



المركز السوري للإعلام وحرية التعبير  
Navenda Sûriyayi ya Ragihandinê û Azadiya Derbirinê  
Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression



**Syrian Arab Republic**

**Submission to the UN Universal Periodic Review**

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## I. Introduction

1. This document is a joint NGO submission by the Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression (SCM) with partners the Gulf Centre for Human Rights (GCHR), the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT). The main drafter of the document was SCM with input and validation contributed by the other partners.
2. Amid the uprising that started across several Arab countries in February 2011, Syrians began protesting the detention of political prisoners and the lack of freedom of expression, democratic rights, as well as social injustice and corruption that led to poverty. The Government reacted to these peaceful protests with excessive force, widespread arrests and abductions during ground operations and at checkpoints placed in nearly every street and with targeted attacks on demonstrators in many locations.<sup>i</sup>
3. The human rights situation in Syria has been extremely poor for decades as a result of the state of emergency that was in effect from 1963 until April 2011, when security forces were given sweeping powers to suppress basic liberties and rights, especially arbitrary arrest and detention. The authorities have a systematic policy of oppression, harassing and imprisoning human rights activists and critics of the government. Freedom of expression, association and assembly are strictly controlled and curtailed, and women and ethnic minorities, in particular, face discrimination.<sup>ii</sup> Bashar al-Assad failed to improve Syria's human rights record in the first 10 years of his rule, and Syria's human rights situation remains among the worst in the world. The Syrian government pursued during this period its systematic policies of violations of basic rights to life, liberty, physical safety, and fair trial, notably towards the media, and freedom of opinion and expression.<sup>iii</sup>
4. Events in Syria since April 2011 reinforced the conclusion that the atrocities and rights violations that have characterized the conflict continued to be the rule. Massive systematic violence including arbitrary arrest and detention, abductions, torture, sexual and gender-based violence, executions, enforced disappearances and field trials, has been practiced by the Syrian Government as a widespread and systematic policy since the eruption of the peaceful protests in Syria. These policies and related practices have become a feature of the armed conflict that erupted later in Syria. Since March 2011, the Syrian authorities resorted to the use of excessive force such as deliberate killing, arbitrary detention, torture and enforced disappearances, among others, in an attempt to suppress the peaceful demonstrations, political opposition and human rights defenders. Clearly, the vast majority of violations since 2011 have been carried out by the Syrian authorities. To this end, the prohibition of arbitrary arrest, forced disappearances, summary and extrajudicial executions or killings applies regardless of detainees' status or of any offenses with which they may be charged. Sanctions may only be imposed after a trial conducted in accordance with due process. Both international human rights and humanitarian law contain rules ensuring that criminal justice is not carried out in secret. Detainees have the right to challenge the legality of their detention, to be informed of charges brought against them and to be legally

represented by counsel. These obligations are non-derogable and apply in situations of armed conflict as well as in times of peace. They form core principles for safeguarding the right to life, liberty and security of persons, and hence are indispensable to prevent impunity for the deaths of prisoners, persons held incommunicado and victims of enforced disappearance.

