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Syrian Democratic Forces Have Arrested/ Detained at Least 61 Teachers Over Educational Curricula and for Forced Conscription Since the Beginning of 2021

Persecution of Nearly 550 Teachers Arbitrarily Dismissed from Their Jobs for Refusing Forced Conscription in the Governorates of Raqqqa, Deir Ez-Zour and Hasaka

Friday 19 February 2021

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 analyses in Syria.

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Content

I. The Policies and Decisions Syrian Democratic Forces Impose on Educational Institutions Threaten the Future of Nearly Half a Million Students in the Governorates of Raqqa, Hasaka and Deir Ez-Zour.....	2
II. At Least 2,147 Persons Have Been Forcibly Disappeared by Syrian Democratic Forces, Amid Widespread Fears That the Group Has Forcibly Disappeared Dozens of Teachers.....	4
III. Arbitrary Arrests, Persecutions and Dismissals of Hundreds of Teachers at the Hands of Syrian Democratic Forces.....	5
IV. Conclusions and Recommendations.....	16

I. The Policies and Decisions Syrian Democratic Forces Impose on Educational Institutions Threaten the Future of Nearly Half a Million Students in the Governorates of Raqqqa, Hasaka and Deir Ez-Zour:

Over the past ten years, the Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) has documented how educational facilities and teachers have been exposed to multiple types of violations by all parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in areas across Syria; foremost among these violations are the targeting of these facilities with bombardment, or their being turned into military headquarters or otherwise having their function changed; in the northeast region of Syria, which this report is concerned with, both the ISIS terrorist organization and the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), the latter of which are mainly composed of personnel from the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG), have sought to impose their ideology on the educational process and to blatantly interfere in schools' curricula and teaching methods, contributing to further tension and unhappiness between the people of the region and the military forces that have seized control of it.

After the defeat of ISIS, Syrian Democratic Forces, backed by US-led coalition forces, took control of the northeast region of Syria. We at SNHR have noticed that the Self-Management Authority of this region under their leadership has, since its establishment, pursued a gradual policy of changing educational curricula and introducing educational materials that are distorted, incorrect and contrary to the history of Syria and its society. The process of developing and changing the educational curricula to the SDF's curriculum alone has been done gradually, with not all schools' curricula being changed at once, with the results of this restrictive process including the enforced abolition of the former twelfth grade secondary school curriculum last year. Many teachers and other local residents in the region reported that they had not been consulted or informed beforehand about the changes in the educational curricula at schools there, which is to say, the changes were introduced without any consultation with local teachers or other academic experts whether from the region or further afield, but were instead imposed as a *fait accompli*, reflecting the YPG's politically focused one-party ideological vision that allows only education which glorifies the views and precepts of the ruling authority, similar to the educational curriculum imposed by the Syrian regime that glorifies the Ba'ath Party and the Assad family.

The violations inflicted by the Self-Management Authority and its armed forces were not limited to the imposition of this system of education-as-indoctrination, but went far beyond this to impose forced conscription of teachers into the group's ranks, as well as persecuting and arresting teachers using the teaching curriculum issued by the Syrian regime (which is still taught in regime-controlled areas within the two cities of Hasaka and Qameshli and some villages).

These incremental, disastrous policies have led to an alarming increase in the percentage of children dropping out of school, forcing many children to attend schools in areas under the control of the Syrian regime simply to obtain a recognized educational certificate. This in turn has led to overcrowded classrooms in the regime-controlled schools, constituting a threat in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, with students' transfers constituting a material and moral burden on their families, with all the aforementioned factors posing a serious threat to [nearly half a million child students](#) in the areas controlled by the Syrian Democratic Forces. There is now an urgent need for the US-led coalition forces to pressure their SDF allies to form an inclusive democratic authority involving all the ethnic and religious groups in the region which can provide genuine care for the wellbeing and fate of all residents there.

In this report, we focus on recent Syrian Democratic Forces violations of the educational system through the group's launch of arbitrary arrest campaigns which have seen dozens of teachers detained since early January 2021 until mid-February. The SDF attempt to justify these arrests by claiming they need to conscript the detained teachers into their ranks, or because the teachers have provided special tutoring or additional lessons for children or have taught them according to the educational curriculum of the Syrian regime, even if those lessons took place within the teachers' own homes, or within centers and schools not under the administration of Syrian Democratic Forces.

