



General Assembly

Distr.: General
16 September 2021

English only

Human Rights Council

Forty-eighth session

13 September–1 October 2021

Agenda item 4

Human rights situations that require the Council's attention

Written statement* submitted by Partners For Transparency, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[22 August 2021]

* Issued as received, in the language(s) of submission only.



The Human Rights Situation in the Syrian Arab Republic

The personal safety of civilians in the Syrian Arab Republic has become unattainable, owing to the daily threats resulting from the human rights violations by all parties to the conflict. In the Syrian Arab Republic, one cannot speak about law enforcement in the presence of all parties to the conflict. All parties, without exception, forcibly arrest civilians without any legal basis against the background of their political opinions. No one dares to raise a voice, otherwise he will be arrested and sometimes severely tortured. Throughout the period from January to July 2021, the prosecution and arrest of citizens, activists, politicians and opinion leaders spread on a horrifying scale. Some human rights reports have documented the arrest of 859 citizens by all parties to the Syrian conflict since the beginning of 2021 until July of the same year. Furthermore, the Syrian government recorded the largest share of arrests with 401 cases for several reasons, topped by the authorities' attempts to muzzle the voices of opposition to the latest presidential election results, which was won by Bashar al-Assad with an overwhelming majority. At the same time, the Turkish-backed armed factions arrested 371 civilians, the majority of these arrests were in Afrin District to force the people to accept the fait accompli, in addition to obtaining ransom money. This comes in conjunction with the wave of arrests carried out by HTS against activists, media workers and politicians, which targeted about 87 citizens, mainly for their opinions that are critical of the HTS.

Accordingly, arbitrary arrests are common during the Syrian conflict and some of them are characterized by being indiscriminate, massive and completely haphazard. Such arrests are also used by the parties to the conflict as a tool to silence the voices of the opposition, which promotes impunity. Therefore, this written intervention highlights the systematic arbitrary arrests by the parties to the Syrian conflict since the beginning of 2021 until July of the same year.

Objection to the presidential election is a reason for the Syrian government's prosecution of citizens.

Indiscriminate and mass arrests are commonly practiced by the Syrian government that mostly target citizens, political and human rights activists without any legal basis for such arrests, in addition to preventing them from communicating with their families or attorneys. No Syrian citizen can ever be spared from the arrests in government-controlled areas. During the period from January to July 2021, the Syrian government made 401 arbitrary arrests, mainly in Daraa Governorate against the background of the residents' abstention in the presidential election and objection to the candidacy of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. From the beginning of May 2021 to July of the same year, the government arranged a series of security campaigns in order to silence any voice critical of al-Assad through an unprecedented wave of mass arrests to send a clear message that whoever is considered a threat to President al-Assad would be crushed. Such tactics eliminates the lowest indicators of political opposition and increases the self-censorship of citizens, particularly the opposition and the human rights activists.

During the presidential election in May 2021, the Syrian security forces arrested about 97 people, 66 of whom were released and the others were forcibly disappeared.¹ The most notable among these arrests is the detention of 20 people in Daraa for objecting to the presidential election after its completion.² The Syrian security forces also raided areas surrounding the power station in Rif Dimashq Governorate, in addition to the mass arrest of 7 civilians for their non-participation in the election and escorting them to unknown destinations without a trace. Furthermore, some military patrols stormed about 8 houses in Hamouriyah city and arrested 5 people for non-participation.³

Citizens' arrest is the main feature in NES.

¹ Documenting 162 cases of arbitrary arrest and recording tens of thousands of cases of detention to force them to vote in May 2021, Syrian Network for Human Rights, <https://bit.ly/3s1s6gY>.

² Arrest cases rise in Daraa after the end of the Syrian regime elections, Nidaa Post, <https://bit.ly/3s1CpBw>.

³ A large-scale security campaign against civilians in Damascus, Syria 24, <https://bit.ly/37shTRh>.

The Turkish-backed armed factions in NES continue their ruthless campaigns against various spectrums of the peaceful political opposition. Anyone who denounces the human rights violations by such armed factions gets arrested for politically-motivated charges divorced from reality, such as the charge of espionage for the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), with a view to silence their voices from demanding freedom and democracy, not to mention the widespread abductions in Afrin for ransom and to collect money from the victims' families. In this regard, during the period from January to July 2021, these armed factions arrested and abducted about 371 people, in addition to the practices of torture and sexual violence against women in detention centers in order to force the citizens to accept the fait accompli for fear of social stigma.

