

The Syrian Regime Announces New Auctions of Lands in Idlib Province Belonging to Displaced Persons and Refugees with the Aim of Seizing them

Thursday 20 October 2022

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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First: The Syrian regime's seizure of political dissidents' property and land is a form of collective punishment:

The Syrian regime has committed many types of violations against the Syrian people since March 2011. Systematic violations on a nationwide scale, particularly arbitrary detention, torture, enforced disappearances, extrajudicial killings, and widespread indiscriminate shelling have caused the gradual displacement of the population in the subsequent 11 years, with the total of displaced Syrians now reaching approximately 14 million in all, including internally displaced persons and refugees. For almost 12 years, we at the Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) have cumulatively documented these violations, clearly showing that they are the main cause of the forced displacement of the population. [We have also documented and reported](#) on the largest forced displacement movements that have taken place within Syria, as well as the violations which the forcibly displaced persons have been subjected to, including the targeting of camps, schools and places of refuge.

Within the framework of documenting the violations against victims of forced displacement, the SNHR has worked tirelessly to document the looting of homes, shops and other facilities, in the cities and towns taken over by the Syrian regime. In March 2020, we issued a [report](#) in which we documented that at least 30 villages and towns, in the northern suburbs of Hama, the southern suburbs of Idlib and the western suburbs of Aleppo, were subjected to theft, pillaging and massive looting of property, carried out by the Syrian regime forces and Iranian militias loyal to it.

In addition, we have documented the " laws" issued by the Syrian regime since 2011 which aimed at legalizing the seizure of displaced peoples' property and land, [issuing several reports on this subject](#). We believe that these laws are mainly aimed at further punishing displaced persons, refugees and forcibly disappeared persons. According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), around 13 million Syrian citizens are either internally displaced persons or refugees. Additionally, as documented by SNHR's database, at least 154,000 Syrian citizens are either in regime detention or forcibly disappeared. In other words, these laws target the majority of the Syrian people and constitute a form of collective retributive punishment. The Syrian regime has also issued overtly discriminatory legal texts that carry a clear political revenge dimension and aim to distribute dissidents' property to regime loyalists as a form of compensation for the services they provide to it in light of the decline in the regime's cash reserves.

On 29 September 2022, the Syrian regime announced through the General Secretariat of Idlib Governorate that it was offering an opportunity for investment in agricultural land in the countryside of Idlib Governorate for a full year through public auctions. This demonstrates that the Syrian regime continues to steal more of the lands belonging to displaced persons and refugees and to try to cover its crimes through rebranding these sales of stolen property as public auctions. This report is the latest in a series of reports we've published on the subject of the regime's theft of agricultural lands and its efforts to legitimize this criminality through the auction process. In this report, we document the locations of the targeted lands with the aim of identifying and condemning the Syrian regime's actions and exposing their illegitimate nature, as part of an effort to return all stolen property and plundered lands to the rightful owners as part of the transitional justice process in order to ensure that the owners' rights of possession are properly restored and to hold the perpetrators of violations accountable, in preparation for the return of displaced persons and refugees.

Fadel Abdul Ghany, Director of the Syrian Network for Human Rights, says:

The Syrian regime tries to steal land and property through procedures that appear to be legal, such as the method of auctions, but in reality they further violate the rights of the forcibly displaced, which are guaranteed by international humanitarian law and international human rights law. The confiscation through these deceptive methods by the Syrian regime is considered to be theft, and amounts to a war crime.

