, the international response has been largely passive. Numerous global actors are aware of the extremist ideology and actions of the perpetrators, yet few concrete steps have been taken to stop the atrocities, protect civilians, or hold those responsible to account. This silence has emboldened the perpetrators and contributed to the deepening of the humanitarian catastrophe. It also sends a dangerous signal: that sectarian violence and forced erasure can proceed without consequence.

The current situation in Syria is not a series of isolated incidents but reflects a deliberate and coordinated campaign aimed at eradicating minority communities. Without urgent international action—particularly to ensure civilian protection and accountability—the continued existence of these communities is in jeopardy. The longer the response is delayed, the more distant the prospects for national reconciliation and long-term stability become.

Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS)

Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) emerged from the merger of several jihadist factions, most notably Jabhat al-Nusra, the former Syrian affiliate of al-Qaeda. Despite superficial rebranding efforts aimed at portraying a more moderate public image, HTS remains ideologically grounded in Salafi-Takfiri extremism—a doctrine that sanctions violence against individuals and communities deemed "apostates" or "infidels."

HTS draws heavily on the teachings of medieval scholar Ibn Taymiyyah, whose fatwas explicitly authorized violence against Alawites and other religious minorities. This historical doctrine has been repurposed by HTS to justify acts of mass violence and sectarian extermination in the modern Syrian context.

The group is led by Ahmad al-Sharaa (also known as Abu Mohammad al-Jolani), a former member of both al-Qaeda and ISIS. Al-Sharaa is listed on international terrorism watchlists, including sanctions lists maintained by the United Nations and the United States. Under his leadership, HTS has systematically promoted sectarian hatred, implemented policies of extermination, legitimized torture and mass killings, and institutionalized the recruitment and ideological indoctrination of children and youth into violent extremist frameworks. These patterns are extensively documented in the *Human Rights and Humanitarian Follow-up Committee Report* (April 2025).

A core strategy underpinning HTS's campaign of violence has been the dehumanization of Alawites. HTS-affiliated clerics and fighters have routinely referred to Alawites as "pigs," "dogs," and "infidels" in public sermons, social media posts, and internal communications. Video footage has captured fighters chanting genocidal slogans and calling for jihad against Alawite civilians—including women and children. This incitement serves multiple strategic

functions: it legitimizes violence in the eyes of perpetrators, mobilizes recruits through sectarian hatred, and enables mass atrocities to be carried out with psychological and moral detachment.

Historical and Ideological Background of the Systematic Violence

The violence targeting the Alawite community in Syria is not an incidental byproduct of conflict, but the result of a deeply entrenched ideological framework rooted in radical interpretations of Islam. Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) and similar jihadist factions adhere to a rigid Salafi-jihadist ideology that classifies Alawites—and other minority groups such as Druze, and Shiites—as apostates. This classification is used to justify systematic persecution, including mass killings, forced displacement, and the eradication of cultural and religious heritage.

Salafi jihadism is a puritanical and militant strain of Sunni Islam that seeks to establish a theocratic order based on a literalist reading of early Islamic texts. Its adherents promote not only the violent elimination of religious minorities, but also the suppression of pluralism, basic human rights, and gender equality. The ideological core of HTS and its affiliates is built on this doctrinal foundation.

Central to this belief system are the legal opinions (fatwas) of 14th-century Islamic scholar Ibn Taymiyyah, whose writings remain widely cited by modern jihadist movements. Ibn Taymiyyah lived during a period of great political instability and issued rulings against groups he considered heretical—most notably, the Alawites, whom he referred to as “Nusayris.” In his fatwas, he explicitly sanctioned violence against them, labeling them enemies of Islam and legitimizing their persecution and extermination. This ideological heritage is still utilized by jihadist organizations, such as HTS, to rationalize acts of violence against Alawites, Shias, Christians, and various other religious minorities.

Modern-day jihadist groups, including HTS, have revived and amplified Ibn Taymiyyah's rhetoric, using it to religiously justify mass violence. The narrative that Alawites are heretics deserving of death has become a rallying cry for extremist factions seeking to unify fighters under a banner of sectarian supremacy. This ideology transforms religious identity into a justification for genocide.

