

VIOLATION OF CHILDREN'S RIGHTS IN SYRIA

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 Analysis

Since the beginning of the Syrian war in 2011, Syrian children have been exposed to different kinds of violence, starting from psychological, physical up to sexual violence. Being exposed to so many human rights violations within the scope of humanitarian law, such as being the victims of civil conflicts during battles, being targeted by weapons, having their rights violated, being deprived of their educational rights, and being separated from their parents during mass migrations can only mean one thing; the children of Syria are faced with a complete darkness of war.

The violations against children are still ongoing, and their suffering are deepening as the war is progressing. It can be seen that Syrian children, whose current conditions remain unstable in the

countries where they defected to, or who stay in their war-torn country, who are deprived of education either partially or completely, and who have deep physical and psychological traumas, are going to be one of the most important problems for the future of Syria.¹

Deaths (violation of rights to live)

According to the 3rd Common Article of Geneva Conventions, it is prohibited to harm lives and physical integrity of civilians who didn't take part in a civil war under any circumstances. In the 3rd article of "Convention on the Rights of Children" which was ratified in 1989 by United Nation General Assembly and by Syria in July 15th 1993, it is mentioned that the favors of children are



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to be prioritized in all activities regarding them. As for the 6th article, it is stated that children have rights to live and parties of the conventions are going to do everything with their full capacity to make sure that children stay alive.

However, as the Syrian war is about to mark its 9th year, various factors, from the attacks on public places like schools, hospitals, and marketplaces, usage of barrel bombs which are forbidden in universal law, not to mention the usage of various kinds of chemical weapons, only increased the death rate. Besides the loss of lives, cases of disablements are increasing year by year.

According to the Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR), the Syrian regime used chemical weapons at least 216 times² and the regime carried out approximately 70.000 barrel-bomb attacks between 2012-2017.³ Besides Russia performed more than 175 cluster bomb attacks on Syria between September 2015 and February 2017.⁴

In its report titled “Syrian Arab Republic – Children and Armed Conflict”, United Nations Security Council lists violations based on confirmed information regarding the days between November 16th 2013 and November 30th 2018. According to the UN, in the period which the report covers, 3891 children, 1800 of whom are boys and 865 of whom are girls, were killed and 3448 children (1294 boys and 626 girls) were disabled.

A total of 358 schools have been attacked; 157 by the regime, 26 by ISIS, 3 by the Free Syrian Army, 2 by HTS, and the rest by other groups. 343 attacks were carried out on hospitals; 281 by the regime, 12 by ISIS, 3 by the Free Syrian Army and the rest by other groups.

As stated in the aforementioned UN report and considering the intense nature of the conflicts,

limits of access, and limited amount of human resources, it is easy to figure out that accurate number of Syrian children’s deaths caused by the war is much higher than the UN could confirm. For example, there is a big difference in the number of casualty produced by the reports of SNHR compared to that of UNSC. According to SNHR, 28,226 children were killed between March 11th 2011 and November 20th 2018. 79.51% (22,444) of these deaths were caused by the regime, 6.63% (1,872) by Russia, 3.45% (975) by various armed groups, 3.18% (ISIS: 837; HTS: 60) by extremist Islamic groups, and 0.6% (167) by YPG.⁵

Detentions, Disappearances and Torture (Violation of Rights of Bodily Integrity)

Since 2011, thousands of Syrian children were detained for various reasons and most of their whereabouts are still unknown. SNHR claims that at least 4469 children were either detained by the parties of war or disappeared between March 11th 2011 and November 20th 2018. It has been determined that 1 child was killed due to torture in 2017. As for 2018, at least 11 children were killed due to tortures in detention centers of the regime. SNHR was able to determine that at least 123 children were imprisoned with their mothers and 84 children were born in detention centers.⁶

For instance, 16 year-old Wael stated that he got arrested together with hundreds of people, put in a cell with 13 other children younger than him and that no food nor water was given to the children whose parents were on the wanted lists. Wael mentioned that a 6 year-old child named Ala was kept for the purpose of blackmailing his father and died on the third day of her capture in front of him.⁷

As for 15 year-old Musa, he said that he stayed with children between the ages of 9-10 in the prison

that he spent 22 days in, that he was tortured with electricity and beatings and that there were rotten dead bodies inside of his cell. Muhammad (24) said that he witnessed soldiers in the prisons confined 12 year-old children in isolation rooms and that psychological health of the children were affected majorly.⁸

These stories are just a glimpse of what the Syrian children go through, they had to face events not even adults can handle. The trauma that they suffer, and the impact on their future life, is simply unimaginable.

