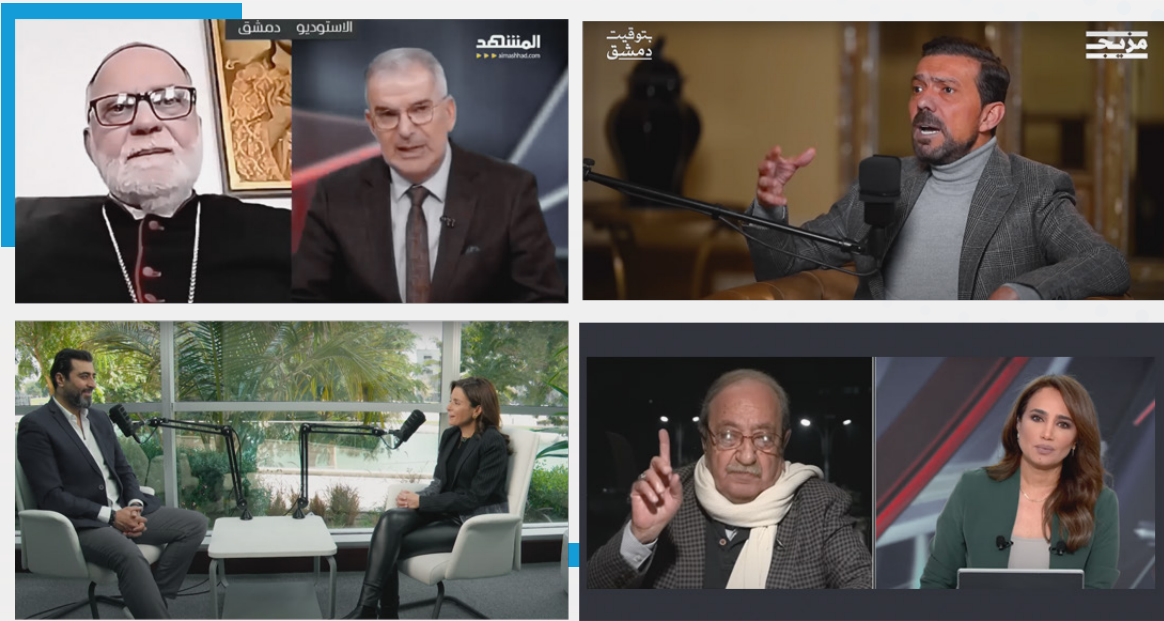


## Statement

# Media Must Stop Aggravating Victims' Feelings by Platforming Assad Supporters or Apologists

Apologizing, Compensating Victims, And Shunning the Limelight and Public Positions Are All Steps that Must be Taken by Perpetrators to Promote Civil Peace



**Monday 20 January 2025**

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.

In the wake of the Assad regime's fall, some media outlets have platformed a variety of figures, including artists, intellectuals, and religious leaders, who were formerly known for supporting the Assad regime and justifying its crimes. Some of these individuals even made statements previously in which they openly called on the Assad regime to increase its bombing and killing of dissidents. These recent media appearances have taken place without these individuals taking any steps to atone for their previous support for the regime or address the trauma and current plight of the Assad regime's victims who survived its crimes and atrocities, who are estimated to number in the millions. Some media platforms have further exacerbated this gross insensitivity by platforming individuals who either denied the Assad regime's crimes had taken place or attempted to justify them, further provoking surviving victims and driving some towards feelings of vengeance and a desire for retaliation.

As the Syrian Network for Human Rights' (SNHR) database attests, the Assad regime committed numerous severe violations and atrocities that amount to crimes against humanity and war crimes, continuing for 14 years. These crimes included the killing of at least 203,000 civilians, including 23,000 children, and the enforced disappearance of about 115,000 others, including about 8,500 women. Additionally, the regime used approximately 82,000 barrel bombs, in addition to other munitions, to bombard Syrian cities, towns and villages. These violations, which were committed on a daily basis, have been documented on SNHR's database which contains details of millions of recorded incidents. Moreover, SNHR has identified over 16,200 of the individuals involved in perpetrating these crimes, including:

- 6,724 members of the former regime's formal military and security forces.
- 9,476 members of the auxiliary forces, including militias and supporting groups, which fought alongside the regime's formal forces.