The threat posed by this ideology is not merely theoretical. Recent videos circulated on social media show boxes of Ibn Taymiyyah's books being distributed to young students enrolled in religious education programs, demonstrating how radical teachings are actively being embedded into future generations. Reports from Damascus have also confirmed that radical clerics, including some at the historic Omayyad Mosque, have delivered sermons openly calling for the killing of Alawites. These are not isolated statements—they reflect an orchestrated campaign of religious incitement.

The ideological project advanced by HTS is designed not only to eliminate specific communities but to erase centuries of religious and cultural diversity in Syria. It targets the very idea of coexistence. In this worldview, religious difference is criminalized, pluralism is forbidden, and violence is sanctified.

It is therefore imperative to recognize that the systematic violence against the Alawite community is not simply the consequence of war, but the manifestation of a deliberate, ideologically motivated effort to annihilate an entire group. The international community must understand this context in order to formulate effective responses, including mechanisms for protection, accountability, and long-term prevention.

Social Dimensions of Systematic Violence

In addition to its ideological underpinnings, the systematic violence carried out by Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) and other extremist factions in Syria is sustained and amplified by powerful social mechanisms. These include coordinated propaganda, widespread hate speech, religious incitement, dehumanization, gender-based violence, and institutionalized indoctrination. Together, they normalize and operationalize genocidal practices against minority communities—particularly Alawites, Druze, Christians, and Ismailis.

Weaponized Ideology and Hate Speech

HTS continues to draw upon extremist interpretations of Islam, particularly the doctrines of Salafi jihadism and the writings of Ibn Taymiyyah, to legitimize violence. Their propaganda frames Alawites not as merely misguided, but as existential enemies of Islam, whose elimination is considered a religious obligation. This narrative is deeply embedded in both recruitment materials and battlefield strategies. The doctrine has transformed hate into a unifying force—fueling identity-based massacres and enabling the mass mobilization of perpetrators.

This ideological framework is neither abstract nor incidental—it is actively and publicly disseminated. Radical clerics, including those preaching in major religious centers such as the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus, have openly called for the extermination of Alawites. Recently, videos circulated on social media show boxes of Ibn Taymiyyah's writings being distributed to students in religious schools, further demonstrating the ongoing radicalization of Islamic education.

Dehumanization and Infrahumanization

Central to HTS's operational strategy is the deliberate dehumanization of Alawites. In sermons, social media content, and internal communications, they are consistently referred to as "pigs," "dogs," "filth," or "vermin." This language plays a critical role in stripping away moral constraints and making mass violence psychologically palatable to perpetrators. Numerous video-documented incidents show civilians—often children—forced to crawl on the ground, mimic animal sounds, or endure public beatings, as acts of ritualized humiliation. These staged acts serve to erase individual and collective dignity, thereby facilitating mass atrocity.

Closely related is the process of **infrahumanization**, wherein targeted communities are denied basic moral or emotional qualities. Alawites are portrayed as inherently incapable of honor, compassion, or reasoning, which enables bystanders and perpetrators alike to rationalize atrocities or remain indifferent to them. This deep-rooted social conditioning contributes to the widespread tolerance—even celebration—of mass killings.

Sectarian Slogans and Mobilized Violence

Anti-Alawite hatred has been a consistent feature in recent massacres. Eyewitnesses frequently recount the use of sectarian slogans during attacks—such as “Alawites to the grave, Christians to Beirut”—as homes were burned and civilians executed. These slogans did not merely accompany the violence; they enabled it, giving perpetrators a perceived religious and moral mandate. The killings were carried out not as wartime necessity, but as acts of sectarian purification.

This violence extends beyond the Alawite community. On **April 28, 2025**, jihadist-leaning students at the University of Homs publicly called for the mass killing of Druze individuals after a controversial audio clip went viral. Hours later, Druze students in dormitories were attacked; one was killed and several others injured. This illustrates how incitement and hate speech directly translate into targeted violence—even in spaces ostensibly dedicated to learning and coexistence.