Second: Through holding new auctions in the suburbs of Idlib, the Syrian regime aims to seize more than 570,000 dunums of land:

As the Syrian Network for Human Rights documented previously, the first attempts of the Syrian regime to use public auctions as a method of stealing and controlling agricultural land and looting crops date back to June 2020. We also documented the announcement of auctions by security committees in all rural areas of Hama Governorate, and in the southern and eastern suburbs of Idlib Governorate, which the Syrian regime and its allies regained control of in 2019 and 2020. These committees are formed by the regime's Security and Military Committee in Hama Governorate, which consists of the heads of the security branches in the region and the governorates, the Police Commander, the Public Defender, and a representative of the National Progressive Front. The participation of all these regime bodies and authorities indicates that the orders are issued from the highest level, demonstrating that the theft of land and crops in this way is a central decision issued by the Syrian regime leadership. On February 11, 2021, we issued a report entitled ["Public Auctions of the Lands of Forcibly Displaced Persons is an Additional Method of the Syrian Regime to Widely and Deliberately Seize the Property of its Opponents"](#) in which we documented the Syrian regime's seizure of about 440,000 dunums of agricultural land in the suburbs of Hama and Idlib, with the report also providing [an interactive map](#) of the most prominent sites in the governorates of Hama and Idlib, which saw the Syrian regime's announcement of auctions to control agricultural lands.

On September 29, 2022, the General Secretariat of Idlib Governorate announced three upcoming public auctions of property, including agricultural land in the suburbs of Idlib Governorate. The announcements included notification of public auctions for investments in agricultural land for a full agricultural season. The announcements, which were entitled 'Auction announcement at full speed' that the areas of land being auctioned might increase or decrease in size. The lands would be handed over on the ground through the presentation of official deeds organized by the special committee. The announcement did not specify the locations of these lands or the names of their owners. Instead, it provided the names of regions and villages affected by the auction, along with the area offered for auction. The announcement specified the location of the auction in 'the Temporary Building of Idlib Governorate in Khan Sheikhoun'.

On October 4, 2022, the pro-Syrian regime [newspaper Al-Watan](#) quoted Thaer Salhab, the Governor of Idlib, who is affiliated with the regime government, as he clarified the identity of the owners of these lands being auctioned for investment, saying, "The lands offered for investment belong to those hiding in the north". Salhab explained, "The lands whose owners are not present are only to be for wheat-growing investment. However, every citizen present in the areas under the control of the state is able to invest and cultivate his land, and this land is not offered for investment and excluded from any investment." He added, "Even this includes any citizen who purchased land or property through a commission from a person in the north, in areas under the control of terrorist organizations, and [only those] in areas controlled by the state are able to invest in the land and cultivate it." As for the amount of land to be offered for investment, Salhab explained that "There are areas [owned by] those who are in hiding, which are practically empty lands that no one manages, and therefore through the Ministry of Agriculture and Idlib Governorate, they are given for investment with the aim of growing wheat only".

The following is a review of three announcements of an auction, published by the General Secretariat of Idlib Governorate on its Facebook account, in order to seize these agricultural lands:

A: Announcement of an auction of land for investment in the Khan Sheikhoun area:

[Announcement of an auction](#) for investment in agricultural land (rain-fed) for the agricultural season 2022-2023, to be held from October 2 to 6, 2022



محافظة ادلب

September 29 at 8:47 PM · 🌐

...

!! إعلان مزاد بالسرعة الكلية !!

من يوم الأحد ٢/١٠/٢٠٢٢ لغاية يوم الخميس ٦/١٠/٢٠٢٢
 ■ أراضي منطقة خان شيخون للإستثمار زراعياً (سليخ)

إعلان مزاد بالسرعة الكلية

لعمارة لمحافظة ادلب عن طرح المساحات التالية لاستثمارها زراعياً (سليخ) عن ٢٠٢٢-٢٠٢٣ وفق المساحات والتواريخ الواردة في الجدول:

ان إجراء المزاد / المبني المؤقت لمحافظة ادلب بخان شيخون /

اراضي منطقة خان شيخون

م الأحد تاريخ ٢٠٢٢/١٠/٢ ولغاية الخميس بتاريخ ٢٠٢٢/١٠/٦

ملاحظات	المساحة الأولية المراد استثمارها / دونم	منطقة العقارية
	١٦٩٢	خان شيخون
	٦٥٥٥	خان شيخون - القطاع الجنوبي الشرقي
	٣٣٦٩	خان شيخون - القطاع الجنوبي الغربي
	٤٧١٥	خان شيخون - القطاع الشمالي الشرقي
	٣٤٧١	خان شيخون - القطاع الشمالي الغربي
	٥١	خان شيخون - تل عراس