5. The recent elections, held outside the agreed UN peace process, unsurprisingly gave a fourth term to the president. In a country ruined by a decade of war, this appears to be an attempt to act as if the conflict were over, and to deny years of war crimes as well as other massive humanitarian law and human rights violations.
6. Defections from the military and security forces fueled the emergence of anti-government armed groups and an increase in their organizational and logistical capacity.<sup>iv</sup> By virtue of these new facts, some protests gradually diverted from their peaceful course into armed skirmishes. The intensity and duration of the conflict, combined with the increased organizational capabilities of anti-government armed groups, met the legal threshold for a non-international armed conflict as of February 2012.<sup>v</sup> The armed conflict has become more entrenched over the years, witnessing the gradual involvement of foreign States and foreign armed groups.<sup>vi</sup>
7. The UN and international and Syrian human rights organizations had already documented during the conflict serious violations of human rights which are tantamount to war crimes and crimes against humanity perpetrated by government forces and a range of non-State armed groups. This documentation clearly show that tens of thousands of people have been arbitrarily arrested, abducted, tortured, suffered sexual and gender-based violence, forcibly disappeared, and executed during the conflict in Syria.
8. All parties to the conflict, especially the Syrian government, have committed, to varying degrees, violations of International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and International Human Rights Law (IHRL). Some of these violations, such as indiscriminate attacks against civilians, siege, starvation as a method of warfare, arbitrary arrest and detention, widespread and systematic torture, sexual and gender-based violence and enforced disappearances, murder and extermination, amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity.<sup>vii</sup>
9. At the end of the Second cycle of the Syrian Arab Republic's UPR,<sup>viii</sup> the Syrian Government did not support many key recommendations including those recommending the ratification of the Optional Protocols to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Convention against Torture; ceasing the practices of widespread use of torture, enforced disappearance and arbitrary detention; releasing all those who are arbitrarily detained; allowing in independent observers and immediately releasing all prisoners of conscience; putting an end to attacks on civilians and granting unfettered access to humanitarian organizations and independent international human rights monitors, particularly the Commission of Inquiry; and allowing independent international monitoring bodies

unconditional access to detention facilities in order to perform their functions.

10. The Syrian Government justified these reservations under the pretext of fighting terrorism. This was the only justification the government provided for the continuous deprivation of the Syrian people of their basic human rights.<sup>ix</sup> In particular, this strategy is used by the Syrian Government to evade fulfilling its obligations arising from international human rights conventions, thereby attempting to justify its gross and systematic violations of the rights of Syrian people over the past decade, since March 2011, which amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity.<sup>x</sup>

## **II. Extrajudicial killing; Arbitrary detention; Torture and ill-treatment; Enforced disappearance**

11. Arbitrary arrest and detention, abductions, torture, executions and enforced disappearances have become a feature of the ongoing armed conflict in Syria. Warring parties, mainly the Syrian Government, have systematically carried out these practices since 2016. These policies and related practices are tantamount to war crimes and crimes against humanity when committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack directed against any civilian population, with knowledge of the attack.<sup>xi</sup>
12. In late 2013, a Syrian military photographer named Caesar defected from Syrian government forces after smuggling thousands of pictures of people allegedly killed under torture and ill-treatment in government prisons after being arbitrarily detained and subjected to enforced disappearance. In 2015, a Syrian NGO posted more than 6000 pictures of the bodies of victims who are believed to have been killed under torture between March 2011 and August 2013 in the governments' prisons and unknown detention centers without any records of the victims. The families of these victims have not been informed of the whereabouts, or fate, of their loved ones.
13. In February 2018, the "Caesar Families Association" was established. The Association consists of 41 families whose loved ones were subjected to enforced disappearance and appeared in the leaked Caesar photos. They are believed to have been killed under torture in government prisons and detention centers. About 563 families, 109 of them still in Syria, have contacted the Caesar Association to clarify the fate of their loved ones. According to the Association, 154 families asked them to search for their deceased in the Caesar photos. Most of the families advised the association that their relatives were arrested by the Syrian government forces (security forces, intelligence, Syrian army, popular committees, Shabiha, military security, and others), while about 45 families could not identify who was responsible for the arrest of their loved ones. About 50 families confirmed that their relatives' photos exist in Caesar's leaked photos, while 40 families confirmed that they had obtained a death certificate from the Syrian government, although some of them refused to accept these certificates. Others said that they were informed by the security authorities or through the district mayor that their loved ones passed away.<sup>xii</sup>

