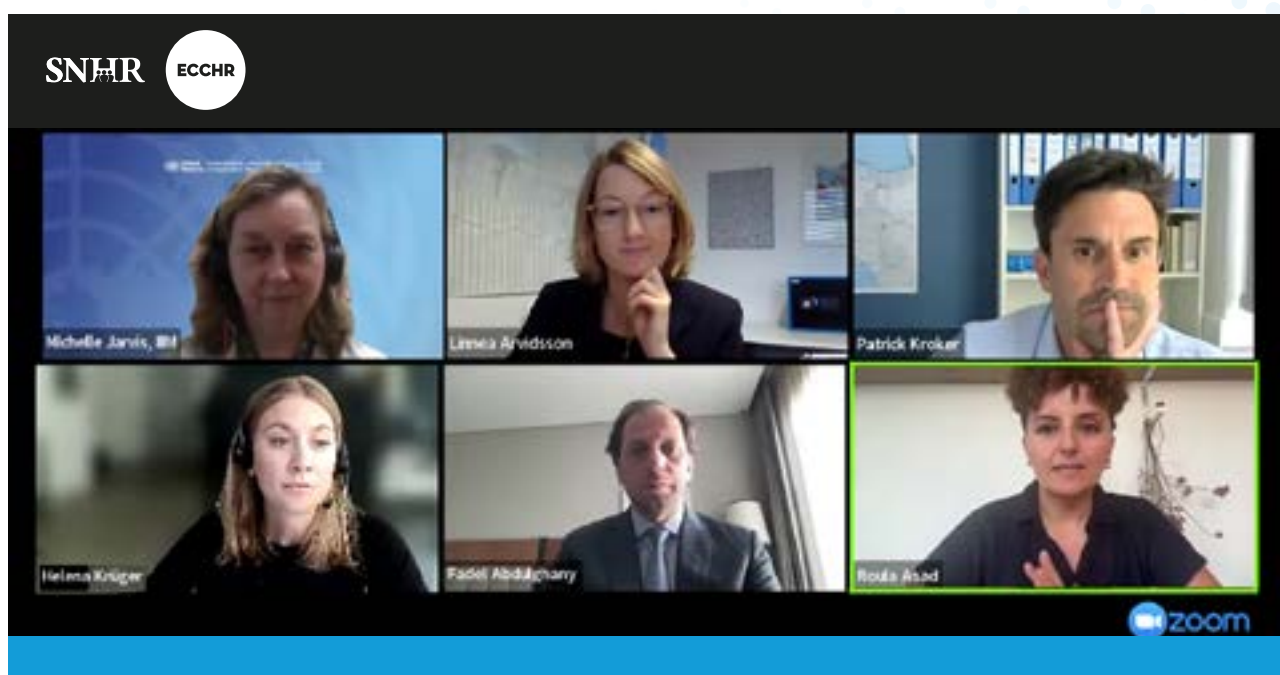


## Statement

### **SNHR and ECCHR Hold a Launch Event for their Joint Report on the Achievements and Blind Spots in Accountability Efforts After 13 Years of Atrocities in Syria**



**Friday 17 May 2024**

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.

## The Hague – The Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR):

Thursday, May 16, 2024, the Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) and the European Center for Constitutional and Human Rights (ECCHR) held an online event entitled, 'Accountability Efforts After 13 Years of Atrocities in Syria'. The event, which was livestreamed via Zoom and SNHR's channels, featured Michelle Jarvis, Deputy Head of the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism (IIIM); Linnea Arvidsson from the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (COI); Patrick Kroker from the International Crimes and Accountability Program at the ECCHR; Helena Krüger, a Legal Advisor with the ECCHR; and Fadel Abdulghany, SNHR Executive Director, with Rula Asad, a co-founder of the Syrian Female Journalists Network, serving as moderator.

The event participants discussed the joint report recently released by the two groups, SNHR and the ECCHR, entitled, '[Patchwork Justice for Syria?](#)'. This report sheds light on the accountability efforts, and the ongoing investigations and trials related to Syria. The report also discusses the role of international mechanisms such as the IIIM, the COI, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), as well as other actors, including justice facilitators, as well as attempting to outline the role of the criminal investigations, trials, and prosecutions currently underway. In addition, the report pinpoints the existing gaps in accountability efforts, such as prosecuting conflict-related sexual violence crimes, corporate accountability, and targeting other actors who have yet to be held accountable. Additionally, the report provides an outline of potential future developments.

The first speaker at the event, Ms. Helena Krüger, a Legal Advisor with the ECCHR, spoke about the report which provides an outline of the potential future developments in the Syrian context. The report was created, she explained, to draw more attention to the accountability issue in a world currently plagued by numerous armed conflicts, especially since some states are choosing to normalize relations with the Syrian regime rather than seeking to hold it accountable for the atrocious crimes that have been committed. Furthermore, she continued, the report tries to create a dialogue about what form or forms the accountability process could take in the future, as the Syrian situation remains unchanged. She also underlined the instrumental role played by Syrian civil society actors in documenting the vast number of violations under the immense pressures and risks they are facing, as well as the accountability steps taken thus far, and those which should be taken in the future.

