

---

---

Syrian Human Rights Committee

---

---

**Annual Report on Human Rights  
Situation in Syria 2004**

(Covering the period from July 2003 to June 2004)

---

---

June 2004

---

---



## Contents

<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>First: The dossiers of detention in Syrian prisons .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>A. The dossier of arbitrary detention .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>B. The dossier of prolonged detention .....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>C. The dossier of those vanished in the Syrian         prisons .....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>D. The dossier of those forcibly deported to Syria .....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>E. The dossier of those returning home .....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>F. Those returning from Iraq .....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Second: Torture in the Syrian prisons and interrogation         centers .....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Third: Death under torture or as a result thereof .....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Fourth: The dossier of the exiled and coercively deported ....</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Fifth: The defenders of human rights and civil society         activists .....</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>Sixth: the dilemma of university students .....</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Seventh: the Kurdish dossier .....</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>Eighth: Bloody confrontations and terrorist attacks .....</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>Ninth: The press, mass media, journalistic and mass         media freedoms .....</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>Tenth: The Freedom to Peaceful Assembly .....</b>	<b>34</b>

## Introduction

The humanitarian situation in Syria had reacted during the past year towards further deterioration, as the regime failed to take an earnest step towards the long-awaited pledge to implement reforms throughout the four years since Bashar al-Asad assumed the presidency of the Republic. Several cases of arbitrary unjustifiable arrests were recorded, and the Kurdish issue got more complicated because of continuous individual and collective detentions. On the 13th of March of this year, events broke out leading to tens of dead and injured persons and hundreds of detainees. A new era of persecution is expected to commence under the prohibition of the Kurdish parties, the activities of which are winked at in the Syrian arena.

The events of March 13 represent the most prominent violent development the Authority practiced in Syria since the 1982 Hamah massacre, when thousands of civilians were killed. The Authority has not released the detainees returning from Iraq, while the dossier of prolonged detention is still lingering without any progress, for no more than one hundred detainees were released at the end of last January. The Authority still conceals the fate of thousands hidden in jails for around a quarter of a century. Meanwhile the dilemma of university students has aggravated because of recurrent arrests and dismissals from the university and halls of residence.

This year we had recurrent news of severe and systematic torture practiced by the Security Authorities. Some confirmed news reported the death of some of the detainees under torture or as a result thereof. Moreover, some of the victims of torture in a number of Syrian prisons were reported to have been mutilated.

The Authorities continued cooperation with foreign governments in arresting Syrian citizens or receiving a number of them, sending them to jails and severely torturing them on their being deported by the said bodies.

Public freedoms, the freedom of opinion, peaceful assemblies and demonstrations are still subject to prohibition, and tight constraints are imposed on whomever intends to practice such activities, in that increasing arrest rulings are passed against civil social activists and defenders of freedoms and human rights, who are recurrently summoned to appear before the exceptional military judiciary. The year has recorded the release of only one activist after the termination of his sentence, and the permission granted to a human rights defender to visit his country after about 23 years he had spent in exile.

While the Syrian Social National Party was allowed some presence, the Kurdish Parties, some of whose activities are winked at, were ordered to stop and change their political activities into cultural societies. Islamists still represent a red line in the sight of the Syrian security authorities.

This year's press and media freedoms witnessed more regression through the withdrawal of the license of the only independent newspaper, denying permits to some media men, monopolizing the press and the media in general as means of propagation for the authorities that dominate the rule in country. The world of the Internet witnessed more constraints through restricting subscribing in the service and blocking new websites and punishing those who browse the Internet outside the range of the Information Society and the General Department of Communications.

The Syrian arena witnessed an isolated incident last April when an attack took place, but the absence of transparency and scarcity of information raised suspicions about the truth of what had really happened that day.

The freedoms to assemble and hold vigils were also suppressed on a number of occasions, the most prominent of which were the 8th of March, on the occasion of the demand to end the implementation of Emergency Laws, as well as the 21st of June where solidarity was declared with political prisoners and a demand made for their release.

## **First: the dossiers of detention in Syrian prisons**

### **A. The dossier of arbitrary detention:**

Clause A of Article 4 of the Syrian Emergency Law permits the preventive detention of suspects, or those who threaten security and public system. It also permits putting individuals and places under surveillance at any time. Security systems go far in arresting and detaining the Syrian citizens with or without a cause, thus contradicting the rulings of the permanent constitution, which states in clause 1 of its 25th article that “freedom is a sacred right, and the State ensures to the citizens their personal freedoms and safeguards their dignity and security.”

Clause 2 of Article 28 states “No one may be kept under surveillance or detained except in accordance with the law.” The first Clause of the same Article states “Every defendant is presumed innocent until proven guilty by a final judicial decision.” The numerous security systems usually pay no attention to all these laws, for they rely on their secret bylaws that permit detaining and torturing the citizens for any reason or simply because of a suspicion or slander, which would exempt them from the responsibility of their acts and crimes that they may commit during performing their duties.

In mid-2003 the retired officer “Adnan Assaf” was arrested on visiting one of the security bodies while applying for a passport for the purpose of medical treatment abroad. He had been a former detainee for 12 years. The Military Intelligence arrested the citizen “Taj al-Din Nawwaf Ahmad” during the first part of July 2003 with the charge of defaming the position of the President of the Republic.

There are still in prison four of the detainees of the town of Darya, who were arrested in May 2003. They are (Haitham al-Hamwi, Yahya al-Shorbaji, Mu’taz Murad and Muhammad Shhadah). The Syrian Security Authorities had detained about 24 citizens from the town of Darya, who held a peaceful sit-in demanding the stopping of bribery, the cleaning of their town and the prevention of smoking. The others were released in successive groups, the last of which

was released in early last April, when seven of them were set free. In late November 2003 the security authorities arrested the Imam and speaker of the big Mosque of the town of Salqin, Sheikh "Muhammad Adib Qasim" because of his open views on public affairs. He was set free on 10/2/2004.

In violation of the rights of refugees and residents, the Iranian citizen "Sharil Putrus", who had come to Syria to interview the Office of the UN General Commission for Refugees in Damascus, was detained.

