

Statement

Readmitting the Syrian Regime into the Arab League Does Not Mean that Syria is Safe for the Return of Refugees Since the Syrian Regime is Still Committing Crimes Against Humanity

The Syrian Regime Has Given No Indications of Goodwill, With Approximately **136,000** Syrian Citizens Still Imprisoned in Regime Detention Centers, Including Approximately **8,473** Women



Thursday 18 May 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.

On Sunday, May 7, 2023, Arab foreign ministers held an extraordinary consultative meeting in the Egyptian Capital Cairo, at which the decision was made to end the suspension of Syria’s membership of the Arab League; this marked the end of a 12-year revocation of Syria’s seat that took effect following [a resolution by the Council issued on November 12, 2011 to suspend Syrian delegates from the Arab League](#). The resolution adopted at the time provided that Arab state would recall their ambassadors from Syria, while imposing political and economic sanctions on the Syrian government in response to the regime’s gross violations against the Syrian people (it is quite bizarre that this readmission is taking place despite the fact that those violations did not stop, nor did the Syrian regime review its policies, apologize, or hold any member of its security or military accountable for said violations).

The May 7 resolution was based on previous meetings in Jeddah and Amman. [The delegates issued a press release following the Amman meeting](#) which reads, “The voluntary and safe return of refugees to their country is an urgent priority. The necessary steps to bring about such a return must be taken immediately,” recommending “Promoting cooperation between the Syrian government and refugee-hosting states and coordinating with the relevant UN organs to organize the voluntary and safe return of refugees and end their suffering in line with specific procedures and a clear timeframe.”



A statement issued following the meeting held by the foreign ministers of Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Egypt, Iraq with the foreign minister of the Syrian regime in Jordan on May 1, 2023

The Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) is seriously concerned that any restoration of relations with the Syrian regime would lead to forcing Syrian refugees to return to Syria. In fact, SNHR has recorded, as of this writing, the refolement of no fewer than 753 Syrian refugees from Lebanon since the beginning of April 2023, including 72 women and 94 children. Of these, we have recorded the arrest of 14 individuals, including one child. Two of those arrested, who are from the same family, were arrested by the Syrian regime's Military Security forces in the al-Masna border area, while the other 12 were arrested by the Syrian regime's State Security branch in Damascus. The crackdowns against Syrian refugees in Lebanon have been concentrated in areas with high Syrian populations, such as Bourj Hammoud, al-Mansourieh, Dekwaneh, and al-Rihab as well as in a number of neighborhoods in Beirut city, the areas of Rechmaya, Hammana, and Saoufar in in Mount Lebanon, and the Ghazze area in the Western Beqaa district in al-Beqaa government.

Furthermore, we have received credible information that the Palestine Branch, which is affiliated with the Syrian regime's Military Intelligence Directorate, is studying the security status of the civilians who were deported back from Lebanon, which raises the possibility of them potentially being arrested in the near future. Many of the refugees who have been repatriated to Syria told us they are trying to flee the country again.



A group of Syrian refugees detained by the Lebanese military in al-Mansourieh town in Lebanon in early May 2023

These well-founded concerns stem from the fact that Syrian authorities are still committing gross violations against people living in regime-controlled areas of Syria, some of which qualify as crimes against humanity. We believe that the refugees who are being forcibly repatriated will suffer similar violations amid the absence of any legal environment, where security agencies have full and uncontested control of the fate of both residents and returnees. According to our documentation, the overwhelming majority of arrests are carried out without any court-issued judicial warrant being presented, with many of those arrested arbitrarily ultimately going on to become forcibly disappeared persons. It is probable that they are being subjected to torture and may face death under torture, as well as being subjected to other violations such as conscription, extortion, and seizure of their lands and properties.

On November 16, 2022, we released [an extensive report](#) analyzing all the amnesty decrees issued by the Syrian regime since March 2011. All of these amnesty decrees have led to the release of only 7,351 detainees in total (6,086 civilians and 1,265 combatants) from the regime's various civilian and military prisons and security branches across Syria, while no fewer than 135,253 of the citizens arrested by the Syrian regime are either still detainees or forcibly disappeared persons.

The refoulment of refugees and the forced repatriation of Syrian refugees constitute blatant violations of the customary international law. Any governments carrying out such practices bear legal responsibility for the torture, killing, enforced disappearance, and other violations that will potentially be perpetrated by the Syrian regime against forced returnees, in addition, of course, to the Syrian regime's direct responsibility for those violations.

It was our hope that if it was the case that Arab states felt compelled to readmit the Syrian regime to the Arab League, they would present a minimal list of demands.

Below are some of the recommended demands to be presented before Syrian regime at the Arab League Summit set to be held tomorrow:

- Immediately release approximately 136,000 political prisoners, including 96,000 forcibly disappeared persons, and disclose the names of the victims who had either died due to torture or have been executed and their burial location.
- Disband all extraordinary courts and repeal all of their rulings.
- Repeal all laws used by the Syrian regime to take over the lands and private properties of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs).
- Allow for the commencement of an independent accountability process for all those involved in carrying out bombardments, killings, and torture against the Syrian people irrespective of the positions they hold in the military and security hierarchies.

Syrian refugees will not voluntarily return as long as the Syrian authorities' multiple violations continue. We are absolutely certain that those violations will not stop as long as the security apparatuses continue to implement the same policies they have perpetrated since 2011. Action must be taken to bring about a political transition in accordance with Security Council resolution 2254 in a way that creates a foundation for a legal environment that respects human rights and international law. Only when Syrian refugees feel safe, and only then, will they voluntarily choose to return to their home country and their homes.



www.snhr.org - info@snhr.org