





Human Rights Report

DEIR EZZOR CHILDREN UNDER SHADOW OF WAR

August 2018

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منظمة العدالة من أجل الحياة  
Justice For Life Organization

## **Deir Ezzor Children under Shadow of War**

**A Brief Report on the Negative Impact of the Conflict on Children  
in Deir Ezzor Province**

August 2018

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### **Summary**

War has started in Deir Ezzor since 2012 and still has considerable impact on civilians, and especially children.

War resulted in displacement of dozens of thousands to more safe spaces in Aleppo countryside, Idleb, and al Hasaka along with area out of government forces control and “Islamic State” group aka ISIS in Deir Ezzor.

Children of Deir Ezzor were exposed to killing, maiming, and torture by many military powers who controlled the province. Many children were missing after being arrested by Syrian security apparatuses and ISIS. Moreover, armed groups recruited children into their forces.

The witness Abo Omar, pseudonym, says “Syrian security apparatuses arrested a 13-year-old child in 2015 while he was in Al Wadi street nearby Al Joura neighborhood for unknown reasons. His fate is still unknown until now’.

War deprived children from education and healthcare, and impacted o their behavior and acts as result of what they have witnessed”.

Nassr, pseudonym, who worked as a headmaster of primary school says “Schools continued in receiving students after vast areas of Deir Ezzor became out of government forces control. We were working by self-support and received some support from the Syrian Interim Government that is affiliated by the National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces. However, as ISIS controlled the province, more than 95 per cent of students were deprived from education. Limited number of students was taking private lessons and in confidential manner, others moved out of Deir Ezzor”. Nassr continues “I depended on my own and my wife in educating and teaching my children following the end of schools work completely”.

Justice for Life organization documented the death of 597 children between January 2016 and July 30<sup>th</sup> 2018 due to aerial [bombardment](#), shelling, executions, [IEDs](#), VBIEDs, and lack of healthcare. Dozens of children became patients in displacement camps due to [lack of healthcare](#) and food along with heat waves, and [some of them died](#).

Justice for Life calls upon all parties to conflict in Syria to respect child rights, International Humanitarian Law and International Human Rights Law, and to take all feasible precautions to protect children from effects of the conflict.

## **Recommendations**

Justice for Life organization demands the following;

All parties to conflict in Syria to:

- 1- Respect the child rights and the rules of international humanitarian law and international human rights law.

- 2- Immediately stop recruiting, enrolling, or using children under age as fighters or within supportive military roles. To take the required measures to make sure of the children age and eliminate any doubts concerning the age by official documents or investigation from relatives or local community.
- 3- Not recruiting or enrolling any individual where there is a doubt in their age unless the age is confirmed over eighteen.
- 4- Taking all feasible precautions to protect children from consequences of conflict.
- 5- Stop to use schools for military purpose and declare schools as safe places.

#### Syrian Government to:

- 1- To ratify the Rome Statute established by the International Criminal Court in order to enable the court prosecution to investigate into the committed violations and crimes in Syria, especially that were committed against children.
- 2- To cooperate with the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism. to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes to ensure accountability for crimes involving violations of international law committed in Syria since march 2011, and the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic. Also, to ensure that those united nations mechanisms are supported and enabled to carry out their mandates effectively.

#### United Nations Security Council:

- 1- To refer the situation to the International Criminal Court to ensure that perpetrators of crimes were held accountable in Syria.
- 2- To issue a resolution by the UNSC that demands all states to cease all military and financial assistance to the forces of the Syrian state or armed groups where they are proved to commit crimes and systematic violations in Syria that are enrolled in the latest report issued by the secretary general about children and armed conflict.<sup>1</sup>
- 3- To establish a center for coordinating about the children as a part of the IIIM and to ensure that there is considerable focus on the violations against children.