The author "Muhammad Ghanim" was detained for several days because of his opposing writings and stances. The Authorities detained thousands of Kurds after the 13th of last March just because they are Kurds. They also detained a citizen for merely talking on the mobile phone to a detained friend whose detention was unknown to him.

Reports refer to a detention campaign that involved a Salafi group from the district of al-'Utaibah in the suburban province of Damascus. Among them were (Usamah Ahmad al-Sheikh, Khalid Jum'ah 'Abd al-'Al, Ahmad 'Ali Haranyah, Muhmmad 'Ali Haranyah, Khalid Farhan 'Abdul-Qadir, Muhammad 'Abdul-Majid 'Abdul-Rahman, Muhammad 'Iz al-Din Dhyab, Ahmad 'Umar 'Ainain, 'Abdul-Razzaq Ahmad Keilani, Na'im Qasim Marwah, Muhammad 'Abdul-Hafiz Keilani, Muhammad Ahmad As'ad, Marwan Zuhair Keilani, Husein Jum'ah 'Uthman, Bassam Jum'ah 'Uthamn, Samir Mustafa Abu al-Khair, Isma'il Abu al-Khair, Muhammad Ahmad Dhyab, Qasim Muhammad Qshaishah, Muhammad Ahmad Keilani, Khalid Ahmad Keilani).

On 27/5/2004 the citizen "Hanif Muhammad al-Sheikh" was arrested by the Military Intelligence because of a slander by a taxi driver who accused him of criticizing the overwhelming corruption. He was then transferred from al-Raqa to the Palestine Branch for Military Interrogation in Damascus. Detention was the lot of dozens of those returning from Iraq, university students, defenders of human rights, and activists of civil society.

**B. The dossier of prolonged detention:**

The Syrian authorities still keep hundreds of detainees from the period of the eighties in the wake of the campaign they launched against the Muslim Brotherhood. During that period they detained thousands of members, supporters, sympathizers and relatives, most of whom were taken as hostages and many of whom were executed in mysterious circumstances. Some others were released, while the authorities still keep a third group in Sednaya prison.

The Syrian Human Rights Committee has listed the names of 360 detainees belonging to the Muslim Brotherhood still kept in Sednaya prison north of the Syrian Capital, Damascus. Some of them suffer from chronic diseases; others from serious psychological and mental ailments. Most of them finished their sentence terms many years ago but have not been set free yet.

There are around 50 detainees belonging to al-Tahrir Party who were arrested in 1999. Most of them were sentenced by the State Security Supreme Court to various terms ranging from four to six years.

There are around 180 detainees in Sednaya prison charged with various accusations, such as belonging to the Ba'thist Party (ban Arab Leadership), Labour Communist Party, and the Arab Communist Organization. There are also Palestinians belonging to "Fateh" Movement and the Palestinian Liberation Front, besides other detainees accused of belonging to the group of "Takfir and Hijrah" or of having alleged relationship with the "Qa'idah" Organization or other Salafi groups, military officers or hostages for their wanted relatives, and others just because they are Kurdish activists, persons deported from other countries or of other Arab nationalities.

In 'Adra prison there are a number of detainees, seven of whom are the detainees of the 'Spring of Damascus', whose sentence terms range from five to ten years, and some Kurds who participated in the Children's Demonstration and who have been tried by the Supreme State Security Court for over a year.

Some sources inform of the detention of the officer Farhan Yusuf Shhadah al-Zu'bu in 1970 (34 years in jail) and he has been confined in a cell at one of the security branches since 1974. The sources record the documented case of detaining 'Imad Sheiha from the Arab Communist Organization in 1974 (30 years in jail) and the case of Subai' al-Siba'i, the Member of the Muslim Brotherhood in 1978 (26 years in jail).

Confirmed information indicates the end of the sentence terms of three military pilots 20 years after their detention. But when they were presumptively released, a patrol from the Intelligence of Air Forces came to arrest them from Sednaya prison and transferred them to the prison of Mezze Military Airport, where they are badly treated by the Air Force Intelligence. The detainees are (Muhammad Bashar al-'Ashi, Muhammad Rafiq 'Umar al-Hamami and Muhammad Ahmad Haidar Kiki).

The Syrian Authorities released a number of detainees belonging to the Muslim Brotherhood, al-Tahrir Party, the Ba'thist Party (National Leadership), Palestinians, and some leftist groups, etc. on 30/1/2004. The Syrian Human Rights Committee confirmed 88 names of those released in this group of various trends. News informs of the release of a list of about 120 detainees including three with the rank of Major (Taysir Lutfi, Salah Halawah, Nadhir al-Saqqah), who were arrested 21 years ago. Confirmed news tells that some of these detainees were returned to prison at the commands of security branches, which happened to some of them more than once. Those who are released are ordered to visit the security bodies fortnightly and present a detailed report on their observations and communications during the period. The Syrian Committee has learnt of the release of 'Abdul-Khaliq Shabariq from Aleppo on 10/6/2004 after seventeen years of detention as he was arrested when he came home from his working place in Kuwait to visit his family.

In a disappointing step, Security Forces detained Mustafa Hijazi from the city of Jabla in October of 2003, and a judicial order to

imprison him for one year was issued after was found to have informed others of how he was mistreated during his 15 years of imprisonment in the past.

**C. The dossier of those vanished in the Syrian prisons:**

After closing the Political Division in the Desert prison of Tadmur (Palmyra), the map of the detainees who disappeared in the Syrian prisons began to become considerably clearer. The majority of them are considered to belong to the Muslim Brotherhood.

The Syrian Human Rights Committee has for several years devoted itself to collecting information and testimonies on the massacres, cases of execution and cases of death under torture or because of disease, health negligence or senility in the Syrian prisons, particularly in the prison of Palmyra.

A number of prisoners who were released at successive intervals mentioned information that help in determining the number of those who disappeared in the Syrian prisons. The Syrian Human Rights Committee thinks that those who died in the prison of Palmyra amounted to 12 thousand, including those who died in the massacre carried out by Rif'at al-Asad in June 1980 and the successive manslaughters that were carried out during the eighties, particularly in 1984, when controversies rose between Hafiz al-Asad and his brother Rif'at in the wake of the illness of the former and the preparation of the latter to snatch authority. Two thousand detainees died in the Mezze prison, while around three thousand detainees died in the intelligence and security branches, and other prisons in the provinces. Thus the total approximate number of those who disappeared in the Syrian prisons is around 17 thousand detainees, most of whom were Islamists, particularly members of the Muslim Brotherhood.

