



COUNTRY OF ORIGIN INFORMATION REPORT

# THE SYRIAN ARAB REPUBLIC

---

3 SEPTEMBER 2010

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## Preface

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- i This Country of Origin Information (COI) Report has been produced by the COI Service, United Kingdom Border Agency (UKBA), for use by officials involved in the asylum/human rights determination process. The Report provides general background information about the issues most commonly raised in asylum/human rights claims made in the United Kingdom. The main body of the report includes information available up to 16 August 2010. The 'Latest News' section contains further brief information on events and reports accessed from 17 August to 2 September 2010. The report was issued on 3 September 2010.
- ii The Report is compiled wholly from material produced by a wide range of recognised external information sources and does not contain any UKBA opinion or policy. All information in the Report is attributed, throughout the text, to the original source material, which is made available to those working in the asylum/human rights determination process.
- iii The Report aims to provide a compilation of extracts from the source material identified, focusing on the main issues raised in asylum and human rights applications. In some sections where the topics covered arise infrequently in asylum/human rights claims only web links are provided. The Report is not intended to be a detailed or comprehensive survey. For a more detailed account, the relevant source documents should be examined directly.
- iv The structure and format of the COI Report reflects the way it is used by UKBA decision makers and appeals presenting officers, who require quick electronic access to information on specific issues and use the contents page to go directly to the subject required. Key issues are usually covered in some depth within a dedicated section, but may also be referred to briefly in several other sections. Some repetition is therefore inherent in the structure of the Report.
- v The information included in this COI Report is limited to that which can be identified from source documents. While every effort is made to cover all relevant aspects of a particular topic, it is not always possible to obtain the information concerned. For this reason, it is important to note that information included in the Report should not be taken to imply anything beyond what is actually stated. For example, if it is stated that a particular law has been passed, this should not be taken to imply that it has been effectively implemented unless stated. Similarly, the absence of information does not necessarily mean that, for example, a particular event or action did not occur.
- vi As noted above, the Report is a compilation of extracts produced by a number of reliable information sources. In compiling the Report, no attempt has been made to resolve discrepancies between information provided in different source documents though COIS will bring the discrepancies together and aim to provide a range of sources, where available, to ensure that a balanced picture is presented. For example, different source documents often contain different versions of names and spellings of individuals, places and political parties, etc. COI Reports do not aim to bring consistency of spelling, but to reflect faithfully the spellings used in the original source documents. Similarly, figures given in different source documents sometimes vary and these are simply quoted as per the original text. The term 'sic' has been used in this document only to denote incorrect spellings or typographical errors in quoted text; its use is not intended to imply any comment on the content of the material.

- vii The Report is based substantially upon source documents issued during the previous two years. However, some older source documents may have been included because they contain relevant information not available in more recent documents. All sources contain information considered relevant at the time this Report was issued.
- viii This COI Report and the accompanying source material are public documents. All COI Reports are published on the RDS section of the Home Office website and the great majority of the source material for the Report is readily available in the public domain. Where the source documents identified in the Report are available in electronic form, the relevant web link has been included, together with the date that the link was accessed. Copies of less accessible source documents, such as those provided by government offices or subscription services, are available from the COI Service upon request.
- ix COI Reports are published regularly on the top 30 asylum intake countries. Reports on countries outside the top 30 countries may also be published if there is a particular operational need. UKBA officials also have constant access to an information request service for specific enquiries.
- x In producing this COI Report, COI Service has sought to provide an accurate, balanced summary of the available source material. Any comments regarding this Report or suggestions for additional source material are very welcome and should be submitted to UKBA as below.

#### **Country of Origin Information Service**

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Croydon, CR0 9XB

United Kingdom

Email: [cois@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:cois@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk)

Website: [http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/country\\_reports.html](http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/country_reports.html)

#### **INDEPENDENT ADVISORY GROUP ON COUNTRY INFORMATION**

- xi The Independent Advisory Group on Country Information (IAGCI) was set up in March 2009 by the Chief Inspector of the UK Border Agency to make recommendations to him about the content of the UKBA's COI material. The IAGCI welcomes feedback on UKBA's COI Reports and other country of origin information material. Information about the IAGCI's work can be found on the Chief Inspector's website at <http://www.ociukba.homeoffice.gov.uk>
- xii In the course of its work, the IAGCI reviews the content of selected UKBA COI documents and makes recommendations specific to those documents and of a more general nature. A list of the COI Reports and other documents which have been reviewed by the IAGCI or the Advisory Panel on Country Information (the independent organisation which monitored UKBA's COI material from September 2003 to October 2008) is available at <http://www.ociukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/>
- xiii Please note: it is not the function of the IAGCI to endorse any UKBA material or procedures. Some of the material examined by the Group relates to countries designated or proposed for designation to the Non-Suspensive Appeals (NSA) list. In

such cases, the Group's work should not be taken to imply any endorsement of the decision or proposal to designate a particular country for NSA, nor of the NSA process itself.

The IAGCI can be contacted at:

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## Latest News

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The Latest News provides a non-exhaustive selection of significant events since 16 August 2010. Further information may also be available from the list of useful sources below.

### EVENTS IN SYRIA FROM 17 TO 2 SEPTEMBER 2010

30 August “Hezbollah and the Syrian army would join forces on all levels in a war with Israel, sources told the Kuwaiti newspaper al-Rai. ... The newspaper based its report on interviews with unnamed sources.

“Syrian military officials would set up a joint situation room with Hezbollah operatives and pool intelligence resources from the battlefield, the report said.”

*United Press International: Syria-Hezbollah would unite vs. Israel*, 30 August 2010

[http://www.upi.com/Top\\_News/International/2010/08/30/Syria-Hezbollah-would-unite-vs-Israel/UPI-31221283168109/](http://www.upi.com/Top_News/International/2010/08/30/Syria-Hezbollah-would-unite-vs-Israel/UPI-31221283168109/)

Date accessed 2 September 2010

30 August “The Syrian Human Rights Committee (SHRC) calls on the president Bashar al-Asad on this day (30th August), the international day of the disappeared to disclose the fate of about twenty thousand disappeared detainees, arrested and detained in the early eighties of the last century but they have never been released nor their fates were disclosed by the Syrian Authorities.

“Three decades have already elapsed since they vanished in the Syrian prisons, however it was not known whether they are still alive or have died in custody. The location of their detention or their burial was not disclosed also.”

*Syrian Human Rights Committee (SHRC): Press Release: On the International Day of the Disappeared*, 31 August 2010 <http://www.shrc.org/data.aspx/d12/4212.aspx>

Date accessed 2 September 2010

29 August “For five years, Chavia Ali’s attempts to start a disability rights group were thwarted - by prejudice, a lack of money. The government gave her a license, but prevented the group from meeting because of what Ms. Ali believes was a whisper campaign against her, a Kurd with a growing profile. Then everything changed.

“Last year, Ms. Ali was told that a third of her budget would be paid by a group led by Asma al-Assad, the wife of the Syrian president, Bashar al-Assad.”

*Day Press News: Opening Doors to Disabilities People in Syria*, 29 August 2010

<http://www.dp-news.com/pages/detail.aspx?!=2&articleId=51699>

Date accessed 2 September 2010

22 August “According to Kurdish Organization for Defending Human Rights and Public Freedoms in Syria – DAD and the Media Institute of Western Kurdistan Society, the family of a military conscript, Shiar Osman Osman, born 1991 in Deyrik, were told on the morning of Sunday, 22 August 2010 about the death of their son, who was serving in one of the military units at Khan al-Sheikh, Damascus. He had not been doing his military service any more than eight months, and was sent to this new unit just three days before he died. His body was expected to arrive the same evening to be buried in Deyrik.

“The responsible authorities informed Shiar’s family that he had committed suicide. We have learned from informed sources that the conscript was shot in the abdomen.”

Support Kurds in Syria – SKS: *A new victim of the mysterious killings in the Syrian army*, 23 August 2010 <http://supportkurds.org/news/a-new-victim-of-the-mysterious-killings-in-the-syrian-army/#more-3144>

Date accessed 24 August 2010

20 August “In spite of protests and warnings, Norwegian authorities chose to forcibly send Abulkarim Hossain back to Syria. He was arrested on arrival.

“Hossain arrived on the Syrian capital Damascus around 0245 Friday morning. Information SOS Racism has obtained says that he was immediately arrested by Syrian authorities and placed in the prison Bab Musala. At ten o’clock Saturday 21st August he was to be transferred to the prison Al Faiha, famous for its crimes against political activists, and under the rule of security police.”

SOS Racism in Norway and The Association of Syrian Kurds in Norway:

*Press statement: Abdulkarim Hossain arrested upon arrival*, 22 August 2010 via <http://supportkurds.org/news/a-new-victim-of-the-mysterious-killings-in-the-syrian-army/#more-3144>

Date accessed 24 August 2010

Amnesty International: *Syria: Syrian Kurd detained, risks torture: ‘Abd al-Karim Hussein*, 26 August 2010 <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/MDE24/023/2010/en/1b4341c9-e8e6-4db0-ab1c-8b0fe2b3fe54/mde240232010eng.html>

Date accessed 2 September 2010

17 August “An informed source in the Iraqi capital has reported that the Syrian embassy in Baghdad has failed to issue Syrian passports to Syrian citizens living in Iraq, and in particular those identified as forced exiles and have been living in Iraq since the 1980s.

“The source reported that at least 25 applications for passports have been made, some since three years ago, among them children and females. These applications have not been processed despite the many requests made and despite the full fees for applications being paid.”

Syrian Human Rights Committee (SHRC): *Press Release: An urgent call for issuing passports to Syrians residing in Iraq*, 17 August 2010 <http://www.shrc.org/data/asp/d13/4203.aspx>

Date accessed 2 September 2010

17 August “Reports from exiled Kurdish activists have raised fears that ‘Abdelbaqi Khalaf [who has been detained since September 2008] has been tortured at the hands of State Security.

“The political activist is reportedly being taken from Damascus Central prison to a State Security office every few weeks to coerce him into ‘confessing’ to being the head of the political wing of a certain Syrian Kurdish organization, which he denies. ...

“Previously a member of the Syrian Kurdish political party known as the Popular Union (Ittihad al-Sha’b), in the 1990s ‘Abdelbaqi Khalaf had helped establish a clandestine library of Kurdish-language books, which are banned in Syria – a country where Kurds face discrimination and where Kurdish civil society activists risk arbitrary arrest, torture and unlawful imprisonment.

“Abdelbaqi Khalaf has been refused access to a lawyer and his family was on one occasion prevented from visiting him, allegedly because he had been tortured and was not in a fit state to be seen.”

Amnesty International: *Fears grow for Kurdish man held in Syrian custody*, 17 August 2010 <http://www.amnesty.org/en/news-and-updates/fears-grow-kurdish-man-held-syrian-custody-2010-08-06>

Date accessed 2 September 2010

Amnesty International: *Syria: Further information: Syrian Kurd tortured in custody: 'Abdelbaqi Khalaf*, 17 August 2010 <http://www.amnesty.org/en/news-and-updates/fears-grow-kurdish-man-held-syrian-custody-2010-08-06>

Date accessed 2 September 2010

## USEFUL SOURCES FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

A list of sources with weblinks is provided below, which may be useful if additional up to date information is required to supplement that provided in this report. The full list of sources used in this report is located in [Annex E – References to source material](#):

[British Broadcasting Corporation \(BBC\)](#) [28]

[European Country of Origin Information Network \(ECOI.net\)](#)

[Institute for War and Peace Reporting \(IWPR\)](#) [45a]

[International Crisis Group's \(ICG\) CrisisWatch Database](#) [36a]

[Support Kurds in Syria – SKS](#) [48]

[United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees \(UNHCR\) Refworld](#)

[United Nations Integrated Regional Information Networks \(IRIN\)](#) [42a]

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## REPORTS ON SYRIA PUBLISHED OR ACCESSED BETWEEN 17 AUGUST AND 2 SEPTEMBER 2010

### International Federation of Red Cross And Red Crescent Societies (IFRC)

*Syria: Drought Emergency appeal no. MDRSY001 Operations update no. 3*, 1 September 2010 (period covered 26 August 2009 to 31 July 2010) via

[http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/rwb.nsf/retrieveattachments?openagent&shortid=EDIS-88VM83&file=Full\\_Report.pdf](http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/rwb.nsf/retrieveattachments?openagent&shortid=EDIS-88VM83&file=Full_Report.pdf)

Date accessed 2 September 2010

For reports published outside of the period covered by the Latest News section, see the database websites of the UNHCR and ACCORD, [Refworld](#) and [ECOI.net](#)

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## Background information

### 1. GEOGRAPHY

1.01 The Syrian Arab Republic (Arabic: al-jamhuriya al Arabia as-Souriya) is situated in western Asia and – as the UN reference map of May 2008 shows below (see [Maps](#) [2a] – it borders Turkey to the north, Iraq to the east, Jordan to the south, and Lebanon and Israel to the south-west. (Europa World, accessed 6 May 2010) [1a] (Country Profile-Location...) The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) Country Profile, last reviewed 23 March 2010, stated “Syria's most contentious boundary is with Israel, where the latter has occupied Syrian territory, the Golan, since 1967. Israel formally annexed the Golan in 1981.” [5a] (Geography)

1.02 The country has an area of 185,180 sq km; its coastline is located on the eastern shore of the Mediterranean Sea and much of the terrain is mountainous and semi-desert. The capital of Syria is Damascus (Arabic: Dimashq); other principal cities – from north to south – include Al Hasakah, Halab, Idlib, Al Ladhqiyyah, Ar Raqqah, Dayr az Zawr, Hamah, Tartus, Hims, Al Qunaytirah and As Suwayda. (FCO Country Profile, last reviewed 23 March 2010) [5a] (Europa World, accessed 6 May 2010) [1a] (Country Profile-Location...) (UN reference map, May 2008) [2a] The United States Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) *World Factbook*, last updated on 24 March 2010, listed Syria's “14 provinces (muhafazat, singular - muhafazah); Al Hasakah, Al Ladhqiyyah (Latakia), Al Qunaytirah, Ar Raqqah, As Suwayda', Dar'a, Dayr az Zawr, Dimashq, Halab, Hamah, Hims, Idlib, Rif Dimashq (Damascus), Tartus.” [6a] (Government)

1.03 The FCO Country Profile, last reviewed 23 March 2010, provided the following information:

**Population:** 20 million: 52% male, 48% female ...

**People:** Arab 90.3%, Kurds, Armenians and others 9.7%

**Language(s):** Arabic (official), Kurdish, Armenian, Aramaic, Circassian, some French and English.

**Religion(s):** Officially secular; Sunni Muslim 75%, Shi'a Muslim 10%, Druze and Alawi minorities 5%, Christian (various)10%. About 100 Jews remain in Syria. [5a]

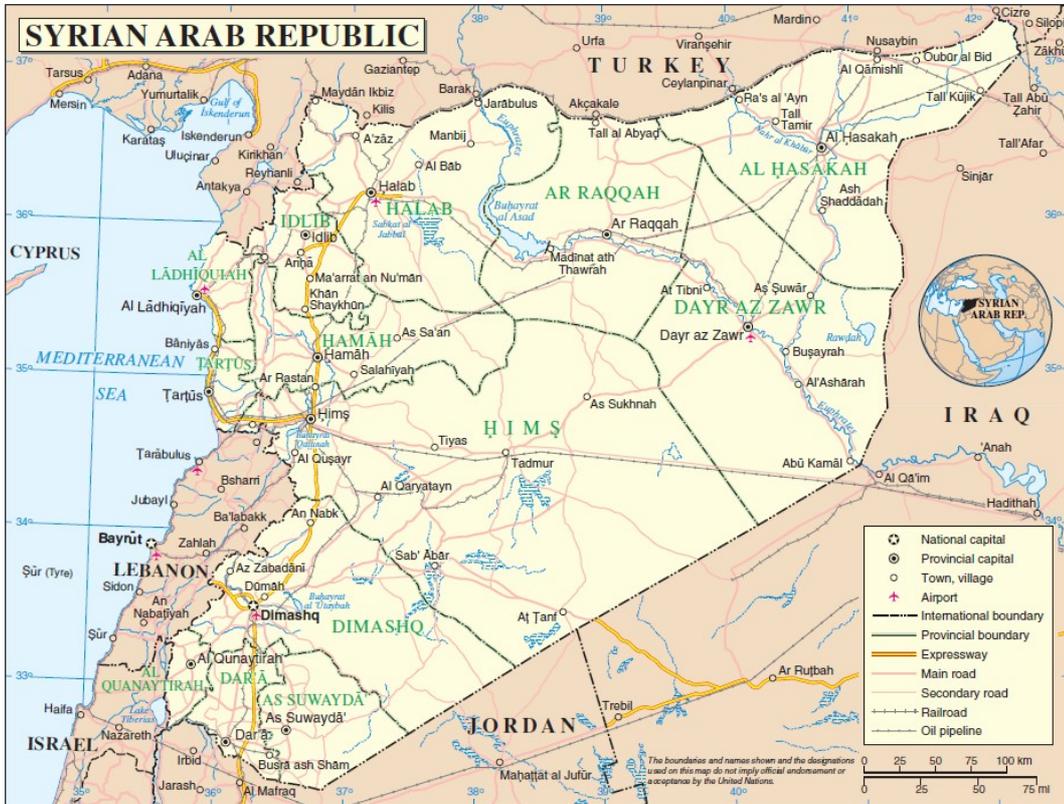
The online edition of the 2009 edition of *Ethnologue: Languages of the World* provided detailed information on the [languages of Syria](#) [30a] including a [language map of Jordan and Syria](#). [30b]

1.04 As of 31 December 2009, there were 472,109 Palestinian refugees registered with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) in Syria, although only 127,831 – or 27.1 per cent – resided in one of the nine official camps. [11a] Additionally, “The ongoing violence in Iraq has led to an influx of between 1.2 and 1.5 mn [million] Iraqi refugees into Syria.” (FCO Country Profile, last reviewed 23 March 2010) [5a] (International Relations)

“The majority of Syrians follow a form of Islamic Sunni orthodoxy. There are also a considerable number of religious minorities: Shi'a Muslims; Isma'ili Muslims; the Isma'ili of the Salamiya district, whose spiritual head is the Aga Khan; a large number of Druzes, the Nusairis or Alawites of the Jebel Ansariyeh (a schism of the Shi'ite branch of Islam, to which about 11% of the population, including President Assad, belongs) and the Yezidis of the Jebel Sinjar; and a minority of Christians.” (Europa World, accessed 6 May 2010) [1a] (Society and Media-Religion)

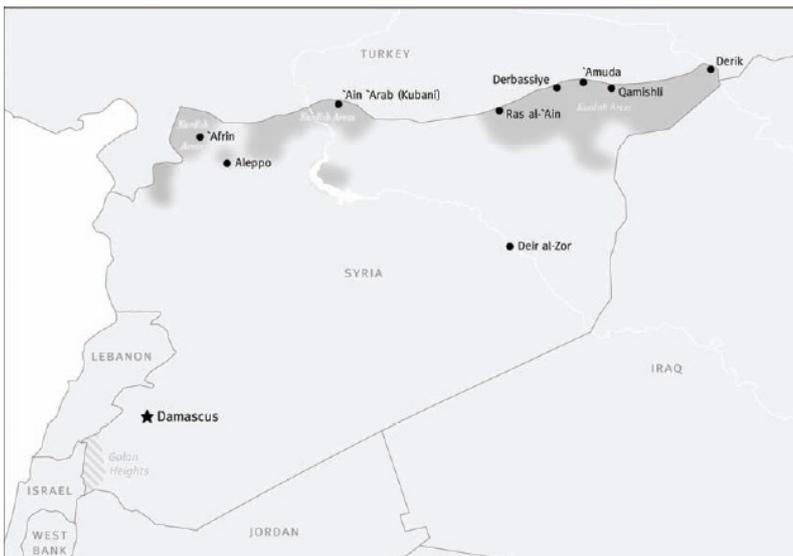
MAPS

1.05 United Nations Cartographic Section (UNCS) reference map of May 2008:



[2a]

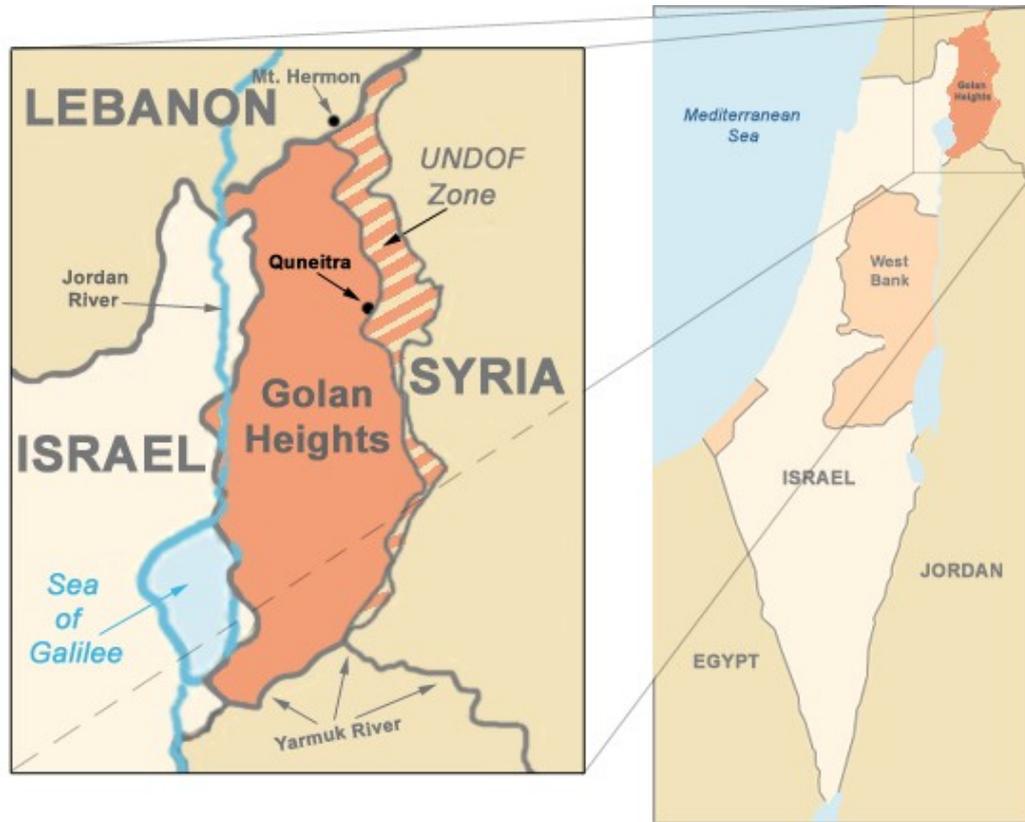
1.06 Map of the Kurdish Area of Syria, copyright 2009 John Emerson, accessed via the November 2009 Human Rights Watch (HRW) report, *Group Denial – Repression of Kurdish Political and Cultural Rights in Syria*:



