



الجمعية الوطنية لحقوق الإنسان
National Society for Human Rights

Violence against Women in Conflict Countries in the Middle East (Study Cases: Syria & Yemen)

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Preamble

Violence against women and girls is one of the most widespread, persistent, and devastating human rights violations in our world today. However, it remains largely unknown due to the impunity, silence, and stigma surrounding it. Out of every three women, at least one woman experiences physical or sexual violence at the hands of a male during her lifetime. The United Nations defines violence against women as “any violent act that is motivated by gender bias and that results in, or is likely to result in, harm or suffering to women, whether from the physical, sexual or psychological aspect, including threats of such acts or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life.”¹

Violence against women and girls escalates in conflict and armed dispute environments on a large scale. Although armed disputes and conflicts have taken a devastating toll on all civilians in general, women and girls have been disproportionately affected by this situation, as hostilities have resulted in the suffering of civilians in different environments of armed dispute due to the severity of the economic crisis, the damaged infrastructure, the collapse of services, but in addition to this, women have had to face limited mobility due to cultural standards prevailing between the sexes. Also, because they are responsible for providing food and care in their homes, they have had to deal with the challenges associated with limited access to food, water, sanitation, and health care services, which have witnessed a steady deterioration following the continuation of armed hostilities in some countries witnessing armed disputes and conflicts.

In the Middle East, disputes and instability in many of its countries have exacerbated pre-existing patterns of discrimination against women and girls and exacerbated the violations of their human rights. In this regard, armed conflicts spread in Yemen, Syria, Libya, Iraq, and Somalia have generated multiple levels of violence against women and girls, including indiscriminate killings, torture, arrests, enforced disappearances, sexual and gender-based violence, and forced marriage, which is attributed to the involvement of the warring parties and forces in the use of violence against women, in particular sexual and gender violence, as a cruel tactic of war, terror, torture, and political repression to achieve its strategic goals, including those aimed at driving populations to flee and taking control of contested lands and natural resources.

¹ العنف ضد المرأة، منظمة الصحة العالمية، 9 مارس 2021، الرابط: <https://bit.ly/3oPsU7m>

Women and girls in overcrowded refugee and displaced environments in countries in the Middle East are among those most affected by crises caused by conflict, forced displacement, and COVID-19, due to their being at high risk of sexual violence, exploitation, and trafficking, particularly in the humanitarian situation continued to deteriorate due to the decrease in humanitarian access and resources in general. In this context, economic despair and the breakdown of social safety networks in the midst of armed conflicts in the Middle East have led to an increase in girls and women resorting to negative coping mechanisms including child marriage and survival sex.

The exacerbating violence against women and girls in conflict countries in the Middle East raises important concerns about the widespread human rights violations against women and girls in these countries. **Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights** expresses its deep concern about the grave violations against women and girls in conflict countries In the Middle East region, it presents a report dealing with forms of violence against women in conflict countries in the Middle East, focusing on **Syria and Yemen** as two cases to study, within the framework of the Sixteen Days Campaign to Eliminate Violence against Women, which begins on November 25 of each year and continues until the tenth of December.

Keywords: violence - women - conflict countries - Yemen - Syria

First: The legal framework for protecting women from violence in armed conflict

International humanitarian law is concerned with protecting civilians, including girls and women in the context of armed conflicts, but it recognizes that women face specific problems in armed conflicts, such as sexual violence and risks to their health. International human law has given remarkable attention to the protection of women as one of the vulnerable groups in dire need of special protection, to spare them the effects of the devastating hostilities carried out by the warring parties in the context of international and non-international armed conflicts. In this context, international humanitarian law provided special protection for women from the violence that may occur against them in the midst of armed conflicts, a protection that is largely reflected in the provisions and articles of the four Geneva Conventions and their protocols that criminalize violations directed against women in international and non-international armed conflicts, including sexual violence, as Article 27 of the Fourth Geneva

Convention prohibits sexual violence that may occur against women in armed conflicts, including rape and enforced prostitution, as it stipulates that women must be protected in particular against any attack on their honor, particularly against rape, enforced prostitution, and any indecent assault.²

In the same context, Article 3 common to the four Geneva Conventions of 1949 provided special protection for all civilians not participating in hostilities in the context of armed conflicts, including women, from any violations that might occur against them, as it recommended the need to treat persons who do not take a direct part in the hostilities humanely in all circumstances, without any adverse distinction based on sex. Hence, it protects both men and women in the aftermath of armed conflict, in addition to the fact that the same article prohibits assault on life and physical integrity, including cruel treatment, torture, and outrages upon personal dignity, in particular humiliating and degrading treatment. Accordingly, all forms of violence against women may be included in one or more of the prohibitions stipulated in this article.

