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Syrian Human Rights Committee

SHRC Seventh Report on the status of Human Rights in Syria 2008

The report covers
the period from June 2006 to December 2007

January 2008

Contents

1. Introduction	2
2. The Issue of Civil Society and Human Rights Activists.....	4
3. Law No. 49	10
First: Rulings of the Supreme State Security Court	10
Second: The Disappeared	13
Third: The Exiled	14
4. Issue of Islamists.....	17
5. Vengeful Measures	23
6. The Ordeal of the Returnees and Visitors	26
7. The Issue of Kurds	28
8. The Issue of Arbitrary Detention.....	32
9. Torture and Ill-treatment.....	35
10. Death Due to Torture.....	37
11. Death Because of Shooting	38
12. Arab Detainees	39
13. Supreme State Security Court	42
14. Vigils and Demonstrations	45
15. Restrictions on Media Freedoms	48
16. The Ordeal of Syrian Exiles in Iraq	53
17. Elections in Syria.....	56
Syrian Human Rights Committee in Brief.....	59

1. Introduction

The Seventh Report on Human Rights Status in Syria covers the period from the beginning of June 2006 to the end of 2007. The report was due to be published on 27th of June 2007, however the Syrian Human Rights Committee (SHRC) decided that its annual report be issued in January of every year instead.

Deterioration of the status of human rights in Syria accelerated on all levels through collective detention of the civil society and human rights activists in the wake of the issue of the Damascus-Beirut Declaration and its ramifications in May 2006, which resulted in the expansion of vengeful and punitive detentions and measures on all levels. The situation worsened also when the authorities launched a second crackdown that involved 40 activists from among the members of the National Council of the Damascus Declaration on the 9th and 10th of December 2007, after they had held a conference during which they elected a new leadership.

Kurds were targeted, but not as fiercely as during previous periods. Dozens of them were released after they had been detained for sympathising with the treacherously murdered Sheikh Muhammad Ma'shooq al-Khaznawi. Some political activists were detained and then released after various terms without any sentences being passed against them. Yet the authorities did not hesitate to shoot at them with live bullets when they rallied in the streets of al-Qamishli and 'Ain al-'Arab, causing a number of casualties among them.

The Exceptional Supreme State Security Court enhanced its unjust rulings quantitatively and qualitatively against whoever had any relationship with the Muslim Brotherhood Movement and strongly relied therein on Law No. 49, which sentences them to death. It favoured the detainees accused of affiliation to Islamic movements with the severest unjust judgments.

Random and arbitrary detentions continued for the most insignificant or even no causes. The Syrian regime went on routinely and systematically employing torture on the widest scale. Meanwhile, the lists of those prevented from travel, dismissed from their jobs, deprived of their civil rights and stripped off their nationality got rapidly longer and longer.

The Syrian authorities still insist on ignoring the large number of cases of disappearance whilst in jail, of those displaced and exiled due to oppression and of the Arabs detained and in prison. It is not only heedless to the suffering of the Syrian exiles in Iraq, who lived their worst days there, but it increased their suffering by detaining the returnees among them and inciting others against them. Besides, the authorities did not deal seriously with any initiative to find out through neighbouring countries, the fate of those detained or lost.

The Syrian regime activated the practice of capital punishment and shot those who participated in vigils and demonstrations on the streets. Many citizens died because of torture and people were silenced and deprived of the freedom of expression. The regime still monopolises the media and blocks more and more websites on the Internet.

2. The Issue of Civil Society and Human Rights Activists

Civil society and human rights activists have been exposed during the period covered by the report, to considerable persecution, harassment, oppression and punitive and vengeful measures. Many of them were detained and sentenced to unfair prison terms, others were prevented from travel and turned back from the airport or the land ports, while some others were dismissed from their jobs and deprived of their work in the state's ministries and administration.

The crackdown on civil society activists reached its peak in May 2006, when the intelligence agencies detained dozens after signing the Damascus-Beirut Declaration. The reformist, author and activist Michel Kilo (67 years) was arrested and sentenced to 3 years imprisonment by the criminal court in Damascus on 13th May 2007, on the charge of weakening national feeling and awakening sectarian and factional drifts. However, it is highly likely that he was tried for the reformist essays he had published. The same court sentenced the activist Mahmud 'Isa, who was arrested in the middle of May 2006, to a similar term on the charge of weakening national feeling. Meanwhile, it sentenced the activists Sulaiman al-Shummar and Khalil Husain to 10 years in prison allegedly for weakening national feeling and provoking factional and sectarian drifts and exposing Syria to hostile actions. On 25 April 2007, the same court unmercifully sentenced the lawyer Anwar al-Bunni, the human rights activist, to five years in prison on the charge of "spreading false news, which may lead to demoralising the nation." He had previously been arrested in the middle of May 2006 for signing Damascus-Beirut

Declaration, but he was tried because of his report to an Arab newspaper on the death of the detainee "Muhammad Shahir Haisah" in Sednaya military prison as a result of torture, and because of the intention of his centre to cooperate with the European Union to offer training courses on human rights. Many individuals were arrested because of their signing the Damascus-Beirut Declaration, to be released successively more than one month later. Among them were Safwan Taifur, Khalid Khalifa, Kamal Sheikhu, Mahmud Mar'i, Nidal Darwish, Ghalib 'Amer, 'Abbas 'Abbas and Muhammad Mahfooz.

As an additional routine measure by the Syrian regime, the Prime Minister issued on 16 June 2006 resolution No. 2746 dismissing the signatories on Damascus-Beirut Declaration from their governmental jobs; including seven from the Ministry of Education: Suhail Hamad Abu Fakhr, 'Isam Mahmud Khaddaj, Fu'ad Ameen al-Bunni, Haitham Naseeb Sa'b, Nabeel Hasan Abu Sa'b, Marwan Saleem Hamza and Kamal Fadlullah al-Dibs; along with Muneer ali Shahhood from the Ministry of Higher Education, Niqola Ghanoom from the Ministry of Health, Sulaiman Shamar from the Ministry of Petroleum, Kamal Yusuf al-Bal'oos from the Ministry of Finance, Ghalib Zaid Tarbiyyeh from the Ministry of Electricity and 'Isam Hani Abu Sa'eed from the Ministry of Agriculture. Two others, Fadullah Muhammad Hijaz and Leena Raghieb Wafa'i, were dismissed from the Ministry of Local Government, and two more, Salma Karkootli and Nazir Jadullah Nasr, from the Ministry of Information. The Prime Minister also issued a decision on 13 May 2007, dismissing Mrs. Raghida Rifqi 'Isa from her job in the General Department of Road transportations as a vengeful measure just for her being the

wife of the lawyer Anwar al-Bunni, and a collective punishment for all her family members.

On 10 May 2007, the criminal court in Damascus passed a very severe ruling against the liberal activist Muhammad Kamal al-Labwani, sentencing him to life imprisonment to be reduced later to 12 years in prison on the charge of contacting a foreign country and inciting against Syria. Dr Kamal al-Labwani was arrested on 7 November 2005 on his way back from a trip to Europe and America.

On 15 August 2006, the military court in Homs sentenced to 3 years in prison the civil activist Habib Salih, who had been detained on 5 May 2005 on the charge of publishing false and exaggerated news. Habib Salih had been among the detainees of Damascus Spring (Rabi' Dimashq) and had served 3 years imprisonment from 12 September 2001 to 9 September 2004.

On 19 November 2006, the Supreme State Security Court in Damascus sentenced to 4 years in prison the human rights activist and engineer Nizar al-Rastanwai on the charge of publishing false news and defaming and insulting the President of the Republic. On 18 April 2005, he was abducted by the military intelligence on his way back home in the Province of Hama.

On 17 June 2007, the Exceptional State Security Court in Damascus cruelly sentenced to seven years in prison Tariq al-Ghorani and Mahir Isber on the charges of exposing the state to hostile actions and belittling and humiliating the state. Meanwhile, it sentenced to 5 years in prison 'Umar Abdullah, Husam Milhim, Ayham Saqar, 'Allam Fakhoor and Dyab

Sirriyyeh on the charge of exposing Syria to hostile actions. The seven young men were arrested one year before they were sentenced, for being involved in a democratic youth activity practised on the Internet in which they exchanged news and ideas.

On 1st of May 2006, Communist Labour Party activist Fateh Jamoos, was arrested on his way back from a trip to some European countries. The criminal judge decided to release him on 12 October 2006 on condition that his trial should continue while he was free, as he was accused of defaming the State while he was abroad. The court sessions are still proceeding.

On 31 March 2007, activist Muhammad Ghanem was arrested and a military court sentenced him on 6 June 2006 to one year in prison which was later reduced to six months, on the charge of insulting the President of the Republic and humiliating the State and awakening sectarian drifts.

On 4 June 2006, activist Bassam Badrah (52 years) from Tartus was arrested only to be released on 25 September 2006 on condition that his trial continue before the military court while he was free, charged with insulting the President of the Republic.

On 10 August 2006, activist and former detainee ali al-Shihabi (51 years) was arrested on the charge of participating in founding a secret society opposing the goals of the Revolution and of signing the Damascus-Beirut Declaration. He was then released on 9 January 2007 when he was included in a pardon.

On 7 February 2007, author and physician Mahmud Sarem (69 years) was rearrested, after he had been released on 19 September 2006 having spent one and a half years in detention. Forty days later he was released to be tried while he was free on the charge of insulting a government official.

Activist Ahmad Hajji Darwish was arrested and then released on 20 September 2006, benefitting from a pardon.

Hasan 'Abdul-'Azeem, spokesman of the opposition National Democratic Assembly, was sentenced to one year in prison on 29 November 2006 for having the publication "The Democratic Stance" of the Democratic Socialist Union, over which he presides.

