

# Syria

The human rights situation in Syria severely deteriorated during 2011, as the regime of Bashar al-Assad took extreme repressive measures to crush the peaceful uprising demanding democracy, change, and the ouster of the regime. Such measures appear to have resulted in crimes against humanity perpetrated against the civilian population. The regime was slow to offer serious reforms to address the demands of the revolution, and even the attempt to contain the revolution with a handful of disingenuous reforms was followed by large scale use of deadly force throughout Syria. The regime's criminal practices against its own people recall the massacres committed by the late Hafez al-Assad in the early 1980s, except on a larger and more widespread scale.

The right to life was violated in a widespread and systematic manner, as several thousand people were killed and injured<sup>1</sup> following the exercise of deadly force that included the use of heavy weaponry, arbitrary shelling by tanks and naval artillery units, and assassinations and summary executions of detainees or dissidents within the ranks of the army or police who refused to

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<sup>1</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, Nov. 23, 2011, <[www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrcouncil/specialsession/17/docs/A-HRC-S-17-2-Add1.pdf](http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrcouncil/specialsession/17/docs/A-HRC-S-17-2-Add1.pdf)>.

take part in the massacres of the Syrian people. Torture also increased markedly, with the number of deaths due to torture reaching unprecedented levels. Syrians in all the major cities and provinces were subjected to collective punishment, with sieges imposed by Syrian army tanks, long curfews, arbitrary shelling of civilian populated areas, and a disruption of electricity, water, and communication services. In some governorates, measures were taken to starve the population by denying entry to trucks carrying flour, and the wages of government workers were withheld or delayed.

The repression extended to numerous rights activists and media workers, who were temporarily arrested, detained, disappeared, or physically assaulted to prevent them from disclosing information concerning the situation. The sustained use of excessive force by government forces prompted various forms of counter-violence by citizens, either in self-defense or motivated by a desire to avenge victims, especially in socially traditional areas where tribal cultures prevail. This was also accompanied by increased summary field executions of dissident military officers and soldiers and the declaration of the formation of the Free Syrian Army, which also engaged the Syrian army in limited battles.

Given these conditions, there are increased fears that Syria may plunge into a wide-scale civil war, stoked by the organized sectarian campaign launched by the Syrian regime, which is attempting to present itself as the protector of minorities. This campaign has pushed the majority of Syrian Christians and the Druze community to seek shelter with the regime, while the Alawite minority appears to remain close to the regime, thinking that its fall will threaten its privileges.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, discriminatory policies against the Kurdish minority continue, as do the routine violation of the human rights of the Kurdish population and the abuse of activists and defenders of Kurdish identity. These violations reached a new level of intensity with the assassination of a prominent Kurdish politician near the end of the year.

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<sup>2</sup> On fears of the militarization of the uprising and sectarian mobilization, see Hassan Abbas, "The Dynamics of the Uprising in Syria," Oct. 16, 2011, <<http://www.arab-reform.net/spip.php?article5080>>.

## Heinous crimes during suppression of demonstrators:

According to the UN, 5,000 people were killed between the eruption of protests in mid-March and late December, among them at least 300 children,<sup>3</sup> as a result of the brutal crackdown, which involved many acts that appear to be crimes against humanity under international humanitarian law. Entire populations were subjected to violent repressive measures, particularly in cities that were placed under military siege. Residents of these areas were driven to the verge of a humanitarian crisis as a result of growing shortages of water, food, and medicine, in addition to the difficulty of obtaining access to medical care. At the same time, the authorities prevented the International Committee of the Red Cross from reaching the most affected areas, where tanks, helicopters, and heavy artillery were used to isolate and suppress demonstrations and to shell civilian infrastructure.<sup>4</sup>

The means used to suppress the uprising went beyond the traditional security agencies, military forces, and intelligence agencies to include armed gangs and militias known as the *Shabiha*, groups run by government affiliated interest networks close to the regime and relatives of Bashar al-Assad.<sup>5</sup> Grave human rights abuses were reported, including extrajudicial killings and summary executions. Reports confirmed cooperation and coordination between the *Shabiha* and security forces, with *Shabiha* forces being observed on more than one occasion wearing civilian clothing and using military vehicles. Government forces also facilitated the movement of these gangs across checkpoints. Reports accused government officials and the Baath Party of playing an active role in coordinating the criminal acts of the *Shabiha*.<sup>6</sup>

Reports also documented acts of murder and summary execution of an unspecified number of officers and soldiers who refused to obey orders to open fire on unarmed demonstrators and civilians, as well as daily mass arbitrary arrest campaigns across the country involving nearly 10,000 people as of October 2011. Nearly 5,000 cases of enforced disappearances and

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<sup>3</sup> UN News Center, "As Syrian Death Toll Tops 5,000, UN Human Rights Chief Warns about Key City," Dec. 12, 2011,

<<http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=40708&Cr=syria&Cr1>>; and The Guardian, "Syria: 5,000 Dead in Violence, Says UN Human Rights Chief," Dec. 12, 2011, <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/dec/12/syria-5000-dead-violence-un>>.

<sup>4</sup> FIDH, "Bashar al-Assad: Criminal Against Humanity," Aug. 9, 2011,

<<http://www.fidh.org/Bashar-Al-Assad-Criminal-Against>>.

<sup>5</sup> Hassan Abbas, "The Dynamics of the Uprising in Syria."