The Authorities, however, decades after the disappearance of this large number of detainees, has not taken any step to settle this thorny dossier. They have not told the relatives of the disappeared of their fate, the circumstances and causes of their death, or the place of their burial. Nor did they investigate these practices.

Many monitors of the Syrian affair believe that this very elaborate dossier represents one of the principal unsettled issues that the security and intelligence bodies are afraid of settling, for opening it would revive the pains and agonies of a large sector of the Syrian nation and these bodies would not benefit by such settlement by any means.

**D. The dossier of those forcibly deported to Syria:**

The Engineer Mahir 'Arrar, the Syrian and holder of the Canadian nationality, was set free on 5/10/2003, after persistent demands by the Canadian Authorities to release him. 'Arrar was arrested by the American Authorities while he was passing across the transit hall in one of the airports of New York on 26/9/2002 and was deported to Syria in compliance with the security cooperation between the two countries, for his being suspected of having traveled to Afghanistan and of being trained there. Mahir 'Arrar was not allowed to stay in Syria after his release, but he was handed over to the Canadian Authorities, who transferred him to Canada immediately.

In this context, in the middle of last March the Syrian Authorities released the Syrian citizen, who holds the Canadian nationality, Abdullah al-Maliki, whose detention is mysterious because of lack of information. It is not clear whether he was detained and deported like 'Arrar, or was detained in the airport of Damascus on his return to Syria. After his release, however, because of the Canadian pressure, he was not allowed to leave the country, but was ordered to present himself before the ordinary judiciary on the 6th of June this year in accordance with Article 278 of the General Criminal Law that criminalizes any person that propagates false news abroad that would defame the State. If such person is not proved innocent, he will be sentenced to imprisonment for several years.

On 13/10/2003 Muhammad Sa'id al-Sakhri was released. He had been deported by the Italian Authorities on 18/11/2002 shortly after he, his wife and four children sought refuge in Italy on 23/11/2002. He was released as a result of the official Italian pressure on the Syrian Authorities when his relatives brought a suit against the

Italian Government to the European Parliament's Human Rights Court. Al-Sakhri is a member of the Muslim Brotherhood and has been living outside Syria since 1982. Al-Sakhri was required to present himself before the Supreme State Security Court on 30/5/2004 without giving any reason. SHRC has learnt that the trial has been postponed till September 2004.

The Authorities did not release others who had been deported from several countries, such as Pakistan, Iran, Iraq and Bulgaria. The Bulgarian Authorities arrested the physician Muhammad Faiq Mustafa in Bulgaria, where he has lived since the early eighties carrying the Bulgarian nationality, and handed him over to the Syrian Authorities whereupon he was arrested as soon as he arrived at Damascus International Airport, and remains detained in prison.

Also detained in Sednaya prison are Bara' As'ad 'Abdul-Latif (4/2002) the Syrian student in Pakistan, Baha' Mustafa Jugl (5/2002), who was living with his sister in Pakistan, Yasir Sankari (2002) and other detainees after they were handed over by the Pakistani Authorities for being suspected of having a potential relationship with the "Al-Qa'eda" Organization.

In the same prison there reside detainees that were deported from Iraq in 2002, including Mus'ab Nasif and Usamah al-'Umar, held for unknown reasons.

The Lebanese Authorities had deported many Syrian residents in Lebanon, particularly Kurds, such as Farhan 'Ali 'Abdul-Rahman, and handed them over to the Syrian Authorities. At present they crouch in the cells of the Syrian prisons.

During the course of last year, the Iranian Authorities deported many Syrians, Palestinians and Lebanese and handed them over to the Syrian Authorities, who detained them and concealed their detention.

**E. The dossier of those returning home:**

A number of deported and exiled citizens tried to settle their situations and return home hoping that they would lead a normal life there. They were encouraged in the wake of promises they had received from the Syrian Embassies and as a result of the speeches of the President of the Republic, and in consequence of intercessions from here and there, some of which were realized with large amounts of money. Yet, when they came back they were all detained for several weeks and some of them are still detained up to the moment of issuing this report.

Informed sources and testimonies by the relatives of the detainees say that a large number of them were exposed to beatings, mistreatment, and psychological and physical pressure. 'Abdul-Razzaq Shollar, an eighty-one years old man suffering from physical diseases and other disorders, was arrested. He had to leave the country in 1981 because he was the father of wanted opponents belonging to the Muslim Brotherhood. Despite his old age and illness that render him unable to serve himself, he was detained for six weeks before he was released on 29/7/2003 in spite of all the promises and assurances that had been given by the Syrian consulate in Jeddah confirming that he would not be taken into custody even for one moment.

On 14/7/2003 Mustafa Muhammad al-Dghaim (having no political affiliation and practicing no opposing activity), who was a resident in Sweden, was arrested as soon as he arrived at Damascus Airport in the company of his wife and two children although he had applied to the Syrian Embassy for permission to visit Syria and received an official permission to do so. Nevertheless he stayed in the branch of interrogation for one week before he was released.

The Security Authorities arrested the female citizen Sawsan Yusuf al-Taybani (the wife of a dissident belonging to the Muslim Brotherhood) in early October 2003 after she had secured a passport and a permission to visit Syria after 23 years of coercive residence in exile. She was released only at the end of the same month.

The Syrian Human Rights Committee learned that the citizen “Arwad ‘Izzat al-Bushi” (holder of Canadian nationality), who settled his situation and returned after certain arrangements with the Syrian Consulate in Jeddah where he resided, was arrested on his return to Syria and transferred to the prison of Sednaya, which suggests that the term of his stay in prison will get longer. Anyhow, up to now two years have elapsed since his return to Syria (detained since 2/7/2002).

The fate of the youth: Yaser “al-Sheikh ‘Abbud”, who returned in the company of his uncle in the spring of 1999, is still unknown. (He has no political affiliations and he is the son of a dissident belonging to the Brotherhood.) The female citizen “Mu’inah Muhammad Yusuf Sa’du” (having no political affiliation—the wife of a political dissident belonging to the Brotherhood) was arrested on 14/1/2004 on her arrival at the Syrian borders on her way from Jordan after she had secured a passport from the Syrian Embassy and a permission to visit the country 24 years after coercive deportation. She was set free only after several weeks.

