

Condemnation for Extremist Groups' Displaying Photos During Idlib and Raqqa Protests of the Terrorist Who Killed the French Teacher Samuel Paty

More Work Is Needed to Expose the Extremists and Their Backers, and to Strengthen Society to Enable Escape from the Symbiotic Evils of the Syrian Regime and Extremist Groups

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The Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR), founded in June 2011, is a non-governmental, independent group that is considered a primary source for the OHCHR on all death toll-related analyses in Syria.

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I. Three Protests Featured Photos of the Chechen Terrorist, Two of Which Were in the Areas Controlled by the Extremist Hay'at Tahrir al Sham Group:

On Friday, October 30, 2020, popular protests took place in several areas of northwest Syria outside the control of Syrian Regime forces, with protesters denouncing the insulting portraits of the Holy Prophet Muhammad, which had previously been published in the French magazine Charlie Hebdo, and also condemning what they viewed as offensive statements about Islam.

During these protests, the Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) documented that some of the protesters displayed photos of terrorist Abdullah Anzurov, the 18-year-old Chechen man, who brutally slaughtered a French teacher named Samuel Paty on October 16, near the French capital Paris, for displaying cartoons insulting the Messenger Muhammad to his students in the school where he taught; the Chechen terrorist's picture was displayed in three of these protests, namely:

The first: In Idlib city, which is under the control of Hay'at Tahrir al Sham; a protest was called for by the Ministry of Endowments of the Salvation Government (a government established by the extremist group Hay'at Tahrir al Sham); during the protest, three people, whom we identified, held up Anzurov's photo. All three were former members of Hay'at Tahrir al Sham, who are not currently affiliated with any military party, as they have opened and now manage the 'Al Zaeem Equestrian Club'.



A protest in Idlib city called for by the Ministry of Endowments of the Salvation Government (a government established by the extremist group Hay'at Tahrir al Sham)

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The second: Again in Idlib city, which is under the control of Hay'at Tahrir al Sham; a protest was held by [students studying](#) at the al Huda Da'wah Center affiliated with Hay'at Tahrir al Sham, which is managed by Abdul Rahman Attoun, HTS' Senior Sharia leader. The Center's administration distributed photos of the terrorist to the children participating in the protest, and ordered them to hold them up during the demonstration.



Students studying at the al Huda Da'wah Center affiliated with Hay'at Tahrir al Sham in Idlib city were forced to hold up photos of terrorist Abdullah Anzurov, who brutally slaughtered a French teacher named Samuel Paty on October 16

The third: In Raqqa city, which is under the control of the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces, [a spontaneous protest](#) took place with no specific party organizing it, in which some people displayed photos of the terrorist.

II. The Popular Uprising for Democracy Came Under Attack by Both the Syrian Regime and Extremist Groups Simultaneously:

The al Qaeda affiliate al Nusra Front announced its presence in Syria on January 24, 2012, that is, nearly a year after the start of the popular uprising in March 2011, in which the people demanded freedom from the tyrannical ruling regime, and the fundamental right to live with dignity, that is, to finally be rid of the persecution, oppression and brutality of the regime's security services. Since the first months of the popular uprising, the Syrian regime's response to these demands has been to perpetrate numerous types of violations, some of which amount to crimes against humanity, as detailed by the International Commission of Inquiry (COI) in [its first report](#), and as also detailed in [reports](#) by international human rights organizations such as [Human Rights Watch](#). The international community has completely failed to protect civilians in Syria.

As for the ISIS terrorist group, it did not appear until more than two years after the start of the popular uprising, announcing its establishment on April 9, 2013; throughout those months preceding its announcement, Syrian society was exposed to the most horrific types of violations by the Syrian regime, including the use of chemical weapons and the dropping of barrel bombs.

We also refer particularly to one type of these violations, which is arbitrary arrest and the accompanying torture and enforced disappearance. Since March 2011, at least 1.2 million Syrian citizens have been subjected to the experience of detention / arrest / enforced disappearance, of whom nearly 14,260 Syrian citizens have been killed due to torture, and nearly 131,000 are still either detained or forcibly disappeared.