[39d] (p9)

See also [Kurds](#)

- 1.07 Map of the Golan Heights, created by ProCon.org using information from the CIA World Factbook:



[58a]

See also [Internally displaced persons \(IDPs\)](#)

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## 2. ECONOMY

- 2.01 The United States Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) *World Factbook*, last updated 24 March 2010, reported:

“Syrian economic growth slowed in 2009 to 2.2% in real terms as the global economic crisis affected oil prices and the economies of Syria's key export partners and sources of investment. Damascus has implemented modest economic reforms in the past few years, including cutting lending interest rates, opening private banks, consolidating all of the multiple exchange rates, raising prices on some subsidized items, most notably gasoline and cement, and establishing the Damascus Stock Exchange - which was set to begin operations in 2009.” [6a] (Economy)

- 2.02 The CIA *World Factbook* also noted the following statistics:

**Inflation rate (consumer prices):** 3.8% (2009 est.)  
**Unemployment rate:** 9.2% (2009 est.)  
**GDP per capita (PPP):** US \$4,600 (2009 est.) [6a] (Economy)

- 2.03 The World Bank Country Brief on Syria, updated March 2010, stated, "Syria's GDP remains dependent on the oil and agriculture sectors, both subject to uncertainties due to changes in oil prices and rain dependency respectively. The oil sector provides approximately 20 percent of the government's revenues and about 40 percent of its export receipts. The agriculture sector, for its part, contributes to about 20 percent of GDP and 20 percent of employment." [62a]
- 2.04 The Fafo Institute for Applied International Studies' 2007 report, *The Syrian Labour Market – Findings from the 2003 Unemployment Survey*, recorded information on labour force participation, employment and work conditions, unemployment and underutilisation of labour, labour markets and economic reforms. [35c]
- 2.05 The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) Timeline, last updated 22 July 2010, reported that, in March 2009, trading was launched on Syria's stock exchange, a sign of the gradual liberalisation of the state-controlled economy. [28a]
- 2.06 International Crisis Group's (ICG) report, *Reshuffling the Cards? (I): Syria's Evolving Strategy*, published 14 December 2009, noted:

"Relatively sound at a macroeconomic level in terms of growth, foreign debt and currency reserves, Syria's economy nonetheless faces numerous, weighty challenges. The country lacks significant natural resources or human capital, most notably a qualified workforce and truly entrepreneurial business class. Its infrastructure is inadequate and aging. In contrast to years past – when the Soviet Union and Saudi Arabia provided support, when Iran or Iraq offered cheap fuel or when it in effect plundered Lebanon – Syria no longer can rely on a foreign rent. Its adjustment to a highly competitive, global economy is belated and sluggish, opposed by strong domestic interests, and undertaken with little outside support. Foreign direct investment almost certainly will remain limited unless Arab investors shift their focus from financial products and real estate to the industrial and agricultural sectors or to infrastructure building and until Syria offers a more attractive environment for Western multinationals, currently driven away by, inter alia, excessive bureaucracy, corruption, cronyism and inadequate services." [36b] (p16)

See also [Corruption](#)

### CURRENCY AND EXCHANGE RATE

- 2.07 The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) Country Profile on Syria, last reviewed on 23 March 2010, reported that the country's currency is the Syrian Pound, also called Lira. [5a] As of 16 August 2010, the Interbank exchange rate (+/- 0 per cent), as reported by oanada.com, was:

1 US Dollar = 47.95300 Syrian Pound  
 1 Syrian Pound (SYP) = 0.02085 US Dollar (USD) [29a]  
 1 British Pound = 74.79757 Syrian Pound  
 1 Syrian Pound (SYP) = 0.01337 British Pound (GBP) [29b]

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## 3. HISTORY: 1946–2009

See also [Annex A: Chronology of major events](#)

- 3.01 The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) Country Profile, last reviewed 23 March 2009, reported, “Syria gained independence from the French in 1946. [Following the] Arab defeat at the hands of Israel she experienced a series of short-lived military governments, followed, between 1958 and 1961, by an unsuccessful experiment of Union with Nasser’s Egypt.” [5a] (History)

### THE CENSUS OF AL-HASAKAH PROVINCE: 1962, AND ARABIZATION: 1960s–1970s

- 3.02 *The Kurds in Syria – Fueling Separatist Movements in the Region?*, a United States Institute of Peace report of April 2009, noted:

“The disenfranchisement of the rights of Syrian Kurds can be traced to 1958, with Syria’s official adoption of Arab nationalism and backlash against non-Arab ethnic minorities, which included the Kurds. In October 1962, Syrian authorities issued a so-called special census in Hasakah province, the northeastern Syrian province in which the majority of Kurds have their origins. The authorities then produced statistical reports on the pretext of discovering people who may have crossed illegally from Turkey to Syria. As many as 120,000 Kurds—nearly 20 percent of Syria’s Kurdish population—were denationalized as a result, losing all rights of citizenship, including the right to vote and participate in public life, the right to travel outside the country, the right to private ownership, and the right to employment in the public sector.” [13b] (p2)

- 3.03 The May 2010 report, *Human rights issues concerning Kurds in Syria*, of a joint fact-finding mission by the Danish Immigration Service (DIS) and ACCORD/Austrian Red Cross to Damascus, Syria, Beirut, Lebanon, and Erbil and Dohuk, Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), remarked:

“At the end of 60’s, the Syrian government decided to create an ‘Arab belt’, a 280 long and 10 - 15 km. wide band of arable, well - cultivated land along the Turkish border. The plan anticipated deportation of 140,000 Kurds living in 332 villages situated inside this band who were supposed to be replaced by Arabs. However, the plan was not realized until 1975 where around 4,000 Arab families of the Walda tribe were moved to forty - one model farms in Jazira as well as to fifteen model farms north of ar - Raqqa. The Arabization campaign of Jazira was halted by Hafiz al - Asad in 1976, but the status quo remained unchanged.” [60a] (p8)

See also [Kurdish political activists](#) and [Kurds](#)

### THE BAATH PARTY SEIZES POWER: 1963

- 3.04 The FCO Country Profile, last reviewed 23 March 2009, stated:

“In 1963 the Baath, a revolutionary party based on the ideas of Arab nationalism and socialism, seized power. In 1966 a radical wing of the Party seized control, expelling the original founders of the Party who eventually established themselves in Iraq, instituting a rivalry between Damascus and Baghdad which has persisted ever since. The radicals then moved closer to Moscow, adopting leftist policies which isolated Syria from many of her neighbours.” [5a] (History)

- 3.05 The United States Department of State *Background Note* (USSD Background Note) of February 2010 reported, “Syria has been under a state of emergency since 1963.

Syrian governments have justified martial law by the state of war that continues to exist with Israel and by continuing threats posed by terrorist groups.” [7a] (Political conditions)

See also [Security situation](#)

### THE REIGN OF HAFEZ AL-ASAD: 1970–2000

- 3.06 The FCO Country Profile, last reviewed 23 March 2009, stated, “In November 1970 the radicals were ousted by Hafez al-Asad, then Minister of Defence, at the head of a more moderate and pragmatic section of the Baath. He repaired Syria’s relations with her neighbours, and in 1972 introduced a Constitution under which elections had to be held both for a National Assembly and for the Presidency. Voted in as President he ruled the country until his death on 10 June 2000.” [5a] (History)
- 3.07 The Freedom House report *Freedom in the World – 2010*, released 3 May 2010, recounted, “The regime cultivated a base of support that spanned sectarian and ethnic divisions, but relied on Alawite domination of the security establishment and the suppression of dissent.” [14a] (Overview) The USSD *Background Note* of February 2010 also reported, “The authoritarian regime was not without its critics, though most were quickly dealt with. A serious challenge arose in the late 1970s, however, from fundamentalist Sunni Muslims, who reject the basic values of the secular Ba’ath program and object to rule by the Alawis, whom they consider heretical.” [7a] (History – 1970 to 2000)

### The Muslim Brotherhood rebellion: 1976–1982

- 3.08 The USSD *Background Note* of February 2010 reported:

“From 1976 until its suppression in 1982, the archconservative Muslim Brotherhood led an armed insurgency against the regime. In response to an attempted uprising by the brotherhood in February 1982, the government crushed the fundamentalist opposition centered in the city of Hama, leveling parts of the city with artillery fire and causing many thousands of dead and wounded. Since then, public manifestations of anti-regime activity have been very limited.” [7a] (History – 1970 to 2000)

See also [Security situation](#), [Islamist / Salafist political activists](#) and [Freedom of religion](#)

### The annexation of the Golan Heights: 1981

- 3.09 The Europa World Country Profile, accessed 6 May 2010, reported:

“Increasing border tension between Syria and Israel was a major influence leading to the Six-Day War of June 1967, when Israel attacked its Arab neighbours in reprisal for the closure of the Strait of Tiran by the UAR [United Arab Republic] (Egypt). Israeli forces made swift territorial gains, including the Golan Heights region of Syria, which remains under Israeli occupation. An uneasy truce lasted until October 1973, when Egyptian and Syrian forces launched simultaneous attacks on Israeli-held territory. On the Syrian front, there was fierce fighting in the Golan Heights until a cease-fire was agreed after 18 days. In May 1974 the US Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger, secured an agreement for the disengagement of forces. Israel’s formal annexation of the Golan Heights in December 1981 effectively impeded the prospect of a negotiated Middle East settlement at this time.” [1a] (Recent History)

See also [Relations with Israel](#), [Freedom of movement](#) and [Internally displaced people \(IDPs\)](#)

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### THE REIGN OF BASHAR AL-ASAD: 2000 TO THE PRESENT

3.10 Europa World Country Profile, accessed 6 May 2010, reported:

“President [Hafez al-]Assad died on 10 June 2000. Shortly after his death the People’s Assembly amended the Constitution, lowering the minimum age required of a president from 40 to 34 years, thus enabling Bashar al-Assad to assume the presidency. Bashar al-Assad was also nominated as Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, and his military rank was upgraded to that of Lieutenant-General. Following approval of Bashar’s nomination for the presidency by the People’s Assembly in late June (the Baath Party having already endorsed his candidacy) ... At the national referendum held on 10 July, Bashar al-Assad (the sole presidential candidate) received the endorsement of a reported 97.29% of voters.” [1a] (Contemporary Political History – Domestic Political Affairs – Bashar al-Assad’s succession to the presidency)

See also [Constitution](#) and [Political system](#)

### The ‘Damascus Spring’: June 2000–February 2001

3.11 Freedom House’s *Freedom in the World – 2010* recounted:

“Bashar al-Assad took power ... pledging to liberalize Syria’s politics and economy. The first six months of his presidency featured the release of political prisoners, the return of exiled dissidents, and open discussion of the country’s problems. In February 2001, however, the regime abruptly halted this so-called Damascus Spring. Leading reformists were arrested and sentenced to lengthy prison terms, while others faced constant surveillance and intimidation by the secret police. Economic reform fell by the wayside, and Syria under Bashar al-Assad proved resistant to political change.” [14a] (Overview)

See also [Economy](#), [Human rights violations by the security forces](#), [Judiciary](#), [Political affiliation](#) and [Human rights institutions, organisations and activists](#)

### Increased opposition and subsequent clampdown: 2003–2007

3.12 Freedom House’s *Freedom in the World – 2010* reported:

“Reinvigorated by the toppling of Iraq’s Baathist regime in 2003, Syria’s secular and Islamist dissidents began cooperating and pushing for the release of political prisoners, the cancellation of the state of emergency, and the legalization of opposition parties. Syria’s Kurdish minority erupted into eight days of rioting in March 2004. At least 30 people were killed as security forces suppressed the riots and made some 2,000 arrests.” [14a] (Overview)

3.13 The May 2010 DIS and ACCORD/Austrian Red Cross report, *Human rights issues concerning Kurds in Syria*, provided brief details of the March 2004 Kurdish riots:

“On March 12, 2004 at a football match in Qamishli, a town in the Jazira region, tensions rose between Kurdish fans of the local team and Arab supporters of a visiting team from the city of Deir al - Zor, and fights eventually erupted between members of the opposing supporter groups. Security forces responded by firing live bullets which resulted in death of at least seven Kurds. The next day, members of the security forces fired at a Kurdish funeral procession and demonstration, causing a number of additional Kurdish fatalities and injuries. Two days of violent protests and riots in Qamishli and other Kurdish towns in the north and northeast, including al - Qahtaniya, al - Malkiya, and ‘Amuda, followed. The army moved into Qamishli and other major Kurdish towns in northern Syria, and a week later calm was restored. At least 36 people were killed, 160 injured, and more than 2,000 detained during the unrest. Most of the detainees were released, including 312 detainees who were released under an amnesty announced by President Bashar al - Assad on March 30, 2005.” [60a] (p7)

3.14 Freedom House’s *Freedom in the World – 2010* reported:

“Despite hints that sweeping political reforms would be drafted at a major Baath Party conference in 2005, no substantial measures were taken. In October 2005, representatives of all three segments of the opposition—the Islamists, the Kurds, and secular liberals—signed the Damascus Declaration for Democratic National Change (DDDNC), which called for the country’s leaders to step down and endorsed a broad set of liberal democratic principles.

“In May 2006, exiled opposition leaders announced the creation of the National Salvation Front (NSF) to bring about regime change. Also that month, a number of Syrian political and human rights activists signed the Beirut-Damascus Declaration, which called for a change in Syrian-Lebanese relations and the recognition of Lebanese sovereignty. Many of the signatories were subsequently detained or sentenced to prison as part of a renewed crackdown that reversed the previous partial leniency on personal freedom.” [14a] (Overview)

3.15 The Europa World Country Profile, accessed 6 May 2010, also reported:

“In May 2006 274 Lebanese and Syrian intellectuals and activists signed the Beirut-Damascus Declaration, a petition urging the Syrian Government to reassess its policy on Lebanon, to respect the sovereign independence of that country and to establish normal diplomatic relations; many of those who signed the Declaration were subsequently arrested. In April 2007 Anwar al-Bunni, a well-known advocate for democratic reform in Syria, was convicted on charges of disseminating false information and thereby damaging national morale, and was sentenced to five years’ imprisonment. Four other prominent Syrian activists, all of whom, like al-Bunni, had signed the Declaration, were convicted on similar charges in the following month; two received three-year prison sentences, while the other two (convicted in absentia ) were sentenced to 10 years’ imprisonment. Human rights groups quickly denounced the convictions, which they claimed were a violation of the right of free speech and part of an ongoing process of intimidation by means of which the Syrian Government hoped to silence dissidents.” [1a] (Recent history)

See also [Relations with Lebanon](#), [Human rights violations by the security forces](#), [Political affiliation](#), [Freedom of speech and media](#); [Human rights institutions, organisations and activists](#) and [Kurds](#)

## Elections and the Presidential referendum: April and May 2007

- 3.16 The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) database on the Syrian Majlis Al-Chaab (People's Assembly), last updated 14 August 2009, stated:

"According to the official results, approximately 56 per cent of the 7.8 million registered voters turned out at the polls. A total of 11,967,611 citizens were eligible to vote. However, many expatriates did not obtain voter cards, bringing the number of the registered voters down to 7,805,994. Opposition figures and human right activists insisted that turnout was as low as 10 per cent, taking into account many deserted polling stations.

"After the polls, street protests condemning vote rigging turned into violent incidents in northern Syria. Following the army's intervention, five people were reportedly seriously injured.

"The final results gave Syria's ruling NPF [National Progressive Front] 172 seats. The remainder went to independent candidates.

"On 7 May, the newly elected People's Assembly held its inaugural session and re-elected unopposed Mr. Mahmud Abrash as its Speaker with 243 votes.

"On 11 May, the People's Assembly unanimously nominated Mr. Bashar Assad as the president of the country for a new seven-year term starting on 17 July 2007. The public referendum of 27 May approved this nomination by over 97 per cent of the votes." [9a] (Last elections)

See also [Constitution](#) and [Political system](#)

### Continued clampdown: June 2007–December 2009

- 3.17 The Europa World Country Profile, accessed 6 May 2010, reported:

"In October 2005 a coalition of political activists and members of banned political organizations had issued a document entitled the Damascus Declaration for Democratic National Change, which urged the establishment, through peaceful means, of a democratic state, built on moderate Islamic principles, with a new constitution to guarantee liberty and human rights for all. The Declaration also appealed for a democratic solution to the issue of Kurdish nationalism. In December 2007 168 signatories convened to re-affirm the Declaration's message and to elect a National Council; Fida' al-Hourani, daughter of Akram al-Hourani, one of the founders of the Baath Party, was elected President. In the weeks following the meeting up to 40 members of the movement were detained;...". [1a] (Recent history)

- 3.18 Freedom House's *Freedom in the World – 2010* also reported:

"..., supporters of the DDDNC formed governing bodies for their alliance and renewed their activities, prompting a government crackdown that extended into 2008.

"In 2009, the NSF fell apart, largely because the Muslim Brotherhood, in deference to the Syrian government's support for the Palestinian militant group Hamas, suspended its opposition activities in the aftermath of Israel's offensive in the Gaza Strip in January. One prominent secular NSF member, Bashar al-Sha'i, quit the opposition in April and returned to Syria after publicly apologizing to the government in July, and another DDDNC member, Michel Kilo, was released from prison at the end of his

three-year sentence in May. Other leading human rights figures within Syria were jailed or faced new charges of 'weakening national morale' or 'spreading false information' during the year. Separately, al-Assad reshuffled his government in April, replacing five ministers and creating an environment ministry." [14a] (Overview)

- 3.19 The last months of 2009 saw the continued arrest, detention, and trial of political, civil and human rights activists.
- 3.20 In July 2009, *Syria Today* noted, "A Syrian court found well-known dissident Walid al-Bunni not guilty of 'weakening the morale of the nation' on June 17." [47a] The article continued, "Bunni's lawyer Mohannad al-Hassani told Reuters news agency on June 17 the judge had acquitted his client for lack of evidence after allowing the defence to present nine witnesses compared to one for the prosecution. 'I wish all the courts in Syria would follow the lead of this tribunal, which did its duty and fairly applied the law,' Hassani said." [47a]
- 3.21 The International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) [46a] and the Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR) [45b] reported on the July 2009 arrest of Bunni's lawyer, Mohannad al-Hassani, who is president of the Syrian Human Rights Organization (Swasiah) and regularly defends activists and political detainees, and is a leading monitor of the State Security Court. The IWPR stated "Syrian civil rights groups say the arrest of a prominent human rights advocate is a worrying sign that the authorities are increasing pressure on civil society." [45b] International Crisis Group's (ICG) CrisisWatch reported on the October 2009 arrest of "Dissident human rights lawyer Haitham Maleh ...". [36a] (November 2009)
- 3.22 The ICG's CrisisWatch also reported on the December 2009 detention of four Kurdish activists after they had demanded autonomy for Syrian Kurds. [36a] (January 2010)

See also [Fair trial](#), [Political affiliation](#) and [Human rights institutions, organisations and activists](#)

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#### 4. RECENT DEVELOPMENTS: JANUARY–JULY 2010

For more recent information on developments in Syria see the [British Broadcasting Corporation \(BBC\)](#) [28], [International Crisis Group's \(ICG\) CrisisWatch Database](#) [36a], the [United Nations Integrated Regional Information Networks \(IRIN\)](#) [42a] and the [Institute for War and Peace Reporting \(IWPR\)](#) [45a]

See also Latest news, [History: 1946–2009](#), [Security situation](#) and [Annex A: Chronology of major events](#)

- 4.01 The International Crisis Group's (ICG) CrisisWatch reported on a clash between the security forces and Kurds celebrating the Kurdish New Year (Newroz) in Raqqa, resulting in the death of at least one Kurd. [36a] (April 2010)
- 4.02 Human Rights Watch (HRW) reported on 26 March 2010 "Kurds gathered in the open field area known as Matahen on the outskirts of Raqqa at about 9 a.m. on March 21 to celebrate Nowruz, the Kurdish New Year. The gathering was organized by the

PYD (Hezb al-Ittihad al-Dimocrati), an unlicensed party closely affiliated with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in Turkey.” [39f]

“When participants refused to comply [with security forces instructions to remove Kurdish flags and pictures of the detained leader of the PKK, Abdullah Ocalan], a fire truck sprayed the stage and the crowds with water in an effort to disperse them. People in the crowd started throwing stones toward the security forces who, said a participant who described the scene, started shooting in the air and shortly thereafter at the crowd. Syrian authorities have not issued an official statement on the incident.” (HRW, 26 March 2010) [39f]

See also [Kurdish political activists](#), [Kurds](#) and [Annex B – Political organisations](#)

- 4.03 The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) Timeline, last updated 22 July 2010, reported on the June 2010 sentencing of the defence lawyer and head of the Syrian Organisation for Human Rights, Mohannad al-Hassani, to a jail term of three years following his conviction of ‘spreading false information and weakening national morale’. [28a] The International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) produced a [Summary report on the compliance of the trial of Muhannad Al-Hasani before the Second Criminal Court in Damascus with international standards of fair trial](#), dated June 2010, which questioned the legality and impartiality of the proceedings. [46a]

See also [Human rights violations by the security forces](#), [Judiciary](#), [Arrest and detention – legal rights](#) and [Human rights institutions, organisations and activists](#)

- 4.04 The BBC Timeline also reported on the July 2010 introduction of a bill to ban face-covering veils in universities, by Higher Education Minister Ghiyath Barakat, who stated they run counter to the academic values and traditions of Syrian universities. [28a]

See also [Freedom of religion](#) and [Women](#)

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## 5. CONSTITUTION

- 5.01 The Syrian Arab Republic adopted its Constitution on 13 March 1973 [3a] (subsequently amended in June 2000). (Europa World, accessed 6 May 2010) [1a] (Recent history) Article 1 states, “The Syrian Arab Republic is a democratic, popular, socialist, and sovereign state.” [3a] (Chapter 1, Part 1)

- 5.02 The Freedom House report, *Freedom in the World – 2010*, released 3 May 2010 stated:

