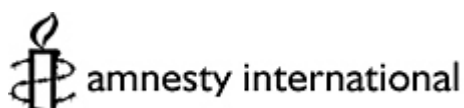


Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	177
Land:	Syrien
Kilde:	Amnesty International.
Titel:	Annual Report 2009.
Udgivet:	28. maj 2009
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	30. juni 2009

Title	Amnesty International Report 2009 - Syria
Publisher	Amnesty International
Country	Syrian Arab Republic
Publication Date	28 May 2009
Cite as	Amnesty International, <i>Amnesty International Report 2009 - Syria</i> , 28 May 2009, available at: http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4a1fadbcc.html



Amnesty International Report 2009 - Syria

Head of state: Bashar al-Assad
Head of government: Muhammad Naji al-'Otri
Death penalty: retentionist
Population: 20.4 million
Life expectancy: 73.6 years
Under-5 mortality (m/f): 20/15 per 1,000
Adult literacy: 80.8 per cent

The state of emergency, in force since 1963, continued to give security forces sweeping powers of arrest and detention. Freedom of expression and association remained strictly controlled. Hundreds of people were arrested and hundreds of others remained imprisoned for political reasons, including prisoners of conscience and others sentenced after unfair trials. Torture and other ill-treatment were committed with impunity; seven deaths as a result were reported. Military Police were reported to have killed at least 17 detainees. Human rights defenders were harassed and persecuted. Members of the Kurdish minority faced discrimination; many were effectively stateless and denied equal access to social and economic rights. Women were subject to discrimination and gender-based violence. Sixteen civilians were killed in a bomb explosion which state media attributed to an armed group.

Background

Diplomatic relations with France and the EU improved, and Syria and Lebanon agreed to re-establish diplomatic relations. The government engaged in new indirect talks with Israel.

On 26 October, US forces attacked a building in al-Sukkariyah near Syria's border with Iraq. The Syrian authorities said eight civilians were killed. A US military spokesman said an investigation was being carried out but its findings were not made public.

A report issued on 19 November by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) said it had not been able to establish the nature of a site in Syria destroyed by an Israeli attack in September 2007.

Political prisoners and prisoners of conscience

Hundreds of people were arrested for political reasons, including scores of prisoners of conscience. Hundreds of other political prisoners, including prisoners of conscience, remained imprisoned, including at least two detainees, Ziad Ramadan and Bahaa' Mustafa Joughel, held without trial since 2005. Scores faced trial before the Supreme State Security Court (SSSC), Criminal Court or Military Court, all of which failed to respect international standards for fair trials.

- Kamal al-Labwani, a prisoner of conscience already serving a 12-year prison term, was sentenced to an additional three years by Damascus Military Court on 23 April, on charges of "broadcasting false or exaggerated news which could affect the morale of the country", on account of remarks he was alleged to have made in his prison cell.
- In August, Nabil Khlioui and at least 12 other alleged Islamists, mostly from Deir al-Zour, were arrested. At least 10 of them remained in incommunicado detention without charge or trial at the end of the year.
- On 15 August, Mesh'al al-Tammo was arrested because of his activities as spokesperson for the unauthorized Kurdish Future Current group. He was held incommunicado for 12 days and charged with "aiming to provoke civil war or sectarian fighting", "conspiracy" and three other charges commonly brought against Kurdish activists. If convicted, he could face the death penalty.
- On 29 October, the Damascus Criminal Court convicted 12 pro-democracy activists of "weakening national sentiment" and "broadcasting false or exaggerated news which could affect the morale of the country". They each received 30-month prison sentences for their involvement in the Damascus Declaration for Democratic National Change, a coalition of unauthorized political parties, human rights organizations and pro-democracy activists from across the political spectrum. Dr Feda'a al-Horani, former prisoners of conscience Akram al-Bunni and Riad Seif, and nine others were arrested between 9 December 2007 and 30 January and were initially held incommunicado, during which at least eight of them were punched in the face, kicked and slapped, and forced to sign false confessions.
- On 7 August, 'Aref Dalilah, a former university economist, was unexpectedly released under a presidential amnesty. He had served seven years of a 10-year prison term, much of it in solitary confinement, for his involvement in the so-called "Damascus Spring", a peaceful pro-democracy movement. He had been in increasingly poor health.

The UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention announced in May that the detention of Mus'ab al-Hariri was arbitrary because his trial had failed substantially to meet international fair trial standards. He had been arrested when aged 15, held incommunicado for more than two years and reportedly tortured. He was then sentenced by the SSSC in June 2005 to six years in prison for belonging, despite no substantiating evidence, to the banned Muslim Brotherhood. Despite the Working Group's finding, the authorities took no steps to remedy the situation of Mus'ab al-Hariri.

Also in May the Working Group announced that it had found the imprisonment of Anwar al-Bunni, Michel Kilo and Mahmoud 'Issa to be arbitrary because they were convicted for legitimately exercising their right to freedom of expression and because their trials had substantially failed to meet international fair trial standards. Lawyer Anwar al-Bunni had been sentenced to a five-year prison term in April 2007 for his legitimate work in defending human rights, while Michel Kilo and Mahmoud 'Issa had been sentenced to three years' imprisonment in May 2007 for their involvement in the Beirut-Damascus Declaration, a petition signed by some 300 Syrian and Lebanese nationals calling for the normalization of relations between their two countries. On 15 December, the Court of

Appeal overturned its earlier decision in November to release Michel Kilo and Mahmoud 'Issa.

Also in May the Working Group declared that it had found the imprisonment of seven men to be arbitrary because they were convicted in a grossly unfair trial for legitimately exercising their right to freedom of expression. Maher Isber Ibrahim and Tareq al-Ghorani were sentenced to seven years' imprisonment and the five others to five-year prison terms in June 2007 for involvement in a youth discussion group and publishing pro-democracy articles on the internet.

Counter-terror and security

Individuals cleared of involvement in terrorist acts or who are related to individuals suspected of involvement in such acts were subjected to arbitrary and incommunicado detention.

- Basel Ghalyoun, who was forcibly returned to Syria by the Spanish authorities after the Spanish Supreme Court acquitted him of involvement in the 2004 bomb attacks on trains in Madrid, was detained on arrival on 22 July. He remained held incommunicado at the end of the year.
- Muhammad Zammar, a victim of suspected unlawful rendition to Syria by the US authorities, remained in prison serving a 12-year sentence imposed by the SSSC despite the UN Working Group's announcement in June 2007 that his detention was arbitrary.
- Two women, Usra al-Hussein and Bayan Saleh 'Ali, were arrested on 31 July and 4 August respectively in al-'Otayba, east of Damascus, and were still held at the end of 2008. The authorities gave no reason for their arrest but some sources suggested that it was related to their efforts to communicate with an international organization regarding the detention conditions of Usra al-Hussein's husband, Jihad Diab, in the US military base at Guantánamo Bay.

Enforced disappearances and impunity

The fate of some 17,000 people, mostly Islamists who were victims of enforced disappearance in the late 1970s and early 1980s, and hundreds of Lebanese and Palestinians who were detained in Syria or abducted from Lebanon by Syrian forces or Lebanese and Palestinian militias, remained unknown. In August, the Lebanese and Syrian Presidents issued a joint statement pledging to examine the fate of people who disappeared in Syria and Lebanon.

- In March, Milad Barakat, a Lebanese man imprisoned in Syria for 16 years, was returned to Lebanon, apparently in a traumatized state. Lebanese security officials had detained him in 1992 and handed him over to the Syrian authorities, who sentenced him to 15 years' imprisonment for fighting against the Syrian army.

On 30 September, the government issued Legislative Decree No. 69. This conferred immunity against prosecution to political security, police and customs officials for crimes committed on duty except in cases where a warrant was issued by the general leadership of the army and military forces.

Unlawful killings

Attacks were carried out by unidentified people. On 12 February, 'Imad Mughniyah, a suspected senior Lebanese Hizbullah commander, was killed by a car bomb in Damascus. On 2 August, Brigadier General Mohammad Suleiman, a senior security officer reported

to be the IAEA's main Syrian interlocutor, was shot dead in Tartous.

A car bomb detonated on 27 September near a security forces' building in Damascus killed 17 people, including 16 civilians. State television broadcasted "confessions" of the alleged perpetrators on 6 November. They had not been brought to trial by the end of 2008.

Amid disturbances in Sednaya Military Prison near Damascus that started on 5 July, Military Police were reported to have killed at least 17 detainees and five other people. The circumstances of the violence and the fate of all prisoners there remained unclear, as the authorities did not announce whether they had investigated the killings, gave no details of the people killed or injured, and did not permit any visits to the prison or prisoners afterwards.

