

Statement



SNHR Was the Most-Cited Source in the US Department of State's International Religious Freedom Report on Syria

Report notes that Iran's Government Supports the Syrian Regime Authorities on Sectarian Grounds and is Recruiting Shiite Fighters from Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan in the Conflict

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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 United States Department of State's Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor (DRL) has released its annual report on international religious freedom for the year 2023, with Syria among the nations featured. The report notes that sectarian violence, fueled and exacerbated by the Syrian regime's procedures, is persisting. Meanwhile, the report sheds light on the destruction of infrastructure and the targeting of individuals on the basis of sectarianism by the regime and other parties to the conflict.

The report draws upon a number of sources, which are listed in descending order below according to the number of times they were cited:

- Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR): 10 citations.
- Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (COI): Eight citations.

The report also cites other sources, such as the Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

The report notes that sectarian violence is continuing in Syria due to the tensions between religious groups, further exacerbated by the regime's actions, worsening economic conditions, and the ongoing conflict in a broader sense. By the end of 2023, the report further notes, about half of the population living in Syria before the start of the popular uprising in Syria in March 2011 had been displaced. As the report further reveals, the Syrian regime's government, with the backing of its allies Russia and Iran, continues to commit human rights violations against dissidents, who are mostly Sunni Muslims, with regime forces also destroying places of worship, hospitals, houses, and other civilian infrastructure.

Furthermore, the report stresses, SNHR documented no fewer than **2,317** arbitrary arrests and enforced disappearance in 2023, with the victims including 129 children and 87 women.

The report stresses that members of the Alawite minority in Syria still enjoys an "elevated political status" disproportionate to the size of the country's Alawite population, particularly in leadership positions within the army, security, and intelligence apparatuses. Meanwhile, the report states, "...the Iranian government, primarily through the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corp, directly supported the Assad regime and recruited Iraqi, Afghan, and Pakistani Shia fighters... to fight in the conflict."

Moreover, the report notes that some Turkish-backed armed opposition factions have also committed violations, including acts of extrajudicial killing, abduction and disappearance of civilians, physical abuse, rape and sexual violence, forced displacement from homes, recruitment or use, pillaging, and seizing private properties, and desecrating religious sites. These violations were concentrated against Kurdish and Yazidi residents, the report notes.

The report also describes the military conscription law that enables regime authorities to seize the assets of “military service evaders” and their families who have failed to pay an exemption fee as “a regime attempt to extort Syrian citizens living abroad, many of whom fled the country to escape the regime’s military offensive and would be unwilling to serve in the military”, adding, “According to human rights groups, the military conscription law disproportionately affected Sunnis and Christians, who comprised the bulk of Syrians who fled the country as a result of the war.”

Citing SNHR, the report notes that the group documented that no fewer than **154,457** of those arrested by the Syrian regime and other parties to the conflict between 2011 and December 2023 are still arbitrarily detained and/or forcibly disappeared, with the regime being responsible for 87 percent (**136,047 individuals**, including 3,696 children and 8,495 women) of these cases. The report further adds, “The SNHR documented at least 33 attacks on mosques in the country during the year, attributing **31 attacks** to the regime (94 percent) and 2 (6 percent) attacks to the SDF.”

In its conclusion, the report underscores that the US President has stressed the need for a political solution to the conflict in Syria in line with UN Security Council resolution 2254, noting that such a solution must be the foundation for a credible, inclusive, and nonsectarian system of rule.

Moreover, the report stresses that the US will continue to support the efforts for documenting, analyzing, and preserving evidence on the violations committed by all parties to the conflict, including violations against religious minorities, through supporting the work of the COI, and the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism (IIIM), as well as directly supporting documentation efforts by Syrian human rights groups.

As the report also reveals, “On June 29 [2023], in a vote in the UN General Assembly, the U.S. government supported the creation of a stand-alone UN mechanism tasked with clarifying the fate and whereabouts of the over **156,000** missing and unlawfully detained in Syria as well as providing adequate support to victims, survivors, and families of the missing.”

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.

To read the full report, which was released by the US Department of State on Thursday, June 27, 2024, please click [here](#).¹



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No justice without accountability

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