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Syrian Human Rights Committee

SHRC Tenth Annual Report on Human Rights Status in Syria

(Covering the period from January to December 2010)



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Contents

1. Contents	3
2. Preface	4
3. Death under Torture	7
4. Missing Persons in Sednaya Prison Massacre	10
5. Missing Persons in Sednaya Prison Massacre	10
6. Human Rights' Activists and the Civil Society	11
7. The Forced Exiled and the Portfolio of Law 49/1980	13
1. The Forced Exiled and Documentation	13
2. Asylum to the West.....	15
3. Documentation of Missing Persons	15
4. Arrests, Trials & Releases	16
8. Examples of the State's Security Court's Rulings for 2010 ...	17
9. Examples on the State's Military Tribunals' Sentences for 2010	19
10. Kurds	22
11. The Portfolio of Arbitrary Arrest	23
12. Examples on those Released	31
13. Persons Prevented from Travelling	34
14. Violating the Rights of Students and Teachers at the Ministry of Education & Higher Education and Private Schools.....	37
15. The General Situation of Media in Syria – Status Quo	39
16. Syrian Human Rights Committee in Brief	42

Preface

The ruling regime in Syria is the most oppressing and harsh towards its citizens throughout the entire Arab region. It has been ruling in accordance to a state of emergency ever since the military coup in 1963. This rule has brought with it a number of laws and tools that are reprehensible such as military tribunals, the Supreme State Security Court, a multitude of new security and intelligence apparatus and, to top it all, the permanent Constitution of 1973. The State has taken claim of the judiciary, put an end to its independence and forced it to become servant of the dictations of the security apparatus. In 1980, the State made an unprecedented qualitative addition in issuing Law 49/1980 which condemns a large segment of the regime's opposition to receiving the death penalty for merely possessing an intellectual affiliation to the opposition. This is in addition to the fact that many Syrians of Kurdish descent have been stripped of their nationality in accordance to the 1962 census and much legislation have been issued to minimise their rights in their own country. Every year, new tools of oppression are added to this oppressive regime, especially with regard to the practise thereof that is most harsh and oppressive such as imprisonment, murder, expulsion, prevention from travelling, torture, corruption, suppression of speech, despotism, combating one's belief, monopolising the media and preventing the civil society from practising its role, etc .

Human Rights in Syria have witnessed many grand and important cases this year. Random and arbitrary arrests remained and the Syrian security authorities continued to demean Syrians' integrity and abuse them as well as physically torture them to the extent that many have lost their lives in certain cases. The fate of tens who have died in the Sednaya massacre is still unknown in light of the Authorities' persistence on total blackout of information as well as taking all measures to prevent the leaking of the massacre's news and scary details outside the prison walls.

Despite the release of detainees from 'the Damascus Declaration for National Democratic Change', except for Ali Al-Abdullah who has been sent for a new trial due to his expression of opinion, many equally important human rights activists – such as lawyers Haitham Al-Maleh

and Muhannad Al-Husseini – have been handed down long prison terms due to their work on human rights and public liberties in Syria. These people have been deliberately mistreated, abused and physically attacked by prison authorities or criminal detainees whom the prison administration has instigated .

The Syrian society has also been preoccupied with the rising arrests of young ladies and women in general coupled with mistreating them and their disappearance in detention centres despite the sensitivity of this topic for the Syrian society and its traditions of respecting women. Hence, the community has reacted tremendously against the detention of the two students: Tal Al-Malloohi and Ayaat Ahmad in addition to blogger Raghda Al-Hasan (female), Tuhama Ma'arouf (female), Hadiyya Yousuf (female) and Fatima Ahmad (female) ... in denial of this harshness of arrest, accusation, concealment and torture.

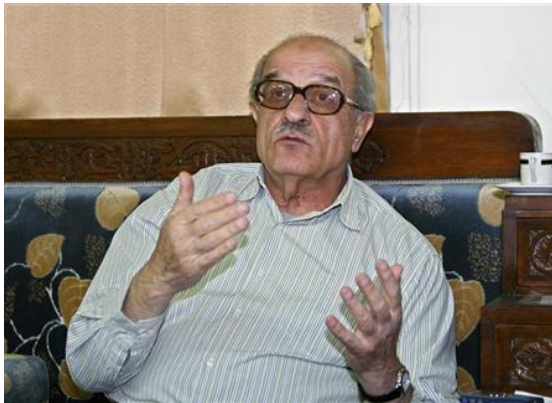
As the suffering and elimination of tens of thousands exiled migrants forced to leave Syria for more than thirty years continues, most Syrian embassies have ceased to provide them with any services by order from the security apparatus and imposes impossible conditions on them for receiving passports, registering births and marriages, issuing powers of attorney ... and at the same time, the Syrian Regime continues with its policy of silence regarding the fate of approximately 20 thousand detainees who have been reported missing in its jails in suspicious circumstances during the 1980's.

As for the suffering of the Kurdish citizens, it still continues as the Regime denies their cultural, heritage and linguistic existence and the right of many of them to equal citizenship and the right of ownership in their areas which they were stripped from due to decree 49/2008; this is in addition to their violated rights which would equate them to the rest of the population in Syria. Therefore, the rate of violating their rights, arresting them and sentencing them, has risen tremendously this year.

The Exceptional State Security Court in Damascus and the military tribunals in the provinces have remained the most far reaching in handing down very harsh and unjustified sentences against the citizens for their expression of opinion, belief or for concern for the current issues; whereas other civil courts have – sometimes – been manipulated to hand down sentences that are not less lenient to certain

citizens; a matter which confirms that the judiciary is no more than a smoke screen and a puppet to the decisions of the security apparatus . As the lists of people prevented from travelling has continued to increase and inflate, there has been a rise in the attack on religious manifestations and women wearing hijab and niqab such as not allowing them to teach or enter university campuses coupled with transfer of professors and teachers and closure of private Islamic schools, among other provocations; whereas schools with other inclinations have been allowed to do what they wish.

The number of restricted websites has increased; including the most famous social media websites. Syrian youth in particular and the society at large have remained restricted from communicating with the outer world. The policy of official media monopolisation in all its forms has continued, in addition to monopolisation of information and publications and the continued self supervision of media personnel, reporters and all private publications connected to the Regime. As for those who forget or deviate, they will always be reminded of the harsh punishment that awaits them.



Lawyer Haitham Al-Maleh (the former President of the Syrian Human Rights' Association) who was handed down a three-year jail term on 4/7/2010 by the Damascus Military Criminal Court

Death under Torture

Syrian authorities have not introduced a single positive step towards preventing torture or minimising its excessive use in prisons, detention and interrogation centres. The use of primitive tools for torture such as beating, kicking, the use of sticks and electric cables, to more sophisticated means of torture, are readily available and in escalating innovation. The barbaric method in which torture is delivered to the victim follows no perceivable reasoning, and when the dosage is increased in an uncalculated way, it leads to dangerous complications that touch upon the safety of the victim. Security apparatus have become accustomed to not caring about the safety of the citizens they are interrogating and do not equate between the torture they are receiving and the nature of their charge. If the victim dies, the authorities in charge of the prison fabricate reports and claim that death was due to unavoidable natural causes. One must take into consideration that the large percentage of fatalities under torture is due to the excessive jurisdiction allowed to the security and intelligence apparatus and to the many decrees that do not hold the perpetrators responsible for their actions while on the job, as well as to the harsh directives of forcing a confession out of the victim be it true or false that a detainee would give so as to rid oneself from torture as there exists no apparatus that may hold these security and intelligence personnel responsible for their actions. These cases of death under torture, which we document a number of every year, occur in light of Regime terrorism that does not allow a public outcry against these unjustified deaths; and there is a deafening silence on the part of the international community in this regard.

In this report, we briefly show some samples of news we have received concerning citizens who have expired under torture or as reason of it, which has been perpetrated against them by a variety of security apparatus this year:

Syrian citizen Mohammad Massto Rasheed (Ifrin/Aleppo) was announced dead on (19/1/2010) after four months of arrest. He was severely tortured and moved to Al-Himmiyyat Hospital in Aleppo four days before he died and then transferred back to Aleppo Central Prison.

The victim is not known to have had any activity and the reason for his detention is unknown.

