

Statement

SNHR Is the Primary Source of Information in the Netherlands' Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Report on the General Situation in Syria Issued in June 2022



The Report Confirms That Syria Is Unsafe and That Various Types of Violations Are Still Continuing

In June 2022, the Netherlands' Ministry of Foreign Affairs released its general report on the situation in Syria in relation to the assessment of asylum applications from persons coming from Syria and for decision-making on the return of rejected Syrian asylum seekers. The points addressed in the report cover several topics, primarily related to the human rights situation in Syria, political developments in the country, and its security situation. The report covers the period between May 2021 and May 2022.

The report relies on several human rights sources,¹ most notably, in order of the number of quotes included:



Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR)

49 quotes



United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

36 quotes



United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)

22 quotes



Independent International Commission of Inquiry (COI)

16 quotes

The report also cites other sources such as the European Asylum Support Office (EASO), Human Rights Watch (HRW), and Amnesty International (AI), in addition to the US Department of State's reports on human rights in Syria, as well as other local and international organizations and various newspapers and media outlets. We at the SNHR have reviewed the 100-page report, which was published in the Dutch language, and will briefly summarize the most prominent of its contents here.

¹ The report also relies on several media sources.

The report addresses the political and security situation, the situation of IDPs and refugees, and the conditions of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees returning to Syria, where the report confirms that people returning from outside Syria have been subjected to many violations by Syrian regime forces, even in cases of security status settlement.

The report refers to the presidential elections that took place on May 26, 2021, in which Bashar al Assad was 'reelected', stressing that the European Union, through the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Josep Borrell, rejected these elections and described them as an illegitimate process that stands in the way of a long-term political solution.

The report further notes that turnout in the elections was low and that before the elections, violence erupted in the polling stations and against those promoting them; because of the social and armed resistance, not many polling stations were established in Daraa governorate, which meant that voting was not possible in most of the governorate (80%). Shortly after the election results were announced, protests and strikes erupted across the governorate.

We at the SNHR [issued](#) a report on the Syrian regime's retaliation against civilians in Daraa governorate after they rejected the elections.

The report also notes that the economic collapse resulting from the decade-long conflict has worsened, stressing that the current humanitarian situation is the worst since the beginning of the popular uprising. The report indicates that nearly 90% of Syrian citizens live below the poverty line, and more than 12 million people suffer in one way or another from difficulties in securing food.

The report emphasizes the lack of security stability in the areas controlled by the parties to the conflict, noting that civilians in areas controlled by Syrian regime forces, including the capital, Damascus, are at risk of arbitrary detention and enforced disappearance at the hands of government forces, as well as being subjected to harassment and violations by armed militias and criminal gangs who enjoy impunity.

The report additionally notes that security instability continues in areas under the control of all Armed Opposition factions/Syrian National Army due to explosive bombings and frequent clashes among these factions, with these areas also witnessing cases of detention, enforced disappearance, and torture by members of the Syrian National Army.

The report adds that the situation is similar in areas under the control of the Syrian Democratic Forces, where violations, including arbitrary detentions and unlawful attacks, have continued, resulting in civilian casualties and restrictions on people's right to freedom of movement. The report notes that the Syrian Democratic Forces have continued to conscript children despite the work plan established by the Syrian Democratic Forces in coordination with the International Commission of Inquiry in 2019.

The report further notes that the anti-torture law issued by the Syrian regime on March 30, 2022, is of no value due to the abundant evidence of the widespread practice of torture in Syrian detention centers and prisons and because real reform must go hand in hand with justice and the prosecution of the violations that have already been committed.

The report indicates that around 7 million refugees are living outside Syria, with approximately 6.7 million IDPs and nearly 2 million displaced persons living in random or regular IDP camps in the country.

The report draws attention to the decrease in the number of returnees compared to last year, adding that 35,000 people returned to Syria, most of them (more than 24,000) returning to areas outside the control of Syrian regime forces, pointing out that it was not possible to verify whether some of these returnees subsequently left the country again.

The report confirms that the returnees have been subjected to many violations, including arbitrary detention, enforced disappearance, torture, and other violations. The report stresses that the Syrian regime's behavior towards return is contradictory as, despite its calls for refugees to return and the coordination of security settlements, even after such security settlements, returnees may be subjected to the same violations by Syrian regime forces.

SNHR's assessment of the situation in Syria is based on the documentation we record on cases of arbitrary arrest, enforced disappearance, torture, forced conscription, and other violations committed by all parties to the conflict and the controlling forces, in particular the Syrian regime, because the regime's security services do not make records of citizens' arrests publicly available since there is, after all, no actual judicial authority in Syria. A refugee may be wanted by a security branch without him or her even knowing this; under the current regime, it is impossible for us or any party other than the staff at the security branch that ordered the individual's arrest to find out this information. Therefore, we reiterate that Syria is extremely unsafe for refugees to return to. This assessment is consistent with that of the COI, HRW, and AI. We continue to hope that the political transition process is successfully implemented, after which Syrian refugees can safely return to their homes and areas with freedom and dignity as soon as possible.

We note that this is the third consecutive year in which the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs has relied mainly on the SNHR in its general report on the situation in Syria. The SNHR stresses its willingness to contribute to all international reports issued by nations' foreign ministries, amongst other bodies, by providing data on the human rights situation in Syria, and we will make the greatest possible effort to provide any data and information required of us in this regard, in order to report the ongoing violations and incidents objectively and credibly and to serve and defend the victims' rights.

To read the full report by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, please download the report via [this link](#). (The report is only available in Dutch.)

