

Statement



The Meeting of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Filippo Grandi, with the Interior Minister of the Syrian Regime's Government, Mohammad al-Rahmoun on 13 September 2022

The Syrian Regime's Interior Minister is Involved in Crimes Against Humanity and War Crimes and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees' Meeting With Him Harms the Issue of Syrian Refugees

On September 13, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) visited several locations in areas of Syria under the Syrian regime's control, [and met with the Syrian Foreign Minister](#). While this was not the UNHCR's first visit to Syria or his first meeting with the Syrian regime, what was striking about this visit was [the UNHCR, Filippo Grandi's, acceptance of an invitation to meet with the Syrian regime's Interior Minister, Mohammad al-Rahmoun](#), in the conference hall of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers in the Kafr Sousa neighborhood of Damascus on September 13. The UNHCR and his staff do not appear to be sufficiently well-informed of the background of Mohammad al-Rahmoun and the egregious violations in which he is involved, some of which constitute crimes against humanity.



The Syrian Interior Ministry's statement through its Facebook account about its meeting with the UNHCR

Following is some of the information on Mohammad al-Rahmon's background from the SNHR's database:

Al-Rahmoun, born in 1957, originally from the city of Khan Shaykhun in the countryside of Idlib Governorate, is now a Major-General and is one of the most prominent security figures engaged in the planning and management of the Syrian regime's internal security affairs. He was [listed on the sanctions list issued by the U.S. Department of the Treasury in early 2017](#). He was also added to [the UK's sanctions lists in 2019](#), due to his direct association with Syria's chemical weapons program, and for being part of the chain of command responsible for issuing a series of orders related to chemical weapons attacks carried out by regime forces on several areas in Rif-Dimashq Governorate, in particular the Ghouta massacre in 2013 in which 1,127 people, whose names and details are registered on the SNHR's database, were killed. In early March 2019, Major General Mohammad Khaled al-Rahmoun was placed on the European sanctions list, which includes seven ministers in the Syrian regime's government.

After heading the Air Security branch in Daraa since 2004, Al-Rahmoun was appointed in mid 2011 as head of the Air Force Intelligence Directorate branch serving the southern region of Syria, remaining in this position until mid-2015; the southern region incorporates three Syrian governorates, namely Rif-Dimashq Governorate, Suwayda Governorate, and Daraa Governorate. During his five years in office as head of the Air Security branch, al-Rahmoun was directly responsible for numerous abuses by air security forces in the southern region, including arrests, enforced disappearances, torture, and killings by shelling villages, towns and cities outside the control of the Syrian regime, causing the displacement of thousands of Syrians in areas where its forces had taken control of military operations.

Al-Rahmoun was appointed as head of the Syrian Ministry of Interior's Political Security Directorate in mid-2015, one in a series of appointments and promotions issued annually by Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. The Political Security Directorate is one of the four main security agencies in Syria, and although it is administratively subordinate to the Ministry of Interior, it reports directly to the National Security Bureau (NSB), the highest-level regime security body in Syria, which contains a few senior security officers who are directly connected to the President of the Republic in his capacity as Commander-in-Chief of the Army and Armed Forces, and to those responsible for the development and implementation of military security plans.

Al-Rahmoun, who was appointed as Interior Minister in the Syrian regime government in October 2018, still holds this position, and is considered to be one of the most prominent security figures in the planning and management of internal security affairs.

In light of the foregoing, and by virtue of the positions he holds and has held, as detailed on SNHR's database, Mohammad al-Rahmoun is clearly proved to be involved in the arrest and enforced disappearance of thousands of Syrians, and the execution of some of those individuals, as well as being responsible for many other violations that the Interior Ministry continues to practice against Syrian citizens, including looting property and degrading human dignity. Many of these violations constitute large-scale attacks against civilians, amounting to crimes against humanity, and some amount to war crimes.

As the UNHCR is well aware, the widespread and systematic violations practiced by the Syrian regime are the main reason behind the displacement of millions of Syrians, and the continuation of these violations is the main reason why those displaced feel unable to return to their homeland, Syria. Also, the reason for these violations' continuation is the survival of the Syrian regime under the same brutal leadership and the same repressive mindset, and inflicting the same heinous practices since 2011 till the present day, with Mohammad al-Rahmoun being one of the most prominent figures among the Syrian regime's upper echelons who are directly and closely involved in the violations practiced by the Syrian regime over the years.

The structure of the Syrian regime is highly centralized. We, at the SNHR, rely on the standard legal definitions of the rules of customary humanitarian law to hold commanders and other senior officials accountable for war crimes committed by their subordinates based on their orders¹ or knowledge, or ability to find out that their subordinates are about to commit or have been committing such crimes and have not taken all necessary and reasonable measures conferred upon them by their authority to prevent the perpetrators or punish those responsible for such crimes if committed. The Syrian regime, with its various institutions, is implicated in committing widespread and systematic violations, many of which constitute crimes against humanity² and war crimes³. Moreover, anyone who orders, entices, encourages, justifies, participates, aids, or facilitates these crimes is considered to be involved in them, with the foremost among these participants being the army and the security institution of the Interior Ministry.

¹ ICRC, International Humanitarian Law, Rule 152, https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/customary-ihl/ara/docs/v1_ru_rule152

² International Criminal Court, Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, Article 7, <https://www.icc-cpi.int/sites/default/files/RS-Eng.pdf>

³ International Criminal Court, Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, Article 8, <https://www.icc-cpi.int/sites/default/files/RS-Eng.pdf>

At the SNHR, we strongly believe that the UNHCR should have avoided meeting with the Syrian regime's interior minister, to whom the security services infamous for their barbarism in dealing with Syrian citizens are theoretically subordinate. This meeting sends a negative message to millions of refugees and displaced people in areas outside the Syrian regime's control, as it bears a distinctly conciliatory tone towards the Syrian regime and indicates a desire for rapprochement between the UNHCR and the Syrian regime, despite [the recent report issued by the UN Independent Commission of Inquiry](#) confirming the regime's continued perpetration of large-scale violations, as also confirmed by the reports of colleagues at [Human Rights Watch \(HRW\)](#) and [Amnesty International](#), as well as by [SNHR's own reports](#), all of which prove beyond doubt that Syria is an insecure and unsafe nation due to the lack of any political change from a dictatorial regime to a democratic system that respects human rights.

The SNHR stresses that any discussion of the return of forcibly displaced persons and refugees under the present conditions, given the survival of the Syrian regime with its current presidency and brutal security services, is wholly irresponsible and gives no consideration to the burden borne by Syrian refugees, as well turning a blind eye to the main cause of the Syrians' displacement, and avoiding addressing the root of the problem. We further stress that that any pressure or restrictions imposed on Syrian refugees in this context falls into the category of refoulement, which is a violation of customary law binding on all the world's countries, including those which have not ratified the 1951 Refugee Convention. The UNHCR should take the lead in defending refugees' rights and stop meeting with those implicated in crimes against humanity and war crimes, out of respect for the feelings of millions of Syrian refugees victimized by them.



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