

Statement

The Syrian Regime is Responding to the August 2023 Protests with the Same Savage Mindset with Which It Reacted to the Protests of March 2011

No Fewer than 57 Civilians Arrested Over the Protests in Regime Areas Since the Beginning of August, including 11 Women, With Hundreds Persecuted



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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.

Since the beginning of August, many regime-controlled areas of Syria have seen peaceful civil demonstrations, in which the protesters held the Syrian regime responsible for the worsening conditions in the country at all economic, social, and political levels. On August 17, the scope of these protests grew significantly, with thousands demonstrating then and since in the governorates of Daraa and Suwayda, in addition to other protest action taking place in Damascus, Rural Damascus (Rif Dimshaq), Latakia, Tartus, and Aleppo. The message was largely the same, namely that Bashar Assad is responsible for the position the country is in, with the protesters calling for ousting the Syrian regime.

Indeed, these protests have come at a time of multiple, unprecedented and increasingly dire economic, living, and human rights crises in Syria. A Syrian state employee currently earns an average monthly salary of no more than approximately \$10, which is a natural outcome of the Syrian regime's oppressive policies since March 2011. The Syrian regime's gross human rights violations have resulted in the displacement of millions of Syrians, the killing of over 200,000 civilians, the enforced disappearance of approximately 132,000 Syrian citizens, and the deaths of at least 15,000 people due to torture, in addition to other crimes such as bombing hospitals and schools, and stealing and pillaging citizens' properties and lands. These draconian practices have generated a climate of fear and terror that has naturally pushed away any influx of foreign capital, as well as failing to allow any degree of normality for local businesses which remain unable to operate amid such an atmosphere. All of these crises have been coupled with systemic corruption that infects every level of the Syrian regime's hierarchy, in addition to worsening crises in Lebanese and recently Iraqi banks. In light of all these factors, it has become starkly clear that there is no way out of this disastrous downward spiral while the current regime led by Bashar Assad- remains in power.

Although voicing criticism of the regime and holding it accountable for its actions should be a fundamental right of the Syrian people who are peacefully expressing their opinions and calling for political change, the Syrian regime's response in August 2023 has been the same as its response to the March 2011 movement: a reaction of state terror, iron and fire. We have monitored and documented multiple vicious methods used by the regime's security forces, including arrest, torture, and enforced disappearance, with the regime also using its media outlets to slander protesters or anyone criticizing the regime in any way as traitors or collaborators working with foreign entities. The Syrian regime has also attempted to stage counter-demonstrations with loyalists chanting pro-regime slogans and threatening anyone opposing the regime.

Most notable Syrian regime violations documented by the SNHR against the August 2023 protests

1. A total of 57 arbitrary arrests, including of 11 women

- The Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) documented the arrests of no fewer than 57 civilians, including 11 women, at the hands of Syrian regime forces in response to various peaceful protests held between the start of August and August 25. These arrests were concentrated in the governorates of Latakia, Tartus, Damascus, Rural Damascus, and Aleppo.

We also documented the setting up of more security checkpoints with increased manpower, which meant higher levels of invasive security inspection of civilians passing by. We've received plausible intelligence which we have yet to confirm that the Syrian regime is publishing lists and names to arrest the protestors.

- We've documented repeated raids and search operations targeting the homes of many of those who participated in or expressed their opinions at the recent demonstrations. Although many of these intimidating regime operations have not yet resulted in arrests, they have driven many of the protesters targeted to limit their movements, give up work, and flee their homes in fear of arrest and torture.

2. The Syrian regime appoints military commanders who were involved in its earlier crimes against humanity and war crimes to senior civilian positions in its ranks

- On Wednesday, August 23, 2023, the Syrian regime issued Legislative Decree No. 216 of 2023, which appointed retired Brigadier General Firas Ahmad al-Hamed as the new governor of Tartus governorate, which is one of the governorates currently seeing some anti-regime activism on social media. Born in 1966 in Quneitra governorate, Firas Ahmad al-Hamed is a former security officer who rose to the rank of Brigadier-General before retiring. He headed a number of regime security branches affiliated with the General Intelligence Directorate and was involved in oppressing demonstrators, and in the torture, enforced disappearance, and execution of Syrian civilians during his tenure as head of Branch 318 (Homs, al-Badiya Branch) of the General Intelligence. He was also the head of the State Security branch in Latakia governorate until July 2023 when he retired. Because of his involvement in gross human rights violations in Syria, he was designated on the sanctions list by the EU on July 24, 2012.

3. Military reinforcements assist in oppressing and crushing protests

Besides the increased number of security checkpoints, we documented that the Syrian regime has deployed servicemen and heavy weaponry to southern Rural Damascus near Kanakir town in order to deter those areas from joining the protests. We have underlined, in many of our monthly reports, the wide arrests taking place in those areas, which target local residents who agreed to security settlements following the Syrian regime restoring control of the area.

SNHR stands in support of the demands of the Syrian people in all areas, in voicing their political opinion freely and in demanding improvements to their economic and political conditions by ousting the current Syrian regime which is the entity directly and mainly responsible for the country's worsening situation and which shows no concern for anything or anyone except its own desperate struggle to cling to power. We also condemn the regime's arbitrary arrests and torture of protestors, with the sole aim of such acts being to silence the Syrian people's voices and prevent the current popular protest movement from growing and spreading. SNHR calls on the international community to protect civilians in Syria, to impose greater pressure on the Syrian regime and its allies to revive the gridlocked political process, to issue statements condemning the violations by the Syrian regime, and to explicitly refuse any attempt to normalize or restore relations with this criminal regime.



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