١٩٠٤	خان شيخون - القطاع الشمالي
٢٠٠	خان شيخون (مستوطن + موقوف)
٧٠٠	خان شيخون (مستوطن)
٣٥٠٠	خان شيخون - القطاع الجنوبي الشرقي
٢٠٠٠	خان شيخون - القطاع الجنوبي الغربي
٣٠٠٠	خان شيخون - القطاع الشمالي
١٠٠٠	خان شيخون - القطاع الشمالي
٦٠٠	الشيخ واديس
١٢٥٤	اراضيها
٤٩٤٥	البحر
٥٧٧	حدائقها
٥٠٠٠	التحويين
٨٠٥	معيضرونة
٥٠٠	موقفا
٧٥٤	تلين
١٠٥٥	الورحة
٢٥٠٠	الورداني
١٢٠٠	الوكسر
١٩١٠	المنكحل
٥١١٠	الزينة
٤٠٠	الحدوة
٥٠٠	الهدنة

Announcement of an auction for investment in agricultural land in the Khan Sheikhoun area published on the Syrian regime-affiliated Idlib Governorate authority's official Facebook account - September 29, 2022

On October 2, the [Idlib province of the Syrian regime government announced](#) the postponement of the auction until Tuesday October 4

B: Announcement of an auction for investment in lands in Ma 'aret al-Nu 'man area:

[Announcement of an auction](#) for investment in agricultural lands (rain-fed) for the agricultural season 2022-2023, to be held from 9 to 13 October 2022

 محافظة ادلب
September 29 at 9:04 PM

!! إعلان مزاد بالسرعة الكلية !!
من الأحد ٩/١٠/٢٠٢٢ لغاية الخميس ١٣/١٠/٢٠٢٢
■ أراضي منطقة معرة النعمان لإستثمارها زراعياً (سليخ)

بإدارة العامة لمحافظة ادلب عن طرح المساحات الكلية لإستثمارها زراعياً (سليخ) لزراعي ٢٠٢٢-٢٠٢٣ وفق المساحات والتواريخ الواردة في الجدول:
مكان إجراء المزاد / المبني المؤقت لمحافظة ادلب بخان شيخون
اراضي منطقة معرة النعمان
يوم الاحد تاريخ ٩/١٠/٢٠٢٢ ولغاية الخميس بتاريخ ١٣/١٠/٢٠٢٢

ملاحظة	المساحة الاولية المراد استثمارها / دولم	نقطة العقارية
	٣٧٤٤	العليج - بالشوكي
	٢٥٠٠	جريف
	٦٠٠٠	نقطة
	٣٣٦٨	شرجة
	١٠٠٠٠	مكي

١٢	الصرحان	١١٠٠٠
١٣	مضاربه	١٠٠٠٠
١٤	المسابع	١٠٠٠٠
١٥	الضبابي	١٠٠٠٠
١٦	العوجة	٣٠٠٠
١٧	الغفلة	٤٠٠٠
١٨	الغريبة	٥٠٠٠
١٩	الغولقة	٦٠٠٠
٢٠	القاهرة	٧٥٠٠
٢١	القراشي	٩٠٠٠
٢٢	القارص	١٠٠٠٠
٢٣	المطربنة	١٠٠٠٠
٢٤	المحيرة	١٠٠٠٠
٢٥	المستامين	١٠٠٠٠
٢٦	المشرفة الشمالية	١٠٠٠٠
٢٧	معرة النعمان شمالا	١٠٠٠٠
٢٨	الهبة	١٠٠٠٠
٢٩	ام الصهاريج	١٠٠٠٠
٣٠	ام الهلالين	١٠٠٠٠
٣١	ام رجب	٣٠٠٠
٣٢	ام مولات	٥٠٠٠
٣٣	الزيتون	٣٥٠٠

