

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	414
Land:	Syrien
Kilde:	Human Rights Watch
Titel:	Syria: Extremists Restricting Women's Rights
Udgivet:	13. januar 2014
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	27. januar 2014

[EN](#) | [DE](#)

- **Source:**
HRW - Human Rights Watch
- **Title:**
Syria: Extremists Restricting Women's Rights
- **Publication date:**
13 January 2014
- **ecoi.net summary:** According to refugees, the extremist armed groups Jabhat al-Nusra and the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIS) are imposing strict and discriminatory rules on women and girls that have no basis in Syrian law [ID 267039]
- **Countries:**
Syrian Arab Republic
- **Original link** <http://www.hrw.org/news/2014/01/13/syria-extremists-restricting-women-s-rights>

Recommended citation:

HRW - Human Rights Watch: Syria: Extremists Restricting Women's Rights, 13 January 2014 (available at ecoi.net)
http://www.ecoi.net/local_link/267039/381173_en.html (accessed 22 January 2014)



Syria: Extremists Restricting Women's Rights

Harsh Rules on Dress, Work, School

January 13, 2014

(New York) – Certain extremist armed opposition groups are imposing strict and discriminatory rules on women and girls that have no basis in Syrian law, Human Rights Watch said today. The harsh rules that some groups are administering in areas under their control in northern and northeastern Syria violate women's and girls' human rights and limit their ability to carry out essential daily activities.

Human Rights Watch interviewed 43 refugees from Syria in Iraqi Kurdistan and conducted telephone interviews with two refugees from Syria in Turkey in November and December 2013. The refugees interviewed said that the extremist armed groups Jabhat al-Nusra and the Islamic State of Iraq and Sham (ISIS) have enforced their interpretation of Sharia, or Islamic law, by requiring women and girls to wear headscarves (hijabs) and full-length robes (abayas), and threatening to punish those who do not comply. In some areas, the groups are imposing discriminatory measures prohibiting women and girls, particularly those who do not abide by the dress code, from moving freely in public, working, and attending school.

"Extremist groups like ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra are undermining the freedoms that Syria's women and girls enjoyed, which were a longtime strength of Syrian society," said Liesl Gerntholtz, women's rights director at Human Rights Watch. "What kind of victory do these groups promise for women and girls who are watching their rights slip away."

The regulations imposed on women by Jabhat al-Nusra and ISIS have a far-reaching impact on women's and girls' daily lives, affecting their ability to obtain education, provide for their families and even procure basic necessities crucial to survival. Some refugees reported abductions of women by these groups, and one refugee said that a widowed neighbor and her three young children died during fighting because a prohibition on leaving her home without a male guardian left her afraid to flee the area.

The refugees from Syria in Iraqi Kurdistan and Turkey told Human Rights Watch that, between September 2012 and November 2013, Jabhat al-Nusra and ISIS imposed restrictions on women's and girls' dress and movement in the Sheikh Maksoud neighborhood in the city of Aleppo, the towns of Afrin and Tel Aran in Aleppo governorate, the city of Hassakeh, the town of Ras al-Ayn in Hassakeh governorate, the city of Idlib, and the town of Tel Abyad in Raqqah governorate. These areas include religiously diverse communities of Sunni Muslims, Shia Muslims, Alawites, Syriac Christians, and Armenian Christians.

Interviewees said that members of Jabhat al-Nusra and ISIS insisted that women follow a strict dress code that mandated the abaya and hijab and prohibited jeans, close-fitting clothing, and make-up. According to interviewees, members of these groups forbade women from being in public without a male family member in Idlib city, Ras al-Ayn, Tel Abyad, and Tel Aran. Women and girls who did not abide by the restrictions were threatened with punishment and, in some cases, blocked from using public transportation, accessing education,

and buying bread.

Interviewees from Idlib city, Tel Abyad, and Tel Aran also said that Jabhat al-Nusra and ISIS banned women from working outside the home in these areas.

While interviewees were not always able to distinguish among members of various extremist armed groups with absolute certainty, reports from media sources and the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights support the refugees' contentions that Jabhat al-Nusra and ISIS have imposed these restrictions. Human Rights Watch cannot confirm whether other extremist armed groups present in the areas mentioned were involved in imposing restrictions.