<sup>6</sup> FIDH, "Bashar al-Assad: Criminal Against Humanity." August, 9, 2011,

<<http://www.fidh.org/Bashar-Al-Assad-Criminal-Against>>.

abductions were reported.<sup>7</sup> Detainees were held in extremely harsh conditions in detention facilities where they were systematically subjected to extreme forms of torture. It is likely that the number of deaths in detention facilities multiplied due to such treatment, with dozens thought to have died due to torture. The crackdown around the country was also accompanied by assaults on medical personnel who were carrying out their professional and humanitarian duty by attempting to reach and aid the injured. Intentional attacks on ambulances were documented, while the intelligence services tightened their grip on hospitals, preventing workers from offering medical care to the injured. Some volunteer doctors were also abducted while trying to help the wounded.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, security forces reportedly abducted wounded civilians from hospitals.

### **Torture and conditions in detention facilities and prisons:**

Thousands of people have been arrested and detained since the beginning of the uprising, including the relatives of activists, among them children. Detainees, including children, were tortured, including through extensive beatings by batons or chains and with electroshocks. Detainees held temporarily in a stadium in Daraa were summarily executed; it is estimated that security forces executed 26 detainees during this incident.<sup>9</sup> The former public prosecutor in Hama, who resigned, accused the authorities of killing 72 inmates at the Hama District Prison and burying them in mass graves near al-Khalidiya, close to the branch of Central Security in Hama. In explaining the reasons for his resignation, the prosecutor said that more than 420 bodies had been buried in mass graves in public parks and that the authorities had asked him to write a report that they had been killed by armed gangs.<sup>10</sup> Given the severe overcrowding of security buildings with thousands of detainees, the camps of the Baath Party Vanguard in several governorates were converted into mass detention facilities which lack proper health care capacities. Reports also documented severe food deficiencies,

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<sup>7</sup> Arabic Network for Human Rights Information, "Suluk al-quwat al-hukumiya al-Suriya jarimat harb wa intihak li-l-qanun al-dawli al-insani," Oct. 19, 2011, <<http://www.anhri.net/?p=41872>>.

<sup>8</sup> Human Rights Watch, "Syria: Red Crescent Workers under Attack," Sep. 14, 2011, <<http://www.hrw.org/news/2011/09/14/syria-red-crescent-workers-under-attack>>; and FIDH, "Bashar al-Assad: Criminal Against Humanity."

<sup>9</sup> Human Rights Watch, "Syria: Crimes against Humanity in Daraa," June 1, 2011, <<http://www.hrw.org/news/2011/06/01/syria-crimes-against-humanity-daraa>>.

<sup>10</sup> Watch the prosecutor's testimony here: <<http://goo.gl/mNMeb>>.

with detainees being given one meal per day consisting of a round of bread and some tomatoes or diluted milk.<sup>11</sup>

International reports observed a stark increase in the number of deaths in detention facilities, with at least 88 detainees dying in less than five months (from early April to mid-August). There is evidence that at least 52 of these deaths resulted either directly or in part from torture. It was reported that many victims, among them children, were mutilated before and after death, after which their disfigured corpses were turned over to their families, with the goal of spreading fear among Syrians. According to these reports, the authorities conducted no official investigations into the 88 cases of deaths, with the exception of two cases. However, the findings of these two alleged investigations are yet to be released.<sup>12</sup>

According to some reports, the funeral for Fahd Ali Adnan, a victim who is thought to have died under torture on 2 August after less than three days in detention, ended in tragedy when security forces raided the funeral tent, smashed chairs, and confiscated the carpets. When the family erected and prepared the tent again, security forces fired sound grenades and tear gas canisters, followed by live ammunition, on the mourners, immediately killing one youth with a bullet to his neck and injuring 13, one of whom later died as a result of a bullet to the head.<sup>13</sup>

### **Human rights defenders under siege:**

Since their establishment, human rights organizations in Syria have been denied legal permits. During 2011, the authorities increased the arbitrary pressure on human rights defenders, especially amid their strenuous attempts to impose an information blackout around the widespread suppression of the uprising. Although a number of human rights defenders benefited from the amnesties issued by the Syrian president as part of an attempt to contain the uprising, this did not prevent many others from being temporarily arrested or detained for extended periods of time, banned from travel, or physically

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<sup>11</sup> Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, "Taqrir 'an manhajiyat al-sultat al-Suriya fi intihak huquq al-insan," Aug. 28, 2011, <<http://www.syriahr.com/28-8-2011-syrian%20observatory5.htm>>.

<sup>12</sup> Amnesty International, "Syria: Deadly Detention: Deaths in Custody amid Popular Protest in Syria," Aug. 31, 2011, <<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE24/035/2011/en>>.