#### United Nations Working Group for Children and Armed Conflict:

To authorize the special representatives of the Secretary-General involved in children and armed conflict to transport information about the serious violations in Syria against children in the Syrian armed conflict to an allegation of the international crime court under article 15 of the Rome Statutes.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://undocs.org/en/s/2018/465>

Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed:

To communicate with the armed groups in Syria and to take their pledges not to commit crimes or serious violations against children or recruiting children.

The International Community and Stakeholders:

- 1- To protect child rights in Syria and work on doubling support to the alternative projects that proved their success such as establishing informal education centers.
- 2- Any agreements of cessation of hostilities or future peace agreements in Syria shall include clear rules of protecting children in order to ensure that no violations are committed against them in the future.

International and Local Organizations:

- 1- To support the efforts aiming at reducing the drop-out rates and to develop child protection programs to counter targeting children by all parties to conflict.
- 2- To provide healthcare for children on regular basis and to develop the policies of child protection.

## **Methodology and Challenges**

This report covers a number of violations against children in Deir Ezzor and shed light on the most obvious effects on children due to what the province of Deir Ezzor has witnessed since 2012 until the end of Jul 2018.



The statistics of the dead children that is included in this report covers the duration between January 1<sup>st</sup> 2016 and July 30<sup>th</sup> 2018.

JFL directly interviewed 19 witnesses in Deir Ezzor, Idleb, and Şanlıurfa and the report depends on 13 testimonies.

JFL focused on interviewing the parents of the children targeted by this report to talk about the war effects on their children. JFL sought to attendance and approval of those parents prior to listen to the children testimonies.

Many parents rejected to give their testimonies for security reasons. Other witnesses requested not to reveal their real names.

## **Introduction**

### Who is Controlling Deir Ezzor Province?

Following years of war and control of successive powers on Deir Ezzor, government forces recaptured the cities and towns located in the south of Euphrates river after a huge military campaign that started in the second half of 2017 with direct support of the

Russian forces. On the other hand, Syria Democratic Forces (SDF) with support of US-led international coalition controlled on the towns and villages located in the north of the river within the battle of “Al Jazeera Storm”.

ISIS is still fighting in some villages of the eastern countryside of Deir Ezzor in the north of the river. ISIS members are still in the desert of Deir Ezzor and these areas are starting points for launching quick assaults on the government forces and SDF.

What Did the Battles of Recapturing the Province Result in?

[Hundreds of civilians were killed](#) and Dozens of thousands of civilians fled the province due to the military actions toward safer spaces in Al Hasaka, Idleb, Damascus, and Aleppo northern and eastern countryside, along with SDF held areas in Deir Ezzor province.

## Justice for Life Organization

[JFL](#) Is an independent, Syrian, civil society organization which is non-governmental and nonprofit. The organization includes a lot of Syrians activists and defenders for human rights despite the difference of their orientation and their affiliations. The organization works on documenting all human rights violations for the aim of benefiting the documentations in upcoming phase that follows the war, the organization uses collected

evidence which is being audited carefully by transitional justice processes in its various forms. Furthermore, the organization constantly works on advocacy campaigns, workshops and conferences that mainstream the human rights culture in the Syrian society

Our Vision:

The organization aspires to a Syrian society based on citizenship and the rule of law, in which all the Syrians can have justice and equality.

Our Message:

The enhance of justice through monitoring and documenting human rights violations, the issuance of statistics and thematic reports of human rights to be use it in the process of justice achievement in Syria. Nevertheless, the organization since its establishment is working on the capacity building of Syrian activities to enable them to seek the facts and document them in the most efficient methods

Our Values:

The Organization believes that human rights are inherent rights, owned by people on an equal manner without any neutralization, interrelated, indivisible or inalienable.

## **Legal Frame**

[Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989](#), which is signed by Syrian Arab Republic in 1990 stated that "the child, by reason of his physical and mental immaturity, needs special safeguards and care", "Recognizing the importance of international co-operation

for improving the living conditions of children in every country". Article 6 stated "States Parties recognize that every child has the inherent right to life. States Parties shall ensure to the maximum extent possible the survival and development of the child".

