

## Statement

# Nine Principal Recommendations to All Armed Opposition Factions and the SNA



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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.

## Introduction

Since **November 27, 2024**, the situation across Syria has been developing rapidly. Armed opposition factions, in partnership with Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), have managed to take control of vast areas as part of the military operation codenamed **Deter Aggression**, which is still going on as of this writing. **On November 30, 2024**, the Syrian National Army (SNA) launched a separate military operation codenamed **Dawn of Freedom**, focusing on areas in eastern rural Aleppo which have been under the control of Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and the Syrian regime.

The Military Operations Command, which is the command center running Deter Aggression, has so far stated that it managed to take over **Aleppo city, Hama city, and large swathes of the rural areas of the governorates of Idlib and Hama, as well as northern rural Homs governorate**. Meanwhile, the SNA has taken over wide areas of **eastern rural Aleppo**. Moreover, the South Operations Room (composed by a number of armed opposition factions in Daraa governorate) has revealed that they managed to take control of **Daraa city and large swathes of Daraa's rural areas**. Similarly, armed factions and local groups have taken control of wide areas in Suwayda governorate.

These developments have placed the responsibility upon these controlling forces of managing regions with large populations, which include pro-regime individuals.

Over the past 13 years, the **Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR)** has released hundreds of reports emphasizing the importance of respecting **international humanitarian law and customary international law**, focusing on the distinction between civilians and combatants and ensuring civilian protection. This statement provides a number of principal recommendations to the controlling forces to ensure adherence to these principles amidst the current developments.

## 1. Protecting civilian property from looting and theft

### Recommendations

#### 1. Enforce measures to curb looting

- Issue clear and explicit orders prohibiting looting and theft in controlled areas.
- Impose immediate disciplinary penalties on violators.

## **2. Ensure property protection**

- Establish secure perimeters around civilian areas, markets, and homes to prevent unauthorized access.
- Maintain accurate records documenting the properties that have been abandoned during the conflict to ensure their protection.

## **3. Establish accountability for looting incidents**

- Conduct comprehensive investigations into cases of looting and theft, holding those responsible judicially accountable, whether through military or civil courts.
- Collaborate with local and international human rights organizations to document violations and ensure justice.

## **4. Public awareness**

- Organize awareness programs targeting fighters and civilians to highlight the importance of laws prohibiting looting and the consequences of violations.

## **5. Protect critical infrastructure**

- Maintain the functionality of water systems, electricity networks, and communication systems to ensure continuity and prevent exploitation or sabotage.

## **2. Balance justice with detainees' rights by regulating the process of releases from detention centers**

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Random releases of detainees without a thorough review of their cases may lead to the release of individuals responsible for crimes, causing further harm to victims and their families. Such decisions might also be perceived as showing a lack of seriousness on the part of the controlling parties in pursuing justice, thereby undermining public trust in the judiciary and fostering a general sense of insecurity.

### **Political detainees' rights**

On the other hand, it is essential to ensure the release of political detainees arbitrarily detained and brutally tortured by the Syrian regime. Still unorganized mass releases could be exploited by some parties to justify freeing perpetrators of crimes, harming the political detainees' case and weakening the credibility of human rights demands.

To ensure justice and avoid such missteps, clear and deliberate mechanisms should be followed for releases, including:

- 1. Review of files:** Thoroughly examine detainee files to distinguish between political detainees and criminals involved in acts threatening societal security.
- 2. Independent human rights oversight:** Assign independent human rights organizations to oversee release processes to ensure justice.
- 3. Victim engagement:** Involve victims or their representatives in decision-making with respect to the release of major crime perpetrators in order to ensure that their rights are respected.

## 3. Treatment of detainees

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### Recommendations

#### 1. Ensure humane treatment

- Ensure detainees are treated with dignity, strictly prohibiting torture and cruel or degrading treatment.
- Provide basic necessities, such as adequate food, water, and healthcare, and allow communication with families.

#### 2. Separate detainees by categories

- Separate civilian detainees from military personnel and distinguish suspected criminals from prisoners of war to ensure appropriate treatment based on legal status.