<sup>13</sup> Alkarama, "Syria: A Detainee Killed in Prison," Aug. 19, 2011, <[http://en.alkarama.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=814:syria-a-detainee-killed-in-prison&catid=36:communiqu&Itemid=198](http://en.alkarama.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=814:syria-a-detainee-killed-in-prison&catid=36:communiqu&Itemid=198)>; and Syrian Human Rights Committee, "Shuhada' majzara khaymat 'aza' Fahd 'Adnan bi-Dar'a," Aug. 5, 2011, <<http://www.shrc.org/data/aspx/d13/4543.aspx>>.

assaulted, nor from receiving implicit and explicit death threats. Some human rights defenders were forced to leave the country and continue their work in exile. Among those who benefited from a general amnesty was Haitham al-Maleh, a prominent rights advocate and the founder of the Human Rights Association in Syria, who was serving a prison sentence of three years after his arrest in October 2009 and a military trial that lacked due process.<sup>14</sup> Also released was well-known human rights defender Muhannad al-Hassani, the president of the Syrian Human Rights Organization – “Sawasiyah” – who was also serving an unfair three-year prison term for his human rights work. He was released following the presidential amnesty on May 31 along with hundreds of other detainees, including several opposition leaders of the Communist Workers Party.<sup>15</sup> On June 4, the authorities released writer Ali al-Abdullah, a leading member of the Damascus Declaration for Democratic National Change, as part of a presidential amnesty. Al-Abdullah had been serving an 18-month prison term after being convicted in a military court on March 13, 2011 on charges of upsetting Syria’s relations with a foreign country due to an article he wrote on Syrian-Iranian relations. These charges had been brought against him to keep him in prison even after he had served his full original term of two and a half years; he had been slated for release in June 2010, but the military investigating judge ordered the continuation of his detention. He had then been placed in the Adra Prison following a request from the General Military Prosecution after these new charges were filed against him.<sup>16</sup> In stark contrast to these amnesties, the harassment and repression of human rights defenders continued. Many were held for several days or weeks, repeatedly detained, or subject to prosecution. Some of these cases include:

- Abd al-Karim Daoun, a member of the board of trustees of the Committees for the Defense of Democratic Freedom and Human Rights in Syria (CDDFHR), who was arrested in early April in al-Silmiya in the governorate of Hama while observing peaceful demonstrations. While being arrested, he was beaten with batons and clubs by the security apparatus.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Syrian Observatory for Human Rights “al-Ifraj ‘an al-nashit al-huquqi al-Suri Haytham al-Malih,” Mar. 8, 2011, <<http://www.syriahr.com/8-3-2011-syrian%20observatory6.htm>>.

<sup>15</sup> Sooryoon, “al-Marsad al-Suri: al-ifraj ‘an Muhannad al-Hasani wa Mash’al al-Tammu,” June 3, 2011, <<http://www.sooryoon.net/?p=25555>>.

<sup>16</sup> Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, “al-Sultat al-Suriya tufrij ‘an al-katib ‘Ali al-‘Abdullah,” June 4, 2011, <<http://www.syriahr.com/4-6-2011-syrian%20observatory2.htm>>.

<sup>17</sup> Frontline Defenders, “Syria: Update-Release of Human Rights Defender ‘Abd al-Karim Dha’oon,” Apr. 19, 2011, <<http://humanrightsdefenders.org/node/14871>>.

- Daniel Saoud, the President of the CDDFHR and a member of the executive committee of the Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network, who was arrested on April 23, 2011.<sup>18</sup>
- Rasim al-Atassi, a member of the board of trustees of the Arab Organization for Human Rights, who was arrested on April 27 pursuant to an arrest warrant issued by the General Military Prosecutor on charges of inciting riots.<sup>19</sup>
- Malak al-Shanawani, a women's rights activist, who was arrested on February 11. Some of her books and her personal computer were confiscated, and she was taken to an intelligence facility in Damascus.<sup>20</sup>
- Mazen Darwish, the President of the the Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression, was arrested on March 23 after being summoned to the political security branch in Damascus; Darwish had given several interviews on television discussing the events in Daraa.<sup>21</sup>
- Abdullah Khalil, a member of the Human Rights Association in Syria, who was arrested in early May after taking part in an interview on the Qatari al-Jazeera channel.<sup>22</sup>
- Dana Jawabra, a journalist and human rights activist, who was detained for nearly ten days in March 2011 after taking part in a protest in the capital. She was again arrested on May 3, 2011.<sup>23</sup>
- Dr. Walid al-Bunni, the prominent political activist and human rights defenders, who was arrested with his sons Iyad and Muayyad on August 7. Al-Bunni was arrested and imprisoned more than once over the

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<sup>18</sup> Arabic Network for Human Rights Information, "al-Sultat al-Suriya ta'taqil ra'is lijan al-difa' 'an al-hurriyat al-dimuqratiya wa huquq al-insan fi Suriya," Apr. 26, 2011, <<http://www.anhri.net/?p=29767>>.

<sup>19</sup> International Freedom of Expression Exchange, "al-Munazzama tudin i'tiqal al-muhandis Rasim al-Atasi wa tutalib bi-l-ifraj al-fawri 'anhu," Apr. 28, 2011, <[http://ifex.org/syria/2011/04/29/al\\_atasy\\_arrested/ar/](http://ifex.org/syria/2011/04/29/al_atasy_arrested/ar/)>.

<sup>20</sup> National Organization for Human Rights in Syria, "al-Sultat al-Suriya ta'taqil ta'assufiyan al-'asharat min al-muwatinin," Apr. 14, 2011, <<http://goo.gl/mNMeb>>.

<sup>21</sup> SKEYES, "I'tiqal al-sahafi wa-l-nashit al-Suri Mazin Darwish," Mar. 24, 2011, <<http://skeyes.wordpress.com/2011/03/24/225699669988/>>; and Reporters Without Borders, "Tawqif Mazin Darwish mudir al-markaz al-Suri li-l-i'lam," Mar. 24, 2011, <[http://arabia.reporters-sans-frontieres.org/article.php3?id\\_article=31989](http://arabia.reporters-sans-frontieres.org/article.php3?id_article=31989)>.