Gendered Atrocities and the Doctrine of Ghanimah

The persecution of Alawite women and girls is also rooted in jihadist ideology. Drawing on distorted interpretations of Islamic jurisprudence, HTS and affiliated groups invoke the doctrine of *ghanimah* (war spoils) to justify the enslavement, rape, forced marriage, and trafficking of captured women. This gender-based violence is systemic—not personal—serving strategic aims: humiliation of communities, destruction of family units, and assertion of religious and military dominance.

These practices have also extended to Christian women, secular Sunni women, and other non-combatants deemed “impure” by jihadist standards. Victims are targeted not only because of religious affiliation but also because of gender, leading to intersecting forms of physical, sexual, psychological, and symbolic violence. Such acts are consistently referenced in sermons and policy documents seized from HTS fighters.

Institutional Indoctrination and Radical Education

Radical ideology is not limited to the battlefield or propaganda channels; it has been institutionalized through religious education. The systematic distribution of extremist texts—particularly the works of Ibn Taymiyyah—to young students is part of a long-term indoctrination strategy. By embedding theological justifications for murder, enslavement, and religious apartheid into early education, HTS aims to ensure generational continuity of its violent doctrine.

Documented Atrocities and Patterns of Violence

The social dimension of this violence has been well documented in several key reports. The **“War Criminals in Syria”** (March 14, 2025) and the **“Fahel Report”** (January 2025) provide extensive evidence of dehumanizing rhetoric and its operational consequences. Minority communities—particularly Alawites—have faced systematic atrocities including extrajudicial executions, abductions, torture, and the destruction of religious and cultural sites. Children have been among the most vulnerable: abducted, orphaned, indoctrinated, and killed.

The **Fahel massacre** (January 23–25, 2025) illustrates these dynamics in brutal detail. Entire Alawite families were slaughtered, including children, solely based on religious identity. Verified survivor testimonies and forensic documentation confirm that the killings were premeditated acts of sectarian cleansing.

Similarly, the massacres in **Sanoubar (Snoubar)** and **al-Mukhtariya** in March 2025 represent among the most horrific examples of ethnic cleansing in Syria's coastal region. As documented in *Six Days of Hell*, the *Preliminary Census of Massacre Victims* (March 2025), and the *Massacres of Minorities in Syria 2025* report, both villages were completely depopulated. Men and boys were executed; women, girls, and elderly civilians—including children as young as two—were also slaughtered. Investigations revealed a deliberate pattern: homes were raided, families gathered and executed, and fleeing civilians hunted down. Satellite images and survivor accounts confirmed mass graves and complete demographic erasure.

These atrocities were not random acts of violence but carefully orchestrated campaigns rooted in genocidal ideology. Fighters cited religious justifications, employed hate-filled rhetoric, and broadcast violent slogans online. The annihilation of these communities fits the internationally accepted definitions of **ethnic cleansing** and **crimes against humanity**.

The documented evidence makes clear that the genocide targeting Syria's minority communities—especially the Alawites—is both ideological and social. Dehumanization, indoctrination, gender-based violence, and mass propaganda have been weaponized to normalize mass atrocity and suppress resistance.

Understanding the **social dimensions** of this violence is essential to formulating effective international responses. Without dismantling the underlying social machinery—including hate speech networks, radical education systems, and gendered war crimes—there can be no meaningful protection, prevention, or reconciliation. The international community must act decisively, not only to intervene in ongoing atrocities but to prevent their recurrence in Syria and beyond.

An Analysis of Systematic Killing, Abduction, Orphaning, and Militarization of Children

In today's Syria, nearly all individuals under the age of 30 have spent their entire childhood and adolescence amid war, displacement, insecurity, and systemic violence. This generation bears the psychological and social scars of trauma, loss, and instability—conditions that will have enduring consequences for Syria's post-conflict recovery, national reconciliation, and social cohesion.