#### 3. Protect legal rights

- Inform detainees of the reasons for their detention and grant them the opportunity to challenge detention decisions in fair courts.
- Allow detainees access to legal representation and visits by humanitarian organizations such as the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).

#### 4. Prison management

- Maintain accurate records documenting detainees' details and explaining the reasons for their detention.
- Establish independent monitoring mechanisms to supervise detention facilities and prevent abuses.

## **5. Training and accountability**

- Train prison staff on standards of humane treatment and human rights.
- Hold perpetrators of violations accountable under local and international laws.

# **4. Establish security and police authorities**

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## **Legal obligations**

- Controlling forces bear the responsibility of restoring public order and ensuring public safety.
- Security forces must respect human rights, as per Article 9 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).

## **Recommendations**

### **1. Form local police forces**

- Establish temporary civilian police units composed of trained local individuals familiar with the communities' cultural and social dynamics.
- Avoid reliance on partisan or sectarian militias to prevent agitating tensions within communities.

### **2. Training and accountability**

- Offer intensive training programs for police personnel on the principles of human rights and international humanitarian law.
- Develop mechanisms to monitor police performance and hold perpetrators of violations accountable.

### **3. Coordinate with local entities**

- Engage local leaders and community representatives in selecting, appointing, and supervising police personnel.
- Ensure demographic diversity in security forces to build trust and foster cooperation with local populations.

### **4. Law enforcement infrastructure**

- Develop police stations with modern facilities and enhance communication and logistical systems to ensure effective security operations.

## 5. Rights and freedoms in controlled areas

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### Basic principles

- Demonstrate commitment to respecting rights and freedoms without any form of discrimination.
- Ensure freedom of movement, assembly, and expression in accordance with the IC-CPR.
- Avoid arbitrary arrests or any such restrictive practices, such as harassment and intimidation of civilians.

## 6. Humanitarian access and displacement

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### Recommendations

#### 1. Facilitate the return of displaced persons

- Ensure voluntary and safe returns for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in accordance with the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement.
- Clear landmines and war remnants to provide a safe and risk-free environment for returning IDPs.

#### 2. Raise awareness of risks

- Implement community-based awareness programs focusing on the dangers of unexploded ordnance, with focus on the most vulnerable groups, such as children.

## 7. Establish accountability for conduct

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### Recommendations

#### 1. Hold perpetrators of violations accountable

- Enforce a strict prohibition on retaliatory actions against civilians.
- Investigate all violations seriously and conduct fair trials to ensure justice.

## 2. Facilitate monitoring

- Allow local and international human rights organizations to monitor the situation and document violations.
- Maintain transparent and accurate records of military actions and detentions.

# 8. Provide basic services

## Recommendations

### 1. Rehabilitate infrastructure

- Prioritize the rehabilitation of water, electricity, and transportation systems to ensure continuity of services.

### 2. Provide healthcare

- Restore the operation of hospitals and clinics, ensuring basic healthcare services are available to all residents.

### 3. Ensure education

- Reopen schools and provide a safe environment for children to ensure the continuation of the educational process.

# 9. Protect cultural heritage

## Legal obligations

- Demonstrate commitment to protecting archaeological and historical sites from vandalism, theft, or deliberate destruction.
- Ensure the preservation and maintenance of cultural assets as part of humanity's shared heritage.

In conclusion, amid the rapid developments on the ground in Syria, the controlling forces must assume their legal and ethical responsibilities to manage the areas under their control in a manner that ensures security and stability while respecting human rights. The recommendations outlined in this report highlight key priorities, including protecting civilians and their property, ensuring justice in the treatment of detainees, providing essential services, and protecting cultural heritage.

Achieving these priorities requires a serious commitment from all parties to uphold the principles of international humanitarian law and to strengthen cooperation with local and international human rights organizations. Only through these measures can trust be rebuilt with the population and the foundations of justice and peace reinforced in areas affected by the conflict.

Finally, this statement serves as a clear call to all armed opposition factions/SNA to take practical and swift steps that demonstrate a genuine commitment to protecting civilian rights and ensuring their dignity. Such efforts will lay the groundwork for a more stable and just democratic future for all Syrians.







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*No justice without accountability*

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