

## Syrian Women: Episodes and Pains in International Women's Day

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### Abstract

The Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) issued many studies supported with facts, personal accounts, and data about the violations against the Syrian women since the beginning of the people's uprising. SNHR also published many statements and reports about the arrested and abducted women (for more details check the webpage of SNHR). Syrian women have made heroic efforts in different fields. In this report, and the previous ones, we could only shed light on a very small part of their standing suffering.

In the UN Women's Day, which comes on March 8 every year, we reaffirm things that became reality so that they might resonate in the ears of decision makers in order to stop the bleeding of the Syrian women.

The number of women victims killed by the government forces in Syria is more than 12813; which means that Syria loses 12 women every day. Whereas, Al Qaeda affiliated groups killed 42 women, while groups of the armed opposition killed 25 women.

All this is happening despite the Security Council resolution 1325 (2011) which states that all countries fully implement the articles of the International Human Law and the International Human Rights Law which are related to the protection of women and girls and take all the necessary measures to protect them against violence committed on sexual bases during armed conflicts.

The UN Security Council established lately the ongoing relationship between keeping the international peace and security and violence against women, especially sexual violence. This came through adopting resolution 2122 (2013). The question here is how it comes that while rejecting to implement the resolutions of the Security Council; that the Syrian government will take any consideration for the International Human Law?

Syria has also endorsed the international agreement to put an end to all forms of discrimination against women since the year 2003, but it showed at that time some reservations about some articles of the agreement. Despite those reservations, Syria is internationally abided to "investigate, stop, take to the law and punish" those who commit violence against women.

## Introduction

Syrian woman activist Suzan Assakka tells SNHR:

“I worked in the relief field, and then followed a course in nursery to help the injured. I kept working silently in field hospitals putting great efforts for one year and a half when the Syrian intelligence could reveal my real identity and started to pursue me and my family members. I left my husband and my two children and ran to Egypt. My husband divorced me after I fled in order to prevent the expected troubles that might come to him and our children from the Syrian intelligence.”

Suzan told SNHR about her bitter experience saying:

“My real position is not here ... I wish to come back soon to help our afflicted people in all parts of our homeland.”

“I can't stand watching and doing nothing concerning the catastrophes and crimes against my countrymen and women.”

Documenting violence against women is very difficult, whether it came in the form of abduction, arrest or sexual violence. The main reason behind this is that Syrian families don't like to talk about their daughters because of the spread of the idea that most arrested women are raped. The other reason for that is the inability of the international organizations to put pressure on the Syrian government to release even one single woman prisoner. When the Syrian government promised to release the famous blogger Tall Al Maluhi, it didn't respect its promise. Moreover, criminals still

have their impunity which encourages them to commit more crimes and even boasting about them in social media.

## Violations by the Syrian Government

### First: extrajudicial killing:

SNHR is one of the most important sources for documenting the victims of the conflict in Syria which is depended on by the United Nations. SNHR depends mainly on its members who are working inside Syria, in addition to activists who are cooperating with us. You can have an idea about the methodology of documentation in SNHR through visiting our website in the following link:

[http://sn4hr.org/public\\_html/wp-content/pdf/english/SNHR%20Methodology.pdf](http://sn4hr.org/public_html/wp-content/pdf/english/SNHR%20Methodology.pdf)

We would like to mention that the daily shelling by barrel bombs and scuds knows no woman, child or civilian. For that reason, the great majority of victims in Syria are civilians (87%), among them (11%) women, though it is supposed that in cases of wars this percent must not exceed (2%). This increase in the case of Syria is a clear indication of the deliberate targeting of civilians.

The SNHR team of documenting the victims in Syria documented the killing of 12813 women by the government forces, among them 3614 female children. The vast majority of them were killed during shelling, but there are different incidents that show government forces' disdain for women. For example, the government forces killed 483 women by snipers, and as it is well-known, a

sniper fully knows the identity of the victim he chooses.

Every day, Syrian people lose 12 women who are killed by the government forces.

In addition to this, tens of women were killed through field executions by a bullet in the head or slaughtering by knives, as what happened in many horrible massacres that took place in many governorates; a clear indication that it is a strategy. We will refer quickly here to the most prominent incidents:

The massacre of Banyas on May, 2, 2013: 71 killed, many raped.

The massacre of Rifa'ai and KarmAzzaitun districts in Homs on March, 9, 2012: 48 women killed, many raped.

The massacre of Dier Ba'albe in Homs on April, 2: 20 women killed, many raped.

In addition to these massacres, 31 women were arrested and tortured to death inside the concentration centers.

