

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	184
Land:	Syrien
Kilde:	Institute for War and Peace Reporting
Titel:	Syrian Kurds Step Up Protests
Udgivet:	12. oktober 2009
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	1. februar 2010

Last Updated: Friday, 29 January 2010, 08:58 GMT

[unhcr.org](#) | [Partners](#) | [Help](#) | [Contact](#) | [Site Map](#)

Search

Enter a word or phrase [Advanced Search](#) | [Search Tips](#)

Regions

[Africa](#)[Americas](#)[Asia](#)[Europe](#)[Oceania](#)

Countries

Categories

[Country Information](#)[Legal Information](#)[Policy Documents](#)[Reference Documents](#)

Browse by

[A-Z Index](#)[Topics](#)[Publishers](#)[Document Types](#)

Resources

[Special Features](#)[Standards and Training](#)[Information Alerts](#)[Protection Starter Kit](#)[Library](#)[News](#)[Refworld Personalization](#)[External Links](#)Text size [Email this document](#)[Printable version](#)

Title	Syrian Kurds Step Up Protests
Publisher	Institute for War and Peace Reporting
Country	Syrian Arab Republic
Publication Date	12 October 2009
Citation / Document Symbol	SB No. 78
Cite as	Institute for War and Peace Reporting, <i>Syrian Kurds Step Up Protests</i> , 12 October 2009, SB No. 78, available at: http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4ad82ba317.html [accessed 29 January 2010]

Syrian Kurds Step Up Protests

Minority complains that rights are trampled on.

By an IWPR-trained reporter (SB No. 78, 12-Oct-09)

While Kurds in Iraq move towards more independence and those in Turkey are guaranteed greater political and cultural rights, their brethren in Syria have been subjected to more and more repression, activists and analysts say.

In the past year and a half, the Syrian authorities have been arresting more and more Kurdish activists, including prominent personalities, and sentencing some to long prison terms, they say.

A protest against the arbitrary arrests of Kurdish dissidents that was scheduled to be held on October 12 in the northeastern region of Qamishly - which is predominantly Kurdish - was cancelled to permit future negotiations between Kurdish political parties and Damascus, the Yakiti party said in a statement.

The government has agreed to engage in dialogue "to solve the Kurdish cause democratically", said the party, one of the main Kurdish political groups.

Kurdish political figures have called on the Syrian authorities to follow the example of Turkey in opening the door to greater political and cultural freedoms for the Kurds in Syria.

The Syrian government seldom makes comment in the media about the situation of the Kurds. Syria's Arab nationalist ideology has, since the 1960s, left little room for the recognition of the culture of non-Arab ethnic minorities.

However, during the congress of the ruling Baath party in June 2005, officials said they would take measures to help the Kurds. The government also floated the creation of a committee to look into the cultural and linguistic heritage of the Kurdish people but the idea has not yet been realised.

Since 2005, officials have also promised to consider granting Syrian nationality to thousands of stateless Kurds in Syria but so far nothing has happened about this.

In a recent interview with the London-based website Quds Press, Ismail Omar, the head of the outlawed Alliance Democratic Party, urged the Syrian government to release all Kurdish prisoners of conscience and grant citizenship to the proportion of the Kurds living in Syria without papers.

He said President Bashar al-Assad's decision last month to grant an amnesty to the Syrian fighters of the Kurdistan Workers' Party, PKK, who operate mainly in Turkey, was not enough.

A close look at Syrian human rights reports shows that the number of Kurdish activists detained or sentenced has been on the rise. There are no accurate figures for the number of Kurds in jails in Syria but almost every day a Kurdish activist is questioned by security officials, Kurdish groups say.

According to a recent report by the Kurdish Human Rights Committee, a group created in 2006 and based in Syria, the state security court sentenced Ezat Ibrahim Sido in July to 10 years in prison. He was charged with possessing explosives and arms and with belonging to the Alliance Democratic Party. Kurdish activists say that Sido was imprisoned merely for being an active member of a Kurdish political party.

