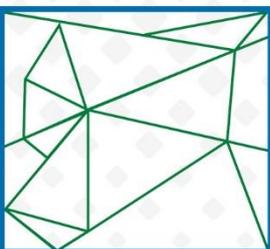


Abbas al-Noury's Statements on Politics and Freedom Rocks the Syrian Autocracy



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*Al-Noury attributed the disappearance of democracy in Syria to
military rule, sparking controversy among supporters and
opponents of the Syrian government*

On 29 January 2022, prominent Syrian actor [Abbas al-Noury](#) gave a live video interview on the Damascus-based [Al-Madina FM](#)'s Al Mukhtar show. Al-Noury focused in the interview on criticizing the current Syrian Constitution and the deteriorating freedoms in Syria. During his interview, al-Noury recalled the Syrian Army's complicity in overthrowing the democracies Syrians enjoyed in the 1950s.

In addressing the Syrian Constitution, al-Noury lamented: "The Syrian citizens do not know what it contains, since they did not participate in its making which is all in the hands of the ruler, who must have a limited power in determining the rights and duties of the ruled." Al-Noury referred to the freedom of expression as a condition for the sustainability of art production in Syria, saying:

"What are the freedoms we are enjoying in our country of the ancient culture and proud history? Once when a poet (He meant the Syrian great poet [Nizar Qabbani](#)) criticized the government, the latter removed his works from the school curricula. In 1950s, Syria once set a fine example of democracy in the region with its multi-party politics and free elections. From the time the military came, they overthrew the constitution, they overthrew democracy, they overthrew all culture."

Al-Noury also criticized the failure of successive Syrian governments since 1963¹ to allow citizens to participate in Syria's public affairs and the governments empty promises to improve human rights in the country. Al-Noury said:

"The government has never been ashamed of its mistakes. Is it reasonable for a state to block Internet sites and allow others? This government does not want to think of its mistakes and it will not admit or questions them, as it has not do that so far."

Furthermore, al-Noury touched upon the theft of the Syrian Central Bank's funds in the 1980s:

"Some well-known Syrian figures ran away with all the money of the Syrian Central Bank and no one uttered a word about it. Knowing that at the time, we had many brilliant lawyers but none dared to file a case against those figures despite the available documented evidence to this effect".

Al-Noury went on to explain that Syria's present situation is a consequence of the authoritarian military rule over all aspects of life, including the economic, social and political realms.

The Public's Reaction: Between Supporting and Opposing al-Noury's Statements

Statements by Abbas al-Nouri sparked controversy on social media among Syrians, both loyalists and opponents of the regime. As a result, Al-Madina FM. deleted the interview from its official website and social media accounts — less than 24 hours after its broadcast. Despite its deletion, Abbas's [speech](#) was disseminated across YouTube channels concerned with Syrian politics.

Al-Noury was threatened with prosecution for crossing "the red lines" in his discussions about the Syrian Army. Haidara Bahjat Suleiman, son of the former Syrian ambassador to Jordan,

¹ The year the Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party came to power via military coup.

threatened to file a case against al-Noury on charges of insulting, degrading, and libeling all members of the Ba'ath party. Meanwhile, pro-government media workers [accused](#) al-Noury of quoting opponents' lies that Rifaat al-Assad stole millions from the Central Bank of Syria.

Forcing Al-Noury to Retract his Statements and Apologize

On 30 January 2022, Al-Madina FM. [announced](#) on its official Facebook page that Al Mukhtar show would sit with al-Noury again in order to explain the "confusion" that emerged following the statements he gave during the previous interview.

When Al-Noury [appeared](#) on the show again, he retracted his statements related to the Syrian Army and freedom, claiming that his statements were clipped and taken out of context.

On the same day, Abbas al-Noury's wife, the well-known Syrian writer Aa'nud Khaled, launched a Facebook solidarity [campaign](#) with al-Noury under the hashtag "#Solidarity_WithAbbas_Al-Nouri". The campaign received a response from hundreds of Syrians who re-posted the hashtag, including Syrian actresses [Shokran Mortga](#) and Reem Zeno, Syrian actor [Ayman Zidan](#), and Syrian singer [Samih Choukaer](#).

Domestic Laws Choke Freedom of Expression

The current Syrian [Constitution, which](#) came into effect in 2012, states in Article 42 "Every citizen shall have the right to freely and openly express his views whether in writing or orally or by all other means of expression." And in Article 36: "The inviolability of private life shall be protected by the law."

However, the Syrian law has several provisions that limit fundamental human rights, especially the right to freedom of expression. These provisions give the executive authorities a free hand to silence the mouths of dissenters and to prosecute and fine them for speaking their opinions.

The Syrian Media Law of 2011

On 28 August 2011, Syrian President Bashar al-Assad ratified a new media law under [Legislative Decree](#) No. 108 of 2011. The Syrian Media Law of 2011 states:

Article 2: "Media, with all its means, is independent and can freely delivers its message within the framework of the constitution and law."

