

Statement



SNHR is the Second Most-Cited Source in the US Department of State 2022 Report on Human Rights Practice in Syria

**Majority of Victims' Families Have Been Unable to
Acquire Death Certificates for Their Loved Ones**

Thursday 23 March 2023

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 analyzes in Syria.

Paris - Syrian Network for Human Rights:

On Monday March 20, 2023, the US Department of State's Bureau of Democracy Human Rights and Labor (DRL) issued its annual reports on the human rights practices documented in nations worldwide for the year 2022. The DRL's 94-page report on Syria documented multiple patterns of violations of international law.

The report draws upon a number of human rights sources. Those are ordered by the number of times they were cited as follows:

1. The Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (COI): 128 citations.
2. The Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR): 104 citations.
3. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR): 10 citations.

In addition, the DRL report cites other sources such as the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Human Rights Watch (HRW), and Amnesty International, as well as local organizations and other sources, in addition to the expertise and the investigations conducted by the team members of the DRL itself.

It should be noted that, with this year's report, the DRL has now used SNHR as a primary source in its reports for 11 consecutive years. The DRL's Human Rights Practices Reports are an official and foundational document that accurately describes the state of human rights in Syria, and a principal reference resource for different US government bodies, as well as many congressmen, congresswomen and other US decision-makers.

Below is a summary of the DRL's Human Rights Practice Report on Syria:

The report notes that the presidential elections held in May 2021 were conducted in an environment "of widespread regime coercion", and lacked the participation of Syrian living in the opposition-held areas. Furthermore, the report highlights that many observers did not consider these elections to be free or fair, with the same applying to the parliamentary elections held in 2020, which also saw electoral fraud in favor of the ruling Baath party, with most candidates being members of, or having ties to the Baath party.

The report adds that the Syrian regime confers "autonomous" powers on its security apparatus and regime-affiliated militias, such as the National Defense Forces. By contrast, it adds, the regime's civilian authorities have only limited power over foreign or paramilitary organizations operating in Syria, such as the Russian forces, Pro-Iran Hezbollah, and the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps.

As the report further reveals, Syrian regime forces and their allies continued their widespread ground and aerial military attacks that they initiated in 2019 to regain control of areas in northwestern Syria, resulting in the killing of hundreds of civilians and the displacement of thousands more.

This offensive, which, as the report notes, involves the use of heavy weapons has led to the destruction of the civilian infrastructure in the targeted areas, which has only exacerbated the already-dire humanitarian situation. Moreover, the report continues, the aerial attacks by Syrian regime forces and Russian forces have repeatedly targeted civilian sites, including hospitals, markets, schools, camps for internally displaced persons (IDPs), and farms, with many of those sites named on UN deconfliction lists.

The report notes that as of September 2022, there are 6.9 million IDPs in Syria and over 5.7 million Syrian refugees registered abroad.

The DRL report also sheds light on the most notable types of violations of the international human rights law that took place in Syria in 2022. Those include: extrajudicial killing, arbitrary arrest and enforced disappearance, torture including sexual violence at the hands of Syrian regime forces, and the harsh life-threatening conditions in detention centers; including denial of medical care, absence of an independent judiciary, and persecution of political prisoners. The report includes an update on such violations based on information from the SNHR's database. Additionally, the report also mentions the regular incidents of unlawful interference with individual privacy and the punishment of family members for offenses allegedly committed by a relative, as well as the unlawful recruitment of children at the hands of Syrian regime forces and other parties to the conflict, as well as other serious violations committed in the context of the internal armed conflict, including ground and aerial military attacks that affect civilians and civilian infrastructure. The report also mentions other violations of civil and political rights, such as citizens being denied the right to change their government peacefully through fair and free elections. The report stresses that the Syrian government has failed to launch any investigation or hold any officer or individuals involved in violations and crimes accountable for their actions, continuing the deeply entrenched policy of impunity within the Syrian regime's various authorities and agencies.

The report also underscores that groups and paramilitary militias linked to the Syrian regime have committed widespread violations, including extrajudicial killings, massacres against civilians, arbitrary abductions and arrests, excessive physical abuse, sexual violence, and unlawful arrests. The report adds that regime-affiliated militias, including Hezbollah, have repeatedly targeted civilians in a deliberate manner, while also stressing that Russian forces have been involved in killings of civilians through their airstrikes.

