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Monthly Report on Arrests/Detentions in Syria

At least 229 Arbitrary Detentions

Documented in January 2025

Legal Regulations and Judicial Process Must be Properly Implemented in All Detentions Carried Out as Part of Security Operations

Tuesday 04 February 2025

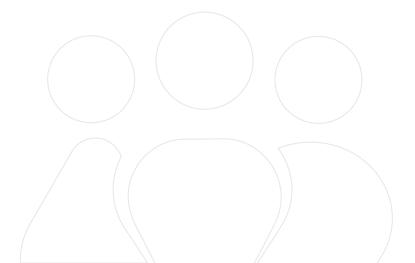




The Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR), founded in June 2011, is a non-governmental, independent group that is considered a primary source for the OHCHR on all death toll-related analyses in Syria.

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I. OVERVIEW OF ARBITRARY ARREST AND ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCE IN SYRIA

On December 8, 2024, Syria witnessed arguably the most seismic political and military event in over 50 years with the fall of the dictatorial Assad regime, which was succeeded by a transitional government. This came after 14 years of a popular uprising that began in March 2011. In those 14 years, arbitrary detentions and enforced disappearances reached unprecedented levels, with these being among the most widely practiced systematic violations committed by the former regime against civilians.

Since 2011, the Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) has been constantly documenting arbitrary detentions and releasing monthly reports. As shown on SNHR's database, the fates of at least 112,000 of the people forcibly disappeared by the former Assad regime remain unknown to this day. Indeed, the ramifications of these violations still persist in both in a legal and social sense, and in both their families' and the collective memory of the victims, illustrating the sheer volume of the human rights atrocities for which the former regime was responsible.

With the transition of power, it's become apparent that there's an urgent need to establish legal regulations that will put an end to the harrowing era of arbitrary arrests and enforced disappearances, and ensure respect for the basic human rights of individuals. In order to achieve this, it's essential to establish a legal framework that promotes human rights and consolidates protective laws, while also building effective control mechanisms to avoid any recurrence of these violations in accordance with international standards.

In this context, SNHR continues to release its monthly reports on arbitrary arrests and enforced disappearances in order to document these practices and monitor any violations that may take place during the transitional phase. Documenting these practices is a crucial part of ensuring the non-recurrence of past violations, supporting the efforts aimed at building a state founded on the rule of law and respect for human rights, enacting reformist policies, and ensuring that security and legal institutions adhere to accountability and transparency norms. In addition, documenting such violations provides the transitional government and the relevant domestic and international bodies to follow and address any potential infringements, thus further strengthening the transitional justice process and promoting victims' rights to reparation and accountability. Finaly, it should be noted that SNHR will continue to regularly issue these reports in order to keep pace with the latest political and legal developments and events on the ground in Syria so as to continue providing an accurate and up-to-date picture of the situation regarding detentions and enforced disappearances in the country.

II. REPORT METHODOLOGY

While Syria continues going through a transitional phase in the wake of the historic ousting of the Assad regime and its downfall on December 8, 2024, SNHR will continue to release our statistical/analytical monthly reports monitoring and documenting arbitrary detentions, enforced disappearances, and releases from detention centers. Accordingly, this report summarizes the arbitrary arrests, enforced disappearances, and releases documented by SNHR in the month of January 2025.

SNHR's standards for documenting detentions

The methodology adopted by SNHR in our reports follows the internationally recognized standards for documenting human rights violations, including the guidelines established by the UN and the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention. More particularly, we use the five criteria adopted by the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention to document such cases. Meanwhile, in cases of enforced disappearance, we use the definition established by the Declaration on the Protection of all Persons from Enforced Disappearance, which was adopted in accordance the UN General Assembly resolution 47/133 on December 18, 1992, as "a body of principles for all states".

Data sources and verification mechanism

In documenting arbitrary arrests, SNHR draws upon several sources, with every item of information provided to us being subjected to rigorous and precise verification mechanisms. <u>These sources include:</u>

- SNHR's own field researchers who are scattered across Syria.
- Direct interviews with victims and their families.
- Eyewitnesses' accounts and local activists.
- Official information provided by state officials.

SNHR adheres to strict documentation procedures, while ensuring that its data is regularly updated in order to maintain accuracy. All data is stored in a specially designated database which incorporates professional archiving practices that conveniently allow for monitoring and updating of individual cases. Every report also goes through multiple revision phases before it is issued.