The report relies on the testimonies provided to SNHR by a number of teachers working in schools in the governorates of Deir Ez-Zour, Raqqa and Hasaka, and on the testimonies of eyewitnesses, students and local activists who were present during the raids, assaults, arrests and detentions carried out by Syrian Democratic Forces which are included in this report. We have provided eight of these accounts in this report, and can affirm that none of these were cited from any open sources. In some cases, we used aliases to protect witnesses' confidentiality and prevent them from being harassed or prosecuted. Witnesses received no financial compensation, other inducements or promises in exchange for interviews. We explained the purpose of the report beforehand to all the interviewees we spoke with, and obtained their consent to use the information they provided to serve the purposes of the report and the documentation process. All these procedures are carried out under the terms of SNHR's internal protocols, which we have worked for years to perfect, and which we strive constantly to develop through our experience in order to consistently maintain the highest standards of care and reliability.

The violations detailed in this report represent the bare minimum that we have been able to document in terms of the magnitude and severity of the violations that have occurred. In addition, the report doesn't include any analysis of the profound social, economic, and psychological ramifications.

II. At Least 2,147 Persons Have Been Forcibly Disappeared by Syrian Democratic Forces, Amid Widespread Fears That the Group Has Forcibly Disappeared Dozens of Teachers:

Syrian Democratic Forces have carried out arrests against teachers without presenting any arrest warrants, directing clear charges, or identifying themselves in terms of their affiliation with any security centers or departments, meaning the arrests are more like kidnappings; the General Security authority in the areas where the arrests were carried out, which is the party officially authorized to maintain security in these areas and carry out arrests and interrogations there, showed no willingness to assist or cooperate with detainees' families, nor to answer their inquiries about the implications of the arrest or fate of their loved ones, or even to tell them where their family members are detained. The detainees are not informed of the reason for their arrest, who is carrying out, or where they are being taken, and most of them are not allowed to defend themselves, and are deprived of contact with the outside world, with their families knowing nothing about their fate.

The Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) maintains a database dedicated to registering detainees and forcibly disappeared persons, using rigorous standards to ensure accuracy and strict [methodology](#) based on the provisions of international laws and the set of principles related to identifying incidents of arbitrary arrest and enforced disappearance. We catalogue and verify all the incidents that we obtain reports on from multiple sources, including members of the Syrian Network for Human Rights team, victims' families, witnesses, and survivors of detention centers, and constantly update cases on the database whenever new information is received and verified, with the aim of tracking and monitoring all detention cases, updating these records continuously in order to ascertain the fate of each detainee, the conditions of his/her detention, and the procedures that his/her family was able to take in relation to the detaining authorities.

The SNHR's database indicates that at least 3,784 individuals, including 659 children and 176 women (adult female), are still arbitrarily detained by Syrian Democratic Forces, who have continued to imprison those who were initially taken prisoner by the Democratic Union Party (PYD). At least 2,147 of these detainees, including 113 children and 83 women, have been forcibly disappeared, in the period between the Kurdish Democratic Union Party's forces first taking control of some areas in Syria in July 2012 up until February 2021. We fear that the arrested teachers will be forcibly disappeared in the absence of serious action by the US-led coalition forces, in particular the US Department of Defense (the Pentagon).

III. Arbitrary Arrests, Persecutions and Dismissals of Hundreds of Teachers at the Hands of Syrian Democratic Forces:

Since the beginning of January 2021 up until February 15, 2021, we recorded at least 61 arbitrary arrests of teachers, either on charges of teaching the Syrian regime's educational curriculum or with the aim of forcibly conscripting them into the ranks of Syrian Democratic Forces. We also monitored planned persecution of hundreds of teachers over their refusal to join the ranks of the Syrian Democratic Forces, with this rejection of military conscription leading to their dismissal from their teaching jobs in the schools run by the Self-Management's Education and Teaching Authority in the governorates of Raqqa, Deir Ez-Zour and Hasaka. These cases are distributed as follows:

A. 27 cases of arbitrary arrest/ detention on charges of teaching curricula other than those imposed by the Self-Management Authority:

Since the beginning of January 2021, the SNHR team has recorded several arrests by the SDF targeting teachers in the governorates of Raqqa, Hasaka, and Deir Ez-Zour, due to their teaching and holding courses to teach the educational curriculum developed by the Syrian regime, whether within their homes or in private centers.

Syrian Democratic Forces personnel had ordered most of the teachers in areas under the SDF's control to sign a pledge to teach the curriculum imposed by them exclusively, and we believe that this pledge was imposed in order to justify subsequently carrying out a campaign of arrests and of intimidating and terrorizing the teachers into obedience.