## **Second: Arrest and Abduction**

The government forces arrested thousands of women for the mere fact that they were medical, relief or media activists. Lots of them were arrested or abducted because their husbands or brothers were political or military activists. In these cases, the government forces would call their families and threaten them to rape the woman in case her husband or brother will not deliver himself. The woman in such cases becomes a hostage and a pressure card on activists to deliver themselves to the authorities.

As we mentioned in the introduction, because

of the huge obstacles we face during our work to document the violations against women, we depended so many times on the evaluative way of documentation due to the difficulty of getting all the names and photos, particularly in cases of arrest and sexual assault. SNHR have got a list of the names of no less than 1240 women who are still arrested by the Syrian government. But, according to estimates got through the accounts of released women prisoners from different Syrian governorates, there are no less than 4570 women who are still arrested by the Syrian government, 31 of them were killed under torture, as we mentioned earlier. Women usually are tortured in ways very similar to the ways men are, though to a lesser extent. (For more details, check our extensive report: 45 ways of torture in concentration centers.)

Syrian authorities haven't either distinguished during the acts of arrest between grown women and small girls. There have not either been any consideration of any sort in the acts of arrest, where government forces broke by force into houses, broke the doors and entered bedrooms at night.

**A sample of the most prominent women activists who are still arrested by the Syrian government until this moment:**

**Ruayda Yosef Kana'an**

### **Tall Al Maluhi**

Syrian blogger and a high school student from Homs, born on November, 4, 1991. She was arrested by the state security apparatus on December, 27, 2009 after she posted some political staff in her blog. She is still arrested until now in the prisons of general intelligence management, despite the fact that there was an adjudication of releasing her on October, 24, 2013 depending on the fact that she has passed three years of her original 5 years sentence.

### **Maisaa Alsaleh**

Media and civil society activist working for Orient TV. She was interrogated by the investigation judge in the court of terrorism on 28/9/2013 who decided to arrest her.

She was arrested from cafe in Saroja in Damascus on 23/4/2013, with a number of civil activist including Moaz Alfara, Waad Aljaraf, Osama Azoz, Nada Aljindi, Dr. Bashar Farhat, Ahmad Zaghlol, Lina Alsamodi, Amani Alshiekh, Journalist Shayar Khalil Khalil.

### **Maysar Hadid**

A lawyer. She was arrested on November, 20, 2012, and then was released during the deal of Iranian prisoners exchange on October, 1, 2013. After that she was arrested again and still arrested until this moment.

### **Zilal Ibrahim Al Salhani**

Peaceful and relief activist from Aleppo, she was a student in Aleppo University, Chemistry Department. She was arrested by air force intelligence, along with two other young men from Al Furqan district on July, 28, 2012. She was accused with helping the injured and civilians and providing them with food and medical supplies and providing places for residence for the IDPs.

### **Zainab Abu Dan**

A lawyer, she was arrested in Al Qabun district on November, 29, 2012.

### **Ms. Salma Abdulrazaq**

Relief and Peaceful activist, 23 years old, Student at faculty of Architecture, was arrested from Yarmouk refugee camp checkpoint in Damascus on 30/12/2012, accused of relief and dealing with displaced.

### **Ms. Mona al-Wadi**

Engineer and relief activist, born in Daraa 1976, was arrested because she was carrying food bags for the affected families in the town of Deir Asafir of Damascus countryside on 26/11/2012, and she was taken to the Palestine Branch and then transferred to the Air Force Intelligence branch in Mezzeh, and reportedly that she is exposed to various types of torture, intimidation and psychological pressure, and after several months of her detention, she appeared on Syrian television to admit of being a “terrorist” after they forced her on it.

### **Ms. Faten Dabous**

Humanitarian and relief activist. Military intelligence raided her house in Razi area in 18/8/2013 and arrested her, she was an IDP from Qadi Askar neighborhood

### **Ms. Sahar Abdulaal**

Doctor and activist, arrested by security forces from Mahmil in Idlib countryside in 1/9/2012

### **Faten Rajab Fawaz**

33 years old political and relief activist, she holds a PHD in Physics and atom sciences. She was born in Duma, Damascus Country-

side. She took part in the peaceful demonstrations from the very beginning of the uprising in her city Duma. She was also known for her efforts in the relief field and field hospitals in the city of Duma.

Dr Faten was arrested in Damascus on December, 26, 2011 by the branch of air force intelligence which interrogated her for ten days before referring her to the special tasks squad, or what is known branch 215 which follows the military intelligence.

Many human rights reports quote former prisoners who were arrested in the same prison with Faten that she was very severely tortured and was injected chemical injections in her head. Former prisoners said that her health situation is much deteriorated and she was always suffering fits of epilepsy and bleeding in her nose and ears and that she was never shown to a doctor.