On 13 December 2006 activist, former detainee and leading figure in the Democratic People's Party, Fa'iq Ali As'ad (al-Meer) from Latakia was detained for offering condolence on the assassination of George Hawi in Lebanon. The Criminal Court in Damascus sentenced him in (31/12/2007) to three years, reduced to one and a half years in prison.

On 26 November 2006, independent social and educational activist Jamal Abu Zaid from the city of Dar'a was arrested for unknown reasons.

On 14 May 2007, activist 'Adil Tawfiq Mahfuz from Tartus was arrested and sentenced by the criminal court to six months in prison on the charge of disturbing the peace of the nation.

Late in June 2006, two activists from Misyaf in Hama, ali al-Sheikh and Hasan Bakir, were arrested. Fidan Qambar (24 years), activist in the Syrian Democratic Union was arrested on 3 July 2006. Activist Jihad Mssuti was detained on 1

November 2007 for four days in Damascus Airport on his way to Cairo to attend a workshop on human rights.

On 27 November 2007, the police arrested the political activist 'A'isha Afandi (45 years) who is favoured by the Kurdish Democratic Union, at her home in Damascus. She is from 'Ain al-'Arab in Aleppo Province.

The security authorities launched an extensive crackdown that involved 40 members of the National Council of the Damascus Declaration in the wake of holding the Council and the election of a new General Secretariat. Following are the names of those arrested on the ninth and tenth of December 2007: Sameer al-Nashshar, Ghazi Qaddoor, Radeef Mustafa, Pier Rustum, Usama 'Ashoor, Muwaffaq Niribyah, Najati Tayyarah, Isma'il 'Umar, Nasr Sa'eed, Kamel 'Abbas, Suhail al-Dakheel, Ahmad Tu'mah, Fawwaz al-Hamis, Fawzi Hamadah, Isma'il al-Hamid, Khalaf al-Jarboo', Mukhlis Shaqrah, Jabr al-Shoofi, Ghalib 'Amer, Muhammad Jabr al-Masalmah, Ali al-Jahmani, Yusuf Sayasnah, Abdul-Qahhar Sarrai, Zradisht Muhammad, Basheer al-Sa'di, Fu'ad Eilya, Fawwaz Tello, Ziyad al-Feel, Khalaf al-Zaroor, Faisal 'Azzawi, Abdul-Kareem al-Dahaak, Mustafa Usu, Ashraf Seenu, Hasan Zeino, Ghassan Najjar, and Usama 'Ashoor. They were later released after interrogation, with the exception of seven of them who were kept detained. They were Ahmad Tu'mah (42) from Deir al-Zour, Jabr al-Shoofi (60) from al-Suwaida' and Akram al-Bunni (51) from Hama, Ali al-Abdullah (57 years) from Deir al-Zour, Fida' al-Hawrani (51 years) from Hama, Walid al-Bunni (43) from Rural Damascus and Yasir al-'Iti (39 years) from Damascus.

3. Law No. 49

First: Rulings of the Supreme State Security Court

The Syrian regime stepped up its crackdown on the Muslim Brotherhood Movement. The Supreme State Security Court continued sentencing to death all the detainees that had been subjected to trial on the charge of being members thereof, according to Law No. 49 of 1980 the first article of which states that “each and everyone belonging to the Muslim Brotherhood Movement is considered a criminal who will be sentenced to death”. The article is applicable to the members of the movement, their proponents, their children and whoever contacts them. But such rulings, after being fixed, confirmed and emphasised are not enforced nowadays, as they used to be in the 1980s and 1990s, but rather reduced to 12 years in prison with hard labour, deprivation of civil rights, interdiction and fines. It is noteworthy that most of those against whom the unjust judgments were passed were the children or relatives of members in the Muslim Brotherhood Movement living in coercive exile since the 1980s. Those coercively exiled individuals returned home after properly referring to their respective Syrian embassies or after promises of pardon given to relatives of theirs referring to the proper security authorities in Syria on their behalf. But once they arrived in the country they were arrested, subjected to torture and ill-treatment and were sentenced to death in accordance with the above-mentioned law. Notably, the court did not declare such rulings clearly. Conversely, the former Minister of Information 'Adnan 'Imran alleged in several interviews that Law No. 49 had been frozen whereas other officials claimed in their press statements that it was cancelled. However, reactivating the

Law in this manner implies the renewal of the nihilistic crackdown on the Muslim Brotherhood Movement.

Consequently, the Exceptional Supreme State Security Court, in application of the first article of Law No. 49 of 1980, sentenced to death dozens of persons, and then reduced the sentences to 12 years in prison with hard labour, deprivation of civil rights, interdiction and fines. Among those individuals were the youth Muhammad Usama Sayes (25 June 2006) from Aleppo after being deported by the British Authorities who denied him asylum because his father, not he himself, was a member of the Muslim Brotherhood Movement, and 'Abdul-Rahman al-Mousa (27 June 2006) from Hama, who had been arbitrarily deported from the USA to Syria on 19 January 2005 for violating immigration laws. He was arrested as soon as he landed at Damascus International Airport and was subjected to torture and ill treatment. The others were Ahmad Mustafa Ibrahim from Aleppo (8 October 2006) and three youths from the city of Jisr al-Shughur; Yusuf 'Umar Husain, Muhammad Thabit Hilli and Fu'ad Ali al-Shughari. The three of them had left the country with their families in the early 1980s, when they were little children and returned in 2005 from their compulsory exile in Iraq in the wake of the horrific deterioration of security and the deliberate targeting of Syrian residents. On 11 February 2007, a sentence was passed against the detainee Muhammad Haidar Zammar of German nationality. Zammar had been abducted in Morocco in 2002 with the help of the American and German intelligence on charges related to terrorism. He disappeared in the Palestinian Branch for four years under military interrogation before being transferred in late 2006 to Sednaya prison and presented for trial before the Supreme State Security Court when it had been proven that

the accusations of terrorism against him were false. Meanwhile, a sentence was passed against Mahmud Muhammad Summaq (62) from Ariha in the province of Idlib. He was one of the exiles of the 1980s and was a resident in Yemen and had worked there since 1981. He returned to Syria pursuant to information he had received that his case had been settled. But the Syrian Intelligence apparatus arrested him as soon as he arrived in Syria on 12 April 2005 and subjected him to torture. Sentences were passed against Ali Fu'ad al-Shaghri on 20 May 2007, Abdul-Jabbar 'Llawi (35) from Suraqib in Idlib Province, Yasin Nafi' al-Sayil (30) from the Deir Alzoor Province on 25 March 2007, 72 year old Yusuf Najiyyah, a returnee from Saudi Arabia and Muwafaq Qarmah (44) on 28 August 2007, Ali Ahmad al-'Ajeel on 30 September 2007, and Ali Ibrahim Ahmad al-Khalaf (60), who had been detained since 6 November 2005, on 4 November 2007, and others.

Due to attempt to affiliate to the Muslim Brotherhood Movement, the detainees were sentenced to death and then the sentence was reduced to 12, 8, or 6 years in prison with hard labour, deprivation of civil rights, interdiction and fines.

Similarly, on 27 February 2007 the Exceptional Supreme State Security Court (SSSC) sentenced to death Sami Ali Dirbak (43) from Banyas for committing the crime of affiliation to the Muslim Brotherhood Movement. The sentence was then reduced to 8 years in prison with hard labour. Sentences of 6 years in prison were the lot of Khalid Ahmad Ahmad (46) from Latakia, Tariq Abdullah al-Hallaq (30), Ali Muhammad Isma'il (35), Abdul Nasir Taha Dirbak (35), and Jamal Jameel Jallul (49), all from Banyas. On 4 November 2007 the court passed a

similar judgment against Usama Ahmad 'Abdeen, who holds the German nationality. On 1 April 2007 Ali Mahmud Shahood 'Umar from Salqeen in Idlib was sentenced to 6 years in prison.

Second: The Disappeared

Nothing new has emerged this year concerning the issue of the disappeared in Syria, numbering about 17000 Syrian citizens who were detained in the late 1970s and early 1980s and whose traces have vanished. Syrian authorities try to ignore the existence of this problem and severely punish whoever discusses this issue or enquires after any of his or her relatives that have disappeared in the prisons of the Syrian regime. This, in spite of the urgent legal situations that require settlement after the elapse of three decades since their detention and subsequent disappearance. The SHRC received numerous enquiries from the relatives of the disappeared, and when the Committee clarified the circumstances and situations that led to their disappearance in the prisons of Tadmur, Al-Mazzah, Kafar Susah and al-Baluna and the interrogation centres of the various intelligence and security apparatuses, they would not welcome the news that their relatives had died or been killed in cold blood, or that they were executed following on-the-spot trials, or had died as a result of diseases and epidemics that permeated the Syrian prisons. Under the new issues the universal human rights organisations have ignored this issue, while some local organisations regard it as a bygone matter unrelated to the present, and refer to it with such statements as unequal to their human responsibilities.

Third: The Exiled

Since the early 1980s, thousands of Syrian citizens have been living outside Syria coercively because they, their children and grandchildren are subjected to Law No. 49 of 1980, which sentences the members of the Muslim Brotherhood Movement and their supporters to death. Syrian authorities enforce this unjust law on whoever contacts such persons. Coercive exiles scattered in the neighbouring countries and the Arab region and with time and due to the complications of their respective circumstances, some of them were forced to depart for Europe and the Americas.