**F. Those returning from Iraq:**

Syrian Security Authorities still detain isolated from the outer world, dozens of Syrian citizens residing in Iraq, who had to return to Syria because of the circumstances of the war. The Syrian Authorities had released some women and a very small number of men. But most of the returning men and youths were arrested and their fate is still a mystery and the locations of their detention are unknown. Those taken in custody on remand exceed 120 detainees. News says that the Authorities were lenient to some extent towards some opposing Ba’thists and allowed some of them to return to Syria after the intercessions of the leaders of some Arab Countries, as has happened to the former Syrian President “Muhammad Amin al-Hafiz”, who was allowed to return in November 2003. But the Authorities were very strict with those belonging to the Muslim Brotherhood and their families. It is believed that about 120 Syrian citizens are still detained over one year after their return from Iraq or their being abducted from the border zone. Some of them died because of torture, as was the case of “Abdullah Qaddur al-Thamir”,

who was arrested with his two brothers “Muath and Muhammad” who were born outside Syria. The list is long and includes, in addition to the abovementioned cases, other cases, such as that of Umar Darwish, Radwan Darwish, Mahmud Ali al-Nabhan, Jamal Mahmud al-Wafa’i, Muhammad Ahmad Afandi, Sa’d al-Din Marwan ‘Lawi, Ahmad Qashush, Adnan Nasif, Anas Aqili, Muhammad Nur Marwan ‘Lawi, Abdul-Aziz Umar al-Zilf, Abdullah Umar al-Zilf, Muhammad Abdul-Razzaq Ubaid). Recently the Authorities arrested Muhammad Faisal Ali Hajj Sa’id on his return to Aleppo in late last March. The Syrian Authorities have suspicions about any citizen that visited Iraq for any reason and call them to account. Therefore they detained a number of university graduates even several years after finishing their regular university studies in Iraqi universities.

It is noteworthy that the dissenter Riyadh Muhammad Khalid al-Shaqfah was subject to a murderous attempt on 23/7/2003, but he narrowly escaped death after having been shot with five bullets that settled in his legs and pelvis when his car was shot. The culprits were not known for sure, but informed sources confirmed to the Syrian Human Rights Committee that al-Shaqfah had been carefully watched and pursued by the security official in the Syrian Embassy in Baghdad, and by the head of the Syrian Military Intelligence personally. If such information proved true, it would be worrisome due to the past of the Syrian Intelligence bodies, who were responsible for the wave of murders throughout the 80s that targeted Syrian dissidents abroad because of their political affiliations.

## **Second: Torture in the Syrian prisons and interrogation centers**

Clause 3 of Article 28 of the Syrian Permanent Constitution states: “No one may be tortured physically or mentally or be treated in a humiliating manner. The law defines the punishment of whoever commits such an act.” Article 5 of the International Declaration of Human Rights states “No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.” But the security and criminal authorities in Syria do not pay due attention to the Constitution nor to International Conventions, and they practice torture widely in the Syrian interrogation centers and prisons.

While the Syrian Human Rights Committee observed a recession in resorting to torture in the “Sednaya prison”, we find it record an increase in using it in the Palestine Branch for Military Interrogation and other centers of interrogation, for the purpose of forcibly eliciting confessions or subjecting, humiliating and destroying the personalities of the detainees, taking revenge on them and defaming them.

Torture is practiced systematically and routinely without any restrictions. Various means are used, ranging from beating with bats, whips, and cables up to other more horrible and more sophisticated means, such as electrocution, the wheel, the suspension, the German chair, besides stripping the detainees of their clothes, depriving them of sleep, threatening them with rape and subjecting them to coercive unfavorable environmental factors.

On 9/1/2004 the Syrian Human Rights Committee documented from the registers of the prosecution and judiciary the torture inflicted on the citizens that were in custody on remand. In the minutes of interrogation we read that Ahmad Salih al-Hmud, the judge of the district of Ma’dan in al-Raqa Province, personally supervised in the court itself, the torture of the female citizen Aminah al-Muhammad al-‘Alouch, who was charged with a criminal offense. The defendant was brought to the judge’s office outside the official time and

subjected to severe torture with the devices of torturing: the wheel and the square cable. A few days after the event of torturing "...a wide patch of blueness was seen under the feet, a large bubble under the heel of the right foot, a small bubble under the heel of the left foot, and traumas surrounding her left eye..." All this was done with the knowledge of the director of the district and directly by the judge and the authority of the district.

On 8/1/2004 Najdat al-Barri from Latakia was exposed to severe torture for four successive days because of a traffic quarrel with a person supported by some of the authorities. Severe torture was also the lot of Arwad 'Izzat al-Bushi, who was arrested two years ago after the settlement of his case and his return to the country. (See: "Those returning home" above.)

We read in the testimony of Qani' Muhammad Ramdan (17 years) who was detained for nine days in March in the wake of the events of al-Qamishli (March 2004)—although he had nothing to do with these events—that he was tortured with electric shocks till he lost his consciousness. A swelling under the fingernail and blueness in the thumb of his right hand were observed. The same was seen in his left foot. His shoulder looked swollen because of the effects of torture. He said: "We were 71 detainees in the police station of the city for 24 hours. We were about to be choked because of crowding, particularly the children below 14 years of age. 24 hours later half the number were transferred and there remained 39 persons who were detained for 9 days before 25 of them were released, I being one of them."

In early April 2004 in the wake of the events of March 2004 in the city of al-Qamishli, the Kurdish citizen Hanif Hanan Muhammad was exposed to torture till he lost his consciousness.

### **Third: Death under torture or as a result thereof**

Many confirmed reports state that during this year cases of death took place under torture, as a result thereof or as a result of the health negligence that is routinely practiced against the detainees during the period of interrogation, or against the detainees kept in the branches of interrogation.

Informed sources testify that the Syrian Kurdish citizen Khalil Mustafa bin Muhammad Sharif died under torture two days after he was arrested for unknown reasons. Deep wounds were seen everywhere on his body. Other information tells of horrible mutilation of his body in that he was cut into pieces, one of his eyes was plucked out and his leg was broken.