Al-Mu'atasim Billah Shafe'a Al-Hareeri, a 25 year-old young man from Dar'aa died on 25/5/2010 due to the torture he received during his arrest. Al-Mu'atasim Billah had travelled to Syria from his place of residency in the United Arab Emirates after having finished all official matters required from him with the competent Syrian authorities in April 2009, but was arrested upon arrival to Syria and for 30 days, was exposed to high dosages of severe torture that he could not bear neither physically nor psychologically. His suffering continued for 10 months after his release until he passed away.

Jalal Horan Al-Kubaisi, a young 25 year-old man from Damascus, died while detained at the Criminal Security Centre in Damascus on 31/5/2010. He was arrested on 28/5/2010 for a labour violation that has a maximum of 250 Syrian Lira fine, or a day's detention, but was beaten so severely, punched and whipped with electric cables that he died 2 days later. Evidence of torture was visible on his body, but the officer-in-charge and Centre personnel presented a fabricated report and threatened the witnesses.

Engineer Wadee'a Sha'abooq (53/Aleppo) died in the same way at the Criminal Security branch in Aleppo/Ashrafiyyeh. He was beaten on his chest and head very severely upon his arrival to the Centre on 13/7/2010 with documentation proving that his son had completed the military service he was being required to serve. He suffered a heart attack due to the beating and was not medicated quickly enough; a matter which led to his death on 17/7/2010.

The body of Syrian citizen Mohammad Ali Rahmoon (Homs) was delivered on 21/6/2010 after being arrested by the Air Force Intelligence and severely beaten due to a quarrel with the Financial Department when an official representative demanded a larger sum after increasing the tax on his shop. Mohammad Ali Rahmoon was accused of calling the government bad names and was handed over to his family with his nails pulled out, teeth broken and body mutilated.

Syrian citizen Riyad Ahmad Khalil (42/Ifrin-Aleppo) died in a Political Security Interrogation branch and was buried under heavy security on 28/8/2010. Only his wife and parents were allowed a final look at him whereas his two sons Ahmad and Dimhat, who were arrested with him

two months prior to that, were not allowed to participate in his burial and their fate is yet unknown.

Hammam Walid Ruqayya (19 years old/Jeiroud – Damascus) died in a security branch's dungeon after being severely tortured for unknown reasons. His body was handed over to his parents three months after his arrest on (30/10/2010) and his family were told not to hold a memorial service.



The activist Ali Al-Abdullah who was referred to the State's Supreme Security Court on 19/4/2010 before the due end of his prison term on 17/6/2010 for political statements he gave

Missing Persons in Sednaya Prison Massacre

Despite the passage of two and a half years on the Sednaya Prison massacre which the prison's authorities committed on 5/7/2008, Syrian authorities have not reported on the fate of fifty people whose trace was lost. It is only natural that they have died during the protest the prisoners held due to the bad treatment they received. The authorities still prevent the families of those fifty from visitation and deny the existence of their children at the prison without giving their families any other explanation or any glimpse of hope. This irresponsible behaviour by the authorities is considered a dereliction of duty that mandates the Regime abide by its responsibility of preserving the lives of the citizens in its custody, yet it is not something out of the ordinary for the Syrian authorities who have killed tens of thousands of detainees without informing their families of their fate. Among those missing whom we have heard of lately: Ahmad Mahmoud Al-Shaikh (Damascus Rural – 36), Basil Madarati (Damascus Rural – 30), Baraa' Ma'aniyya (27), Tahseen Mamo (30), Khaled Ali Khaled (33), Ziad Al-Kilani (Damascus Rural), Shiyar Mamo (32), Amer Abdulhadi Al-Shaikh (Damascus Rural – 24), Omar Jamal Nadir (26), Omar Sa'eed Hassan, Fadi Abdulghani, Mohammad Ahmad Abdulghani (35), Mohammad Osama Atiyyeh (33), Mohammad Izzeddine Diab (Damascus Rural), Mohammad Tayyib Al-Raddar (42), Mohammad Fadi Feisal Sha'aban (28), Nizar Rastanawi (Hamah – 41), Yahia Al-Bunduqji (Damascus Rural – 39).

Human Rights' Activists and the Civil Society

During June and July, Syrian authorities released the leaders of the Damascus Declaration after serving their two and a half year sentence. These are: Ahmad Tu'ama Al-Khedir, Jabr Al-Shoufi, Akram Al-Bunni, Fidaa' Al-Hourani, Talal Abu Dan, Riyad Seif, Walid Al-Bunni, Yasir Al-lyti, Fayez Sarah, Mohammad Hajji Darwish and Marwan Al-Ush. It retained the custody, though, of Ali Al-Abdullah who was referred to the State's Supreme Security Court on 19/4/2010 before the due end of his prison term on 17/6/2010 for political statements he gave to Italian news agency Acki while still in prison. He has been charged with the dissemination of false news that could weaken the morals of the nation and the deliberate intent of disturbing the Regime's good relations with a foreign country. He is currently still in Adra Central Prison awaiting his trial and will be handed down a new sentence.

In another vein, on 23/6/2010, the Second Criminal Court in Damascus handed down a three-year jail term to lawyer Muhannad Al-Husseini – President of the Syrian Human Rights Organisation – who has been imprisoned since 28/7/2009 for documenting rulings issued by the State Security Court and other courts. He has been charged with weakening the national morals and the dissemination of false news that will further weaken the nation. A few days after he was awarded the Martin Ennals Award for Defenders of Human Rights in 2010, he was violently attacked by an inmate whom the prison authorities instigated, in his cell at the Damascus Central Prison in Adra on 28/10/2010 which resulted in a deep wound that required ten stitches in his forehead and a blood aneurism that almost cost him his eyesight.

On 4/7/2010, the Damascus Military Criminal Court handed down a three-year jail term to lawyer Haitham Al-Maleh – the former President of the Syrian Human Rights' Association – for his legal activism and for giving a statement to a satellite channel regarding corruption in Syria. He has been charged with disseminating false news that aims to weaken the nation's morals. The eighty-year old Al-Maleh suffers from many illnesses but has not been allowed to take his prescribed medication, and is allowed only to use readily available medicine at the prison which does not suit his condition.

On 23/2/2010, Abdul Hafeeth Abdulrahman – member of the Syrian Human Rights Organisation's Board of Trustees (MAF) – was arrested at his home in Al-Ashrafiyyeh/Aleppo. He was referred to court on 1/9/2010, i.e. six months after his arrest, and was released by order of the presiding judge.

On 23/8/2010, Isma'eel Abdi – Member of the Board of Trustees for the Committees for the Defence of Democratic Freedoms and Human Rights in Syria – was arrested and has not been freed nor referred to court for trial since then.

On 20/10/2010, Mustapha Badee'a Haj Bakri – member of the Arab Human Rights Organisation in Syria – along with his daughter Ishraq were arrested in Latakia. Reason for his arrest is yet unknown.

On 28/6/2010, Mahmoud Bareesh (64, Idlib) was arrested and jailed due to his activities with the Damascus Declaration for National Change Coalition.

On 23/1/2010, a military security patrol car arrested Doctor of Pharmacy Walid Mahmoud Yousuf – member of the Board of Trustees for the Kurdish Human Rights and Public Liberties Organisation in Syria (DAD) – and no news has been heard of him since his arrest.

On 7/11/2010, the Military Criminal Court in Aleppo sentenced legal activist Mustapha Ismail Bakr to two and a half years in prison for his writings on various Internet websites and for taking part in talk shows on some Kurdish satellite channels.

On 24/11/2010, the Criminal Court in Damascus handed down a two-year prison sentence to Khalaf Al-Jarboo'a (1963, Al-Raqa) for diminishing the State's status and being a member of an underground association whose aim is to alter the State's economic and social being. In reality, he was jailed due to his opposing remarks against the State on the Internet and for attending the meeting of the National Committee of the Damascus Declaration for Democratic National Change almost three years ago. Khalaf had been previously arrested (1985-1991) for membership in the Communist Party – Political Bureau. He was arrested while en route to Lebanon on 27/10/2009.

The Forced Exiled and the Portfolio of Law 49/1980

1. The Forced Exiled and Documentation

Many local and regional official and popular parties have tried to bring an end to the disagreements between the authority and the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria and to solve the issues pending between them for more than three decades. But the news we have received states that these efforts have led to a dead end due to the authority's unwillingness to merely deal with this complex portfolio that brings along with it tens of thousands of missing persons, hundreds of thousands exiled migrants, tens of thousands dead people as well as many files related to thousands of real estate properties that the Regime has seized and rights that have been violated.