This section highlights four critical areas of abuse inflicted on children during the current phase of the Syrian conflict: **systematic killing, abduction and enforced disappearance, orphaning and separation**, and **militarization and ideological indoctrination**. These violations are not isolated incidents but part of a broader campaign of sectarian violence and demographic engineering perpetrated by extremist factions, particularly in minority-populated regions.

Children have been among the primary and most vulnerable victims of this violence. Grave abuses—including killings, kidnappings, and ideological indoctrination—are extensively documented in several independent and institutional reports, including:

- *War Criminals in Syria* (March 14, 2025)
- *Preliminary Census of Victims* (March 17, 2025)
- *OHCHR's Distressing Scale of Violence in Coastal Areas* (March 2025)

One of the most harrowing examples is the **massacre in Fahel village**, detailed in the *Fahel Report* (January 2025). In this attack, entire Alawite families were executed, including numerous children—targeted solely for their religious identity. Verified survivor testimonies and video evidence confirm that the massacre was not the result of random violence but part of an organized campaign of sectarian cleansing.

These systematic atrocities against children constitute not only severe violations of international humanitarian law and the Convention on the Rights of the Child but also represent elements of a broader genocidal strategy. The deliberate targeting of minors—through murder, forced separation from parents, and conscription into militant ranks—aims to eliminate the future of entire communities by destroying their next generation.

This analysis underscores the urgent need for international action to protect children in conflict zones and to hold perpetrators accountable for crimes that strike at the heart of humanity. Without justice, trauma will define an entire generation—and peace will remain an illusion.

Murdered Children

Children have been deliberately and systematically killed in conflict-affected areas of Syria, frequently targeted because of their sectarian or religious identity. Verified reports and survivor testimonies confirm that children were murdered in their homes, on the streets, in hospitals, or while attempting to flee violence. In large-scale massacres such as those in **al-Mukhtariya**, **Sanoubar**, and **Baniyas**, entire families—including very young children—were exterminated.

Mass graves discovered in these areas provide irrefutable physical evidence of these atrocities. These acts constitute grave breaches of international humanitarian law, including violations of **Article 6 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)**, which guarantees the right to life, and **Common Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions**, which prohibits violence against civilians, including children.

These killings were not isolated incidents, but part of a deliberate and coordinated campaign of **sectarian cleansing**. Children were often executed during house raids or mass round-ups in minority-populated villages. In **Rasafah** (Masyaf district), survivor accounts describe how armed militants conducted door-to-door assaults, separated family members, and executed them without warning or due process. In numerous cases, children under the age of five were shot at close range or found among charred remains after homes were set ablaze.

Evidence suggests that the use of children as victims served not only to terrorize but to symbolically annihilate targeted communities. In several villages, slogans were spray-painted on walls following massacres, invoking religiously charged threats and signaling continued extermination campaigns. In **Sanoubar** and **al-Mukhtariya**, the entire populations were wiped out. The bodies of children were found in mass graves alongside their parents, hastily buried under debris and scorched earth. Eyewitnesses described fighters mocking victims during the killings—further reinforcing the sectarian and ideological motives driving the violence.

The **deliberate nature** of these crimes is evident in the choice of locations and timing. Many attacks occurred in the early morning hours when families were most vulnerable. Hospitals and shelters—spaces protected under international law—were not spared. In **Baniyas**, at least three children were killed in medical facilities while receiving care, demonstrating blatant disregard for humanitarian norms.

Digital verification using open-source intelligence (OSINT), including satellite imagery and social media posts disseminated by perpetrators, confirms that these killings were neither spontaneous nor isolated. They form part of a broader **strategy of demographic terror** aimed at forcibly depopulating minority regions. Patterns of behavior, consistent language, and repeated tactics across different governorates suggest inter-factional coordination under a shared ideological doctrine.

The psychological toll on surviving children and families is immeasurable. Many children not only lost parents and siblings but also witnessed the killings firsthand. This trauma compounds their physical vulnerability with long-term emotional and developmental harm.

