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Recommendations Regarding Syria for the 76th Session of the UN General Assembly

STJ Calls on Member States to Concentrate on the Recruitment of Syrian Mercenaries, Ongoing HLP Violations, and Continuing Arbitrary Arrests

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*Syrians for Truth and Justice Calls on Member States to Concentrate
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From 14 - 21 September 2021, the 76th Session of the UN General Assembly will convene. During this week of negotiations and debate, STJ hopes the member states will consider the following recommendations for action and accountability in Syria:

1. STJ calls on the UN to halt the recruitment of Syrians, especially children, sent to fight as mercenaries in Libya.

Since late 2019, Syrians have been recruited to join the war in Libya as mercenaries to [support](#) the Government of National Accord (GNA), that was led by Fayez al-Sarraj and backed by Turkey, or the Libyan National Army (LNA), led by Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar and backed by Russia and other countries. Both [Turkey](#) and [Russia](#), and particularly the armed groups they back, enlisted thousands of mercenaries and dozens of [children](#) to fight as mercenaries in Libya. While the UN and international community have called for a ceasefire in Libya and a withdrawal of foreign forces and mercenaries from the conflict, STJ investigations have revealed that mercenaries, including [children](#), [continue to operate](#) in Libya.

As of July 2021, STJ and the Syria Justice and Accountability Centre [confirmed](#) that within the military groups of the Turkey-backed Syrian National Army, the Auxiliary Forces/Al-Quwat al-Radifa, Front and Alert Units, and Special Intrusion Units have children serving among their ranks in Libya. Similarly, hundreds of Syrians were transferred to Libya by armed Syrian groups and Russian security companies between October 2020 and April 2021. The enlistments were carried out by paramilitary groups directly linked with the Syrian government and included several confirmed children who were provided with identity documents falsifying their age. Sources note that Russian forces were aware that the children were being recruited and chose to turn a blind eye.

The continued recruitment and use of Syrian children in hostilities is a clear violation of international humanitarian and international human rights law. In addition to having their rights violated during their military service, like other Syrian mercenaries, Syrian children serving in overseas conflicts will struggle to return to civilian lives, further impeding the chance for Syrian society to recover.

STJ calls on UN member states to:

1. Pressure Turkey and Russia, as well as the armed groups responsible for the recruitment of children, to halt the recruitment of children and provide the groups with guidance and training on age assessment methods.
2. Enjoin the UN Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM) to address the grave violations of recruiting or using child soldiers and organize a country visit to assess the global situation of children in Syria and the extent of their being trafficked to participate in hostilities.
3. Recognize that in order to stop the use of Syrian mercenaries in foreign conflicts, effort must be placed in stopping recruitment in Syria.
4. Apply sanctions on states, armed groups, and companies currently engaged in facilitating the recruitment and transfer of Syrian mercenaries to Libya and other countries.

2. STJ calls on the UN to prioritize investigating and finding solutions for the large-scale violations of housing, land, and property rights occurring across Syria, by multiple actors in the Syrian conflict.

Since the beginning of the Syrian conflict, Syrians have had their homes seized and their land sold without their consent by multiple governmental and armed groups. In order to create a Syria which is safe for return, the Housing, Land, and Property (HLP) rights of Syrians, both displaced and living within the country, must be enforced and protected.

Multiple parties in the Syrian conflict have violated the HLP rights of civilians. Throughout 2020, notably in Hama and Idlib, the Syrian government [seized](#) large areas of agricultural lands from displaced civilians and offered them for public auction. Civilians, who were forced to leave their farms and houses behind as they escaped military operations launched by government forces, had over 6000 hectares of land stolen, much of it along with crops and expensive machinery.

In Tal Abyad and Ras al-Ayn (Serê Kaniyê), currently occupied by Turkey, over 1700 hectares of land were [seized](#) by armed groups operating under the opposition-Syrian National Army (SNA) between April and August 2020. Land abuses continue to [affect landowners](#) from across the region's diverse Kurdish, Arab, Assyrian, and Yazidi communities - all among the area's indigenous population. Crops cultivated by Arab and Kurdish farmers were [confiscated](#), lands belonging to Christian citizens were expropriated, and lands belonging to Syria's Yazidi minority were seized. In many cases, owners were not only forcibly kept from accessing their land but were forced to transfer ownership of their property using deception, threats, violence, or detention.