In a related context, the two additional protocols to the Four Geneva Conventions guarantee special protection for women in the context of armed conflicts. In this regard, Article 75 of Additional Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions prohibits the violation of human dignity in armed conflicts, in particular, the humiliating and degrading treatment of human beings. In addition, it prohibited enforced prostitution and any other form of indecent assault, which is the same thing confirmed by Article 76 of the same protocol, as it stipulates that “women shall be the object of special respect and protection, particularly against rape, forced prostitution, and any other form of outrage.”³ Also, Article 4 of Additional Protocol II to the Geneva Conventions has prohibited outrages upon personal dignity, in particular humiliating and degrading treatment, rape, enforced prostitution, and anything that would offend modesty; this is for all persons not taking part in hostilities, men and women alike.⁴ In a context such as the one we mentioned above, the protections guaranteed by international humanitarian law for women highlights from all forms of violence that may occur against them in the midst of international and non-international armed conflicts.

² المادة 27 من اتفاقية جنيف الرابعة، للاطلاع على كامل مواد الاتفاقية أنظر الرابط التالي: <https://bit.ly/2Zdj2He>

³ المادة 75 و 76 من البروتوكول الإضافي الأول إلى اتفاقيات جنيف، 1977، اللجنة الدولية للصليب الأحمر، 21 نوفمبر 2017، الرابط: <https://bit.ly/3qL54w8>

⁴ المادة الرابعة من البروتوكول الثاني الإضافي إلى اتفاقيات جنيف، اللجنة الدولية للصليب الأحمر، الرابط: <https://bit.ly/3Hz8Q1E>

On a related context, the international action was marked by many international legal efforts that reaffirmed the provisions and articles of the international humanitarian law conventions that require the needed protection for women in turbulent environments and armed conflicts. In this regard, the United Nations Security Council adopted in 2000 Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security, which calls for increased participation of women and the inclusion of a gender perspective in all efforts made by the United Nations to achieve peace and security in countries experiencing conflict, and in 2008 the Security Council adopted Resolution 1820, as the first resolution dedicated to addressing violence Sexual violence in conflict situations, as the resolution considered that sexual violence and rape are at the heart of international crime as a war crime, crime against humanity, or genocide.⁵

In the same context, the UN Security Council issued a number of subsequent resolutions, such as Resolution No. 1888 (2009), Resolution No. 1889 (2009), and Resolution No. 1960 (2010), which focused largely on preventing and addressing violence against women related to armed conflict through establishing a number of United Nations mechanisms to achieve this target, including the appointment of the Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict to strengthen coordination among existing United Nations mechanisms and supporting the end of sexual violence against women in cooperation with governments, and the establishment of a team of experts on the rule of law and sexual violence in conflict, which works with the United Nations on the ground and assists national authorities in strengthening the rule of law, appointing and employing women's protection advisers, and establishing mechanisms for monitoring, analysis, and reporting.⁶

Likewise, the UN Security Council, in the context of UN efforts to criminalize violence against women related to armed conflicts, in its Resolution No. 2242 (2015), considered that acts of sexual and gender-based violence practiced in the context of armed conflicts can be used as a method of terrorism, which is the same thing that is emphasized by the Security Council in its Resolution 2331 of 2016, as the Security Council affirmed that there is a link between human trafficking, sexual violence, terrorism, and transnational organized crime.

⁵ حقوق الإنسان والمخاوف المرتبطة بالجنسانية الخاصة بالمرأة في حالات النزاع وعدم الاستقرار، الأمم المتحدة مجلس الأمن، الرابط: <https://bit.ly/3cBLzhr>

⁶ المرجع سابق نفسه.