“Syria is not an electoral democracy. Under the 1973 constitution, the president is nominated by the ruling Baath Party and approved by popular referendum for seven-year terms. In practice, these referendums are orchestrated by the regime, as are elections for the 250-seat, unicameral People’s Council, whose members serve four-year terms and hold little independent legislative power. Almost all power rests in the executive branch.” [14a] (Political Rights and Civil Liberties)

- 5.03 Article 3 of the Constitution requires that the President be a Muslim, and “Islamic jurisprudence is a main source of legislation”. [3a] (Chapter 1, Part 1) Article 25 of the Constitution provides that:
- “(1) Freedom is a sacred right. The state protects the personal freedom of the citizens and safeguards their dignity and security.  
 “(2) The supremacy of law is a fundamental principle in the society and the state.  
 “(3) The citizens are equal before the law in their rights and duties.  
 “(4) The state insures the principle of equal opportunities for citizens.” [3a] (Chapter 4)
- 5.04 The Constitution also guarantees citizens’ rights – in accordance with the law – to political, economic, social, and cultural participation; their right to privacy, and to freedom of religion, expression and assembly. [3a] (Part 4, Articles 26, 27, 31, 32, 35, 38 & 39) Nevertheless, as stated in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office’s (FCO) *Annual Report on Human Rights 2009*, published March 2010, “An Emergency Law, in place since 1963, continues to restrict the rights of Syrian citizens.” [5b] (p157)

See also [Human Rights](#)

## Supreme Constitutional Court

- 5.05 The United States Department of State *2009 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices* (USSD Report 2009), released 11 March 2010, reported, “The Supreme Constitutional Court (SCC) rules on the constitutionality of laws and decrees, hears special appeals regarding the validity of parliamentary elections, and tries the president if he is accused of criminal offenses, but it does not hear appeals from the civil and criminal justice system.” [7b] (Section 1e)

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## 6. POLITICAL SYSTEM

- 6.01 The Europa World Country Profile, accessed 6 May 2010, reported:
- “Under the 1973 Constitution (as subsequently amended), legislative power is vested in the unicameral People’s Assembly, with 250 members elected by universal adult suffrage to serve a four-year term. Executive power is vested in the President, elected by direct popular vote for a seven-year term. (Following the death of President Hafiz al-Assad on 10 June 2003, the Constitution was amended to allow his son, Lt-Gen. Bashar al-Assad, to accede to the presidency). He governs with the assistance of an appointed Council of Ministers, led by the Prime Minister. Syria has 14 administrative districts (mohafazat ).” [1a] (Government)
- 6.02 The Freedom House report, *Freedom in the World – 2010*, released 3 May 2010, stated “The only legal political parties are the Baath Party and its several small coalition partners in the ruling National Progressive Front (NPF). Independent candidates, who are heavily vetted and closely allied with the regime, are permitted to contest about a third of the People’s Council seats, meaning two-thirds are reserved for the NPF.” [14a] (Political Rights and Civil Liberties)
- 6.03 The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) *World Factbook*, last updated 24 March 2010 on date of access, recorded the following information on political groups in Syria:

**“Political parties and leaders:**

**“Legal parties:** National Progressive Front or NPF [President Bashar al-ASAD, Dr. Suleiman QADDAH] (includes Arab Socialist Renaissance (Ba'th) Party [President Bashar al-ASAD]; Socialist Unionist Democratic Party [Fadlallah Nasr Al-DIN]; Syrian Arab Socialist Union or ASU [Safwan QUDSI]; Syrian Communist Party (two branches) [Wissal Farha BAKDASH, Yusuf Rashid FAYSAL]; Syrian Social Nationalist Party [Ali QANSU]; Unionist Socialist Party [Fayez ISMAIL])

**“Opposition parties not legally recognized:** Communist Action Party; National Democratic Front [Hasan Abdul AZIM, spokesman] (includes five parties - Arab Democratic Socialist Union Party [Hasan Abdul AZIM], Arab Socialist Movement, Democratic Ba'th Party [Ibrahim MAHKOS], People's Democratic Party [Riad al TURK], Revolutionary Workers' Party [Abdul Hafeez al HAFEZ])

**“Kurdish parties (considered illegal):** Azadi Party [Kheirudin MURAD]; Future Party [Masha'l TAMMO]; Kurdish Democratic Alliance (includes four parties); Kurdish Democratic Front (includes three parties); Yekiti Party [Hasan SALEH, Fu'ad ALEYKO]

**“Other parties:** Nahda Party [Abdul Aziz al MISLET]; Syrian Democratic Party [Mustafa QALAAJI]

**“Political pressure groups and leaders:**

“Damascus Declaration National Council [Riyad SEIF, secretary general] (a broad alliance of opposition groups and individuals including: Committee for Revival of Civil Society [Michel KILO, Riyad SEIF]; Communist Action Party [Fateh JAMOUS]; Kurdish Democratic Alliance; Kurdish Democratic Front; Liberal Nationalists' Movement; National Democratic Rally; and Syrian Human Rights Society or HRAS [Fawed FAWUZ]); National Salvation Front (alliance between former Vice President Abd al-Halim KHADDAM, the SMB, and other small opposition groups); Syrian Muslim Brotherhood or SMB [Sadr al-Din al-BAYANUNI] (operates in exile in London; endorsed the Damascus Declaration, but is not an official member).” [6a]

See also [Political affiliation](#) and [Annex B – Political organisations](#)

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## Human Rights

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### 7. INTRODUCTION

For recent information on the human rights situation in Syria see the country specific pages on the websites of [Amnesty International \(AI\)](#) [12a], the [International Federation for Human Rights \(FIDH\)](#) [31a], [Human Rights Watch \(HRW\)](#) [39a], and the website of the [Syrian Human Rights Committee \(SHRC\)](#). [44a]

Return to the [Contents](#) page for sections containing detailed human rights information on specific issues and groups.

7.01 The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) *Annual Report on Human Rights 2009*, published March 2010, noted, “Syria’s human rights record continued to deteriorate in 2009. An Emergency Law, in place since 1963, continues to restrict the rights of Syrian citizens. This is based on the justification that Syria is still at war with Israel. We remain deeply concerned about arbitrary arrests, intimidation, torture, travel bans, lack of freedom of expression, and lack of respect for the Kurdish minority.” [5b] (p157)

7.02 The United States Department of State *2009 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices* (USSD Report 2009), released 11 March 2010, stated:

“During the year [2009] the government and members of the security forces committed numerous serious human rights abuses, and the human rights situation worsened. The government systematically repressed citizens’ abilities to change their government. In a climate of impunity, there were instances of arbitrary or unlawful deprivation of life. Members of the security forces tortured and physically abused prisoners and detainees. Security forces arrested and detained individuals—including activists, organizers, and other regime critics—without due process. Lengthy pretrial and incommunicado detention remained a serious problem. During the year the government sentenced to prison several high-profile members of the human rights and civil society communities. The government violated citizens’ privacy rights and imposed significant restrictions on freedoms of speech, press, assembly, association, and travel. An atmosphere of corruption pervaded the government. Violence and societal discrimination against women continued, as did sexual exploitation, increasingly aimed at Iraqi refugees, including minors. The government discriminated against minorities, particularly Kurds and Ahvazis, and severely restricted workers’ rights.” [7b] (p1)

7.03 The Human Rights Watch (HRW) *World Report 2010*, published January 2010, noted:

“Syria’s poor human rights situation deteriorated further in 2009, as the authorities arrested political and human rights activists, censored websites, detained bloggers, and imposed travel bans. No political parties are licensed. Emergency rule, imposed in 1963, remains in effect and Syria’s multiple security agencies continue to detain people without arrest warrants. The Supreme State Security Court (SSSC), an exceptional court with almost no procedural guarantees, resumed trials in March 2009, following an eight-month suspension.

“Syria’s repressive policies toward its Kurdish minority continue. Security agencies prevented political and cultural gatherings, and regularly detain and try Kurdish activists demanding increased political rights and recognition of Kurdish culture.” [39b]

In July 2010, HRW released the report [Syria: A Wasted Decade – Human Rights in Syria during Bashar al-Asad’s First Ten Years in Power](#), which reviewed “... [President Bashar] al-Asad’s human rights record in five key areas: repression of political and human rights activism; restrictions on freedom of expression; torture; treatment of the Kurds; and Syria’s legacy of enforced disappearances.” [39g]

7.04 The Freedom House survey, *Freedom in the World – 2010*, reported, “Freedoms of expression, association, and assembly remained tightly restricted throughout 2009, especially with regard to certain groups, such as the Kurdish minority.” [14a] (Overview) Freedom House also included Syria in *The Worst of the Worst 2010*, its June 2010 companion report to the *Freedom in the World – 2010* survey. [14d]

7.05 Amnesty International’s *Annual Report 2010*, stated:

“The government remained intolerant of dissent. Critics, human rights defenders, alleged opponents of the government and others were detained, often for prolonged periods; some were sentenced to prison terms after unfair trials. Torture and other ill-treatment remained common, and were committed with impunity; there were several suspicious deaths in custody. The government failed to clarify the circumstances in which prisoners were killed at Sednaya Military Prison in 2008 and, again, took no steps to account for thousands of victims of enforced disappearances in previous years. Women faced legal and other discrimination and violence. The Kurdish minority remained subject to discrimination, and thousands of Syrian Kurds were effectively stateless. At least eight prisoners were executed.” [12b] (p313)

7.06 The concluding observations of the United Nations Committee against Torture (UNCAT) noted the Syrian Government had ratified or acceded to the following international instruments:

- (a) International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (21 April 1969);
- (b) International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (21 April 1969);
- (c) International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (21 April 1969);
- (d) Convention on the Rights of the Child (15 July 1989), as well as its two Optional Protocols, namely Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict and Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography (25 May 2000);
- (e) Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (28 March 2003);
- (f) Convention on the Protection of the Rights of all Migrant Workers and Members of their Families (2 June 2005); and
- (g) Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (10 July 2009). [57a] (Para 4)

7.07 The United Nations Development Programme – Programme on Governance in the Arab Region’s (UNDP-POGAR) undated page on Human Rights in Syria, reported, “Syria has agreed to the ‘Cairo Declaration on Human Rights in Islam’ issued in 1990 by foreign ministers of Muslim countries. The declaration is a guiding document that does not require ratification. Syria also ratified the ‘Arab Charter of Human Rights/Amended’ prepared by the Arab Summit in Tunisia in May 2004, however, it has not been enforced yet.” [4c]

Further, “Syria has a limited governmental institutions [sic] concerned with human rights, and a limited number of non-governmental organizations that operate at an overall level, such as: The Arab Organization for Human Rights in Syria (2004), Committees for Defending Human Rights in Syria (2000) and Syrian Human Rights Association (2001).” [4c]

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## 8. SECURITY SITUATION

- 8.01 The Security and Foreign Forces section, last updated 5 November 2009, of the Jane’s Information Group *Sentinel Country Risk Assessments: Syria* (Jane’s Assessment) reported:

“Syria’s powerful network of security and intelligence agencies traditionally ensured a high level of security throughout the country, especially in Damascus. There was thus much international speculation about the background to a series of violent incidents that rocked Syria during 2008. In February, Hizbullah military commander Imad Mughniyah was killed by a car bomb near the Syrian military intelligence headquarters in Damascus. In August, General Muhammad Sulaiman, a key security adviser to Assad, was shot dead at his chalet in an exclusive beach resort near Tartus. In September, a car bomb exploded in Damascus, claiming 17 lives.” [8a] (Security Forces)

See also [Security forces](#)

- 8.02 Chapter 3: State Sponsors of Terrorism of the US Department of State’s *Country Reports on Terrorism 2008* (USSD Terrorism Report 2008: State Sponsors) released 30 April 2009 remarked:

“The Syrian government, using tightly-controlled press outlets, was quick to blame a Lebanon-based, al-Qa’ida-affiliated group, Fatah al-Islam, for the September 27 [2008] attack against a prominent military intelligence installation. Syrian TV broadcasted a November 7 program featuring the confessions of some 20 Fatah al-Islam members, including the daughter and son-in-law of Fatah al-Islam leader Shakr al-Absy, of their involvement.

“It remained unclear why Fatah al-Islam would have launched an attack against Syrian security elements, but media reports suggested Absy’s disappearance inside of Syria as a possible motive. In response to the September 27 bombing, the Syrian security services conducted at least one reported raid on an alleged terrorist cell residing in the Damascus area, killing and arresting several suspected militants and confiscating a cache of weapons and explosives.” [7e] (Syria)

- 8.03 On the Islamist threat to the Syrian regime, the Executive Summary of the Jane’s Assessment, last updated 13 August 2010, stated:

“The potency of the Islamist threat lies more squarely with the second strand of the opposition: militant groups that appear increasingly willing to use violence against the Syrian regime. The growth of this militancy can be partly explained by Syria’s proximity to Iraq and the regime’s willingness after 2003 to allow the country to become a hub for Islamist militants travelling to join the Iraqi jihad. The regime initially appeared to turn a blind eye to this activity. However, international pressure and

concerns about the domestic impact of acting as a thoroughfare for foreign militants led the security services to clamp down on the practice, deporting some militants back to their countries of origin. The general atmosphere appears to have encouraged 'home-grown' militants to become bolder in their challenge to the regime. It looks increasingly as though these militants are not part of any one particular group, but are rather cells of individuals operating independently. The picture is complicated by ties between Syria and a host of Palestinian militant groups.” [8a]

See also [Relations with Iraq](#)

8.04 The USSD *Background Note*, last updated February 2010, reported:

“In September 2007 Israeli warplanes attacked a purported nuclear facility in Syria. Investigation by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) discovered particles of enriched uranium at the site, with a low probability they were introduced by the missiles used to attack the facility. As of June 2009, the IAEA continued to investigate the issue with only limited cooperation from the Syrian Government.” [7a] (**National Security**)

8.05 The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) Timeline, last updated 22 July 2010, reported that “The UN nuclear watchdog, the IAEA, said traces of undeclared man-made uranium were found at a second site in Syria - a reactor in Damascus. The IAEA was investigating US claims that a Syrian site destroyed in a 2007 Israeli raid was a nuclear reactor that was not yet operational.” [28a] Amnesty International’s *Annual Report 2010* stated, “In November [2009], the International Atomic Energy Agency said that it had not been able to investigate whether a facility destroyed by the Israeli air force in 2007 had been used for nuclear development purposes as the government had been unwilling to co-operate.” [12b] (p314)

8.06 The International Crisis Group’s (ICG) CrisisWatch noted that the Syrian Foreign Minister (FM) Muallim rejected the IAEA’s call, in an 18 February report, for greater access for the agency’s inspectors. [36a] (**March 2010**) In April 2010, ICG’s CrisisWatch reported, IAEA inspectors visited a Damascus nuclear research reactor, but were denied access to contentious military sites. [36a] (**May 2010**)

See also [Relations with Israel](#)

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## INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

8.07 The ICG reported that the signing of a European Union (EU) association agreement, originally scheduled for 26 October, was postponed indefinitely after Syrian officials said more time was needed for review. [36a] (**November 2009**) The EU foreign policy chief Ashton met President Assad and FM Muallim during a March 2010 visit to Damascus during which the resumption of stalled negotiations on the EU association agreement were reportedly discussed. [36a] (**April 2010**)

8.08 The BBC Timeline [28a], last updated 22 July 2010, and the ICG’s CrisisWatch [36a] (**March 2010**) both reported on the February 2010 appointment of the first US ambassador to Syria after a five-year break due to the accusation that Syria was responsible for the assassination of former Lebanese PM Hariri. This, and the decision to engage increasingly with Syria, faced rising domestic criticism in April 2010. (ICG Crisiswatch) [36a] (**May 2010**)

- 8.09 The BBC Timeline reported that in May 2010 the US renewed its sanctions against Syria, stating that Damascus supports terrorist groups, seeks weapons of mass destruction and has provided Lebanon's Hezbollah with Scud missiles in violation of UN resolutions. [28a]

International Crisis Group's (ICG) two reports of December 2009, [Reshuffling the Cards? \(I\): Syria's Evolving Strategy](#) [36b] and [Reshuffling the Cards? \(II\): Syria's New Hand](#), [36c] discussed in detail Syria's current and prospective relations with its neighbours, and other countries such as the United States and the European Union.

A May 2010 Middle East Memo, [How to talk and how not to talk to Syria: Assessing the obstacles to and opportunities in a future Israeli-Syrian-American peace negotiation](#), published by the Saban Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution – University of Bern, also discussed the foreign policy and international relations of Syria. [52b]

## Relations with Lebanon

- 8.10 The US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) *World Factbook* last updated 24 March 2010, remarked "...lacking a treaty or other documentation describing the boundary, portions of the Lebanon-Syria boundary are unclear with several sections in dispute; since 2000, Lebanon has claimed Shab'a Farms in the Golan Heights..." [6a] (Transnational issues)

- 8.11 The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) Country Profile on Syria last reviewed 23 March 2009, reported:

"Syrian intervention in Lebanon during the 1980s brought an end to the civil war in that country. By September 2004, Syria still had a military force of approximately 15,000 men in Lebanon and commanded a high degree of influence there.

"On 14 February 2005, former Lebanese Prime Minister, Rafiq Hariri, was assassinated in a bomb that killed 19 others and injured over 200. In Lebanon it was widely believed that Syria was involved in this attack and on 14 March 2005 approximately one million demonstrators came out onto the street to demand the departure of Syrian forces. In response to domestic and international pressure, Syria withdrew and a UN verification team reported on 23 May 2005 that all Syrian troops had withdrawn from Lebanon, although it was uncertain whether all intelligence personnel had left.

"Syria is widely suspected of involvement in the murder of the [sic] Rafiq Hariri. On 7 April 2005, United Nations Security Council resolution 1595 was passed which mandated the establishment of a UN International Independent Investigation Commission [UNIIC], into the attack. ...

"In May 2007 United Nations Security Council resolution 1757 established the Special Tribunal for Lebanon (STL) under Chapter VII of the UN Charter to try suspects involved in the murder of Hariri and other attacks [sic]. The Special Tribunal began its work in the Hague on 1 March 2009." [5a] (International relations)

For more information on the investigation of the UNIIC see the UN Security Council's President & Secretary-General (SG) Letters pages from [2005](#) [37a], [2006](#) [37b], [2007](#) [37c] and [2008](#) [37d].

- 8.12 On the assassination of Hariri, the BBC Timeline, last updated 22 July 2010, reported on the April 2009 arrest of a key suspect in Dubai, "Mohammed Zuhair al-Siddiq, a former Syrian intelligence officer, was a witness to Hariri's killing." [28a] Whilst on 23 July 2010, Human Rights Watch (HRW) reiterated its call for the release of Ziad Wasef Ramadan, who had been held by Syria without charge since 2005 in connection with the assassination. The UN commission investigating Hariri's assassination interviewed Ramadan twice in prison, but nothing has been heard of his whereabouts since September 2007. [39h]
- 8.13 The USSD *Background Note* last updated February 2010, noted:
- "Syrian-Lebanese relations have improved since 2008 when, in response to French and Saudi engagement with Syria, Damascus recognized Lebanon's sovereignty and the two countries agreed to exchange ambassadors. Syria sent Ali Abdul Karim Ali to Beirut as its ambassador to Lebanon in May 2009. Following his election in November 2009, Prime Minister Saad Hariri, son of the slain leader, traveled to Damascus for discussions with President Asad. During the visit, the two countries agreed to demarcate their border for the first time." [7a] (Foreign relations)
- 8.14 The Executive Summary of the Jane's Assessment last updated 13 August 2010, remarked, "Nonetheless, Syria retains a powerful interest in Lebanon's internal politics, even after the formation of the new Lebanese government in November 2009. While some developments have taken place, many issues remain unresolved, not least the demarcation of the border between the two countries." [8a]
- See also [History: 1946–2009](#), [Human rights violations by the security forces](#) and [Foreign refugees](#)

### Relations with Israel

- 8.15 The US CIA *World Factbook* last updated 24 March 2010, reported that the "Golan Heights is Israeli-occupied with the almost 1,000-strong UN Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) patrolling a buffer zone since 1964...". [6a] (Transnational issues) The USSD *Background Note*, last updated February 2009, remarked that "... achieving a comprehensive Arab-Israeli peace settlement, which includes the return of the Golan Heights ..." was one of the primary goals of Syrian foreign policy. [7a] (Foreign Relations)
- 8.16 The FCO Country Profile last reviewed 23 March 2009, stated:
- "President Bashar al-Assad claims to be committed to fulfilling his father's legacy by achieving peace with Israel. However, Syria's support for Palestinian rejectionist groups is seen by many to directly contradict this aim, Syria has said that if the Roadmap for Peace is acceptable to the Palestinians then it is acceptable to Syria. President Asad has sought a bigger role for the EU, rather than the United States, in the MEPP [Middle East Peace Process]. Indirect peace negotiations between Syria and Israel resumed in May 2008, with Turkey acting as an intermediary. The talks halted when Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert announced he was stepping down." [5a] (International relations)
- 8.17 The USSD *Background Note* last updated February 2009, reported:
- "During the summer of 2006 tensions again heightened due to Israeli fighter jets buzzing President Asad's summer castle in response to Syria's support for the

Palestinian group Hamas, Syria's support of Hizballah during the July-August 2006 conflict in Lebanon, and the possible rearming of Hizballah in potential violation of UN Resolution 1701. Rumors of negotiations between the Israeli and Syrian Governments were initially discounted by both Israel and Syria, with spokespersons for both countries indicating that any such talks were not officially sanctioned. However, the rumors were confirmed in early 2008 when it was announced that indirect talks facilitated by Turkey were taking place. The talks continued until December 2008 when Syria withdrew in response to Israel's shelling of the Gaza Strip." [7a] (Foreign relations)

- 8.18 The Executive Summary of the Jane's Assessment last updated 13 August 2010, noted, "Assad has indicated his willingness to re-open talks, but Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu, preoccupied with demands to restart talks with the Palestinians and the perceived threat posed by Iran, is currently reluctant to engage in a Syrian peace process. Netanyahu has said he is willing to restart talks with but with [sic] French rather than Turkish mediation." [8a]
- 8.19 The BBC Timeline last updated 22 July 2010 reported that, in July 2009 US special envoy George Mitchell visited Syria for talks with President Assad regarding peace in the Middle East. [28a] The ICG's CrisisWatch noted that the Syrian foreign ministry issued a warning in December 2009 that an Israeli bill, making a referendum necessary for conceding the Golan – a move supported by Prime Minister (PM) Netanyahu's government – would damage chances for peace. [36a] (January 2010)
- 8.20 In February 2010, the Israeli Defence Minister Barak suggested all-out regional war possible, to which Syrian FM Muallim threatened a response against Israeli cities. The Israeli FM Lieberman also threatened retaliation against the Syrian regime with war, but a spokesperson for PM Netanyahu later reaffirmed that peace talks were Israel's priority. (ICG CrisisWatch) [36a] (March 2010) However, in March 2010, the Turkish PM Erdogan stated Syria was willing to resume Turkish-mediated indirect talks with Israel, and that there were 'positive signals' coming from Israel. (ICG CrisisWatch) [36a] (April 2010)

The United States Institute for Peace (USIP) released the Special Report: [Mapping Peace between Syria and Israel](#) in March 2009 [13d] and the Briefing: [A Renewable Energy Peace Park in the Golan as a Framework to an Israeli Syrian Agreement](#) in June 2009. [13a]

See also [History: 1946–2009](#), [Internally displaced people \(IDPs\)](#) and [Foreign refugees](#)

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## Relations with Turkey

- 8.21 The FCO Country Profile last reviewed 23 March 2009, reported:

"In October 1998, Turkey threatened military action against Syria, in frustration at alleged long-term Syrian hospitality for Kurdish PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party) terrorist groups active against Turkey. The dispute was resolved diplomatically, with Syria meeting most of the Turkish demands.