### **Ms Rama Yasser Al-Assas**

Political and relief activist, student at literature faculty of Damascus, was born in Damascus 1986, arrested many times for her participation in peaceful demonstrations, as her house was raided many times, so she had to stay out of sight because of the continuous pressure on her

and her family.

On August 27, 2012, she was provoked to an ambush by an email for detainee, where many men in military forms attacked her, they blackmailed her family to pay 2 million Syrian Pounds to release her, but no one knows anything about her up to this date.

to Military intelligence in Homs where the director their told her mother that she will never get released and she will be transferred to field military court.

Last report to SNHR shows that she was in security branch No.248 in Damascus.

Farah is the only daughter in the family, noted that an ex-detainee was with Farah in State Security branch in Homs described her mental condition as very deteriorating and should find any way to release her.

### **Farah Safi**

29 Years old Relief activist, she was on sabbatical leave from work as a medical administrative assistant at the Charity and Social Services Hospital (Al-birr Hospital).

On 12 August 2013, she received a call asking her to pass by the hospital in order to renew her leave. She went to the hospital on the same day with her mother, and was arrested as soon as she arrived by Homs State Security. Her mother was told by the arresting forces that this was just a simple routine interrogation that would take 2 hours. However, this was the last time her family saw her. The next day, they received a phone call from her, informing them that she was being held in the State Security Division in Homs, then she moved

### **Third: Sexual Violence**

The government forces practiced sexual violence on a large scale in many Syrian governorates. This is an indication that sexual violence was a strategy; especially that rape was common inside in the government prisons. Hundreds of women were raped in Homs, Damascus Countryside, Latakia, Banyas, Hama, Jisr Al Shugur, Der Ezzor and Dara'a.

There are three major cases in which there were acts of rape:

1. Rapes during the storming of towns and suburbs.
2. Rapes after abduction.
3. Rapes inside prisons.

The most extensive incidents of rape came af-

ter the government forces raided Baba Amr district in Homs in April, 2012. Those cases were considered as a threat message to all areas in Syria so that they don't do what Baba Amr has done. Acts of rape happened also in Arrifa'ai and Karm Azaitun districts in Homs.

As for Idleb provinvcce, the most extensive acts of rape came after the government forces stormed Jisr Ashugur in September, 2011.

Rapes also took place when the government forces abducted women who are relatives to political and military activists.

Dr Bara'a Wahbi, a researcher working in SNHR says:

“Big numbers of offices were established to follow the cases of rape. They are similar to real estate offices.”

Estimates of SNHR indicate that 7500 women were exposed to sexual violence, among them 400 girls under the age of 18.

850 of the women were raped inside prisons and intelligence quarters.

Upon these acts of rapes, many cases of compulsive pregnancy were documented.

Rape is considered a war crime according to article 6 of Rome Convention. It is also a war against humanity in case it came as a part of a comprehensive attack on civilians.

Sexual violence is considered one of the main reasons that thousands of Syrian families joined the refugee camps. SNHR estimates indicate that among the 3.5 million Syrian refugees, 1.2 million are women.

### **Forth: Killing or Arresting Husbands or sons:**

The government forces killed no less than 104571 civilians from the beginning of the uprising until the 28th of February, 2014. Among these are 25800 married men, which means that there are 25800 widowed women in Syria now.

There were among the killed 14275 children, which mean that 14275 women have lost one of their children. Some women have lost their husbands plus one or more of their children.

Moreover, tens of thousands of men and children were arrested or compulsively disappeared. This puts heavier economic and moral burden on the Syrian women and keeps the Syrian society under the threat of complete disintegration.

We refer here to a sample case. It is the case of one woman from the village of Sa'ada in Der Ezzor. She lost her seven sons, three of them (Basem, Bassam and Faiz) were killed together during the government forces shelling of the village. The eldest son Abdulrahman was arrested

and tortured to death in Sednaya military prison. After that, the rest of her sons died during the fights between the government forces and the rebels.

Here is an interview with her talking about how she lost her seven sons:

A photo for the mother of martyrs and her seven sons:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B9Bj18tYYKBb3R2OFJoZEVIMGM/edit?usp=sharing>

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B9Bj18tYYKBcEUwZ3FwVEZXcjQ/edit?usp=sharing>

### **Conclusions Concerning the Violations Committed by the Syrian Government:**

1. We notice that the Assad forces committed all kinds of crimes against the Syrian woman. Extrajudicial killings, rape, arrest, abduction and systemized displacement; all these are considered crimes against humanity.