Classifying cases according to the party responsible

In this report, detentions are classified according to the parties responsible for carrying out the arrests. These parties are:

- The transitional government which has been governing Syria since December 8, 2024.
- Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) who controls the northeastern region of the country.
- Armed opposition factions/Syrian National Army (SNA) who are currently in the process of being incorporated into the new Syrian army.

Cases are additionally classified according to the place in which each detention took place, rather than by the detainee's governorate of origin. The report also contains a demographic analysis of detainees by sex and age (males, females, children), in addition to classifying releases based on their contexts.

Analyzing violations' patterns

This report provides an analysis of the patterns of behavior displayed by the parties that committed arbitrary detention and enforced disappearance practices in January 2025. This analysis draws upon SNHR's 13-plus years of expertise in this field. The report also gives a brief summary of the laws and decrees issued by these parties regarding this issue with an assessment of their effects.

In addition to the usual challenges in documenting arbitrary arrests and enforced disappearances, our team has encountered additional challenges in the period following the fall of the Assad regime, given the sweeping changes this has effected on the ground. This has necessitated a redoubling of our efforts to ensure the accuracy of our data and the continuation of our monitoring processes. We will ensure that information on both legal developments and changes on the ground are regularly updated to reflect how these affect the process of documentation.

In light of the staggering volume of violations and the exceptional difficulties in the documentation process, this report only represents the bare minimum of the actual figures, which may be far higher.

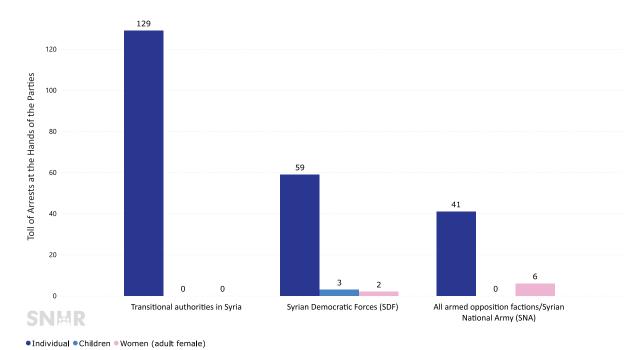


III. ARBITRARY ARRESTS, ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCES, AND RELEASES IN SYRIA IN JANUARY 2025

A. Arbitrary detention and enforced disappearance in January 2025

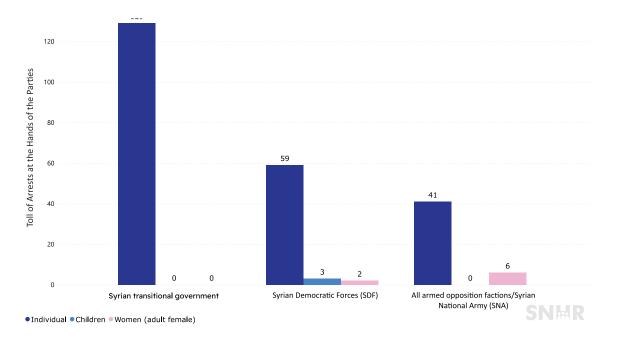
In January 2025, SNHR documented no fewer than 229 cases of arbitrary arrest/detention, with those detained including three children and eight women (adult females).

Arbitrary arrests/detentions documented in January 2025 are distributed according to the parties to the conflict and controlling forces as follows:



- A. Transitional government: 129 arrests. Of the 129 arrested, 36 have been released.
- B. All armed opposition factions/Syrian National Army (SNA): 41 arrests, including of six women. Of the 41 people arrested, 12 have been released.
- C. Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF): 59 arrests, including of three children and two women. Of the 59 people arrested, 12 have been released.

Arbitrary arrests/detentions documented as having been carried out in January 2025 by the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in Syria are distributed across Syrian governorates as follows:



As the chart above shows, Aleppo governorate saw the highest monthly number of arbitrary arrests/detentions, followed by Homs, then jointly Damascus and Deir Ez-Zour, then Hama, and then Ragga.