- 14.** Since the second cycle, the SCM Violations Documentation Center (VDC) has documented tens of thousands of people who were subject to arbitrary arrest and detention, abduction, torture, execution, and enforced disappearance. The figures provided are fully documented, and thus a minimum number. The actual figure is expected to be much higher. The VDC/SCM documented 2307 people who were arbitrarily detained during 2020 by all parties. In addition, 1,493 people were released in 2020, including people who were arrested before 2020. Our statistics and figures show that among those who were arrested and released, 3642 were civilians and 158 were non-civilians, including 195 women and 3427 men, in addition to 178 children, 61 of whom were female and 117 who were male. The SCM documentation shows that the Syrian government has arbitrarily arrested and abducted 457 persons, and released 690 persons. According to the statistics, 91 individuals were arrested or abducted by Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), and 52 were released. The VDC has also documented the names of 476 individuals who were arrested or abducted by the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), who also released 206 individuals. According to the statistics, 967 individuals were arrested or abducted by different opposition factions during 2020, and 440 individuals were released. In addition, 217 individuals were abducted by unknown parties, who released 102 individuals. The statistics also show that 99 individuals were subjected to enforced disappearances by unknown parties, and three individuals who were forcibly disappeared were located with unknown parties.
- 15.** Jaish al-Islam (Army of Islam) which was mainly active in Eastern Ghouta has been regularly accused of committing serious crimes, such as, arbitrary arrest and detention, abduction, torture, execution, and enforced disappearance against the civilians living under its rule, starting in 2011 until 2018. Thousands of Syrians have suffered as a result of these atrocities. On 09 December 2013, four human rights defenders – Razan Zaitouneh, Wael Hamada, Samira Khalil and Nazem Hamadi (The Douma 4) were abducted by a group of armed men who raided the offices of the Violations Documentation Centre (VDC) in Douma, in Eastern Ghouta, near Damascus. Jaish al-Islam is the main group suspected of having abducted, detained and tortured Razan Zaitouneh and her companions who were being targeted primarily for their human rights work.
- 16.** Syrian refugees who chose to return to Syria were also subjected to arbitrary arrest and detention, torture, ill-treatment and forced disappearances. A survey prepared by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees found that the percentage of refugees who do not wish to return to Syria during the year 2020 has increased to 89%.<sup>xiii</sup> The study also considers that the main factor behind the refugees' decision not to return related to concerns of their safety, fear of prosecution, or an unknown fate that awaits them. The OHCHR stated in February 2019 that despite changes in the situation in Syria, those returning face a lack of rule of law, widespread human rights violations and poor economic prospects, noting that 'safe and sustainable returns' were not possible due to continuing hostilities.<sup>xiv</sup> Given the retention of control by the government, it is expected that HRDs and other activists in particular would face persecution, disappearance and possible execution if they return.

While the Syrian government and its allies constantly declare that conditions are favorable for the return of refugees to Syria, it is worth noting that the Syrian government is not interested in the return of refugees from certain groups, as a strategy of demographic re-design considering loyalty to the government.<sup>xv</sup>

17. However, a growing number of Syrian refugees returned home from countries including Germany, Sweden and Denmark, for reasons including family reunification, applications being rejected and problems integrating in their host countries.<sup>xvi</sup> Human rights reports confirmed the conduct of security prosecutions against the returnees, more than 2000 arrests of refugees returning to Syria as well as more than twenty cases of murder under torture, some of whom were children.<sup>xvii</sup>
18. We reiterate that SCM's data shows that arbitrary arrest and detention, abductions, torture, executions and enforced disappearances in Syria are carried out namely by Military Intelligence; Air Force Intelligence; Political Security and General Intelligence; the armed forces, and militias associated with the Syrian Government.
19. In March 2021, SCM issued a report on torture in Syria, produced in cooperation with the Gulf Centre for Human Rights (GCHR). In this report, SCM had interviewed fifteen torture survivors and six medical and legal experts. Through this report, SCM confirmed that Syria is in breach of many international conventions to which the country is a party, such as the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment; the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities; the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women; the International Convention on Economic, Social or Cultural Rights; and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.<sup>xviii</sup>

### **III. Gender-based violence and discrimination**

20. The Syrian constitution does not explicitly criminalize discrimination and violence against women, while certain articles deprive women of rights<sup>xix</sup> such as granting nationality to their children and full guardianship over them. The conflict in Syria has contributed to an erosion in the status, and role, of women in society, which is heightened by wide-spread gender-based violence. The government has failed to put measures in place to protect women and girls from honor killing, early marriage and domestic violence.
21. In addition to serious violations mentioned in Section II, the Syrian government has used the detention of women, including gender-based violence and other torture, to humiliate, punish, and threaten males in the family and wider community. They have also been used as bargaining chips. "The Commission of Inquiry finds that the Syrian Government and associated militias used rape and other forms of sexual violence as part of a widespread and systematic attack against the civilian population of Syria in order to cause maximum "terror and humiliation to the population" and "to target civilians broadly perceived as associated with the opposition." The Syrian government reportedly used sexual violence primarily