The Syrian Network for Human Rights has documented the arrest of at least 27 teachers of various subjects due to their teaching the educational curriculum used by the Syrian regime; we have recorded the release of 14 of these teachers in exchange for their signing the aforementioned pledge, as a form of coercion and intimidation, while the remaining 13 teachers are still arrested/ forcibly disappeared up until the moment of preparing this report.

Most of the witnesses we spoke with told us that the arrests were carried out with excessive violence, with the SDF failing to take into account the dignity and physical and psychological integrity of those arrested, who were prevented from appointing a lawyer or communicating with their families and informing them of their whereabouts in a manner similar to the detention methods practiced by Syrian regime forces.

The SNHR spoke with teacher Ahmad al Shamti¹, who was [among the teachers arrested](#) by Syrian Democratic Forces in al Derbasiya city in Hasaka suburbs on January 19, 2021, due to their refusal to sign a pledge not to teach the Syrian regime's educational curriculum. He told us: **"In the last months of 2020, some teachers signed a pledge not to teach the educational curriculum that is taught in areas controlled by the Syrian regime, while others refused to sign; on January 19, 2021, the Syrian Democratic Forces' General Security Service arrested the teachers who did not sign this pledge, without prior notice in a brutal manner, from their homes or while they were passing through SDF checkpoints in the city, with some of them being arrested in front of their students while they were delivering educational courses.**

We were taken to a security center in al Derbasiya city, and we were not interrogated for the first two days. As a result [of the arrests], there were student demonstrations in the city denouncing our arrest, and we went on hunger strike inside the prison. So, the General Security Service met with us inside the prison and they asked us: 'Why do you give the curriculum of the Syrian regime?'

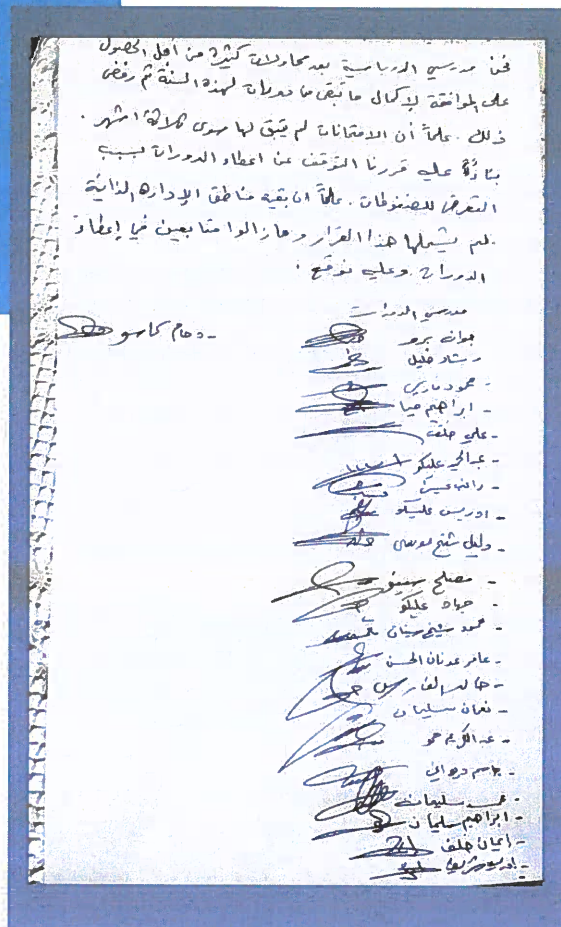
We told them 'Your curriculum is not recognized outside the areas under your control and even outside Syria, while the curriculum that we teach is recognized wherever it is, and this is a humanitarian issue; we cannot sacrifice this generation as a result of your decisions, in addition to teaching them subjects according to your thinking. In addition, you informed us that your curriculum will be taught at the end of the school year, and in this case the students will move to study within the areas under the control of the Syrian regime, so why did you not make this decision since the beginning of the year?'"

Ahmad said that the General Security authority's reply was that this directive was issued by a leader called 'Robar' and that although they did not even know the reasons behind it, such directives had to be implemented. He added: **"Then, through pressure and protests by people and students, they released all the teachers on January 23, 2021."**

Ahmad told us that after their release, the teachers, who he estimated numbered 22 in all, held a meeting, in which they decided not to provide teaching courses for the remainder of this year due to the intolerable pressure and threats of death, property seizure, or arrest and delivery to the Syrian regime by Syrian Democratic Forces.

