United Nations Security Council Arria-formula Meeting
“Syrian Women's Voices on Detainees and the Disappeared in Syria”

June 3, 2022
Trusteeship Council Chamber, UN Headquarters, New York, NY
10:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.

The United States of America, together with UN Security Council members Albania, France, and the United Kingdom, with additional co-sponsors Belgium, Canada, Germany, the Netherlands, Qatar, and Turkey, with the support of the Syrian Negotiations Commission (SNC) will hold an Arria-formula meeting of the UN Security Council on the need for increased efforts to shed light on the ongoing scale of detainees or forcefully disappeared persons by the Syrian regime.

Background

For more than eleven years the war in Syria has inflicted unspeakable suffering and cruelty on the Syrian people: hundreds of thousands of people have been killed, and more than 12.5 million have been forced to flee their homes. That is more than half of the pre-war population. According to the UNHCR, over 5.6 million people have fled Syria since 2011, the worst humanitarian crisis since World War Two.

In addition, with the backing of its allies, including Russia, the Syrian regime has carried out a ruthless war against civilians, through a secret system of arbitrary arrests, sending hundreds of thousands into prisons. Nearly 128,000 Syrians have disappeared and are presumed dead or still in custody. Yet the exact number of civilians detained in captivity is unknown. As a result, millions of relatives of the missing detainees remain living in social and psychological limbo. The Assad regime is responsible for numerous war crimes and crimes against humanity, especially for the systematic torture of political dissidents and activists – not only since the peaceful protests in 2011 but for decades.

Victims suffer physical, sexual, and social violence as well as estrangement from their families and deprivation of their children. During the conflict, thousands of civilians, including protesters,
doctors who took care of wounded demonstrators, and even children and their mothers, have been forcibly disappeared, detained, killed, tortured to death, or forced to flee the country.

According to the Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR), around 28,618 Syrian women have been killed in Syria since March 2011, while 10,628 are still arrested or forcibly disappeared. Still, the real number is likely higher because of a lack of documentation and the fear of the social repercussions in light of the conservative nature of Syrian society. Women have often been subjected to sexual assault and other violations after participating in demonstrations and political, humanitarian, media, and human rights activities. They were also affected by the repercussions of violations that affected the Syrian society as a whole.¹

Syrian civil society actors are working to progress from the theoretical and moral approach to ending the detentions to a practical one by exploring the possibilities of litigation in European countries as in Germany, France, the Netherlands, Sweden, Norway and others, or by setting practical determinants and mechanisms for the framework of justice, such as the Charter of Truth and Justice which was approved by five Syrian victims’ societies.

Indeed, the Assad regime is responsible for grave violations of international law, including but not limited to (1) the use of indiscriminate weapons and the targeting of civilians, (2) the use of chemical attacks, (3) forced disappearances, (4) torture, (5) arbitrary detentions, and (6) the denial of humanitarian evacuations for wounded and sick civilians. Despite several efforts by the international community, including the United Nations Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, the International Impartial Independent Mechanism, and current independent state efforts to refer Syria to the International Criminal Court, which has always been hindered by Russia’s veto at the UNSC, more must be done to address the pressing and vital needs of the missing persons and their relatives.

**Objectives**

In 2015, the UNSC unanimously adopted Resolution 2254 to promote a peaceful, inclusive political process. Resolution 2254 calls for the release of arbitrarily detained persons. The co-sponsors plan to hold an Arria formula meeting to provide Syrian voices with a platform to call for an international response to the issue of arbitrarily detained and missing persons. The event aims to support civil society’s efforts to further the cause by exploring practical measures to secure the release of detainees, particularly women and children, and obtain information on the fate and whereabouts of the missing. The event will include representatives from the Syrian Negotiation Commission.

The specific objectives of the event are to:

- Underscore that it is impossible to achieve sustainable peace in Syria without finding solutions that respond to victims’ demands on all sides.
- Highlight to the international community that victims from all religions and ethnicities suffer from the Syrian regime’s atrocities.
- Request immediate access to all detention centres and all detainees.

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¹ International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women: Tenth Annual Report on Violations against Females in Syria Mostly at the Hands of the Syrian Regime:
https://sn4hr.org/blog/2021/11/25/57072/
**Briefers**

Four women representatives from civil society organisations, from different religious and ethnic groups (voice of the victims):

- Mariam Alhallak, Caesar Families Organisation
- Najah Malak, Activist
- Alise Mofrej, Head of the Detainee Committee, SNC
- Hala Kayal, Activist
- Commentary: Haytham Alhamwi, Chairman of the Syrian British Council

**SNC Legal team representatives:**

- Dr. Bader Jamous, Head of SNC international Affairs
- Tarek Al Kurdi, SNC Legal Office (Virtual)
- Joumana Seif, Syrian lawyer and Human rights activist (Virtual)

**Interventions**

Member states and regional organizations will be invited to deliver statements after the briefers. We ask delegations to speak for no more than three (3) minutes in order to allow more time to hear from the briefers and to let the briefers respond to comments from member states. Translation will be provided in all six UN languages.