Arming Children

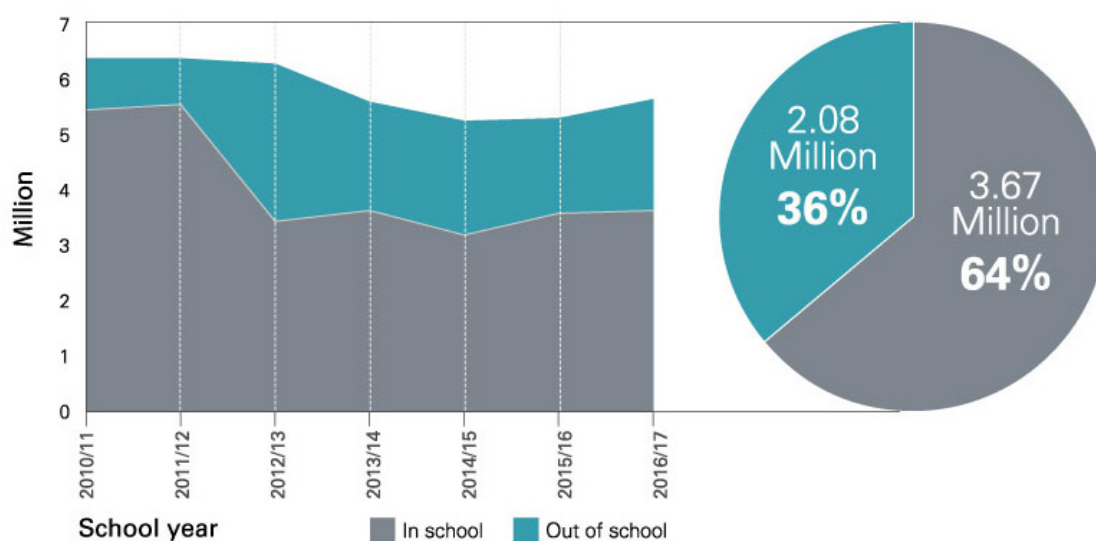
According to the 37th article of the “UN Convention on the Rights of Children”, children cannot be enrolled for armed services. The Syrian regime, with the enactment that was published in 2013, ordered that all people who reached the age of 18 were to enlist for armed services; and otherwise, announced that they would be forced to do so. However, children were also recruited in the following years.⁹

The families that refuse the enlistment of their children are threatened, some children are

kidnapped from schools to be used in war and their families are not informed about them. UN confirmed cases of 3377 children enlistments (3150 boys, 227 girls). 82% (2753) of the children are armed and in uniforms; while others participate in armed conflicts after receiving military training.

Deprivation of the Right of Education

Prior to the war, participation in elementary schools was almost 100% and 70% for secondary schools. According to the 2004 population census, the literacy rate in the country was 79.6% and women constituted 73.6% of it.¹⁰ Because of the bombings, schools are turned into sanctuaries for relocated families and they are also being used by armed forces as bases; today 1 in every 3 schools in Syria are unusable. Since the beginning of the war, more than 4000 attacks have been performed on schools and approximately 150,000 educators had to live the country. The families, lest their children should get kidnapped, because of the ongoing bombings and for other reasons like those, do not send their children to the remaining schools.¹¹ Thus, more than 2 million of children (39%) are deprived of education.¹²



Source: No Lost Generation (NLG)

Children and Humanitarian Aid

At least 13.1 million of Syrians need humanitarian aid. 6.2 million of these people are relocated people. It is estimated that currently 8.35 million of children live in Syria, where 5.6 million of them need humanitarian aid too.¹³

5.6 million Syrians, 2.7 million of whom are children, live in Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, and Egypt. Even though these host countries try to meet the demands of the refugees in various fields like health and education, the extensive demands are not being met sufficiently.

Conclusion

In order to prevent the violation of human rights in Syria, it is critical for opposing groups to stop their attacks on public places such as schools and hospitals, as well as places where civilians reside; and to stop using chemical weapons and barrel bombs which usage are forbidden and have dreadful effects. Each detained children must be released as soon as possible; information about those who lost their lives in detention centers must be shared with their families. If possible, their bodies are to be given to the families. The parties of war must stop using children under the age of 18 and return them to their families. During the battles, the

tactic of siege must be stopped and free access of humanitarian aid must be provided. The parties of war must provide all necessary transparency of any violation of the Syrian children's right, and individuals responsible for the violations must be judged before international courts.

Since the beginning of the Syrian war, children constitute the group that has been harmed the most. The lack of sufficient and effective rehabilitations for these children will result in the conveyance of major problems to the future generations. We do not need to look far to prove this; today, analysts have found that the children and adults that were exposed to violations in Iraq in the beginning of 2000's played a major role in the formation of ISIS.

Psychosocial support and education must be enhanced, and psychosocial elements must be integrated to all sectors in rebuilding the country. Senior members of families should also receive psychological support and be informed about the conditions of their children and grandchildren. Psychosocial support programs must be both sustainable and long-term. The notion of peace must be emphasized more on the political level compared to the previous years. When it comes to the subject of peace in Syria, children should always be put as priority. It must be borne in mind that a new Syria cannot be built without its children!

Sonnotlar

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* *Translated by İbrahim Mercan*