Very few and rare are the organisations that boldly deal with this portfolio as it shall lead to damnation and direct merciless punishment from the authority. Therefore, we do not witness for this suffering as much echo as in other reports even though it is a matter at the heart of human rights. Also, we find that many relatives of forced exiled persons suffer from prevention from travel, deprivation from the right to hold office or be employed even if they are qualified professionals; and all of this for merely a blood relation.

In 2010, the Syrian regime escalated its pressure on tens of thousands of citizens forced to leave the country and who live in their forced exile in neighbouring and far countries by preventing them from renewing or issuing travel documents, as issuing such is considered the scale by which one can judge how hard-line the authority is. The regime's behaviour was described as constantly stiff up until 2005 when the Office of the Minister of Foreign Affairs issued a circular that grants passports to all Syrians living abroad regardless of the reasons that previously prevented them from obtaining them. But later, in December 2009, the security apparatus issued instructions to the departments of Passports and Immigration to stop issuing Forced exiled Syrians any official family documents they used to receive via their relatives in the country. At the same

time, Syrian embassies abroad have mandated that any citizen wishing to renew his/her passport must issue a new family record, rendering the matter almost impossible to achieve. Names of citizens banned from being issued any documentation or receiving any services from within Syria have been sent via the Internet to Syrian embassies and consulates abroad.

The implementation of these directives was selective as some embassies in Yemen, Iraq, Jordan and the Sudan (countries where many forced exiled Syrians reside) were strict in allowing forced Syrian migrants from obtaining documents, registering births and granting them powers of attorney; whereas Syrian embassies in other countries had a mix of orderly issuance of documents mixed with certain strictness and along with some corrupt employees benefitting financially through the extortion of people in dire need for passports so that they may not be deported from their countries of residence.

A private report on the practises of the Syrian embassy in Yemen has stated that its employees hinder the requests of forced Syrian migrants. Those responsible for these impediments are first and foremost the Embassy's security officer Muhsin Dirgham, Ambassador AbdelGhafour AsSabooni and Ma'en Al-Ghazzi as well as the ex-Consul Alaa' Hamdan and the current one Mohammad Dayyoub. The Embassy refuses to register new birth and requests that the parents travel to Syria to do so, noting that this is a matter impossible to achieve in light of Law 49/1980 which condemns to death any member of the Muslim Brotherhood, their children, relatives or sympathisers. The Embassy is notably strict in demanding that required documents be presented for issuing passports and requests a family record to be presented, a matter which is only allowed for people living in Syria to do, and demands that the tax for living abroad be paid by force even though it is only paid upon return of citizens to Syria proper. In many instances, the tax is taken from the citizens as a condition for receiving or extending a passport, but afterwards, the Embassy still refuses to issue the documents. The passports are also confiscated at the Embassy or by the authorities in Syria when handed over for renewal or extension. The Embassy refuses to register marriages

and births and insists that people travel to Syria to do so. This is in addition to refusing to certify documents and university records for political reasons. The report issued by the Syrian Human Rights' Committee in Yemen – an independent organisation – includes lists of hundreds of cases in each category. Matters are also not less severe at the embassies in the Sudan and Iraq, and then Jordan, as well as at other Syrian embassies around the world. We have issued similar reports in the course of 2010 about how Syrian embassies treat their forced migrant citizens and we have made reference to certain examples.

2. Asylum to the West

The Syrian Human Rights Committee has detected an active increase in the numbers of Syrians going to Europe in recent months. We believe the reason is because of the increasing pressure by the Syrian authorities and its return to its tools of the past that are more oppressive, and we fear that this will reflect more negatively on the status of forced Syrian migrants in those foreign countries.

3. Documentation of Missing Persons

As for the missing persons in Syrian prisons for approximately 30 years, despite active search in all directions, the Syrian authorities are ever insistent on cover up and as if things never happened, and whoever seeks information on those missing, is brutalised and punished severely. The Syrian Human Rights Committee has tried as much as possible to gather and document persons missing in Syrian jails since 30 years, whose numbers range between 17000-25000 (according to its statistics), but its efforts also face a multitude of difficulties due to intimidation of relatives to provide any information for fear of falling victim to the authority's oppression. This is in addition to many forced migrants' refusal to provide information for unknown and unjustified reasons; most probably due

to forgetfulness since matters happened so long ago as well as the death of those who had that particular piece of information.

4. Arrests, Trials & Releases

Arrest of forced migrants by the Syrian security apparatus within Syria and abroad through Syria's embassies around the world, and luring them to come to Syria is still ongoing. These authorities do not care much about their reputation when they give a promise to a citizen that all will be well if travelling to Syria, but then that citizen is arrested and tried in accordance with Law 49/1980.

In late February 2010, Syrian authorities arrested citizen Nadir AdDweiri (Homs, late 50's) upon return from his forced exile in Saudi Arabia after being promised not to be harmed by many security entities. He is still somewhere in Syrian prisons since his arrest and no news has been heard of him.

Whereas detainees Yousuf Najiya (Idlib, 1935) and Omar Darweesh (Aleppo, 1953) were released after a Presidential pardon covering those with terminal illnesses.

On 20/12/2010, the State Supreme Security Court sentenced German passport holder Mohammad Fawzi Yousuf (Aleppo/lfrin) to life imprisonment after his sentence was reduced from two counts of execution for being accused of Muslim Brotherhood membership and murder. The Syrian Human Rights Committee has looked into the second charge, i.e. murder, and found it baseless.

Examples of the State's Security Court's Rulings for 2010

The State's Supreme Security Court was introduced following the legislative Law no. 47 on 28/3/1968 and it replaced the Exceptional Military Tribunal. This Court tries those whom it describes as people who pose a threat to the State's security. Its rulings are irreversible and cannot be appealed. The truth of the matter is that trials at this Court do not adhere to any controls or criteria that other trials have at normal courts. The influence of the security apparatus on this Court is absolute and admissions of guilt are ripped out through coercion and torture. Its rulings are politicised and for the silliest reasons at many times. It is considered an exceptional court that was established under the state of emergency whose main purpose is to oppress people's freedom of expressing their opinion.

Instead of heeding continued calls to those concerned in command to dismantle this exceptional and unconstitutional court, they established a second room in early October after its hearings became semi-closed and not even the relatives of the people under trial were allowed to attend.

Some examples of the Court's total injustices for this year are as follows:

In its session on 26/1/2010, the State's Supreme Security Court issued the following sentences to Islamists: nine years' imprisonment for As'ad Abbas who was charged with disrupting Syria's relations with other countries and seven years' imprisonment for Maher Yousuf for the same charge.

On 18/4/2010, the Court issued the following rulings on Kurds: a five-year prison sentence to Nazmi Hannan Mohammad, Yasha Khaled Qadir, Dalkash Shamo Mamo and Ahmad Khaleel Darwish charged with calling for splitting off part of the State's land and annexing it to a foreign country because of their alleged membership in the Kurdish Yekiti Party in Syria.

On 20/6/2010, the Court sentenced Islamists as follows: twelve years' imprisonment for Mahmoud Azeezi, Yahia Hindawi, Rabee'a Doba, AbdulMalik Hammoudah and Omar Othman for membership in a secret

association whose aim is to change the State's political and social structure.

Rabee'a Al-Issa was sentenced to ten years for the same charge and two years for Sameer Shaikh Zein for stirring sectarian and creed feuds . On 22/8/2010, the Court passed sentence on Islamists as follows: An eight-year sentence to Mohammad Omar AsSa'adi, Khaled AsSa'adi and Jabr Mahmoud for membership in a secret association that aims to alter the State's economic and social structure; A six-year sentence to Faris Jabr Omran, Yasir Mohammad Khalil, Faris Jabawi and Mohammad Hussein Ibrahim on the same charge; a five-year sentence to Jamal Ahmad Mar'ee on the same charge and a similar sentence to Iraqi citizen Ghaith Yacoub Yousuf for providing an enemy state with information about Syria.