Article 7 stated that "The child shall be registered immediately after birth"

The convention defined the child as "Every human being below the age of eighteen years unless under the law applicable to the child".

Article 19 stated "States Parties shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child"

Article 24 stated "1. States Parties recognize the right of the child to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health and to facilities for the treatment of illness and rehabilitation of health. States Parties shall strive to ensure that no child is deprived of his or her right of access to such health care services.

2. States Parties shall pursue full implementation of this right and, in particular, shall take appropriate measures:

(a) To diminish infant and child mortality;

(b) To ensure the provision of necessary medical assistance and health care to all children with emphasis on the development of primary health care;

(c) To combat disease and malnutrition, including within the framework of primary health care, though, inter alia, the application of readily available technology and through the provision of adequate nutritious foods and clean drinking-water, taking into consideration the dangers and risks of environmental pollution;

(d) To ensure appropriate pre-natal and post-natal health care for mothers;

(e) To ensure that all segments of society, in particular parents and children, are informed, have access to education and are supported in the use of basic knowledge of

child health and nutrition, the advantages of breastfeeding, hygiene and environmental sanitation and the prevention of accidents;

(f) To develop preventive health care, guidance for parents and family planning education and services.”

Regarding education, the convention said that states parties shall “Take measures to encourage regular attendance at schools and the reduction of drop-out rates”. Article 29 stated that States Parties agree that the education of the child shall be directed to:

(a) The development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential;

(b) The development of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and for the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations;

(c) The development of respect for the child's parents, his or her own cultural identity, language and values, for the national values of the country in which the child is living, the country from which he or she may originate, and for civilizations different from his or her own;

(d) The preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of indigenous origin”

Part 1 of Article 32 stated that “States Parties recognize the right of the child to be protected from economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with the child's education, or to be harmful to the child's health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development.”

Rule 120 of the [Customary International Humanitarian Law](#) stated “Children who are deprived of their liberty must be held in quarters separate from those of adults, except where families are accommodated as family units”.

Rule 135 stated “Children affected by armed conflict are entitled to special respect and protection”.

Rule 136 stated “Children must not be recruited into armed forces or armed groups”.

Article 7 of [Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court](#) 1998 defines torture as “The intentional infliction of severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, upon a person in the custody or under the control of the accused; except that torture shall not include pain or suffering arising only from, inherent in or incidental to, lawful sanctions” considering it as “Crimes against humanity”.

Paragraph 26 of the article 8 stated that “Conscripting or enlisting children under the age of fifteen years into the national armed forces or using them to participate actively in

hostilities” is considered as “War crime”. This is assured by article 4 in [Protocol \(II\) Additional](#) to the Geneva Conventions.

United Nations Security Councils “Strongly condemns the targeting of children in situations of armed conflict, including killing and maiming, sexual violence, abduction and forced displacement, recruitment and use of children in armed conflict” in resolution [1261](#) at its 4037th meeting, on 25 August 1999.

The Protocol (II) Additional to the Geneva Conventions in its article 6 (4) stated that “The death penalty shall not be pronounced on persons who were under the age of eighteen years at the time of the offence”, and the [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#) in its article 6 stated that “Sentence of death shall not be imposed for crimes committed by persons below eighteen years of age” .

## **Testimonies for Children’ Parents from Deir Ezzor on the War Impacts on their Children**

Children Recruitment:

The military factions' behavior varied towards children in Deir Ezzor. The Syrian government forces arrested, tortured, forcibly disappeared, and used them in digging ducts in fighting fronts. ISIS and other extremist groups encouraged children to join their forces through schools, mosques sessions, competitions, and gifts. It was noticed that there were children members who served in the checkpoints of SDF in Deir Ezzor.