Announcement of an auction for investment in agricultural land in the Maaret al-Nu 'man area published on the Syrian regime-affiliated Idlib Governorate authority's official Facebook account - September 29, 2022

C: Announcement of the auction of lands around Saraqeb and Abu al Thuhour:

[Announcement of an auction](#) for investment in agricultural land (rain-fed) for the agricultural season 2022-2023, to be held from October 16 to 20, 2022


محافظة ادلب
 September 29 at 8:57 PM

!! إعلان مزاد بالسرعة الكلية !!

من الأحد ١٦/١٠/٢٠٢٢ لغاية الخميس ٢٠/١٠/٢٠٢٢

■ أراضي منطقة سراقب وأبو الظهور لإستثمارها زراعياً (سليخ)

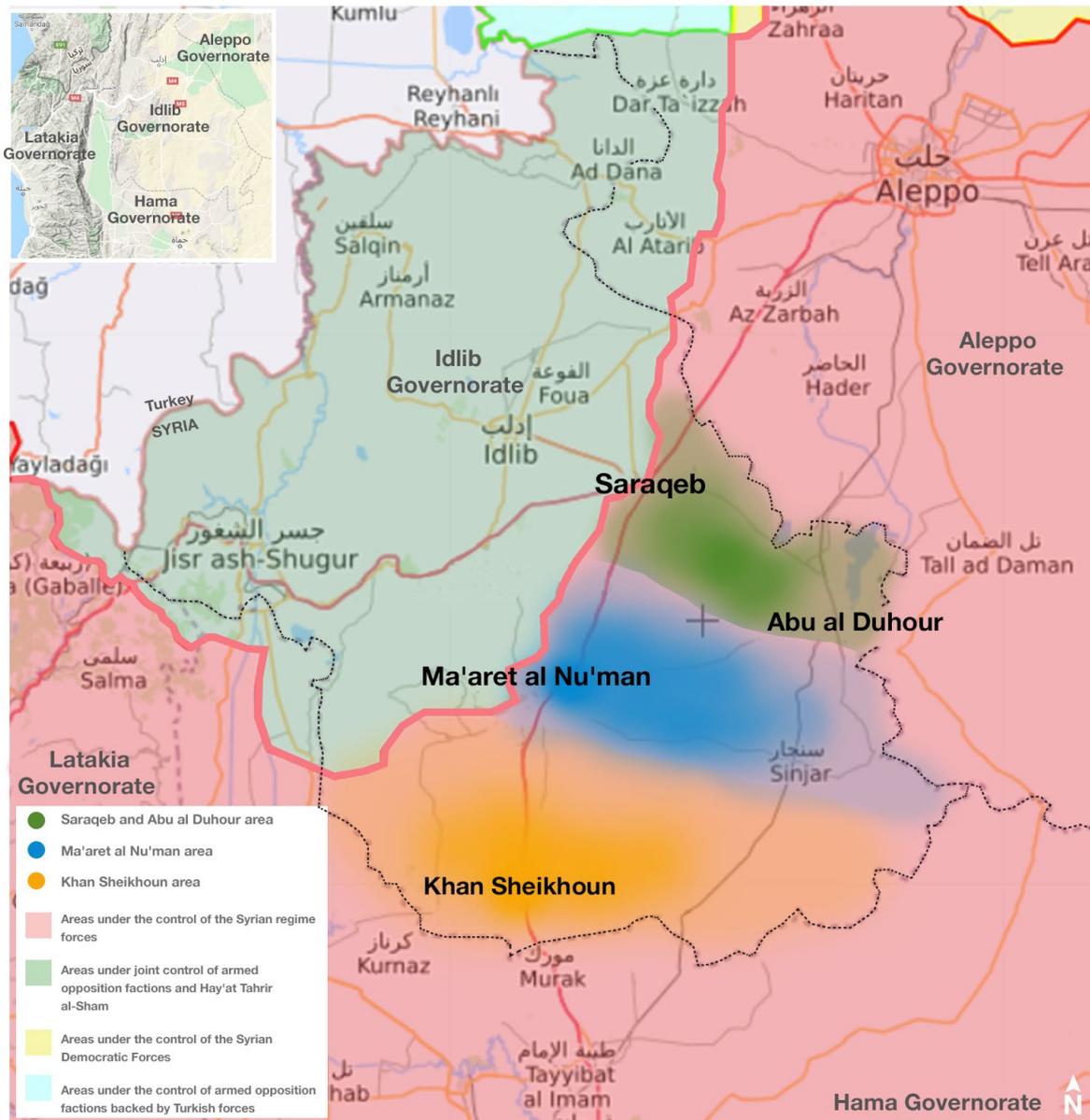
رقم الأرض	المساحة (دونم)	المنطقة العقارية
٢٠	٤٠٠	السرورية
٢١	١٠٠٠	الرصافة
٢٢	١٥٥٥	الزعر
٢٣	١٢٠٠	شكركية
٢٤	٦٠٠	الشيخ ابريس
٢٥	١٦٠٠	الشيخ ابريس
٢٦	١٤٠٠	المسكينة
٢٧	٦٥	الطريفة
٢٨	٤٥	المستريحة
٢٩	١١٣٥	الشرفية
٣٠	١١٤٥	البيوتية
٣١	٤٠٠	الوسطية الغربية
٣٢	٦٠٠	القراني
٣٣	٥٢٠٠	باريسا
٣٤	٢٢٩٠	بجلاص
٣٥	١٢٥	بضمري
٣٦	١٢٠٠	بل الاخر
٣٧	٢٠١٠	بل السلماني
٣٨	٥٢٦١	بل الطوفان
٣٩	٢٤٥٠	بل الفخار
٤٠	١٥٠٠	بل القباريز
٤١	٤١٠٠	بل حطرد
٤٢	١٦٥٠	بل سلمو
٤٣	٦٠٠٠	بل موزيح
٤٤	١٠٠٠	ارابا
٤٥	٢٥٠٠	سراقب - الدور