On 10/10/2010, the Court sentenced Islamists as follows: A six-year jail sentence to Ahmad Madi Al-Abwi, Mani'a Za'al AdDeif and Sa'eed Al-'alo for membership in a secret association aiming at altering the State's economic and social structure through illegitimate means; a five-year prison term to Hussein Al-Matrood, Hani Khalaf As-Sa'adi, As'ad Mohammad As-Sa'adi and AbdulHadi Sa'eed Al-Bustani on the same charge; a three-year jail sentence for Palestinian citizen Mo'ataz AbdulHafeez Al-Wali on the same charge.

On 18/12/2010, the Court sentenced Syrian citizen and holder of German passport Mohammad Fawzi Yousuf to life imprisonment in accordance with Law 49/1980 for membership in the banned Muslim Brotherhood Group.

Examples on the State's Military Tribunals' Sentences for 2010

Many Syrian citizens have been referred this year to stand trial at military courts that are spread out in the provinces for expression of opinion, participation in a ceremony, writing slogans in Kurdish, giving statements to a newspaper or a satellite channel, or for being members of a political party. In the paragraph on Human Rights' Activists, we have mentioned that the elderly human rights activist Haitham Al-Maleh was sentenced by a military court in mid 2010 to three years in jail for a mere statement he gave a satellite channel on corruption in Syria. The sentences of the military courts this year have focused on Kurdish Syrians more than others as we shall notice from the examples we have chosen, simply for clarification purposes and not to say all. In these examples, we have stated only samples of some people who have received sentences and not those whose trials are still ongoing:

On 17/1/2010, the Solitary Military Court in Al-Qamishly sentenced Mohammad Shaikho Issa, Khaleel Ibrahim, AbdulSalam Shaikhmus Mahmoud and Rami Shaikhmus Al-Hassan to six months in prison for stirring sectarian feuds. AbdulSalam Shaikhmus Mahmoud and Rami Shaikhmus Al-Hassan were sentenced to a month's imprisonment for the misdemeanour of inciting riot. Mohammad Sheikho Issa and Khaleel Ibrahim were sentenced to a three-month prison term and three and a half months to AbdulSalam Shaikhmus Mahmoud and Rami Shaikhmus Al-Hassan.

On 17/2/2010, the Solitary Military Court in Al-Qamishli passed a six-year jail sentence to Mohammad Ali Ma'asoom (1959, AdDirbasiyya), Sarla Ahmad (1990, Hasaka), Mohammad Nawwaf al-Muhammad (1991, Al-Hasaka) and Banki Shaikh Mousa Shaikhmus (1978, Amooda) for stirring sectarian and faith feuds.

On 8/2/2010, the Solitary Military Court in Al-Qamishli sentenced Mr. Khalid Mamo Kanjo to four months in prison for stirring sectarian and faith feuds.

On 20/6/2010, the Solitary Military Court in Al-Qamishli passed a one year sentence on Mr. Mahmoud Saffo, member of the Kurdish Left-wing Political Party in Syria, for stirring sectarian and creed

feuds and for membership in a secret and unlicensed association in which he holds a position of leadership.

On 11/7/2010, the Solitary Military Court in Al-Qamishli passed a four-month sentence for stirring sectarian and creed feuds on Suleiman Oso, Hafand Hussein, Iwan Abdullah, Mas'ood Baro, Dal Khawaz Darweesh, Rasho Mikhan Bindwar Shaikhi, Dal Khawaz Mohammad, Sarla AbdulRahman, Riyad Hoban, Ayman Al-Mahmoud, AbdulKareem Abdo, Riyad Ahmad, Dahham Shaikhi, Rasheed Othman and Siwar Shaikhi.

On 25/8/2010, the Military Criminal Court in Al-Qamishli passed a one-year prison sentence on Ifraz Mohammad Amin Yousuf for weakening national feeling.

On 26/9/2010, the Military Criminal Court in Aleppo sentenced Mr. Ibrahim Tayfour Tayfour (Al-Qamishli) to one and a half years imprisonment for creating problems between Syria and a foreign country. The same Court passed a two-year prison term on citizen Ali Mohammad Tammo (Ras Al-Ain) for the same reason.

The Second Solitary Military Court judge in Aleppo passed a five-month sentence on citizen Mohammad Othman Ramadan (Ain Al-Arab, 50 years) for disseminating false news that may cause harm to the State's financial structure. On 26/10/2010, the Military Criminal Court passed a two-year jail sentence on female citizen Manal Ibrahim Ibrahim (Al-Hasaka, 1981) for conducting work and writings that can stir-up problems between Syria and a foreign country.

On 3/10/2010, the Solitary Military Court in Al-Qamishli gave a six-month jail term to Hozan Mohammad (Al-Qamishli, 1986) for committing a felony that may stir racist feuds. It also sentenced Mohammad Abdi Sa'adoon, member of the Political Committee at the Kurdish Azadi Party, to a one-year jail term for membership in a banned political association that was established for the purpose of stirring racist feuds and for holding a position of leadership therein as well as disturbing the fine relations among the nation's elements.

On 29/11/2010, the Military Criminal Court in Aleppo passed a one and a half-year jail sentence onto Dilsheer Khateeb Ahmad (Al-Qamishli) and Lawrence Hajr (Amoodah) for conducting business and publishing writings that may stir problems with a foreign country. The same Court, in the same case, passed a one-year sentence on

Fawwaz Muhyiddeen Hassan (Amoodah) for interfering in matters that will cause problems with a foreign country.

On 2/12/2010, The Third Military Court judge in Aleppo passed a six-month jail term to Abdullah Masko bin Mohammad (Ain Al-Arab, 1987), Azeez Khaleel bin Barkal (Ain Al-Arab, 1962), Khaleel lydan Masto (Ain Al-Arab, 1990), Bozan Bozan bin AbdulQadir (Ain Al-Arab, 1958), Subhi Barkal bin Othman (Ain Al-Arab, 1965) and Fayeq Nabi bin Mohammad (Ain Al-Arab, 1971) for the misdemeanour of conducting business that intends to stir-up sectarian or racist feuds or to encourage conflict between sects and varied elements of society.

On 28/11/2010, the Solitary Military Court in Al-AI-Qamishli sentenced university student Walid Soufi Hussein bin Mohammad Ali to a six-month jail term for inciting sectarian or racist feuds. In the same session, the judge passed a three-month sentence on Mohammad Shaikho Issa, Khaleel Ibraheem, AbdulSalam Shaikhmus and Mahmoud and Rami Shaikhous for the misdemeanour of stirring racist feuds.

On 7/11/2010, the Military Criminal Court in Aleppo passed a two and a half-year sentence on human rights activist Mustapha Ismaeel Bakr for his writings on varied Internet sites and his participation in dialogue shows on certain Kurdish satellite channels.

On 14/12/2010, the Military Criminal Court passed a one and a half-year jail sentence on Mrs. Fatima Ahmad Hawool (Al-Malkiyah, 1976), member of the Kurdish SITAR Women's Party for the misdemeanour of conducting business that stirs problems with a foreign country.

On 29/11/2010, the Military Criminal Court in Aleppo passed a one and a half-year sentence on Dalsheer Khateeb Ahmad (Al-Qamishli) and Lawrence Hajr (Amoodah) for conducting business and writings that stir-up problems with a foreign country.

Kurds

The Syrian Kurdish community faced increasing oppression in 2010. Arbitrary arrests have continued all year long in an increasing manner, especially in north eastern and northern areas and in the capitol Damascus where most Syrians of Kurdish descent live. Military courts in these areas have been filled with waves of Kurds referred to them and who have been sentenced to oppressive jail terms that lack mere objective legal classifications. Most charges they were accused of range from being members in an unlicensed, secret or prohibited organisation which aims at detaching a portion of the country and adding it to a foreign country; or for the dissemination of false news that can weaken the country, stirring up sectarian and racist feuds, inciting riots, inciting sectarian divide, etc.

The Syrian authorities have not hesitated whatsoever in opening fire on Kurds celebrating the new Kurdish year (Nairouz 21/3/2010) where people (such as Mohammad Haidar ...) have died in Al-Raqa, while others were wounded or arrested. Security authorities have vandalised locations for lighting Nairouz fireworks in many areas and have arrested many Syrian citizens.

The authority's security forces have arrested Kurds who are active in the public current issues and human rights, and have sentenced some of them to unjust terms whereas others still await a similar fate at prisons and interrogation centres.