Abdullah Qadir al-Thamir, who suffered from rickets and other chronic handicaps, died after his return from Iraq, his detention and subjection to torture till his health deteriorated. When he became terminally sick the authorities abandoned him to die in the hospital.

The Committee has learned of the death of "Firas Mahmud Abdullah", who died under torture during the attempt to forcibly elicit confessions from him in the Branch of Criminal Security in Latakia on 7/1/2004. His relatives, the judge and the legal physician were not allowed to inspect his corpse.

In May 2004 the detainee Thabit al-Dikhil (Ba'th, ban Arab Leadership) died because of negligence that led to the deterioration of his health. The administration of the prison did not provide him with the required health care. In early 2004 and under similar circumstances the detainee Sulaiman Khashan Abdulhameed (Muslim Brotherhood) died in Sednaya prison. Both detainees had been in prison for decades. Earlier reports in late June 2003 revealed the death of the Lebanese citizen Joseph Hawwas, who was detained in Syrian prisons. The reports then said that the death was caused by the circumstances of torture, mistreatment and nutritional and health negligence.

On 6/4/2004 the Kurdish citizen Husein Hammu Na'isu from the district of Afrin in northern Syria died two days after his detention. Two days after his death (8/4/2004), the Kurdish citizen Farhad Muhammad, also died, as a result of being exposed to severe torture although he had been shot with a bullet. When his health worsened irrecoverably, he was transferred to al-Hasakah Hospital, where he passed away soon after.

#### **Fourth: The dossier of the exiled and coercively deported**

In early December 2003 the Syrian Minister Faruq al-Shar' claimed in the Third Conference of the Branches of the Progressive National Front that there were no exiled Syrians. He added: "No Syrian citizen abroad should claim or pretend that he is exiled, for we do not exile our citizens."

But the truth not acknowledged by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, in spite of the good information of the Syrian Embassies that belong to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs headed by him, is that there are thousands of Syrian citizens who cannot return to their country and these embassies do not grant them any documents to prove their identities, or any passports. They even prohibit registering deaths and births, and refuse to issue proxies so that their deputies in Syria can take measures on their behalf. This situation applies to three successive generations: the first generation that had to leave Syria before being arrested and executed in accordance with Law no. 49 for the year 1980 that sentences the defendant for merely belonging to the Muslim Brotherhood; the second generation are the children who went out with them or were born outside Syria; the third generation are their grandchildren. Some of the well-off among these resort to paying large amounts of money in hard currency to secure passports through corrupt officials and bribed security members in the Syrian embassies, or influential persons in the State administrations. The Syrian Human Rights Committee managed to collect scores of testimonies about citizens who could not obtain passports for themselves and their children except through paying large amounts of money to security members and officials whose names are kept by the Committee.

A preliminary study carried out by SHRC states that prominent State officials and security officers are involved in these blackmailing processes that bring to them substantial amounts of money. Therefore, a lot of them intentionally undermine any attempt to legally grant these deportees any passports. The study indicates

that these deportees exceed 150 thousand Syrian citizens who were not only exiled from their homeland but were deprived of enjoying any of their natural and civil rights. The official authorities practiced all types of pressure on them and on their relatives inside Syria and on the countries they took refuge in to return them to prisons and detention stations.

A quarter of a century later the state is still the same as it was at the beginning. Throughout that time these Syrian citizens were deprived of their rights in their homeland and most of them had to live in poverty, low education and insecurity owing to this cruel treatment. Yet when some citizens thought of settling their situations and contacted the Syrian embassies in the places of their residence, and agreed to resolve their issues through the security systems and some of the embassies subsequently granted them security and told them that they could return to their country peacefully, they were arrested as soon they arrived home, and were subjected to interrogation. Many of them were subject to torture, abuse and blackmail and they stayed in prison for weeks and months before they were released. Some of them were detained for long periods, and some have been detained in the Syrian prisons for several years (for more examples, see: "Those returning home".)

Outside Syria there are other dissidents who cannot return to their country, such as leftists, secularists, Ba'thist dissidents, non-affiliated and Kurds, who number in thousands and are all threatened, in case they return, of being arrested and presented before the State Security Court or the Exceptional Military Courts, and of the possibility of being sentenced to long terms of imprisonment, tortured and mistreated. The Kurdish citizen, Husein Dawud, was arrested in 2000 as soon as he was deported from Germany on his way to Syria, where he spent two year in prison.

### **Fifth: The defenders of human rights and civil society activists**

The security campaign against the activists of the civil society and the defenders of human rights is still going on. Seven out of ten: Riyad Saif, Muhammad Mamun al-Himsi, Arif Dalilah, Walid al-Bani, Kamal al-Labwani, Habib Isa and Fawwaz Tallo, were arrested in 2001 and are serving prison terms reaching in some cases to ten years in the prison of Adra north of the Syrian Capital.

Reports have informed of the deterioration of the health of Arif Dalilah and Muhammad Mamun al-Himsi in the solitary prison during the last year without providing them with the necessary health care. The Syrian authorities had released one of the detainees of the Spring of Damascus; Hasan Sa'dun on the ninth of September after serving two years imprisonment he had been sentenced to by the Supreme State Security Court.

The campaign against the activists of the civil society aggravated; more than twenty civil activists were arrested in Aleppo on 22/8/2003 because they had intended to attend a lecture in al-Kawakibi Forum (the office of the lawyer Samir al-Nashar) and then they were released, but fourteen of them were forwarded to the Military Judiciary (Najib Dadam, Safwan Akkash, Fatih al-Jamus, Abd al-Jawad Salih, Samir al-Nashar, Fuad Bwadaqchi, Zaradasht Muhammad, Abdul-Ghani Bakri, Muhammad Adib Kur, Abdul-Jawad Salih, Hashim Hashim, Muhammad Hazim Ajjaj Aqra'i, Ghazi Mustafa, Yasar Qaddur, Ahmad al-Nasir). After several sessions an exceptional military court sentenced thirteen of them to three months' imprisonment, while it sentenced the fourteenth to one-year's imprisonment, and these sentences are still being appealed.