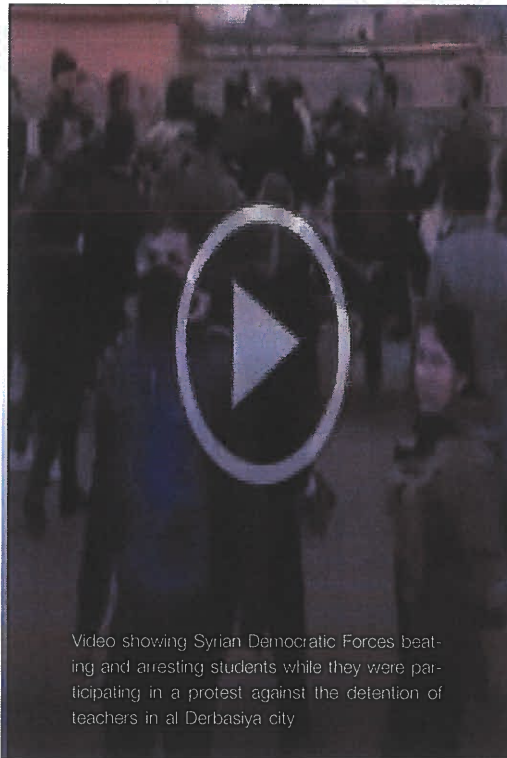
¹ Via phone on February 9, 2021

The following photo shows a statement prepared by the teachers, one of whom provided the Syrian Network for Human Rights with this photo of it - announcing their decision to stop teaching and refuse to provide educational courses to students due to the pressure exerted on them.



Detention and beating of children/ school students, including girls:

On Wednesday, January 20, 2021, Syrian Democratic Forces personnel in al Derbasiya city in the northern suburbs of Hasaka governorate physically and verbally assaulted pupils from a number of local schools, as well as the families of arrested teachers, when they held a protest against the arrest of seven of their teachers by the SDF the previous day, January 19, 2021, with the young protesters being beaten and insulted, and some also being detained. SNHR documented the detention of 17 students, six of them girls, by the SDF forces, who physically and verbally assaulted all the students in punishment for their peaceful [protest](#). We documented that all of them were released on Saturday, January 23, 2021. We also note that all the students who were detained are children aged between 15 to 17 years old, with their juvenile status not being taken into consideration in any way. We obtained videos and photos showing Syrian Democratic Forces violently storming the protest, and then viciously beating the students in a policy aimed at suppression and crushing of dissent by military force.



Video showing Syrian Democratic Forces beating and arresting students while they were participating in a protest against the detention of teachers in al Derbasiya city



Photo showing Syrian Democratic Forces arresting one of the students while they were participating in a protest against the detention of teachers in al Derbasiya city

The SNHR spoke with student Ismail Yaqoub², one of the protesters who was detained for several hours. He told us: **“We live in constant tension and we don’t see any future for ourselves. After the arrest of our teachers, we organized a peaceful protest, in which we raised banners calling for their release and for the freedom of choice for us to choose the curriculum we want to study. Shortly after we started to protest, the Asayish [YPG-affiliated] personnel attacked us, and beat a number of us and dragged them towards these members’ car. As for me, when I saw them attacking, I tried to run and flee, but two personnel grabbed me and beat me all over my body, then put me in their car with two other students and drove us to the Asayish center, where they put us in a cell while insulting and humiliating us, before they released us a few hours later.”**

The most notable incidents of arrest/ detention that targeted teachers due to the educational curricula they teach:

On Saturday, February 6, 2021, Syrian Democratic Forces carried out a campaign of raids and arrests targeting a number of teachers’ homes in Amouda city in the northern suburbs of Hasaka. The Syrian Network for Human Rights documented the arrest of five teachers in connection with their teaching an educational curriculum other than the one imposed by the SDF in areas under their control, with all five being taken to an undisclosed location.

² Via phone on January 29, 2021

On Sunday, February 7, 2021, Syrian Democratic Forces carried out a campaign of raids and arrests targeting a number of teachers' homes in Ma'bada town, which is administratively a part of al Malekiya district in the northeastern suburbs of Hasaka. The Syrian Network for Human Rights documented the arrest of nine teachers in connection with teaching an educational curriculum other than the one imposed by the SDF in areas under their control, with all nine being taken to an undisclosed location.