Last year some citizens tried to settle their cases with the Syrian authorities in accordance with the conditions of the security forces, but when they arrived in Syria, they were detained and were sentenced according to Law No. 49 of 1980 (See the section on the Ordeal of the Returnees and Visitors). In the wake of the war that broke out in Iraq in March 2003, many citizens were forced to return to Syria to be detained and tried according to the above-mentioned law. As for those who are still abroad, the Syrian regime is trying to press the governments to dismiss them. The security authorities, taking advantage of their cooperation with the Americans in respect of the so-called “war on terror”, have provided them with lists of hundreds of Syrian dissidents as terrorists. Some ambassadors of the Syrian regime have, during the current year, demanded that certain exiles and residents in some Arab and European countries be handed over, and they tried to exert pressure in this direction. In several meetings between the Syrian government and its

counterparts from neighbouring countries this issue was discussed. Now and then, the exiles become the victims of the closeness in official relations and bargaining chips between the Syrian regime and some of these countries. Some of the exiles whose petition for refuge to a secure location was denied were then deported to Syria to face detention and cruel trials before the Exceptional State Security Court.

Under such continuous pressures, the ordeal of the exiles who are living abroad worsens, as many of them lose their 'legal identity' as Syrian citizens as well as their belongings to a specified country and their unstable residence in various countries depending on their being favoured or rejected according to the fluctuations in political circumstances. The families of the exiled unwillingly scatter among various countries, so that they cannot meet each other or live together. Many of them suffer from unemployment, inability to educate their children, and many social, economic and psychological problems. We have referred to some examples in some of the sections of the report, mentioning names and numbers. As for Syrian Ministry of Expatriates Affairs, and rather than giving priority to the solution and settlement of this issue, the Minister is apparently exclusively concerned with establishing relationships with the rich, the business communities and those supporting the Regime, while ignoring those and similar people who become targets for their aggression as was the case on several occasions in the last year.

During the last summer vacation of 2007, the Syrian Human Rights Committee recorded some images of the sufferings experienced by the families of the exiles, some of whom can visit Syria. They are exposed to lengthy stopping on the land

borders and at airports and ordered to refer to the intelligence and security centres in their respective provinces and the capital. The wife and children are required to give precise information about the husband or father, his biography, life circumstances and social environment. They are usually faced with threats, insults, prevention from travel and return, and sometimes with confinement, detention, ill-treatment and torture (See the report: The Suffering of the Families of the Coercive Exiles during the Summer Vacation of 2007).

4. Issue of Islamists

The various Syrian intelligence and security authorities have targeted the Islamists who have Salafi trends or the Tahrir Party and others in an unprecedented way since Bashshar al-Asad assumed the presidency of Syria, whereas the Shiites visiting the country have enjoyed great facilities in building centres and Shiite mosques and practicing various activities. The authorities and their adherents would defame the Islamists through calling them as ‘extremists, terrorists, Takfiris, Wahabis, and dissenters”, and most of them were sentenced according to article (306) of the criminal law on the charge of affiliating to a secret society that seeks to change the economic and social structures of the state. Some others faced arbitrary and unjust rulings on the charge of belonging to Salafi movements, or due to their Islamic trends, or on the pretext of awakening sectarian and factional conflicts, weakening the morale of the nation, weakening the national feelings and disturbing the stability of the nation.

The Syrian Human Rights Committee monitored the campaign of the Syrian security and intelligence authorities to support some persons who tried to arouse the religious feelings of the citizens under the slogans of Jihad (holy war) and opposing the occupants. They helped them by providing religious pulpits in some mosques and regions, and overlooking their activities, the least of which is not permitted for other people. They granted them the means to transfer the volunteers to the neighbouring countries in various ways and shapes. Some of those who went there were killed; those who survived to return were promptly detained by the intelligence authorities and

presented to be tried by the State Security Court, which passed severe sentences against them. Of those who did not go there many were detained and sentenced to unjust imprisonments on the charge of affiliating to extremist and non-conformist movements.

The sentences against Islamists ranged from 15 years to one year. A large number of them were sentenced to some years with hard labour, deprivation of civil rights, interdiction and fines. It is significant to note that the Supreme State Security Court is particularly specialised in passing sentences against the Islamist, for, allegedly, sentencing them is directly linked to the emergency state imposed on the country. In contrast, the secular detainees and the human rights activists are often referred to courts of civil nature in appearance—although they were not independent from the authority of the intelligence—such as the magistrate courts and criminal courts and others. This can be accounted for by the fact that the external opposition against the Regime's attitude towards the detainees of religious background is insignificant, while other states and international organisations of human rights exert great efforts to defend the liberal figures and human rights activists and regard them conscience prisoners, and do not cease submitting their problems every when and on all occasions and in all conferences.

In this respect, the Exceptional State Security Court sentenced on 7 May 2006 ten detainees of Islamic tendencies to various terms in prison: Mahmud Hajji 'Arab (8 years), Mahmud al-Shafi'i (7 years), Usama al-Shafi'i (3 years), Mus'ab Hajji Husain (9 years), Isma'il Mustafa (9 years), Abdul-Qadir Murad (7 years), Muhammad Tawfiq Murad (4

years), Hydil Badru (3 years), Muhammad Khalil (8 years) and Muhammad Shareef Dawood (8 years). On 19 June 2006, the court sentenced Ali 'Ammar Nu'man to five years on the charge of affiliating to a Salafi movement. On 1 October 2006, it sentenced Anas al-'Awf to four years because of his religious tendencies. On 5 November 2006 sentences were passed against the so-called "the group of Hama", when Ali 'Abd al-Samad al-Jajah was sentenced to six years in prison, Muhammad Abdul-Wahab al-'Imadi, Ahmad Hijazi and Abdul-Hameed Tabba' were sentenced to five years in prison, while Firas Hamood, Ahmad al-Musili, Hudhaifah Qizirbash, Bassam al-Asfar, Iyad Nirabbiyyah and Muhammad Hamama were sentenced to three years in prison. The court sentenced Hamid Khidr, who had been detained since 25 July 2004 and Muhammad Hasan Hamada, who had been detained since 25 June 2004 to five years in prison on the charge of affiliating to a secret society seeking to change the state's economic and social structures. On 14 November 2006, the court sentenced Ahmad Ali Haranyah, Husain Jum'ah 'Uthman, Samir Abu al-Khair, Muhmmad Abdul-Hafiz Kailani, Muhammad 'Iz al-Deen, Muhammad Ali Haranyah and Na'eem Marwah to six years in prison, while it sentenced Khalid Jum'ah Abdul-'Aal, Khalid Hamami and Muhammad Ahmad As'ad to seven years in prison, and Ali Ahmad 'Umar 'Abdeen to 9 years in prison on the charge of affiliating to the Salafi orientation. On 10 December 2006 Mustafa al-Fahal was sentenced to 3 years in prison on the charge of affiliating to a secret society seeking to change the state's economic and social structures. On 24 December 2006, the court passed judgments against five detainees because of their Islamic tendencies. They were the Palestinian Lebanese Muhammad Mustafa Isma'il (8 years),

Husain al-Ibrahim (6 years), Mazin al-Khateeb (3 years), Mu'awiyah al-Rahhal (one year and a half) and Abul-Kareem Khalid (one year and a half). On 14 January 2007, the court passed prison sentences for fifteen years against Marwan Zain al-'Abideen and Ibrahim al-Yusuf. On 14 January 2007, it passed judgments against a group of youths from Duma in the Province of Rural Damascus, who had been arrested in October 2004. They were Muhammad Jameel Summaq, Mustafa Ka'kah (10 years), Jihad Shammah, Husam Abdullah, Muhannad Muhsin, Yasir Biswani (7 years) and Mamdooh Rushu (4 years). It passed judgments against four university students from Latakia Province. It sentenced Nadeem Balooshi, the student of Mechanical Engineering for 10 years in prison, Waseen 'Affur and Husam Halawah, the students in Marine Engineering, and Abul_Ra'oof Seeno, the student of English Literature for 7 years in prison. It sentenced 'Asim Muhammad Basheer (37 years old) to 10 years in prison, Muhammad Ghassan Fawzi al-Khateeb for 7 years in prison, Shahir Muhammad Ma'roof al-Zarqah (27 years old), Jamal Husain Zayniyyah (35), Maher Hasan Khaz'al (30) from al-Tal in Rural Damascus to 6 years in prison and Murad Ma'roof al-Zarqah (29) for 4 years in prison. On 25 February 2007, it sentenced Khidir Abdullah Ramadan from Talkalakh in the Province of Homs to 5 years in prison, Muhammad Ali al-Kailani from al-'Utaibah in Rural Damascus to 7 years in prison on the charge of affiliating to a secret society and weakening the national feeling. On 4 March 2007, the court passed judgments against Islamists in Rural Damascus: Ahmad al-Shalbi and Usama Ma'eenah (10 years), Muhammad Abdul-Ghani (8 years), Husam Shalhoom and Abdul-Wahab al-Dahir (7 years), Ibrahim Nasri (6 years), Muhammad Khair al-