"There has been substantial high level bilateral contact between Turkey and Syria in the past year - with both the Syrian President and Foreign Minister in Ankara and the

Turkish Foreign Minister in Damascus in the last quarter of 2007,. Turkey has sought to use this contact to encourage Syria back into the international fold and Syria is also keen to ease its isolation. Turkey believes it is important for the West to engage with Syria to weaken its ties to Iran...”. [5a] (International relations)

- 8.22 The ICG’s CrisisWatch detailed recent cooperation between the two countries, noting the September 2009 accord to end visa requirements and strengthen economic cooperation. [36a] (October 2009) A meeting of several Syrian cabinet ministers with their Turkish counterparts occurred in October 2009, which was the first session of a strategic cooperation council; [36a] (November 2009) also, Syria held joint military exercises with Turkey in late April 2010. [36a] (May 2010)

See also [Relations with Israel](#), [Kurdish political activists](#), [Kurds](#) and [Annex B – Political organisations](#)

### Relations with Iran

- 8.23 The FCO Country Profile last reviewed 23 March 2009, stated, “Syria has good relations with Iran, including on defence ties, and the two signed a memorandum of defence understanding in June 2006.” [5a] (International relations) The USSD *Background Note* last updated February 2009, reported, “Sensing its international isolation [following the February 2005 assassination of Lebanon’s prime minister, Rafiq Hariri, and Syria’s subsequent withdrawal from Lebanon], the Syrians strengthened their relations with Iran and radical Palestinians groups based in Damascus, and cracked down on any signs of internal dissent. However, during the July-August 2006 conflict between Israel and Hizballah, Syria placed its military forces on alert but did not intervene directly on behalf of its ally Hizballah.” [7a] (History: 2000-2009)
- 8.24 The ICG CrisisWatch noted that, in August 2009, “Syria reportedly mediated in [the] release of French researcher and embassy employee held in Iran on charges of espionage.” [36a] (September 2009) In December 2009 the Iranian Defence Minister Vahidi attended the first meeting of an Iran-Syria joint defence commission in Damascus. [36a] (January 2010) In February 2010, the two countries signed a bilateral visa-free travel deal during the visit of Iranian President Ahmadinejad. [36a] (March 2010)
- 8.25 The BBC Timeline last updated 22 July 2010, reported that, in July 2010, Syria and Iran had denied US media reports that Iran has given Syria an advanced radar system, which could hamper Israel’s ability to fly over Syria and target Iran’s nuclear facilities. [28a]

See also [Relations with Lebanon](#), [Relations with Israel](#) and [Foreign refugees](#)

### Relations with Iraq

- 8.26 The FCO Country Profile last reviewed 23 March 2009, reported, “On 21 November 2006 Syria and Iraq signed an agreement to restore diplomatic relations almost 25 years after they cut them.” [5a] (International relations) The USSD *Background Note* last updated February 2009, stated, “However, both nations withdrew their ambassadors following August 2009 bombings in Baghdad. Iraq continues to call for more action on the part of Syria to control its border and to prevent Iraqi and Arab elements residing in – or transiting – Syria from contributing financially, politically, or militarily to the insurgency in Iraq.” [7a] (Foreign relations)

- 8.27 The FCO Country Profile last reviewed 23 March 2009, noted, “The ongoing violence in Iraq has led to an influx of between 1.2 and 1.5 mn [million] Iraqi refugees into Syria.” [5a] (International relations) The CIA *World Factbook* last updated 24 March 2010, estimated 1-1.4 million Iraqi refugees were present in Syria. [6a] (Transnational issues) A June 2010 UN Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN) article reported:

“The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) has revised downwards the number of Iraqi refugees it has registered in Syria.

“‘In 2010 we issued revised figures for the number of registered Iraqi refugees based on the verification of their presence in Syria throughout 2009,’ said Wafa Amr, a spokesperson for UNHCR in Damascus. ... More than a quarter of the Iraqi population registered in Syria was deregistered - 58,000 files were deactivated - leaving 165,493 registered refugees at end-April this year. ...

“The true number of Iraqi refugees is considered to be higher than UNHCR registrations, although significantly lower than the 1.2 million figure given by the Syrian authorities.

“Many refugees did not want to register or have been hard for UNHCR to reach in their urban setting.” [42b]

USIP released the Working Papers: [Iraq, its Neighbors, and the Obama Administration: Syrian and Saudi Perspectives](#) [13a] and [Won't You Be My Neighbor: Syria, Iraq and the Changing Strategic Context in the Middle East](#) [13c] in February and March 2009 respectively.

See also [Foreign refugees](#)

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## 9. SECURITY FORCES

- 9.01 The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) *Annual Report on Human Rights 2009*, published March 2010, reported, “The security services are pervasive in Syrian society. They monitor opposition figures, human rights lawyers and defenders.” [5b] (p158) The US Department of State *2009 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices* (USSD Report 2009), released 11 March 2010, stated: “Security forces arrested and detained individuals – including activists, organizers, and other regime critics – without due process.” [7b]

- 9.02 The USSD Report 2009 further noted:

“The role of the security services extends far beyond strictly security matters due to a continuing state of emergency the government declared in 1963. The government justified the Emergency Law on the basis of its conflict with Israel and threats from terrorist groups. ...

“Corruption continued to be a serious problem in the police forces and security services .... No mechanisms for investigations of security force abuse existed. In September 2008 President al-Asad issued a law that mandates that only the

General Command of the Army and Armed Forces may issue an arrest warrant in the case of a crime committed by a military officer, member of the internal security forces, or customs police officer in the pursuit of his normal duties, and that such cases may be tried only in military courts.” [7b] (Section 1d)

## ARMED FORCES

- 9.03 The Central Intelligence Agency’s (CIA) *World Factbook: Field Listing – Military branches* listed the following branches of the Syrian armed forces “Syrian Arab Army, Syrian Arab Navy, Syrian Arab Air and Air Defense Forces (includes Air Defense Command) (2008)”. [6b]

See also [Military service](#)

## INTERNAL SECURITY FORCES (ISF)

### Police, Gendarmerie and Desert Guard/Frontier Force

- 9.04 The USSD Report 2009 stated, “The Ministry of Interior (MOI) controls the police forces, which consist of four separate divisions: emergency police, traffic police, neighborhood police, and riot police.” (USSD Report 2009) [7b] (Section 1d)

- 9.05 The Security and Foreign Forces section, last updated 5 November 2009, of the Jane’s Information Group *Sentinel Country Risk Assessments: Syria* (Jane’s Assessment) reported:

“There are four main branches [of the Syrian Public Security Police]: administration, criminal investigation, public order and traffic. It includes city police forces, which operate in Damascus and the country’s other major cities. There are no precise figures available for the strength of the city police.

“In addition to the city police, there is an 8,000-strong paramilitary force, the Gendarmerie, which operates in rural areas, ...” [8a] (Police)

- 9.06 The same section of the Jane’s Assessment also noted, “Syria has a border guard force, sometimes known as the Desert Guard or Frontier Force. In May 2006, Syria’s Ambassador to the United States claimed that the strength of the Border Guard had been greatly increased following the 2003 Iraq War, and that the number of border guards deployed was about 10,000.” [8a] (Border Guards)

## SECURITY AND INTELLIGENCE FORCES

### Overview

- 9.07 The USSD Report 2009 stated:

“The four major branches of security forces include the SMI [Syrian Military Intelligence] and Syrian Air Force Intelligence (SAFI), both part of the military; the Political Security Directorate; and the General Intelligence Directorate. The four branches operate independently and generally outside the control of the legal system, and all four devote some of their overlapping resources to monitoring internal dissent and individual citizens.” [7b] (Section 1d)

- 9.08 The Security and Foreign Forces section, last updated 5 November 2009, of the Jane's Assessment, reported:

"Syria has a myriad of security and intelligence services with overlapping missions to gather intelligence on opponents of President Bashar al-Assad and his regime, and then neutralise them. Some are civilian agencies, for example the General Intelligence Directorate and the Political Security Directorate; others are military such as Syrian Military Intelligence and Air Force Intelligence. The bigger organisations have their own detention cells and interrogation centres. All these bodies are directly responsible to the president and his closest advisers. Currently, Assad's chief adviser on security matters is Mohammed Nassif, who was reported in recent years to have been head of the internal security department of the National Security Bureau." [8a] (Security Forces)

- 9.09 The May 2010 concluding observations of the United Nations Committee Against Torture (UN CAT) stated it was:

"... concerned at reports that the State party has established secret detention facilities under the command of intelligence services, ... The centres controlled by these Services are not accessible to independent monitoring and inspection bodies, and are not subject to review by the authorities. The Committee is further concerned that detainees are deprived of fundamental legal safeguards, including an oversight mechanism in regard to their treatment and review procedures in respect to their detention. The Committee is also concerned at allegations that those detained in such facilities could be held for prolonged periods without any judicial review, in practice in incommunicado detention and subject to torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment". [57a] (p6)

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## HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS BY THE SECURITY FORCES

- 9.10 The May 2010 concluding observations of the United Nations Committee Against Torture (UN CAT) reported:

"... the Committee expresses its concern that the State of Emergency, issued by Legislative Decree No. 51 of 22 December 1962 and amended by Decree-Law No. 1 of 9 March 1963, which was intended to apply to exceptional circumstances where there is an internal or external threat to national survival, now has quasi permanent nature and allows the suspension of fundamental rights and freedoms. The Committee notes with concern that the State of Emergency attributes broad emergency powers to various branches of the security forces outside any judicial control which in practice leads to serious breaches of the Convention by State authorities." [57a] (p4)

- 9.11 The same report also highlighted:

"According to information before the Committee, the Legislative Decree No. 61 of 1950 and Decree No. 64 of 2008 grant members of intelligence agencies, including military, air and public security forces, de facto immunity from prosecution for crimes committed while they were on duty. The Committee is deeply concerned at a widespread impunity preventing prosecution for crimes committed on duty, including torture and ill-treatment, in total violation of the provisions of the Convention". [57a] (p5)

- 9.12 Amnesty International's April 2010 [Briefing to the Committee against Torture](#) on Syria provided information on human rights violation committed by the security forces, including deaths in custody, methods of torture, the definition and criminalization of torture, the role of the State of Emergency legislation, impunity and safeguards against torture. [12e] Although concentrating primarily on the mistreatment of "... persons arrested or detained for expressing dissent or criticizing the government or its policies and who are perceived by the authorities as opponents of the government ..." the report also noted "...torture and other ill-treatment of criminal suspects by the police is reported to be common." [12e] (p4)

See also [Avenues of complaint](#)

### Arbitrary arrest and detention

- 9.13 The USSD Report 2009 stated, "The constitution prohibits arbitrary arrest and detention; in practice these activities persisted and remained significant problems." [7b] (Section 1d) The Freedom House report, *Freedom in the World – 2010*, released 3 May 2010 noted, "The state of emergency in force since 1963 gives security agencies virtually unlimited authority to arrest suspects and hold them incommunicado for prolonged periods without charge. Many of the estimated 2,500 to 3,000 political prisoners in Syria have never been tried." [14a] (Political Rights and Civil Liberties)

- 9.14 Amnesty International's April 2010 briefing to the UN CAT stated:

"The SEL [State of Emergency Law] gives wide-ranging special powers to the various branches of the security forces outside any judicial control. This results in arbitrary and incommunicado detention of political suspects for as long as the security forces please. Thus hundreds have reportedly been subjected to arbitrary arrest and detention, kept in prolonged incommunicado detention without access to legal counsel nor brought before a judge or judicial authority to challenge their detention, nor allowed visits from their families during which time many have been subjected to torture." [12e] (p10)

- 9.15 The May 2010 concluding observations of the UN CAT noted, "The Committee is also gravely concerned at the absence of systematic registration of all detainees in places of detention under the State party's jurisdiction ...." [57a] (p3)

- 9.16 The USSD Report 2009 continued:

"During the year [2009] the government continued to make arbitrary arrests, especially of alleged Islamists and MB [Muslim Brotherhood] members, and maintained pressure on civil society and human rights activists. Under the authority of laws that criminalize membership and activity in organizations the government deems illegal, security forces arrested a number of persons linked to local human rights groups and prodemocracy student groups, as well as scores of minorities, particularly Kurds...." [7b] (Section 1d)

See also [Political affiliation](#), [Freedom of association and assembly](#), [Freedom of speech and media](#), [Human rights institutions, organisations and activists](#) and [Kurds](#)

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### Torture

- 9.17 The USSD Report 2009 noted, “The law prohibits such practices [torture and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment], and the penal code provides punishment for abusers. Under article 28 of the constitution, ‘no one may be tortured physically or mentally or treated in a humiliating manner.’ Nevertheless, security forces reportedly continued to use torture frequently.” [7b] (Section 1c) Additionally, the May 2010 concluding observations of the UN CAT noted, “...with concern the absence of a definition of torture...” in the legal system of Syria. [57a] (p2)
- 9.18 AI stated in its April 2010 briefing to the UN CAT that it had:
- “... received information from a wide range of sources indicating that torture and other cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment ... of prisoners remains common and widespread in Syria. Political suspects, in particular, are frequently subjected to prolonged incommunicado detention without charge or trial, secret detention or enforced disappearance, and a number have died in custody in suspicious circumstances, yet their deaths have not been independently investigated.” [12e] (p4)
- The AI briefing also noted, “...torture and other ill-treatment of criminal suspects by the police is reported to be common ...”. [12e] (p4)
- 9.19 The Human Rights Watch (HRW) *World Report 2010*, on events in 2009, released January 2010, stated “Human Rights Watch received numerous reports of ill-treatment and torture by security agencies.” [39b] (p3)
- 9.20 Also reporting on the human rights situation in 2009, the Amnesty International *Annual Report 2010*, released 28 May 2010, noted:
- “Torture and other ill-treatment were reported to be common in police stations, security agencies’ detention centres, and prisons. These abuses were committed with impunity. The SSSC [Supreme State Security Court] and other courts continued to convict defendants on the basis of ‘confessions’ that the defendants alleged were extracted under torture while they were held incommunicado in pre-trial detention.” [12b] (p315)
- 9.21 The Human Rights Watch (HRW) February 2009 report, *Far From Justice – Syria’s Supreme State Security Court*, reported:
- “Human Rights Watch’s review of trial notes prepared by foreign diplomats as well as statements issued by defense lawyers and Syrian human rights groups shows that at least 33 defendants who appeared before the SSSC between January 2007 and June 2008 claimed that the Syrian security services extracted their confessions using torture. In none of the trial notes reviewed is there information to suggest that the judge undertook any steps to investigate the torture allegations.” [39c] (p27)
- 9.22 The Freedom House report, *Freedom in the World 2010*, stated, “The security agencies, which operate independently of the judiciary, routinely extract confessions by torturing suspects and detaining their family members.” [14a] (Political Rights and Civil Liberties)
- 9.23 The World Organisation Against Torture’s (OMCT) *Steadfast in Protest – Observatory for the protection of human rights defenders: Annual Report 2009*, released 19 June 2009, recounted:

“On September 30, 2008, the jurisdiction of these [military] courts was expanded by Decree No. 69, which provides for the transfer to a military jurisdiction in the event of crimes of torture involving police or customs officers, as well as those involving members of internal or political security. This new legislation, by giving the general command of the army the sole power to prosecute members of security forces accused of crimes of torture, establishes a *de facto* impunity for these crimes.” [34a] (p482)

9.24 The USSD Report 2009 noted, “Local human rights organizations continued to cite numerous credible cases of security forces allegedly abusing and torturing prisoners and detainees and claimed that many instances of abuse went unreported. Individuals who suffered torture or beatings while detained refused to allow their names or details of their cases to be reported for fear of government reprisal.” [7b] (Section 1c)

9.25 The May 2010 concluding observations of the UN CAT reported:

“The Committee is deeply concerned about numerous, ongoing and consistent allegations concerning the routine use of torture by law enforcement and investigative officials, at their instigation or with their consent, in particular, in detention facilities. It is also concerned at credible reports that such acts commonly occur before formal charges are laid, as well as during the pre-trial detention period, when the detainee is deprived of fundamental legal safeguards, in particular access to legal counsel. This situation is exacerbated by the reported use of internal regulations which, in practice, permit procedures contrary to published laws and in violation of the Convention.” [57a] (p2-3)

The UN CAT concluding observations highlighted its particular concern over allegations of the mistreatment and torture of Kurdish detainees. [57a] (p3)

See also [Kurdish political activists](#) and [Kurds](#)

9.26 The USSD Report 2009 recalled:

“AI [Amnesty International] reported that torture was most likely to occur while detainees were held at one of the many detention centers operated by the various security services in the country, particularly while authorities attempted to extract a confession or information. Courts systematically used ‘confessions’ extracted under duress as evidence, and defendants’ claims of torture were almost never investigated.

“Kurdish citizens were especially likely to face torture in custody, according to an HRW [Human Rights Watch] report released November 26 [2009].” [7b] (Section 1c)

9.27 The USSD Report 2009 stated that torture methods, according to former prisoners, detainees and reputable local human rights groups, included:

- electrical shocks;
- pulling out fingernails;
- burning genitalia;
- forcing objects into the rectum;
- beating, sometimes while the victim was suspended from the ceiling;
- alternately dousing victims with freezing water and beating them in extremely cold rooms;
- hyper-extending the spine;

- bending the detainees into the frame of a wheel and whipping exposed body parts;
- using a backward-bending chair to asphyxiate the victim or fracture the victim's spine
- stripping prisoners naked for public view. [7b] (Section 1c)

The May 2010 AI [briefing](#) to the UN CAT also provides information on the methods of torture and ill-treatment employed in detention centres and prisons in Syria. [12e] (p6-9)

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## Surveillance

9.28 The May 2010 AI briefing to the UN CAT reported, "The SEL allows the arrest of people, monitoring of their mail, surveillance, censorship, closure and confiscation of all forms of mass media and expression. It gives the authorities the power to place restrictions on people's freedom to move, travel and assembly." [12e] (p10)

9.29 The Freedom House report, *Freedom in the World – 2010*, stated:

"The security services intensified their ban on public and private gatherings in 2006, forbidding any group of five or more people from discussing political and economic topics. This rule has been enforced through surveillance and informant reports. Such activity by the intelligence services has ensured that a culture of self-censorship and fear prevails, and ordinary Syrians are unwilling to discuss politics under most circumstances." [14a] (Political Rights and Civil Liberties)

9.30 The May 2010 report, *Human rights issues concerning Kurds in Syria*, of a joint fact-finding mission by the Danish Immigration Service (DIS) and ACCORD/Austrian Red Cross to Damascus, Syria, Beirut, Lebanon, and Erbil and Dohuk, Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), remarked:

"According to a Kurdish journalist and human rights activist anyone who has attracted the attention of the security service e.g. by participating in demonstrations would be put under surveillance and the security services actually have the capacity to do that despite the large number of demonstrators. In Qamishli for example, the security services have about 1,000 employees and an even larger net of informants, and 6,000 employees only in Damascus." [60a] (p36)

The same report cited other sources, such as a Western diplomatic source, prominent Kurdish leader and representative of a Kurdish human rights organisation, who concurred on the use of surveillance at, and following, demonstrations. [60a] (p37-39)

9.31 The Human Rights Watch (HRW) February 2009 report, *Far From Justice – Syria's Supreme State Security Court*, reported:

"The prosecution of ordinary Syrian citizens for expressing criticism of the president or the government, sometimes in the privacy of their own homes or at their place of employment, is indicative of the extent to which the government uses the SSSC to prevent any expression of opposition. Accusations of neighbors, friends or family members are sometimes enough to land a person in jail." [39c] (p4)

- 9.32 The same report also noted, “The Syrian Human Rights Committee has reported that hundreds of government informants are rewarded for or coerced into writing reports on relatives, friends, and associates who are suspected of involvement in ‘antiregime’ activities.” [14a] (Political Rights and Civil Liberties) The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) reported on the security services’ surveillance activities specific to the Internet in it’s reports *10 Worst Countries to be a Blogger* of April 2009 [15d] and *Middle East Bloggers: The Street Leads Online* of October 2009. [15b]

See also [Internet freedom](#)

- 9.33 The Freedom House 2010 report also noted, “Intelligence services generally monitor Kurdish leaders closely, sometimes excluding them and their families from public-sector employment.” [14a] (Political Rights and Civil Liberties)

See also [Kurdish political activists](#) and [Kurds](#)

### Extrajudicial killings & ‘disappearances’

- 9.34 The USSD Report 2009 remarked, “During the year [2009] there were reports of arbitrary or unlawful deprivation of life.” [7b] (Section 1a) The report went on to relate details of known or suspected extrajudicial killings, including two deaths in custody, three deaths in clashes with the police, and the deaths of at least eighteen Kurdish conscripts during their mandatory military service. [7b] (Section 1a)

See also [Military service](#) and [Death of Kurdish conscripts](#)

- 9.35 Al’s April 2010 briefing to the UN CAT on Syria reported:

“Between 2004 and 2010, Amnesty International recorded more than 40 deaths in custody. Of these, 17 are reported to have occurred during the events at Sednaya Military Prison around 5 July 2008, while others may have resulted from torture or other ill-treatment. Some deaths occurred in pre-trial detention, others in prisons where the deceased were serving prison terms. No official investigations are known to have been carried out into any of the deaths recorded by Amnesty International.” [12e] (p5)

- 9.36 Amnesty International’s *Annual Report 2010* stated, “Seven suspicious deaths in custody were reported [during 2009] but the authorities apparently took no action to investigate them or the allegations of torture made by detainees.” [12b] (p315) The Freedom House report *Freedom in the World – 2010*, noted “In 2009, police killed several civilians who were protesting the demolition of illegally constructed homes outside Damascus.” [14a] (Political Rights and Civil Liberties)

- 9.37 The Human Rights Watch *World Report 2010*, released January 2010, reported, “More than one year after security forces opened fire on rioting inmates in Sednaya prison, killing at least nine, the government has not disclosed any information about the casualties.” [39b] (p3) The same report also noted, “Syria’s multiple security services continue to detain people without arrest warrants and frequently refuse to disclose their whereabouts for weeks and sometimes months—in effect forcibly disappearing them.” [39b] (p3)

See also [Prison conditions](#)

- 9.38 The USSD Report 2009 stated, “There were reports of enforced disappearances during the year [2009], some of which were politically motivated.” [7b] (Section 1b) The report related the specific details of various disappearances during 2009, and 2008, some of whom were released after prolonged periods of incommunicado detention. [7b] (Section 1b)

“The government continued to withhold information on the welfare and whereabouts of persons who disappeared in previous years; little was known other than the approximate date of their disappearance. The government had a long record of allegedly ‘disappearing’ individuals, some of whom were believed to have died while others were likely in long-term detention, and it did not investigate or punish any security force members for their role in disappearances.” (USSD Report 2009) [7b] (Section 1b)

- 9.39 AI’s April 2010 briefing to the UN CAT, when discussing the State of Emergency Law, reported “Many [detainees] have apparently simply ‘disappeared’: the government has denied that they were detained and has denied any knowledge of their whereabouts. In some cases, it appears that detainees have been sentenced to death after summary trials over several years; Amnesty International fears that they may have been secretly executed.” [12e] (p11)

See also [Death penalty](#)

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### **Alleged Syrian involvement in the ‘disappearance’ of Lebanese nationals and Palestinians**

- 9.40 The USSD Report 2009 noted that the Syrian government continued to deny reports that the security forces had ‘disappeared’ thousands of persons in the 1970s and 1980s, including:

“... hundreds of Lebanese and Palestinians who were detained in Syria or abducted from Lebanon by Syrian forces or Lebanese and Palestinian militias. The Lebanese NGO Support of Lebanese in Detention and Exile (SOLIDE) estimated that more than 600 Lebanese prisoners remained in Syria. In August 2008 Lebanese Justice Minister Ibrahim Najjar stated in a televised interview that 745 Lebanese citizens remained missing in Syria, divided into two categories: convicted criminals and victims of ‘enforced disappearances’.” [7b] (Section 1b)

- 9.41 The April 2010 AI briefing to the UN CAT also stated:

“During Syria’s 29-year military presence in Lebanon, human rights violations including enforced disappearance and torture were carried out by Syrian military and intelligence personnel against Lebanese nationals, Palestinian refugees and others.