B. 34 cases of arbitrary arrest/ detention of teachers, along with persecution and dismissals of nearly 550 teachers on the grounds of their rejecting forced conscription into the SDF ranks:

In June 2019, Syrian Democratic Forces amended the 'law' that the SDF introduced in 2014 mandating military service, labelled by the SDF as 'Self-Defense Duty', with its forces (there is no clear mechanism for how to draft, discuss, legislate and enact laws in SDF areas, because, in practice, the SDF consists of only one entity, the military force, to which the political authority belongs, with no judicial body or three powers, and no separation between these powers, with the texts enforced by the SDF loosely called laws). Following the amendment of this 'law', Syrian Democratic Forces published lists of people, including teachers residing in some areas under the SDF's control, demanding that they be forcibly conscripted into the SDF's ranks, and circulated these lists to its educational centers and complexes through the Self-Defense Authority's 'discipline centers'; this arbitrary practice was initially concentrated in Hasaka governorate, followed by persecution and dismissal of teachers. With the beginning of 2020, these lists were expanded to include teachers in the various other areas under SDF control, including the governorates of Raqqqa and Deir Ez-Zour. These lists included nearly 550 names of teachers wanted for conscription, most of whom were born in 1990, implementing [a decision](#) issued by the co-presidency of the Self-Defense Department for North and East Syria, on Wednesday, January 22, 2020, whereby the birth month and year of those assigned to carry out 'Self-Defense Duty' was specified, so that the first to be conscripted were those born in the first month of 1990. In 2020, the persecution and arrests of teachers were limited to specific areas in Hasaka governorate, which we believe is [due to the SDF's decision to suspend its conscription campaigns](#) for a period of three months, as part of the preventive measures introduced to stop the spread of the COVID-19 coronavirus.

On June 9, 2020, the Education and Teaching Authority issued [a decision](#) which stipulated that it would not accept postponement by any teacher of their obligatory service of their 'Self-Defense Duty'. While this decision also mentioned the possibility of restoring some of the teachers previously dismissed due to their non-enrollment in conscription to their teaching jobs according to the needs of the educational complexes, we at the SNHR have not noticed any effective return of those teachers who were dismissed over their refusal of military conscription due to the teachers' fear of being arrested while carrying out their work.

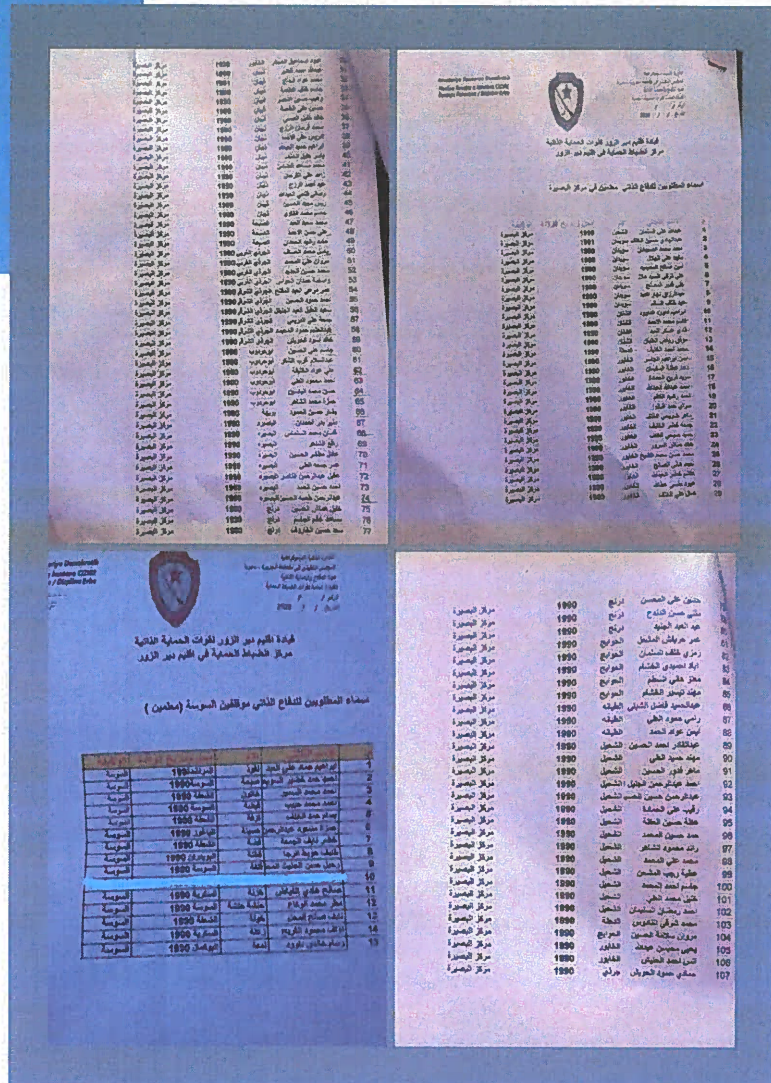
On June 28, 2020, the Self-Management Authority's Education and Teaching Authority introduced a requirement to [end the Self-Defense service](#) as a basic condition for working in its schools, in line with the conscription decisions issued by the Syrian Democratic Forces, indicating the complicity of these institutions with the aim of intimidating and obliging teachers to fulfill the Self-Defense Duty, 'conscription'.