Mubarak (5 years) and Mundhir Barmo (4 years). On 11 March 2007, the State Security Court passed judgments against 26 Islamist detainees from Qatnah in Rural Damascus: Fadi Muhammad Abdul-Ghani, Yahya Muhammad Bandaqchi, Ahmad Mahmud al-Sheikh (12 years), Muhammad Usama Ahmad 'Atiyyah, "Amer Abdul-Hadi al-Sheikh, Ayham Ahmad 'Umran, 'Umar Muhammad Jamal Nadir (6 years), Rasheed Mahmud al-Sheikh, Muhammad Ma'moon Qasim al-Hilu, Sari Muhyi al-Deen Badr al-Deen, Mahmud Nayif Qaddurah, Nasir Muhammad al-"Amer, Ibrahim Ahmad Saburah, Muhammad Ahmad al-Nu'mani, Waseem Muhammad Jamal Nadir, 'Umar Abdul-Rahman 'Umran, Ibrahim Zain al-Deen and Hasan Muhammad Deeb al-Zain (5 years), Ahmad Khalid Khasarah, Bilal Khalid Khasarah, Abdul-Razzaq Yusuf Ahmad, Hasan Muhammad Deeb al-Zain and Rami Ahmad Suhaib 'Arafah (4 years). On 25 March 2007, it passed judgments against four Islamist detainees: Muhannad Haitham Libni (7 years), Muhammad Mahdi al-Najjar and Marwan Muhammad al-Shareef (4 years). On 18 March 2007, it sentenced Anwar Husain Hamada to seven years in prison, Muhammad Fatih to 6 years, 'Umar al-Mutlaq to (2 years). On 1 April 2007, the court sentenced Yahya Khattab to 7 years in prison and Muhammad Ali Kubbah on the charge of affiliating to a secret society. On 15 April 2007, Anas Qurah, Khalid Qurrah and 'Isa al-Abdullah were sentenced to 5 years in prison. The court sentenced Nidal al-Khalidi to 6 years in prison on 30 September 2007 on the charge of affiliating to a secret society. On 20 May 2007, it sentenced Muhammad Ali al-Sheikh and 'Ammar Abdullah to 3 years in prison on the charge of awakening sectarian inclinations. On 14 June 2007, it sentenced Ahmad al-Shuwakh and 'Aqbah al-Wasil to 7 years

in prison on the charge of affiliating to a secret society. On 24 June 2007, it sentenced Muhammad Qasim al-Zu'bi and Abdullah al-Juboori to 9 years in prison, Salman Dawood Ali to 7 years. On 29 July 2007, it passed judgments against the youth Mahmud Ali Teebah and Khidir al-Husain. On 2 August 2007, it sentenced Sulaiman Shahir to 7 years in prison, Walid 'Umar to 5 years. One week later it sentenced Ahmad Mansoor al-Hilali and Mustafa Noor al-Deen to 6 years in prison. On 25 September 2007, it sentenced Ahmad Hamdan to 4 years in prison, Ali Zain al-'Abideen (2 years) and Ahmad Da'bool (one year). On 11 November 2007, it sentenced Khalid al-'Abbood to 7 years in prison, Mahmud Muhammad al-Sheikh (8 years), Muhammad al-Humood (6 years) and Muhammad Barboor Darwish (4 years). On 25 November 2007, it sentenced Mu'awiyah al-Hasan to 2 years in prison on the charge of awakening sectarian feuds and encouraging disputes among the religious groups. The State Security Court sentenced Naji Muhammad Wadi (27 years old) to 10 years in prison with hard labour for an alleged terrorist crime, while it had sentenced on 30 September 2007 the Jordanian Ibrahim Muhammad al-Tahir to 15 years in prison for the crime of affiliating to a terrorist organisation. On 2 December 2007, it sentenced Ahmad Mahmud Sawan to one year in prison on the charge of awakening sectarian feuds. On 16 December 2007, it sentenced Muhammad Anas Saleh and Rami al-Sayyid to four years in prison, Muhammad Anas Saleh to five years in prison on the charge of disseminating false news and it sentenced 'Abd Salhab to ten years in prison on the charge of affiliating to a secret society that intends to change the State's economic and social structures and to provoke sectarian feuds.

5. Vengeful Measures

The Syrian authorities escalated the use of the other measures they practise against the civil society and human rights activists and their opponents, such as prevention from travel, withdrawal of passports, not issuing new passports, ordering them to periodically visit the security apparatuses, which resort to threatening and intimidating them and terrorising them, or winning the support of those who cannot withstand them. Added to this are the measures of firing from work, the attempt to improvise the people, isolate them socially and humiliating them as these authorities did and are still doing against the families of the detainees of the 1980s, who were closely boycotted. A detainee who was released after 16 years of detention reports that he found his family living in a house the roof of which had collapsed but the authorities did not allow anyone to aid them and compelled them to live in a roofless house. The alternative roof was pieces of plastic. The authorities prevented their relatives from helping them in their living and let them unwillingly lead a miserable life. The wife and the children would periodically present themselves to be asked about their income and who supported them financially.

In this respect the list of those prevented from travel has expanded so much so that you can hardly find a human rights activist or an opposing politician that is permitted to travel. After the prevention of the human rights activist Radwan Ziadeh from travel in 2006, the human activist Aktham N'aisah was prevented also and was ordered to visit the security services. Suhair al-Atasi, the chairman of the Forum of Jamal al-Atasi for National Dialogue was prevented from travel. On 27 July 2006 the security authorities prevented the lawyer

Muhannad al-Hasani from traveling to participate in a legal forum in Amman, and they prevented the politician Ahmad Manjunah from travel at the same date. On 4 November 2007, they prevented three Kurd activists of human rights: Radeef Mustafa, Mustafa Usu and Hasan Mashshu, as well as Khalil Ma'tuq and the lawyer Muhannad al-Hasani from attending a legal workshop in Cairo. The Kurdish activist Khair al-Deen Murad was prevented from traveling to Norway to visit his family in late August 2007. The Political activist Abdul-Razzaq 'Eid was prevented from traveling to France for medical treatment of a persistent illness for which no cure was available in Syria, but after a lot of intercessions he was granted permission. Yet the Syrian authorities still refuse to permit the former member of the People's Council (Parliament) Riyadh Saif to travel for medical treatment of prostate cancer. He appealed from the decision of the security apparatuses but the Syrian biased judiciary refused his case twice without presenting any justifications. The human Rights activist Nasir al-Ghazali, the holder of Swedish nationality, was prevented from returning to Sweden on 28 September 2007 after his visit to Syria. In the middle of November 2007, Rasim Sayyid Sulaiman, the Chairman of the Arab Human Rights Organisation in Syria, was prevented from traveling to Turkey to attend the Quds Forum. On 19 November 2007, 'Ammar Qurabi, the director of the National Human Rights Organisation was prevented from traveling to Amman to attend a legal forum. Previously, the activist Sireen Khuri had been prevented from traveling to Jordan. The student Mustafa al-Hayid was prevented in August 2007 from traveling to study. On 21 November 2007, the authorities prevented Muhannad

Abdul-Rahman and Juan Yusuf from traveling to attend legal activities. The cases of prevention from travel are countless.

The Syrian Intelligence prevented the engineer Abdul-Kareem Matar from Deir al-Zour from returning to his work in one of the ministries after 13 years imprisonment. He had to work as a taxi driver till he died upon having a heart attack on 27 July 2007 because of intense emotion.

The Syrian authorities use deprivation of civil rights as an additional penalty and another vengeful measure against those who have served the imprisonment penalty for political matters, so that their life is not stabilised and their freedom is not completed after their release. Those deprived of civil rights, according to judgments passed against them pertaining to this deprivation; suffer from the scarcity of work opportunities in a country where a big number of its population depend on governmental jobs to earn their living. Deprivation of civil rights in Syria includes, besides non-employment in governmental jobs, deprivation of passports. Consequently, former detainees are most probably prevented from leaving the country in search for a source of living. Some former detainees can get some documents, including passports, through corrupted channels and by paying tributes or bribes. Deprivation of rights is also the lot of thousands of Syrian Kurdish citizens who were deprived even of the nationality according to the unjust exceptional census of 1962 that had taken place in al-Hasaka Province only.

6. The Ordeal of the Returnees and Visitors

The returnees and visitors to Syria suffer from the risks of being detained, interrogated and tortured. They are easy victims to give information, be manipulated and be subjected to the financial corruption characterising the intelligence apparatus and the Syrian security authorities. We cite as examples the detention of Abdullah Abdul-Rahman al-Zu'bi from Dar'a Province, who visited the country on 1 June 2006; the detention of Patricia Dabbour, who holds the Swiss nationality on 4 July 2007, when she visited the country, to be released later on; the detention of the university student in Yemen, Muhammad Salah al-Deen Abdul-Latif (20 years) from Aleppo on 12 July 2006, when he arrived in the country to spend the summer holiday there; the detention of Usama Muhammad Ali al-'Allu (24 years), who resides with his family in the UAE, when he visited the country on 4 September 2006, and the detention of Muhammad al-Hariri and Husain al-Nabulsi (two Syrians) and Mahmud Husain Shuhaibir and Fathallah Husain Shuhaibir (two Palestinian residents) when they arrived coming from Libya on 17 November 2006, after 16-year detention in Libya because of their Sufism, to be released later on. On 10 December 2006, detention was the lot of Muhammad 'Abdul-Hay Shalabi (64 years) from al-Tal in Rural Damascus immediately on his arrival from Saudi Arabia, despite the arrangement of his visit with the official authorities and despite his suffering from an incurable disease. On 30 December 2006, there was detained Husain Isma'il al-Dughaim, who came from Malta to visit his family in Idlib Province, and was deprived of the money he was carrying with him. As soon as he was released, he was arrested by another

security body and his detention lasted for six months, and he is still forbidden to go back to his family in Malta, where he lives, works and holds its nationality. On his arrival in late December, 2006, to visit Syria coming from Saudi Arabia, where he works, the consultant doctor, Jihad Sha'ban Qabaqeebu (50 years) from Homs, was arrested although the visit had been arranged with the authorities, to be set free in the first half of July, 2007. There may be added Muhammad Usama Sayes, Abdul-Rahman al-Musa and Abul-Jabbar 'Allawi, who have been already mentioned in the section on Law 49.