The armed factions arrested about 24 people during July 2021. They launched mass arrest campaign in the village of Baadina that included house raids and attacks residents, leading to the arrest of 9 people.⁴ On the other hand, the number of arrests in Afrin increased in July to about 55 arrests,⁵ contrary to May with 15 arrests. In addition, March and April recorded 71 arrests, while February recorded the largest number of arbitrary arrests with 77 arrests, followed by January by around 66 arrests.⁶ Notably, some of those arrested were released after money payments made by their families. For example, Abdo Hassan was arrested in May 2021 by a militia of the Sultan Sulaiman Shah Brigade under the pretext of sharing intelligence with the SDF. Hassan was brutally beaten and tortured, but he was released after his family paid a sum of \$3000.⁷

Those arrested are reportedly tortured and humiliated inside the detention centers of the armed factions. This is clearly demonstrated by the abusive practices committed by the Chief of the Military Police branch of Turkey, "Abu Riyadh", against women in Marata Prison that included the worst forms of sexual violence under the pretext of an investigation. Despite all the complaints filled by the families against Abu Riyadh, the Turkish government has not taken any steps in this case until today, indicating that he enjoys impunity.⁸

Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) is beyond critique

The HTS is arresting all media workers, politicians and humanitarian workers against the background of expressing their critical opinions. It arrested 87 people between January and July 2021, most notably the arrest of media worker Adham Dashrani after his objection to the HTS's policies on social media platforms.⁹ This is in addition to the arrest of activist Mazen Arja, young man Abbas Smeasim and others for the same reason. Meanwhile, in early August, Cleric Hussam Sharif was arrested against the background of criticizing the HTS in one Friday Sermon.¹⁰ Those arrested are also subjected to all forms of torture inside 21 security prisons of the HTS, foremost among them is editor Bilal Abdul Kareem who was tortured during his 6-month period of detention. Abdul Kareem was arrested in August 2021 against the background of his coverage of special reports on the real conditions in prisons of the HTS. Following his release, he revealed that during his detention, he heard voices of detainees being tortured in nearby cells, and spoke about the various violations he suffered from.¹¹

⁴ 24 Arrest Cases During July 2021 in Afrin by Turkey-backed National Army Factions, Violations Documentation Center in Northern Syria, <https://bit.ly/37rk0ET>.

⁵ 55 arrests in Afrin during June 2021, Syrians for Justice and Truth <https://bit.ly/3CvrfKr>.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ The humiliation of kidnapping is one of the daily practices and actions of the Free Syrian National Army, Afrin for Human Rights <https://bit.ly/3rZZLYv>.

⁸ Sexual harassment and major abuses against female detainees in Marata Prison in Afrin by the Commander of the Military Police, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, <https://bit.ly/3s2szzG>.

⁹ Media professional Adham Dashrni detained by Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham, violations of Jabhat al-Nusra, <https://bit.ly/3jz3Grd>.

¹⁰ Al-Nusra Front violations, <https://bit.ly/3s1dw9a>.

¹¹ EXCLUSIVE: Bilal Abdul Kareem breaks silence over HTS detention in Syria. Middleeasteye. <https://bit.ly/3AkB7og>.

Recommendations

No party to the Syrian conflict can deny its involvement in the arbitrary arrests that were often accompanied by torture and sexual violence against the victims. Accordingly:

- The Syrian government shall release the detainees and to stop the indiscriminate and mass arrests of citizens because of their political opinions;
 - The HRC must investigate the violations against the detainees inside the detention centers of the armed factions, particularly Al-Ra'i Prison, Marata Prison, and prisons of the HTS. This is in addition to condemning the Turkish government for turning a blind eye on the practices by its armed factions in northern Syria;
 - Human rights organizations shall prosecute those responsible for the arbitrary arrests and torture, so that the perpetrators of such crimes do not enjoy impunity, by using the multiple human rights mechanisms to achieve this end such as the principle of universal jurisdiction.
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