On December 19, 2020, the SDF's Protection Discipline Center circulated lists containing the names of teachers wanted for forced conscription, a.k.a. 'Self-Defense Duty'³, to educational centers and schools in villages and towns under SDF control in the governorates of Deir Ez-Zour and Raqqa, with these lists including the names of nearly 107 teachers, all born in 1990, who had not performed their military service in the ranks of the Syrian Democratic Forces; according to the so-called 'Self-Defense Duty Law' issued by Syrian Democratic Forces, those called up for service who have failed to enroll are still obliged to perform military service before they reach the age of forty⁴, with the conscripts forcibly enlisted in the 'Self-Defense Forces' first undergoing 40 days of military training in one of the Syrian Democratic Forces' camps in the southern suburbs of Hasaka, before being allocated to serve in military centers and bases in the areas under the SDF's control for a period of six months or one year (depending on the individual case), with one month's additional retention in the event of committing any infraction of SDF rules.

³ Self-Defense Duty' is a period of compulsory military service which all males from the Self-Management areas of north and east Syria aged over eighteen years are obliged to serve.

⁴ Under Article 13 of the 'Self-Defense Duty Law' approved by the SDF's Self-Management Authority

These photos show the lists naming the teachers wanted for conscription that were circulated to educational centers in Deir Ez-Zour in December 2020



We spoke with Mr. Emad al Ahmad⁵, an employee of the People's Municipality in al Soor city in the northern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate, who told us about the lists of people wanted for Self-Defense Duty service, saying: **“The leaders of the Self-Defense centers in the areas under the control of Syrian Democratic Forces demanded that the directors and heads of educational centers provide lists of the names of their teachers and their personal data, so that the conscription centers could check them to find out which ones were of military service age, then they’d send the names of the teachers wanted for conscription, taking into consideration that**

⁵ Via phone on February 11, 2021

the number of wanted persons does not affect the educational process,” Emad added: **“Whoever refuses to comply with the conscription, they will first suspend his salary as a warning, and then permanently dismiss him from his job, and he is persecuted, with his name circulated at checkpoints.”**

The SNHR also spoke with 31-year-old Khaled al Amer⁶, a teacher working at a primary school in the suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate, who was among the teachers who were summoned for conscription by the Syrian Democratic Forces. He told us: **“About two months ago, I was informed via WhatsApp by the director of the Educational Center in our town that my name was included in the list of persons wanted for Self-Defense Duty. The director told me that he was told: ‘Dismiss any teacher who refuses to join or visit the related conscription center too’ - that is the teacher wanted, is open to prosecution, as his name is to be circulated at the checkpoints of the SDF. Since that time to date, I cannot move easily for fear of the checkpoints, and I cannot go to school for fear of raids by the SDF forces on schools in search of wanted teachers. The director told me that my salary is suspended because of my dismissal from my job. I cannot join the ranks of the SDF, because that puts my life at risk by ISIS cells, and I am the only breadwinner for my family and children.”**

We also spoke with Mr. Muhammad al Hamada⁷, a local activist and employee at a school in his hometown of al Soor city in the northern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate. He told us: **“Al Soor city and its villages have witnessed strike action in schools for about two weeks, that is, from the end of January to date, in protest against the conscription decision that included teachers. The SDF has deployed checkpoints on various roads to arrest those wanted for conscription, and carries out raids on homes and schools in search of those who did not join up for the conscription.**

“Last Friday, February 5, 2021, we held a protest in al Soor city, which included a number of families, students and teachers, against the SDF’s forcible conscription decision. At the present time, the majority of young people of the age required for conscription can’t move easily due to the large number of checkpoints, and some of them can’t sleep in their houses at night for fear of dawn raids by the SDF.”

