

SYRIA – An overview

New Amnesty Report Reveals ‘Pure Horror’ of Life in Aleppo

Sheer terror and unbearable suffering has forced many civilians in the besieged city of Aleppo to eke out an existence underground to escape the government’s relentless aerial bombardment of opposition-held areas, according to a new report published by Amnesty on 5 May.

The report mentions damage caused by barrel bombs – oil barrels, fuel tanks or gas cylinders packed with explosives, fuel and metal fragments, which have been dropped by government force helicopter on schools, hospitals, mosques and crowded markets. Many hospitals and schools have had to move into basements or underground bunkers. Barrel bombs killed more than 3,000 civilians in Aleppo governorate alone last year, and over 11,000 in Syria since 2012. Last month local activists recorded at least 85 barrel bomb attacks in Aleppo city, killing at least 110 civilians. Yet the Syrian government, even President Bashar al-Assad, deny that barrel bombs had ever been used.

Amnesty is calling on all parties to the conflict in Syria to end deliberate attacks on civilians and civilian buildings or infrastructure, as well as the use of imprecise explosive weapons such as barrel bombs or mortars in populated areas.

Situation Dire for Syrian Media Workers on World Press Freedom Day

On World Press Freedom Day on 3rd May 2015, journalist and freedom of expression advocate Mazen Darwish, who is the President of the Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression (SCM), was be honoured with the prestigious UNESCO / Guillermo Cano World Press Freedom Prize in recognition of the work he has carried out in Syria for more than 10 years at great personal sacrifice. Unfortunately Mazen Darwish wasn’t able to accept his award. Like many other Syrian journalists, he spent World Press Freedom Day behind bars.

Since the uprising began in Syria in 2011, government forces have repeatedly subjected journalists to arbitrary arrests, unlawful detentions, enforced disappearances, as well as torture because of their involvement in recording and reporting on human rights violations in Syria. Some of them have died in the custody of the Syrian authorities. According to the International Press Institute's Death Watch, 74 journalists have been killed in Syria since 2011.

Citizen journalist Ali Mahmoud Othman was arrested by government forces in Aleppo in March 2012. He remains subjected to enforced disappearance. He is current casefile for Amnesty UK.

Chlorine Gas Attacks Families in Idlib

Amnesty has called again for Syrian to be referred to the International Criminal Court after alleged chlorine gas attacks. Eyewitnesses to an alleged chlorine gas attack in Idlib, northern Syria, told Amnesty about the horrific death of an entire family, including three children younger than three years of age. Around 100 people in all were exposed to toxic levels of chlorine after Syrian armed forces helicopters dropped four barrels containing the gas in two attacks on Sermine and nearby Qmainass between 9:15PM and 11:00PM on 16 March, according to witnesses.

Casefiles

Khalil Ma’touq

Human rights lawyer Khalil Ma’touq set off to drive to work in his home town of Sahnaya on 2 October 2012, with his friend Mohammed Thatha. Given Khalil’s work as a human rights lawyer and the fact that there are several government-controlled checkpoints on his usual route to his office in the city, there were immediately concerns that he had been arrested by the security forces. Amnesty believes that Khalil Ma’touq has been arbitrarily detained and subjected to enforced disappearance and considers him a prisoner of conscience.

Ali Mahmoud Othman

Ali Mahmoud Othman is a citizen journalist from Homs – an individual who took up reporting on the situation in Syria in the absence of reports by professional domestic and foreign journalists, due to restrictions imposed by the Syrian authorities. He was arrested in March 2012 in Aleppo province and remains held incommunicado in conditions which amount to an enforced disappearance. Amnesty considers Ali Mahmoud Othman to be at risk of torture and to be a prisoner of conscience.

SYRIA - EVENTS:

Amnesty International UK and FREE-Syria invite you to:

The Syrian Freedom Charter: What Syrians Want With guest speaker, Rafif Jouejati

Tuesday 19 May | 7:00pm – 8:30pm (Doors open at 6:30pm)

At Amnesty International UK, The Human Rights Action Centre, 17-25 New Inn Yard, London EC2A 3EA
Discussion & Q&A with Rafif Jouejati - Director, Foundation to Restore Equality and Education in Syria (FREE-Syria). A reception will follow from 8.30pm.

Reserve your free tickets at: <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/events/syrian-freedom-charter-what-syrians-want>

USEFUL LINKS:

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde24/1370/2015/en/> (Amnesty report on war crimes and human rights abuses in Syria)

<https://leilashrooms.wordpress.com/>

<http://www.syriasforgottencities.org/>

<http://free-syrian-voices.org/>

ACTIONS:

1. Get involved with the #OpenToSyria campaign by taking part in the photo action with your groups and friends. All the info and resources you need is here: <http://opentosyria.tumblr.com/>
2. Organise a film screening of The Dublin Pitfall by Rime El Jadidi (a documentary on the plight of Syrian refugees in Europe) and debate on Syrian refugees in Europe in your community during Refugee Week (June 15th – 21st).
Rime has kindly offered that Amnesty groups can screen the film for free.
3. Start planning an event or action for Day of the Disappeared (30 August) where you can highlight the disappearance and detention of Khalil Ma'touq and Ali Mahmoud Othman

Additional ideas (from Free Syrian Voices):

We need you to help us Free Syria's silenced voices!

1/ Urge the Syrian authorities to release all activists, media and humanitarian workers arbitrarily detained for their work.

2/ Call on concerned governments particularly Russia and Iran to exert pressure on the Syrian authorities and on non state armed groups to reveal the whereabouts and release all activists, media and humanitarian workers arbitrarily detained or abducted for their work.

Tweet and share the following message:

.@Presidency_Sy @KKdolgov @JZarif: #Syria needs its civil society activists free <http://free-syrian-voices.org/#FreeSYVoices>