On 25/7/2004 security elements aggressively beat the mother of a human rights activist because he had made some declarations on the status of human rights in Syria to some news channels. Harassments then continued against him and his colleagues in 'the Committees for Defending Democratic Freedoms and Human Rights

in Syria'. Ahmad al-Hazim and Hasan Wafah were arrested because they participated in the sit-in to end the emergency state on 8/3/2004, and they were not released till the 9th of May. However, they were prevented from resuming their work. Then Aktham Nu'aisah, the Head of the Committees for Defense Democratic Liberties and Human Rights in Syria, was arrested on 13/4/2004 two days after the Committees issued their annual Report on the status of human rights in Syria. Aktham Nu'aisah is tried by the State Security Court for the accusations of 'forging and publishing false information, which may lead to sentencing him to several years of imprisonment if he is proved guilty. It is worth mentioning that Aktham Nu'aisah had been detained before, and he suffers from many diseases. It has been reported that he was prevented from taking medicine and treated badly. The trial standards adopted by the State Security Court can never realize justice and cannot be looked upon as a court qualified to look into any case. The defendant is not allowed to defend himself in it, and his lawyers do not have the right to justly defend him (bearing in mind that permission to appoint lawyers to defend those whose cases are investigated by the court is a new practice that had not been adopted in the past when the detainees were deprived even of this right). Its judgments are final and not subject to appeal. The family of another activist was exposed to continuous harassments because of his human rights activity. The activist in the Committee for Democratic Liberties, Salar Dawud Hasan, had disappeared from the street in Aleppo on the 17th of last May, and then it was discovered that he was detained by the security systems.

The security authorities prevented many civil activists and defenders of human rights from traveling. They prevented Haytham al-Maleh, Head of the Human Rights Society in Syria because of his activities in the field of civil and human rights. They prevented the activists Abdul-Majid Manjonah and Anwar al-Bunni for the same reasons. Fatih al-Jamus was prevented from traveling to Europe on 24/5/2004 and was told in the airport that an order prevented him from traveling according to a warrant issued by the Department of Political Security. The list of those prevented from traveling for political reasons of because of civil activity is long, and the number of those

prevented from traveling increases continuously. The SHRC keeps a list including the names of 200 persons prevented from traveling.

On the other hand, the Syrian authorities permitted the activist in Human Rights, Haytham Manna', to return to Syria after 24 years in exile. He managed to obtain a passport from the Syrian Embassy in Paris and visit his country for 13 days from the end of August 2003.

The civil activist and author, Abul-Razzaq 'Eid and the translator Bakr Sidqi were summoned to present themselves before the exceptional military judiciary, partly because of a book authored by the former on the experiment of the civil society in Syria and articles written by both of them, and partly because of their testimony in the case of the fourteen activists. The Court, however, showed that the case was not within its specialty and demanded that it be referred to a criminal or civil court.

### **Sixth: the dilemma of university students**

University students suffer from discrimination in enrolment on the basis of preference in grades, for the student activists in the 'Revolution Youth Union' are granted up to 20 extra degrees to be added to the total, which would enable them to occupy the seats of their fellows who have worked hard throughout the year to score similar grades. University students also suffer from the dominance and persecution practiced by the 'National Union of Syrian Students' and the 'Office of Higher Education' that belongs to the Regional Leadership of the ruling Ba'th Party. Students are not allowed to practice any other activities, and even free expression of their opinions is confronted with severe persecution inside the sanctuaries of the principal Syrian Universities in Damascus, Aleppo, Homs and Lattakia. Not only this but the students who try to practice any activity are immediately exposed to a series of revengeful and punitive procedures, such as dismissal or deprivation of university lodging and scholarships.

In late January 2004 there was issued decree no. 6 that terminates the State's commitment to employ engineers after graduation. Some students found that unfair and practiced their right of protesting and demonstrating in the sanctuary of Aleppo University and outside its fences. But they were confronted with a cruel assault and persecution by the Student Union Organization that supports the Authority and Security corpses. The students were aggressively beaten and many students were arrested, such as Muhammad 'Arab, Hasan Qasim, Shifan Rashak, Ahmad Abdullah, Hashim As'ad, Rani Ilyas, and Ahmad Bashar. Then they were released with the exception of "Muhammad 'Arab", who was set free later. Shortly thereafter, in early March 2004 Aleppo University passed the decision of terminally dismissing five students from Aleppo University because of their previous protests and sits-in: Muhammad Arab, Basil Dayyub, Bara'ah al-Radi, Hashim Las', Lina Razzuq.

Kurdish students in Damascus and Aleppo universities were terminally or temporarily dismissed from the university or from the

university lodging after the events of March that took place in the wake of confrontations between two football teams in the city of al-Qamishli in the furthest district to the north-east of Syria and the subsequent protests against the cruel treatment the Kurdish citizens were exposed to by the security and intelligence elements. A number of students were dismissed Jawidan al-Hasan, Ilham Abdul-Rahman, Midia Mahmud, Mahmud Hammu Abdul-Wahab, Rash Musa, Juan Battal, Mahmud Muhammad Bashshar, Asim Sulaiman al-Ahmad, Hamza Ahmad Antar, Dalkash Sallum, Birivan Isa, Ibrahim Qasim, Muhammad Ibrahim, Marwan Bashar, Syahur As'ad, and others, while many students from Damascus and Aleppo Universities were arrested just because they are Kurds.

On 24/6/2004 the security authorities arrested from the Damascus University lounge eleven students Basil Dayyub, Khalid al-Asrawi, Shadi Abu Fakhr, Zahir Abu Lutf, Umar Abdullah, Muhammad Bashir Arab, Mustafa al-Yusuf, Muhannad al-Dibs, Mihyar Hashrum, Nasir al-Nabulsi, Wa'el Azzuz from Damascus and Aleppo Universities, who were discussing the notion of appealing to the Ministry of Higher Education concerning the arbitrary decision to deprive some of them of education. Three days after arrest the above-mentioned students were released with the exception of Muhammad Arab and Muhammad al-Dibs, whom the authorities are reportedly determined to present them to the exceptional judiciary for trial.

The punishment of dismissal was furthermore inflicted on secondary and even preparatory students as well. In early current June it is reported that Eva Ibrahim Dawud, the student in secondary second year in al-Hasakah Governorate, was dismissed because of a slander by her classmate, who is the daughter of a security official in the Governorate. The dismissal penalty was also the lot of another female student in the first preparatory year.