Syria does not have a state-mandated religion and its constitution protects freedom of religion. While the Syrian penal code and personal status laws, which govern matters such as marriage, divorce, and inheritance, contain provisions that are discriminatory to women and girls, the Syrian constitution guarantees gender equality. Public protests in June 2009 led the government to abandon an effort to introduce more regressive personal status laws. Interviewees told Human Rights Watch that, in the past, women and girls were largely able to participate in public life, including work and school, and exercise freedom of movement, religion, and conscience.

Refugees said that Jabhat al-Nusra and ISIS also imposed limitations on male dress and movement in the village of Jindires in Afrin and in Ras al Ayn, Tel Abyad, and Tel Aran, but all said that greater restrictions were placed on women and girls. Former residents of Tel Abyad and Tel Aran said that the armed groups did not permit males to wear jeans or fitted pants, but that the groups imposed a less specific dress code on males than on females.

Interviewees said that restrictions on movement for men and boys in the village of Jindires in Afrin and in Ras al Ayn, Tel Abyad, and Tel Aran were part of universal restrictions on movement, such as evening curfews; they said that, in October 2012 in Ras al Ayn and July and August 2013 in Tel Aran, armed extremist groups including Jabhat al-Nusra exerted control by announcing that no one could go out in public after 5 p.m. In no cases were limitations on dress or freedom of movement applied solely to men and boys.

While unjustified restrictions on dress and freedom of movement for anyone violate their rights and should be rescinded, restrictions that apply to and affect women and girls disproportionately are discriminatory.

Commanders of Jabhat al-Nusra and ISIS should immediately and publicly rescind all policies that violate women's rights, including mandatory dress codes and limitations on freedom of movement. The groups should cease punishing and threatening women and girls whose dress or behavior does not conform to the strict rules imposed by these groups. They should also halt unlawful interference in women's and girls' rights to privacy, autonomy, and freedom of expression, religion, thought and conscience, enforce adherence to international human rights law, and punish those under their command who restrict women's dress and access to work, education, or public space. Any concerned governments with influence over these groups should also press them to put an end to these discriminatory restrictions on women, Human Rights Watch said.

"Groups like ISIS and al-Nusra claim to be part of a social movement, yet they seem more focused on diminishing freedom for women and girls than providing any social benefit," Gerntholtz said. "As we have seen in situations in Somalia, Mali, and elsewhere, these kinds of restrictions often mark the beginning of a complete breakdown of women's and girls' rights."

Clothing Restrictions

Eleven interviewees told Human Rights Watch that, between September 2012 and October 2013, they saw or heard announcements by Jabhat al-Nusra and ISIS at mosques, on pamphlets or posters, or to individuals in Aleppo's Sheikh Maksoud neighborhood, Ras Al Ayn, Tel Abyad and Tel Aran, stating that women must cover themselves from head to foot by wearing the abaya and hijab. In some cases the groups demanded that women wear the niqab, a veil covering all of the face apart from the eyes. The restrictions also forbade women wearing jeans, tight-fitting clothing, skirts or dresses above the ankle and make-up. In some areas, the groups ordered women not to style their hair or visit hair salons.

Basmah (all names have been changed at the request of interviewees), who had been studying at a university in Syria, said that after extremist armed groups gained control of Ras al-Ayn in the fall of 2012, they insisted that women wear the abaya and hijab in public and could not wear jeans or makeup. "We were very afraid," Basmah said. She used the term "ISIS" to refer to all members of armed extremist groups in the area. "If I went anywhere ISIS were and I didn't wear the long dress that they said I should wear, then they would say, 'You should never be here in this dress; you should wear what we want.'" According to media reports, Jabhat al-Nusra and Ghurabah al-Sham took control of Ras al-Ayn from the Syrian government in battles in November 2012. Since January 2013, media and independent monitoring groups have reported ongoing clashes between the armed wing of the Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD) and extremist armed opposition groups, including Jabhat al-Nusra and ISIS, which are fighting for control of the area.

A woman from Tel Abyad and a man from Tel Aran said that in July and August 2013 they saw members of Jabhat al-Nusra compel civilian men to rebuke women who did not comply with the dress code. Media reports indicate that fighters from Jabhat al-Nusra and ISIS were in the towns at this time. Rashid, 27, from Tel Abyad, said that if women did not abide by the restrictions, fighters whom he and his wife both identified as members of Jabhat al-Nusra would visit the women's homes and threaten their male relatives to make them enforce the rules. "They would say, 'This time we are saying this to you; next time we will take action,'" Rashid said.