“Even after the end of Lebanon’s civil war in 1990 and up until the withdrawal of Syrian troops from the country in April 2005, individuals in smaller numbers were subjected to questioning and at times enforced disappearances by Syrian intelligence and security officials based in Lebanon. Some disappeared for days, others for weeks, months or even years. Others never returned.” [12e] (p12-13)

See also [History: 1946–2009](#), [Relations with Lebanon](#) and [Foreign refugees](#)

## AVENUES OF COMPLAINT

9.42 The May 2010 concluding observations of the UN CAT reported:

“Notwithstanding the information provided to the Committee in the State party report on the possibility for a person to submit a complaint of torture allegedly committed by a public official to the Office of the Public Prosecutor, the Committee regrets the lack of an independent complaint mechanism for receiving and conducting impartial and full investigations into the many allegations of torture reported to the authorities, and ensure that those found guilty are appropriately punished.” [57a] (p6-7)

9.43 The USSD Report 2009 stated, “Arbitrary and false arrests were problems, and detainees had no legal redress.” [7b] (Section 1d) The same report also noted a specific case where human rights defender, Khalil Matuk, filed a formal complaint in a civil court about government inaction on the alleged shooting of his nephew, Sami Matuk, and Joni Suleiman, in the course of pursuing smugglers in 2008:

“During the year [2009] the Homs Military Court initiated a countersuit against him for provoking sectarian discord, insulting the president, and insulting government officials. The court’s action was widely presumed to be retribution for Matuk’s formal complaint, activists reported. Khalil Matuk refused to attend any of the hearings in Homs. On October 14, the court sentenced him on the aforementioned charges, in absentia, to 13 months in prison. Matuk remained free pending appeal at year’s end.” [7b] (Section 1a)

See also [Human rights institutions, organisations and activists](#)

9.44 On redress and compensation for victims of torture, the April 2010 AI briefing to the UN CAT reported:

“Despite the prohibition on torture in the Syrian Constitution (Article 28) and the fact that the Penal Code (Articles 319 and 391), allows penalties for ‘[a]nyone who batters a person with a degree of force that is not permitted by law...’ in practise Syria contravenes Article 14 of the Convention and despite repeated and consistent allegations of torture, Amnesty International’s research shows that Syrian laws penalizing the use of illegal force against detainees are rarely, if ever, implemented. In fact, Legal Decree no. 16 of Constitutional Decree No. 14 of 1969 states that employees of the State Security administration shall not be prosecuted for offences they commit while carrying out their duties.

“Amnesty International notes that the Initial Report states that under the CCP [Code of Criminal Procedures] victims of the crime of torture ‘have the right to obtain compensation by applying to a competent court which will award fair and appropriate compensation depending on the circumstances of the case. The award will take account of the damage suffered, loss of earnings and other losses and all other circumstances. Compensation will be awarded taking into account all material and psychological damage incurred.’ In addition, the State and perpetrator ‘may be held liable’ and ‘may be ordered to provide appropriate compensation’.

“However, we [AI] remain concerned that thus far no steps have been taken by the authorities to provide redress or compensation for past and continuing human rights violations; we are not aware of any investigations into claims and reports of torture and ill-treatment, including deaths in custody. Despite numerous allegations of torture, some of which were made in court by the victims themselves, no proper

investigations appear to have been carried out by the Syrian authorities. Neither are we aware of other forms of compensation being granted to victims including reparation, restitution or rehabilitation.” [12e] (p22-23)

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## 10. MILITARY SERVICE

10.01 The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) *World Factbook* last updated 24 March 2010 remarked that at 18 years of age a man is eligible for compulsory military service, and that conscript service obligation is 30 months or 18 months in the Syrian Arab Navy. The *World Factbook* also noted that women were not subject to conscription but could volunteer to serve. [6a] (Military)

10.02 The May 2008 *Global Report* of the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers (CSC) stated:

“Under the terms of the constitution conscription was compulsory for all Syrians (Article 40). In practice, it only applied to Syrian (and Palestinian) males over the age of 19 living in Syria. Under the Service of the Flag Law, Decree No. 115 of 5 October 1953, the minimum age for conscription was the ‘first day of January in the year in which a Syrian citizen reaches 19’. The law reserved the right to lower the recruitment age to 18 in times of ‘war or emergency’ from the ‘first day of January following the date on which the recruit reaches 18 years of age’. In 2005 military service was reduced from 30 to 24 months. In 2007 Decree No. 30 further amended the Flag Law and updated conditions for the deferral of service and exemptions, including study and residency abroad. Those from families with only one son were also exempted. From the ages of 17 to 42, all Syrian males required advance permission from the Armed Forces recruitment department to leave the country. Voluntary recruitment was open to men and women over 18.” [55a] (Government – National recruitment legislation and practice)

10.03 The May 2010 report, *Human rights issues concerning Kurds in Syria*, on a joint Danish Immigration Service (DIS) and ACCORD/Austrian Red Cross fact-finding mission to Syria, Lebanon and the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) stated:

“The Swedish embassy reported in 2004 that: ‘There is no military service for stateless Kurds. There is military service for the Syrian Palestinian at the Palestinian Liberation Army. There is military service for the Kurds holding the Syrian ID card.’

“Rachel Raenell Bernu, Managing Director, Kurdish Human Rights Project, London, doubted that stateless Kurds are obliged to perform military service in Syria.” [60a] (p66)

See also [Stateless Kurds](#)

10.04 The August 2005 Concluding Observations of the United Nations Human Rights Committee (CCPR) remarked, “The Committee takes note of the information provided by the delegation whereby Syria does not recognize the right to conscientious objection to military service, but that it permits some of those who do not wish to perform such service to pay a certain sum in order not to do so.” [72a] (p4)

- 10.05 On draft evasion the DIS and ACCORD/Austrian Red Cross fact-finding mission report, *Human rights issues concerning Kurds in Syria*, of May 2010, stated:

“According to Amnesty International men who evade compulsory military service (21 months’ duration) reportedly face different levels of penalty according to the circumstances of the case:

- “● Persons who were abroad and failed to report when summoned for military service face arrest by the military police immediately upon return to Syria and sentence of two to three months of imprisonment (usually at Tadmur Prison);
- “● Persons who fail to report for military service while in Syria face arrest and a prison term of three months, then further imprisonment for six months if they fail to undertake military service after completing the first term of imprisonment.” [60a] (p65)

- 10.06 Other sources consulted by the DIS and ACCORD/Austrian Red Cross fact-finding mission indicated:

“...if a person has been drafted for military service while residing abroad, he would be identified by the immigration authorities upon return to Syria as his name will then appear on a list of wanted persons. The immigration authorities will instruct him to report to the military usually within two weeks or up to one month. However, if he does not report to the military within the specified time, he will be called to the Military Court and he will be charged with draft evasion. Any prison sentence issued in absentia by a Military Court will be commuted to an additional three months of service in the army. It was added that in reality nobody goes to prison for draft evasion.” [60a] (p65)

Information sourced in the fact-finding mission report from a Syrian lawyer consulted by the Swedish Embassy in Damascus in 2004 stated, “The punishment for not showing up to service varies between 2 – 6 months. However, due to the issuance of amnesty decrees regularly and annually by the President it is not applied in practice. In addition, since these sentences are issued in absence, they are subject to objection and then cancellation.” [60a] (p65)

See also [Exit and return](#)

- 10.07 War Resisters’ International’s (WRI) [Refusing to Bear Arms – A worldwide survey of conscription and conscientious objection to military service](#) of April 1998, though dated, was still the most comprehensive report on military service in Syria. [17a]

- 10.08 The US Department of State *2009 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices* (USSD Report 2009), released 11 March 2010, reported:

“During the year [2009] at least 18 Kurdish soldiers died under mysterious circumstances while performing their required service in the military, bringing the total number of Kurdish conscript deaths over the last five years to at least 36. Authorities frequently attributed the deaths to suicide or accidents, but Kurdish human rights activists and victims’ families asserted the deaths were deliberate government killings and demanded the government investigate them.” [7b] (Section 1a)

See also [Death of Kurdish conscripts](#)

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## 11. JUDICIARY

- 11.01 The United Nations Development Programme – Programme on Governance in the Arab Region’s (UNDP-POGAR) undated page on the Syrian judiciary, accessed 31 March 2010, reported:

“The legal system of Syria draws primarily from Civil Law traditions, as well as Islamic and Egyptian legal traditions. The Syrian Constitution of 1973 guarantees the independence of the judiciary.

“The chief codifications of law are contained in the Civil Code of 1949, the Commercial Code of 1949, the Penal Code of 1949, the Criminal Procedure Code of 1950, the Civil Procedure Code of 1953, and the Personal Status Code, contained in Legislative Decree No. 59 of 1983. The Judicial Authority Law of 1961 and the Civil Code of 1949 are the primary documents governing the organization and functioning of the secular judicial system. Administrative authority of the judiciary, including the powers to appoint, promote, and transfer judges, is vested in the Supreme Judicial Council, which is presided over by the Minister of Justice.” [4a]

### ORGANISATION

- 11.02 UNDP-POGAR’s undated page on the Syrian judiciary stated:

“Syria has a dual judicial system, with separate secular and religious courts. The secular courts hear both civil and criminal matters. At the lowest level are the Courts of Peace, or Courts of Conciliation (Sulhiyya), composed of a single judge with jurisdiction to hear cases involving lesser offenses. At the second level are the Courts of First Instance (Bida’iyya), which are divided into civil and criminal courts. The Court of Assize is an additional criminal court that hears cases in which the punishment may exceed three years’ imprisonment.

“Decisions rendered by the Courts of Peace, Courts of First Instance, and Court of Assize may be appealed to the Court of Appeal, or, in some instances, the Court of Cassation. (Of the 30 total Courts of Appeal, three criminal courts and four civil courts are located in Damascus, and one civil court and one criminal court is located in every district.) Decisions of the Courts of Appeal may not be appealed. However, their verdicts may be nullified by the Court of Cassation, which is located in Damascus and subdivided into specialized three-judge panels devoted to civil, criminal, canonical, and military matters.” [4a]

- 11.03 The US Department of State *2009 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices* (USSD Report 2009), released 11 March 2010, noted, “The judicial system is composed of civil and criminal courts, under the Ministry of Justice (MOJ), and religious courts, which adjudicate matters of personal status such as divorce and inheritance.” [7b] (Section 1e)

- 11.04 The UNDP-POGAR undated page on the Syrian judiciary provided more detail on the religious courts:

“The Shari’a, Doctrinal, and Spiritual Courts have specialized jurisdiction. The Shari’a courts hear cases involving personal status, family, and inheritance disputes among

Syrian Muslims and non-Syrian Muslims who apply Islamic personal status laws in their own countries. The cities of Damascus and Aleppo have three Shari'a Courts; other districts have one. The Doctrinal Courts are composed of a judge of the Druze Muslim sect and are empowered to guarantee that personal status decisions of members of the Druze sect are not in conflict with the rules of the sect. The Spiritual Courts settle personal status matters for Jewish, Christian, and other non-Muslim groups. Decisions of all of the religious courts may be appealed to the Canonical and Spiritual divisions of the Court of Cassation." [4a]

11.05 The USSD Report 2009 continued:

"The Court of Cassation is the highest court of appeal. The Supreme Constitutional Court (SCC) rules on the constitutionality of laws and decrees, hears special appeals regarding the validity of parliamentary elections, and tries the president if he is accused of criminal offenses, but it does not hear appeals from the civil and criminal justice system. The SCC is composed of five members who are appointed by the president for renewable four-year terms.

"Military courts have authority over cases involving soldiers or members of other military or police branches. If the charge against a soldier or member of the military or police branch is a misdemeanor, the sentence against the defendant is final. If the charge is a felony, the defendant has the right to appeal to the Military Chamber at the Court of Cassation. Military courts also have authority to try civilians in cases based on military law. Civilians have the right to appeal all sentences in military court. A military prosecutor decides the venue for a civilian defendant. In contrast to previous years, there were no reports during the year that the government operated military field courts, which reportedly observed fewer formal procedures than regular military courts, in locations outside established courtrooms.

"The Supreme State Security Court (SSSC) tries political and national security cases and operates under the provisions of the 1963 Emergency Law, which authorizes the prosecution of anyone 'opposing the goals of the revolution' and creating 'sectarian strife.'" [7b] (Section 1e)

See also [Trials before the Supreme State Security Court \(SSSC\)](#)

## INDEPENDENCE

11.06 UNDP-POGAR's undated page on the Syrian judiciary reported, "The Supreme Judicial Council oversees the judiciary and has the power to appoint, dismiss and transfer judges." [4a] The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) *World Factbook*, last updated 24 March 2010, stated that the President headed the Council. [6a] (Judicial branch) The USSD Report 2009 noted, "The constitution provides for an independent judiciary, but courts were regularly subject to political influence. According to observers, approximately 95 percent of judges were Ba'athists or closely aligned to the Ba'ath Party and therefore not independent." [7b] (Section 1e)

11.07 The May 2010 concluding observations of the United Nations Committee Against Torture (UN CAT) reported, "The Committee is concerned by information that the lack of judicial independence and arbitrary procedures have resulted in the systematic violation of the right to fair trials. In addition judges do not enjoy immunity according to the provisions of Legislative Decree 40, issued on May 21, 1966 and they can be transferred by order which is not subject to any form of review ...". [57a] (p5) The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) *Annual Report on Human Rights 2009*,

published March 2010, stated that human rights lawyers and defenders were monitored by the security services and "... often subject to arbitrary arrest and detention." [5b] (p158)

See also [Human rights institutions, organisations and activists](#)

11.08 The Freedom House survey *Freedom in the World 2010*, reported:

"While the lower courts operate with some independence and generally safeguard defendants' rights, politically sensitive cases are usually tried by the Supreme State Security Court (SSSC), an exceptional tribunal established under emergency law that denies the right to appeal, limits access to legal counsel, tries many cases behind closed doors, and routinely accepts confessions obtained through torture. SSSC judges are appointed by the executive branch, and only the president and interior minister may alter verdicts." [14a] (Political Rights and Civil Liberties)

See also [Trials before the Supreme State Security Court \(SSSC\)](#)

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## FAIR TRIAL

11.09 The USSD Report 2009 noted:

"Defendants before civil and criminal courts are entitled to legal representation of their choice; the courts appoint lawyers for indigents. Defendants are presumed innocent, and they are allowed to present evidence and to confront their accusers. Trials are public, except for those involving juveniles or sex offenses. Defendants can appeal verdicts to a provincial appeals court and ultimately to the Court of Cassation. Appeals are often difficult to win because the lower courts do not provide verbatim transcripts of cases, only summaries prepared by the presiding judges. There are no juries. Defendants and their attorneys have access to government-held evidence relevant to their cases. Human rights lawyers noted that, in some politically charged cases, the prosecution case files that defense lawyers were allowed to see did not include any evidence.

"The law extends the above rights to all citizens in criminal cases. In some cases, such as the May 11 case of Kurdish Future Movement leader Meshaal Tammo, defendants were denied the right to speak at their trial. A number of sections of family and criminal law are based on Shari'a and do not treat men and women equally. Some personal status laws use Shari'a regardless of the religion of those involved in the case." [7b] (Section 1e)

11.10 With regard to military courts, the same report stated:

"If the charge against a soldier or member of the military or police branch is a misdemeanor, the sentence against the defendant is final. If the charge is a felony, the defendant has the right to appeal to the Military Chamber at the Court of Cassation. Military courts also have authority to try civilians in cases based on military law. Civilians have the right to appeal all sentences in military court. A military prosecutor decides the venue for a civilian defendant. In contrast to previous years, there were no reports during the year that the government operated military field

courts, which reportedly observed fewer formal procedures than regular military courts, in locations outside established courtrooms.” [7b] (Section 1e)

- 11.11 The World Organisation Against Torture’s (OMCT) *Steadfast in Protest – Observatory for the protection of human rights defenders: Annual Report 2009*, released 19 June 2009, reported:

“On September 30, 2008, the jurisdiction of these [military] courts was expanded by Decree No. 69, which provides for the transfer to a military jurisdiction in the event of crimes of torture involving police or customs officers, as well as those involving members of internal or political security. This new legislation, by giving the general command of the army the sole power to prosecute members of security forces accused of crimes of torture, establishes a *de facto* impunity for these crimes.” [34a] (p482)

### **Trials before the Supreme State Security Court (SSSC)**

- 11.12 The Human Rights Watch (HRW) February 2009 report, *Far From Justice – Syria’s Supreme State Security Court*, observed:

“Forty years after its creation, the Supreme State Security Court (SSSC) remains one of the pillars of repression in Syria. An offspring of the state of emergency that the Syrian authorities declared on March 8, 1963, the government created the SSSC to prosecute those it deemed a threat to state security. In practice, the SSSC’s role has been to prosecute those whom the Syrian authorities do not approve of in trials that lack basic due process guarantees. The SSSC consistently ignores claims by defendants that their confessions were extracted under torture and frequently convicts them on vague and overbroad offenses that essentially criminalize freedom of expression and association. ...

“Today, most of the defendants are suspected Islamists, often accused of being salafis (adherents to fundamentalist Islamic thought) or wanting to fight in Iraq, Kurdish activists demanding increased autonomy and cultural recognition, and independent activists who criticize the regime.” [39c] (p1)

See also [Death penalty](#), [Political affiliation](#), [Freedom of speech and media](#) and [Human rights institutions, organisations and activists](#)

- 11.13 The May 2010 concluding observations of the UN CAT reported:

“...the Committee is deeply concerned at the numerous, consistent and serious allegations that this court [the SSSC] fails to function in accordance with the international standards for courts of law. The Committee notes that the Supreme State Security Court was established under Decree No. 47 of 1968 and has been created as an exceptional court outside the ordinary criminal justice system accountable only to the Minister of Interior. The Court, composed of two judges, one civilian and one military, has the competence to adopt sentences and impose penal sanctions for crimes very widely defined, such as ‘weaken the national sentiment’ or ‘awaken racial or sectarian tensions, while Syria is at war or is expecting a war’. According to information before the Committee the Court is exempt from the rules of criminal procedure and permits the use of prolonged incommunicado detention without judicial supervision. In addition, lawyers are not allowed to meet with their clients until the trial begins and the decisions of the court cannot be appealed”. [57a] (p5)

## 11.14 The USSD Report 2009 noted:

“The SSSC does not observe constitutional provisions safeguarding defendants' rights. Its verdicts are not subject to judicial appeal, but the minister of interior may ratify, nullify, or alter an SSSC ruling, and the president must approve the verdict or may ask for a retrial. Charges against defendants before the SSSC were usually vague, and authorities sometimes prevented defendants' access to their lawyers before trial. Under SSSC procedures, defendants and their lawyers are not present during the preliminary or investigative phase of the trial during which the prosecutor presents evidence. Lawyers submitted written defense pleas rather than making oral presentations. Trials took place before one to three judges and usually remained closed to the public as well as to the defendants' families. Authorities did not permit human rights NGOs to visit the SSSC, but local lawyers affiliated with local NGOs [non-governmental organisations] acted as defense counsel in some cases. Authorities granted diplomatic observers limited access to the SSSC during the year. Human rights organizations estimated that the SSSC tried hundreds of cases annually. Most cases during the year involved charges relating to membership in banned political groups, including religious parties such as the MB, the Islamic Liberation Party, and Syrian Kurdish parties. During the year the SSSC sentenced more than 100 citizens to sentences ranging from three years' imprisonment to execution (in all cases commuted to 12-15 years' imprisonment during the year). The SSSC is not required to keep a regular schedule. Following the July 2008 Sednaya prison riots, the SSSC suspended operations for approximately eight months. Even when the SSSC scheduled a case on a given day, the court sometimes failed to convene, offering no reason.” [7b] (Section 1e)

11.15 HRW's February 2009 report, *Far From Justice – Syria's Supreme State Security Court*, reported:

“The SSSC's repeated breaches of basic human rights standards have not gone unnoticed. The United Nations, Syrian and international human rights groups, and Syrian lawyers in the past repeatedly have criticized the SSSC. For example, the UN Human Rights Committee, the body charged with monitoring states' compliance with the ICCPR, stated in 2005 that SSSC procedures are incompatible with the provisions of the ICCPR. Writing 13 years ago about the SSSC, Human Rights Watch also noted that ‘defendants prosecuted in the state security court are denied their right under international law to a fair and public trial by a competent, independent and impartial tribunal.’