The above-mentioned examples are just a few of a large number of cases of detention and interrogation that are carried out against the visitors and returnees to Syria. Hardly is there a day without the occurrence of such law-violating events. The Syrian Human Rights Committee received several complaints during the last summer vacation on the nuisances experienced by some of the visitors to Syria, in particular those Iraqis who have proved that they had not been allowed entrance to Syria except after paying bribes to the officers and security personnel in Damascus International Airport. Some of them were detained for hours and days and some stories were forged against them and they were humiliated and mistreated when they refused to pay what they were asked to pay.

7. The Issue of Kurds

The crackdown on the Kurdish activists is going on in all its varieties: detention, presentation to exceptional and military courts, persistence in denying the rights of Kurds as citizens entitled to all their rights, denying their cultural and ethnical rights which the Regime awards to other ethnic groups living in Syria and suppressing any of their claims even if by using violence and shooting against them.

Many of them were presented to exceptional courts charged with ready accusations made to measure, such as affiliation to a secret organisation and the endeavor to split part of the Syrian land to annex it to a foreign country. On 10 December 2006, for example, Qambar Husain Qambar was sentenced to 3 years in prison in accordance with the above-mentioned accusation. On 4 February 2007, 12 Kurds were sentenced for the same accusation to various terms in prison, as follows: seven and a half years in prison were the lot of Ahmad Ali Rustum, Jan Bakr, Luqman Mustafa, Muhammad Hasan and Muhammad Ali Mustafa; four-year imprisonment was the sentence against Abdul-Qadir Sheikho and 'Inayat Ali Ibish; three years in prison were for Shairzad Bakr and Muhammad Muhammad Ibish; two and a half years in prison was the sentence against Khabat Rashkilo, Sheikh Musa Qasim and Mustafa Hasan. On 23 November 2006, Shairkoh al-Ahmad, the Kurdish political activist and leading member in the Democratic Union, was sentenced in absence. There are large numbers of the Kurdish ethnicity who are being tried while they are free. Reportedly, 49 Kurds were being tried while they are

free before a military court in Damascus on 14 December 2006 because of celebrating the first anniversary of the abduction and assassination of the Kurdish Sheikh Muhammad Ma'shooq al-Khaznawi.

During the period covered by the report, dozens of Kurdish activists or some unfortunate people who were the victims of the Syrian intelligence and security apparatuses were arrested. Reportedly, Ibrahim Khalil (58 years), 'Izzat 'Uthman (33 years), Muhammad 'Abd Khaleel (42 years) and Salah Muhammad Bilal (35 years) were detained in al-Ashrafiyyah Neighbourhood in Aleppo on 4 August 2006. On 5 October 2006, some of the participants in a sit-in in al-Qamishli, carried out in protest against the exceptional census of 1962, were arrested. Among them were Zuhair Kanjo Hamu, Jad'an 'Uthman, Radeef Mustafa, Fawzi Ali, Isma'il Mustafa, Kanuwar Ali, 'Amer Hamu, Jum'ah Isma'il Mahmud, Abdullah Mahmud Mnawir, Suroor Sheikhmoos, Muhammad Nabi, Ali ..., Najm al-Deen ... and Isma'il It has been reported that Murad al-Khaznawi, the son of the assassinated Sheikh Muhammad Ma'shooq al-Khaznawi, was detained on 13 November 2006 on his way to Amman, but he is said to have been released later on. Luqman Muhammad Muhammad was detained in al-Dirbasiyyah town on 2 November 2006, and Ahmad Farhu on 4 November 2006 following a visit to their relatives in Northern Iraq. The military intelligence in 'Ifreen arrested the Kurdish activist Na'eemah 'Abdoo (40 years) in late August 2006, and it is reported that she was subjected to severe torture so that she had to be transferred to the Military Hospital in Aleppo. On 16 October 2006, Raizan 'Adil Ahmad was arrested from his

working place in 'Amooda town and was hurriedly taken to al-Qamishli and then to Damascus. On 19 November 2006, Musallam Mustafa Kutu was arrested from 'Ifreen. Three days before, some armed individuals from the Political Section had attacked a number of houses in Aleppo to arrest Khalid Rasheed Rasheed (from Jandarees), Muhammad Musa Hamko and 'Uthman Muhammad Musa Hamko (from Rajo). On 20 December 2006, the secretary of the Kurdish Democratic Union Party in Syria, Muhammad Sheikhmoos Aali (54 years) was arrested from a cafe in Aleppo. In the middle of August 2007, the expatriate citizen Mahmud 'Isa was arrested from his village 'Arshqaibar following a visit of his from Germany. On 17 December 2006, the youth Muhammad Mustafa Bayram from Dummar in Rural Damascus was arrested, and the university student 'Ammar al-Ahmad from Aleppo was arrested, too. On 12 August 2007, Ma'roof Mulla Ahmad, the leading member in the Kurdish Yekiti Party was arrested. On 15 April 2007, a group of Kurdish labourers in the Nabik town were arrested; among them were Ra'ad Taha Ramadan, Marwan Muhammad Sa'eed, 'Adnan Muhammad Yusuf, Ibrahim Muhammad Khalaf, 'Imran ..., and Idris On 22 July 2007, the Intelligence of the State Security arrested the former Kurdish detainee 'Izzat Fa'iq Mustafa (49 years) from 'Ifreen district. On 2 September 2007, the Military Intelligence arrested Bashar Ameen al-Ali, the member of the Political Committee of the Turkish Aazaad Party from his home in al-Hasaka Province while he was in his night dress. The activist in the Committee of Educated Kurds, Ibrahim Mustafa (27 years) was arrested from 'Ain al-'Arab town on 16 June 2007 to be transferred to the branch of State Security in Aleppo and then to Damascus. Fifteen Kurds from the city of al-Qamishli

were arrested on 2 January 2007 in the wake of their protest demonstration, and they are being tried by the only military judge in al-Qamishli city. They are Muhi al-Deen Sheikhmus Husain, 'Abd Kamal Isma'il, Saleem Sulaiman Hadi, Sha'lan Muhsin Ibrahim, 'Abbas Khaleel Ibrahim, Sheikhmus 'Abdi Hasan, 'Isa Ibrahim Hassu, Abdul-Kareem Husain Ahmad, Muhammad Haleem Ibrahim, Abdul-Rahman Sulaiman Rammu, Jameel Ibrahim 'Umar, Walid Hasan Husain, Mazin Findyar Hammu, Firas Faris Ahmad, and Mussa Sabri 'Ugail. The following juveniles were referred to the criminal court in al-Hasakah: Husain Ahmad Hasan, Tahseen Taha Fattah, Seeban Khaleel Ali, Khaleel Muhammad Isma'il, Nafi' Abd al-Ra'oof Ghaida, Shnidar Jamal Sareek and Sheendar Salah Ali. On 16 December 2007, the security authorities and the forces for preserving order dispersed a demonstration that Kurdish parties called to carry out in front of the State Security Court to protest against trying a group of Kurds. The Syrian authorities once more adopted the same approach of detaining the participants in the picketing in large trucks and dumping them away from the location of the picketing.

8. The Issue of Arbitrary Detention

Arbitrary detentions go on in Syria widely in villages, towns and cities, targeting whoever opposes the Regime and whoever is suspected of opposing it. In reality, the majority of arbitrary detentions do not have access to mass media and human organisations, particularly when the case is related to religious individuals, for they are secretly detained at night, and their families, who are threatened of detention and punitive measures, are reluctant to release the news. Arbitrary detention is practised by the Security and Intelligence Apparatuses spontaneously pursuant to the reports of the informants, false allegations fabricators and agents, which is contrary to the law. Nevertheless, the Authorities justify their actions on the pretext of the emergency state declared in Syria since 8 March 1963 on the allegation that the country is being exposed to foreign dangers.

As brief samples of arbitrary detention, patrols of Air force Military Intelligence raided, on 11 November 2006, numerous houses in the City of Homs arresting a number of citizens for their alleged affiliation to al-Tahrir Party. Among them were Ghazwan al-Shawwa, Jihad al-Kayyal, Bashir Abu al-Laban and Iyad al-Kharraz. The above-mentioned Intelligence continued its crackdown by arresting Hashim Bayerli and Musheer Abu al-Laban from the street two days later. On the 18th of the same month, a patrol of the Political Security Section attacked the clinic and dentist laboratory and arrested their owner Yaseen Hadeed and some of those working in the laboratory, for the same claim.

The teacher Muhammad al-As'ad and Yamen al-Taweel were arrested in the last week of August 2006 in the town of Salqeen in Idlib Province, because of their religious tendencies. For the same reason, the Palestinian citizen Maher Najmah was arrested in Yarmuk camp in Damascus on 17 August 2006. A patrol of Military Intelligence arrested Abdul-Aziz Rafee'ah, Abdul-Rahman Rafee'ah, 'Umar Rafee'ah, Abdul-Rahman Yusfan, Abdul-Aziz Yusfan, 'Adel Mahlimi and Abdul-Aziz Mahlimi from their homes in Alqamishli city on 20 November 2006 because of their religious orientations. On the morning of 15 November 2006, the doctor Muhammad Ali 'Isa (29 years) was arrested because of his religious orientations to be followed by his brother Yusuf, just for his coming to the Intelligence Section to ask about him.

The Intelligence Forces launched a series of arrests in Ariha district among the youths returning after performing 'Umrah in July 2007. They arrested Safwan Qaddoor and then Mus'ab al-Sheikh to be both transferred to Palestine Branch (Branch No. 235). Then Muhammad Qurabi was arrested along with Muhammad Skhatah, Muhammad Taku, Mohsen Taku and Iyad al-'Adil, a minor below the legal age.

