

After Assad's fall, the task of unearthing the dead from Syria's mass graves is just beginning

NAJHA, Syria (AP) — Bones are visible here and there among the mounds of earth in a field south of Damascus, one of the mass graves around Syria believed to hold the bodies of tens of thousands of people killed under Bashar Assad's rule. With his ouster, residents, forensic teams and international groups face what could be a yearslong task of unearthing the dead.

In this site alone, by the town of Najha, several tens of thousands of bodies could have been buried, said Stephen Rapp, a former U.S. ambassador-at-large for war crimes issues who was visiting the site Tuesday. Some are believed buried under already existing graves of a regular cemetery nearby, he said.

It's too soon to start digging, and it's unknown how many bodies remain there or if some were moved over the years. But here and there, bones were visible, including some vertebrae from a human spine and fragments of a femur.

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