“Western diplomats who began observing trials at the SSSC since 2004 also have been highly critical of the SSSC and its president, Fayez al-Nuri, in private conversations with Human Rights Watch.” [39c] (p5-6)

Refer to the February 2009 HRW report, [Far From Justice – Syria's Supreme State Security Court](#), for more information on the procedures of the court. [39c]

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## 12. ARREST AND DETENTION – LEGAL RIGHTS

12.01 The US Department of State *2009 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices* (USSD Report 2009), released 11 March 2010, reported:

“Upon arrest an individual is brought to a police station for processing and detained until a trial date is set. At the initial court hearing, which is sometimes months or years after the arrest, the accused may retain an attorney at personal expense or be assigned a court-appointed attorney, although lawyers are not ensured access to their clients before trial. The individual is then tried in court, where a judge renders a verdict. Although the prison code provides for prompt access to family members, human rights organizations and families reported inconsistent application of the code, with some families waiting as long as a year to see relatives. Civil and criminal defendants had the right to bail hearings and possible release from detention on their own recognizance. This right was not applied consistently throughout the legal system and was rarely available to detainees under the 1963 Emergency Law.” [7b] (Section 1d)

12.02 The USSD Report 2009 noted:

“The Emergency Law authorizes the government to conduct preventive arrests and overrides constitutional and penal code provisions against arbitrary arrest and detention, including the need to obtain warrants. In cases involving political or national security offenses, arrests were often carried out in secret with cases assigned in a seemingly arbitrary manner to military, security, or criminal courts. Suspects were detained incommunicado for prolonged periods without charge or trial and were denied the right to a judicial determination regarding pretrial detention. Unlike defendants in regular criminal and civil cases, security detainees did not have access to lawyers before or during questioning, or throughout the preparation and presentation of their defense. In most cases detainees were not informed of charges against them until their arraignment, which was often months after their arrest. Those suspected of political or national security offenses were arrested and prosecuted under ambiguous and broad articles of the penal code and were subsequently tried in either criminal or security courts.” [7b] (Section 1d)

12.03 The May 2010 concluding observations of the United Nations Committee Against Torture (UN CAT) reported:

“While noting that Prison Regulation No.1222 guarantees the right of prisoners to communicate with their lawyers and family members as well as visiting rights, the Committee is seriously concerned that in practice these provisions do not provide all detainees with all fundamental legal safeguards and are not applied from the very outset of the detention. Such legal safeguards comprise the right to have prompt access to a lawyer and an independent medical examination, to notify a relative, to be informed of their rights at the time of detention, including about the charges laid against them, and to appear before a judge within a time limit in accordance with international standards.” [57a] (p4)

See also [Security forces](#) and [Judiciary](#)

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## 13. PRISON CONDITIONS

13.01 The US Department of State *2009 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices* (USSD Report 2009), released 11 March 2010, noted “Prison conditions were generally poor and did not meet international standards for health and sanitation. ...

Severe overcrowding at several prisons forced inmates to sleep on the floor. In past years activists and former inmates reported that prison officials would withhold food to punish inmates.” [7b] (Section 1c) Further:

“The government prohibited independent monitoring of prison or detention center conditions and publishing of any materials on prison or detention center conditions [including visits by international human rights observers], but diplomatic and consular officials were granted limited access in some cases during the year. Nuns from the Good Shepherd convent in Damascus were granted access to the women’s prison in Duma to conduct vocational training and provide preschool services for inmates’ children who resided in the prison when no other family was available to care for them.” [7b] (Section 1c)

- 13.02 The *Annual Report 2008* of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) stated, “No reply had been received from the Syrian authorities by the end of the year [2008] regarding the ICRC’s offer of services, made in 2006 to visit people deprived of their freedom in the Syrian Arab Republic, in accordance with its mandate.” [18a] (p363)
- 13.03 The May 2010 concluding observations of the United Nations Committee Against Torture (UN CAT) reported, “The Committee notes that the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Interior and the Prosecutor General are empowered to inspect prisons to verify that inmates are being treated humanely. The Committee is nevertheless concerned at the lack of systematic, effective and independent monitoring and inspection of all places of detention.” [57a] (p6)
- 13.04 The USSD Report 2009 also stated, “There were separate detention facilities for men, women, and children. The government reportedly sometimes held minors in adult facilities. Pretrial detainees, particularly those held for political or security reasons, were usually held separately from convicted prisoners.” [7b] (Section 1c)

## ABUSES IN PRISONS

- 13.05 The USSD Report 2009 reported:

“According to local human rights organizations, political prisoners were sometimes deliberately placed in crowded cells with convicted and alleged felons and subjected to verbal and physical threats. Political prisoners also reported that they often slept on the ground due to lack of beds, were subject to frequent searches, and faced solitary confinement if authorities found impermissible items. Guards regularly eavesdropped on prisoners’ conversations with their lawyers and visiting family members. Some former detainees and human rights observers reported that the government denied political prisoners access to reading materials, including the Koran. Facilities for political or national security prisoners, especially accused Islamists, were generally much worse than those for common criminals. Each branch of the four security services operated its own detention centers. Most reported torture or mistreatment cases occurred in these facilities, according to local human rights organizations.” [7b] (Section 1c)

- 13.06 An April 2010 Amnesty International (AI) report, *Syria: Briefing to the Committee against Torture*, noted:

“According to one testimony received in 2009 from a prisoner of conscience held at ‘Adra prison: “[t]he prison management works on the principle of humiliation and fear and demoralizing of prisoners. They have turned the prison into a detention camp or

intelligence branch. All kinds of torture are present, [including the] dulab ... busat [flying carpet] .... along with piling between 60-90 prisoners in each room, with only 32 beds, so most of them sleep on the floor..."

"Both detainees and sentenced prisoners complain that they are subject to insults and threats, including threats against their families, and that they are commonly stripped naked especially on arrival at their place of imprisonment, frequently left to remain naked in front of others for hours and sometimes beaten by guards while they are naked. Inmates are reportedly held in severely overcrowded conditions; are subject to periodic, arbitrary beatings; held without access to light or exercise in the open air; made to sleep on the floor with inadequate bedding, including in extremely cold temperatures; and receive inadequate food, water and access to toilet facilities. In some cases, it is reported, conditions are so overcrowded that prisoners have to take it in turns to lie down to sleep." [12e] (p7-8)

For further information on deaths in custody, methods of torture, the definition and criminalization of torture, the State of Emergency legislation, impunity and safeguards against torture see the full [report](#). [12e]

See also [Human rights violations by the security forces](#)

- 13.07 The USSD Report 2009 stated, "At some prisons security officials demanded bribes from family members. During the July-December 2008 Sednaya prison riots and for the first six months of the year, prison authorities denied all visits to inmates at Sednaya prison. ... In past years activists and former inmates reported that prison officials would withhold food to punish inmates." [7b] (Section 1c) Also, "According to local and international human rights organizations, the government held prisoners and detainees without adequate medical care and denied medical treatment to some prisoners who had significant health problems." [7b] (Section 1c)

Amnesty International's July 2010 report, ['Your son is not here': Disappearances from Syria's Saydnaya Military Prison](#), provided detailed information on the Sednaya prison riots, and those inmates whose whereabouts were still unaccounted for following the riots. [12d]

See also [Human rights violations by the security forces](#) and [Political affiliation](#)

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## 14. DEATH PENALTY

- 14.01 The United States Department of State *2009 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices* (USSD Report 2009) released 11 March 2010, stated, "During the year [2009] the SSSC [Supreme State Security Court] sentenced more than 100 citizens to sentences ranging from three years' imprisonment to execution (in all cases commuted to 12-15 years' imprisonment during the year)." [7b] (Section 1e) The report also noted, "Most cases [before the SSSC] during the year involved charges relating to membership in banned political groups, including religious parties such as the MB [Muslim Brotherhood], the Islamic Liberation Party, and Syrian Kurdish parties." [7b] (Section 1e)

See also [Trials before the Supreme State Security Court \(SSSC\)](#) and [Political affiliation](#)

- 14.02 The undated Hands Off Cain database's entry on Syria, accessed 6 April 2010, noted the following:

"Capital crimes are: treason; murder; political acts such as bearing arms against Syria in the ranks of the enemy, desertion of the armed forces to the enemy and acts of incitement under martial law or in wartime; violent robberies; rape; verbal opposition to the government; and membership in the Muslim brotherhood.

"Syria also applies the death penalty for drug trafficking whilst the punishment for possession of drugs is life imprisonment.

"The minimum age for the imposition of the death penalty in Syria is 18 years. The maximum age was not defined in Syrian law, but there had never been a case of somebody condemned to death older than 60 years." [23a]

- 14.03 The USSD Report 2009 related four specific instances of death sentences handed down by the SSSC during 2009, all of which were commuted to 12 years imprisonment and/or hard labour. [7b] (Section 1e) Amnesty International's *Annual Report 2010* stated, "At least seven men were sentenced to death after being convicted of murder and at least eight prisoners were executed, including four who were executed at Aleppo Central Prison in August. The true number of executions may have been higher as the authorities rarely disclose information about executions." [12b] (p316) AI's report, *Death sentences and executions in 2009*, also reported the same statistics. [12c]
- 14.04 The *Hands Off Cain 2009 Report* on 2008, and the first six months of 2009, noted, "Absolute secrecy governs executions in some countries, such as North Korea and Syria, where news of executions does not even filter through to the local media." [23b]

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## 15. POLITICAL AFFILIATION

- 15.01 The US Department of State *2009 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices* (USSD Report 2009), released 11 March 2010, stated:

"The president and the Ba'ath Party suppressed political opposition. The constitution provides that the Ba'ath Party is the ruling party and ensures it has a majority in all government and popular associations, such as workers' and women's groups. The Ba'ath Party and nine other smaller satellite political parties comprise the NPF [National Progressive Front], originally established in 1971. The NPF represented the only framework for legal political party participation for citizens; the Ba'ath Party dominated it, and the one-party character of the political system remained. The Ba'ath Party dominated the 250-member parliament, or People's Council. During the 2007 parliamentary and local elections, NPF candidates won an overwhelming majority of offices. Some independents the government had vetted were permitted to run and win seats at both levels." [7b] (Section 3)

- 15.02 Amnesty International's *Annual Report 2010* noted:

"Syria remained under a national state of emergency in force continuously since 1963 and which, over many years, has been used to suppress and punish even peaceful dissent. This pattern continued throughout 2009. Political activists, ... minority

Kurdish activists and others who criticized the government or exposed human rights violations were subject to arbitrary arrest and often prolonged detention or were sentenced to prison terms after unfair trials before the grossly deficient Supreme State Security Court (SSSC) or Military and Criminal Courts. They included prisoners of conscience. Others, including former detainees, were subject to travel bans.” [12b] (p314)

See also [Political system](#), [Human rights violations by the security forces](#), [Fair trial](#), [Political affiliation](#), [Freedom of speech and media](#), [Human rights institutions, organisations and activists](#) and [Exit and return](#)

## FREEDOM OF POLITICAL EXPRESSION

15.03 The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) database entry on the Syrian Arab Republic, last updated 14 August 2009, noted that, to be eligible to vote in the Syrian elections a person must have reached the age of 18 years and be a Syrian citizen. A person can be disqualified from voting if found to be insane, has sworn allegiance to a foreign State, been convicted of specific crimes, or is a member of the armed and police forces. [9a] (Electoral system)

15.04 The Freedom House report, *Freedom in the World 2010*, released 3 May 2010, reported:

“Syria is not an electoral democracy. Under the 1973 constitution, the president is nominated by the ruling Baath Party and approved by popular referendum for seven-year terms. In practice, these referendums are orchestrated by the regime, as are elections for the 250-seat, unicameral People’s Council, whose members serve four-year terms and hold little independent legislative power. Almost all power rests in the executive branch.” [14a] (Political Rights and Civil Liberties)

## FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION AND ASSEMBLY

15.05 The USSD Report 2009 noted:

“The constitution permits private associations but also grants the government the right to limit their activities. In practice the government restricted freedom of association, requiring prior registration and approval for private associations. The government often denied requests for registration or failed to act on them, presumably on political grounds. ...

“The government granted registration to some groups not engaged in political or other activities deemed sensitive. The government restricted the activities of associations and their members, and the executive boards of professional associations were not independent.” [7b] (Section 2b)

15.06 The same report also stated:

“The government did not permit the establishment of independent political parties. In recent years citizens have sought to establish political parties but have not received licenses from the government. In practice the government tolerated some political parties, such as the Communist Union Movement, and it subjected members of other parties, such as the Communist Action Party, the People’s Party, and the Arab Social

Union, to harassment but not automatic arrest for membership. Members of Islamist parties were subject to immediate arrest and execution. Including the MB [Muslim Brotherhood] and 12 Syrian Kurdish parties, there were an estimated 30 illegal opposition political parties of varying sizes and influence operating in the country.” [7b] (Section 3)

[Annex B – Political organisations](#)

- 15.07 The Freedom House report, *Freedom in the World 2010*, released 3 May 2010, reported:

“Freedom of assembly is closely circumscribed. Public demonstrations are illegal without official permission, which is typically granted only to progovernment groups. The security services intensified their ban on public and private gatherings in 2006, forbidding any group of five or more people from discussing political and economic topics. This rule has been enforced through surveillance and informant reports. Such activity by the intelligence services has ensured that a culture of self-censorship and fear prevails, and ordinary Syrians are unwilling to discuss politics under most circumstances.” [14a] (Political Rights and Civil Liberties)

See also [Surveillance](#)

- 15.08 On peaceful assembly, the USSD Report 2009 noted:

“The constitution provides for the right of assembly, but Emergency Law provisions superseded this right, and the government did not respect it in practice. MOI [Ministry of Interior] permission is required for demonstrations or any gathering of more than three persons, and the government required political forums and discussion groups to obtain prior approval to hold lectures and seminars and to submit lists of all attendees. Several domestic human rights and civil society groups held meetings without registering with the government or obtaining prior approval because they assumed permission would be denied, as has regularly been the case in the past. In many instances the government took steps to disrupt such gatherings or prevent them from occurring. Either the government or the Ba’ath Party authorized and organized most public demonstrations.” [7b] (Section 2b)

The report went on to relate five specific instances where the security forces inhibited freedom of assembly in 2009. [7b] (Section 2b)

- 15.09 A November 2009 Human Rights Watch report, *Group Denial – Repression of Kurdish Political and Cultural Rights in Syria*, reported on the repression of Kurdish public gatherings since the events of Qamishli in March 2004, and the May 2005 unrest following the murder of the respected Kurdish religious leader, Sheikh Ma’shuq al-Khaznawi. [39d] (p18-30) “Since then, Syrian security forces have cracked down on Kurdish political and cultural gatherings, often resorting to violence to disperse the crowds. Kurdish groups have in response increased their calls for public gatherings.” (HRW, November 2009) [39d] (p18)

See also [Increased opposition and subsequent clampdown: 2003-2007](#), [Kurdish political activists](#) and [Kurds](#)

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**OPPOSITION GROUPS AND POLITICAL ACTIVISTS**

- 15.10 The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) *Annual Report on Human Rights 2009*, published March 2010, stated that opposition figures were monitored by the security services and "... often subject to arbitrary arrest and detention." [5b] (p158) Also, "There is no accurate figure for the number of political prisoners in Syria." [5b] (p157)

The report went on to note that estimates from international and Syrian non-government organisations (NGOs) ranged from 2,500–3,000 to around 4,000 political prisoners. Further, "In January [2009], the NGO Syrian Human Rights Information Link published their annual list of political prisoners. Though not definitive, the list shows an increase in new political prisoners, from 800 imprisoned in 2008 to 974 in 2009." [5b] (p157)

- 15.11 The USSD Report of 2009 stated:

"The number of political prisoners and detainees – both citizens and foreigners – remained difficult to determine due to the lack of official government information and because different branches of the security services, each of which maintained its own incarceration facilities, held significant numbers of such detainees. Authorities refused to divulge information regarding numbers or names of persons in detention on political or security-related charges. Local human rights observers continued to estimate that 1,500 to 3,000 political prisoners, including accused Islamists, were in detention. The government frequently held detainees for extended periods without trial and without information provided to their families." [7b] (Section 1e)

"Most cases [heard before the Supreme State Security Court (SSSC)] during the year [2009] involved charges relating to membership in banned political groups, including religious parties such as the MB [Muslim Brotherhood], the Islamic Liberation Party, and Syrian Kurdish parties. During the year the SSSC sentenced more than 100 citizens to sentences ranging from three years' imprisonment to execution (in all cases commuted to 12-15 years' imprisonment during the year)." [7b] (Section 1e)

- 15.12 The same report continued:

"In 2006 the government began to try some political detainees in criminal court; once convicted on political or security-related charges, they were treated like common prisoners. ...

"The government did not permit regular access to political prisoners or detainees by local or international humanitarian organizations. Human rights groups reported that many political prisoners serving long-term sentences remained in prison after the expiration of their sentences." [7b] (Section 1e)

- 15.13 Further, "The government detained relatives of detainees and fugitives to obtain a confession or surrender, respectively, and harassed and intimidated the families of activists and political prisoners. There were unconfirmed reports that security personnel forced prisoners to watch relatives being tortured to extract confessions." [7b] (Section 1f)

- 15.14 Human Rights Watch's (HRW) *World Report 2010*, released January 2010, reported, "The SSSC [Supreme State Security Court] sentenced over 45 people in 2009 on various grounds, including membership in the banned Muslim Brotherhood, Kurdish activism, membership in unauthorized political groups, and independent criticism of the government." [39b] (p3) HRW's March 2010 article, *Syria: Repression Grows as Europe, US Avoid Discussing Rights*, reported:

“On February 10 [2010], border police detained Ragheda Sa’id Hasan, who had been a political prisoner in the 1990s for her Communist Action Party membership, as she tried to cross into Lebanon. Three days later, unidentified individuals entered her apartment and confiscated a copy of ‘The New Prophets,’ a manuscript in which she describes her experience as a political detainee, as well as publications issued by various Syrian opposition parties. She remains in detention.” [39e]

See also [Annex B – Political organisations](#)

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### Islamist / Salafist political activists

15.15 The USSD Report 2009 stated, “The government forbids membership in Islamist parties, and authorities immediately arrested and executed these members.” [7b] (Section 1f) Elsewhere, the same report stated that cases in which the SSSC passed the death sentence were all commuted to 12-15 years’ imprisonment in 2009. [7b] (Section 1e) Also, “During the year [2009] the government continued to make arbitrary arrests, especially of alleged Islamists and MB members ...”. [7b] (Section 1d) Further, “Human rights organizations reported that alleged Islamist prisoners and detainees were subject to torture and mistreatment in custody.” [7b] (Section 2c)

15.16 Amnesty International’s *Annual Report 2010* reported:

“Suspected Islamists and supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood, which remained outlawed in Syria, faced arrest, prolonged detention and unfair trials, mostly before the SSSC. Defendants convicted of belonging to the Muslim Brotherhood are routinely sentenced to death and then have their sentences immediately commuted to 12-year prison terms. Hundreds of suspected Islamists and others accused of security offences were believed to be held at Sednaya Military Prison and other prisons, and to be subject to harsh treatment regimes.” [12b] (p314-315)

See also [Fair trial](#), [Prison conditions](#) and [Death penalty](#)

15.17 The Human Rights Watch (HRW) February 2009 report, *Far From Justice – Syria’s Supreme State Security Court*, stated:

“The largest group of defendants before the SSSC in the last three years can broadly be categorized as ‘Islamists’ – proponents of an Islamic state where shari’a (Islamic law) would be enforced. Trial observation notes by diplomats attending the SSSC and statements issued by Syrian lawyers and human rights groups show that the court described as ‘salafis’ at least 106 of the 237 defendants before the SSSC between January 2007 and June 2008. The court uses this designation where it considers the defendants to have espoused radical ideas, such as establishing an Islamic state in Syria or expressed a desire to fight in Iraq. It accused another 22 of membership of the banned Muslim Brotherhood.

“A review of trial notes shows that the prosecution usually charges these defendants with ‘awakening sectarian tensions’ (Art. 285 of the Penal Code) and ‘membership in an association created to change the economic or social structure of the state’ through ‘terrorist means’ (Art. 306 of the Penal Code). The SSSC relied on this last provision to convict at least 106 defendants since January 2007.

“Yet, Human Rights Watch’s investigation shows that in these cases, the prosecutor often failed to produce evidence that the defendants actually belonged to a group planning to use ‘terrorist means,’ as required by Syrian law. ...