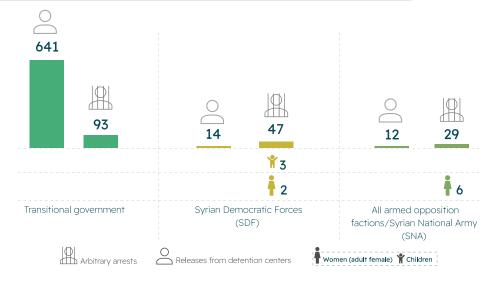
B. Releases from detention centers in January 2025

In January 2025, SNHR documented the release of no fewer than 667 people from the various parties' detention centers in Syria.

The releases by the parties to the conflict and controlling forces in Syria documented in January 2025 are distributed as follows:

- A. Transitional government: 641 releases.
- B. All Armed opposition factions/Syrian National Army (SNA): 12 releases.
- C. Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF): 14 releases.

Comparison between arbitrary arrests and releases from detention centers documented in January 2025 for each of the parties to the conflict and controlling forces in Syria:



As the chart above shows, the number of releases from the transitional government's detention centers exceeds the number of arbitrary detentions; this was mainly due to the transitional government's release of hundreds of detainees from Homs Central Prison who had been arrested over their alleged connections to the Assad regime after its downfall on December 8, 2024.

IV. MOST NOTABLE PATTERNS OF ARBITRARY ARRESTS AND RELEASES BY THE PARTIES TO THE CONFLICT AND CONTROLLING FORCES IN SYRIA IN JANUARY 2025

The detentions carried out by the parties to the conflict in their areas of control in January 2025 were carried out for various reasons and in different contexts. Below are a number of salient observations concerning the detentions carried out by the parties to the conflict in January 2025

A. Transitional government

1. Arbitrary detentions

In January 2025, the transitional government's General Security Directorate carried out campaigns involving raids and detentions in various areas under the government's control, with a particular focus on the governorates of Latakia, Homs, Hama, and Damascus, as part of a crackdown on individuals accused of committing violations during Bashar Assad's rule. These operations targeted former military combatants and former regime employees, with large quantities of weapons and ammunition being confiscated. Those arrested were taken to Homs Central Prison, Hama Central Prison, and Adra Prison in Rural Damascus governorate.

While these arrests were part of security campaigns, we could not verify whether they were made based on legal judicial warrants. Furthermore, videos have been circulated online of detainees arrested in the course of these campaigns being subjected to physical and verbal abuse, including beatings and degrading treatment.

In this context, SNHR has prepared <u>a form</u> to enable members of the public to report human rights violations that take place in the transitional phase and post-transitional phase in Syria. Detainees' family members can fill these out and submit them to SNHR's team, who will follow up on these cases, record the results, and contact the families to complete the documentation process.

2. Releases

In January 2025, we documented the transitional government's release of about 641 individuals who had been detained for periods ranging from a few days to a month. Most of those detained and released are originally from the governorates of Homs, Hama, and Latakia, with the majority having been released from Homs Central Prison in small groups.

B. Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF)

1. Arbitrary detentions

In January 2025, the SDF continued its policies of arbitrary detention and enforced disappearance. In pursuit of these policies, SDF personnel carried out mass raid and arrest campaigns that targeted civilians on the pretext of being ISIS affiliates. We also documented SDF arrests/detentions targeting civilians over their alleged cooperation with Arab tribal forces and the SNA, and over accusations of taking part in Operation Deter Aggression, which was launched on November 27, 2024. The SDF also arrested and detained civilians over their participation in the popular celebrations of the fall of the Assad regime. These arrests were concentrated in Raqqa city and SDF-held areas of Raqqa governorate. We also documented arrests/detentions of civilians over their voicing criticism of the SDF's practices in the territories it controls.

2. Releases

In January 2025, we documented the SDF's release of 14 detainees from their detention centers, who had been arrested for multiple causes, as follows

- We documented the release of 12 detainees who were held for periods ranging from a few days to one month. Most of them were from the governorates of Deir Ez-Zour, Aleppo, and Ragga.
- We documented the release of two individuals as part of a prisoner exchange deal with the SNA, carried out on January 7, 2025, in Deir Hafer area in eastern rural Aleppo governorate. The two freed prisoners had been held for a month-and-a-half.