Mohammad, under a pseudonym, says "Many cases were reported for children under ten who fled to join ISIS, and parents who try to return their children from the training camps, they were exposed to be punished. This resulted in radical change in the behavior of those children who headed toward violence and did not care about their families anymore".

Ahmad, under a pseudonym, confirms "Two children of my relatives escaped from their families and joined ISIS. We were not able to ask ISIS for their return. However, they returned by their own and ISIS did not prevented them from doing so".

"One month after his escape and joining ISIS, he was sent to participate in Ain Al Arab/Kobane as the battles were in full swing. Two weeks later, we received the news of his death due to aerial bombing. ISIS pushed him to fighting fronts despite his young age".

Saleh, under a pseudonym, narrates the story of his 13-year-old brother and how did he join ISIS:

#### Torturing and arresting Children:

Syrian Security Apparatuses arrested indiscriminately children. Likewise, ISIS arrested hundreds of children by security charges such as dealing with armed opposition and other media parties. Also, children were arrested by the charges of not attending prayer, not fasting in Ramadan, and smoking. Children were beaten and crucified in public squares by ISIS. They also were enrolled in Sharia courses.

Abo Omar, under a pseudonym, says:

"Syrian Security Apparatuses arrested a 13-year-old child in 2015 when he was in Al Wadi Street nearby Al Joura neighborhood in Deir Ezzor city for unknown reasons. Until this moment, his fate is still known".

Mohammad, under a pseudonym, says “ISIS arrested my 13-year-old son because they saw him in the street in the prayer time. I could not know his place unless two days passed. Following searching for him in the security points in our area, he was not released unless they whipped both of us and enrolled us in Sharea course”.

Ahmad, who is the father of an 11-year-old child says” They arrested my son for many hours for not fasting in Ramadan and crucified him for two hours in the shop market in Hatla village in the countryside of Deir Ezzor. I asked them to crucify me instead of him as he is still young and cannot stand, but they refused and told me: Are you raising your sons to obey God?”

The pursuit after children by ISIS resulted in injuries due to gunshots or running over them.

The witness Hussein, a pseudonym, says:

“My son was riding a motorbike and listening to songs when a vehicle of Al Hesba saw him. My son tried to escape while they were pursuing him. My son fell down and because of high speed of their vehicle, they ran over him and caused nerves deterioration in his foot. I could not hospitalize him out of Deir Ezzor due to the prevention by ISIS. I applied a complaint, but they did not respond”.

#### Deprivation from Education:

Many parents and teachers told JFL about the impact on children due to stop of schools in vast areas in Deir Ezzor province.

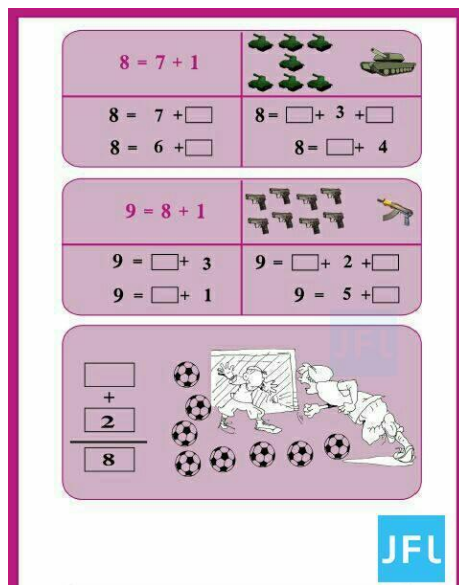
Um Sham, is a witness who was displaced from Deir Ezzor city to the countryside says:

“Government forces targeted in the end of 2017 the school that my children were attending by artillery shells. We had to stop sending them to school fearing from shelling”





Picture 1: Previous Curriculum in ISIS Held Areas in Deir Ezzor



Picture 2: Previous Curriculum in ISIS Held Areas in Deir Ezzor

Ahmad, from Hawayej Theyab village in the eastern countryside of Deir Ezzor, prevented his son from attending ISIS school says “ISIS opened many schools, however, and since the curriculum evokes on violence, I prevented my son from attending those schools”.