<sup>22</sup> Syrian Human Rights Committee, "I'tiqal al-huquqiyyin Nadir al-Husami wa 'Abdullah al-Khalil," May 2, 2011, <<http://www.shrc.org/data/asp/d18/4448.aspx>>.

<sup>23</sup> Alkarama, "Suriya: tawqif al-'adid min al-mudafi'in 'an huquq al-insan khilal hamalat al-qam' al-akhira fima tawara al-ba'd al-akhar 'an al-anzar," May 6, 2011, <[http://ar.alkarama.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=4134:2011-05-09-07-17-14&catid=155:-&Itemid=100](http://ar.alkarama.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=4134:2011-05-09-07-17-14&catid=155:-&Itemid=100)>.

last decade. His most recent arrest came only two months after he finished serving a two-and-a-half year prison term, due to his leading role in the Damascus Declaration for Democratic National Change.<sup>24</sup>

- Abdel Karim Rihawi, the president of the Syrian League for the Defense of Human Rights, who was arrested on August 11, 2011.<sup>25</sup>

In addition, Maen al-Awdat, a prominent political activist and advocate, was shot and killed by the security apparatus in Daraa on August 8 after security forces opened fire on a funeral march for a recently killed martyr.<sup>26</sup>

## **Harassment of the political opposition:**

The presidential amnesties issued to a few hundred political prisoners and detainees appears to have been a diversionary tactic to draw attention away from the wave of arrests of thousands of people suspected of involvement in the peaceful popular uprising, along with political dissidents, including several who had been released under the presidential amnesties. According to field reports, several political activists, writers, and human rights defenders, as well as their families, received threats via telephone, email, or social media networks, warning them they would be killed or harmed if they continued to support the uprising. Numerous people were taken hostage to harass their activist family members.<sup>27</sup> Prominent figures, among them Suhair al-Atassi, the President of the Jamal al-Atassi Forum for National Democratic Dialogue, were arbitrarily arrested and detained. Atassi was arrested on March 16 after receiving death threats by phone and threats to abduct her children.<sup>28</sup> More than 25 political activists were arrested, including Kamal Sheikhou and Hassiba Abd al-Rahman, after participating in a sit-in in front of the Interior Ministry. They were charged with

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<sup>24</sup> Arabic Network for Human Rights Information, "I'tiqal al-duktur Walid al-Bunni mujaddadan ma' najlayhi Iyad wa Mu'ayyad," Aug. 17, 2011, <<http://www.anhri.net/?p=37083>>.

<sup>25</sup> Elaph, "Faransa tutalib Suriya bi-itlaq sarah 'Abd al-Karim al-Rihawi," Aug 12, 2011, <<http://www.elaph.com/Web/news/2011/8/675491.html?entry=articleRelatedArticle>>; and SKEYES, "Skayz yastankir i'tiqal ra'is al-rabita al-Suriya li-huquq al-insan 'Abd al-Karim al-Rihawi," Aug. 16, 2011, <<http://skeyes.wordpress.com/2011/08/16/465465465465465-6/>>.

<sup>26</sup> Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, "Thamaniyat shuhada' bi-rasas al-quwat al-Suriya wa ighitiyal al-nashit Ma'in al-'Awdat," Aug. 9, 2011, <<http://www.syriahr.com/9-8-2011-syrian%20observatory1.htm>>.

<sup>27</sup> Syrian Human Rights Committee, "'Ajl: al-mukhabarat al-Suriya tuhaddid bi-ikhtitaf abna' al-mu'aridin wa tasfiyatihim," Feb. 27, 2011, <<http://www.shrc.org/data.aspx/d13/4333.aspx>>.

<sup>28</sup> Arabic Network for Human Rights Information, "I'tiqal al-nashita Suhayr al-Atasi wa akharin 'ala khalfiyat tazahurat al-hurriya," Mar. 16, 2011, <<http://www.anhri.net/?p=26835>>.



undermining the standing of the state and inciting racial and sectarian tensions.<sup>29</sup>

Before it was abolished, the exceptional State Security Court harshly sentenced activist Tal al-Mallouhi to five years in prison after her conviction on charges of disclosing information to a foreign state. State Security had abducted her late last year, and her fate was unknown until she was brought to trial.<sup>30</sup> Also in March the security forces arrested writer and political activist Loay Hussein after he launched an online petition in support of peaceful demonstrators in Daraa.<sup>31</sup> Syrian dissident Assem Qubtan, a leading member of the Democratic Socialist Arab Union Party, was arrested the same month and taken to an undisclosed location.<sup>32</sup> In April, Farouk al-Bassel, the son of political activist Bassam al-Bassel, was taken hostage, as was the son of political activist Mahmoud al-Mudallal and three of his brothers, as well as the nephew of political activist Ayman al-Aswad in Daraa.<sup>33</sup> In July, prominent dissidents were arrested, including Dr. Adnan Wahba and engineer Nizar al-Samadi, both members of the National Coordination Committee for Democratic Change in Syria (NCC), and George Sabra, a member of the Syrian National Democratic Party.<sup>34</sup>

It was reported that at least 50 political dissidents were killed by the police, the army, or the *Shabiha* in the seven months following the eruption of the uprising. Several of them were likely targets of premeditated murder or extrajudicial killing. These dissidents include prominent Syrian dissident Ziad al-Ubeidi, who was killed while fleeing from the security forces after

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<sup>29</sup> Arabic Network for Human Rights Information, "Ihalat 32 nashita wa nashitan Suriyan ila-l-qada'," Mar. 17, 2011, <<http://www.anhri.net/?p=26953>>.