Article 3: The practice of media work is based on the following basic rules:

1. Freedom of expression and fundamental freedoms guaranteed in the Constitution of the Syrian Arab Republic, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the relevant international conventions ratified by the Syrian government.

In 2013, President Bashar al-Assad issued Decree No. 199 establishing that the National Media Council be responsible for regulating the media sector. The Decree named the nine members of the Council and claimed that it would be autonomous and independent financially and administratively. However, in practice, the National Media Council is an instrument of the Executive. The National Media Council has the full power to prevent the issuance of any action, behavior, or statement that may anger the authorities, and to prosecute the persons

responsible for it. Moreover, any media outlet (A newspaper, TV. channel, radio, website, news agency, etc) who wants to operate in Syria must apply for a license from the National Media Council, who has the absolute right to grant it or not. Furthermore, the Council can revoke the license of any operating media outlet without a warrant, according to Articles 22 and 100 of the Syrian Media Law. The media freedoms in Syria have been curtailed since it became supervised by the Executive, albeit indirectly.

The Syrian Media Law explicitly refers to taboo topics as:

- Any content that could lead to division, discord, or the disruption of national unity and security.
- Any content that offends religions or religious beliefs or that could incite sectarian strife.
- News and information related to the military and armed forces, except for what is issued by them.
- Any content that targets the states' symbols.

These conditions, which are also contained in the Syrian Penal Code, are broad, unclear, and thus subject to various interpretations. This helps the Executive to limit the freedom of expression at will.

The current Syrian Constitution was promulgated in 2012, meaning after the adoption of the Media Law. Consequently, the government had to supposedly amend the Media Law in line with the articles related to freedom of expression contained in the Constitution.

In 2016, the Syrian President issued [Legislative Decree No. 23](#), amending the Media Law issued by Legislative Decree No. 108 of 2011. Decree No. 23 stipulated that the Ministry of Information would replace the National Media Council, which means the return of the direct and even the absolute control of the executive authority over the media sector in Syria.

The Syrian government went further in choking the freedom of opinion and expression by enacting the Law for the Regulation of Network Communication against Cyber Crime No 17. Of 2012, which requires websites to clearly publish the names and details of the owners and administrators. The owner of a website or online platform is also required to save a copy of their content and traffic data to allow verification of the identity of persons who contribute content on the network (Articles 3 and 8). The law also permits the search of any computer program (Article 26), meaning that the authorities have the right to search the personal accounts on social media and all other online contents.

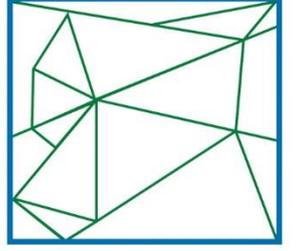
The Military and General Penal Codes

[The Syrian Military Penal Code](#) prohibits and even criminalizes criticizing the Syrian military, which entails a higher penalty in war than in peacetime. This Code gives the military courts in Syria the power to prosecute not only soldiers and military, but also civilians. The Syrian Military Penal Code provides for a penalty of up to 3 years in prison against any person, military or civilian, "who is guilty of insulting the army, attacking the dignity, reputation, morale of the army, or acts liable to undermine military discipline, obedience and respect due to superiors, or criticism on the action of the military hierarchy or officers the army, thereby undermining their dignity" (Article 123).

Along the same lines, among the Syrian laws that choke freedom of opinion and expression is the Counter-Terrorism Law No. 19 of 2019, whose Article 8 states: "Anyone who distributes publications or information stored in any form with the intention of promoting the means of terrorism or terrorist acts shall be sentenced to long-term hard labor. The same penalty shall apply to anyone who runs or uses a website leading to the same purpose." This article allows the Syrian government to prosecute Syrian citizens, including human rights activists, who express opinions other than those of the public authorities and the political establishment under the pretext of promoting terrorism.

In summary, all the Syrian Constitution's provisions relating to freedom of opinion and expression are just for show, as they are not respected in practice. The Syrian governments' acts of silencing dissenting views and opinions are a violation of the freedom of expression provided for in several international instruments and conventions, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights of 1966, whose Article 19 states:

1. Everyone shall have the right to hold opinions without interference.
2. Everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of his choice.



About Us:

Syrians for Truth and Justice (STJ) is a nonprofit, nongovernmental organization monitoring human rights violations in Syria. Founded in 2015, STJ has been based in France since 2019.

STJ is an impartial and independent Syrian human rights organization operating across Syria. Our network of field researchers monitor and report human rights violations occurring on the ground in Syria, while our international team of human rights experts, lawyers, and journalists gather evidence, examine emerging patterns of violations, and analyze how violations break domestic Syrian and international law.

We are committed to documenting violations of human rights committed by all parties in the Syrian conflict and elevating the voices of all Syrians victimized by human rights violations, regardless of their ethnicity, religion, political affiliation, class, and/or gender. Our commitment to human rights monitoring is founded on the idea that professional human rights documentation meeting international standards is the first step to uncovering the truth and achieving justice in Syria.



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