In a related context, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women has undertaken unremitting efforts to address violations related to violence against women in the context of armed conflict, as it adopted in 2013 General Recommendation No. 30, which provides authoritative guidance to States parties to the Convention on legislation and policies and other appropriate measures to protect, respect and fulfill the human rights of women in situations of conflict and instability, and in the same context adopted General Recommendation No. 35 on sexual violence against women, which considered sexual violence against women and girls to constitute discrimination under the Convention. Accordingly, it has prohibited states parties from engaging in any actions that involve manifestations of sexual violence against women.⁷

Second: Forms of violence against women in conflict countries in the Middle East

Women and girls have faced a wide range of forms of violence, abuse, and systematic targeting by all parties involved in armed conflicts in the Middle East, as they have been subjected to multiple forms of violence related to armed conflicts, including killing in the context of war operations conducted by warring parties in the midst of their armed conflicts and the enforced detention, arrest, and disappearance in prisons and detention centers under the control of the parties to the armed conflict, as well as the torture and other forms of ill-treatment of women and girls at the hands of the parties to the conflict, as well as the practices of rape, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, forced pregnancy, forced marriage, and other forms of sexual violence committed against women by parties to the conflict in the countries covered by the report. In light of the foregoing, we review the forms of violence against women in countries of armed conflict in the Middle East, focusing on the cases of Syria and Yemen, as follows:

Murder of women

Thousands of women have been killed in the midst of armed conflicts in many countries of the Middle East by parties to the conflict, in violation of the international protection guaranteed to civilians under international humanitarian law. Over the past years, a wide range of women has been murdered by a male family member based on the so-called honor killings. In **Yemen**, whose armed conflict has crossed its seventh year, thousands of civilians, including women,

⁷ المرجع سابق نفسه.

were killed in the context of war actions carried out by the parties to the armed conflict in order to consolidate their political control over Yemen. According to a report issued by the National Commission for Inquiry into Human Rights Violations in Yemen, more than 2,617 women and girls were killed and injured (528 women were killed and 805 injured, in addition to 512 girls were killed and 772 others were injured) during the period from 2015 to the end of 2020 by the Houthi rebel group, as a result of the indiscriminate bombing that targeted residential neighborhoods in a number of Yemeni governorates⁸. Domestic violence crimes that claimed the lives of women and girls in Yemen, particularly what are known as honor crimes, have also increased over the past few years. Many killings against girls and women in Yemen have been documented under various pretexts, most of which revolve around revenge for the sake of honor. In this regard, the 23-year-old Yemeni young woman, **Shurooq Ahmed**, was killed by hanging in October 2021 by her brothers and one of her cousins, amid allegations of her pregnancy after they accused her of having an affair with a person, without any action from the authorities in Dhamar Governorate, south of Sana'a⁹. In November 2021, a woman called **Iqbal Saeed Ghaleb** was starved to death by her husband, **Abdul Aziz Yahya Abdul-Jalil**, after he detained, tortured, and deprived her of food and drink inside a closed room for several days in a rural village in the Sharab Ar Rawnah District, Taiz Governorate, Yemen.¹⁰

In **Syria**, all parties to the conflict have been implicated in the killing of thousands of civilians, including women and girls, throughout the Syrian conflict. According to a report issued by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the number of deaths in the Syrian war from March 2011 to March 2021 has reached more than 350 thousand persons of both civilians and soldiers, while the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights estimated the number of civilians who died as a result of the war operations and indiscriminate bombing operations carried out by the parties to the Syrian armed conflict over a decade of conflict, at more than 117 thousand civilians, including more than 27 thousand women¹¹, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights verified the killing of 6 women and the injury of 11 others between January and February 2021, and that

⁸ اليمنيات بـ"يوم المرأة" .. الكشف عن حصيلة إرهاب الحوثيين، العين الإخبارية، 8 مارس 2021، الرابط: <https://al-ain.com/article/yemen-al-houthi-international-women-s-day>

⁹ شروق آخر ضحايا جرائم قتل النساء وغياب القانون في اليمن، على الدرج، 19 أكتوبر 2021، الرابط: <https://bit.ly/30JTtH8>

¹⁰ جريمة هزت اليمن.. حبسها زوجها وحرىها الطعام والماء حتى ماتت، العربية، 19 نوفمبر 2021، الرابط: <https://bit.ly/3oLAznj>

¹¹ الأول منذ 2014.. الأمم المتحدة تصدر إحصاء لقتلى الحرب المؤقتين في سوريا، DW، 24 سبتمبر 2021، الرابط: <https://bit.ly/3HLlo6q>