اعلان مزاد بالسرعة الكلية
 مائة العمة لمحافظة ادلب عن طرح المساحات التالية لاستثمارها زراعياً (سليخ)
 الزراعي ٢٠٢٢-٢٠٢٣ وفق المساحات والتواريخ الواردة في الجدول:
 مكان إجراء المزاد / المبني المؤقت لمحافظة ادلب بخان شيخون
 أراضي منطقة سراقب + أبو الظهور
 يوم الأحد تاريخ ١٦/١٠/٢٠٢٢ ولغاية الخميس بتاريخ ٢٠/١٠/٢٠٢٢

ملاحظة	المساحة الأولية المزاد استثمارها / دونم	المنطقة العقارية
	٤٢٥٠	أبو الفوس
	٢١٣٥	أبو الظهور
	٢١٤٥	أبو الظهور - الشوحة
	١٦٠	أبو الظهور - العادلية
	٣٠٠	أبو الظهور - العريضة
	١٥٠٠	أبو الظهور - رسم العابد

Announcement of an auction for investment in agricultural land in Saraqeb and Abu al Thuhour published on the Syrian regime-affiliated Idlib Governorate's official Facebook account - September 29, 2022

A map showing areas in the suburbs of Idlib where the Syrian regime has announced auctions for investment in agricultural land in October 2022



As SNHR's team has documented, the area of the land, including agricultural lands, in rural Idlib governorate offered for investment at public auctions to date has reached at least 570,000 dunums.

The most prominent villages and towns featured in the three auction announcements can be found on the [interactive map link](#).