against women and girls and in house-to-house searches, at checkpoints and in detention. The International Commission of Inquiry found that “women and girls who were raped often witnessed the killing of male relatives” and that in detention settings “male guards routinely subjected women and girls to intimate searches, the most invasive of which amount to rape.” The Commission of Inquiry also found a pattern of rape and other forms of sexual violence against men and boys in detention by the Syrian Government, including acts of genital mutilation.”

22. Detained pregnant women<sup>xx</sup> or those detained with their children suffered the most due to the dire conditions of detention, lack of sanitary products, denial of children’s needs, inadequate quantity and quality of food, low level of hygiene and access to reproductive and medical care.
23. Women who have been released continue to suffer social, economic and psychological effects of their detention, including the social stigma that can lead to divorce, ostracism from the family and society, exclusion from education and dismissal from work.
24. Women who have lost male family members may be seen as particularly vulnerable<sup>xxi</sup> when they search for them. They may be exposed to the risk of exploitation and sexual harassment by government officials, influential people or those who claim to be able to help release detainees or find the whereabouts of the disappeared. Often it falls to women to search for the disappeared persons, to argue for legal processes, and then try to obtain a visit. Often, they are forced to travel to Damascus from all governorates to seek justice and information from the authorities leaving them open to corruption or exploitation.
25. As noted in Para. 16 above, returning refugees have faced many hurdles. In cases where failure to return would involve the loss of property, women have often returned first, when it was seen as too dangerous for males to do so. Nevertheless, female returnees have been arrested. Even after relatively short periods of detention (two days - four months), women have often not been able to then leave the country, and remain isolated and stigmatized by government accusations of terrorism or betrayal.

#### **IV. The illegal use of chemical weapons and other internationally prohibited weapons**

26. On 4 April 2017, in the deadliest use of chemical weapons in Syria since August 2013, over 83 people were killed, including 28 children, and over 293 people were reported to have been injured by a confirmed sarin gas attack carried out by the Syrian Government on the northern rebel-held area of Khan Shaykhun, Idlib Province.<sup>xxii</sup> The attack followed a pattern of repeated use of chemical weapons in the Syrian conflict in many areas including Eastern Ghouta in August the same year, which poses serious health, humanitarian, and security threats to civilians, healthcare personnel, and first responders in Syria. Moreover, the use of chemical weapons constitutes a clear and egregious violation of international law, particularly, the 1993 Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), and such continued impunity

sets a dangerous precedent for current and future conflicts.

27. On 8 April 2020, the investigation and identification team (IIT) of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) released its first report, which was based on a strict methodology of analysis and multitude of evidence. This report indicated the responsibility of the Syrian Air Force for three incidents in which chemical weapons were used in Syria on 24, 25 and 30 March 2017. In two of these incidents, the Syrian Air Force used Sarin gas, while in the third it committed a double crime by bombing a hospital in the northern countryside of Hama with a munition loaded with chlorine, killing a doctor and injuring thirty people.<sup>xxiii</sup>
28. On 12 April 2021, the IIT of the OPCW released its second report in which reached a conclusion that there are reasonable grounds to believe that, at approximately 21:22 on 4 February 2018, a military helicopter of the Syrian Arab Air Force under the control of the Tiger Forces hit eastern Saraqib by dropping at least one cylinder. The cylinder ruptured and released chlorine over a large area, affecting 12 individuals.<sup>xxiv</sup>
29. We consider that the repeated use of chemical weapons against residential areas in Syria amounts to war crimes and crimes against humanity when committed as widespread or systematic attack directed against any civilian population, with knowledge of the attack.
30. Siege and starvation have been widely used by the Syrian government. In January 2016,<sup>xxv</sup> the Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs noted that siege and starvation were used systematically in Syria, and that using starvation as a weapon amounted to a war crime. On 24 June 2021, the Syrian government forces began to tighten their restrictions on Daraa Al Balad and its surroundings. The siege<sup>xxvi</sup> is preventing and restricting movements and was accompanied by overflight of warplanes at a low altitude and random gunfire from snipers to intimidate civilians.