<sup>30</sup> Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, "al-Hukm bi-l-sajn li-muddat khams sanawat bi-haqq al-nashita al-Suriya Tal al-Malluhi," Feb. 16, 2011, <<http://www.syriahr.com/14-2-2011-syrian%20observatory14.htm>>; and Arabic Network for Human Rights Information, "Suriya: al-shabaka al-'Arabiya tastankir al-hukm al-sadir al-qasi didd al-mudawwina Tal al-Malluhi," Feb. 17, 2011, <<http://www.anhri.net/?p=24238>>.

<sup>31</sup> Asharq al-Awsat, "Munazzama huquqiya: i'tiqal al-katib al-Suri Lu'ay Husayn," Mar. 23, 2011, <<http://www.aawsat.com/details.asp?section=4&issueno=11803&article=613821>>.

<sup>32</sup> Syrian Human Rights Information Link, "al-Ajhiza al-amniya al-Suriya ta'taqil al-qiyadi al-mu'arid 'Asim Qubtan," Mar. 30, 2011, <[http://www.shril-sy.info/modules/news/article.php?com\\_mode=nest&com\\_order=0&storyid=6085](http://www.shril-sy.info/modules/news/article.php?com_mode=nest&com_order=0&storyid=6085)>.

<sup>33</sup> Human Rights Watch, "Syria: Lift the Siege of Daraa," May 5, 2011, <<http://www.hrw.org/news/2011/05/05/syria-lift-siege-daraa>>.

<sup>34</sup> Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, "I'tiqal al-mu'aridin al-barizin 'Adnan Wahba wa Nizar al-Samadi," July 28, 2011, <<http://www.syriahr.com/28-7-2011-syrian%20observatory1.htm>>.

they raided his home in Deir al-Zor,<sup>35</sup> as well as political dissident, rights activist and engineer Maen al-Awdat and Kurdish leader Mashaal Tammo.

### **Large-scale attacks on media workers and artists:**

The brutal suppression of the popular uprising was accompanied by a large-scale assault on various means of expression and the media. The authorities imposed an absolute information blackout in areas under tight military siege, such as Daraa, Homs, Baniyas, and al-Muaddamiya in suburban Damascus, after cutting off all internet service and blocking access to social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. They also denied foreign journalists and correspondents entry to the country and prevented other correspondents from reaching the areas where government attacks were occurring.<sup>36</sup> Satellite channels critical of the regime were also censored.<sup>37</sup> In March, the authorities forced seven correspondents with Reuters and the Associated Press to leave the country.<sup>38</sup> Photographers with AFP and the Associated Press were also detained on March 22 while covering events in the province of Daraa.<sup>39</sup> On April 27, the Qatari Al-Jazeera channel was forced to halt its coverage of events and suspend all its activities in Syria indefinitely following several threats and intimidation campaigns launched against its staff.<sup>40</sup> The Syrian authorities continuously pressured Syrian Al-Jazeera employees to resign while also denying correspondents with this and other channels access to the city of Daraa, where the uprising erupted.<sup>41</sup> Al-Jazeera also lost contact with its Canadian-Iranian correspondent, Dorothy Parvaz, upon her arrival in Damascus on April 29. According to the Syrian embassy in the US, the Syrian authorities

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<sup>35</sup> BBC Arabic, "Suriya: maqtal mu'arid bariz wa lajna li-siyaghat al-dustur," Oct. 15, 2011, <[http://www.bbc.co.uk/arabic/middleeast/2011/10/111015\\_syria\\_activist\\_killing.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/arabic/middleeast/2011/10/111015_syria_activist_killing.shtml)>.

<sup>36</sup> Asharq al-Awsat, "Ta'tim kamil 'ala-l-mudun wa-l-ahya' al-Suriya al-khadi'a li-l-hisar al-'askari," May 11, 2011, <<http://www.aawsat.com/details.asp?section=4&issueno=11852&article=621159>>.

<sup>37</sup> Committee to Protect Journalists, "Syria Cracks Down on Press; Attacks in Libya, Elsewhere," Mar. 28, 2011, <<http://cpj.org/2011/03/syria-cracks-down-on-press-attacks-in-libya-elsewh.php#more>>.

<sup>38</sup> Reporters Without Borders, "Istimrar al-ta'tim al-i'lami, al-sultat al-Suriya tastahdif Ruyatarz," Mar. 28, 2011, <[http://arabia.reporters-sans-frontieres.org/article.php3?id\\_article=31992](http://arabia.reporters-sans-frontieres.org/article.php3?id_article=31992)>.

<sup>39</sup> Reporters Without Borders, "Tawqif Mazin Darwish mudir al-markaz al-Suri li-l-i'lam."

<sup>40</sup> Reporters Without Borders, "Murasilin bila hudud tastankir al-qam' didd al-i'lam fi Suriya," May 3, 2011, <[http://arabia.reporters-sans-frontieres.org/article.php3?id\\_article=32022](http://arabia.reporters-sans-frontieres.org/article.php3?id_article=32022)>.