Post-massacre documentation includes detailed records of child victims. In **Rasafah** alone, **47 children** were confirmed executed between March 1–15, 2025. However, local sources suggest the actual number is higher, as numerous families remain unaccounted for, and many bodies remain unidentified due to **burning or dismemberment**.

As of the report's publication date, **77 children** have been confirmed killed through individually verified cases. Among these:

- **68 children** had documented age information.
- **9 children** remain unidentified by age due to the severity of injuries or incomplete records.
- The **youngest victims** were just **2 years old**; the **oldest**, **17**.
- The **average age** of murdered children is approximately **10.6 years**.

These demographic findings underscore the systematic nature of the violence. Children were not collateral damage—they were central targets in an effort to annihilate both the present and future of Syria's religious minority communities. The presence of toddlers and school-aged children in mass graves—buried with parents and siblings—demonstrates an explicit intent to

extinguish entire family lines and erase centuries-old communities from the demographic fabric of Syria.

Abduction and Forced Disappearance of Children

The **abduction and enforced disappearance of children** has become a widespread and systematic tactic employed by extremist factions in Syria, particularly targeting vulnerable communities and young girls. These actions constitute grave violations of **Article 35 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)** and the **International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance**. In many cases, abducted children are subjected to **sexual violence, forced labor, militant recruitment, trafficking, or ransom extortion**. These practices reflect not only violations of international humanitarian and human rights law but also a deliberate strategy to terrorize civilian populations, dismantle social structures, and perpetuate long-term trauma.

Between **January and April 2025**, at least **14 cases of child abduction** were verified through a combination of **local testimonies, family reports, and digital evidence**, including open-source intelligence (OSINT) and eyewitness documentation. These cases were recorded across multiple governorates, including **Latakia, Tartus, Homs, Aleppo, and Hama**.

The majority of victims were **girls between the ages of 11 and 17**, abducted from homes, near schools, or in public locations such as markets and checkpoints. In several instances, children were forcibly taken in the presence of family members or bystanders during targeted raids. One notable case involved **N. M. Q. (age 5)** and **M. M. Q. (age 3)**, who were abducted alongside their mother in **Al-Mashrafa (Homs)** on **April 21, 2025**. All three were eventually released—a rare exception in a landscape otherwise marked by enforced disappearance.

As of the reporting date, the fate of the remaining **12 abducted children** remains unknown. There is credible concern—supported by survivor testimonies and investigative reports—that these children may have been subjected to **sexual violence, forced marriage, militant training, or trafficking across militant-held territories**. Some families have reported receiving threats or ransom demands. In several cases, it is believed that girls have been **enslaved and sold**, treated as *ghanimah* (spoils of war) in accordance with the extremist interpretations of religious doctrine espoused by their captors.

These acts amount to **crimes against humanity**, including **slavery, trafficking in persons, and sexual exploitation of minors**, as defined under international legal frameworks. The abductions reflect an intersection of **sectarian persecution, gender-based violence, and economic exploitation**, all underpinned by a violent ideological framework that dehumanizes children and treats them as disposable instruments of terror.

In nearly all cases, no communication was received following the abductions, and the children remain unaccounted for. Their identities, circumstances, and sources of verification have been meticulously recorded in **Annex 1** of this report, in line with international child protection guidelines and data confidentiality protocols.

These disappearances not only devastate individual families—they are part of a broader effort to break the social and psychological foundations of minority communities in Syria.

Immediate international attention is required to locate missing children, dismantle trafficking networks, and bring the perpetrators of these crimes to justice.

Militarization and Indoctrination by Extremist Groups

Extremist factions in Syria—most notably **Hay’at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS)** and its affiliates—have actively engaged in the recruitment, militarization, and ideological indoctrination of children. Testimonial and visual evidence confirm that minors are being trained in the use of firearms, immersed in hate-filled propaganda, and conditioned to view violence as a normative aspect of daily life. These practices violate multiple international legal frameworks, including the **Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict** and constitute prosecutable **war crimes under the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court**.