The report also mentions violations by parties other than the Syrian regime and its Russian allies, such as violations in areas under the control of armed opposition factions, including killings, physical abuse, and arbitrary detention. In this context, the report notes that the continued absence of security in opposition-held areas has contributed to fostering an environment in which human rights violations are committed, including killings, abductions, and excessive physical abuses.

The Report also notes that armed terror groups such as Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) have committed a wide range of violations, including unlawful killings, abductions, and excessive physical abuse, in addition to being involved in the killing of civilians which is described by the COI as "indiscriminate".

The report further sheds light on the fact that Armed Syrian opposition groups backed by Turkey have also committed human rights violations against residents in northern Syria, including against Kurdish and Yezidi residents and other civilians. The report also notes that such groups have been responsible for arbitrary detentions, enforced disappearances, torture, and sexual violence against civilians, in addition to forced evacuations of homes and the looting and seizure of private properties. Other violations by those groups include transferring detained civilians across the borders to Turkey, cutting water access for civilian residents, child recruitment, and desecration of religious sites.

The report also notes that the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), which include members of the Kurdish People's Protection Units, have committed human rights violations, including arbitrary arrests, and the imposition of restrictions on the freedom of assembly, in addition to being involved in unlawful acts of corruption.

The report reveals that SNHR documented the killing of over 229,112 civilians between March 2011 and September 2022, and documented that over 15,265 individuals, including 196 children and 113 women (adult female) had died due to torture in the same period. The Report notes that Syrian regime forces were responsible for 89 percent of all deaths under torture in 2022.

The report adds that SNHR has documented that no fewer than 155,368 of the individuals arrested by the parties to the conflict in Syria since March 2011 remained under arrest and/or forcibly disappeared as of December 2022. The report notes that the Syrian regime is responsible for 87 percent of all these cases (135,706 individuals, including 2,691 children and 8,484 women).

The report further notes that SNHR revealed in a report released in April 2022 that the Syrian regime "avoided providing any definitive clarification of the fate of the forcibly disappeared" and stated that "families are often not informed about the timing or manner of death of those who are disappeared." The DRL report also cites another SNHR report released in August 2022 which noted that the families of 88 percent of all victims of the conflict since March 2011 have not been able to acquire death certificates for their loved ones.

The report also states that the law nominally criminalizing torture which was promulgated by the Syrian regime on March 30, 2022, "effectively whitewashes decades of state-sanctioned human rights violations." This law, the report continues, also "fails to offer redress to past victims of torture [or] include any protection measures for witnesses or survivors of torture," and "fails to mention any measures that could be taken to prevent torture from occurring in detention centers and prisons in the future."

Additionally, the report sheds light on the regime's systematic practice of seizing the properties of its opponents. The report explains how the regime legitimizes this practice of confiscating dissidents' properties by promulgating related legislation after charging the dissidents with terrorism, which is a charge commonly leveled by the regime since 2012 against the overwhelming majority of its political opponents and those arrested in the context of the popular uprising that started in March 2011. To this end, the Counterterrorism Court is empowered to rule in cases while the defendant is absent, which provides the regime with legal cover for the seizure of properties whose owners, now refugees and IDPs, felt forced to leave for their own safety. The report further notes that Syrian regime forces and pro-regime militias have seized numerous properties owned by refugees and IDPs in the areas over which the regime regained control, as well as being involved in widespread looting practices.

In conclusion, SNHR reaffirms our preparedness to contribute to all reports by states and international organizations on the state of human rights in Syria. We shall continue in our commitment to spare no effort in reporting the violations and incidents that take place with integrity and impartiality to the best of our abilities as part of our mission to protect civilians in Syria, hold accountable all perpetrators of violations, and initiate progress in pursuing the course of change towards democracy.

It is noteworthy that, in 2019, SNHR signed a [Memorandum of Understanding](#) with the US Government establishing a coordination and collaboration mechanism for sharing the information and data documented by SNHR on human rights violations in Syria and on the figures and entities involved in perpetrating these violations in order to contribute to the investigation processes conducted by the US government into some of those violations, with the aim of adding as many as possible of those involved in those violations to economic and political sanction lists, thereby creating a significant obstruction to any attempt to rehabilitate the Syrian regime and its various bodies. This remains, in fact, one of the most important forms of accountability presently feasible.

To read the latest report from the US Department of State's DRL in full, please click on this [link](#).



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