<sup>41</sup> Committee to Protect Journalists, "Qanat 'al-Jazira' tu'alliq 'amaliyataha fi Suriya," Apr. 27, 2011, <<http://www.cpj.org/ar/2011/04/017226.php>>.

deported the journalist to Iran on May 1, but the Iranian Foreign Minister informed the Iranian News Agency on May 14 that Iran had no information about her.<sup>42</sup>

Numerous writers, journalists, and political activists were arrested for participating in protests and peaceful demonstrations or because they were classified as dissident political activists or involved in the struggle for democracy. These include writer and journalist Fayeza Sara, a leading member of the Damascus Declaration for Democratic National Change<sup>43</sup>; Dr. Nizar al-Madani, a member of the central council of the NCC; and well-known author Ihsan Taleb.<sup>44</sup> A patrol with air force intelligence arrested prominent Syrian dissident Mohammed Saleh in an ambush set for him after he received a phone call from a person claiming to be a journalist with Al-Jazeera and setting an appointment to meet him. Saleh was taken to an undisclosed location before being released the next day.<sup>45</sup> The authorities also arrested writer and journalist Omar Kush upon his arrival to the Damascus airport in early May, as he was returning from a conference in Turkey.<sup>46</sup> On October 3, the authorities referred a group of activists and journalists to the Public Prosecutor for investigation more than 50 days after they had been arrested and kidnapped by the political security apparatus. They included Rudy Osman, Omar al-Asaad, journalistic writer Hanadi Zahlout, film editor Shadi Abu al-Fakhr, and activists Assem Hamchou and Guevara Said. They were presented with charges of inciting demonstrations and civil disobedience, inflaming sectarian tensions, forming illegal organizations known as the Damascus Neighborhood Committees, and contacting satellite channels to broadcast materials to defame Syria.<sup>47</sup> A lot

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<sup>42</sup> Reporters Without Borders, "Ayn al-sahafiya al-Amrikiya al-Kanadiya al-Iraniya al-murahhala min Suriya ila Iran?" May 16, 2011, <[http://arabia.reporters-sans-frontieres.org/article.php?id\\_article=32028](http://arabia.reporters-sans-frontieres.org/article.php?id_article=32028)>.

<sup>43</sup> Al-Hiwar al-Mutamaddan, "al-Sultat al-Suriya ta'taqil al-katib wa-l-sahafi al-Suri Fayiz Sara," Apr. 11, 2011, <<http://www.ahewar.org/news/s.news.asp?nid=674467>>.

<sup>44</sup> Arab Organization for Human Rights in Syria, "I'tiqal al-dukatur Nizar al-Madani wa-l-katib Ihsan Talib," Oct. 17, 2011, <<http://www.aohrs.org/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=2588>>.

<sup>45</sup> Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, "al-Mukhabarat al-Suriya tatanahhal sifat fida'iyat al-jazira li-i'tiqal al-mu'arid al-bariz Muhammad Salih," Sep. 24, 2011, <<http://www.syriahr.com/22-9-2011-syrian%20observatory7.htm>>.

<sup>46</sup> Reporters Without Borders, "Murasilun bila hudud tastankir al-qam' didd al-i'lam fi Suriya."

<sup>47</sup> Arabic Network for Human Rights Information, "'Suriya: al-shabaka al-'Arabiya tunaddid bi-ihalat nushata' li-l-niyaba al-'amma wa ightiyal akharin," Oct. 4, 2011, <<http://www.anhri.net/?p=40761>>.

of ambiguities surrounded the case of these detainees, most of whom were abducted from a cafe, and some of them are believed to have been tortured.<sup>48</sup>

The fate of several journalists and bloggers who were abducted or arbitrarily detained remains unknown, among them journalists Aba Mundhir and Maryam Haddad, blogger Jihad Jamal, and Omar al-Asaad, a correspondent with Al-Jazeera and the journals *al-Safir* and *al-Hayat*.<sup>49</sup> The whereabouts of Algerian journalist Khaled Sid Mohammed, a resident of Damascus, are similarly unknown. Affiliated with Radio France International, Mohammed disappeared on April 9, 2011 under mysterious circumstances, amid the total silence of the Syrian authorities.<sup>50</sup> The authorities arbitrarily arrested Syrian blogger and internet activist Anas al-Maarawi in early June 2011, refusing to disclose his whereabouts or the reason for his detention.<sup>51</sup>

The brutal crackdown on the uprising also touched many artists who were involved in or released artistic works in solidarity with the uprising. Ibrahim Khashoush, known as the singer of the revolution and writer of the song, “C’mon, Bashar, leave,” lost his life on July 5 shortly after being abducted. His body was found thrown in the Orontes River, his throat slit and his larynx ripped out; it is believed that the security apparatus was responsible for the murder.<sup>52</sup> Masked members of the security forces attacked internationally renowned cartoonist Ali Ferzat near Umayyad Square in the capital, insulting and beating him brutally and injuring his fingers in particular, leaving him with severe bruising, especially on his face and hands. Ferzat is well-known for the stinging criticism of the Assad regime found in his sardonic cartoons.<sup>53</sup> The parents of well-known pianist Malek

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<sup>48</sup> Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, “Ikhtitaf sahafiyyin,” Aug. 6, 2011, <<http://www.shrc.org/data.aspx/d12/4542.aspx>>.