2. The Assad forces committed all these crimes in an armed unintentional conflict; consequently, they are considered war crimes.

3. The government forces breached many of the rules of the Common Human Law.

### **Al Qaeda Affiliated Groups “The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS)”**

#### **A: Extrajudicial Killings:**

The team of documenting victims in SNHR documented the killing of 33 women on the hands of ISIS, whether in the areas controlled by the group or during the clashes the group had in areas controlled by opposition groups or the government forces.

#### **B: Constrains Posed by ISIS on Civilians Living in Areas Controlled by the Group:**

After taking over different areas, ISIS posed discriminating laws and put rules for punishing those who breach them. After ISIS took over Raqa province completely on the 20th of January, 2014, the group issued a statement that contained articles related to the lives of people and their private issues that relate to their work, movements in the city and even clothes. Those laws were not limited to Raqa; rather, they included all the areas controlled by ISIS.

ISIS allowed women to walk around when only they abide to certain form of clothes (wide cloak, veil and gloves). The group prevented women from going out of their house unless accompanied by her husband or some of her close male family members whom she can't marry. Any breach of the articles of that statement was to be punished by ISIS.

A Picture of the Statement Issued by ISIS

[https://docs.google.com/file/d/0B9dF5VO4iR18WIVibFZWcVJpVWc/edit?usp=drive\\_web](https://docs.google.com/file/d/0B9dF5VO4iR18WIVibFZWcVJpVWc/edit?usp=drive_web)

### **C: Abduction and Arrest:**

ISIS abducted and arrested many women activists, especially in the field of media.

(For more details, check the extensive report about the violations of ISIS prepared by SNHR)

[http://sn4hr.org/public\\_html/wp-content/pdf/english/Research%20about%20ILIS.pdf](http://sn4hr.org/public_html/wp-content/pdf/english/Research%20about%20ILIS.pdf)

### **Conclusions concerning the Violations of ISIS:**

Violations mentioned in the report are considered war crimes. They all took place in areas controlled by ISIS. ISIS is considered the status qua authority in the areas controlled by them; consequently, the group must respect the primary rights and hold those who violate them responsible.

### **Armed Opposition**

#### **A: Killing:**

Different groups that follow the armed opposition killed no less than 11 women during the shelling and clashes with the government forces. For more details, please check the following link:

<https://docs.google.com/file/d/0B9Bj18tIYYKBTG1pbmF4QVFMSFE/edit?usp=sharing>

#### **B: Sexual Violence:**

There came news to SNHR that some groups of the armed opposition exploited women sexually in order to allow them pass through their checkpoints. In some cases they will allow them to pass only when they get some food bribery. We are still investigating such news and trying to reach the victims and get their full accounts of what had happened.

#### **C: Abduction:**

Some groups of the armed opposition abducted women for the sake of exchange with the government forces.

## **Conclusions Concerning the Armed Opposition:**

Violations mentioned in the report are considered war crimes. They all took place in areas controlled by the armed groups. The armed groups are considered the status qua authority in the areas controlled by them; consequently, these groups must respect the primary rights and hold those who violate them responsible.

## **Recommendations**

### **The Security Council**

1. Taking a decision to transfer the Syrian issue to the International Criminal Court.
2. Warning the Syrian government against the aftereffects of using rape on civil peace and co-existence among members of the same society.

### **Human Rights Council**

1. Showing more interest and seriousness in dealing with sexual violence which is one of the nastiest crimes ever.
2. Demanding the Security Council and the related international institutions to shoulder responsibility in this extremely dangerous issue.
3. Applying pressure on the Syrian government to stop the acts of rape and initiating international investigations about those who commit such crimes.
4. Holding the allies and supporters of the Syrian government - Russia, Iran and China –as materially and morally responsible for what is happening in this regard.
5. Establishing specialized committees to take care of the situation of the victims of rape and helping and supporting them financially and morally.
6. Establishing committees that will offer the moral and psychological support necessary to qualify the victims.

### **The Arab League**

1. Asking the Human Rights Council to seriously care about this dangerous issue.
2. Applying political and diplomatic pressure on the main allies of the Syrian government; Russia, Iran and China in order to prevent them from continuing to provide international and political backing and protection for the crimes committed against the Syrian people, and holding them materially and morally responsible for all the violations of the Syrian government.
3. Caring seriously about this issue and making it a priority and trying to follow the cases of the victims of rape and taking care of them.
4. Establishing specialized committees to take care of the situation of the victims of rape and helping and supporting them financially and morally.
5. Establishing committees that will offer the moral and psychological support necessary to qualify the victims.