

**Brief Report**

# **An Increasing Frequency of Arrests and Enforced Disappearances by Kurdish Self-Management Forces**

**SNHR**

SYRIAN NETWORK FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

الشبكة السورية لحقوق الإنسان

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The Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR), founded in June 2011, is a non-governmental, independent group that is considered a primary source for the OHCHR on all death toll-related analyses in Syria.



## Contents

I. The Start of a Black Year and Widespread Violations Affecting Dozens of Residents of Areas Under the Control of Kurdish Self-Management Forces

II. Most Notable Incidents

III. Conclusions and Recommendations

## I. The Start of a Black Year and Widespread Violations affecting Dozens of Residents of Areas Under the Control of Kurdish Self-Management Forces

Since the beginning of 2019, the SNHR team has documented a number of large-scale raid and arrest campaigns carried out by Self-Management forces<sup>1</sup> in both Raqqa and Hasaka governorates. Half of the detainees seized in these campaigns have been forcibly disappeared in light of the Self-Management forces' denial of their arrest, as well as their preventing detainees from contacting their families or retaining a lawyer, in addition to the detainees' families being unaware of their whereabouts.

The arrests are part of a broader policy by the Kurdish Self-Management forces of harassment, repression and violation of basic human rights norms in the territories under their control. We have documented numerous types of violations, foremost among which are arbitrary arrests, most of which result in enforced disappearance, as well as torture, conscription of children and forced conscription.

The raids and arbitrary arrests carried out by the Self-Management forces since the beginning of last January were concentrated in:

The cities of Raqqa, Tal Abyad and al Tabaqa, in addition to the villages of al Qahtaniya, Ein al Arous, Mas'ada, Khas Habbal, Khas Dakoul and Khas Aalej, as well as the towns of Slouk and Mansoura in Raqqa governorate, and both Ein al Arab and Manbej cities in Aleppo governorate, and Hasaka and al Derbasiya cities in Hasaka governorate.

<sup>1</sup> Forces consist primarily of the Democratic Union Party – a branch for the Kurdistan Workers' Party



The SNHR team documented the arrest of at least 107 individuals, including four children and six women, by Self-Management forces from the beginning of January 2019 until the publication of this report. Fifty-two of these detainees have been forcibly disappeared, with the Self-Management forces denying any knowledge of their arrest or whereabouts, and preventing them from contacting their families, from retaining a lawyer, or even from being tried in courts in areas under these forces' control. The most egregious of those violations was the death of two people due to torture and medical negligence in the Self-Management forces' detention centers. The Self-Management Forces subsequently returned their victims' bodies to their families.

The arrests carried out by Self-Management forces targeted IDPs residing in areas under their control, mainly the inhabitants of refugee camps, citing various charges such as alleged kinship relationships between the IDPs and members of ISIS, or members of Armed Opposition factions. We documented several incidents in which the Self-Management forces arrested many individuals from the same family, and targeted individuals participating in protests against their policies, as well as targeting dignitaries and tribal sheikhs who refused to support their policies, such as the imposition of conscription, or to condemn protests against them. The arrests also targeted teachers who deviated from the educational curriculum and teaching methods imposed by the Self-Management forces.

Most of the arrests and raids we documented were carried out without any judicial warrant. A number of residents of the areas that have witnessed protest movements such as al Mansoura town, in the western suburbs of Raqqa governorate, told us that the area was surrounded by military units of the Self-Management forces, who broke into homes. In other cases, we documented operations similar to abductions of civilians from markets and other public places by members of these forces. We have also received reports from some residents that a number of detainees were shot while attempting to flee from Self-Management forces, and their families haven't received any information about their fate.

In addition to all of the aforementioned incidents, we have learned from some residents who are being persecuted by the Self-Management forces that they have received threats that their properties will be burnt down and their families arrested if they do not surrender.

As for the Self-Management forces' continuing conscription of children, we recorded four conscription incidents of children aged 13-17 during the period covered by this report, all of whom were abducted by the Self-Management forces, who have refused to give their families any information about their children's whereabouts or wellbeing except to state that their children have been taken to military training centers.



## II. Most Notable Incidents

On Friday, January 11, 2019, Self- Management forces carried out a raid and arrest campaign in Khas Dakour village in the eastern suburbs of Raqqa governorate. We documented the arrest of 12 civilians, including four members of the same family, who were taken to an undisclosed location.

On Wednesday, January 23, 2019, Self- Management forces carried out a raid and arrest campaign in al Mansoura village in the western suburbs of Raqqa governorate. We documented the arrest of 37 civilians, who were taken to an undisclosed location.

On Thursday, January 24, 2019, Self- Management forces arrested six civilians, including one child and three women, following a raid on their home in al Rmaila neighborhood in Raqqa city, taking all the detainees to an undisclosed location.

## III. Conclusions and Recommendations

Kurdish Self-Management forces have repeatedly violated international human rights law in many areas. According to article 7 of the Rome Statute, torture, enforced disappearances and severe deprivation of physical liberty constitute crimes against humanity if they are knowingly and broadly exercised. The intensity of the incidents of this nature perpetrated by the Kurdish Self-Management Forces, which are cited in this report, indicates that this is a broad strategic policy employed by these forces.

International law provides special protection for children in situations of armed conflict, including a strict prohibition on the conscription of children, and the use of children in hostilities. Kurdish Self-Management forces have repeatedly violated this prohibition by abducting children and taking advantage of their vulnerability and poor living and psychological conditions to force them into military service with their forces.

### **Recommendations:**

#### **Self-Management forces**

- Respect the principles of international human rights law, end all forms of arbitrary arrest, disclose the fate of detainees, allow them to communicate with their families and to receive a fair trial, acknowledge the fate of the disappeared, and stop all forms of torture.
- Publish the sites of the detention centers and invite the families and human rights organizations to visit them, open investigations into Self-Management forces' members and leaders involved in abductions and torture, and suspend them from duty immediately, as well as taking legal action against them in connection with these crimes.



## **The states supporting Self-Management forces**

- The states supporting the Syrian Democratic forces should apply pressure on these forces in order to compel them to cease all of their violations, as documented in this report, in all the areas and towns under their control.
- All forms of arms support should be ceased. Providing the Syrian Democratic forces with weapons and other military support while knowing that these can be used in perpetrating war crimes or crimes against humanity can be seen as a contribution to these crimes.
- Support the course of a democratic political process in the areas of eastern Syria, and begin an electoral process in which all members of society can freely participate under international supervision, leading to a democratic political authority that truly represents society, whose establishment will lead to stability and justice.





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