Muhammad added that the conscription campaigns have worsened the already poor living conditions for local people due to the wanted individuals’ fear of going to work for fear of arrest and being taken away for conscription.

⁶ Via phone on February 9, 2021

⁷ Via phone on February 9, 2021

Another teacher who SNHR spoke with, Mr. Abdullah al Ali⁸, who works in the suburbs of Raqqqa governorate, is also among those wanted for conscription by the Syrian Democratic Forces. He told us: **"I have been informed by the Educational Complex in my area of the need to visit the Self-Defense Duty center even though the school I work in suffers from a shortage of qualified teachers. I have refused to visit the center or to join the service. What's happening to the teachers in the Self-Management Authority areas is a clear threat and a choice between joining the service or being left without work and income, living in a state of fear of arrest."**

Abdullah added that all the educational complexes in Raqqqa have received lists of names of teachers required for service, with at least 20-25 teachers wanted for conscription in each complex, and with all those on these lists being threatened with dismissal if they refuse military service.

Since the start of 2021, the Syrian Democratic Forces have begun implementing its arbitrary decision to forcibly conscript teachers on a large scale, with the SNHR noticing an escalation in the number of campaigns of raids and arrests in search of people wanted for conscription; after receiving circulars listing the teachers wanted for conscription, the educational centers and complexes, have dismissed or sacked teachers who refused to enroll for conscription or failed to visit the 'Self-Defense Duty' centers⁹, as well as suspending their salaries.

All of the teachers we spoke with told us that these decisions, which are, to say the least, arbitrary and authoritarian, were enforced against them without their having any opportunity to respond or challenge them, adding that they learnt of the action taken against them through unpleasant verbal notifications delivered via social media rather than through any official channels, legal correspondence or regular contract dismissal; instead, the directors of the centers notified the teachers of their termination and the suspension of their salaries through messages delivered via social media applications, which included threats to permanently ensure they were unable to work in teaching again in the event that they continued to refuse conscription. We believe that relaying such information in this deeply unprofessional way is intended to ensure that anyone who reveals the Syrian Democratic Forces' activities, including their flagrant violations of international human rights law in the areas under their control, will be distrusted, accused of lying and of disloyalty.

Between the beginning of January 2021 and February 15, 2021, the SNHR team documented the arrest of at least 34 teachers on the grounds of forced conscription by Syrian Democratic Forces, with all those detained being taken to the SDF's conscription centers.

⁸ Via phone on February 8, 2021

⁹ The Self-Defense Duty center conducts the affairs of those conscripted for Self-Defense Duty in accordance with the 'laws' and decisions issued by these authorities' so-called Defense Department

Community protests and rejection:

The persecution and dismissal of teachers in order to forcibly conscript them into Syrian Democratic Forces has led to many student protests and public demonstrations rejecting these abusive practices, with a number of schools and teachers announcing the suspension of their work in order to reject the decision of forced conscription in many villages and towns in Deir Ez-Zour governorate.

[A statement](#) issued by 39 teachers from Hajin town in the suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate on December 18, 2020, entitled "Teachers Not Recruits," declared their refusal to be forcibly conscripted into the SDF.

These photos show some of the protests by students and teachers from many schools in the villages and towns of the eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour in December 2020 and January 2021.



[A statement](#) issued by the teachers of al Sh-heil city and al Hawayej town in the eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour on July 13, 2020, declaring their rejection of the curriculum imposed by the SDF on schools in the areas under SDF's control in Deir Ez-Zour governorate, as well as the rejection of teacher conscription operations.

Another teacher wanted for forced conscription, Mr. Jasem al Naser¹⁰, from Hajin town, told SNHR: **"On January 10, 2021, Syrian Democratic Forces raided the Education Complex in Hajin and demanded that the compound's management provide the names of teachers who rejected the forced conscription decision in order to dismiss and persecute them. The Education and Teaching Committee in Deir Ez-Zour, affiliated with the Syrian Democratic Forces, also dismissed dozens of teachers who refused to be enlisted and to visit the conscription centers whose names were included in the lists that were published; currently, most of the teachers are out of work and live under persecution."**

Jasem told us that, like the teachers in the other areas, he had received a message on his phone from the director of his educational complex in a group conversation for teachers during which they were informed of the dismissal of all those who refused conscription, arbitrarily without any official ruling or opportunity for complaint.