The next speaker, Mr. Patrick Kroker from the ECCHR's International Crimes and Accountability Program, discussed the gaps that currently exist in the accountability processes, while analyzing the existing accountability paths available. He also emphasized the vital nature of the role played by civil society organizations (CSOs) and international bodies, especially the UN's IIIM, in creating a space to prosecute the perpetrators in Europe ahead of holding them accountable. However, Mr. Kroker noted that this will be a prolonged process that must be constantly finessed, with its gaps addressed.

Mr. Fadel Abdulghany, SNHR Executive Director, spoke next about the principle of universal jurisdiction, stressing that the role which it can fill at present remains narrow and is marred by many complications and challenges, firstly those inherent in the very nature of this principle, and secondly those stemming from the world states' willingness to invoke it. He noted that universal jurisdiction remains a rudimentary instrument for a number of reasons – most notably the fact that while most states require that a perpetrator be present on their territories in order to prosecute them, it is highly unlikely that any high-level Syrian regime officials would, of their own volition, travel to a state with a judiciary that incorporates universal jurisdiction, which is why all of the cases brought to date have been against low-ranking individuals, most of whom had no decision-making powers. Meanwhile, he noted, in absentia trials are not without their own legal issues. Finally, he explained, regime-allied states, such as Russia, Iran, China, Venezuela, and Lebanon, will not agree to extradite criminals to the German, French, or Swedish authorities for prosecution even if those bodies issued arrest warrants against the aforementioned criminals and demanded they be handed over. Mr. Abdulghany emphasized, however, that this does not mean that arrest warrants should not be issued against major perpetrators in the Syrian regime's ranks, as well as other parties, but simply means that those warrants will, most likely, not lead to those individuals' arrest and prosecution.

The SNHR head added that the Koblenz trials have been a great accomplishment, even if these concerned very few individuals, since the individuals in question are part of the Syrian regime's notoriously brutal security apparatus. These trials have exposed the barbaric torture practices used by the Syrian regime, he noted, and garnered widespread media coverage, which further exposed and shed light on the regime's crimes in the German, European, and international public spheres. For these reasons, the Koblenz trials are a remarkable accomplishment in relation to advocating for the issue of detainees and raising awareness of the unconscionable torture they are enduring, as well as, in a broader sense, advocating for the Syrian cause and for Syrians' right to demand the ousting of a regime that does not hesitate to use the most horrendous practices against political dissidents. Europeans, Mr. Abdulghany noted, have also realized that Syrians are fleeing not just death and bombardment, but also arrest and the subsequent monstrous torture, which has affected the public opinion on Syrian refugees and the refoolment thereof.

Furthermore, he noted that those trials are a living proof of the resolve of those Syrians who believe in democratic change, and who seek every possible avenue, no matter how minor, to end the culture of impunity. These efforts, he emphasized, demonstrate Syrians' yearning for justice for all, including even their opponents, and their excitement at putting the expertise they've gained into practical service on the path to transitional justice, which includes holding as many perpetrators as possible to account.

Mr. Abdulghany ended his address by shedding light on SNHR's ongoing work to document violations since June 2011, noting that thanks to these tireless efforts, SNHR today possesses a large database detailing the events of the past 13 years. He also noted that while SNHR does not itself build criminal cases, it has shared the data it has with other groups which possess the necessary experience to build criminal cases, including those against Anwar Raslan, Dr. Alaa, and others.

He also revealed that SNHR is playing a similar role in the case brought by the Netherlands and Canada before the International Court of Justice (ICJ), and is set to share large amounts of information with the Dutch and Canadian prosecutors who are working on building the case.

The next speaker, Ms. Michelle Jarvis, Deputy Head of the IIIM, shed light on the integral mandate for which the IIIM was established at a time when the UN Security Council was deadlocked, with the referral of the Syrian case to the International Criminal Court (ICC) being blocked, and there being no ability to establish a tribunal on Syria. Under those crippling conditions, she said, the IIIM's establishment was an extremely important step to build criminal cases through collecting and protecting evidence for future accountability processes.

In the final address, Ms. Linnea Arvidsson from the COI first gave an overview of the nature of the COI's work since its foundation in August 2011, which has focused on investigating human rights violations in Syria and identifying their perpetrators. To that end, she noted, the COI has released over 50 reports so far.

Even though at least 50 individuals have been convicted of war crimes and crimes against humanity through the principle of universal jurisdiction, she went on, the parties to the conflict and the international community have all found themselves confronting a precarious dilemma, since these are the only accountability avenues available even after over a decade of violations being committed on such a massive, widespread scale.

At the conclusion of the event, the panelists answered some questions from the audience. To watch the event in full, please click on [this link](#).





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*No justice without accountability*

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May 2024