The security apparatus still follows the activities of people interested in Kurdish heritage (language, poetry, folklore, art) and arrests them on the charge of dividing nation members.

We have mentioned many such examples in our statements on Arbitrary and random arrests, Rulings of military tribunals and State security, Civil society activists and Civil society rights .

The Portfolio of Arbitrary Arrest

The Syrian intelligence apparatus arrests anyone it suspects of opposing the current regime in Syria. A member of the opposition does not have to be an activist to be arrested for he/she may possess particular thought that the Regime opposes – as is the case with many religious groups or the thought of labour communist party. This is in addition to any civil activities or the call for reform or peaceful change that brings along a pluralistic democratic regime as has been conducted by the representatives of the Damascus Declaration .

A period of interrogation that may extend to months at end follows an arrest and a detainee is referred afterwards to one of many courts in accordance with whatever classification the crime or misdemeanour proven against him, usually extracted from him/her through torture and coercion, is given; and this is determined by the intelligence apparatus, not the judge.

The courts which detainees are referred to range anywhere from the State's Supreme Security Court – whereby persons referred to it are classified as posing a threat to the State's security such as all Islamic groups – or to Military Courts that are spread out in the provinces. Many Kurds and others are referred to the Solitary Military Court in the provinces where they reside or to the Criminal Court in certain instances. But in any of these scenarios, the sentence would already be preset by the intelligence apparatus that arrested the citizen.

Arbitrary arrest occurs without an arrest warrant or divulging the charge to the individual. In many instances a home or a place of work is charged or the individual may be arrested on the street and would disappear for many months before he/she can be traced. The security apparatus usually do not admit their arrest of him/her to the family or to any knowledge of their whereabouts.

The arrest follows reports from informants spread out among the Syrian society for the intelligence apparatus have been able to infiltrate the family level let alone other institutions; and students or Ba'athist organisations or others, are considered to be the eyes and militia of the Authority.

Arrests are conducted with complete secrecy and nothing is known of a detainee. It usually takes his/her family or close confidants friends to

learn of his arrest, and they usually fear to tell anyone this news or talk about it for fear of punishment and reprisal from the concerned intelligence apparatus. This is why civil society and human rights organisations receive only a trickle of information for they may learn of the arrest of an individual without knowledge of other details such as his charge, the date of his arrest or when he was/will be released.

Arbitrary arrest is in contradiction with the Syrian constitution which states that, "It is not allowed to investigate or arrest an individual except according to the law" and that "Every suspect is considered innocent until convicted by a binding judicial ruling" and that "There shall be no crime nor punishment except those which follow a legal statute" ... but all of these quotes are yet to be implemented since they were ratified in 1973 due to the state of emergency which has practically overshadowed the scene of day-to-day life in Syria since 1963.

Among the examples on Arbitrary Arrest in 2010, we have documented the following :

On 28/1/2010, security apparatus arrested Dr. Hassan Abbara (Talda/Homs, 1949) after many security summons; his release has not been confirmed.

On 2/1/2010, Syrian journalist Ali Taha was arrested after being summoned to a security agency in Damascus; we have been unable to follow up on his case.

On 1/1/2010, Air Force Intelligence arrested Kurdish religious cleric AbdulRazzak Janko (Al-Al-Qamishli, 1948) while attempting to travel to the UAE to visit one of his sons, but was released on 17/1/2010.

In late February 2010, forced migrant Nadir AdDweiri (in his late 50's) was arrested upon returning from his forced exile in Saudi Arabia. He is still under arrest and has disappeared in jail while his fate remains unknown.

On 10/2/2010, female writer Raghda Hassan (38) was arrested while attempting to travel to Lebanon. She was left incommunicado with the outer world and was interrogated by the Political Security and is still under arrest as she is being tried at the Military Criminal Court in Homs. She is also an ex-detainee due to her membership in the Communist Labour Party, but her latest arrest is not related to this matter but rather to the fact that she wrote an unpublished political novel entitled 'The New Prophets.'

On 28/3/2010, Kurdish Syrian opposing citizen, Mahmoud Saffo, was arrested after being summoned for interrogation by the Political Security in Al-Malkiyyah.

On 20/3/2010, a security patrol arrested driver Bassam AbdulJaleel Shakir (Al-Hasaka, 28) and we have been unable to follow his case.

On 19/3/2010, citizen Fareed Jammo (Ifrin) was arrested for celebrating Nairouz.

On 19/3/2010, young Qutaiba Al-Issa (Homs) was arrested at the airport upon return from Malaysia where he is continuing his graduate studies in political and administrative sciences. His fate is still unknown, but unconfirmed reports have stated that he is in the Palestine branch for Military Interrogation.

On 17/3/2010, university student Hanadi Mohammad (Ain Al-Arab, 1986) was arrested for standing in solidarity with the victims of Halabja who perished in the 1980's in Iraq. He was released on 24/4/2010.

On 21/2/2010, Syrian Border Security authorities arrested opposition member Ahmad Bsamsi (Idlib, 70) upon return from exile after 42 years and after having received special security permission to enter Syria. He was later released on 25/3/2010,

Syrian citizen Shams Eddein Sayyid Khaleel bin Yousuf (46) was arrested at Damascus International Airport upon return from a 16-year stay in Germany. He is still under arrest till date.

Kurdish Syrian young citizen Rasho Abbas Ibraheem (Al-Qamishli, 1990) was arrested at his place of work by a State Security patrol in Al-Qamishli. He was immediately transferred to Damascus.

On 18/4/2010, a State Security patrol in Aleppo arrested university student of Kurdish descent, Azad AbdulRazzaq Wali.

On 16/4/2010, the Military Intelligence arrested Kurdish Hadiyya Al-Malki (Al-Malikiya, 1972) who is a female activist in the Women's Union – SITAR – while she was visiting a village in the Ifrin district in Aleppo rural areas.

On 4/3/2010, an intelligence patrol in Damascus stormed the residence of Kurdish citizen Saleh Mulla Sa'eed Suleiman and took him – blindfolded – to an unknown area despite the serious diseases he suffers from.

On 24/5/2010, activist Hussam Eddine Kurdi was arrested after heavily armed security personnel closed down the Hamdaniya neighbourhood and confiscated two computers, books and various publications.

On 20/5/2010, Syrian Mohammad Abdi Sa'adoon - member of the Political Committee at the Kurdish Azadi Party in Syria – was arrested after being summoned by the General Intelligence branch. His fate is yet unknown.

On 18/5/2010, a security patrol arrested Kurdish student Bahour Saleh Ahmad (Aleppo). His fate is yet unknown.

Hussein Musllam Jarad – a student at the Aleppo University Faculty of Engineering – was arrested by a security apparatus without knowing the reason(s).

On 2/5/2010, an intelligence apparatus patrol in Damascus arrested Philosophy student Abdullah Natheer Mohammad (Al-Hasaka, 1985).

On 7/2/2010, student of Journalism at Damascus University, Radwan Rasheed Othman (Tell Abyad, 1987) was arrested and referred to the Military Court after two and a half months of his arrest.

Young Benkin Mohammad Amin Antar (21) was arrested after storming his house.

In May 2010, young Radwan Mohammad Shareef was arrested at an Internet cafe in Al-Qamishli.

On 2/4/2010, a security apparatus arrested Syrian citizen of Kurdish descent, Mustapha fajr Habash (Ain Al-Arab, 1967) without knowing the reason.

The following are some citizens arrested during April and May 2010 in the city of Ain Al-Arab: Luqman Mustapha Na'asan, Khaleel Othman Shaikho, Jarrah Dawood Shaikho, Saleh Mohammad Bozan, Mohammad Ali Haj Afdo, Adel Khaleel Kar'o, Ali Mustafi, Darweesh AbdulQadir and Anwar Mesteh (1974).

On 5/3/2010, a security branch patrol in Ain Al-Arab arrested the following Kurdish citizens: Bozan Bozan AbdulQadir and Waheed khaleel Yousuf after storming the latter's house and detaining him for hours before releasing him, and then re-arresting him and sending him to Aleppo.

On 13/4/2010, ten Kurdish citizens were arrested for participating in Nairouz festivities in Al-Raqa. They are members of the Kortek village. These are: Mohammad Issa, Jum'aa Mohammad Issa, Iskandar

Mohammad Issa, Ma'asoum Mustafa Issa, Ramadan Mohammad Musallam, Mohammad Ramadan Musallam, Adnan Ramadan Musallam, Mohammad Mahmoud Musallam, Mustafa Mahmoud Musallam and Yacoub Mahmoud Musallam .