On 14 October, security officials opened fire on unarmed people in al-Mishrefeh, near Homs, killing Sami Ma'touq and Joni Suleiman. The Military Prosecutor announced an investigation but its outcome had not been made public by the end of the year. Unidentified individuals were reported to have tampered with evidence at the scene of the killings on 20 October, increasing concern that any investigation would be flawed.

Freedom of expression

Freedom of expression and all forms of media remained strictly controlled by the state. Punitive laws were used against those who expressed dissent.

- Tariq Biasi, a blogger, was sentenced to three years' imprisonment by the SSSC on 11 May on charges of "weakening national sentiment" and "spreading false news". He had posted critical comments about the security services on a website. Arrested in July 2007, he was held in pre-trial detention for 10 months.
- Habib Saleh, a pro-reform activist and former prisoner of conscience, was arrested in May and held incommunicado for three months, then brought to trial before the Damascus Criminal Court on charges including "weakening national sentiment" and "aiming to provoke civil war or sectarian fighting". The charges arose from articles on the internet calling for governmental reform and democracy. If convicted, he could face the death penalty.
- Karim 'Arabji, a blogger, was being tried before the SSSC on the charge of "spreading false news". He was alleged to have moderated the internet youth forum www.akhawia.net. Following his arrest in June 2007, Karim 'Arabji was reported to have been held in prolonged incommunicado detention during which he was tortured and otherwise ill-treated.
- It was reported on 8 December that Fu'ad Shurbaji, chief editor of a small private TV station, had been convicted of "slander" and "defamation" of a state media official and sentenced to three days' imprisonment.

Torture and other ill-treatment

Detainees continued to be tortured and otherwise ill-treated. Confessions extracted under duress were used as evidence in court. Seven deaths were reported to have occurred as a possible result of abuses in custody. The authorities took no action to investigate torture allegations.

Violence and discrimination against women

At least 29 women were reportedly killed in the name of "honour" and the perpetrators

of such killings, when prosecuted, continued to receive lenient sentences under the Penal Code. Women's rights defenders campaigned for better protection from gender-based violence and for an end to legal discrimination against women. In July, the authorities said that a committee was being formed to draft an anti-trafficking law.

Discrimination – Kurds

Members of the Kurdish minority, who comprise up to 10 per cent of the population, continued to suffer from identity-based discrimination, including restrictions on the use of the Kurdish language and culture. Tens of thousands of Syrian Kurds remained effectively stateless and so were denied equal access to social and economic rights.

On 10 September, the authorities issued Legislative Decree No. 49. This further restricted housing and property rights in border areas, including the pre-dominantly Kurdish-populated north-east border areas.

Human rights defenders

Human rights NGOs remained active although they were not officially authorized. Human rights defenders continued to face harassment. Lawyers Muhannad al-Hassani and Razan Zeitouneh were among at least 20 human rights defenders prevented from travelling abroad.

Death penalty

The death penalty remained in force for a wide range of offences. At least one person convicted of murder was executed and on 1 April seven others were sentenced to death for drug trafficking.

In December, Syria voted against a UN General Assembly resolution calling for a worldwide moratorium on executions.

Refugees and asylum-seekers

Syria continued to host around 1 million Iraqi refugees. Some Iraqi refugees were arrested and forcibly returned to Iraq for having incorrect residency or work permits or for being suspected of working with international organizations. Syria also hosted around 500,000 Palestinian refugees who are long-term residents. Tens of thousands of Syrians remained internally displaced due to Israel's continuing occupation of the Golan.

Ahwazi (Iranian Arab) asylum-seekers continued to be at risk of forcible return to Iran.

- On 27 September, Ma'soumeh Ka'bi and her five children aged between four and 14 were forcibly returned to Iran, where they were immediately detained.

Amnesty International visits

An Amnesty International delegation visited Syria in February/March to look into the situation of Iraqi refugees and to gather information about human rights abuses in Iraq.

Amnesty International reports

- Iraq: Rhetoric and reality: the Iraqi refugee crisis (15 June 2008)
- Syria: Repressing dissent: Pro-democracy activists on trial in Syria (8 October 2008)

Copyright notice: © Copyright Amnesty International
