

Statement



At the Invitation of the Doha Institute for Graduate Studies, SNHR Participates in a Seminar on the Strategies and Mechanisms of Human Rights Organizations in the Context of Changing Policies

At the Invitation of the Doha Institute for Graduate Studies, SNHR Participates in a Seminar on the Strategies and Mechanisms of Human Rights Organizations in the Context of Changing Policies

On Tuesday, March 15, 2022, the Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) participated in a seminar held by the Master's in Human Rights Program at the [Doha Institute for Graduate Studies](#), entitled "Strategies and Mechanisms of Human Rights Organizations in the Context of Changing Policies." Researcher Amr Magdi, Senior Researcher for Human Rights Watch's Middle East and North Africa Division, and Mr. Fadel Abdul Ghany, Director of SNHR, addressed the seminar, which was moderated by Professor Moataz El Fegiry, Assistant Professor and Head of the Human Rights Program, in the presence of some of the institute's professors and many Master's Degree students.

The seminar discussed the role of cross-border networks, given that human rights work transcends national borders, providing SNHR and HRW as models. Dr. El Fegiry explained that national and international human rights organizations are active in shaping the human rights discourse and directly impact the shaping and development of international law. Amongst other topics, the seminar also addressed the cultural challenges faced by these organizations when they talk about international law and its implementation in different contexts.

Mr. Fadel Abdul Ghany presented a lecture entitled **“Documenting violations in the Syrian Network for Human Rights is a difficult journey through over a decade.”** At the beginning of his address, he referred to the importance of practical implementation of international law and the challenges facing human rights organizations when documenting violations by all parties to any conflict, including the ruling regime.

He recalled that March 15 marks the eleventh anniversary of the start of the popular uprising in Syria, which the Syrian regime confronted with live bullets and arrests since its earliest days, and expanded to the level of crimes against humanity, as confirmed by the first report of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights issued in September 2011, noting that the SNHR emerged from the womb of this uprising to contribute to preserving the rights of victims and defending them.

The SNHR founder talked about the most basic foundations of human rights work, which depend on the priorities of the situation and the context of events, underlining the importance of building a professional and credible database on violations, and explaining that, **“In the Syrian conflict, no one collected data and information of victims except for civil society organizations,”** stressing the vital role of this documentation in the stage of transitional justice and the achievement of accountability in the future.

He went on to speak about the most important initial stages of the documentation process, talking about building a network of relations with families, local activists, and eyewitnesses, and noting, **“We work for the victims, and at the same time, the victims and their relatives are the most important sources for human rights activists, and without their cooperation, the work cannot succeed,”** and stressing the importance of paying attention to and observing the psychological state of the victims, as well as emphasizing the importance of balance and avoiding exaggeration.

Mr. Abdul Ghany spoke about the importance of guaranteeing all the rights stipulated in international covenants and charters and of working to ensure that all parties to the conflict are committed to compliance with the rules of international humanitarian law and human rights law by reflecting the data documented in human rights reports and then employing these reports.

He further noted that sharing data and reports with international bodies and organizations is essential because the goal of documentation processes is to build an accumulated archive, to preserve historical memory, and to put pressure on stakeholders and decision-makers to end violations, and then hold criminals accountable.

He continued to talk about the challenges facing civil society organizations and the differences between them depending on the country in question, noting that the security factor is the most prominent issue in the case of the Syrian conflict because an individual may lose his or her life while documenting a violation or trying to obtain information, or may be arrested, tortured, or forcibly disappeared; he noted that three SNHR staff members are still subject to enforced disappearance up to the current date.

The SNHR director also addressed changes in the areas controlled by the various parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in Syria, all of which are legally obliged to implement international humanitarian law and human rights law, and stressed the importance of considering the reality of this control during investigations, in addition to the importance of accurately assigning responsibility for each incident of violation, to demonstrate the extent of criminality and to ensure that the statistics of victims are humanized so that they do not turn into mere numbers. He stressed that factors such as keeping pace with incidents continuously on a 24-hour basis, creating a suitable documentation methodology and constantly developing it to suit the developments of the conflict, maintaining high standards in documenting violations, ensuring accuracy in investigative work while working on databases and subjecting these to continuous audits to reflect new information, and then reflecting all these issues in outcomes, have all led to building SNHR's excellent reputation and high credibility with international and regional organizations and others interested in the Syrian issue. He added, **"The Syrian Network for Human Rights has been a primary source, or one of the most prominent sources of information in many reports of foreign ministries and situation reports for countries worldwide since 2012. SNHR has also become a source for many Arab and international news agencies within their coverage and reports on Syria."**

Mr. Abdul Ghany noted that the organization's documentation work generally falls within the framework of criminal and non-criminal accountability, such as imposing economic sanctions and taking political decisions to make efforts to stop crimes against humanity and achieve a political transition towards democracy and human rights. He also explained that for this purpose, SNHR has signed several memoranda of understanding and agreements to share data with UN and international bodies and governments of many countries and research centers. He also referred to the SNHR's participation in some legal cases filed on the basis of the principle of universal jurisdiction, including the case of A.R., who was convicted in January of this year by the Higher Regional Court in Koblenz of committing crimes against humanity: **"According to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, they mean that they are crimes of a**

systematic or widespread nature, and therefore cannot be carried out by individuals in the Syrian regime without it being a central policy of the Syrian regime, and being involved in these at the highest levels. This sentence constitutes a severe blow to anyone who thinks of restoring any form of relations with the Syrian regime, and all those who support it, primarily Russia, China, and Iran.”

Abdul Ghany concluded his lecture by emphasizing the importance of organizing and participating in advocacy events, “**The Syrian Network for Human Rights regularly participates in international and UN events. We also organize side events on the sidelines of international events. As part of its endeavor to transfer the extensive experiences it has gained, the Syrian Network for Human Rights provided training to large numbers of Syrian media activists and human rights activists in Syria and other countries. It also provided training on international humanitarian law to the political offices of factions of the Armed Opposition.**”

Participation in this seminar forms part of the Syrian Network for Human Rights’ efforts to spread and promote a culture of human rights, support efforts to document violations, and issue reports based on these, raise awareness of the importance and centrality of the role of victims and emphasize the need for Syrian society to cooperate in order to expose those involved in perpetrating crimes, hold perpetrators of war crimes and crimes against humanity accountable, and fight the culture of impunity.

The full seminar can be viewed at this [link](#).