C. All armed opposition factions/Syrian National Army (SNA)

1. Arbitrary detentions

In January 2025, all armed opposition factions/SNA carried out arbitrary arrests/detentions, mostly of groups of people, targeting individuals coming from SDF-controlled areas, including women. We also documented arrests/detentions that exhibited an ethnic character, which were concentrated in areas under the SNA's control in Aleppo governorate. These arrests/detentions were carried out without any judicial authorization or any involvement of the police, which is the only body officially vested with judicial authorization to carry out arrests and detentions. These arrests were also carried out without any clear charges being leveled against the detainees.

Moreover, we recorded arrests/detentions by the SNA of civilians over their alleged cooperation with the SDF, with these arrests being concentrated in a number of villages that are administratively a part of Afrin city in Aleppo governorate. Other arrests/detentions by the SNA involved a number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) returning to their homes in SNA-controlled areas, with these arrests also being concentrated in Afrin city.

In addition, we recorded arrests/detentions by the SNA's al-Sultan Suleiman Shah Division targeting a number of farmers in order to pressurize them into paying fees to the division for their own olive trees. These arrests were concentrated in Merkan village which is administratively a part of Afrin city.

2. Releases

In January 2025, we recorded the release of 12 individuals, who had been arrested for multiple causes, by all armed opposition factions/SNA, <u>as follows:</u>

- We documented the release of nine detainees from all armed opposition factions/SNA's
 detention centers where they had been held for a few days. Most of those released were
 from Aleppo governorate.
- We documented the release of three detainees as part of an exchange deal with the SDF, carried out on January 7, 2025, in Deir Hafer area in eastern rural Aleppo governorate. Those released had been held for about one month.

V. SNHR'S VISION OF AND APPROACH TO THE ISSUE OF ARBITRARILY ARRESTED DETAINEES AND FORCIBLY DISAPPEARED PERSONS AT THE DOMESTIC AND INTERNATIONAL LEVELS

Since the beginning of the Syrian popular uprising for democracy in March 2011, SNHR has placed great emphasis on resolving the issue of detainees and forcibly disappeared persons in Syria, bearing in mind the humanitarian and human rights-related factors surrounding this matter. To ensure that this immensely sensitive issue is given the appropriate high priority, SNHR has assembled a working team consisting of highly trained and qualified members with legal and technical expertise. This team has been working tirelessly to document and record violations, beginning by establishing a database to catalogue the details of detainees and forcibly disappeared persons. These documentation efforts are then used as the foundation for periodically released detailed reports, which aim to protect the rights of victims and their families and to expose the perpetrators of violations.

Since the issue of missing and forcibly disappeared persons is one of the most persistent, complex and dangerous issues that continues to plague Syrian society, SNHR has strived to work in coordination with the various international and UN entities to document and combat this harrowing phenomenon. These partners include the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (COI), the International, Impartial, and Independent Mechanism (IIIM), the UN Human Rights Office (OHCHR), and the UN Independent Institution on Missing Persons in Syria. SNHR's work in this field involves collecting and analyzing evidence and information on enforced disappearance cases and related violations, and providing the international community with accurate reports and information based on these investigations. As such, SNHR's reports have become a vital instrumental and reputable source of information on these issues internationally.

Successes and accomplishments

As mentioned above, thanks to our invaluable expertise and strict compliance with international standards, SNHR's data has come to be regarded as a reputable principal source of information for many UN bodies, being used and cited in numerous UN statements and resolutions, including a draft resolution on the situation of human rights in Syria (A/C.3/78/L.43), passed by a majority vote on Wednesday, November 15, 2023, condemning the Assad regime's continued serious violations of international law. This resolution also acknowledged that the documented number of detainees in Syria exceeds 135,000. Relatedly, the resolution holds the Assad regime responsible for the systematic use of enforced disappearance, which, it notes, constitutes a crime against humanity.

Meanwhile, the case brought against the Assad regime at the Hague-based International Court of Justice (ICJ) on the Application of the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (Canada and the Netherlands v. Syrian Arab Republic) draws upon the data and evidence supplied by SNHR. Elsewhere, SNHR, through its many partnerships, has contributed to numerous legal cases brought against individuals responsible for human rights violations in Assad regime detention centers under the principle of universal jurisdiction in Europe and to the Foreign Sovereign Immunities Act in the US, as well as other cases, all of them steps on the path to justice and accountability.