Given the pressing need to establish a clear pathway to transitional justice in Syria in order to hold those primarily responsible for crimes against humanity and war crimes accountable, it is imperative that this accountability should also extend to the Assad regime's influential supporters, who were not directly involved in major crimes, whether these were from security agencies or the political and economic elites that backed the Assad regime. Transitional justice is essential in ensuring a transition from dictatorship to democratic stability and respect for human rights.

Although forming a transitional justice committee may take a year or more, immediate steps can be taken by Assad regime supporters:

1. Return stolen properties, including lands, homes, shops, and vehicles, to their rightful owners.
2. Issue both written and recorded public apologies on media and social media platforms, acknowledging their responsibility for supporting the Assad regime, together with a pledge not to repeat such actions.
3. Provide material and moral compensation to victims and their families for money stolen from them or for any extortion they endured.
4. Contribute to the reconstruction of the affected communities and to funding survivor initiatives and educational programs for victims' families.
5. Volunteer to provide direct services to victims and their families.
6. Pledge not to hold leadership positions in future Syrian governments.
7. Abstain from media appearances or participation in public events until these steps have been taken.

These measures are vital for protecting civil peace and for helping to safeguard Assad regime supporters against potential retaliatory actions. Many victims may feel understandably unable to restrain their emotions when witnessing Assad regime supporters occupying their homes or justifying the crimes committed against them.

Many former Assad regime loyalists now claim to have been ignorant of the regime's brutality and barbarism despite the vast number of media and human rights reports documenting its crimes. These claims of supposed ignorance, especially after the Assad regime's fall, do not absolve them of responsibility, however. They should, therefore, refrain from making any media, cultural, or social appearances before thoroughly educating themselves about the crimes and atrocities committed by the regime which they supported or justified.

Justifying the Assad regime's crimes cannot be classified as freedom of opinion and expression, as it constitutes a blatant and grotesquely insensitive violation of the dignity of millions of victims and traumatized survivors. Henceforth, laws should be enacted to explicitly criminalize glorifying the Assad regime or justifying its brutal actions.

**While the focus of this discourse is primarily on Assad regime supporters, since the regime is responsible for about 90 percent of the violations, these measures should also apply to all other perpetrators of violations.**

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### Current government

- Issue a directive prohibiting the denial or justification of Assad regime crimes in any form.
- Incorporate education about and elucidation of Assad's crimes against the Syrian people into current media programming and require schools and universities to highlight these crimes to ensure future generations understand the terrible consequences of tyranny and the vital importance of democracy.
- Ensure that any individuals who supported the Assad regime have completed all the previously mentioned steps before granting them any role in activities or collaboration with state institutions.
- Remove all Assad regime symbols, including images and slogans, and address online content promoting, rationalizing or justifying its crimes.
- Memorialize the victims of the Assad regime through national events and memorials.
- Collaborate with Syrian human rights organizations to raise awareness about the Assad regime's brutal legacy.
- Support initiatives that promote dialogue among communities divided by years of armed conflict.

### Media outlets

- Cease hosting individuals who deny or justify Assad regime crimes in any form.
- Commit to compliance with ethical standards that reject any whitewashing of those involved in crimes and instead work to promote values of justice and accountability. Media platforms should act as partners in comprehensive accountability processes rather than as tools for normalizing perpetrators of violations.
- Produce films and educational programs documenting the horrors of the Assad regime's detention centers and recounting the suffering of the families of victims who were killed, forcibly disappeared, or whose homes were destroyed, in order to preserve collective memory and enhance public awareness.



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*No justice without accountability*

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