According to Thaer Salhab, the regime-appointed quoted earlier, the lands included in the public auctions belong to the “people in hiding in the north of Syria”. The Syrian regime’s Court of Cassation defines a person in hiding as a person against whom an arrest or capture warrant has been issued by the judicial authority that has the right to issue such warrants or who has been sentenced to a penalty and has not presented himself for the implementation of whatever punishment was issued against him. We at SNHR can affirm that a warrant of arrest or capture may be issued by the Syrian regime’s Military Field Court or [Terrorism Court](#) without the knowledge of the person against whom it was issued, and that warrants of arrest may be issued intentionally against persons whose lands are to be stolen. The Terrorism Court and the Military Field Court are in fact bodies of the regime’s security services.

We also note that on 15 September 2021, the Ministry of Justice [issued Circular No. 30 of 2021](#), which imposed the need for the regime’s security services’ approval in order to obtain any judicial power of attorney for the absent and the missing. The procedures for obtaining this approval are accompanied by bargaining and material extortion. Many absentees are also wanted by the security branches, and this Circular means that it is impossible to give their families and relatives the right to obtain a commission (power of attorney) to manage the absentee’s funds. This Circular further restricts the families of missing and absent persons first, as well as hindering the ability of refugees or displaced citizens in the north of Syria to manage or dispose of their property, including agricultural land covered in public auctions. The security approval required by the Circular needs about three months or more to obtain and doing so is subject to the mood of the officers and staff at the security branches. If the power of attorney was not obtained for the absentee because of the difficulty of obtaining security approval, this will inevitably further hinder subsequent procedures such as the transfer of inheritance, transfer of ownership of real estate, or disposal of it. This Circular is considered a major legal violation because it violates the Syrian Personal Status Law, which does not require any consent of any kind.

Third: Conclusions and Recommendations

Legal Conclusions:

- Since 2012, the Syrian regime has issued many texts that contradict the most basic principles of the law, calling these documents “decrees’ or ‘laws”, in order to legitimize the process of seizing hundreds of thousands of properties and lands belonging to political opponents of the hereditary dictatorship. The People’s Assembly, which is considered one of the security services’ subdivisions, has been used as a rubber stamp in passing these arbitrary laws.

- The process of seizing the property of hundreds of thousands of opponents of the Syrian regime is consolidating the process of eviction and forced displacement, which is an attempt to engineer the nation's demographic and social structure, and which necessarily constitutes a major obstacle to the return of refugees and displaced persons. The public auctions announced by the Syrian regime in recent years are just another method adopted in areas outside the regime's control to expand the seizure process to include agricultural lands and crops, and to distribute these among its supporters.
- The seizure of the land of hundreds of thousands of political opponents constitutes a significant source of funding and income for the Syrian regime; while it is difficult to specify an exact figure for the value of these properties, real estate and lands, it is certain, from even cursory examination, that their value can be estimated at hundreds of millions of dollars at least.
- Most of the residents of these towns work as farmers, with their lands being their only source of livelihood, so the Syrian regime's seizing control of them in such an arbitrary manner carries a political dimension of revenge, and terrorism towards the people of the community. We are talking about thousands of people being affected by a deliberate process of impoverishment and looting, blatantly stealing the money and property of the Syrian people for the benefit of the ruling class.
- The Syrian Network for Human Rights fears that the policy of announcing auctions will extend to the other areas whose populations have been displaced by the Syrian regime, such as the eastern Ghouta in Damascus and areas in western Ghouta and the suburbs of Homs with the vast majority of them unable to return due to the regime's existential threat to them through arbitrary arrests and prosecutions that may end in enforced disappearance and death under torture, as well as through forced conscription of the people to fight, perhaps against those who were besieged with or demonstrating alongside them.
- The auctions announced by the Syrian regime through its security committees are a flagrant violation of the property rights stipulated in the Syrian Constitution itself, which includes a number of articles that guarantee the rights of ownership and disposition. Although the processes of investing in land and thus cultivating and benefiting from the crops grown there do not in themselves expropriate the land from its owner, these acts are still an attack on ownership. Article 768 of the Syrian Civil Code stipulates that "the owner¹ of the article alone has the right, within the limits of the law, to use, invest and dispose of it." Article 770 states that "the owner of the article has the right to all its fruits, products and accessories unless there is a text or agreement to the contrary²."