Late in October 2006, the Security Authorities launched a crackdown against those affiliated to the Salafi movement in the countryside of Idlib. Among the detainees were Maher Muhammad Abdul-Baqi (23 years), Abdul-Ghafoor Abdul-Baqi (22 years), Ahmad Abdul-Ghafoor Abdul-Baqi (24 years), Muhammad Marwan Abdul-Baqi (26 years) and Ma'moon Ahmad Fir'awn (28 years), all of whom are from Mohambel, along with Usama Nader 'Asi, Abdul-Latif As'ad 'Asi, Sa'ad

Nafi' 'Asi, al-Qi'qa' Nafi' 'Asi and their fourth brother, besides Sa'eed Ahmad 'Asi, all of whom are from Ariha.

On 13 January 2007, the Syrian Authorities arrested 'Umar Muhammad Bakkour (34 years) and his brother Sufyan Muhammad Bakkour (30 years) the sons of Muhammad Bakkour the opponent residing in Iraq. They both returned to Syria after arriving at a settlement in the spring of 2003. 'Umar Muhammad Bakkour was released later on, but Sufyan is still detained as a hostage for his father although he does not belong to any political organisation and is not designated as an activist in the political or social field, nor did he do anything that justified his detention even in accordance with the Regime's criteria, except for his being the son of an opponent. Sadiq al-Barazi, translator and former detainee, was arrested having been summoned to one of the security headquarters on the (20/11/2007). He was released on (26/12/2007) without any explanation of this random arrest.

Moreover, the detentions mentioned in the other chapters devoted to the Islamists, Kurds and the activists of the civil society and human rights and politicians are deemed arbitrary, illegal and unjustifiable.

9. Torture and Ill-treatment

Torture is widely practised on a systematic and routine basis in the Syrian interrogation centres, jails and prisons. It can be confirmed that all those that are interrogated are subjected to torture. Torture is intensified, diversified and coloured according to the detainee, his accusation and the degree of his cooperation with interrogators. Those detained because of their Islamic tendencies usually receive the worst portion of torture, and while the security and intelligence apparatuses degrade their integrity extensively, many international human organisations show no interest in highlighting their state and defending them. What complicates the situation is the great authority the officers and investigators enjoy, keeping in mind that the Syrian Regime did not endorse the anti-torture convention.

Torture assumes various shapes, such as beating with the hand, slapping the face, the use of the baton and cables, electrocution of sensitive areas of the body or electrocutions along with the use of water, the ghost, wind carpet, the German chair, the tyre, hanging upside down, the fan, cracking the body's organs, leaving the detainee suffer from pain without treating him, drenching in water, burning with cigarettes, handcuffing and shackling for long periods, depriving of sleep, etc.

The judge "Amer al-Khateeb, the former Chairman of the State Council and the Chairman of the Supreme Administrative Court declared on 27 November 2006 that he had been subjected to physical and psychological torture during interrogating him in the Branch of Political Security in

Damascus. It has been proved beyond question that the political activist Muhammad Kamal al-Lubwani was subjected to torture upon detaining and interrogating him during the period covered by the present report. The detainee Muhammad Haidar Zammar was subjected to severe torture in Palestine Branch to extract confessions from him during interrogating him by Syrian and non-Syrian intelligences. Rukana Muti' Hammur reported that she had been kidnapped from the street and from her home in her night gown and had been subjected to torture, humiliation and immoral abuse because of a family dispute with her brothers, in which the security forces sided with her brothers, who had paid them large amounts, as she reported.

In the session of the Supreme State Security Court on 26 November 2006 to try Husam Milhim, 'Allam Fakhur, Ayham Saqar, Mahir Isber, Tariq al-Ghurani, 'Umar al-'Abdullah, Dyab Sirriyah and Ali al-Ali, they all denied the accusation attributed to them and confirmed that their confession had been extracted by the security apparatuses under severe torture and duress.

Moreover, a lot of news have revealed that those returning to Syria were subjected to torture, the dose of which being multiplied for the detainees of Islamic tendencies.

10. Death Due to Torture

In considerable cases torture leads to death, but the authorities do not acknowledge that. When the corpse of the detainee is handed over to his relatives they are told not to open the coffin and to bury it promptly, while the report of the prison's doctor explains out the death as the result of a "sudden heart attack". A closely related source, for example, mentioned that the corpse of the youth Abdul-Mu'iz al-Salem from Ariha, who had been detained in Palestine Branch, was handed over to his relatives in a black bag on 4 July 2007 under the supervision of the Military Intelligence, and they were instructed to bury him hurriedly in a plot belonging to his father. A similar event had occurred one year before when the Military Intelligence handed the corpse of the detainee Muhammad Shahir Haisa over to his family from Tishreen Military Hospital in Rural Damascus. A special report received by the Syrian Human Rights Committee late in October 2007, mentions that Ibrahim 'Alwan (35) from Aleppo died under torture in one of the Syrian interrogation centres. On 6 November 2007, a patrol of the Criminal Security Forces beat, kicked and humiliated Ahmad Saleem al-Sheikh (37) in the street till he died under the sight of the by-passers.

Ahmed Abdulghafour Abdulbaqi died under torture also in December 2007. The Authorities attempted to hide this incident by claiming that he had been killed in Iraq, despite records showing that he was detained by Syrian intelligence 5 months ago.

11. Death Because of Shooting

During this period the use of live bullets increased to terrorise the citizens, some of whom were killed unjustifiably. On 22 September 2007, Abdul-Hadi Bistu was killed by the bullets of the police in Dummar in Rural Damascus, where he was present while the municipal labourers were demolishing an unlicensed house. The youth 'Ammar Fandi (30) was killed, when the Security Forces assaulted his house in Latakia on 9 June 2007 and shot him with a cascade of bullets to kill him. An element of the Security Forces opened fire on a car running on the highway between al-Qamishli and al-Hasaka without warning, which resulted in the immediate death of Naser Mish'an al-Dhirb (30). The car halted and there got off Saleh Hammad al-Nazzal to protest against the death of his friend, whereupon the security element opened fire from a very short distance to kill him, too. On 2 November 2007, 'Isa Khaleel Mulla Husain fell dead in the city of al-Qamishli when the authorities opened fire on the demonstrators protesting against the Turkish military multitudes at the borders of Northern Iraq, while several people were injured, such as Shyar Ali Khaleel, Bilal Husain Hasan and others.

On the morning of Friday, 2 June 2007, armed fighting took place in the wake of tension and a wide operation of detentions in the town of 'Irbeen in Rural Damascus, during which were killed many juveniles of the district who were less than 17 years old. Among those who were killed were Wisam Dofash, Abdul-Rahman al-Sheikh Muhyiddin, Muhammad al-Qalish, Muhammad al-Buqa'i and another person from Al-Ton family.

12. Arab Detainees

The Syrian Intelligence Apparatuses and Security Forces arrested dozens of Arab citizens visiting Syria during this period along with hundreds who had already been suffering in the Syrian prisons and detention centres, not to mention those hundreds who disappeared in the same way as their Syrian detained fellowmen had disappeared three decades before.

Reportedly, some Saudi citizens visiting the country to spend a holiday to visit their relatives or get medically treated were arrested and accused of affiliating to the Wahabi school of thought and Islamic orientations, or detained because of being suspected of attempting to sneak into Iraq or practising immoral actions. It turned out that most of the detention cases took place with the intention of blackmailing by supported corrupt security personnel. This issue was addressed in the Saudi press and by the Saudi human rights activists, who pleaded to their government to intercede to release the detainees who numbered 180 Saudis according to certain reports. Some of the released declared that they had been subjected to torture and accused of affiliating to the Wahabi school of thought. The family of "Amer Hosan S'ud al-Maqadi mentioned that their father had vanished before the day of his return to Saudi Arabia from Damascus on 19 April 2007. Later on a lady telephoned demanding 50000 Saudi Riyals to release him. Others have stated that some Saudi tourists were plundered, and faced aggression against them and their cars, besides being verbally insulted and detained by the Syrian Intelligence elements.

As to the Jordanian detainees in the Syrian prisons, their story is both old and new. This year this issue has been activated and some Jordanian human organisations moved to call for their release. It has been reported that King Abdullah II, upon his visit to Syria in November 2007, asked President Bashar al-Asad to release the detainees, whereupon the Syrian authorities delivered 18 criminal detainees to the Jordanian authorities, out of 215 according to certain official reports, while other reports claim that the number of the Jordanian detainees in Syrian prisons may be 1000. The Syrian Human Rights Committee believes that many of the Jordanian detainees that were arrested in the 1980s have disappeared in the prisons; they were either hanged or died under torture, but the Syrian authorities are still indifferent to their case, as they are to the issue of the disappeared Syrians.

The Syrian security authorities had already acknowledged the existence of 80 Lebanese detainees, but the Lebanese human rights organisations raise the number to 850 detainees that were detained during the period of the Syrian presence in Lebanon. They were arrested for various allegations and the Regime does not declare their being under its hold. Added to them are a number of Lebanese soldiers. Reports and some of the released detainees have referred to their exposure to severe torture, including whipping, deprivation of sleep and handcuffing and shackling for long periods. The Syrian authorities rejected all the calls for releasing the Lebanese detainees, while the Syrian Human Rights Committee believes that many of them disappeared in the Syrian prisons and were secretly liquidated therein, without the Syrian authorities acknowledging their bloody practices.

Moreover, dozens of Palestinians and Iraqis were detained this year. Nothing is mentioned about them because of the silence of the Syrian intelligence and security authorities and the fear of the detainees' families of the consequences of disclosing the detention of their loved ones.

13. Supreme State Security Court

Supreme State Security Court (SSSC) is one of the most important devices of repression used by the security authorities. By virtue of law, the authorities are entitled to form more than one state security court and to set them up in various areas of the country. The state security court was formed to replace the exceptional military courts, which were cancelled in 1968.

