



Statement

The Syrian Network for Human Rights, in Partnership with International Organizations, Held A Launch Event for Its Tenth Annual Report: Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in 2020

‘The Bleeding Decade’

Monday, February 8, 2021: The Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR), in partnership with Amnesty International, the Global Center for the Responsibility to Protect, the European Center for Constitutional and Human Rights, and the Heinrich Boell Foundation, held an event entitled: “The Bleeding Decade” to launch its tenth annual report entitled: ‘[The Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in 2020](#)’. The event was broadcast on the Zoom platform and the SNHR’s official accounts on social media platforms, with participants including:

Mr. Kristyan Benedict, Amnesty International UK Campaigns Manager: Crisis & Tactical, Syria; Dr. Simon Adams, Executive Director, Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect; Mr. Patrick Kroker, International Crimes and Accountability program on Syria, European Center for Constitutional and Human Rights; Ms. Anna Fleischer, Program Coordinator, Heinrich Boell Foundation Middle East, and Mr. Fadel Abdul Ghany, Chairman, Syrian Network for Human Rights. The event moderator was Ms. Emma Beals, Senior Advisor at the European Institute of Peace and Editor of Syria in Context.

Ms. Emma Beals began the session by thanking the Syrian Network for Human Rights for organizing the event, going on to note in her opening address: **“The Syrian regime is by far the most prolific perpetrator of these violations in terms of both the severity and the quantity of these crimes, and some of them constitute crimes against humanity and war crimes. For 10 years the international community and the UN Security Council have failed to mitigate the severity of these violations or to help end the Syrian conflict. Meanwhile, the demand of the popular uprising remains the same - to hold all perpetrators accountable, to move Syria from dictatorship towards democracy, and to ensure an adherence to human rights principles and to international law.”**

Following Ms. Beals’ address, Mr. Abdul Ghany said in his speech: **“It’s now the tenth year since the start of the popular movement in March 2011 calling for freedom, dignity, and a political transition to democracy. Ten years have passed, all bloody, and all kinds of horrifying violations have been committed, some amounting to crimes against humanity.”** He then went on to highlight the most notable points contained in SNHR’s tenth annual report, underlining the fact that, despite the decrease in the levels of violations compared to previous years, they still remain the highest in the world. The SNHR chairman also revealed that the levels of some of the violations covered in the report have increased compared to other violations, citing the example of the dangers of the COVID-19 pandemic to 148,000 detainees held in regime prisons, further noting that among the other types of violations that increased in this period are the theft and robbery of IDPs’ and refugees’ properties, and the seizure of home, lands, and farms.

Mr. Abdul Ghany added: **“It is very sad that, for ten years we’ve been documenting atrocities, and this is continuing in 2021, as we documented the death of 113 civilians, and 213 cases of arrest.”** The SNHR head emphasized: **“The responsibility for what is happening in Syria doesn’t fall on the Syrian regime and its allies Iran and Russia alone, but also on the failure of civilized democratic countries to make far greater efforts than they did. Fighting the crimes against humanity that occur in Syria is not the task of the Syrians alone. It is the duty of human rights organizations, civil society, and all countries, foremost among which are the countries that respect international law and human rights in their lands.”**

Another of the distinguished guest speakers, Dr. Simon Adams, said of the UN Security Council's failure: **"The offensive on Idlib by the Syrian regime and by its Russian allies where we saw about fifteen hundred civilians killed, one million people displaced in a campaign of organized cruelty which really focused on the points of vulnerability for civilians, bombing hospitals, targeting schools, destroying evacuation routes, and making it harder for people to flee from harm [...] none of this has been because of the lack of information, it has been because over the last 10 years the UN Security Council - the only international body deemed responsible for the maintenance of international peace and security - has consistently failed to uphold its responsibility to protect the Syrian people."**

Dr. Adams added: **"16 vetoes by Russia, eight of which were [issued] alongside China, which have undermined international efforts to hold perpetrators of the conflict accountable and to see the situation referred to the International Criminal Court so I think, you know, that is the reason for this deadly cycle of impunity."**

Mr. Adams address was followed by Mr. Patrick Kroker's, who said: **"The avenues for justice, they were all closed, mainly because of the veto of the avenue towards the International Criminal Court because the Security Council couldn't refer or didn't want to refer [the Syrian regime] because of the vetoes by Russia and China"**.

Mr. Kroker added: **"Organizations and state entities and civil society organizations also, such as the Syrian Network for Human Rights [and] also including the ECCHR, need to come up with new ways to achieve that [referral to the ICC] and I also think that to some degree we can today think of some steps that have been taken, and that we're really, I would say, quite surprised in the end - I mean we always demanded these steps but that they would actually happen. I'm mainly speaking, of course, of the arrest warrants that were handed down in in 2018 against Jamil Hassan, a head of the Syrian Air Force Intelligence, in France and in Germany, and then also [prosecutions] in France against Ali Mamluk and Abdul Salam Mahmoud; this was really, I think, a key moment. Also when it comes to the history of international criminal law, so to say, the fact that the principle of universal jurisdiction is producing these results is certainly a sign for hope, but definitely only a sign, [that we need] to keep on doing this work."**

Following Mr. Kroker's address, Mr. Kristyan Benedict, spoke about the importance of accountability: **"The root of this crisis - and not just the past 10 years but for decades - is the impunity issue, and in a sense it's something that can be done [addressed] outside of geopolitics."**

Mr. Benedict added: **"The regime at the moment has a fairly sophisticated propaganda campaign in the west to remove these sanctions and to locate western sanctions as the main reason there is a crisis in Syria - that's basically the Syrian [regime's] top line obviously - there's something deeper underneath that, around not just releasing, not just removing, the sanctions but also demanding stabilization and reconstruction funds."**

The next speaker, Ms. Anna Fleischer, discussed the depth and variety of the violations that have been committed by the Syrian regime and other parties: **“I think that, you know, both local and international organizations in the situation that we’re in now have a responsibility to understand the layers of violations that we’re looking at because we’re looking at more than bombings, kidnapping and forced disappearance and detention - those are all very important to document and to understand and to call out, however we’re also looking at more complex and difficult to understand violations, for example statelessness of children born in areas outside of regime control or children born to women of foreign fighters; that issue will definitely define the future of the country as well, and will make it very difficult. We’re also looking at a situation in Lebanon where lots of children have been born in the past few years who do not possess the proper documentation, therefore it will be extremely hard to prove that they are in fact Syrian children.”**

Ms. Fleischer added: **“The sensibility and sensitivities around these issues [mean that] there has been a push among Syrian feminist and women’s organizations to, for example, talk about the trauma of detention for women and what it means for women after their release that they’re actually ostracized and pushed out of Syrian society and out of their communities because they are seen as shameful because of their detention and the experiences that are assumed that they lived through.”**

The event concluded with many questions and an interactive discussion. You can listen to the full contents of the event via the following [link on our YouTube channel](#):