Documenting victims

In the years since its foundation, SNHR has established multiple rigorous procedures to document and provide details on victims in detention centers, building on our ever-expanding wealth of experience gained through close monitoring of enforced disappearance cases. SNHR has also maintained a longstanding and close working relationship with the UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances, which has required maintaining constant communication with the families of 'missing' and 'disappeared' persons to build comprehensive files for every case. Up until the Assad regime's downfall on December 8, 2025, this data was then sent to the UN special rapporteur who could then contact the relevant regime officials to enquire about some of the cases submitted. Furthermore, SNHR continues to correspond with the two UN special rapporteurs on torture, counterterrorism, and mental health to follow up on such cases.

Facilitating communication with victims

In addition to the above, we created <u>a special online form</u> on our website for detainees' families to report their loved ones' cases; once the family members complete this form, it's then sent automatically to our team working on the issue of detainees and forcibly disappeared persons. SNHR has also always endeavored to ensure that we're easily accessible for the families, through facilitating various means of communication, including phone numbers, our official channels online, or through our team members who are scattered across Syria, who work to collect information and provide support for the families.

VI. Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

- Violating the dignity of detainees and the prohibition of torture: The report documents physical and psychological abuses against detainees, including torture and degrading treatment, that explicitly contravene the 1984 Convention Against Torture, which compels all parties to take effective measures to prevent torture and to hold those who carry out torture accountable.
- More must be done to ensure the legal and organized release of detainees: While we have documented the release of some detainees, these processes currently lack any clear judicial procedures or transparent investigative processes, which raises concerns about arrests continuing outside the relevant legal frameworks, in violation of the principle of the arbitrary deprivation of liberty, as established in Article 3 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
- More must be done to protect victims' rights and their families: The fact that enforced disappearance persists without the fate of forcibly disappeared persons being revealed or any official information about them being provided to their families is a violation of the 2006 International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, which compels states and organizations to reveal detainees' place of detention and to enable families to know their loved ones' fate.
- Absence of accountability mechanisms and transitional justice: Despite the political change, insufficient measures have been taken to date to ensure accountability for past violations or to achieve justice for the victims, reflecting an inadequate level of commitment to the requirements of transitional justice which necessitates establishing investigation and accountability mechanisms, in addition to ensuring that these violations do not recur in the future.
- Armed opposition factions/SNA have carried out arrest and torture practices against some residents in areas under their control.
- The SDF has committed violations of basic human rights, including torture and enforced disappearance even though it possesses a political structure, which means that it is also obligated to abide by international human rights law.
- Lack of compliance with fair trial procedures: The data documented shows that many detentions have been carried out without judicial warrants or legal guarantees, which is an explicit violation of Article 9 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) that prohibits arbitrary arrests and affirms detainees' right to know the cause of their detention and to appear before a court as soon as possible.

Recommendations

UN Security Council and international community

1. Refer crimes to the International Criminal Court (ICC)

pressure on government and international stakeholders, including the Russian government, to
ensure the extradition of those responsible for crimes, such as Bashar Assad and his close aides,
to the competent international courts for trial.

2. Freeze and seize the funds of the former regime

Take legal action to freeze and confiscate the funds and assets of the former regime's officials
who were involved in violations, and use those resources to support transitional justice programs and compensate victims.

3. Support international efforts to reveal the fate of missing persons and achieve national reconciliation

- Secure the necessary resources to support the efforts of the Independent Institution on Missing Persons in the Syrian Arab Republic (IIMP) and the International Commission on Missing Persons (ICMP), including training local teams on advanced search techniques to identify the missing.
- Fund programs to support national reconciliation, and provide psychological and social support for the families of forcibly disappeared persons.

UN Human Rights Council

- Continue to focus on the issue of detainees and forcibly disappeared persons in Syria and regularly highlight this issue in all annual meetings.
- Promote cooperation and coordination with active local human rights groups in Syria to support the efforts of documentation and accountability.

Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (COI))

- Launch in-depth investigations into all the arbitrary detention and enforced disappearance cases included in this report and previous reports.
- Focus on the issue of forcibly disappeared persons and ensure the monitoring of the status of forcibly disappeared persons following the Assad regime's downfall.
- Cooperate with human rights groups, including SNHR, to secure the necessary evidence.

International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism (IIIM)

- Collect and analyze evidence on the crimes of arbitrary detention, enforced disappearance, and torture included in this report.
- Support the exchange of information and expertise with Syrian organizations working in the field of documenting violations.