The Supreme State Security Court (SSSC) in Damascus was the worst device used by the Authority in its crackdown on the Syrian society in the 1980s. It is believed that this court passed, during the 1980s alone, thousands of judgments, most of which were death penalties. The Authorities were not satisfied only with using the court as a means to legalise repression but its judgments were enforced and applied against a large number of political detainees, according to the testimonies of the witnesses in Tadmur prison and other prisons where the politicians were detained.

Despite the considerable decrease in the decisions passed by this court in the 1990s, the trials before it have not come to an end completely; for it passed judgments against activists in the field of human rights, among the most prominent of whom were the members of the committees for the defense of democratic freedoms and human rights and members in the Communist Party—the Political Bureau and the Communist Labour League. This court resumed trying the political detainees after 2000 although it had lost its legality, which was reaffirmed again because its head continued presiding over it after being retired. It even revived Law No. 49 of 1980 and passed, according to it, death sentences against those

accused of affiliation to the Muslim Brotherhood Movement. It, however, started reducing sentences to long-term imprisonment. We have mentioned in the section on Law No. 49 that it sentenced to death, during the period covered by this report, at least 24 detainees.

This court is regarded among the most serious violations of human rights in the country due to the absolute jurisdictions that it enjoys. Moreover, it is directly linked to the institution of the republic presidency; for only the President has the authority to prevent the implementation of its decisions, or to command the repetition of the trial; namely, the fate of the one sentenced by the court is left to the decision of the head of the executive authority.

Legislative Decree No. 47 issued by the President of the Republic on 28 March 1968, which instituted the Supreme State Security Court and defined its jurisdictions in its sixth article, states that "The jurisdiction of the Supreme State Security Court comprehends all civilians and military persons regardless of their status or immunity."

Although the Decree confirms in its seventh article "the protection of the defense right stated in the valid laws", it legalises the extra-judicial action through confirming that "the state security courts shall not abide by the usual procedures stated in the valid legislations, in all the sessions and measures of pursuit, interrogation and trial", and "the prosecution, while interrogating, has all the jurisdictions granted to it, those granted to the examining magistrate and those granted to the judge in accordance with the valid laws".

The judgments passed by the Supreme State Security Court are inviolable; the only person that can prevent the execution of the judgments is the President of the Republic; for these judgments are not enforceable except after their being endorsed through a decision by the Head of the State, who is entitled to annul the judgment and order retrial, to annul it and preserve the lawsuit, or reduce the punishment or replace it with a lighter one. The preservation of the lawsuit has the effect of general amnesty. The decision of the Head of the State shall be final in this case and shall not be violable or questionable in any way. The tenth article of this Decree annuls "all the rulings opposing this legislative decree".

14. Vigils and Demonstrations

Syria is ruled by a tight security hold, and expression of opinion is forbidden unless it is in conformity with the attitudes of the Authority. Such prohibition involves all citizens no matter how high ranks they may occupy. Nevertheless, this has not prevented the civil society activists and those who have their own cases from stepping over barriers and rallying in the streets to express their opinion. The forces of security, intelligence and order preservation are used to deal with sit-ins and demonstration, however limited they were, to terrorise the citizens and prevent them from participating in them. The measures, taken by these forces against the participants in sit-ins and demonstrations, range from preventing congregations to beatings and up to fire opening. On 5 October 2006, the security and police forces prevented a peaceful sit-in that was supposed to be carried out in front of the cabinet on the occasion of the anniversary of the exceptional census that was carried out in al-Hasaka Province in 1962, which resulted in depriving 150 thousand Kurds of their Syrian nationality. The participants in the vigil tried carrying out their vigil in an alternative location but the security forces were well-prepared to undermine all alternatives. Numerous citizens, including Kurds, civil society activists and politicians, were arrested.

On 2 November 2007, Kurdish influential activists arranged in al-Qamishli and 'Ain al-'Arab two demonstrations to protest against Turkish military multitudes at the Iraqi borders, whereupon the security forces confronted them and dispersed them causing a number of injuries, besides one fatal case and dozens of arrests.

On 30 October 2007, dozens of al-Golan citizens carried out a vigil in front of the Red Cross Bureau in Damascus sympathising with the Syrians and Arabs detained in the prisons of the Israeli occupation. On 23 August 2007, a similar vigil had been carried out in front of the UN Headquarters in Damascus upon the call of the activities of Syrian human organisations to demand the release of the Syrian captives and detainees in the prisons of the Israeli occupation.

On 28 November 2007, a multitude of the families of the farms of Western Homs and their relatives set out in four coaches to arrange a sit-in in front of the presidential palace in Damascus against the illegal expropriation of their farms by the municipality of Homs. Upon their arrival at the street of Abu Rummaneh, the elements of the security, police and traffic forces started confronting them and preventing them from gathering together. Consequently, there occurred violent quarrels and confrontations and the sight attracted the attention of the by-passers and the journalists who were in the street. Upon the persistence of the participants in the sit-in, three of them were allowed to enter the office of the palace guards, who referred them to the office of the Prime Minister. They went there, where a worse confrontation took place again upon the arrival of the news that the municipality of Homs had started evacuating the farms. The citizens were exposed to hustle and bustle, violence and beating on the part of the elements of security and police though their demands were simple; for they just wanted them to wait till the legality of the expropriation of their orchards by the municipality is legally decided before their being evacuated from them.

The security forces have used a new approach to prevent sit-ins, such as detaining those heading for the sit-in and beating them, or detaining them temporarily as happened in the forty-fourth anniversary of imposing the emergency state, when the security forces arrested those proceeding to the sit-in in front of the People's Assembly in March 2007 and transferred them to distant regions in the outskirts of the Capital Damascus to disperse the participants in the vigil and prevent it.

15. Restrictions on Media Freedoms

Mass media in Syria are restricted in respect of licensing and the freedom of publication. The authorities continue restricting licensing magazines, newspapers, TV channels and broadcasting stations. Official mass media are still dominant in all fields. As to the magazines, newspapers and TV channels that were instituted during the few past years, most of them avoid discussing political issues in order to survive. The unique exceptional example is that of al-Dumari newspaper, which was the first independent newspaper in Syria after 38 years of banning independent press; namely, since 8 March 1963, when the Baath Party assumed power in a military coupe. The result, however, was that within a short period the newspaper ceased terminally because of the political and economic restrictions practised by the Ministry of Information and the governmental establishment in charge of distributing newspapers and magazines.

As to the majority of the magazines and newspapers that started to be published in the country during the few past years, they are void of political subjects, and overwhelmed by social issues, with the exception of some mass media that are owned by influential figures, such as the magazine "White and Black", whose publisher is Bilal Hasan Torkmani (the son of the Minister of Defense) and the TV channel "al-Dunya", which is owned by Rami Makhluf (the cousin of the President). They both handle political issues and publish news. As to the "Shaam (Levant)" channel, which is owned by Akram al-Jundi, it was compelled to cease a few hours after its official broadcasting in October 2006, after broadcasting the news. It

had to depart to broadcast from the City of Media Production in Egypt.

The restrictions extend to cover the new media, i.e., the websites. The list of blocked websites is increasingly expanding. The Governmental Communication Establishment prohibits the users of the Internet to have access to such websites as are not favoured by the Authority. Prohibition does not involve only political or opponent websites but it covers some non-opponent websites when, in what they publish, they step over the red lines drawn by the monitor, which are unknown because they are not published. Among such websites are the ones run by Baathist activists, or youth websites (such as "Shabablak" website, which has been recently banned. It is a social youth forum visited by more than 50 thousand members, and is not designated as opponent). A well-known journalist in Syria declared in the aftermath of blocking the famous website of "Face Book" lately that no websites remain in Syria but those of Sana, Tashreen, al-Thawrah, the Ministry of Information, the People's Council and some indecent websites. As to the websites of political parties, the opposition, human rights organisations and news websites, they have all been blocked.

The Syrian authorities have issued strict instructions to the owners of the Internet cafes requiring that they keep precise information about their visitors, including the identity of the persons, their residence, the electronic websites they visited while they were in the cafe, the numbers of the booths they sat at and the numbers of the equipment they used. These pieces of information shall then be presented to the official bodies when demanded, which will facilitate the arrest of any person

visiting banned websites, the owners of the cafes being responsible. Moreover, communications via the Internet are banned, for they are not subject to the telephone monitoring imposed by the Syrian authorities on the entire telephone network.

The international organisations that defend the freedom of the press designate the Syrian Regime as the most inimical to the Internet in the world. Besides banning and blocking the websites and monitoring their visitors, the Syrian authorities detained dozens of citizens during the current year just for trying to browse websites blocked in Syria.

The authorities base their repression of media freedoms on legislative decree No. 50, which the Syrian President Bashar al-Asad issued on 22 July 2001. The decree represents the new law of publications in Syria that has replaced the old decree that was issued on 8 October 1949.

The long-awaited law permits the publication of printed materials that are not subject to the monitoring of the State and granting licenses to issue periodical materials, but it imposes numerous restrictions on publishing. It imposes severe penalties on offenders. The opponents deprived of their civil rights are denied licenses. Decree No. 50 regulates the work of printing houses, bookshops and publishing houses, the procedures of granting licenses for periodicals, forbidden publications, the crimes of publication and the relevant principles of trials. The Decree did not introduce anything new when it allowed individuals and judicial persons to publish periodicals according to a number of conditions, for the former law of 1949 had granted licenses for periodicals according to almost the same conditions. But this aspect has been

practically ineffective since the Baathist Party assumed power in 1963.

The Decree grants the Prime Minister wide jurisdiction to deny licensing newspapers. It is strict with the contents of publications, and its penalties are directly applied to the journalists and what they publish.