We also spoke with Mr. Salah al Raji¹¹, a local activist in Mhaimda town in the western suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate, who has participated in meetings between local dignitaries and Syrian Democratic Forces personnel which were intended to resolve the crisis of young men and teachers being forcibly conscripted. He told us: **"Dignitaries from the Deir Ez-Zour tribes met with officials from the SDF in charge of al Kasra district in the western suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour about two weeks ago (at the beginning of February), rejecting the decision to impose forced conscription on Deir Ez-Zour's people, including teachers. Tribal dignitaries stated that schools in Deir Ez-Zour suffer from a shortage of specialist educational personnel, and that the imposition of conscription on teachers will affect the educational process and lead to the closure of a large number of schools; the dignitaries demanded that the decision be canceled and that joining the ranks of Syrian Democratic Forces be limited to volunteers, who join voluntarily. The officials stated that they would transfer these demands to the military leadership in Qameshli."** Mr. Salah added that to date, no official response has been issued by the Syrian Democratic Forces officials to these demands.

¹⁰ Via phone on February 1, 2021

¹¹ Via phone on February 10, 2021

The most notable incidents of arrest/ detention targeting teachers due to conscription by Syrian Democratic Forces:

On Tuesday, December 29, 2020, Syrian Democratic Forces carried out a campaign of raids and arrests in the towns of al Shaddadi, Markada, Ma'bada and Tal Hmais in the suburbs of Hasaka governorate. The Syrian Network for Human Rights documented the arrest of 33 civilians, including 16 teachers, in retaliation for their refusal to submit to forced conscription within the SDF, with all of them taken to an undisclosed location.

On Sunday, January 3, 2021, Syrian Democratic Forces arrested five teachers from the Educational Complex in al Shaddadi town in the southern suburbs of Hasaka, and took them to a conscription center in Hasaka governorate.

IV. Legal Conclusions and Recommendations:

Conclusions:

Syrian Democratic Forces/ Self-Management Authority have introduced texts and imposed these as laws despite their lacking any legislative or legal foundation, being based wholly on the reality of the SDF's military control in these areas, then further punished and persecuted the local population under the terms of these texts and decrees.

This forced conscription within these military forces which are involved, according to UN, international and local reports, in committing several types of violations against the local population, is a violation of the people's right to personal freedom, human dignity, freedom of movement, and the right of everyone to express conscientious objection to military service as a legitimate exercise of the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, in particular in the context of armed conflicts, and individuals' right to reject military participation in these. Arbitrary dismissal from work, persecution, arrest, torture and enforced disappearance based on the rejection of forced conscription, all of these are compounding and cumulative violations of the most fundamental principles of international human rights law.

Recommendations:

US-led Coalition Forces and the states supporting Syrian Democratic Forces:

- The new US administration should promote the human rights situation in northeast Syria, take steps along the path towards fair and democratic elections that allow full political expression for all members of the local electorate, and end the current totalitarian military rule, allowing for the establishment of an independent and impartial legislative and judicial authority.
- Conduct investigations and hold those responsible accountable for the horrific human rights violations in northeast Syria, ending the current culture of total impunity.
- Pressure Syrian Democratic Forces to end their forced conscriptions, and their dismissal and arrests of teachers over their rejection of military conscription.

- Work to disclose the fate of all those forcibly disappeared by Syrian Democratic Forces, and to secure the release of all those arbitrarily detained, primarily the teachers.
- Support the development and establishment of a fair and independent judiciary that prohibits any military entities from carrying out arbitrary arrests and enforced disappearances, and holds all those responsible for violations against the local population accountable.

Syrian Democratic Forces/ Self-Management Authority:

- Stop all forms of arbitrary arrest, reveal the fate of the forcibly disappeared, allow their families to visit and communicate with them, and subject them to fair and independent trials.
- Immediately release all teachers who have been arbitrarily arrested, and end the policy of forced conscription.

Independent International Commission of Inquiry (COI) and the High Commissioner for Human Rights:

- Launch investigations into the cases included in this report. SNHR is willing to cooperate in this context.
- Including arbitrary arrests and enforced disappearances against teachers in your upcoming report.

The Human Rights Council:

- Follow up on the issue of detainees and forcibly disappeared persons in Syria, highlight it in all periodic annual meetings, and allocate a special session to address this terrible threat.

Gratitude and solidarity

We wish to express our heartfelt solidarity with the victims and their families, and to extend our sincere thanks and appreciation to the families and local activists who, without whose efforts this report could not have been prepared in this way.



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