Also arrested was Ali Mustapha (Tell Abyad, 1968) who was inquiring about the whereabouts of his brother who was wounded during the Nairouz festivities.

On 26/4/2010, a security apparatus in Ain Al-Arab arrested three Kurdish citizens after holding memorial services on 23/4/2010 at the Kortek Sheikhan village. The arrested were: Haji Ismaeil (Kortek Sheikhan, 1950), Mohammad Ismaeil (Kortek Sheikhan, 1955) and Sayyad Mahmoud (Kortek Sheikhan, 1955).

Citizen Ismat Shaikh Hassan was arrested by a security apparatus in Ain Al-Arab three times in one week. He was detained after his last arrest and referred to Aleppo. Reasons for his arrest and his whereabouts in Aleppo are unknown.

In May 2010, military recruit AbdulRahman Shalabi (Damascus, 19) was arrested by the Air Force Intelligence from his military unit in Homs – where he serves his military service – for reasons of recurrent visits to Internet cafés. He was not among those released by the end of 2010.

Reliable sources have stated that writer and Kurdish activist in the Committees for Defence of Democratic Freedoms and Human Rights in Syria, Kamal Shaikho (Al-Hasaka, 1978), was arrested on 23/6/2010 at the Syrian-Lebanese border.

On 5/5/2010, a Military Intelligence patrol stormed the Minute Machinery Department at the oil refinery in Homs and arrested young Ghassan Al-Kurdi (Homs, 1972) for his religious inclinations.

A second patrol, and on the same date, stormed the shop of young Muhannad Ghannoum in the Baba Amro neighbourhood West of Homs and took him to an unknown location. He is the brother of Jamal Ghannoum who was detained three years ago without trial at Sednaya Prison under the pretence of holding 'Salafist' thought.

A third patrol, on the same date, stormed the home of cleric Zeidan AtTaalib, the Imam and speaker at the Abi Bakr AsSiddeeq Mosque in the village of Jobar West of Homs, and took him to an unknown location. In mid July 2010, a Political Security patrol arrested the Head of Nursing at the Homs National Hospital, Khalid Al-Akhras (Al Qusair/Homs), for

his religious inclinations after false reports were written by one of the female nurses under his watch. His fate remains unknown.

On 12/7/2010, Kurdish citizen Arif Atton Khaleel was arrested while visiting his friends in Ain Al-Arab.

In early July 2010, a security apparatus in Aleppo arrested Citizen Hassan Shaikh Ahmad for reasons of his concern for public interest.

On 27/8/2010, Imad Askan Ahmad (Al-Hasaka, 1975) was arrested and taken to an unknown location.

On 10/8/2010, an armed Military Intelligence patrol in Al-Raqa stormed the house of Ahmad Ali (Baghdak) and arrested his minor son Marwan Ahmad Ali (Baghdak). He is still under oppressive arbitrary arrest.

On 26/9/2010, security apparatus arrested young Shiraz Sabri Nabu upon entering Syria via Turkey. He is still under arrest for reasons unknown.

On 21/9/2010 in Al-Sweida Province, Political Security arrested Citizen Hassan Hani Al-Atrash on order from the Central Political Security Office in Damascus for a verbal clash with Lebanese pro-Syrian politician, Wi'am Wahhab.

On 9/8/2010, Mohammad Jihad Al-Mua'zin (Homs, 1967) was arrested after returning for his summer holidays from his place of work in Saudi Arabia.

On 20/9/2010, a Political Security patrol in Al-Qamishli arrested Assyrian citizen Kibraeel Issa Iskandar for carrying a flag with Assyrian heritage symbols while participating in a music concert for a singer in the Diaspora. The concerned citizen is among those denied citizenship in accordance with the 1962 census. He was referred to court for inciting sectarian feuds.

On 22/9/2010, Citizen Naheer Hannah was arrested by the Political Security and referred to court for inciting sectarian feuds.

On 20/9/2010, Political Security in Damascus stormed the homes of Kurds Jihad AbdulRahman Ali and Farraz Feisal. The two were arrested for lighting fires on Nairouz eve in 2010.

On 21/9/2010, Political Security branch in Al-Qamishli detained Kurdish teacher Jamal Ibraheem Manja for standing five minutes in protest of decree 49/2008 marking two years since it was issued and implemented.

On 12/9/2010, Political Security division arrested Kurdish citizen Musallam Hussein Abbas (Al-Hasaka Province, 1975). Reasons for his arrest are unknown.

On 14/9/2010, four Kurdish citizens were summoned by the General Intelligence branch in Al-Qamishli where they were detained. These are Luqman Hussein Ibraheem (A veterinary doctor well known for his interest in public affairs), Salah Sa'eed Shaikhmus, AbdulGhafour Hussein Hussein and Sa'ad Farman Al-Hassan. They were released on 23/10/2010.

On 23/8/2010, Ismaeil Abdi (Al-Hasaka, 1960) – member of the Board of Trustees for the Democratic Freedoms and Human Rights' Defence Committees in Syria – vanished at the hands of the security apparatus. The State Security Office in Homs arrested Agricultural Engineering student Wardan AbdulQadir Idrees (Al-Qusair). No reasons are known for his arrest.

On 15/10/2010, Kurdish citizen Sarbest Mohammad Rashad 'Abbo (Al-Hasaka, 1986) was arrested after being deported by Turkey. He was then referred to the Public Prosecutor in Al-Hasaka for being smuggled into Turkey for reasons of crossing into Europe.

On 14/11/2010, a Political Security patrol arrested brothers Shaikhmus Mohammad Ali and Ali Mohammad Ali of Al-Hasaka province. Reasons for their arrest and location where they are held are unknown.

On 15/10/2010, Mohammad Ashraf Mousa Rummo was arrested by a security branch in AdDirbasiyyah where, five days ago, Mohammad Ahmad Oskan was arrested by a Political Security patrol. Reasons for their arrest are unknown.

State security apparatus arrested three Kurdish citizens for migrating to Cyprus for reasons of improving their economic status, but the authorities in Cyprus deported them to Syria in October 2010. These are: Rakan Elias Janbali, Mohammad Shafa Janbali and Hassan Elias Janbali. They are still under arbitrary oppressive arrest at Al-Hasaka Central Jail.

On 17/10/2010, we learnt that the Political Security branch in Al-Hasaka had arrested 6 Kurdish citizens after a tip from an informant that they had donated handsome amounts of money for the prohibited Kurdish PKK party. They were referred to the Solitary Military Judge in Al-Qamishli. These are: Sa'ad Mamdouh Haj Khaleel (Ras Al-Ain, 1972),

Nawwaf Ahmad Farhan (Ras Al-Ain, 1948), Shukri Hussein Frahan Khaleel (Ras Al-Ain, 1966), AbdulRaheem Mahmoud Farhan (Ras Al-Ain, 1977), Farhan Antar Al-Muhammad (Ras Al-Ain, 1959) and Kamiran Mohammad Siddeeq Farhan (Ras Al-Ain, 1971).

On 25/11/2010, Kurdish writer Siyamind Haji Ibraheem (Al-Qamishli, 1955) was summoned to the Political Security branch for interrogation. He was subsequently arrested and referred to the Solitary Military Judge for conducting business that is meant to cause conflict between sects and state elements.

In mid November 2010, Kurdish citizen Yousuf Imad Morjan was arrested in Al-Qahtaniyah, Al-Hasaka province. His fate is yet unknown and his personal computer and some belongings were confiscated.

On 16/12/2010, Kurdish citizen Yousuf Haji Yousuf was arrested in Al-Malkiyyah for what is believed to be his concern for the public interest.

The Political Security branch in Al-Hasaka arrested Kurdish citizen Juan Yousuf Mohammad after recurrent summons after he was deported from Cyprus where he was with another group en route to migrating to Europe.

Examples on those Released

The year 2010 witnessed the release of some of those who finished the time of their sentence, were arrested then pardoned before passing sentence on them or those who were included in a Presidential pardon. But the testimony of all whom SHRC was able to reach, in one way or another, affirms the widespread use of medium to heavy torture at the jails and intelligences branches. As for mistreatment, this is a routine procedure that is practised at all Syrian interrogation centres and prisons.