#### **V. Violations against the media and freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association**

31. The Syrian government has been practicing gross violations against media professionals, and freedom of expression, in addition to repressing the rights to peaceful assembly and association. Articles 44 and 45 of the Syrian Constitution restrict the right to Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association (FoAA). These practices made Syria one of the most dangerous countries for media workers and journalists<sup>xxvii</sup> since 2011. Violations against media and journalists, including citizen journalists and online activists, extends from direct targeting, arbitrary arrest, torture, enforced disappearance, and long periods of detention without trial, to extra-legal trials. This has led to the deterioration of human rights in general and media rights and freedoms in particular.
32. The ongoing military conflict in Syria has had a direct impact on the deterioration of human rights in general and, in particular, the rights of the media and the people to express themselves freely. All parties to the conflict, including predominantly the Syrian

Government, are committing gross violations of human rights and basic freedoms of the Syrian people, <sup>xxviii</sup> including against media personnel, which has made Syria one of the world's deadliest country for journalists.<sup>xxix</sup> A continued failure to hold the perpetrators accountable would lead to the complete deterioration of free media and elimination of the narrow margin of freedom of expression that Syrians have managed to retain over the past decade.

33. Freedom of expression is severely limited and even posting on social media can lead to arrest. This was the fate of many Syrian activists and HRDs who resorted to activism and protest on social media as an alternative to the physical protest that turned deadly in 2011, and continues to this day. For example, eight people including a well-known media figure (who works for pro- government media) were arrested in January 2021 by Syria's Criminal Security Department "for the offense of communicating with and dealing with suspicious websites" for comments made on Facebook, in violation of their right to freedom of expression, according to reports received by the Gulf Centre for Human Rights (GCHR).<sup>xxx</sup>
34. The collected data by the SCM team in Syria has revealed that, between 15 March 2011 and the end of December 2020, 1670 violations against the media and media personnel were reported. The Syrian Government topped the list of perpetrators of such violations, with a total 778 violations attributable to governmental authorities. Moreover, it is also notable that 70 violations were committed against female journalists. In addition to these violations, the SCM has documented 720 extrajudicial killings, 434 arbitrary detentions, 140 enforced disappearances and abductions, 61 attacks on media headquarters, 222 injuries by direct and indirect targeting, 40 physical and verbal abuse, and 24 attempts to prevent media coverage.<sup>xxxi</sup>
35. Murders of journalists remain generally unsolved and their killers have total impunity. In its [report published to mark the International Day to End Impunity](#),<sup>xxxii</sup> on 2 November 2020, GCHR included cases of seven Syrian journalists who have been murdered with total impunity. They represent a small number of journalists killed, and since then, other journalists have been killed or escaped assassination attempts in 2020 and 2021.<sup>xxxiii</sup>
36. A survey conducted by the Syrian Women Journalists Network indicated that women journalists and human rights defenders faced physical and verbal abuse, arrest, kidnapping, bans on working, harassment, imposition of dress codes, cyber-attacks and other risks that Syrian women face in the workplace or as a result of working. Notably: 77% feared a digital security threat, 46% feared physical harm, 33% had friends or family targeted because of their work, and 49% believe that attacks and abuses targeting women journalists and human rights defenders have increased over the past 5 years.<sup>xxxiv</sup>

## **VI. Mercenaries**

37. The humanitarian suffering that resulted from the ongoing conflict across Syria makes mercenaryism an attractive option for financial gain for many young Syrians who have

grown up in conditions of extended war and displacement. The financial desperation among young people and their families has driven many individuals to enlist for combat abroad.

38. The So-called Private Military Company (PMC) Wagner is suspected of committing serious crimes in Syria including torture and extrajudicial killings. A litigation was recently filed by SCM and other human rights NGOs on behalf of a family of a Syrian victim to hold Russian suspects accountable for serious crimes committed in Syria. The complaint demands the initiation of criminal proceedings on the basis of murder committed with extreme cruelty, with a view to establishing the alleged Wagner perpetrators' responsibility for this and other crimes, including war crimes.
  