Children are systematically taught to regard Alawites, Christians, Druze, and other minorities as existential enemies—fueling generational cycles of hatred, sectarianism, and violence.

Organized Training and Religious Complicity

One particularly alarming case occurred at **Al-Iman Mosque** in **Hama**, where a series of recurring lectures—led by **Abdelnasser Alwan**—targeted boys under the age of 18. Ostensibly religious in nature, the sessions were used to promote militarization over spiritual instruction. Eyewitness accounts and photographic documentation confirm that the gatherings included live-ammunition drills conducted in unauthorized outdoor fields. Children were seen **handling and firing weapons inside mosque premises**, directly violating both the sanctity of religious spaces and international prohibitions on child soldiering. These activities raise urgent concerns about public safety, institutional complicity, and legal accountability.

Spread of Informal Armed Indoctrination

Militarization is not limited to formal training sites. In **Tell Rifaat**, a widely circulated video depicts a child openly engaged in live-fire practice with an automatic rifle in a civilian neighborhood. The unregulated nature of such training suggests a growing culture of informal indoctrination beyond organized camps.

Even more disturbing is a separate video featuring a **child under the age of five**, dressed in an ISIS-style uniform, holding a firearm and standing in what appears to be a staged militant training post. This footage—shared by extremist networks on social media—glorifies child soldiering, embedding militant identity into early childhood experiences and presenting it as honorable.

Events of Public Indoctrination

Another incident exemplifies the institutionalization of extremist ideology in community spaces. A publicly shared video shows dozens of boys participating in an event organized by the group **Dar Al-Muttaqin**, delivering sectarian speeches under a jihadist flag. One child proclaims, *“We are the sons of martyrs who died defending the faith.”* The speech was rife with sectarian slurs and militant rhetoric, pointing to deliberate **ideological conditioning under the guise of religious education**. The use of coordinated uniforms, flags, and rehearsed language suggests a systematic effort to radicalize children through psychological manipulation.

This activity constitutes both **sectarian incitement** and **emotional abuse**, directly violating provisions of the **CRC**, including the right of the child to be protected from all forms of mental violence and exploitation.

Militant Ideology in Daily Life

Further evidence of indoctrination emerges in a widely shared video where a man casually asks a boy, “Where is your drone headed?” The child responds, “To the coast.” In Syrian conflict parlance, “*the coast*” refers to predominantly Alawite-populated regions. While the exchange may seem innocuous, it reflects a disturbing **internalization of sectarian targeting**—transforming childhood play into a vehicle for ideological warfare.

This moment reveals a dual process: the **militarization of children's imagination** and the **normalization of sectarian hostility**. The drone is no longer a toy—it is a symbolic weapon. The coast is no longer a geographic location—it is an enemy territory. The child, shaped by ideological exposure, becomes both an agent and a symbol of militant indoctrination.

Conclusion: A Framework of Criminal Responsibility

These documented practices illustrate how children are not merely future recruits—they are **actively being shaped as ideological combatants** in the present. Whether through weapons training, propaganda dissemination, or symbolic participation in jihadist discourse, minors are being co-opted into a worldview of division and perpetual violence.

This constitutes a **direct violation of international humanitarian law** and meets the threshold for **war crimes** under **Article 8 of the Rome Statute**, which prohibits the conscription, enlistment, or use of children under 15 in hostilities. The widespread, deliberate nature of this recruitment effort demands urgent international response, including **legal accountability, protective interventions, and rehabilitation frameworks** for affected children.

Orphaned and Unaccompanied Children

The widespread massacres and ongoing violence in Syria have produced a dire humanitarian crisis, particularly among **orphaned and unaccompanied children**. These children—many of whom have lost one or both parents—face **extreme risks of exploitation, abuse, trafficking, and neglect**. Deprived of familial protection, they often lack access to **basic necessities** such as food, shelter, medical care, and education.

The psychological toll is profound. Many of these children have **witnessed the killings of their parents** firsthand, fled from gunfire, or hidden near the bodies of slain family members. Such experiences leave lasting emotional and developmental scars, threatening their long-term well-being. **Article 20 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)** obliges states to provide special protection for children deprived of their family environment—yet the situation in Syria reflects a stark failure to uphold these obligations.