Ahmad gives some examples in the math book “You have 47 bullets and there are 9 infidels in front of you, how would you divide those bullets into them?”

Khalid, a pseudonym, says “I sent my 12-year-old brother to work in one of the cybercafés to fill the gap of being dropped out. However, as my brother was selling satellite internet card to a woman, ISIS arrested and beaten him with a cable so his back became blue”.

Nassr, a pseudonym, who worked as a former headmaster in a primary school says:

“Schools continued in receiving students after vast areas of Deir Ezzor became out of government forces control. We were working by self-support and received some support from the Syrian Interim Government that is affiliated by the National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces. However, as ISIS controlled the province, more than 95 per cent of students were deprived from education. Limited number of students was taking private lessons and in confidential manner, others moved out of Deir Ezzor”.

Nassr continues “I depended on my own and my wife in educating and teaching my children following the end of schools work completely”.

Abd, a pseudonym, who worked as a teacher in a primary school, was arrested as he rejected the curricula that were imposed by ISIS in Deir Ezzor.

Abd talks about the drop-out of students;

“As education stopped in ISIS held areas, most students started working due to the financial need and to get away from the propaganda used by ISIS to attract children”. “Children who were in five or six when schools were closed, now they are eight or nine years old, and his means that they are illiterate”.

#### Lack of Healthcare:

Stopping the medical organization activities in ISIS held areas and besiegement on the areas held by the government forces, including the leaving of most doctors, resulted in grave impact on children, especially those who suffer from chronic diseases.

Um Sham says “My 12-year-old daughter suffered from leishmaniosis, and the medications were not available on permanent basis and the movement was very difficult due to security conditions”.

Mahmoud, a pseudonym, whose child suffers from hepatitis from birth, says:

“My child suffered from hepatitis and itchy as number of doctors could not give diagnosis. I had to travel to Damascus once a month to follow up his treatment by Cortisone and chemo. As war started, the Syrian pound decreased and my financial situation got bad. This impacted on my child treatment. I could travel only once every three months”.

Mahmoud continues “Following ISIS control and imposing travel permit, they did not allow me to travel to Damascus despite the fact that I provided them with all report that prove my child’ illness. I had to travel without a permit through smuggling way and each time I had to pay 200,000 SYP”.

Shahin, a pseudonym, says “We had to flee. We lived in a house where no basic requirements available including water, electricity, and the place was not clean. We saw diseases for the first time in our children”.

Yusuf, a pseudonym, says “My nephew worked in a primary oil extractor to have a salary as living condition were deteriorated. This resulted in health problems for the child”.

#### Change in Children Behavior:

War has affected on children in Deir Ezzor province as they were forced to witness the cases of executions and victims’ bodies’ parts. The shelling scenes were deeply rooted in their memory, especially the survivals.”

Ahmad, a pseudonym, says “When a warplane closes, children start to cry and shout as they saw what shelling means. They also fear from the sound of gunshot”.

Khalaf, a pseudonym, talks about the behavior change of his 10-year-old son:

One day in summer 2015, ISIS executed someone in our village. People who witnessed the execution were from different ages. When I came back to the house, my son had a knife and put it on the neck of my other son and started saying “Allahuakbar”. I took the knife before he hurt his brother”.

Khalaf continues “ISIS member told me that media officials always asking us to focus on children”.

Abd tells his notices concerning the behavior change “Children were remarkably influenced by what they see and hear. Even in their clothes, they started to wear in an imitating way what they see in their areas”.

Um Sham talks about her 12-year-old son “Our house was targeted by sour missiles and resulted in one killed. Few months ago, our neighbors’ house was also targeted. My son was shaking and he started fearing from any strange movement in the house”.