UN and international community

- Apply pressure on all parties to compel them to publish lists of detainees' names and reveal the location of these prisoners' detention according to a fixed timetable.
- Allow UN and international organizations, particularly the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), to access detention centers to assess the humanitarian conditions there.
- Support organizations working on documenting violations and torture, and provide sustainable support for victim rehabilitation programs.

UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances

- Increase the capacity of the team working on the issue of forcibly disappeared persons in Syria, especially in light of the high numbers and extensive scope of enforced disappearance cases in the country.
- Prepare periodic and more detailed reports on developments to maintain pressure on involved parties.

UN Independent Institution on Missing Persons in Syria (IIMP)

- Look into all the cases included in this report and cooperate with SNHR to obtain the necessary data.
- Ask the transitional government to start operating in Syria and to cooperate with the IIMP to document the cases of the missing and take effective steps to ensure transparency and accountability.

Russian government

- Cooperate with the international community to extradite Bashar Assad and fugitives implicated in war crimes to the custody of the transitional government or the competent international courts.
- Support the efforts aimed at promoting transitional justice in Syria to ensure fair reparation for the victims.

All parties to the conflict and the controlling forces

- Arbitrary arrests and enforced disappearances must be ended immediately; the fate of all detainees and forcibly disappeared persons must be revealed.
- Families must be allowed to visit detainees immediately, and the bodies of detainees who have died as a result of torture must be returned to their families.
- Ensure the unconditional release of all arbitrarily arrested detainees, especially those who have been imprisoned merely for exercising their political and civil rights.
- Allow international monitors, such as those with the COI and the ICRC, to access all detention centers with no restrictions.
- A UN committee must be formed to monitor and periodically assess the release of detainees
- End the policy of carrying out arrests without presenting legal warrants, and ensure that detainees appear before courts within a reasonably short period of time following their arrest.

Syrian transitional government

1. Cooperate with international mechanisms

- Issue official invitations to independent UN and international agencies, including:
 - International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism (IIIM)
 - Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic
 - International Commission on Missing Persons (ICMP).
 - International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).
- Enable these organizations to have unrestricted access to detention centers and crime scenes.

2. Protect evidence and crime locations

- Document burial sites and prisons, and prevent any interference or evidence tampering.
- Adopt clear measures to preserve all articles of evidence and ensure their use in fair trials.

3. Promote transitional justice and accountability

- Ratify the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC) and grant the ICC retroactive jurisdiction.
- Devise a comprehensive plan to hold those responsible for crimes accountable, compensate victims, and enhance transparency in investigations.

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4. Reform the judicial and security system to prevent future violations

- Enact new legislation that ensures the autonomy of the judiciary and prohibits all forms of arbitrary arrest.
- Restructure the security apparatus in line with international human rights standards.

5. Provide psychological and social support for those affected

Establish specialist programs to rehabilitate torture and detention survivors, and provide support for victims' families.

6. Enhance monitoring and accountability for the state security services

- Establish independent monitoring committees to ensure the non-recurrence of violations during security services' operations.
- Hold those responsible for human rights violations accountable to ensure non-recurrence.

7. Improve communication with families and enhance transparency

- Hold regular meetings with local community representatives to clarify security policies and ensure that no groups are specifically targeted.
- Publish periodic reports on arrests and releases to ensure transparency.

8. Address misinformation campaigns

- Establish official platforms on social media to publish accurate news.
- Cooperate with independent media to ensure professional coverage of events.

9. Respect human rights during security operations

- Train security forces in how to treat detainees in a humane way.
- Commit to releasing any suspect who was part of the Assad regime if it's been established that they were uninvolved in perpetrating any violations.

10. Expedite settlement procedures for wanted individuals

• Implement a fair process to resolve the situation of wanted individuals, and encourage them to reintegrate in society.

11. Involve civil society in decision-making

• Enhance the role of the local community in decision-making mechanisms to ensure fair representation for all groups.

Acknowledgment and Solidarity

We wish to extend our most sincere thanks to survivors and to victims' family members and friends, as well as to eyewitnesses and local activists, for their significant and invaluable contribution to this report. We stand in full solidarity with all detainees and forcibly disappeared persons and their families.



SYRIAN NETWORK FOR HUMAN RIGHTS



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No justice without accountability

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