Other Kurdish activists were jailed although they had not apparently planned or taken part in any

violent activities, some critics say.

Fouad Aliko, a prominent member of the Yakiti party, was sentenced to a year in jail in April for being part of an association "with an international facet".

Hassan Saleh, a member in the same party, was sentenced to 13 months in prison for "instigating riots and sectarian tensions".

Two main reasons lie behind the increased repression: regional changes and better networking of Kurds inside and outside Syria, said Abdel-Hakim Bashar, an official of the Kurdish Democratic Party in Syria. He said three members of the party were sentenced to three months in prison in August.

Syria is worried about democratic changes in the region, especially in Iraq, where Kurds are gaining more political ground, he said, and Syrian Kurdish groups are coordinating with the national democratic opposition, which includes secular and Islamist groups.

"The fear that Kurdish popular movements would become a general phenomenon in Syrian society has pushed the authorities to use all repressive means to try to tame the Kurds," Bashar said.

Bashar was briefly detained along with 192 other Kurdish protesters in November last year after organising a rally in Damascus against an official decree that restricted the right of Kurds to hold property near the border.

The government's opponents say there is a risk of more internal agitation if repression continues and international pressure on the government could increase. Syria has 15 Kurdish political parties, which want the Kurdish language and culture to be recognised and Syrian citizenship to be granted to tens of thousands of Kurds living in the country without papers. They are not seeking independence from Syria.

International human rights groups say that Kurds in Syria cannot use the Kurdish language freely, are not allowed to register children with Kurdish names and are prohibited from starting businesses that do not have Arabic names. They are not permitted to build Kurdish private schools and are prohibited from publishing books and other material in Kurdish.

The 2008 human rights report by the British Foreign Office said that the long-term policy of dispossession of the Kurds by Syria is causing mass poverty and migration. It says 80 per cent of Syrian Kurds live below the poverty line compared with 40 per cent in 2005.

There are no official figures for the number of Kurds living in Syria but estimates say they make up between 10 and 15 per cent of the 21 million population. Kurds, who mainly live in the north and northeastern parts of the country, are the second largest ethnic group in the country after Arabs.

Although they are officially banned, Kurdish political parties have emerged from secrecy in recent years, organising protests and mustering support not only in Kurdish regions but also in large cities like Aleppo and Damascus.

Kurdish political groups say repression increased when they started organising more demonstrations.

Kurds mostly protest to mark the assassination of prominent Kurdish figures or to object to government decisions affecting their livelihoods. Protests also take place on March 21 each year when Iranians and Kurds mark Nowruz, the Persian New Year.

In 2008, three Kurdish youths were killed and several others were wounded by security forces during a protest on the eve of Nowruz.

The military judiciary is currently trying 16 Kurdish individuals for their participation in activities held around this year's celebration of the spring event, said Mustafa Osso, a lawyer and the chairman of the Kurdish Organisation for the Defence of Human Rights and Public Freedoms in Syria.

Osso said that prominent members of the Kurdish Azadi political party are also being tried and could face life imprisonment for allegedly instigating civil strife and belonging to a secret association aimed at changing the state's social and economic identity.

The Syrian regime lacks any clear vision for the future of Kurds in the country, said the Syrian critic Yassine al-Haj Saleh, in an article after the sentencing in March of Mashaal Tamo, the spokesman of the Kurdish Future Movement, to three years in jail for "weakening national sentiment" and "undermining the standing of the state".

Saleh, a former political prisoner, has said that Kurdish movements in Syria were always democratic and had never resorted to armed struggle.

"The deterioration of the situation of the Kurds results from the fact that the government is unable to forge a consistent policy towards the Kurds," said Saleh.

He said that in addition to repression, the Kurds in the past few years have suffered growing economic and social problems, which make their situation even more explosive.

Copyright notice: © Institute for War & Peace Reporting