¹ Syrian People's Assembly, Civil Code, [Article 768](#).

² Syrian People's Assembly, Civil Code, [Article 770](#).

- The auctioning of agricultural land in this manner is a violation of article 15³ of the Syrian Constitution, which stipulates that: “Individual ownership shall not be expropriated except for the public benefit and in return for fair compensation in accordance with the law, and private expropriation shall not be imposed except by a court ruling.” This once again confirms that no constitutional provisions are valid under a dictatorial authoritarian system.
- Customary international law prohibits looting in accordance with⁴ rule 52, rule 111⁵, and international criminal law, does not require the looting to be on a large scale or of high economic value as this has serious consequences for the victims, and therefore amounts to a serious violation of international humanitarian law.
- The Syrian regime, with the clear support of its Iranian and Russian allies⁷, has also violated the Geneva Conventions through massive theft and looting and, in a large number of areas. This has taken a form of extensive destruction or seizing of property not justified by military necessities in an unlawful and arbitrary manner.

The Syrian regime has also violated Principle 21 of the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement⁸, which states:

1- 1. No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his property and possessions.

2- In all circumstances, the funds and property of internally displaced persons shall be protected, in particular against the following acts:

(a) pillage;

(b) direct or indiscriminate attacks and other acts of violence;

(c) using them as a shield for military operations or objectives;

(d) retaliation

(e) destruction or seizure as a form of collective punishment.

3- 3. Property and possessions left behind by internally displaced persons should be protected against destruction and arbitrary and illegal appropriation, occupation or use.

³ Ministry of Justice of the Syrian Arab Republic, Syrian Constitution of 2012, [Article 15](#).

⁴ ICRC, International Humanitarian Law, [Rule 52](#)

⁵ International Committee of the Red Cross, International Humanitarian Law, [Rule 111](#)

⁶ ICC, Rome Statute, ICC, [Article 8.2b-16, and 8.2e.5](#).

⁷ Geneva I Convention, [Article 50](#).

Geneva Convention II, [Article 51](#)

Geneva Convention III, [Article 130](#)

Fourth Geneva Convention, [Article 147](#)

Protocol II to the [Geneva Conventions](#)

⁸ United Nations, Economic and Social Council, [Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement](#).

Recommendations:

The international community

- Must condemn the practices of the Syrian regime in stealing and looting the property of displaced persons and refugees and expose its deceptive practices in this context.
- Must support the speedy implementation of the political transition process to prevent further theft and looting of land and property.
- Must support efforts to expose the documentation of violations by the Syrian regime and to increase humanitarian assistance to forcibly displaced persons who have lost their homes and land.

The International Independent Investigation Commission COI:

- Must document the looting of new lands carried out by the Syrian regime through the policy of public auction.
- Must issue a special report or statement condemning such operations and clarifying the threat they pose to the return of IDPs and refugees.

The OHCHR:

- Must condemn the practices of the Syrian regime in the extensive theft, looting and control of property and residential and agricultural lands, and report to the Security Council and the international envoy to Syria in this regard.

The International Envoy to Syria:

- Must highlight the systematic seizures of property and land belonging to political opponents and the impact of these acts in sabotaging the political process.
- Syrian regime:
- Must stop its theft and looting of agricultural land and crops through the policy of auctions.
- Must stop violating international law and the current Syrian constitution, restore rights and property to their proper owners, and must end the policy of discrimination against political opponents.

Syrian regime:

- Must stop its theft and looting of agricultural land and crops through the policy of auctions.
- Must stop violating international law and the current Syrian constitution, restore rights and property to their proper owners, and must end the policy of discrimination against political opponents.



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