23 women were killed and 26 others were wounded between February and April 2021, and that 15 women were killed and 17 others were wounded in the period between April and June 2021, and from the killing of 24 women and wounding of 49 others in the period between June and August 2021, and from the killing of 17 women and the wounding of 24 others between August and October 2021, as a result of the hostilities undertaken by all parties involved spread throughout the Syrian Arab Republic.¹²

In the same context, crimes of domestic violence against women in Syria, particularly what is known as honor killings, have increased. According to human rights reports, 24 girls and women have been killed by their relatives in the name of honor from the beginning of 2020 until February 2021, and dozens of women have been killed during the past few months based on the pretexts of killing for the sake of honor. On February 24, 2021, a father named “**Mohammed**” killed his daughter, **Rahaf**, born in 2004, who were displaced from the countryside of Homs, by shooting her directly in the head, out of honor, on the pretext that she was taking off her veil outside, in "Abu Dafneh" camp in the town of "Killi" in Idlib countryside¹³. A minor girl named **Aida al-Hamoudi al-Saeedo**, who is from the Al-Hasakah, was shot by her brothers and her father in an abandoned house, in July 2021, after she refused to marry her cousin and ran away with another young man she loved¹⁴, and in the same month, a 16-year-old girl was suffocated by her father after a rape case she was subjected to in Al-Hasakah¹⁵. The previous facts highlight the extent of the prevalence of domestic violence against girls and women in the name of honor, in light of almost complete impunity for these crimes.

Forced disappearance arbitrary arrests of women

According to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, no one may be deprived of his or her liberty except on specific grounds established by law. Anyone who was arrested at the time of arrest must be informed of the charges against him, and anyone accused of criminal offenses has the right to appear promptly before an official authorized by law to exercise judicial functions

¹² تقرير الأمين العام الحادي والسبعون، والثاني والسبعون، والثالث والسبعون، والرابع والسبعون، والخامس والسبعون، المقدم إلى مجلس الأمن الدولي بخصوص الجمهورية العربية السورية،

للإطلاع على كامل هذه التقارير انظر الرابط التالي: <https://bit.ly/3oWbarg>

¹³ بذريعة “الشرف”: جرائم مستمرة بحق النساء في مناطق سورية مختلفة، سوريون من أجل الحقيقة والعدالة، 5 مايو 2021، الرابط: <https://bit.ly/3HJLMxt>

¹⁴ قتلاوا شقيقتهم في وضح النهار.. ووثقوا الجريمة بالفيديو، Sky news Arabia، 3 يوليو 2021، الرابط: <https://bit.ly/3HUkiW3>

¹⁵ مقتل فتاتين خلال أيام باسم “الشرف”.. نساء الحسكة يتظاهرن لنيل العنف ضد المرأة، الحرة، 16 يوليو 2021، الرابط: <https://arbne.ws/3qWXajx>

in a manner that enables him to be tried within a short period or to be released. Women and girls in the reporting countries have been subjected to enforced disappearances, arrests, and detentions by the parties to the conflict without any real charges being brought against them, or based on baseless allegations and accusations. When the parties to the conflict target women and girls for arrest and disappearance, they are mainly aiming at extorting women and their families in order to change their political affiliation or in order to exchange women for money and gold. In **Yemen**, the arrests and disappearances of Yemeni women have expanded in an unprecedented manner during the past few years by the Houthi rebel group. In this context, the number of girls and women detained in Houthi prisons from December 2017 to December 2020 reached nearly 1181, including 274 girls and women were forcibly disappeared, 292 women activists and human rights activists and from the education sector, 246 relief and humanitarian workers, 71 cases of rape and 4 suicide cases of women and dozens of cases of male and female children who were detained with their arrested mothers inside Houthi prisons¹⁶, were documented. The most prominent incidents of forced detention of women during the past few years by the Houthi group are evident in the arrest of the 19-year-old Yemeni model, **Intisar Al-Hammadi**, who was arrested in February 2021 at a checkpoint in Sana'a while she was on her way to a photo session because of her profession as a model¹⁷, in addition to the arrest of Ms. **Ovi Al-Naami**, the resident director of the Saferold Organization, who was arrested in January 2019 in the prison of the National Security Agency.¹⁸

