

Statement

SNHR is the Second Most-Cited Source in the US Department of State 2023 Country Report on Human Rights Practices in Syria

The Syrian Regime and Regime-Linked Paramilitary Militias are the Most Prominent Perpetrators of Violations in Syria



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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.

The US Department of State's Bureau of Democracy Human Rights and Labor (DRL) has issued its annual report on human rights practices documented in nations worldwide for the year 2023. The 113-page section of the DRL report concerning Syria documented multiple types of violations of international law.

The report draws upon various human rights sources. These 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): 85 citations.
- 2. The Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR): 58 citations.

In addition to these, the DRL report cites a number of other sources including, inter alia, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Human Rights Watch (HRW), and Amnesty International, as well as local organizations, in addition to utilizing the expertise and the findings of 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 12 consecutive years. The DRL's Human Rights Practices Reports are official and foundational documents that accurately describe the state of human rights in Syria, and serve as principal reference resources for different US government bodies, as well as for 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 human rights conditions in Syria saw no noteworthy change during 2023, with the Syrian regime, and other parties to the conflict and controlling forces, continuing to commit various types and categories of human rights violations, including, inter alia, extrajudicial killing; enforced disappearance, torture or cruel, inhumane, or degrading treatment; harsh and life-threatening imprisonment conditions, arbitrary arrest/detentions; serious issues related to the autonomy of the judiciary; political prisoners or detainees; transnational repression against individuals in another country; arbitrary or unlawful interference with privacy; punishment of family members for alleged offenses by a relative; conflict-related sexual violence; unlawful recruitment and use of children in armed conflict by the regime and other armed actors; placing serious restrictions on freedom of expression and media freedom, including violence or threats of violence against journalists, unjustified arrests or prosecutions of journalists, and censorship.

The report stresses that regime-linked groups and paramilitary militias committed frequent violations, including extrajudicial killings, massacres against civilians, arbitrary arrests and abduction, excessive physical harm, sexual violence, and unlawful arrests. The report also adds that regime-linked militias, including Hezbollah, have deliberately and repeatedly targeted civilians, while stressing that Russian forces have also been involved in killings of civilians through their airstrikes.

Relatedly, the report stresses that the Syrian regime “did not take credible steps or government action to identify and punish officials who may have committed human rights abuses.”

The report also sheds light on violations by other parties, besides the regime and its Russian allies. The report notes that areas under the control of armed opposition factions have seen multiple types of violations, including killings, physical assault, and arbitrary detentions. In this context, the report notes that the continued volatile security conditions in areas under the control of armed opposition factions has heightened the climate of impunity for human rights violations, including killings, abductions, and excessive physical abuse.

As the report further reveals, terrorist groups such as Hay’at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) has engaged in a wide range of abuses, including killings, kidnappings, and excessive physical abuse. The group has also been involved in killing civilians through attacks that were described by the COI as “indiscriminate”.

Moreover, the report notes that Türkiye-supported armed opposition factions in Syria have committed human rights violations against Kurdish and Yezidi residents and other civilians, including arbitrary arrests, enforced disappearance, torture, and sexual violence, in addition to forced displacement from homes, and transfer of detained civilians to Türkiye across the borders. Other violations include cutting off civilians’ water supply, child recruitment, and desecration of religious sites.

Additionally, the report adds that Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), personnel, which includes People’s Protection Units (YPG) have committed human rights violations, including arbitrary arrests, and placing restrictions on the freedom of assembly and demonstration, in addition to being involved in illicit acts of corruption.

The report notes that SNHR documented the killing of no fewer than 1,032 civilians, including 181 children and 150 women, at the hands of the parties to the conflict and controlling forces in Syria this year.

As the report further reveals, SNHR has documented that at least **112,713 individuals**, including 3,105 children and 6,698 women, of those arrested by the parties to the conflict between March 2011 and August 2023 are still forcibly disappeared. The report stresses that the Syrian regime is responsible for 85 percent of all enforced disappearance cases in the country (accounting for **96,103** of these cases), with the victims including 2,327 children and 5,739 women. In 2023 specifically, SNHR documented that **1,923 individuals** had been forcibly disappeared at the hands of the parties to the conflict and controlling forces in Syria, with the regime being responsible for 942 of these cases.

Relatedly, the report notes that “The regime maintained a vast network of detention centers where detainees were subjected to human rights abuses. In July, the COI reported dire and appalling conditions in regime detention facilities amounted to ill-treatment and [which] in some cases could amount to torture. Reports from human rights groups and former detainees suggested that there continued to be many informal detention sites and that authorities held thousands of prisoners in converted military bases and in civilian infrastructure, such as schools and stadiums, and in unknown locations. Activists asserted the regime housed detainees in factories and vacant warehouses that were overcrowded and lacked adequate sanitary facilities.”

Additionally, the report adds that SNHR has documented that no fewer than **156,457 individuals**, including 5,235 children and 10,199 women, of those arrested by the parties to the conflict in Syria since March 2011 remained under arrest and/or forcibly disappeared. The report further notes that the Syrian regime is responsible for about 87 percent of all these cases (136,047 individuals, including 3,696 children and 8,495 women).

As of December 2023, the report notes, over 11 million Syrian citizens are either internally displaced persons (IDPs) or asylum-seekers in foreign countries according to the UNHCR. Meanwhile, 90 percent of all Syria’s residents are living in extreme poverty.

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 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 the individuals involved in perpetrating 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](#).



SYRIAN NETWORK
FOR HUMAN RIGHTS



info@snhr.org
www.snhr.org

No justice without accountability

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