

Brief report

Syrian Regime Forces Forcibly Disappear 10 Popular Uprising Activists in Suwayda and Use Repression to Confront Their Rightful Demands

At Least 2,172 Persons from Suwayda Governorate Are Currently Detained or Forcibly Disappeared in the Syrian Regime's Official and Unofficial Detention Centers

SNHR

SYRIAN NETWORK FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

الشبكة السورية لحقوق الإنسان

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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. At Least 2,172 Cases of Arrest or Enforced Disappearance and the Death of 37 Persons Due to Torture Since March 2011 Until June 2020

Since the outbreak of Syria's popular uprising demanding freedom and democratic change in March 2011, Suwayda governorate's location and the nature of its demographics mean that its experience has differed from that of other regions; whilst the governorate, the home of most of Syria's Druze community, has witnessed sporadic anti-Syrian regime protests since 2011, as well as multiple sit-ins by lawyers and engineers, with a large number of its people arrested and the vast majority of these forcibly disappeared, it has remained almost completely under the control of Syrian Regime forces throughout this time, and thus has not subject to air strikes, which is the main reason behind the destruction of Syria's neighborhoods, towns and villages, and the mass displacement of people.

In this context, it should be noted that there is an extensive presence of local armed forces affiliated with prominent local sheikhs and dignitaries in the Suwayda region, with these forces being entrusted by their founders with the mission of preventing Syrian Regime forces from looting and exploiting areas in the region, and protecting the governorate's people from arrest, enforced disappearance, and forced conscription into the Syrian regime army. Various areas of the governorate, such as Suwayda city and some regional villages, such as al Qrayya and Shahba, have witnessed periodic demonstrations and protests since 2011 against the Syrian regime's policies and horrendous violence in the areas that broke free of its control, and against the regime's detention of political prisoners, with protesters demanding the release of the detainees and the disclosure of the fate of the 'disappeared' people from the governorate.



Suwayda governorate has paid a great cost for these demands for political change; according to the Syrian Network for Human Rights' (SNHR) database, we have documented at least 2,172 persons from Suwayda governorate have been formally documented as being detained or forcibly disappeared in the Syrian regime's official and unofficial detention centers since March 2011 until June 18, 2020. In addition to this, we also documented the deaths of at least 37 individuals from the governorate due to torture in the Syrian regime's official and unofficial detention centers during the same period.

II. Syrian Regime Forces Confront New Popular Uprising in Recent Days with Repression, Arrest, Torture and Enforced Disappearance

On June 7, 2020, popular demonstrations again broke out in Suwayda city, with the protesters chanting slogans calling for the release of the detainees, the departure and the fall of the Syrian regime, and the start of a political transition. [SNHR has documented that these demonstrations continued almost daily](#) until June 15.

The Syrian regime sensed the danger of the new protest movement erupting in areas classified as being under its control, fearing that Suwayda might be seen in other regime areas an example to follow, with the protests potentially constituting a spark that might spread to other regions; accordingly, the regime dealt with the protests using the same brutal practices and tactics that it had previously utilized in confronting demonstrators in 2011, including arrest, torture, 'disappearance' and sending threatening messages, as well as trying to organize counter-demonstrations to chant slogans in support of the Syrian regime and threaten anyone opposing it.



A popular protest in Suwayda city near the governorate building - June 8, 2020



On June 9, we documented the arrest of a young local man, Raed Abdi al Khatib, an activist in the popular uprising, who was arrested in a raid on an office located in Anji Tower in Suwayda city, following his participation in anti-Syrian regime demonstrations in the city.



In addition, on June 15, we recorded brutal [assaults](#) on demonstrators in Suwayda city by Syrian regime law enforcement personnel and pro- regime militias wearing civilian apparel (shabiha) [after an anti-Syrian regime demonstration took place](#) in [al Seir Square](#) in the city center. SNHR documented the arrest of nine civilians that day, all of whom were taken to an undisclosed location. Among those detained were government employees who had earlier been [arbitrarily dismissed](#) from their jobs due to their dissent with the Syrian regime.

The arrests were conducted without any legal arrest warrants being issued by a court, and no members of the detainees' families were informed of their arrest, with the phones of those arrested being confiscated, preventing them from contacting their families or lawyers. SNHR fears that they will be subjected to torture and ultimately classified as forcibly 'disappeared' like approximately 85 percent of detained persons, with genuine and well-founded fears about the detainees' fate, particularly given the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic.



III. Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions:

The Syrian regime has confronted the new popular movement in Suwayda with the same tools it used in its initial efforts to crush the popular uprising against it that broke out in March 2011, such as arbitrary arrest, torture, enforced disappearance, and threats, in a manner that violates the most basic principles of international human rights law, further confirming that this regime has learnt nothing from all the horrendous experiences which Syria has endured since, and that it is fundamentally incapable of change in regard to essential issues such as respecting fundamental rights and accepting peaceful transition toward democracy, with its only choice being to achieve resolute and overwhelming victory at any cost in order to ensure absolute, unending rule over Syria for the autocratic ruling dynasty.

Recommendations:

The Syrian Network for Human Rights supports the Syrian people's rightful popular demands for freedom, integrity, democracy and social justice, holding the Syrian regime responsible for the state of the Syrian economy, and demanding the release of all unjustly imprisoned detainees. We demand:

The international community and the United Nations:

- Protect civilians in Suwayda from torture and enforced disappearance, and don't repeat the disastrous failure to protect Syrian civilians, as has happened since March 2011.
- Send a clear message in support of the popular demands and fundamental rights advocated by the protesters.
- Pressure the Syrian regime and its allies, specifically its Russian ally, to reveal the fate of the ten individuals forcibly disappeared in this latest uprising in Suwayda and demand their immediate release.
- Make a real effort to revive the process of political transition and establish a specific timetable for that transition, which will contribute to alleviating the suffering of the Syrians and enabling their safe and voluntary return.



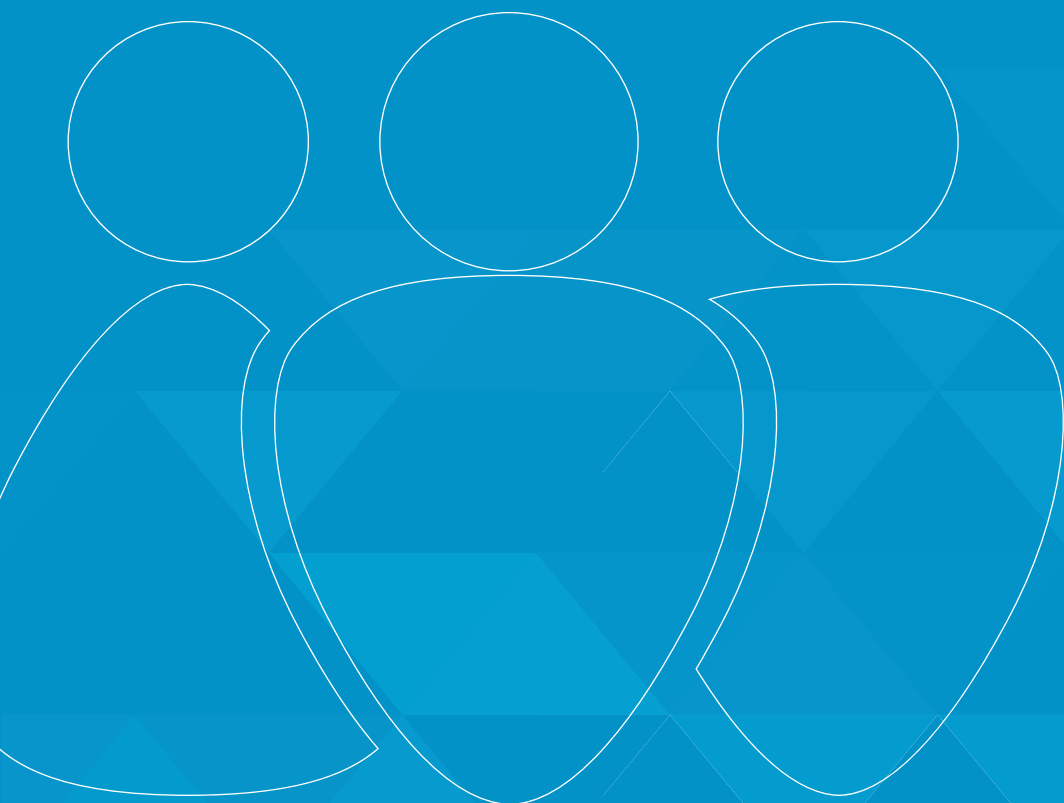
The Syrian regime:

- Stop terrorizing Syrian citizens, violating the Syrian constitution and international human rights law, particularly those laws regarding enforced disappearance and torture.
- Allow people the freedom to demonstrate, and freedom of opinion and expression, and end the policy of coercing government employees into participating counter-demonstrations under pressure.
- Release detainees of Suwayda governorate and of all governorates and stop using detainees as hostages and bargaining chips.

Thanks

We offer our sincere thanks to all the people, including activists in the uprising, whose contributions enriched this report.





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