In **Syria**, the parties to the Syrian conflict have been involved in the detention of women and girls on a large scale, as the parties to the Syrian conflict have deliberately arrested women and girls in order to use them as pressure cards to force the fleeing opponents to surrender. According to human rights reports verified by Maat, the number of women who are still detained or forcibly disappeared by all parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in Syria from March 2011 to March 2021, approximately 9,264 women and girls, including 8,029 women and girls, were arrested or disappeared by the Syrian regime forces, and 255 women and girls were arrested or disappeared by Daesh terrorist organization, 43 women and girls were arrested or disappeared by Hay'at Tahrir al-

¹⁶ معزولات عن العالم.. سجون الحوثي مقابر لنساء اليمن، "تحالف نساء من أجل السلام في اليمن" و"تكتل 8 مارس من أجل نساء اليمن" و"المنظمة اليمنية لمكافحة الاتجار بالبشر"،

فبراير 2021، الرابط: <https://bit.ly/3kTWYOb>

¹⁷ اليمن: عارضة الأزياء انتصار الحمادي المسجونة في صنعاء تحاول الانتحار، France 24، 3 يوليو 2021، الرابط:

¹⁸ معزولات عن العالم.. سجون الحوثي مقابر لنساء اليمن، مرجع سابق.

Sham, 761 women and girls were arrested or disappeared by the armed opposition factions known as the National Army forces, and 176 women and girls were arrested or disappeared by the Syrian Democratic Forces.¹⁹

Torture and other forms of ill-treatment against women

International humanitarian law and international human rights law prohibit torture and other kinds of ill-treatment and do not justify it under any circumstances, and the authorities always resort to it in order to extract confessions or to obtain information, the parties to the armed conflict in many countries of the Middle East, particularly countries covered in the report, used torture and other forms of ill-treatment against the female opponents in order to instill fear and panic in them and force them to abandon their political orientations and affiliations that they do not like.

In **Yemen**, the parties to the Yemeni conflict, particularly the Houthi rebel group, have committed a wide range of torture against girls and women throughout the Yemeni conflict. According to reports issued by local Yemeni organizations that were verified by Maat, more than 33 women and girls were subjected to various types of physical and psychological torture and harsh treatment inside Houthi prisons since the outbreak of the Yemeni conflict until June 2020, which resulted in some of them being completely or partially paralyzed, others with chronic diseases, memory loss, and visual and hearing disabilities, in addition to some of them dying inside the cells under torture whips, and others died as a result of neglect and the deterioration of their health condition in light of the continuous denial of treatment²⁰. The most prominent incidents of torture and other patterns of ill-treatment that women have been subjected to during the past few years by the Houthi group were manifested in the incident of torture of **Samira Al-Houri**, head of the “Yemeniyat Commission”, who was subjected during the period of her arrest to beating and electrocution until blood ran out of her body²¹, as well as the incident of torture of **Sonia Saleh**, who was arrested in March 2019 by the Houthi group due to her activity on social media, as he criticized the general situation in the areas controlled by the Houthi militias, and the Houthis’ seizure of humanitarian aid. During her detention, which exceeded a year, she was subjected

¹⁹ في اليوم الدولي للمرأة قرابة 9264 امرأة لا تزال قيد الاعتقال/ الاختفاء القسري واستهداف النساء على خلفية عملهن، الشبكة السورية لحقوق الإنسان، 8 مارس 2021، الرابط:

<https://bit.ly/3xjjePB>

²⁰ إحصائية تكشف عدد ضحايا التعذيب في سجون الحوثيين، حفریات، 28 يونيو 2021، الرابط:

²¹ مذبذبات يروين ويلات التعذيب والاعتصاف في سجون الحوثي، العربية، 29 أبريل 2021، الرابط: <https://bit.ly/30NqNbM>

to all forms of physical and psychological violations, including electrocution, beatings, spraying with cold water, and pulling out fingernails.²²

In **Syria**, all parties to the Syrian conflict were implicated in cases of torture of women and girls, which led to the death of many of them. According to statistics issued by local organizations that were verified by Maat, at least 92 women and girls were killed due to torture by all parties and the dominant forces in Syria between March 2011 and March 2021, including 74 women who were killed due to torture by the Syrian regime forces, 14 women were killed due to torture by Daesh, two women were killed due to torture by the Syrian Democratic Forces, and one woman was killed by the armed opposition factions known as the National Army Forces, and another woman was killed by an unknown party.²³