Young blogger Kareem Antwan 'Arabji (Damascus, 1978) was released in accordance with a Presidential pardon. He was arrested on 7/6/2007 for taking part in administering (Akhawia) forum on the Internet and was sentenced by the State's Supreme Security Court to three years' imprisonment on 13/9/2009.

Before him, Kurdish citizen Khalid Ma'amo Kanjo was released on 3/1/2010 who was arrested prior to this date upon deportation from Germany.

Kurdish cleric AbdulRazzaq Janko was released on 17/1/2010. He was arrested at the beginning of the same year while attempting to fly out of Aleppo airport to visit one of his sons in the UAE.

The Solitary Military Judge ordered the release of Kurdish citizen Bahjat Mohammad Ali Ibraheem on 19/1/2010. He was being tried for belonging to a prohibited secret association whose aim is to cut-off a piece of Syrian land and annexes it to a foreign country.

The following day, the Solitary Military Judge ordered the release of Kurdish artists Nihad Yousuf Hussein, Bijwar Muneer Abdullah and Jwan Muneer Abdullah who were arrested for singing at the banned wedding of a Kurdish citizen in Al-Malikiyah. They were charged with singing nationalistic Kurdish songs. Artist Jamal Sa'adoon, who was arrested with them, was released two weeks later.

Cleric AbdulRahman Kooki (Damascus) was released on 16/2/2010 in a special Presidential pardon. He was arrested on 23/10/2009 after taking part in an Al-Jazeera Channel programme called 'The Opposite Direction' on the issue of Niqab and the decision by the late top Al-Azhar cleric of banning it. He was sentenced to a year's imprisonment.

On 31/2/2010, Kurdish citizens Zubayr Hassan and his son Mahmoud were released in Al-Qamishli. They were arrested on 11/9/2009 for carrying Kurdish publications.

In early April, elderly cleric Yousuf Najiyah (Idlib, 70) and Omar Darweesh (Aleppo, 1953) were released. They were being held in accordance to Law 49/1980. Their release came in implementation of a Presidential pardon for all prisoners suffering from terminal diseases.

Afterwards, Hassan Zahra – who was arrested on 21/5/2009 – was released. This was also due to his terminal illness. Anas AtTurk was also released due to a psychological illness.

On 27/4/2010, Kurdish writer Mustapha Mohammad, AKA Pierre Rustum, was released. He was arrested on 15/3/2008 after being summoned by the Air Force Intelligence branch in Aleppo.

Three days prior to this, three students at the Aleppo University were released. They were arrested for standing five minutes of silence marking the passage of twenty years on the Halabja massacre. These are: Hanadi Tamo Mohammad, Ronak AbdulRahman Mohammad and Siyamin Mohammad 'Atteh, as well as school student AbdulAzeez Mohammad 'Atteh.

During the same month, four minors who were arbitrarily arrested, were released. They are: Mo'atasim Oweis Deek, Kawa Othman Abdullah, Khaleel Mahmoud Khaleel and Ali Mohammad Issa.

On 10/6/2010, social activist and writer Riyad Hammoud Darrar was released. He had been arrested for a memorial speech by cleric Ma'ashooq Al-Khazooni who was kidnapped and murdered by Syrian intelligence in May 2005. The State's Supreme Security Exceptional Court had indicted him on 2/6/2006 and sentenced him to a five-year prison term.

On 27/7/2010, Kurdish citizen MohyeeEddine Hassan, of 'Amoodah, was released after serving his year and a half prison term.

June and July witnessed the release of the Damascus Declaration detainees except for Mohammad Al-Abdullah who was re-tried for a new charge (See segment on Civil Society Activists and Human Rights.)

On 16/8/2010, young blogger Tarek Omar Bayasi (Banyas) was released after three years of arrest. He was indicted by the State Security Court for weakening the nation's morale and disseminating false reports over the Internet.

On 26/8/2010, and after fourteen months of arrest, Dr. SalahEddine Kiftaro was released. Kiftaro is the director of the Abu Al-Nour Complex. He was falsely charged and none of the accusations were upheld either during interrogation or at trial.

On 1/9/2010, member of the Board of Trustees for the Human Rights' Organisation in Syria (MAF), was released. AbdulHafeeth AbdulRahman had been arrested on 2/3/2010 and was charged with being a member of a secret association that aims to detach a portion of Syrian soil and add it to a foreign country. The Solitary Military Judge, however, ordered his release.

Syrian authorities released writer and poet Firas Sa'ad (Latakia, 1970) after having served more than four years for his writings in which he was charged with the dissemination of false news that was intended to weaken the nation.

On 25/9/2010, Kurdish university student Hafras Mohammad Ameen Hassan (ArRumailah) was released after ten months of arrest.

On 23/10/2010, and after more than a month's detention, four Kurdish citizens from 'Amoodah were released. They had been arrested for standing five minutes of silence against Law 49/2008. These are: Luqman Ibraheem Hussein, Salah Sa'eed Younes, AbdulGhafour Hussein Hussein and Sa'ad Farman Hassan. They were charged with inciting insurrection.

On 27/11/2010, member of the Al-Hasaka Oversight and Inspection Commission, was released after two weeks of detention – reasons for which are unknown.

Persons Prevented from Travelling

The right of travelling from a one's country and back into it is a right that the Syrian Constitution guarantees, as does the International Declaration on Human Rights. But measures which restrict this right, including prevention from travelling which is not mentioned nor described in Syrian laws, has remained rife this year. This has been the case particularly with regard to civil and political activists and relatives of forced migrants as the Syrian authorities deliberately punish them and prevent them from communicating through participation in other activities abroad. Citizens do not have prior knowledge regarding their prevention from travelling except when they are not allowed to issue a passport or when turned back at any border checkpoint. Syrian civil society and human rights' activists prevented from travelling are numbered in the thousands. These numbers do not include those prevented from travelling for other reasons such as military recruits, state employees (who need departmental approval), military personnel, relatives of opposition politicians, etc.

Some of the examples we have received this year on people prevented from travelling include:

Turning back lawyer Radeef Mustapha – Chairman of the Board for the Kurdish Human Rights' Committee in Syria and Coordinator of the Syrian Coalition for Combating the Death Penalty – from Damascus International Airport late last February 2010 while en route to attending the Fourth International Conference on Combating the Death Penalty which was to be held in Geneva/Switzerland from 24-26 February, 2010.

On 18/2/2010, it was learnt that citizen AbdulAhad Rosa Qess (Al-Hasaka, 1949) was surprised to learn while attempting to issue his passport that he is prevented from travelling for security reasons. No clarification was given.

A number of members from the Arab National Conference in Syria were prevented from travelling, by order of Syrian security authorities, to attend the conference held in Beirut between 16-18/4/2010. These are: Rasim Sayyid Suleiman Al-Atasi – President of the Arab Human Rights Organisation in Syria, lawyer Hassan

AbdulAzeem – the Spokesperson for the National Democratic Coalition in Syria, lawyer Mohammad AbdulMajeed Manjoonah – member of the Conference's Assembly and ex-Minister, AbdulMajeed Hammo – member of the General Assembly for the Islamic National Conference, Tarek AbulHassan, Mohammad Al 'Aryan, Najeeb Dadam and Mohammad Barakat. In the same vein, Dr. Burhan Zreyq (80) was prevented from travelling on 15/4/2010 to attend the same Conference.

On 27/4/2010, young lady Vian AbdulHakeem Bashar (Al-Hasaka) discovered upon attempting to renew her passport at the Department of Passports and Immigration in Al-Hasaka that she was prevented from travelling and was wanted by the Palestine branch for Military Intelligence in Damascus because her father is the Secretary of the Kurdish Democratic Party in Syria.

Upon applying for a passport at the Department of Immigration and Passports, Mr. Ghalib Omar – who was planning on travelling to Doha after being invited to attend the Special Sessions on Human Rights and Democracy held at the 10th Doha Forum (29/5 – 2/6/2010) – learnt of a State Security order that prevented him from travelling abroad.

On 17/8/2010, it was learnt that medical doctors Mustapha AbdulFattah 'Awji and Issa AbdulSalam Shaikho had been prevented from travelling because they attended a medical conference organised by the Diyar Bakr Municipality (Turkey) in 2009.

