



Statment

Human Rights Defenders in the Middle East and North Africa Call on International Community, European Union and Arab Countries to Carry their Responsibilities Towards Syrian Refugees

We, the undersigned, are a group of activists working in the field of human rights in the Middle East and North Africa region. We firmly uphold principles of international human rights law and applicable related international treaties and conventions, through which we seek to promote the values, principles and standards of human rights and defend them in the Middle East and North Africa and throughout the world. As a duty towards human rights principles, we follow with great concern the developing crisis of asylum seekers in Europe, and the various reports on the deaths of hundreds of Syrian refugees who drowned and, or, strangled during their travel to European Union countries.

The excessive use of military force and consequence crimes committed in Syria, including the use of indiscriminate weapons, explosive barrels and chemical weapons; have all led to the displacement of more than four million Syrians outside Syria (those that United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees UNHCR has been able to register their cases), in addition to the displacement of around six millions internally. During this period, the international community failed to even condemn clear and grave violations, and failed to present any solution that provide protection for civilians inside Syrian territories; in particular, against intentional air force attacks on residential areas.

During more than four and a half years of asylum, Syrian refugees were not granted the status of “refugee” in most neighboring countries, and instead they were referred to as “guests”- a term that does not hold definition in international law, while denying these refugees many of their civil and political rights they should have enjoyed as refugees in these countries.





The Syrian government's refusal to renew or issue identity documents to Syrians who are not "loyal" to the government, has effectively denied thousands of refugees from exercising their economic, cultural and social rights, while Syrians living abroad since or before the crisis have been severely impacted, such as those in the Gulf Cooperation Countries. Large numbers of Syrians were not able to renew their residencies, employment contracts, and even access medical and educational services for themselves and their children.

Such circumstances have forced an increased number of Syrians to continuously search for ways to access countries that grant asylum. Europe represented a favorable destination based on closeness of its geographical location. Seeking refuge in these countries escalated in parallel with the continuation of the Syrian crisis.

Despite the gradual escalation of the asylum situation, the EU countries have so far failed to adopt effective policies to deal with the crisis, in addition to its failure to deal with its consequences. Refugees continued to suffer ill-treatment in southern European countries – gateway for refugees to the rest of the EU- where authorities in Macedonia, Hungary, Italy, Greece and Bulgaria push refugees to leave their territories towards other EU countries, using torture and other cruel, degrading treatment; effectively making refugees vulnerable to smuggling gangs in Greece and Bulgaria, both of which are not linked geographically to any member state of the Schengen Agreement.

The European Union's refusal to provide legal and safe access routes for refugees, evades it from its responsibilities towards its neighbors in distress. It shows a great deal of carelessness towards the fate of men, women and children perishing in sea and land. The abandonment of Arab States, in particular the Arab Gulf states, of their role in providing protection and safe access to refugees constitute a similar failure to uphold critical responsibilities.





Accordingly, we believe that the international community, including Arab states must do the following:

1. Develop an effective political mechanism to ensure the ending of ongoing violations and to hold accountable the perpetrators, giving hope to Syrians who fled the country, and those already in Syria and are trying to flee, which may also help fleeing Syrians to return to their land.
2. Take responsibility and respect obligations towards refugees, including states that are not members of the “1951 Refugees International Convention” and “the 1967 Protocol to the Status of Refugees”, in particular, the Arab Gulf and Arab Maghreb countries. This responsibility includes consideration by the host countries to the unique circumstances Syrians undergo; such as not being able to renew their supporting documents, improving the services provided to refugees in neighboring countries where many refugees live in inhumane conditions such as tents and confronting challenging weather conditions. Additionally, repeal their lack of access to education and health services needed and granting them the right to work.
3. Adopt mechanisms to ensure humane and dignified reception of refugees who arrive in the territory of the European Union, and provide an effective mechanism to assess their individual situation.
4. Give priority to search and rescue missions, not monitoring and control, and to provide financial and technical support to search and rescue competent bodies;
5. We also call on the European Union to find a practical mechanism to deal with the asylum crisis, to ensure decent treatment of refugees, and monitoring of violations that occur in the receiving countries.

[the statement was signed by 97 Human Rights experts, defenders and activists until Septemeber 7, 2015- Original Arabic statement with signatories can be found here]

For more information, contact:

Fadi Al-Qadi (Jordan)
fadi.qadi@gmail.com OR Twitter

Obaida Fares (Syria)
obaida.fares@gmail.com OR Twitter

Bassam Al Ahmad (Syria)
bassamalahmed@gmail.com OR Twitter

Fadel Abdul Ghany (Syria)
fadel@sn4hr.org

