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HRW – Human Rights Watch

Dozens of Prisoners Released in Syria

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A Positive Step, but Thousands Still Held Incommunicado

On November 4, local news outlets reported that the [Syrian government had released over 60 individuals](#) from detention facilities in southern Syria and Damascus. While not the first such release, the news is a positive development in an area where little to no progress has occurred. But it is also a reminder that thousands remain locked away in Syria’s secretive detention system, many held from as far back as 2011, and with no hint as to their whereabouts.

The majority of those released this week were reportedly arrested after the Syrian government retook areas [often through brutal and unlawful tactics](#). Individuals who chose to remain in southern Syria after it was retaken by government forces in 2018 were forced to sign ‘reconciliation agreements’ promising they would [not get involved in anti-government activities](#). In return, these agreements were supposed to protect them from retaliation by security services.

However, as Human Rights Watch documented last year, security services [continued to arbitrarily detain and forcibly disappear individuals](#), including former opposition leaders, activists, and aid workers. Local organizations, including Syrians for Truth and Justice and the [Daraa Martyrs Documentation Office](#), had documented a staggering 500 arrests between August 2018 and May 2019.

The lack of anything resembling due process, plus the government’s continued practices of arbitrary arrests, mistreatment and harassment, continue to be a major deterrent to people considering a return to Syria. As Russia moves forward with [plans to organize a high-level conference in November on returns in Syria](#), we should recognize that ad hoc releases of this kind, while positive, do not come close to addressing the stark absence of any meaningful protection from risks of arbitrary detention and mistreatment in Syria.

ecoi.net summary:

Government releases over 60
people from detention facilities in
Southern Syria and Damascus;
thousands still held incommunicado

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Syrian Arab Republic

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[HRW – Human Rights Watch](#)

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