### **Seventh: the Kurdish dossier**

Statistics indicate that the Kurds living in Syria and enjoying its citizenship may number over one and a half million. While the authorities persist in depriving them of many of their natural and cultural rights and follow against them the policy of coercive Arabization, the Kurds increasingly adhere to and demand these rights, and the authorities get more aggressive and repressive against them. The authorities arrested seven fathers Khalid Muhammad, Sharif Farman, Amir Murad, Salar Salih, Hawzan Muhammad, Husein Ramadan, and Muhammad Mustafa, during their participation in a demonstration in front of UN's UNICEF on the International Day for Children 2003, to protest against the deprivation of the Kurdish child of his/her natural and cultural rights. The fathers are still detained about one year after their arrest in the prison of Adra north of the Syrian Capital. Recently on 23/5/2004 they were presented before the State Security Court, which postponed looking into the case to the 29th of current June.

During the past year many Kurds were arrested on the grounds of their party activities that demand granting the Kurds their natural and cultural rights. The University student Mas'ud Hamid, the activist in Yikiti Party, was arrested in the examination hall in Damascus University on 24/7/2003. Khalil Mustafa from the village of Maktala, died under torture on 8/8/2003, and his corpse was badly mutilated. The Intelligence of Air Forces arrested Ali Khalil Sulaiman in his working office in the Agricultural Department in Jabal Sam'an. On 2/5/2004 Ahamd Sulaiman, the member of the Kurdish Progressive Democratic Party, and many others were arrested. On 9/3/2004 a security force stormed into a place where a Kurdish women band were preparing for a celebration on the occasion of the International Woman Day, and dispersed people by force and arrested the supervisor of the band, the artist Akram Muhammad Murad, and then arrested his two brothers Hasan Murad and Husein Murad, in addition to Fahim Yusuf and his son Jomard Yusuf and the two brothers Kadar Nawaf Manjah and Siraj Nawaf Manjah. The sergeant Qasim Muhammad (22 years old, from al-Hasakah

Governorate) was murdered during performing the compulsory military service near al-Kiswah district with the bullets of the Syrian security forces in early current June. Kurdish sources say that four Kurdish soldiers were murdered by their immediate commanders.

But the events of the city of al-Qamishli on 13/3/2004 and the subsequent Kurdish protests and official persecution represented the most prominent unprecedented happening since the massacre of Hama in 1982, in that the security forces and party militias dealt with the Kurdish citizens with the policy of the thick staff and oppression. According to the official report 25 Kurdish citizens were killed, while Kurdish sources say they were over one hundred, besides hundreds of injured persons. The authorities arbitrarily arrested—according to Kurdish sources—about 6000 Kurdish citizens. They were arrested indiscriminately, and many of them were arrested in their houses, in their university residences or their working places just because they are Kurdish. Thereafter the security apparatuses intensified discrimination against the Kurdish citizens, which brought to mind the memories of their practices and oppression during the painful events in the eighties.

The authorities claimed foreign elements were behind these events and that they constituted part of 'a conspiracy against Syria'. But they withdrew these allegations according to later declarations by the President of the Republic to one of the satellite channels, which reflects the truth of the bad performance of the Authority towards the Syrian Kurds in the field of human rights and public and private freedoms.

The Syrian Human Rights Committee has recorded the names of some of those who were injured or killed in these mishaps. The authorities released groups of Kurds in the past weeks. Those remaining in detention are estimated at 400 to 500 Kurds, tens of whom have been referred to the military judiciary while others were not charged with any offence.

According to the latest reports it is thought that about 500 detainees are still held in detention; on 8/6/2004 eight juveniles were referred

to the interrogation magistrate of the district of Ras al-'Ain. They are: Ahmad Shukri Sa'dun, Bahzad Jamil, Khidir Sa'id (under 15 years old), Khalil bin Ahmad, Siamind Aal Rashi (under 15 years old), Ali Sa'id, Kaniowar Muhammad, Muhammad Ali Maju (under 15 years old).

In a remarkable escalating step six Kurdish party leaders inside Syria were summoned to the Palestine Branch for Military Investigation, where influential bodies in the military intelligence ordered them to give up their party activities and turn to cultural activities and register their parties in the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour as societies that have nothing to do with political action, which would change them into secret organisations. Such a procedure is apt to result in a political conflict between them and the Authority that may have serious human and human rights consequences. This is regarded as a withdrawal of the recognition of the President of the Republic that the Kurdish Nationality is the next greatest nationality in Syria in his speech with an Arabic satellite channel.

### **Eighth: Bloody confrontations and terrorist attacks**

A “terrorist” attack targeted a vacant building that had been occupied by UN offices in the Mezze suburb, Damascus, on April 27, 2004, according to the official account. The authorities whose account changed, say that they killed three of the assailants and arrested the fourth, and that they discovered a weapon store belonging to the attacking group. Persons close to the Authority have declared to the mass media that the attack was the action of Al-Qaeda Organization, but the Syrian President said: ‘It is a local isolated event.’ Lack of transparency and scarcity of information coming from the Authority on the reality of the ongoing investigations about the attack have raised suspicions as to the motives behind the operation, its executors and the credibility of the information reported about it. Informed sources revealed the occurrence of armed confrontations in the city of al-Salmiyyah of Hamah Province between an armed group and the forces of the Military Intelligence two days after al-Mezze attack, when a Military Intelligence Patrol tried to break into a house inhabited by a family known for its Salafi trends. Reportedly one person from the Keilanis was killed while two others ran away. The Syrian authorities did not announce any news on the event because they had triggered it off.

### **Ninth: The press, mass media, journalistic and mass media freedoms**

Audio-visual and read mass media are still possessed by the State. No opinion other than the official one that supports the policy of the standing regime and the ruling Ba'athist Party is allowed to be published. All the newspapers that are issued in Syria are either official or semi-official. They represent the Authority or the parties of the Progressive Front allied with it. In addition to the papers Tishreen, al-Ba'th, al-Thawrah and Syrian Times (in English), the parties of the Front issue newspapers that are still of meager circulation and influence and are unknown to the Syrian street, such as the fortnightly paper al-Mithaq (the Socialist Union—Safwan Qudsi), al-Nur paper (the Communist Party), Aafaq paper (the Socialist Arabs' Movement), al-Wihdawi paper (the Party of Socialist Unionists). Al-Nur paper remains the most circulated among them due to publishing articles that contain some criticism of the Government's policies.