Refugees from the Sheikh Maksoud neighborhood of Aleppo city and Ras al-Ayn, Tel Abyad, and Tel Aran told Human Rights Watch that Jabhat al-Nusra fighters threatened women with punishment if they did not comply with clothing restrictions. According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, Jabhat al-Nusra took control of Tel Aran in late July and continues to control the town. According to reports from media and the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights in late November and December, ISIS controlled areas of Tel Abyad, even forcing evictions of Kurdish families, and continued to fight Kurdish armed groups for complete control of the region. As of January 6, however, media reported that attacks on ISIS by other armed opposition groups threatened their position of power in Tel Abyad.

Restrictions on Movement

A total of 14 men and women told Human Rights Watch that Jabhat al-Nusra and ISIS imposed restrictions on women's movement in Jindires village in Afrin, Sheikh Maksoud in Aleppo, Idlib city, Ras al Ayn, Tel Abyad, and Tel Aran. Rihab, 39, from Tel Aran, said women's lives changed dramatically in July 2013 after fighters whom she identified as members of Jabhat al-Nusra announced restrictions on women's movement. The group no longer allowed women to appear in public alone and required a male relative to accompany them.

"We could not go visit our friends," she said. "We could not go to the market. Freedom was gone for us [women]. It was like we were in jail. We couldn't even go outside near our house. If we went outside, Jabhat al-Nusra would tell us to go back in our houses." Rihab said that when fighters in her neighborhood would not permit her to leave her house to visit her family in a different village, she obeyed. "I was too afraid," she said.

Refugees from Idlib city, Tel Abyad, and Ras al-Ayn, said that armed groups prohibited women from appearing in public unaccompanied by a male relative. They also said that Jabhat al-Nusra and ISIS banned women from driving in Tel Abyad and Idlib city. Mohammed, 57, said that fighters whom he identified as members of Jabhat al-Nusra forbade bus drivers in the Sheikh Maksoud area of Aleppo from accepting female passengers who were not wearing the hijab.

Faiza, 24, and Rihab, 39, both from Tel Aran, said that in July and early August Jabhat al-Nusra fighters took up a position in the bakery and barred them from purchasing bread for their families during Ramadan. "If any woman went in, they would tell us, 'Go back,' and, 'You should not bring bread; you are a woman,'" Faiza said.

Refugees from Tel Abyad and Tel Aran said that, between September 2012 and July 2013, female-headed households in these towns were trapped without access to work or supplies or had to take extreme measures to support themselves, such as traveling to far-away villages where extremist armed groups were not present to shop for food and necessities, despite ongoing clashes in the area. Hana, 19, from Tel Abyad, said that Jabhat al-Nusra threatened her female neighbors if they violated the dress code when going out to get supplies while their husbands or male family members were away working.

Faiza said that her widowed neighbor became stranded with her children, ages 3, 4, and 6, when Jabhat al-Nusra fighters in Tel Aran prohibited women from leaving their homes without a male guardian. As clashes intensified in July 2013, many townspeople retreated to a large open space away from the town center. "We asked her, 'Why don't you leave with us?'" Faiza said. "And she replied, 'I don't have any relatives or support. I will stay in my house with my children. I can't go with you.'" The widow and her children died when a shell hit their home. "All of our houses were destroyed," Faiza said. "Their bodies were trapped under the rubble for four days before anyone could take them out."

Refugees from Sheikh Maksoud in Aleppo, Ras al Ayn, Tel Abyad, and Tel Aran told Human Rights Watch that most women comply with the restrictions due to fear of punishment or repercussions for themselves or family members. Inhibiting rules and the resulting climate of fear has contributed to families' decisions to flee Syria for neighboring Iraqi Kurdistan, they said. Members of six families told Human Rights Watch that they decided to leave specifically due to the presence of Jabhat al-Nusra and ISIS, fearing the consequences of defying restrictions and the establishment of an even more severely restricted environment.

Restrictions on Employment and Access to Necessities

Refugees from Idlib city, Tel Abyad, and Tel Aran said that Jabhat al-Nusra and ISIS banned women from working outside the home. Isma, 25, a former hairdresser in Ras al-Ayn, told Human Rights Watch that in July and August 2013 all of the hair salons, which had mainly employed women, were closed in the neighborhoods controlled by extremist fighters, whom she identified as Jabhat al-Nusra. Media and the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported that Jabhat al Nusra was fighting for control of Ras al Ayn in July alongside at least six extremist armed splinter groups.