“The SSSC has cast the net too wide in its prosecution of Islamists and has blurred the lines between holding or expressing fundamentalist religious opinions or beliefs (which is protected by international law) and actual acts which warrant being criminalized, such as involvement in violence. Individuals who simply hold salafi opinions but do not incite violence and otherwise abide by a state’s laws should not be prosecuted.” [39c] (p4-5)

Refer to the February 2009 HRW report, [Far From Justice – Syria’s Supreme State Security Court](#), for more information on the trials of suspected Islamists and ‘Salafis’, including members of the Muslim Brotherhood. [39c]

See also [Trials before the Supreme State Security Court \(SSSC\)](#)

- 15.18 The USSD Report 2009 noted “There were no new reports on reasons behind the January 2008 arrests of 13 Islamists in the al-Sfeerah area of Aleppo, including students Hamza Haaj Hamza, Hossam Qana’a, and Muhammad Moaz Qana’a, primary school teacher Muhammad Raheem, and pharmacist Barakaat al-Aswad, or the July 2008 arrest of religious scholar Sheikh Yusuf Omar Mobayyedh. There had been no reports on the release of these individuals at year’s end [2009].” [7b] (Section 1d)

#### Al-Ikhwan al-Muslimun (Muslim Brotherhood)

- 15.19 The Syrian Human Rights Committee (SHRC) *Eighth Annual Report on Human Rights in Syria 2009*, reporting on events from January-December 2008, recounted:

“The campaign against members of the Muslim Brotherhood and their supporters has persisted unabated since 1980 in accordance with law 49/1980 which was introduced by the People’s Council (Parliament), at the behest of former president Hafez Al - Assad, on the 7th of July 1980. Al - Assad ratified the law the following day after which it became retroactively effective. The first article of the law carries the death sentence for any member in the Muslim Brotherhood, their supporters and sympathisers. Thousands of Syrian citizens have been killed as a result of introducing this law.” [44c] (p14)

- 15.20 The USSD Report 2009 reported:

“The government continued to deny reports that security forces ‘disappeared’ an estimated 17,000 persons in the late 1970s and early 1980s. According to HRW [Human Rights Watch], the disappeared persons were mostly detained Muslim Brotherhood (MB) members and other Syrian activists, as well as hundreds of Lebanese and Palestinians who were detained in Syria or abducted from Lebanon by Syrian forces or Lebanese and Palestinian militias.” [7b] (Section 1b)

See also [The Muslim Brotherhood rebellion: 1976–1982](#), [Increased opposition and subsequent clampdown: 2003–2007](#), [Relations with Lebanon](#), [Human rights violations by the security forces](#), [Fair trial](#), and [Foreign refugees](#)

- 15.21 The Executive Summary of the Jane’s Information Group’s *Sentinel Country Risk Assessments*, last updated 13 August 2010, stated, “Despite [President] Assad making a number of concessions to the movement in 2005, the Muslim Brotherhood

was not afforded any space within the country. In December 2008, with little prospect of effecting regime change in the foreseeable future, the Muslim Brotherhood signed an agreement with the Syrian government that formally ended its opposition.” [8a]

- 15.22 The SHRC *Ninth Annual Report on Human Rights in Syria 2010*, reporting on events from January-December 2009, noted, following the MB’s declaration that it was suspending its opposition:

“It was hoped that the Syrian Authority would suggest appropriate solutions to persistent issues, such as the issue of Law 49/1980, and consequently the issues of the exiled and missing, and stopping random arrests and trials by the exceptional Supreme State Security Court (SSSC). However, the final analysis shows that the Authority by the end of the year 2009 had been practicing its traditional strict policy without any modification or change.” [44b] (p10)

- 15.23 As noted above in [Islamist / Salafist political activists](#), suspected members of the Muslim Brotherhood continued to be arrested and subjected to trials before the SSSC during 2009 and 2010.

See also [Continued clampdown: June 2007-May 2009](#)

- 15.24 The USSD Report 2009 noted that the government restricted access to the websites of the Muslim Brotherhood, and Syrian Muslim Brotherhood. [7b] (Section 2a) The report also stated, “Persons who have unsuccessfully sought asylum in other countries and who have past connections with the MB have been prosecuted upon their return to Syria.” [7b] (Section 2d)

See also [Internet freedom](#), [Exit and return](#) and [Annex B – Political organisations](#)

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## Kurdish political activists

For recent information on the situation of Kurds in Syria, see the [Syria](#) and [Reports](#) web pages of the UK-based International Support Kurds in Syria Association – SKS. [48a-48b]

- 15.25 The May 2010 report, *Human rights issues concerning Kurds in Syria*, on the joint fact finding mission by the Danish Immigration Service (DIS) and ACCORD/Austrian Red Cross to Syria, Lebanon, and the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) from 21 January to 8 February 2010, noted that a Western diplomatic source believed “...the number of members of Kurdish political parties in Syria is approximately 10,000 ... .” [60a] (p21) The same source further stated that there were about 14 Kurdish political parties and “... estimated that the number of members and sympathizers of Kurdish political parties is approximately 60,000. These 60,000 person[s] are able to mobilize thousands more in connection with Kurdish cultural activities such as Nowruz.” [60a] (p21)

The report also noted that, “According to Rachel Raenell Bernu, Kurdish Human Rights Project, London, the Kurdish political parties are fairly well organised within the context in which they work, but they are ever changing names and make - up. It was added that there are 12 or 13 Kurdish political parties for a relatively small group.” [60a] (p21)

See also [Annex B – Political organisations](#)

- 15.26 The HRW November 2009 report, *Group Denial – Repression of Kurdish Political and Cultural Rights in Syria*, reported:

“In early June 2004, three months after the March 2004 events, officers in Military Intelligence reportedly summoned three Kurdish leaders to warn them that all Kurdish parties in Syria had to cease their political and cultural activities; otherwise, the government would treat them like members of other banned parties. In response to that warning, leaders of 12 unlicensed Kurdish political parties held a meeting in Qamishli on June 15 and issued a statement. They asserted their right to continue their activities and that their lack of legal status was due to the absence of a ‘law organizing political parties’; they noted that all parties in Syria, including those in power, were unlicensed.” [39d] (p18)

See also [Increased opposition and subsequent clampdown: 2003–2007](#)

- 15.27 The Executive Summary of the Jane’s Information Group’s *Sentinel Country Risk Assessments*, last updated 13 August 2010, stated:

“Syria’s 1.7 million Kurds represent the largest, most persistent and potentially the most coherent source of popular disaffection toward the country’s Arab nationalist regime. The Kurdish opposition, comprising more than a dozen banned political parties, was for a long time united under Sheikh Mohammed Mashouq al-Khaznawi, a moderate cleric. However, in May 2005, less than a month after he predicted regime change for Syria in the Canadian press, al-Khaznawi disappeared in Damascus. The discovery of his body on 1 June brought tens of thousands of Kurdish protesters onto the streets of Al Qamishli. Al-Khaznawi’s death removed an important organising force behind the Kurdish opposition movements and has stalled home-grown efforts to force a redressing of major grievances. Kurdish expectations, however, remain high, and calls for change have grown increasingly bold. It is unlikely that the regime will offer any real concessions in the near future as Assad cautiously eyes developments in the Kurdish region of Iraq. The Syrian-Turkish-Iranian consensus on the Kurdish issue at the regional level, and the moderation of Iraqi Kurds’ demands for autonomy constitute significant factors that have lowered Syrian Kurdish expectations and opportunities for separation from, or regime change in, Syria.” [8a]

- 15.28 Various sources consulted for the May 2010 DIS and ACCORD/Austrian Red Cross joint fact finding mission report, *Human rights issues concerning Kurds in Syria*, agreed that Kurdish political parties were primarily personality driven; consequently “... cases of fractioning are usually the result of personal differences and not the result of ideological disagreements.” [60a] (p21) A Western diplomatic source stated:

“... [the Partiya Yekitiya Demokrat, Democratic Union Party] PYD is the one Kurdish political party that distinguishes itself from the other Kurdish political parties. The PYD is the best organised and disciplined Kurdish political party. While other Kurdish parties have more open and personality driven leadership processes, PYD is based on strict and secretive membership and leadership rules. PYD’s estimated 1,000 members in Syria are considered to be very active.” [60a] (p21)

See also [Annex B – Political organisations](#)

- 15.29 The HRW November 2009 report, *Group Denial – Repression of Kurdish Political and Cultural Rights in Syria*, noted:

“Both in connection with suppressing public demonstrations, and separately, Syrian security services have pursued individual Kurdish political leaders and activists. A Kurdish activist told Human Rights Watch in April 2009, ‘There used to be a red line on detaining known Kurdish political leaders. But since 2004, this line is no longer there.’ While security services detained some Kurdish leaders for a few hours only, they referred others for prosecution before military courts, which often sentenced them to jail. ...

“The security forces have focused particularly on arresting members of five political parties: Yekiti, the Kurdish Future Movement, Azadi, the KDP-S [Kurdish Democratic Party of Syria], and the PYD [Hezb al-Ittihad al-dimocrati]. According to Kurdish political activists, the authorities have focused on Yekiti, Azadi, and the Future Movement Party because these three parties frequently organize demonstrations and are more explicit in demanding recognition of Kurdish rights. The harassment of PYD members, according to members of the party and outside observers, is because of Syria’s security agreement with the Turks, and the PYD’s ability to mobilize large crowds.” [39d] (p31)

The [report](#) went on to detail specific instances of the arrest, detention and/or prosecution of members of these five Kurdish parties, and the Kurdish Left Party in Syria, in 2007, 2008 and 2009. [39d] (p31-43)

See also [Relations with Turkey](#), [Human rights violations by the security forces](#), [Judiciary](#), [Arrest and detention – legal rights](#), [Freedom of association and assembly](#) and [Annex B – Political organisations](#)

- 15.30 The USSD Report 2009 stated, “The government was especially harsh toward individuals allegedly involved in Kurdish political or civil society activism.” [7b] (Section 1e) Further, “Kurdish citizens were especially likely to face torture in custody, according to an HRW report released November 26 [2009].” [7b] (Section 1c) The USSD Report 2009 related over a dozen specific cases where the Syrian authorities detained, arrested and/or prosecuted Kurds – at least some of whom were tortured – for their actual or imputed political activities, or for ‘unknown reasons’ in 2009. [7b] (Sections 1c, 1d, 1e, 2b, 6)

See also [Human rights violations by the security forces](#),

- 15.31 The Human Rights Watch’s (HRW) *World Report 2010*, released January 2010 stated:

“Security forces detained at least nine prominent Kurdish political leaders in 2009, including, on January 10, Mustapha Jum’a, acting general secretary of the Azadi Party. On April 14 a military court sentenced two Yekiti party leaders, Fuad ‘Aliko and Hasan Saleh, to 8 and 13 months in prison respectively for membership in an unlicensed political organization. On May 11 a criminal court sentenced Mesh`al Tammo, spokesperson for the Kurdish Future Movement in Syria, to three-and-a-half years in prison for ‘weakening national sentiments’ and ‘broadcasting false information.’ On October 20 a criminal court sentenced Ibrahim Berro, a Yekiti party leader, to eight months in prison for membership in an unlicensed political organization.” [39b] (p4)

- 15.32 HRW's 11 March 2010 article, *Syria: Repression Grows as Europe, US Avoid Discussing Rights*, stated:

"Security forces also have cracked down on political activists, particularly Kurdish leaders. On December 26 [2009], Political Security detained four prominent members of the Kurdish party Yekiti: Hassan Saleh, Muhammad Mustapha, Ma'ruf Mulla Ahmad, and Anwar Naso. All four remain in incommunicado detention. In a recent report, Human Rights Watch documented the increased repression of Syria's Kurds following large-scale Kurdish demonstrations in March 2004." [39e]

- 15.33 Various sources consulted for the May 2010 DIS and ACCORD/Austrian Red Cross joint fact finding mission report, *Human rights issues concerning Kurds in Syria*, agreed that both high and low level Kurdish party members and sympathisers were at risk of arrest, detention and/or trial. [60a] (p26-28)

"Rachel Raenell Bernu, KHRP, stated that within the last year several prominent political persons and several human rights activists whom were not expected to be in risk of being arrested have in fact been arrested. However, the general pattern concerning who is in risk of being arrested has not changed. Political party members are treated more harshly than others. Bernu could not state the names of the low - profile Kurdish political activists who have been arrested lately. Arrests of individuals or small groups of Kurdish political activists who are not well - known often go unreported. On the other hand arrests on a larger scale are usually reported in the media. Being a member of a political party in Syria does not in itself imply that a person is active for the party, and the Kurdish political parties use whoever can help them.

"Representatives of a Kurdish human rights organisation remarked that the courts generally do not distinguish between Kurdish low - level party members and high - level party members. Kurdish political leaders might receive a harder sentence than low - level party members, but in general it does not matter whether the person at trial is a human rights activist, an ordinary member of a Kurdish political party or a party leader." [60a] (p27)

- 15.34 Throughout the same report, the various sources repeatedly noted that there was a high degree of arbitrariness in the behaviour of the security forces towards Kurds in terms of arrest, treatment during and length of detention, and trial. [60a] Whilst the higher a activist's visibility in terms of their participation in political or cultural activities the more likely they were to attract the attention of the authorities, a Kurdish journalist and human rights activist also stated, "Persons are picked randomly by the security services, regardless of their degree of political activity or their political ranks. It was added that there are generally no rules for the function of the security services in Syria. Sometimes the security forces arrest persons unfoundedly." [60a] (p26) Further:

"According to Ahmad Safa, journalist, KRI, most of Kurds who are arrested, harshly treated and even killed by the Syrian government are young persons who very often do not have a strong – if any – affiliation with Kurdish political parties. The source added that elder Kurds and political activists are very often 'only' put in jail, and they are not exposed to same harsh treatment as the young generation.

"A[nother] Western diplomatic source stated that representatives of political parties are treated relatively better by the security services than grassroots activists." [60a] (p28)

Refer to the full May 2010 DIS and ACCORD/Austrian Red Cross report on their joint fact finding mission, [Human rights issues concerning Kurds in Syria](#), for more information. [60a]

- 15.35 The HRW February 2009 report, *Far From Justice – Syria’s Supreme State Security Court*, reported:

“The arrest and trials of Kurdish activists is part of the broader Syrian policy of suppressing the demands for cultural rights and increased autonomy by the Kurdish minority in Syria. ...

“The most common accusation against Kurdish activists is undertaking any ‘acts, speeches, writings or other means to cut-off part of Syrian land to join it to another country’ (Art. 267 of the Penal Code). The SSSC invoked this provision against at least 16 defendants between January 2007 and June 2008, the vast majority of whom had only participated in peaceful activities. Examples include sentencing activists for presenting a petition to the National Assembly to ‘remove the barriers imposed on the Kurdish language and culture’ or for participating in a peaceful demonstration to demand that Syrian authorities allow Kurdish children to learn in their own language.” [39c] (p5)

Refer to the February 2009 HRW report, [Far From Justice – Syria’s Supreme State Security Court](#), for more information on the trials of Kurdish activists. [39c]

See also [Fair trial](#), [Freedom of speech and media](#) and [Kurds](#)

- 15.36 Freedom House’s *Freedom in the World – 2010* reported:

“Suspected Kurdish activists are routinely dismissed from schools and public-sector jobs. ... While one demonstration to demand more rights for the Kurdish community was allowed to take place in northern Syria, security forces stopped four demonstrations in February and March, detaining dozens of people and referring some to the judiciary for prosecution. Intelligence services generally monitor Kurdish leaders closely, sometimes excluding them and their families from public-sector employment. At least 15 such leaders are barred from leaving Syria.” [14a] (Political Rights and Civil Liberties)

- 15.37 The HRW November 2009 report, *Group Denial – Repression of Kurdish Political and Cultural Rights in Syria*, also detailed similar harassment of Kurdish activists and their families. [39d] (p51-52) Additionally, the report noted the security forces continued to call activists in for interrogation even after their release, and “... regularly arrange for Kurdish activists [and their family members in public employment] to be relocated to faraway posts as a way of punishing them...”. [39d] (p51)

- 15.38 The *Report of the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, Githu Muigai – Addendum – Summary of cases transmitted to governments and replies received* of 21 May 2010 recounted specific allegations of mistreatment received on the arrest, detention and mistreatment of unnamed Kurdish activists, and their families in 2008 and 2009. [56a] (p28-31)

See also [Surveillance](#), [Kurds](#) and [Exit and return](#)

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## 16. FREEDOM OF SPEECH AND MEDIA

For recent reports on freedom of the media, see the [Committee to Protect Journalists \(CPJ\)](#) [15e] and the [Reporters sans Frontières \(RSF\)](#) [16b] web pages on Syria.

- 16.01 The US Department of State's *2009 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices* (USSD Report 2009), released 11 March 2010, noted:

"The constitution provides for freedom of speech and the press. The government significantly restricted these rights in practice, relying when necessary on Emergency Law provisions that suspend such rights and supersede constitutional practices. The government strictly controlled the dissemination of information and prohibited criticism of the government and discussion of sectarian issues, including religious and ethnic minority rights. Authorities detained and abused journalists, writers, and other individuals for expressions of opinion that violated these restrictions, leading them to practice self-censorship. The government also attempted to impede criticism through monitoring of political meetings and informer networks.

"Emergency Law and penal code articles dealing with crimes against state security allow the government broad discretion to determine what constitutes illegal expression. The Emergency Law prohibits publication of 'false information' that opposes 'the goals of the revolution.' Penal code articles prohibit acts or speech inciting sectarianism." [7b] (Section 2a)

- 16.02 Freedom House's survey, *Freedom in the World – 2010: Syria*, released 3 May 2010 stated, "Freedom of expression is heavily restricted. Vaguely worded articles of the penal code, the Emergency Law, and a 2001 Publications Law criminalize the publication of material that harms national unity, tarnishes the image of the state, or threatens the 'goals of the revolution.' Many journalists, writers, and intellectuals have been arrested under these laws." [14a] (Political Rights and Civil Liberties)

- 16.03 The Human Rights Watch (HRW) February 2009 report, *Far From Justice – Syria's Supreme State Security Court*, reported:

"Of the 237 cases it is known to have decided since January 2007, the SSSC [Supreme State Security Court] sentenced at least 153 of the defendants on the basis of vague and overbroad offenses, such as 'issuing calls that awaken racial or sectarian tensions,' spreading 'false or exaggerated information that weakens national sentiment,' or undertaking 'acts that [...] disrupt Syria's ties to foreign states.' The Syrian government has long relied on such broadly worded 'security' provisions in its penal code, primarily based on speech or writings, as its primary lever to silence critics, or perceived critics." [39c] (p3)

Refer to the February 2009 HRW report, [Far From Justice – Syria's Supreme State Security Court](#), for more information on the criminalisation of freedom of expression. [39c]

See also [Trials before the Supreme State Security Court \(SSSC\)](#)

- 16.04 The USSD Report 2009 specifically noted:

"The law prohibits the publication of 'inaccurate' information, particularly if it 'causes public unrest, disturbs international relations, violates the dignity of the state or

national unity, affects the morale of the armed forces, or inflicts harm on the national economy and the safety of the monetary system.’ Persons found guilty of publishing such information are subject to prison terms ranging from one to three years and fines ranging from 500,000 to 1 million pounds (\$10,000 to \$20,000). The government used these laws during the year to suppress criticism. The law also imposes strict punishments for reporters who do not reveal their government sources in response to government requests.” [7b] (Section 2a)

16.05 The RSF *Country Report – Syria*, released 5 January 2010, stated:

“Media expansion in the past few years has not led to pluralism. And the return of Syria to the international scene in 2008 has not altered the status quo since the Baath Party has continued to keep a stranglehold on the media. Even though a few publications not controlled by the state have appeared in recent years, this has not given rise to any liberalisation of news and information. All media are subject to a highly restrictive press decree, passed in 2001, which aims to prevent any attempt to challenge certain unassailable principles, such as the interests of the Syrian people, the Baath Party (in power since 1963), national unity, the armed forces and the president’s policy.” [16a]

16.06 In a September 2009 article, the same organisation reported:

“‘Repression has been stepped up considerably since the start of the summer,’ Reporters Without Borders said. ‘Under intelligence agency influence, the information ministry has been conducting a series of interrogations and arrests of human rights activists, lawyers and journalists.’

“The press freedom organisation added: ‘The journalists have been questioned about articles that are said to constitute ‘an attack on the nation’ or threaten ‘state security.’ The summonses and the closures of their offices have left them feeling confused and harassed.’” [16c]

16.07 The Committee to Protect Journalists’ (CPJ) *Attacks on the Press 2009* report noted, “Intelligence agents and police shut the Damascus office of the Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression, a local advocacy group, on September 13 [2009], according to local and regional news reports. Authorities did not give a reason for the shutdown, the center said in a statement. The center, which also had an office in France, continued to document press freedom cases in late year.” [15a] (Syria)

16.08 Freedom House stated, “Academic freedom is heavily restricted. Several private universities have recently been founded, and the extent of academic freedom within them varies. University professors have been dismissed or imprisoned for expressing dissent.” [14a] (Political Rights and Civil Liberties)

On 15 July 2010, RSF published a critique of press freedom in Syria, [Ten years after Bashar el-Assad’s installation, the government still decides who can be a journalist.](#) [16f]

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## PRINT MEDIA

16.09 The USSD Report 2009 noted:

“The government heavily influenced the media, and the government or the Ba’ath Party owned most newspaper publishing houses. A number of quasi-independent periodicals, usually owned and produced by figures with government connections, were published during the year, including the National Progressive Front’s (NPF) Communist party newspaper *The People’s Voice*; the NPF’s Socialist Union party’s newspaper *The Unionist*; and privately owned newspapers *The Nation (Al-Watan)*, *The Economy (Al-Iqtissad)*, and *Al-Khabar*, the latter two of which were sometimes critical of the government’s economic policies and performance. The government prohibited all Kurdish-language publications, although there were credible reports that such publications were available in the country. The Ministry of Information continued to deny permission to publish *Al-Ousboua Al-Iqtissadi*, a business weekly, and *Al-Riyada wa Al-Shabab*, a new magazine for young sports fans. In May Prime Minister Mohamad Naji al-Utri decreed that public-sector entities (e.g., businesses and education facilities) could not work with any media outlet except the state-run Syrian Arab News Agency. Civil society activists claimed this was an effort to marginalize the private media’s access to social and economic information. At year’s end it remained unclear whether the public sector was complying with the decree or how the government would enforce it.” [7b] (Section 2a)

16.10 The Freedom House survey, *Freedom in the World 2010*, reported, “More than a dozen privately owned newspapers and magazines have sprouted up in recent years, and criticism of government policy is tolerated, provided it is nuanced and does not criticize the president. The 2001 press law permits the authorities to arbitrarily deny or revoke publishing licenses and compels private print outlets to submit all material to government censors.” [14a] (Political Rights and Civil Liberties)

16.11 The USSD Report 2009 stated:

“The Ministry of Information and the Ministry of Culture and National Guidance (MCNG) continued to censor domestic and foreign publications prior to circulation or importation and stopped circulation when content was judged to be critical or sensitive. Publication or distribution of any material security officials deemed threatening or embarrassing to the government was prohibited. Censorship usually was greater for materials in Arabic. Journalists also practiced self-censorship.” [7b] (Section 2a)

The report went on to relate three specific instances of censorship of printed media by the Syrian authorities during 2009. [7b] (Section 2a)

16.12 The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) *Annual Report on Human Rights 2009*, published March 2010, reported “In June [2009], the Ministry banned the distribution of youth magazine *Shabbalek* and the Lebanese newspaper *Al Ahkbar Daily* and in September, the Syrian security authorities closed the Syrian Centre for Media and Freedom of Expression.” [5b] (p159)