<sup>49</sup> Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, “Ikhtitaf sahafiyyin.”

<sup>50</sup> Arabic Network for Human Rights Information, “Suriya: Athna’ al-qam’ al-shadid li-l- ihtijajat al-silmiya ikhtifa’ sahafiya bi-qanat al-jazira ba’d asabi’ min ikhtifa’ sahafi Jaza’iri,” May 3, 2011, <<http://www.anhri.net/?p=30499>>.

<sup>51</sup> National Organization for Human Rights in Syria, “Tawasul ‘amaliyat al-qam’ fi Suriya wa tazayud suqut al-dahaya,” July 12, 2011, <<http://goo.gl/KSUCU>>.

<sup>52</sup> Arabic Network for Human Rights Information, “Qat’ raqaba mughanni Suri ghanna ‘yalla irhal ya Bashar,” July 10, 2011, <<http://www.anhri.net/?p=35518>>; and Fact International, “Maqtal mughanni al-thawra al-Suriya fi Hamah wa qat’ hanjaratih,” July 9, 2011, <<http://www.factjo.com/pages/fullNews.aspx?id=28625>>.

<sup>53</sup> Al-Arabiya, “I’tida’ ‘anif ‘ala rassam karikatir al-Suri ‘Ali Farzat wa naqluh ila-l- mustashfa,” Aug. 25, 2011, <<http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2011/08/25/164024.html>>; Arabic Network for Human Rights Information, “al-I’tida’ ‘ala rassam al-karikatir ‘Ali Farzat wa tahdiduh,” Aug. 27, 2011, <<http://www.anhri.net/?p=38322>>; Arabic Network for Human Rights Information, “Luju’ al-ajhiza al-amniya al-manhaji ila-l-ta’dhib,” Aug. 27, 2011, <<http://www.anhri.net/?p=38328>>; and al-Jazeera, “al-I’tida’ ‘ala-l-rassam ‘Ali Farzat fi

al-Jandali were assaulted by the *Shabiha*, who raided their home in Homs in mid-September because of al-Jandali's pro-revolutionary stance.<sup>54</sup>

### **Ongoing oppression of the Kurdish minority:**

Political activists and rights advocates in Kurdish cities remained special targets for acts of repression, which are regularly faced by the Kurdish minority within the framework of policies of systematic discrimination. The most serious of these assaults came on October 7, when prominent leader Mashaal al-Tammo, the spokesman for the Kurdish Future Movement, was assassinated after armed masked men stormed his home, injuring his son as well.<sup>55</sup> Al-Tammo was one of the hundreds of detainees and prisoners who were released by presidential amnesty in June 2011.<sup>56</sup> Throughout the year, Kurdish political activists, rights advocates, writers, and artists continued to be arbitrarily arrested. In February 2011, three Kurds were sentenced to four months in prison by a military judge in al-Qamishli following their conviction on charges of inciting racial tensions after they organized a Kurdish poetry festival.<sup>57</sup> On January 24, Kurdish artist Abd al-Rahman Mohammed Omar was arrested and taken to an undisclosed location,<sup>58</sup> while on January 12, Kurdish writer and researcher Hawas Mahmoud was detained upon his return from Turkey to al-Qamishli in the Hasaka governorate. Poet Ibrahim Barakat al-Ahmed was also arrested in al-Hasaka, as was writer Khidr al-Akkari, a resident of al-Silmiya. The latter is thought to have been taken to a detention facility in Damascus.<sup>59</sup>

Kurdish activists with human rights organizations were also arbitrarily detained, among them lawyer Radwan Osman Seydou, a member of the board of the Kurdish Committee for Human Rights in Syria (Rased), who

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Suriya," Aug. 25, 2011, <<http://www.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/C0774B6A-39EB-4A5F-9CED-65D89C7BB827.htm>>.

<sup>54</sup> Arabic Network for Human Rights Information, "I'tida' wahshi 'ala waliday 'azif al-biyanu Malik al-Jandali," Sep. 21, 2011, <<http://www.anhri.net/?p=39782>>.

<sup>55</sup> Amnesty International, "Assassination of Syrian Kurdish Leader a 'Dangerous Escalation,'" Oct. 11, 2011, <<http://www.amnesty.org/en/news-and-updates/assassination-syrian-kurdish-leader-%E2%80%98dangerous-escalation%E2%80%99-2011-10-11>>.

<sup>56</sup> Sooryoon, "al-Marsad al-Suri: al-ifraj 'an Muhannad al-Hasani wa Mash'al al-Tammu."

<sup>57</sup> Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, "Hukm ta'assufi wa ja'ir 'ala thalathat muwatinin Kurd Suriyin bi-sabab tanzimihim mahrajan shi'r," Feb. 18, 2011, <<http://www.syriahr.com/18-2-2011-syrian%20observatory6.htm>>.

<sup>58</sup> Syrian Human Rights Information Link, "al-Rasid: i'tiqal al-fannan al-Kurdi Bafi Salah min qibl dawriya amniya majhula," Jan. 25, 2011, <<http://www.shril-sy.info/modules/news/article.php?storyid=5880>>.