The executive authority in Syria is entitled to interpret and apply the law in matters of publication as it wishes. Offenders can be sentenced to penalties ranging from 10 days to three years in prison. Monetary fine may amount to one million Syrian Liras (more than \$20000). Offending newspapers are punished by barring their issue for a period ranging from one week to six months, in addition to the penalties stated in the valid laws, while the party who is responsible for any publication that calls for changing the constitution of the state through non-constitutional means is punished by withdrawing its license in addition to the stated penalties. The Minister of Information is entitled to withdraw the press identification card from the journalist if he refuses to make known "a responsible source" to which press information has been attributed. The Government claims that it seeks to amend the law of publications so as to cover the new media. Consequently, it is expected that the restriction and ban imposed on the Internet websites will be regulated by the law, rather than leaving the matter to those in charge of communications to deal with each case separately.

In this respect the Syrian authorities dismissed the special correspondent of Agence France Presse (AFP) to Syria (Joil Bsul) on 7 August 2006, without the spokesman of the Ministry of Information giving a justification for that except that

he behaved according to the instructions of the Ministry of Interior.

On 7 September 2006, the press apprentice Muhannad Abul-Rahman was arrested because of his work as a journalist, and, simultaneously with him, the journalist 'Ala al-Deen Hamdoon was arrested, and then both of them were released on 22 September 2006, but their case remained before the military judiciary till 25 September 2007, when the court dismissed the case as invalid for absence of a crime.

On 2/12/2007, the Ministry of Information issued a memorandum instructing no cooperation to be extended to the journalist Wadhah Muhhiddin, as a result of his documented reports on a major corruption scandal in Aleppo involving a number of high-ranking officials.

16. The Ordeal of Syrian Exiles in Iraq

Syrian exiles residing in Iraq since the early 1980s were exposed, during the period covered by the report, to major dangers that threatened their life and existence. They were targets for the Iraqi police, the armed militia close to them and the American forces. About 38 of them were killed after their being taken from their houses, the locations of their work or from the street. About 23 persons were arrested and forces in the uniforms of police attacked some of their houses in Hayfa Street and set on fire 15 houses on 16 January 2007. What intensified the danger of exposing the exiled Syrians to detention and murder was the refusal of the Iraqi Ministry of Foreign Affairs to renew their residences or tearing them up and tearing up the documents some of them had gained from the UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), to acquire the status of refugees.

Owing to these risks the families of the exiled tried to move to other countries, but the neighbouring countries refused even their transit across them. The UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) was unable to offer any help despite contacting it and sending direct and indirect calls and appeals to it. Meanwhile, the intelligence and security apparatuses continued waiting for whoever of them returned and would arrest him upon his arrival at the Iraqi borders. Hundreds of the Syrian exiled families could do nothing but leave Iraq as soon as possible at any cost and by any means that would enable them to survive a sure massacre that had been contrived against them by the Iraqi police and the armed militia allied with them, leaving behind all their belongings and a quarter-of-a-century-long memories. Nevertheless, another considerable

number of families were not fortunate enough to depart, especially those who are waiting for the release of their relatives from prisons, those who are looking for their missing ones, those who have marriage and in-law relationships there, or those who could not find a means to depart. Those who have departed are suffering in their new residences from unemployment, destitute and loss of neighbours and companions.

In this respect the Syrian Human Rights Committee has recorded the following events: The corpse of the youth Salih al-Madani (25 years) was found in one of the streets of Baghdad on 11 September 2006. The police had arrested him along with his companions in the street on 15 July 2006. The twins Zaid and Zaidon Tirkawi (17) were assassinated by the armed militia in early October 2006. Detention was the lot of Ahmad Tirmanini (55), Khidir Hasan al-Juburi, Abdullah Karkab al-Marsumi, Ibrahim Judai' al-Marsumi, Khalaf al-'Ilaiwi, Khidir Hamad al-Hasan and Ali Nasir on 21 December 2006 and their corpses were found mutilated two days after their arrest. The youth Abdul-Fattah Juha (20), a resident in Mosul was abducted on 14 January 2007 and his corpse was found a few hours after his abduction.

Muhammad Bakkur, Muhammad Badawi, Ibrahim Jarkas and Uthman Bisbasa were arrested on 9 January 2007. While Muhammad Bakkur, the Head of the Syrian Committee for Democratic Action was released two days later, but his comrades have not been released yet.

The Iraqi police arrested Rakan Taher Qintar (45) , Mahmud Abdul-Majeed al-Muhammad (43) and Ali Abdul-Kareem al-Modlej (28) in the second half of 2006, while the American

forces arrested Abdul-Rahman Muhammad Qal'achi (57) and his three sons, 'Adnan Abdul-Rahman Qal'achi (23), Ahmad Abdul-Rahman Qal'achi (30) and Razwan Abdul-Rahman Qal'achi (23), who was arrested in May 2007. The American forces arrested 'Umar 'Akkash (20) on 13 January 2007, Ahmad Muhammad Snobar (55) on 23 February 2007, Usama Muhammad 'Mash (26) on 20 May 2007, Ibrahim Muhammad Abdul-Ghani Najjar (18) on 8 August 2007, and Abul-Rahman Ahmad Muhammad (29) on 16 August 2007. The Iraq police arrested Muhammad Ibrahim 'Asi (42) on 25 March 2007, Abdul-Ghani Muhammad Najjar (20) in April 2007, Mus'ab Fa'our (26) on 3 July 2007, Ahmad 'Awwad al-Hasan (34) on 25 April 2006, Ghasaan Muhammad Abdul-Ghani Najjar (21) on 15 July 2007 and Mustafa Mahmud Shamma (45) on 25 August 2007.

17. Elections in Syria

The year 2007 saw three election events; Parliament elections in April, a referendum on the President in May and local government elections in August, all of which saw the absence of proper democratic measures and standards.

The Ba'th party's lot in Parliament is 134 out of a total of 250 seats, and with its ally; the marginal National Progressive Front Coalition, it enjoys 172 seats. This leaves to the rest of the Syrian people less than 80 seats or so (independent), most of whom are either the newly rich who share strong ties and relationships with security officers and major figures within the regime.

As a result of the absence of any real democratic competition and with the share of the Ba'th party and its allies guaranteed, Syrians demonstrate a deep and considerable sense of apathy. At a time when the regime carried out a number of measures in order to raise the numbers of voters, including holding elections on working days and punishing government employees who's ID cards show that they have not voted, numbers have failed to rise above the 10% mark in all three election campaigns. However, this did not deter the Ministry of Interior from declaring the numbers at 97% for the referendum on the President, 35% for the Parliament elections and 49% for the local government elections.

The referendum on the President lacks the bare minimum conditions of democracy, as no one is allowed to nominate themselves, as nominations can only be made by the higher strands of the ruling Ba'th Party which has a complete monopoly over state and society by virtue of Article 8 of the

Constitution, designed especially by the former President Hafez al-Asad in 1973, and does not allow for anyone to stand for the position of President.

What was worse was that a number of citizens were arrested after the referendum on the President and disappeared in a variety of prisons and interrogation centres, including Misbah Ala'iddin from the village of Bisnada in Latakia after casting a 'no' vote in the referendum.

A number of journalists who covered the referendum were attacked by security officials and were ordered out of the country immediately, including the Iraqi correspondent Saif al-Khayyat from JJ Japanese media agency who was arrested, abused and subjected to severe torture before being ordered out of the country.

SHRC documented many cases in which citizens were coerced and forced, either individually or collectively to vote with a 'yes' in the referendum. SHRC also documented a large number of cases in which ID cards (lost or replaced) were issued in order to ensure dubious castings. A number of agents for the independent candidates in both the parliament and local elections stated that they had been ordered to leave the polling hall a full hour before polling closed, which casts doubts over whether papers were replaced. Also the private voting booth was discarded during the referendum, and reports confirm that security officials stood over ballot boxes to ensure the vote was a 'yes', and to report the names of those who cast a 'no' vote, so that they could be persecuted later.

Syrian authorities refuse to allow any party, public or international, to monitor elections and ensure their fairness

and transparency. The authorities also refuse to accept any appeals or protests pertaining to the elections. It is noteworthy that all denominations of the Syrian opposition boycotted the elections due to the total absence of any standard of democratic notion, as well as fairness, transparency and freedom as a result of the Ba'th party's right to the majority vote by virtue of the constitution.

Syrian Human Rights Committee in Brief

The Syrian Human Rights Committee is an independent impartial human rights advocacy body, concerned primarily with the public freedoms and the status of Human Rights in Syria through the following means:

Disclosing the violations and transgressions pertaining to Syrian human rights and basic freedoms and publicizing those breaches through media outlets and addressing those concerned with such practices and raising them before the relevant authorities.

Carrying out research and publishing books and studies relating to Syrian basic freedoms and human rights, in accordance with proper and sound academic research standards and field surveys.

Publishing articles, running campaigns, holding seminars and carrying out interviews and meetings which go towards publicizing the status of human rights in Syria.

Spreading awareness regarding the culture of human rights and public freedoms throughout Syrian society and encouraging the public to demand its human rights so that the necessary changes which ensure the attainment of such rights occur through peaceful means.

SHRC abides by the principle of collaboration and cooperation with other non-governmental bodies, organizations, agencies, groups and associations which specialize in the field of human rights, whilst maintaining its full and complete independence.

SHRC was established in the summer of 1997, in an initiative by the members of the Syrian committee for the defence of human rights in Syria and other independent activists who joined efforts.

Human rights activist Walid Saffour was elected to head SHRC and its Board of Directors in 2004. His term ends in the summer of 2008.

Until the time SHRC is permitted to open its headquarters in Damascus and its branches in the Syrian provinces, it will hold its temporary offices in London.

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