Additionally, STJ also [documented](#) the arbitrary seizure of over 80 houses from locals in Raqqa by The Northern Democratic Brigade, which is affiliated with the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF).

STJ calls on the UN member states to:

1. Pressure both Syria and Turkey, as well as the armed groups they support, to stop land seizures and return the lands they have seized.
2. Call on Turkey, Syria, and neighboring states to cease buying crops from the armed groups responsible for systematically looting civilian lands.
3. Send Working Groups to investigate HLP violations, particularly how vulnerable communities are bearing the cost of property and land seizures.
4. Apply sanctions on states, armed groups, and companies currently engaged in confiscating land, crops, and buying confiscated property.

3. STJ calls on the UN to pressure Turkey, Syria, and other parties in the Syrian conflict to put an end to the systemic practice of arbitrary arrests.

Hundreds of thousands of Syrians have been arbitrarily detained and forcibly disappeared by multiple actors in the Syrian conflict. UN member states must prioritize safe guarding the health and release of those detained arbitrarily in Syria, and provide Syrian families with information about the location of their loved ones.

Thousands of Syrians remain imprisoned in Syrian government prisons with little hope for release. Throughout 2020, STJ monitored a troubling [trend](#) of Syrian families discovering that their loved ones have died in detention, but being denied death statements and certificates by the Syrian government. The families of deceased Syrians should not be forced to choose between receiving falsified, untrue, or incomplete death documents or not receiving any.

Arbitrary detentions and disappearances also continue to occur in [Afrin](#), currently occupied by Turkey. Kurdish people, indigenous to the region where the arrests are taking place, are disproportionately at risk of being arbitrarily arrested by the Turkish-backed Military Police. In 2020, the Military Police arrested 793 people, and as of August [2021](#), they have arrested 289 people. These detentions, most of them arbitrary, are often for the cause of financial gain. Additionally, in violation of international law, some detainees have been [transferred](#) to Turkey and “disappeared”, their families unable to locate them and provide them with the legal counsel necessary for their release.

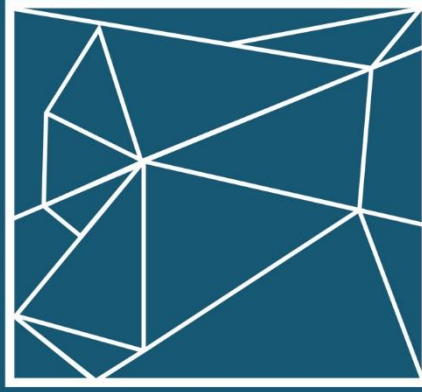
Turkey’s presence in Syria is officially recognized as an “occupation” under international law; however, the UN and member states have not recognized Turkey’s presence in Syria as such. The UN Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic has said that “in areas under effective Turkish control, Turkey carries a responsibility to, as far as possible, ensure public order and safety.” Other groups, like the Autonomous Administration in Northern Syria, are also responsible for conducting arbitrary arrests of [teachers](#), [activists](#), and [journalists](#).

STJ calls on UN member states to:

1. Pressure Syria to open its prisons and detention centers to the UN as well as other concerned international human rights and humanitarian organizations like the Red Cross, to properly identify detainees, stop torture and executions, and end enforced disappearances in Syria.
2. Urge Turkey to put an end to systematic arbitrary arrests in the areas under its occupation and by groups it supports.
3. Maintain a record of arbitrary arrests and releases for future accountability initiatives.
4. Recognize the Turkish presence in Syrian territories as occupation to promote Turkey to take responsibility for the human rights of the Syrian civilians under its control and the control of the armed groups it supports.
5. Pressure the Autonomous Administration to stop the continued arrests of civilians, activists, journalists, and teachers in the areas it controls.

سوريون
من أجل
الحقيقة
والعدالة

Syrians
For Truth
& Justice



History

Syrians for Truth and Justice was conceived during the participation of its co-founder in the Middle-East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) Leaders for Democracy Fellowship program, who was driven by a will to contribute to Syria's future. Starting as a humble project to tell the stories of Syrians experiencing enforced disappearances and torture, it grew into an established organisation committed to unveiling human rights violations of all sorts.

Convinced that the diversity that has historically defined Syria is a wealth, our team of researchers and volunteers works with dedication at uncovering human rights violations committed in Syria, in order to promote inclusiveness and ensure that all Syrians are represented, and their rights fulfilled.

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