Sexual violence against women

The phenomenon of sexual violence has been closely linked to armed conflicts in many countries in the eastern region, particularly in Syria and Yemen. All warring parties in the Syrian and Yemeni conflict have committed grave sexual violations against women and girls, some of which amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity. In **Yemen**, the armed conflict that has lasted for more than seven years has exacerbated the phenomenon of sexual violence against women due to the increase in their responsibilities and the development of their roles in light of the worst Yemeni humanitarian crisis in the world, as described by the United Nations, as all warring parties in the context of the Yemeni conflict committed grave sexual violations against women and girls. This was evident in the involvement of all parties to the conflict in Yemen, particularly the Houthi rebel group, since the beginning of the Yemeni conflict in committing crimes of rape, sexual slavery, forced prostitution, and forced marriage against women and girls in prisons and detention centers, which led to the escalation of the sexual violence crimes committed against women and girls by 63% since the escalation of the Yemeni conflict in 2015.²⁴

Rape and other forms of sexual violence against women and girls are a systematic policy that the Houthi rebel group has pursued throughout the Yemeni conflict. According to local reports, the Houthis alone were implicated in more than 71 cases of rape against women and girls in prisons under their control during

²² «قتل وتعذيب واغتصاب».. شهادات توثق جرائم ميليشيات الحوثي ضد نساء اليمن، الرؤية، 21 فبراير 2021، الرابط: <https://bit.ly/32nSRDF>

²³ في اليوم الدولي للمرأة قرابة 9264 امرأة لا تزال قيد الاعتقال/ الاختفاء القسري واستهداف النساء على خلفية عملهن، مرجع سبق ذكره.

²⁴ تأثير الحرب في العنف ضد النساء والفتيات في اليمن، مركز العربية فيلنكس للدراسات، 21 فبراير 2021، الرابط: <https://bit.ly/3oJ1QGR>

the period from December 2017 to December 2020, including 6 rape cases that occurred during 2020 alone²⁵, the testimonies of the survivors from Houthi prisons confirm that they were raped by Houthi soldiers on multiple occasions over long periods. In this context, **Nesma Mohammed**, a survivor of Al-Houthi prisons, says that she was taken to a room where a man nicknamed Abu Hashem raped her, and despite her crying and begging him not to rape her, he beat her and continued to do so. A week later, she was taken to another cell with her eyes closed and was raped without ever recognizing her rapist. Although she collapsed and attempted suicide, the Houthis took her to another room, and she was photographed and raped by two persons on the same day²⁶. The Houthis justify their sexual crimes against women and girls arrested in their prisons under the pretext of the clearance jihad, which is a veiled rape in which the Houthi individual who belongs to the Hashemite dynasty rapes the victim to give her a positive trait similar to clearance, as they claim. As a result of these grave sexual violations against women, the UN Security Council issued on February 25, 2021, Resolution No. 2564 of 2021, in which it imposed sanctions on the Director of the Houthi Criminal Investigation Department in Sana'a, "**Sultan Zabin**" for adopting a policy of intimidation against politically active women, and his use of sexual violence in the Yemeni armed conflict against girls and women arrested in Houthi prisons based on their political affiliations.²⁷

On a related level, Security Belt Forces have been implicated in perpetrating multiple types of sexual violence against women and girls throughout the Yemeni conflict. In 2020 alone, Security Belt soldiers raped five women and four girls and subjected two women and two girls to other forms of sexual violence, one of the survivors in this context told that she has been raped on multiple occasions over 13 days by 28 soldiers, including in cases of a gang rape perpetrated by multiple military personnel. Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights has serious concerns about other allegations documented by a team of Eminent International and Regional Experts on Yemen in its September 2020 report that these forces raped 30 other women and girls.²⁸

²⁵ معزولات عن العالم... سجون الحوثي مقابر لنساء اليمن، مرجع سابق.