39. The recruitment of Syrian mercenaries to fight in Libya and Azerbaijan was widely reported in 2019-2020. The Russian Private Military Security Contractor (PMSC) Wagner Group coordinated with the Syrian Government to bring thousands of Syrian soldiers to aid the Russian-backed General Khalifa Haftar and his Libyan National Army.<sup>xxxv</sup> Haftar's April 2019 offensive against territory held by the Turkish-backed Government of National Accord (GNA) compelled Turkey to redeploy its proxies in the Syrian National Army (SNA) for the purposes of countering Haftar's forces.<sup>xxxvi</sup>

## VII. Recommendations

In view of the above-mentioned violations, we make the following recommendations to the Syrian authorities:

### Treaty Adoption

- A. Ratify and accede to the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance and withdraw its reservations to Articles 2 and 15 (4) of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women;
- B. Ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (OPCAT)
- C. Ratify the Arms Trade Treaty as well as the Convention on Cluster Munitions and the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction, and abolish the use of illegal weapons;

### National Laws

- D. Change Articles of the Syrian Constitution that restrict human rights and basic freedoms, including articles 44 and 45 to guarantee the right to Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association (FoAA) in line with international standards of human rights, and without restrictions and create a safe space for the exercise of those rights in practice;
- E. Abolish the death penalty; Establish a moratorium on the death penalty as an interim measure before its abolition and implement all human rights obligations, including the core international human rights treaties;
- F. Pass legislation to amend the discriminatory provision in Article 3 (a) of Law Decree No. 276, the Nationality Law of 1969, in compliance with the CEDAW Committee's 2014 Concluding Observations to grant women the right to pass their nationality to their children;

- G. Pass legislation to criminalize domestic violence, and provide protection and support for its victims;
- H. Immediately establish a national human rights institution in accordance with the Paris Principles;

#### UN Mechanisms

- I. Cooperate with the Human Rights Council and all UN Human Rights Mechanisms, including the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances, the International, Impartial, and Independent Commission for Syria, the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, as well as implement all recommendations of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syria;
- J. Allow the United Nations Subcommittee on the Prevention of Torture (SPT) to visit detention facilities;

#### Practices

- K. Immediately and unconditionally release all persons arbitrarily detained by Syrian government authorities, giving priority to women, children and elderly persons;
- L. Cease arbitrary detentions and release all those held in detention who have been unfairly and indiscriminately arrested, in addition to publishing a list of all detainees under its control, along with information on the grounds for their detention, as well as lists of detainees who have died in detention facilities operated by the Government and militias affiliated with it;
- M. Immediately cease sexual and gender-based violence against women, girls, men, and boys;
- N. Grant full access to enable international monitoring of detention facilities under the control of the Syrian Government;
- O. Cease egregious abuses against prisoners and allow for the immediate, unfettered access to medical services for all detainees;
- P. Offer compensation to the estates of victims of enforced disappearances and summary executions;
- Q. Immediately halt the practice of enforced disappearance, arbitrary arrests and detention, as well as the systemic use of torture, including sexual and gender-based violence, in accordance with Syria's obligations as a State party to the Convention against Torture;
- R. Conduct and investigate and hold accountable all persons involved in, or responsible for, cases of enforced disappearance, arbitrary detentions, and acts of torture, including sexual and gender-based violence, associated therewith as well as communicate the findings of such investigations to the victims' families;
- S. Immediately release human rights defenders and other prisoners of conscience, particularly those detained and imprisoned for participating in peaceful demonstrations, and ensure the prompt, impartial and effective investigation into the arbitrary detention, harassment and persecution of human rights defenders;
- T. End impunity and ensure accountability for the systematic and widespread violations and abuses of human rights and violations of international humanitarian law that are being committed on a large scale throughout the Syrian Arab Republic;

- U. Refrain from mobilizing mercenaries, which aim to support its war efforts in the context of the Syrian conflict, and ensure compliance with International Humanitarian Law;
- V. Stop and prevent the exploitation of Syrian mercenaries and ensure compliance with International Humanitarian Law.
- W. Enable the return of refugees who choose to do so, in particular by ceasing arbitrary detention and abuses while detained, as well as respecting property rights.