While the weekly Abyad wa Aswad (white and Black) is salable on the grounds that it is the only independent political magazine, it is not distant from the circles of the ruling authorities, for its owner is the son of the new Syrian Defense Minister.

The former Minister of Information Adnan Umran personally contributed to the obstacles in the path of issuing the weekly Al-Domari till the former Prime Minister passed a decision to cancel its permit on July 1, 2003.

A study mentions that fifteen permits granted to newspapers and magazines have been cancelled since 2000, when for the first time it was theoretically permitted to have non-governmental press in the country. It is worth mentioning that many of the permits were often granted to advertising, scientific, athletic, cultural or child publications. Many of the permits were cancelled because of the hard conditions and complications imposed on publications.

All newspapers, magazines and publications in Syria are subject to the publication act that restricts the media freedoms and that was decreed in September 2001 and entitles the Prime Minister to cancel any permit granted to any publication on the proposal of the Minister of Information without presenting any reason (Article 22).

Presswork in Syria still requires securing a permit in advance from the Ministry of Information and the security bodies in Syria. Such bodies still prevent the journalists from practicing their work or deprive them of their permits because of their impartial covering of the Syrian official policies. Some of them are subject to be summoned. The journalist Yasin al-Hajj Salih, who writes in al-Nahar Lebanese newspaper and other newspapers, was summoned to the Political Security Department in Damascus and was harshly threatened and warned against writing 'destructive articles'!! The reporter of the Jordanian newspaper al-Dustur, the Jordanian citizen Suhaib al-Tal was also summoned to interrogation, he was arrested and then released on 7/11/2003. In early September 2003 the Syrian journalist Basil al-Rifa'i was exposed to severe vexations and was forced to evacuate the house he had hired from the local authorities, on the grounds of writing critical articles against the corruption prevalent in al-Hasakah Province.

The 'Syrian Information Society' and the 'General Directorate for Communications' control the Internet in Syria. Its black (blocking) list contains thousands of informational, human and other websites, particularly those interested in Syria. For instance, they have blocked the website of Akhbar al-Sharq, which is specialized in the news of Syria. Prior to that the websites of Ilaf and Maktoob had been blocked. They blocked the website of the Electronic Alraei (Opinion) Newspaper, which is published in Paris by the Communist Party—Political Bureau. Then on 21/3/2004 they blocked the website 'Kulluna Shuraka Fil Watan' 'All 4 Syria.org'. Last May they blocked the Kurdish websites (Qamishlo.com, Amuda.com and Ifrin.net). They have blocked the website of the Syrian Human Rights Committee for several years, but they raised the blockage on the website of 'hotmail'. International organisations defending the press freedom consider Syria as restricting the Internet freedom.

The Organisation of Article 19 classifies the Authority in Syria as one of the ten regimes that are most inimical to the Internet and most restrictive of its uses so much so that many Syrian citizens have not had the chance to browse it even once in their lives. The subscribers in the Internet in Syria do not exceed 80 thousand subscribers in Syria—from among 18 million Syrians. Abd al-Rahman al-Shaghouri, who was arrested in early 2003 with the charge of browsing the website Akhbar al-Sharq and printing and distributing some of its materials was tried on 14/12/2003 by the State Security Supreme Court and was transferred to the prison of Sednaya, which suggests that his term of imprisonment may be prolonged. The Supreme State Security Court subsequently sentenced him on the 20th of the current June to two and a half years imprisonment.

On 11/4/2004 the Security Authorities arrested Fa'iq al-Mir in the street in the city of Lattakia because of keeping a copy of the electronic "alraei" newspaper. Then they arrested his friend Muhammad Jum'ah Quoban merely for contacting him on his mobile before they released him on 10/6/2004 after accusing him of propagating false news and raising disputes among the members of the community. It is noteworthy that Quoban had been imprisoned for 17 years before. On 9/6/2004 the journalist writer Jihad Nasrah was summoned by the Branch of Internal Security for interrogation on critical writings and articles he had written. He was then released after receiving open warning and covert threat as to the consequences of what he writes.

As to the broadcasting stations, TV stations and the Satellite Channel, they are all possessed exclusively by the State, and they belong to 'the General corporation for Broadcasting and TV'. Abul-Razzaq Salim the reporter of the 'Al-Arabiyya' Satellite Channel was arrested during covering the events of al-Qamishli on 15/3/2004 and a few days later he was released after confiscating the audio and video tapes and warning him.

## **Tenth: The Freedom to Peaceful Assembly**

A number of political, opposition, civil and legal bodies called for a number of peaceful vigils in order to convey their views on a number of arising issues which affect the country. However, Syrian authorities did not allow any such peaceful vigil to pass peacefully, as it dealt with those taking part with extreme brutality, and prevented the vigils from taking place, detained many who took part and even presented a number of those to illegal military and emergency courts. Among the vigils suppressed by the Security Forces were those that were carried out by students at Damascus and Aleppo universities, demanding what they felt were matters that affected them as students, including the repeal of decree No. 6, which absolved the state from its responsibility towards employing graduate engineers. The Security Forces also violently suppressed the vigil held in March of this year by civil and human rights activists demanding the lifting of emergency laws in Syria. In addition, a peaceful demonstration held by Kurdish children accompanied by their parents in front of the United Nation's office was violently and brutally dispersed, and a number of participating parents were arrested. On the 21st of June, 2004, the authorities prevented a vigil in support of the political detainee, from taking place and beat and abused those who came to participate in this activity.

The Syrian Authorities continue to prevent the establishing and licensing of forums, despite its turning a blind eye to some forums, such as that of Jamal Al-Attasi, and only licensed one such forum belonging to parliamentarian Mohammed Habash, who is known to have close ties with official and security sources.



•

**© 2004 All Rights Reserved  
Syrian Human Rights Committee (SHRC)  
BCM Box: 2789  
London WC1N 3XX  
United Kingdom  
Fax +44 (0)870 137 7678  
[www.shrc.org](http://www.shrc.org)**