<sup>59</sup> Free Syria, "Istimrar al-i'tiqal al-ta'assufi bi-haqq muwatinin Suriyin," Feb. 14, 2011, <<http://www.free-syria.com/loadarticle.php?articleid=37918>>.

was arrested on August 24 upon his return from Turkey.<sup>60</sup> Attorney Mohammed Ibrahim Darwish, a member of Rased, was also arrested on September 16.<sup>61</sup> Human rights defender Ayo Jwan, a member of the CDDFHR, disappeared after his home in al-Hasaka was stormed by security forces; his family has obtained no information about the reasons for his arrest or his whereabouts.<sup>62</sup>

### **Hope for reform fades:**

The Syrian authorities have abjectly failed to prove their seriousness with regards to adopting a democratic reform agenda. It had been hoped that the lifting of the state of the emergency, effective in the country since 1963, would represent an important step in this regard, but on the ground, the bloody suppression of the popular uprising continues, as the security apparatus, army, and *Shabiha* are given free rein to commit atrocities and crimes against humanity without any modicum of accountability. This has made the decision to lift the emergency law utterly worthless. Indeed, the end of the state of emergency and the abolition of the exceptional State Security courts have merely provided a façade of reform, which nevertheless cannot cover a reality in which all that remains of the foundations of the rule of law has utterly disappeared and no legal barrier exists to all manners of repression and abuse.

The Syrian authorities attempted to fill the vacuum left by the ostensible abolition of the exceptional state of emergency by granting additional exceptional prerogatives to the security apparatus under Law 55, which allows security agencies to question and provisionally detain persons for up to one week without a judicial warrant. Under the law, the term of provisional detention may be extended up to 60 days with the approval of the Public Prosecutor. Indeed, the law usurps the statutory authority of the Public Prosecutor and Public Prosecution to investigate certain crimes and pursue their perpetrators, giving them to the security apparatus. A quick

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<sup>60</sup> Arab Organization for Human Rights in Syria, “al-Mutalaba bi-l-ifraj al-fawri ‘an al-zamil al-nashit al-huquqi al-ma’ruf al-muhami Radwan ‘Uthman,” <<http://www.aohrs.org/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=2508>>; and Damascus Center for Human Rights Studies, “al-Mutalaba bi-l-ifraj al-fawri ‘an al-zamil al-nashit al-huquqi al-ma’ruf al-muhami Radwan ‘Uthman Saydu,” Aug. 25, 2011, <<http://www.dchrs.org/news.php?id=383&idC=2>>.

<sup>61</sup> Arabic Network for Human Rights Information, “al-Mutalaba bi-l-ifraj al-fawri ‘an al-nashit al-Suri al-muhami Muhammad Ibrahim Darwish,” Sep. 17, 2011, <<http://www.anhri.net/?p=39416>>.

<sup>62</sup> Alkarama, “Syria: Political Security Disappear a Young Human Rights Defender from Al Hasakah,” Sep. 26, 2011, <<http://goo.gl/qoUc2>>.

review of these crimes shows that the authorities have preserved the absolute powers of the emergency law that allowed the security apparatus to abuse political opponents and a broad array of persons who exercise their rights to express their opinions, peacefully protest and assemble, and organize and associate. These crimes include those impinging on state security, harming the standing of the state and nationalist sentiment, felonies against the constitution, crimes that undermine national unity or disturb the peace among elements of the nation, and involvement in illegal associations, and demonstrations and riotous assemblies.<sup>63</sup>

Although the Syrian regime has taken no steps to end the dominance of the ruling Baath Party over politics or its monopoly on power, insofar as remains the leading party under the Syrian constitution, the regime has intimated that it is taking steps toward political pluralism by passing a new political parties law. Yet, the articles of this law do not include real guarantees for the freedom to form parties, as the law gives the Baath Party the right to approve or reject other new parties through a parties committee headed by the interior minister, putting the Baath Party on the same footing as the ruling National Democratic Party in Egypt prior to President Mubarak's ouster. The parties committee also includes three public figures appointed by the president, as well as the Deputy Chief of Justice of the Court of Cassation. The law also adopts the authoritarian method of licensing new parties rather than a system of establishment by notification alone. The amendments to the electoral law contained the same façade of cosmetic reforms. Along the same line as these ostensible reforms, the new law makes a supreme judicial committee responsible for the administration of elections; however, this step is meaningless as long as the executive controls the judiciary and minimum guarantees for judicial autonomy do not exist. The law also preserves the 50 percent legislative quota for workers and farmers, even as worker and farmer candidates must be approved by labor unions and the farmers' federation, both of which are subordinate to the Baath Party.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Al-Masry al-Youm, "Hukumat al-Asad tusdir qanun al-intikhabat, wa 41 qatilan wa jarihan," July 28, 2011, <<http://www.almasry-alyoum.com/article2.aspx?ArticleID=305403&IssueID=2210>>; BBC Arabic, "al-Ra'is al-Suri yusdir qararan bi-tashkil lajna li-shu'un al-ahzab," Aug. 22, 2011, <[http://www.bbc.co.uk/arabic/middleeast/2011/08/110822\\_syria\\_parties.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/arabic/middleeast/2011/08/110822_syria_parties.shtml)>; and Haitham Maleh Foundation, "al-Khida'," May 6, 2011, <<http://goo.gl/KnaV4>>.

<sup>64</sup> Hassan Abbas, "The Dynamics of the Uprising in Syria."