Abda, 20, and her father, Ahmed, said that fighters at checkpoints identified themselves as Jabhat al-Nusra and that the same group announced restrictions on women's employment in Tel Abyad in 2013. "Women could only do work in the home, such as knitting and tailoring," Abda said. "Before, it was normal for women to work outside the home, like as engineers."

Due to limitations on freedom of movement and their ability to work, a woman from Tel Abyad and another from Tel Aran told Human Rights Watch that they became wholly dependent on male family members.

Restrictions on Access to Education

Women and girls also face increasing obstacles to accessing education in areas where Jabhat al-Nusra and ISIS are present. Yasmina, 20, from the village of Yabseh near Tel Abyad, said that men she identified as members of Jabhat al-Nusra prevented her and other female students from registering for national university exams. "We saw that Nusra was running the [registration] office," she said. "They refused to talk to me, even though I was wearing a headscarf. I was wearing Western clothes and they said this was not acceptable."

People interviewed said that school attendance by both males and females declined with the increased presence of Jabhat al-Nusra and ISIS due to fear of armed clashes, but the impact on female students was compounded by the imposed restrictions and a perceived heightened risk to women's and girls' personal safety. Zahra, 20, who was a student in the city of Hassakeh, said that 10 of the 30 female students in her class at the Secondary School of Business stopped attending after Jabhat al-Nusra established a presence in the city in July and August 2013. Hana, the 19-year-old from Tel Abyad, also said that she and her female friends no longer attended class because they were afraid of Jabhat al-Nusra fighters in the area. Reports from media and the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights indicate that, in schools in Tweihineh, Saraqeb, and Tariq al-Bab in Idlib governorate, ISIS is requiring girls to abide by strict Islamic dress codes, distributing leaflets promoting Islamic religious classes, and pressuring school authorities to separate the sexes, including prohibiting male teachers from instructing girls.

Abductions and a Climate of Fear for Women and Girls

Women told Human Rights Watch they felt unsafe due to threats of punishment and reports of abductions of women by Jabhat al-Nusra and ISIS, which created a climate of fear in their communities. Two women told Human Rights Watch that they had been abducted by fighters they believed belonged to Jabhat al-Nusra. Arwa, 22, said that as she was leaving Firat University in Hassakeh by taxi in August 2013, Jabhat al-Nusra fighters abducted her from a checkpoint and held her for several hours. Ghadah, 44, said that an Islamist armed group in Tel Hassel abducted her during a raid on her home in which they killed her husband and nephew. They held her for two days with 10 of her and her relatives' children. The group released her husband's second wife after 16 days. Eight other interviewees told Human Rights Watch that Islamist groups had kidnapped or detained women on the road from Aleppo to Afrin and in Afrin, Aleppo, Ras al Ayn, and Tel Aran.

Six men and women also told Human Rights Watch that Jabhat al Nusra and ISIS made public announcements in Ras al Ayn, Tel Abyad, and Azaz declaring Kurdish women and property "halal" for their fighters. The interviewees universally interpreted this to mean that leaders of these groups were giving their fighters freedom to abduct local women without consequence.

International Standards Human rights law guarantees the right to freedom of religion, including the right to manifest one's religious beliefs through dress, worship, observance, practice, and teaching in private and in public. Human Rights Watch takes no position on Sharia-inspired norms or cultural dress practices per se, but opposes all laws or policies that impinge on basic rights, including public dress codes mandated by governments or other groups.

The enforcement of a compulsory and restrictive dress code on women and girls in Syria violates their rights to private life, personal autonomy, freedom of expression, and freedom of religion, thought, and conscience. These and restrictions on women's and girls' freedom of movement also constitute a form of gender-based discrimination prohibited under international treaties to which Syria is a party, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.

De facto authorities are responsible for respecting fundamental human rights in areas under their control and holding those who abuse them to account. Human Rights Watch has previously criticized governments and armed groups in Chechnya, Indonesia, Somalia, Mali, and Afghanistan for imposing regulations including mandatory Islamic dress codes and restrictions on women's liberties. Human Rights Watch has also criticized the governments of Germany, France, and Turkey for violating religious freedoms by banning religious symbols in schools and denying Muslim women the right to choose to wear headscarves in schools and universities. Women and girls should be free to decide whether or not to wear religious or traditional dress.