<sup>i</sup> Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, UN Doc A/HRC/46/54. 21 January 2021.

<sup>ii</sup> Amnesty World Report 2009.

<https://web.archive.org/web/20090902132608/http://thereport.amnesty.org/en/regions/middle-east-north-africa/syria>

<sup>iii</sup> Syria: Black Hole for Media Work: 10 years of violations, Syrian Center for Media and freedom of Expression. May 2021. <https://bit.ly/3z1U7YR>.

<sup>iv</sup> Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, *Ibid*.

<sup>v</sup> Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, *Ibid*.

<sup>vi</sup> Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, UN Doc A/HRC/31/68, 11 February 2016.

<sup>vii</sup> World Report 2018: Syria, Human Rights Watch. <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2018/country-chapters/syria>.

<sup>viii</sup> Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review, Syrian Arab Republic. Accessed on November 5, 2020, at: <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G16/441/78/PDF/G1644178.pdf?OpenElement>.

<sup>ix</sup> Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review, Recommendations from the second cycle of the universal periodic review following the examination of the second national report of the Syrian Arab Republic, Accessed on 5 May 2021, at: <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/UPR/Pages/SYIndex.aspx>.

<sup>x</sup> Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review, Syrian Arab Republic. Addendum Views on conclusions and/or recommendations, voluntary commitments and replies presented by the State under review. Accessed on 5 November 2020, at:

<https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G17/055/86/PDF/G1705586.pdf?OpenElement>.

<sup>xi</sup> Rome Statute of the International Criminal court, Article 7.

<sup>xii</sup> Information related to the leaked Caesar photos was reported to SCM by “Caesar Families Association”.

<sup>xiii</sup> Syrian Refugees’ Perception & Intentions on Return to Syria, UNHCR. March 2021.

<https://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/MENA%20regional%20survey.pdf>

<sup>xiv</sup> UN Human Rights Council, UN Commission of Inquiry on Syria, Continued hostilities and lawlessness countrywide render safe and sustainable returns impossible. 28 February 2019.

<https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/Pages/NewsDetail.aspx?NewsID=24229&LangID=E>

<sup>xv</sup> <https://www.fidh.org/en/region/north-africa-middle-east/syria/assad-s-syria-how-he-planned-to-transform-syria-since-2011>.

<sup>xvi</sup> Arrests and torture of Syrian refugees returning home reported, the Irish Times. 17 March 2018.

<https://www.irishtimes.com/news/world/middle-east/arrests-and-torture-of-syrian-refugees-returning-home-reported-1.3429762>

<sup>xvii</sup> SCM statement regarding holding of the refugees conference und the auspices of the Syrian government:

<https://scm.bz/en/scm-statements/statement-regarding-the-holding-of-the-refugees-conference-under-auspices-of-the-syrian-government>

<sup>xviii</sup> [Invisible Scars Torture in Syria and its Legal and Socio-Economic Implications – المركز السوري للإعلام وحرية التعبير](https://scm.bz/en/violations-watch/invisible-scars-torture-in-syria-and-its-legal-and-socio-economic-implications).

The Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression (SCM). March 2021. [https://scm.bz/en/violations-](https://scm.bz/en/violations-watch/invisible-scars-torture-in-syria-and-its-legal-and-socio-economic-implications)

[watch/invisible-scars-torture-in-syria-and-its-legal-and-socio-economic-implications](https://scm.bz/en/violations-watch/invisible-scars-torture-in-syria-and-its-legal-and-socio-economic-implications)

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- <sup>xix</sup> World Relief, Statement for the Hearing on the Syrian Refugee Crisis before the Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights, and Human Rights. 7 January 2014. Article 3 (a) of the Syrian Nationality Law states that “anyone born inside or outside the country to a Syrian father” shall be considered Syrian, thereby explicitly discriminating against women by denying them the ability to pass their nationality on to their children
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