²⁶ حالة حقوق الإنسان في اليمن، بما في ذلك الانتهاكات والتجاوزات المرتكبة منذ أيلول/سبتمبر 2014، مجلس حقوق الإنسان

²⁷ تقرير الأمين العام، العنف الجنسي المتصل بالنزاع، الأمم المتحدة..مجلس الأمن، مرجع سبق ذكره

²⁸ انتهاكات مروعة.. أثر النزاعات المسلحة على النساء والأطفال في منطقة الشرق الأوسط، ماعت للسلام والتنمية وحقوق الإنسان، 3 يونيو 2021، الرابط:

<https://bit.ly/3DM6aLU>

In **Syria**, sexual violence has increased dramatically since 2011, to the extent that it has become a systematic policy that all parties to the Syrian conflict, including the forces affiliated with the regime, armed opposition groups, and terrorist groups, have been keen to implement in different ways to achieve their interests and goals. According to local reports of which Maat verified authenticity, the number of incidents of sexual violence committed against women and girls by all parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in Syria from March 2011 to March 2021 amounted to approximately 11,523 incidents of sexual violence, including 8,013 incidents of sexual violence committed by forces affiliated with the Syrian regime, and 3,487 incidents of sexual violence committed by members of the terrorist organization Daesh, 11 incidents of sexual violence committed by armed opposition factions, and 12 incidents of sexual violence committed by the Syrian Democratic Forces.

During February 2020 alone, more than 30 cases of rape occurred in the north of the Syrian Arab Republic, and members of the Free Syrian Army were involved in a number of these incidents, as evidenced by the rapes they committed during house raids, as well as the cases of sexual violence that they committed in places of detention as a strategy to humiliate and extract confessions similar to the rape of a minor in front of male detainees in the detention facility in Afrin in 2020.²⁹

According to the report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic issued on August 14, 2020, several women detained during 2020 were sexually assaulted by employees of the Syrian authorities in a number of unofficial detention sites, including Branch 227 of the Intelligence Division, as well as individuals affiliated with the Islamic State were involved in a number of cases of sexual violence that occurred during 2020, as the United Nations documented more than 19 cases of sexual violence that occurred during 2020, affecting 12 girls and 7 women, and in five of these cases, Yazidi girls were targeted in areas controlled by the Islamic State organization in the north of the Syrian Arab Republic.³⁰

In the overcrowded camps for internally displaced persons in light of the Syrian conflict, many girls were forced to resort to harmful coping mechanisms to face physical and financial insecurity, as many girls as young as ten years old were

²⁹ تقرير الأمين العام، العنف الجنسي المتصل بالنزاع، الأمم المتحدة..مجلس الأمن، 30 مارس 2021، الرابط: <https://undocs.org/ar/S/2021/312>

³⁰ المرجع السابق نفسه

forced to marry due to living difficulties, fear, and security threats they face. In this context, the rate of early marriage among girls in Syria increased from 13 to 46 percent during the war period, and some fathers in the northwest of the Syrian Arab Republic forced their girls before puberty to take hormones to induce puberty in anticipation of early marriage, which is at the heart of the practices that constitute sexual violence under international conventions³¹

Conclusions & Recommendations:

With reference to the foregoing, it can be said that Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights has reasonable grounds to believe that violence against women and girls is widely practiced by all parties involved in the armed conflicts in many Middle Eastern countries, particularly in Syria and Yemen. It is the violence whose manifestations and forms vary between honor killings of women and in the context of combat operations, forced arrests, disappearances, and detentions, torture, and other forms of ill-treatment, and crimes of sexual violence, including rape, forced and early marriage. In this Context, Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights presents its recommendations to all parties concerned with the aggravating situation of violence against women in conflict countries in the Middle East, including the international community with its governmental and non-governmental organizations, and parties involved in armed conflicts, as follows:

- The need to adhere to international treaties and charters that constitute the core of international humanitarian law and international human rights law, in the midst of armed conflicts in many countries of the Middle East, in a manner that guarantees the necessary protection of civilians, including women and girls.
- The need to commit to preventing violence against women related to armed conflicts in the Middle East, particularly in Syria and Yemen, and to address it and hold perpetrators accountable for their crimes.
- The need to immediately release all women and girls arrested by all parties involved in armed conflicts in the Middle East, and to ensure that women are removed from the conflict.

³¹ ضحايا العنف الجنسي في سوريا بين وصمة العار وغياب المساءلة، مركز مالكوم كير – كارينجي، 17 فبراير 2021، الرابط: <https://bit.ly/3FGjp19>

- The need of increasing the humanitarian assistance provided to girls in the context of armed conflicts so that they do not fall prey to forced and early marriage in order to provide for their basic food needs.
- The need to recognize women and girls who have experienced sexual violence, perpetrated by all parties involved in armed conflicts in the Middle East as victims who deserve reparation and redress.
- Work on integrating concerns about violence against women related to armed conflict into national emergency response plans.