As the conflict continues, the number of orphaned children continues to rise. In areas such as **Rasafah, Mukhtariya, and Sanoubar**, entire families have been wiped out. In many instances, no relatives remain to confirm a child’s orphan status, particularly in villages subjected to total annihilation. The destruction of **civil registration systems**, combined with mass displacement and the collapse of community networks, has made it extremely difficult to obtain verifiable data on affected minors.

Efforts to identify and support orphaned children have been further hindered by the **destruction of schools, orphanages, and local institutions** that once provided community-based child protection. In the absence of these systems, many children **disappear into displacement zones**, fall prey to **armed group recruitment**, or are trafficked for forced labor and exploitation.

Despite these immense challenges, efforts to trace, document, and support orphaned children are ongoing. This report remains a living document. Over the coming months, targeted efforts will intensify to **trace surviving relatives**, document living conditions, and identify at-risk children across conflict-affected regions. Ensuring the **long-term protection and rehabilitation** of these children is not only a humanitarian priority—it is a legal and moral obligation.

Conclusion

The **systematic targeting of children** in Syria—through **killing, abduction, orphaning, and militarization**—represents one of the gravest dimensions of the Syrian crisis. These crimes do not only destroy individual lives; they **shatter families, destabilize entire communities**, and threaten the future of a diverse, inclusive Syrian society.

Urgent international action is required. The global community must:

- **Protect vulnerable children** through immediate humanitarian interventions.
- **Hold perpetrators accountable** under international law.
- **Invest in long-term rehabilitation and reintegration programs** for affected minors.

Breaking the cycle of violence will require coordinated efforts grounded in **justice, recovery, and child-centered protection frameworks**. Only then can Syria begin to rebuild a future where children live free from fear, hatred, and exploitation.

Annexes

This report includes **three annexes** containing **verified documentation** of grave violations against children in Syria since **December 2024**. These materials have been compiled through:

- **Survivor and eyewitness testimonies**
- **Trusted local sources**
- **Open-source intelligence (OSINT) verification**
- **Photographic and video evidence**, where ethically appropriate

All documentation was gathered with strict adherence to the principles of **confidentiality**, **informed consent**, and **respect for the dignity** of victims and their families. These annexes serve as critical tools for:

- **Preserving historical memory**
- **Informing legal and humanitarian responses**
- **Facilitating international investigations and accountability mechanisms**

Due to the sensitive nature of this information, the annexes will only be shared with verified international institutions and actors under strict data protection protocols.

List of Annexes

Annex 1: List of Abducted Children

This annex provides **verified information on 14 children** abducted between **January and April 2025**. Each entry includes the child's **name, age, location of abduction**, and the **source(s) of verification**.

(Full individual records are included in the separate annex document.)

Note: Certain source names have been withheld for safety reasons and are cited as “**Verified Local Source**.” All data has been collected and preserved in compliance with international child protection and data confidentiality protocols.

Annex 2: List of Murdered Children

This annex documents **78 confirmed cases** of children **systematically murdered** during targeted attacks on minority communities. The records include each child's **name, age, location, date of death**, and associated **evidence** (where available).

Note: Where **photographic or video evidence** exists, it has been **securely archived** and will only be made available to **authorized international legal and investigative entities** upon formal request. The evidence has been cataloged according to international standards for forensic documentation and chain-of-custody integrity.

Annex 3: Documentation of Child Militarization and Indoctrination

This annex contains **verified evidence** of the recruitment, training, and ideological indoctrination of children by **extremist groups**, specifically **Hay’at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS)** and affiliated factions. It includes:

- **Eyewitness testimonies**

- **Photographic and video materials**
- **Social media content** showing the use of children in armed propaganda and religious radicalization

Note: Due to the presence of sensitive content involving minors, this material is **not publicly disseminated** and is handled in strict accordance with **international child protection protocols**, including redaction and secure storage practices.