On 28/10/2010, Syrian authorities prevented citizen Khalid Al-Khalidi – member of the Arab Human Rights' Organisation in Syria – from accompanying the Lifeline Convoy to Gaza which was on a mission to deliver humanitarian aid to the people of the besieged strip.

The Syrian authorities prevent many Ahwaz Refugees from leaving the country and deports them to Iran in a step that contradicts with international conventions. Syria has prevented brothers Ahmad and Arslan Shaqooti from travelling after they were granted refugee-status by the United Nations' General Commission for Refugees, and arrested them pending deportation to Iran to face the death penalty as it has done to others in the past. It has been reported that

they were moved from Damascus to an undisclosed location as a prelude to that end.

Female novelist Rosa Yaseen Hassan (Damascus, 1974) was prevented from travelling to Lebanon to attend the Arab Intellectual Conference that was held in Beirut on 9/12/2010 by order of a security apparatus. It is believed she was prevented from participating in the Conference so as not to discuss the circumstances of female Syrian bloggers who spread stories and writings via the Internet.

As for those not allowed to return to Syria, except to prisons or through the Security Gate, they number in the tens of thousands, atop of whom come the forced migrants who are affected by Law 49/1980 or other political opposition members or civil activists who live abroad. Unfortunately, all efforts and mediations utilised to solve the impasses regarding these people's return has been met with objection by the security apparatus as it benefits much from a continued state of crisis within Syria.

We have mentioned some examples on arrests of returnees to Syria earlier in this report.



Lawyer Muhannad Al-Husseini (President of the Syrian Human Rights Organisation) who was handed down on 23/6/2010 a three-year jail term by the Second Criminal Court in Damascus

Violating the Rights of Students and Teachers at the Ministry of Education & Higher Education and Private Schools

The year 2010 witnessed many expulsions and transfers of thousands of teachers and professors all the way from the elementary stage to the university level. This occurred in an unfair manner with total disregard to freedom of choice and of practising one's belief in a positive way. The Syrian Minister of Education, Ali Sa'ad, has confirmed on 27/6/2010 that he issued an order to expel 1200 females wearing Niqab from their teaching jobs and transfer them to other administrative positions at other ministries and departments in support of the secularity of education and other educational reasons that have later been proven false. It is a known fact that teachers wearing Niqab do not whatsoever wear it inside the classroom. This is in addition to the fact that not all whom were expelled wear the Niqab, rather a mere head cover (Hijab).

Minister of Higher Education Ghiyyath Barakat followed suit on 17/7/2010 with a decision preventing any student wearing Niqab from entering the campuses of Syrian universities.

On 1/9/2010, the transfer of teachers with religious inclinations to administrative positions commenced. For example: The 1st and 2nd ranking inspectors for the Islamic Education subject in Homs – AbdulKafi Orabi AnNajjar and AbdulMun'im Al-Kenj – were transferred to the Ministry of Health.

On the same day, a decision was issued to transfer teachers Tahir Al-Abrash and Mohammad Al-Shami from the Ministry of Education payroll in Homs to that of the Ministry of Health.

On 19/10/2010, seven distinguished professors from the Faculty of Islamic Shari'a at Damascus University were expelled for their religious inclination. These doctors are: EmadEddine ArRasheed, Junayd Deir Shoy, Mohammad Idrees AtTa'an, Mumina Basha (female), Muna Al-'Assa (female), Ghayda' Al-Masri (female) and Hind Al-Khouli (female). Similar news was heard about Aleppo University.

A wide range of arbitrary and oppressive terminations and transfers occurred at the Ministries of Education and Higher Education in which the most basic rights of teachers and professors were violated. Security reports, personal relations and nepotism played a major role for we have learned about a female teacher who wrote a false report against a colleague at a particular school so that the former may be allowed to transfer to that same school once the teacher has been expelled and an opening is announced. The complainant wrote that the teacher wears Niqab and is a strict Muslim, even though she is not and merely wears Hijab. The innocent teacher was actually expelled due to the assistance of certain corrupt member of staff at the school and at one of the intelligence apparatus.

Private schools with religious tendencies have been attacked and many have been shut down on the premise that their dosage of religious education is higher than the prescribed curriculum. Tens of these schools are currently under pressure and face impossible-to-meet conditions so that they may fail and be closed down despite the fact that its annual graduates are better than their peers throughout the entire country.



The General Situation of Media in Syria – Status Quo

The media in Syria is totally monopolised by the Regime which tries to show that it is developing, but in reality lacks any advancements whatsoever. If it has allowed a limited number of satellite channels to operate, then they must be connected to it and to its policies. The Regime treats the press, broadcasting services and the Internet similarly. If one were to forget to practise self-oversight, even once, then he/she shall have his/her license withdrawn and then arrested, etc.

Dealing with any disseminated media must be in adherence to the news channels of the Syrian News Agency, SANA. If any contradicting news is published, it is considered as disseminating misleading news aimed at weakening the nation's morale. The distribution of publications is an exclusive right granted to the Arab Advertising Establishment. The Internet is provided solely by the General Institution for Telecommunications and the Information Association. And behind these beautiful flashy names stands a very strict security apparatus that monitors and controls every single detail.



Arrest of Writers and Media Professionals for doing their Job

Members of the media, writers and reporters are still being arrested for covering and writing about matters of public concern.

Among the examples we were able to document for 2010 was the arrest of reporter Ali Taha on 7/1/2010 for covering news of public concern.

Female writer Ghada Sa'eed Hassan (Tartous, 37) was arrested at the 'Areedah gate at the Syrian-Lebanese border for her unpublished political novel entitled (The New Prophets). Raghda is an ex-prisoner (1993-1995) because of her membership in the Labour Communist party. She is still under arrest and is being tried by the Military Criminal Court in Homs.

On 13/4/2010, male and female journalists Bassam Ali and Suhaila Ismaeil stood before the Court of Appeals in Homs. They are charged with resisting the socialist system for their work in journalism which has been able to uncover cases of corruption, forgery and embezzlement of the General Company for Fertilisers' assets worth tens of millions Syrian Liras.

On 15/9/2010, Kurdish public interest writer Luqman Hussein was arrested after being summoned by the State Security branch in Al-Qamishli for his writings in newspapers and websites.



Restricting and Infiltrating Websites

The year 2010 did not witness any change in Syria's policy towards restricting access to any website it sniffs that its news may be neutral. The number of websites restricted by the Regime thus far has exceeded 260 that are for human rights' organisations, CSO's and political parties. Among those restricted for years is the website of the Syrian Human Rights Committee.

In January 2010, Syrian authorities restricted access to the Kurdish Future Party in Syria.

In mid February 2010, Regime authorities infiltrated the website of the Syrian Human Rights' Observatory and destroyed its files and left words of threat on it to its curators.

In April 2010, the website of The Party for Modernity and Democracy in Syria was hacked into and vandalised. A message left on its homepage stated that it was done by Syrian security apparatus.

In the late summer of 2010, the website of the League of Syrian Islamic Scholars was infiltrated and completely destroyed even though it is a non-political apparatus. Pictures of Indian female dancers were placed on its homepage.

There have been two attempts to infiltrate the website of SHRC during 2010, but were unsuccessful and none of its files were destroyed.



Syrian Human Rights Committee in Brief

The Syrian Human Rights Committee (SHRC), established in 1997, is an independent and neutral human rights organisation concerned fundamentally with defending general liberties and human rights of the Syrian people through several practices, which includes:

1. Exposing the violations, assaults and aggressions against human rights and fundamental liberties of the Syrian citizens and publishing such incidents to the international media, addressing authorities, and following-up on such reported incidents with all concerned entities.
2. Conducting researches and publishing books and studies related to fundamental liberties and human rights in Syria utilizing scientific research methodologies and investigative verification.
3. Issuing various reports, initiating humane campaigns and conducting seminars and interviews to highlight and bring to attention the human right issues in Syria.
4. Raising awareness and promoting the culture of human rights in the Syrian society and encouraging members of this society to continually demand for their human rights and general liberties until the materialisation of changes, which would guarantee them those rights through peaceful means.
5. SHRC adheres to the principle of cooperation with organisations, entities, centres, and non-governmental associations specializing in actively defending and advocating human rights, while preserving the independent nature of the committee's work agenda.



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