Violence in any society is the product of a complex variety of circumstances and contexts, and to attain any deep insight it is necessary to delve further into understanding its root causes, which this brief report is not able to do at any length; however, we believe that the most prominent causes of violence in Syrian society are summarized in the following points:

1. The practices of authoritarian regimes, whose continuous looting and harnessing of the state's resources in their favor have serious negative repercussions on the political, social and economic levels within society.
2. A nihilistic worldview in which injustice is the norm rather than the exception has spread among many in Syrian society as a direct result of the brutal violations by the Syrian regime on the one hand, and the non-intervention of the international community and failure to provide any protection for civilians on the other.
3. Any peaceful popular uprising by oppressed people demanding democracy and respect for human rights constitutes a fundamental threat to every totalitarian dictatorial regime, with the Syrian regime being the primary example of this, as well as posing the same threat to extremist groups, with both the Syrian regime and extremist groups needing a cowed and subservient populace. Given this shared interest, both the Syrian regime and extremist groups agree to weaken, threaten and terrorize society in order to subjugate and control it; the Syrian regime uses the capabilities of the Syrian state, including the security services and the army, to suppress society, while religious extremist groups label the vast majority of society as infidels unless they submit to the extremists' warped perception of religion, with both the Syrian regime and extremist groups offering only two choices to those under their brutal rule: either accept their absolute power unquestioningly or be arrested, tortured, and/or killed.
4. The Syrian regime benefits from creating favorable conditions for the emergence of extremist groups in order to justify its own brutal violence and to validate its claim to be killing terrorists; likewise, the extremist groups benefit from the violence of the Syrian regime to recruit members, exploiting religious texts, taking advantage of the ignorance of many and mobilizing gullible young people from all over the world to join their ranks and adopt their extremist ideology.

Extremist groups have benefited from social media platforms such as Twitter and Telegram in marketing and promoting their aspirations and ideologies. We at the SNHR have noted that many non-religious youths have also joined these extremist groups, which confirms what the French researcher Olivier Roy wrote in his book *Holy Ignorance*¹, that some violence emanating from these young people is not religious or political, but rather is a nihilistic revolution in which death is both an end and a means. The regime's machinery of repression and the lack of any economic and political horizons has pushed some Syrians and non-Syrians to join these extremist groups.

III. Conclusions and Recommendations:

- Displaying the photo of the Chechen terrorist constitutes a violation of the rights of the Syrian people, and an attempt to impose extremist symbols and an extremist agenda on it; this is achieved via armed force, threats and terrorism.
- The Syrian Network for Human Rights condemns the displaying of this or any other terrorist's photo and all terrorist operations carried out by extremist groups, including the spread of extremist ideology.
- Extremist groups are actively spreading their ideology, and relentlessly trying to alienate society, isolating the people from the context of their culture and faith, which makes it easier for these groups to recruit as many people as possible into their ranks, mainly based on cynically exploiting the legitimate grievances resulting from the Syrian regime's continuing crimes against humanity, and the lack of any political and economic hope on the horizon.
- The Syrian Network for Human Rights supports the freedom of peaceful expression of opinion, while simultaneously calling for a deeper understanding of the causes behind the spread of these violent phenomena and practices, in order to work to combat them and to sever their roots.

Recommendations:

The international community and the United Nations:

- Work seriously to achieve a political transition towards democracy and human rights in Syria, which can only be achieved by applying various pressures on the Syrian regime and its allies, because it will not voluntarily give up power.
- The political transition is the only way to get rid of both the Syrian regime and the extremist groups, both of which consider democracy to be intolerable; a timetable must be set for the completion of this political transition, because leaving it open-ended means increased dissemination of the causes of extremist thought, and thus a greater proliferation of extremism, violence and terrorism.
- Enhance the strength of Syrian society by providing more relief assistance, including in education and healthcare, and supporting local Syrian organizations working in the field of awareness, citizenship, and psychological rehabilitation.
- Do not focus on fighting only one type of terrorist groups, but rather oppose all extremism by targeting all terrorist groups whatever their sectarian or ethnic orientations.

¹ Olivier Roy, *Holy Ignorance: When Religion and Culture Part Ways* (2010)



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