Alaa, a pseudonym, who fled from Al Mayadin city in the east of Deir Ezzor, says:

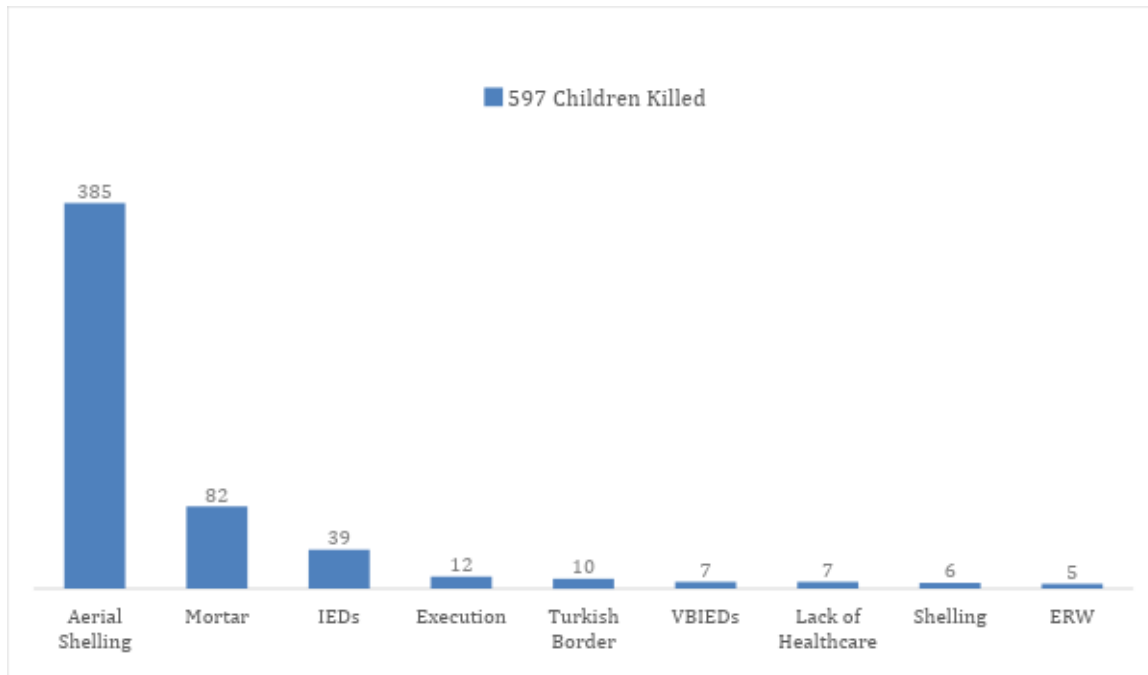
“Shelling became intensive by using all weapons on the city, when we tried to flee towards SDF held areas by river boats, the warplanes targeted all boats. My 7-year-old son suffered from severe mental reaction after he saw the shelling and bodies around”.

Yusuf says “Because of the long work and simple financial revenue along with the fact of his killed mother, my nephew started smoking and entered into depression”.

## How Did War Affect Children in Deir Ezzor?

The war that started since 2012 in Deir Ezzor has resulted in tremendous negative impacts on children at all levels. JFL documented the death of 597 children in the duration covered by the report due to aerial bombing, artillery shells executions, landmines, VBIEDs and lack of healthcare.

Also, dozens of thousands of families had to flee and dozens of children in the displacement areas were exposed to illness due to lack of healthcare and high temperatures where number of them passed away.



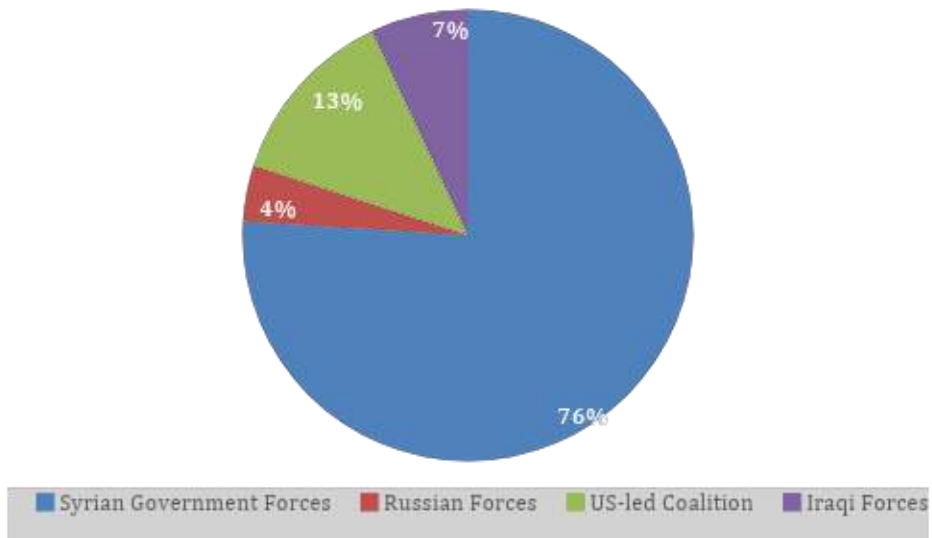
JFL documented the death of ten children on the Turkish-Syrian border during the period covered by this report either by gunshot or by landmines explosion.



**Omar Al Dabab – He was killed on the Turkish-Syrian border on August 2nd 2017**

Since January 1st 2016 until June 30th 2018, 385 children were killed by aerial bombardment by Syrian government forces, Russian forces, Iraq Air force, and US-led international coalition.

### 385 Children Killed by Aerial Bombardment





**Bushra Amer Al Hmaidan – She was killed by aerial bombardment on Al Mayadin city on August 7th 2017**



**Ala'a Bashar Bakr Theyab- She died of her injuries that were resulted by aerial bombing on Al Shumaiteyya village on August 24th 2017**



**Sarah Al Sannouh – She died due to lack of healthcare in Al Sadd camp in SDF held areas in Al Hasaka province on August 25th 2017**

Children were deprived from education, especially following ISIS control on most of Deir Ezzor province in July 2012. This led to displacement of hundreds of families towards areas where schools are available inside or outside Syria.

Hundreds of children started to work due to dire living conditions. Some families had to push their children to work in order to fill the gap and avoid being recruited by ISIS.

ISIS prevented the work of medical organizations. The battles and arrests forced most doctors to flee. This resulted in negative impact on health sector and acute shortage in vaccination as a report stated that at least 20 cases of suspected polio clinically diagnosed and one case at least laboratory diagnosed.

JFL documented the death of eight people in the duration covered by the report due to lack of healthcare in the province of Deir Ezzor.

Hundreds of children who were born after the war were not registered in the civil registry directorate as state institutions stopped in vast areas in the province and fear of their families to go to government held areas.

Landmines that were planted by parties to conflict in the province resulted in killing and injury of dozens of IDPs, either inside the province, or on their displacement road.

Thirty-seven children were killed and dozens were injured by landmines<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> As documented by JFL





**A child from Deir Ezzor whose fingers were cut off by a landmine in Al Kubar village in the western countryside of Deir Ezzor**

Syrian government forced children to [dig ducts](#) along with some works for many hours. ISIS and SDF recruited children and pushed them forward the battles. ISIS refused the populations demands to return their children.

## **Expression of Gratitude**

JFL expresses its gratitude for those who contributed to achieve this report.

Special thanks is extended to Syrian Legal Development Center.

Special thanks to all children and adults who shared their stories with us and agreed to use information in this report, and to those who facilitated access to the witnesses.

JFL is also grateful for the researchers for their tremendous efforts in achieving this work and the previous ones.





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