16.13 The USSD Report 2009 noted, “The print and electronic media were critical at times of the Ba’ath Party and government performance. They reported openly on a range of social and economic issues, such as corruption in the energy and communications sectors.” [7b] (Section 2a) However, the FCO *Annual Report on Human Rights 2009* stated, “The Ministry of Information closes media organisations that are critical.” [5b] (p159)

## RADIO AND TELEVISION

16.14 The Freedom House survey, *Freedom in the World – 2010*, reported, “Apart from a handful of radio stations with non-news formats, all broadcast media are state owned. However, satellite dishes are common, giving most Syrians access to foreign broadcasts.” [14a] (Political Rights and Civil Liberties)

16.15 The USSD Report 2009 stated:

“Whereas the government or the Ba’ath Party owned and operated some radio and most television companies, examples of privately owned stations included Al-Medina radio station and Ad-Dounia and Al-Rai television stations. The Ministry of Information closely monitored radio and television news and entertainment programs to ensure adherence to government policies. The government did not interfere with broadcasts from abroad. Satellite dishes were widely used and available.” [7b] (Section 2a)

The report went on to relate two specific instances where the Syrian authorities had censored a television station and a television talk show in 2009. [7b] (Section 2a)

16.16 The CPJ *Attacks on the Press 2009* report stated:

“On July 29 [2009], authorities shut the Damascus office of the Dubai-based Al-Mashriq satellite channel, according to local and regional press reports. Internal Security agents directed staff to report to a government security office in the capital, according to Akhbar al-Sharq, a London-based news Web site. Agents interrogated some employees and forced them to pledge no longer to work for the station, the Web site reported. News reports said the channel, owned by Ghassan Abud, a Syrian businessman, had been shut for filming a Damascus market without permission from authorities.” [15a] (Syria)

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## JOURNALISTS

16.17 Freedom House’s survey on *Freedom of the Press 2009* reported, “Journalists are frequently harassed and detained. Harassment includes banishment from the country, failure to respond to accreditation requests, and extralegal intimidation. A wave of arrests continued in January following a December 2007 meeting of the Damascus Declaration, a group organized around a 2005 manifesto calling for democratic change in Syria.” [14b] The organisation’s *Freedom in the World 2010* survey also noted that the 2001 Press Law “... imposes punishment on reporters who do not reveal their sources in response to government requests.” [14a] (Political Rights and Civil Liberties)

16.18 In a July 2010 open letter to President Bashir al-Asad, the CPJ highlighted the case of “...Ali al-Abdallah, a freelance journalist who is being held despite completing 30-month prison sentence for a critical article he wrote while in prison...” [15f] Also “... two investigative journalists, Bassam Ali and Suhaila Ismail ...currently facing a military trial in connection to reports they wrote in 2005 and 2006 on corruption...”. [15f] Similarly, RSF released a critique of al-Asad’s first decade in power in July 2010, which noted, “Journalists and cyber-dissidents are constantly watched and are often summoned for questioning. Those who challenge government policy quickly find themselves being arrested and jailed. Many have left the country because of the threats and harassment.” [16e] (Repression of government opponents who want democracy)

16.19 Freedom House's survey *Freedom in the World 2010* reported:

"Criticism of the government can lead to legal suits, fines, harassment, and dismissal. Several journalists were reportedly removed from their positions during the year for criticism of the government and meeting with international media organizations. ... In February [2008] the MOI [Ministry of Information] briefly halted distribution of three journals for criticizing government policies. The ban on one, *Al-Hal*, remained in place at year's end [2008]." [14b]

16.20 The USSD Report 2009 noted:

"As in previous years, government forces detained, arrested, and harassed journalists and other writers for works deemed critical of the state. Harassment included banning from the country, firing for association with international organizations, and failing to respond to requests for journalists' accreditation. The government also arrested journalists and others who wrote in Kurdish or in favor of greater Kurdish rights." [7b] (Section 2a)

The report went on to relate five specific instances of the arrest or harassment of journalists by the Syrian authorities in 2009. [7b] (Section 2a) Including:

"On November 22 [2009], state security agents arrested journalist Ma'an Akal from his workplace at *al-Thawra* newspaper, according to human rights observers. Although the specific reasons for his arrest were unknown at year's end, human rights observers suspected Akal's forthright reporting on corruption inside the regime may have been a contributing factor. Akal is a former political prisoner who spent nine years in prison for being a member of the 'Labor League'." (USSD Report 2009) [7b] (Section 2a)

16.21 Freedom House's survey *Freedom in the World 2010* reported, "Since the Kurdish protests in 2004, the government has cracked down on journalists calling for the expansion of Kurdish or regional rights; the information minister fired a newspaper editor in Homs in August 2009 for publishing a column about regional identity." [14a] (Political rights and Civil Liberties)

See also [Kurdish political activists](#) and [Kurds](#)

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## INTERNET FREEDOM

16.22 The Freedom House survey on *Freedom of the Press 2009* noted that, "While Syria does not have internet-specific laws, charges can be filed against internet users under the Press Law, the Emergency Law, and the penal code." [14b] The Human Rights Watch (HRW) *World Report 2010*, released January 2010, stated, "The government has extended to online outlets restrictions it imposes on other media. Internet censorship of political websites is pervasive and extends to popular websites such as Blogger (Google's blogging engine), Facebook, and YouTube." [39b] (p2) A May 2009 RSF article reported, "Reporters Without Borders' concerns about online free expression in Syria have increased as a result of an informal meeting on 10 May [2009] of the committee tasked with drafting a new press law. While the press law would continue to be subject to the criminal code, the proposed changes would extend its penalties to Internet users." [16d]

- 16.23 The October 2009 CPJ report *Middle East Bloggers: The Street Leads Online* stated, "Syria extends its press law to prohibit electronic publications from publishing political content unless the site is specifically licensed to do so. The publication of 'falsehoods' or 'fabricated reports' is punishable by fines and prison terms." [15b] The CPJ April 2009 report, *10 Worst Countries to be a Blogger* included Syria stating:

"The government uses filtering methods to block politically sensitive sites. Authorities detain bloggers for posting content, even third-party material, deemed to be 'false' or detrimental to 'national unity.' Self-censorship is pervasive. In 2008, the Ministry of Communications ordered Internet café owners to get identification from all patrons, to record customer names and times of use, and to submit the documentation regularly to authorities. Human rights groups noted that authorities harass and detain bloggers perceived as antigovernment." [15d]

See also [Surveillance](#)

- 16.24 Freedom House's *Freedom in the World 2010* survey reported:

"Syrians access the internet only through state-run servers, which block more than 160 sites associated with the opposition, Kurdish politics, Islamic organizations, human rights, and certain foreign news services, particularly those in Lebanon. Social-networking and video-sharing websites such as Facebook and YouTube are also blocked. E-mail correspondence is reportedly monitored by intelligence agencies, which often require internet cafe owners to monitor customers. In practice, internet users often find ways around these restrictions, and poor connections and high costs tend to hinder access more effectively than government regulations. The government has been more successful in fostering self-censorship through intimidation; a dozen cyberdissidents are currently imprisoned." [14a] (**Political Rights and Civil Liberties**)

- 16.25 The USSD Report 2009 stated:

"The Internet was widely available in both dial-up and high-speed wireless connections, and Web cafes continued to proliferate throughout major cities. According to 2008 International Telecommunication Union statistics, approximately 17 percent of the country's inhabitants used the Internet. The government relied on its press and publications laws, the penal code, and the Emergency Law to censor access to the Internet. The government also monitored Internet usage and in some instances blocked access to Internet sites or Web-based e-mail that contained or transmitted information deemed politically sensitive." [7b] (**Section 2a**)

- 16.26 The FCO *Annual Report on Human Rights 2009*, published March 2010, reported, "The Syrian government monitors internet use closely. Internet cafés are a focus of the Syrian security services, which act to catch people who blog against the government." [5b] (p159)

- 16.27 A CPJ article of November 2009 on the OpenNet Initiative (ONI), which tracks the blocking and filtering of the Internet around the world related:

"'We are now onto third-generation controls,' [project co-ordinator, Jillian] York said of Internet censorship. 'The first generation was simple filtering, IP blocking in China, for example.' The second generation was surveillance, which ranged from placing spies or closed-circuit cameras in Internet cafés to installing tracking software on computers themselves. 'The third generation controls combine all the above. We see it in China, Syria, and Burma. It's a very broad approach,' York laments." [15c]

See also [Surveillance](#)

16.28 Amnesty International's *Annual Report 2010* stated:

"Syria remained under a national state of emergency in force continuously since 1963 and which, over many years, has been used to suppress and punish even peaceful dissent. This pattern continued throughout 2009. ... bloggers, ... and others who criticized the government or exposed human rights violations were subject to arbitrary arrest and often prolonged detention or were sentenced to prison terms after unfair trials before the grossly deficient Supreme State Security Court (SSSC) or Military and Criminal Courts. They included prisoners of conscience. Others, including former detainees, were subject to travel bans." [12b] (p314)

See also [Trials before the Supreme State Security Court \(SSSC\)](#)

16.29 The USSD Report 2009 stated:

"According to an international human rights group, all three of the country's Internet service providers regularly blocked access to a variety of Web sites. The government restricted access to Web sites associated with Kurdish opposition groups, the MB [Muslim Brotherhood], and the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood. Other electronic media the government restricted during the year included Amazon.com, social networking Web site Facebook, video sharing Web site YouTube, online pan-Arabic newspapers such as *Asharq al-Awsat*, online telephone service Skype, and online news services such as LevantNews.com. The proreform Web site All4syria.org has remained blocked in Syria since 2004. According to a May Syria Media Center report, the government blocked 225 Internet sites in 2008, up from 159 in 2007; 21 percent of the banned sites were Kurdish, and 15 percent were run by Syrian opposition groups. Cyberdissidents.com reported that eight cyberdissidents were imprisoned in the country and that the earliest arrests dated back to 2005." [7b] (Section 2a)

16.30 The FCO *Annual Report on Human Rights 2009* noted, "In 2009, three Syrian bloggers were imprisoned for writing anti-government statements." [5b] (p159) The USSD Report related details of three specific instances of the Syrian authorities blocking web sites, and the sentencing of a cyber dissident and blogger – both to three years' imprisonment – during 2009. [7b] (Section 2a)

16.31 A HRW article of March 2010, *Syria: Repression Grows as Europe, US Avoid Discussing Rights*, reported:

"On December 27, 2009, State Security called in Tal al-Mallohi, 19, a secondary school student, for interrogation, reportedly for articles she wrote and distributed on her blog. A few days later, the security services confiscated her computer and detained her. A Syrian human rights activist told Human Rights Watch that she remains in detention. Human Rights Watch was unable to determine what article the security forces deemed objectionable." [39e]

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## 17. HUMAN RIGHTS INSTITUTIONS, ORGANISATIONS AND ACTIVISTS

- 17.01 The June 2007 concluding comments of the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (UN CEDAW) reported, “While appreciating the State party’s emphasis on working in cooperation with civil society organizations and noting that the State party is in the process of revising the Associations Law, the Committee is concerned that the currently applicable law hinders establishment and operation of civil society organizations.” [32a] (para 35)
- 17.02 The Freedom House survey, *Freedom in the World 2010*, reported, “Freedom of association is severely restricted. All nongovernmental organizations must register with the government, which generally denies registration to reformist or human rights groups. Leaders of unlicensed human rights groups have frequently been jailed for publicizing state abuses.” [14a] (Political Rights and Civil Liberties)
- 17.03 The Human Rights Watch (HRW) *World Report 2010*, released January 2010 stated, “All Syrian human rights groups remain unlicensed, as officials consistently deny their requests for registration.” [39b] (p3)
- 17.04 The World Organisation Against Torture’s (OMCT) *Steadfast in Protest – Observatory for the protection of human rights defenders: Annual Report 2009*, released 19 June 2009, noted:
- “Under Law No. 93 of July 8, 1958, the creation of an association is subject to authorisation. For several years, applications for registration of human rights organisations have been systematically denied or have received no reply. ...
- “Therefore, members of those human rights organisations were forced to operate illegally under the threat of being prosecuted under Article 71 of Law No. 93, under which any activity conducted under a non-registered association is liable to a fine and a sentence of three months’ imprisonment or under Article 306 of the Criminal Code prohibiting the creation of unlawful organisations.” [34a] (p483-484)
- 17.05 The OMCT also reported:
- “... the provisions of the emergency law provide the security forces and administrative authorities with powers they subsequently use to restrict the activities of human rights defenders and violate freedom of peaceful assembly, which is nonetheless recognised by Article 39 of the Syrian Constitution. Indeed, any demonstration or gathering of more than five people requires prior authorisation from the Ministry of the Interior. The authorities always refuse to issue such permits and unauthorised public meetings were systematically repressed by the authorities.” [34a] (p482)
- 17.06 The US Department of State *2009 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices* (USSD Report 2009), released 11 March 2010, stated, “There were no legal domestic human rights groups, but approximately 14 human rights groups operated illegally in the country. During the year [2009] there were reports that the government harassed domestic human rights activists by subjecting them to regular surveillance and imposing travel bans as activists sought to attend workshops and conferences outside the country.” [7b] (Section 5) The OMCT *Annual Report 2009* noted, “Civil society activists who denounced the Kurdish situation were also particularly targeted by Government repression in 2008.” [34a] (p483)
- 17.07 The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) *Annual Report on Human Rights 2009*, published March 2010, stated that human rights lawyers and defenders were monitored by the security services and “... often subject to arbitrary arrest and

detention.” [5b] (p158) The USSD Report 2009 noted that, in 2009, the government “... maintained pressure on civil society and human rights activists. Under the authority of laws that criminalize membership and activity in organizations the government deems illegal, security forces arrested a number of persons linked to local human rights groups and prodemocracy student groups ...”. [7b] (Section 1d)

Further, “During the year [2009] the government sentenced to prison several high-profile members of the human rights and civil society communities.” [7b] The report went on to relate the ‘disappearance’, detention, arrest and/or trial of over a dozen human rights, civil society or pro-democracy activists by the Syrian authorities in 2009. [7b] (Sections 1a, 1b, 1e, 2a)

- 17.08 The *Report of the Special Rapporteur on independence of judges and lawyers, Gabriela Carina Knaul de Albuquerque e Silva – Addendum – Communications to and from Governments* of 18 June 2010 noted the specific case of detention and disbarment of Mr. Muhannad Al-Hassani, lawyer, President of the Syrian Human Rights Organization (SHRO) and Commissioner of the International Commission of Jurists. [56b] (p152-153)

The same report also noted the harassment, arrest and incommunicado detention of Mr. Mustafa Ismail, a lawyer of Kurdish origin, who “...writes frequently about the treatment of Kurds in the Syrian Arab Republic and Turkey for a number of foreign-based websites.” [56b] (p153-154)

See also [Recent developments](#), [Judiciary](#) and [Kurds](#)

- 17.09 The OMCT *Annual Report 2009* stated:

“As of late 2008, dozens of human rights defenders remained detained in Syrian prisons for ‘weakening the national sentiment’ by ‘issuing calls’ or ‘spreading false or exaggerated information’ (respectively Article 285 and 286 of the Syrian Criminal Code), jailed for the most part with ordinary criminal prisoners. Some were subjected to ill-treatments, while others were deprived of care. Moreover, Syrian authorities refused rights of ordinary criminal prisoners to human rights defenders. Indeed, Syrian law on penalties allots prisoners the right to request an amnesty after serving three quarters of their sentence.” [34a] (p484)

The OMCT report went on to relate the specifics of a number of high-profile activists in detention in 2008, and further noted, “... the Syrian authorities have especially increased the use of Article 285, of the Criminal Code to arrest and convict several other human rights defenders.” [34a] (p484)

- 17.10 The USSD Report 2009 stated, “Several domestic human rights and civil society groups held meetings without registering with the government or obtaining prior approval because they assumed permission would be denied, as has regularly been the case in the past. In many instances the government took steps to disrupt such gatherings or prevent them from occurring.” [7b] (Section 2b)

- 17.11 Amnesty International’s *Annual Report 2010* stated:

“Syria remained under a national state of emergency in force continuously since 1963 and which, over many years, has been used to suppress and punish even peaceful dissent. This pattern continued throughout 2009. ... human rights defenders, ... and others who criticized the government or exposed human rights violations were

subject to arbitrary arrest and often prolonged detention or were sentenced to prison terms after unfair trials before the grossly deficient Supreme State Security Court (SSSC) or Military and Criminal Courts. They included prisoners of conscience. Others, including former detainees, were subject to travel bans.” [12b] (p314)

- 17.12 The Save the Children (STC) Sweden report, *Child Rights Situation Analysis for MENA Region*, of August 2008 noted:

“Civil society organisations (CSO) in Syria include charities, religious organisations, cultural and social associations, development organisations and trade unions. Article 49 of the Constitution governs the establishment of unions, social and professional organisations, and production cooperatives. However, the CSOs are not truly independent, and human rights defenders and activists continue to be at risk of detention and harassment. The Emergency Laws imposed in 1963 have remained in place, enabling the government to act in many areas in the name of security, including cracking down on civil society advocacy groups, such as the Committee for the Defence of Human Rights in Syria, and restricting contacts between Syrian organisations and foreign embassies.” [33a] (p115-116)

See also [Human rights violations by the security forces](#), [Fair trial](#), [Freedom of association and assembly](#) and [Exit and return](#)

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## TRAVEL ABROAD

- 17.13 The USSD Report 2009 noted:

“During the year [2009] the government increased the use of travel bans to prevent more than 400 critics of the regime, human rights activists, political reformers, and civil society leaders from leaving the country, according to a 2009 study by the Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression. The study named 400 individuals whose travel has been restricted; human rights observers believed the actual number of activists affected by a travel ban was in the tens of thousands, partly because many citizens learned of the ban against their travel only after they were prevented from departing the country.” [7b] (Section 2d)

- 17.14 The OMCT *Annual Report 2009* stated, “In 2008, more than 102 travel bans would have been issued by the authorities against human rights defenders who were prevented from leaving Syria to attend regional or international workshops and seminars.” [34a] (p485) The Human Rights Watch (HRW) *World Report 2010*, released January 2010, noted, “The government continues to prevent activists from traveling abroad, and in some cases, their families. ... The SCM [Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression] issued a report in February listing 417 political and human rights activists banned from traveling.” [39b] (p3)

See also [Exit and return](#)

## INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS

- 17.15 The USSD Report 2009 stated:

“In general the government remained highly suspicious of international human rights NGOs and typically did not allow them into the country. As a matter of policy, the

government has denied in the past to international human rights groups that it commits human rights abuses. The government did not permit HRW or AI to visit the country during the year. At year's end [2009] the government had signed memoranda of understanding with at least 14 international humanitarian NGOs – including Première Urgence, the Danish Refugee Council, the Danish Red Cross, International Medical Corps, the Qatari Red Crescent, the Institut Européen de Coopération et de Développement, the Turkish Blue Crescent, Enfants du Monde-Droits de l'Homme, HELP, International Rescue Committee, Mercy Corps, and the Islamic Relief France – primarily for projects related to assisting Iraqi refugees. The government monitored this work closely and restricted outreach efforts.” [7b] (Section 5)

See also [Internally displaced people \(IDPs\)](#) and [Foreign refugees](#)

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## 18. CORRUPTION

- 18.01 The US Department of State *2009 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices* (USSD Report 2009) released 11 March 2010, stated:

“The law provides criminal penalties for official corruption. During the year [2009] the government led a major national anticorruption campaign that produced scores of arrests; nonetheless, officials continued to engage in corrupt practices with impunity. During the year there were reports of prison guards demanding bribes from prisoners and their visitors. On August 9, *White and Black* magazine reported that corruption was rampant. Visiting family members who paid higher bribes enjoyed visits to detainees without police surveillance. Bribes reportedly ranged from 200 to 3,300 pounds (\$4 to \$75). Human rights lawyers and family members of detainees also cited solicitation of bribes for favorable decisions and provision of basic services by government officials throughout the legal process in both courts and prisons. Traffic police officers regularly solicited bribes from drivers, and child laborers reported bribing police to avoid arrest.” [7b] (Section 4)

The report went on to relate the details of six specific instances of the Syrian authorities taking action against alleged corrupt officials. [7b] (Section 4)

- 18.02 The Freedom House report *Freedom in the World – 2010*, released 3 May 2010 stated:

“Regime officials and their families benefit from a range of illicit economic activities. Syria is slowly opening itself economically by removing heavy tariffs and eliminating subsidies, but these limited reforms benefit a small minority at the expense of average citizens. Corruption is widespread, and bribery is often necessary to navigate the bureaucracy. Syria was ranked 126 out of 180 countries surveyed in Transparency International’s 2009 Corruption Perceptions Index.” [14a] (Political Rights and Civil Liberties)

- 18.03 The Transparency International *2009 Corruptions Perceptions Index – Regional Highlights: Middle East and North Africa* also ranked Syria 14 out of the 19 countries surveyed in the region with a score of 2.6. (CPI Score relates to perceptions of the degree of corruption as seen to exist among public officials and politicians by business people and country analysts. It ranges between 10 (highly clean) and 0 (highly corrupt). [21a]

See also [Economy](#) and [Human rights violations by the security forces](#)

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## 19. FREEDOM OF RELIGION

- 19.01 The United States Department of State's *International Religious Freedom Report 2009* (USSD IRF Report 2009) released 26 October 2009, reported:

"The Constitution provides for freedom of religion; however, the Government imposes restrictions on this right. While there is no official state religion, the Constitution requires that the president be Muslim and stipulates that Islamic jurisprudence is a principal source of legislation. The Constitution provides for freedom of faith and religious practice, provided that religious rites do not disturb the public order; however, the government restricts full freedom of choice on religious matters." [7c] (p1)

- 19.02 The Minority Rights Group International (MRG) report, *State of the World's Minorities and Indigenous Peoples 2010: Syria*, of July 2010 noted:

"The majority of Syria's population is Sunni Muslim (74 per cent). The country is also home to a number of other Muslim groups, including Alawites, who are a sect of Shia Islam, Ismailis and Shia. Together they constitute 13 per cent of the population. Druze account for another 3 per cent of the population, while various Christian groups make up the remaining 10 per cent. There is also a small Yezidi community of 30,000 members and between 100 and 200 Jews." [41a]

- 19.03 The USSD IRF Report 2009 also highlighted that "The minority Alawite sect holds an elevated political status disproportionate to its numbers because President Asad and his family are Alawites." [7c] (Section I)

- 19.04 The Freedom House survey, *Freedom in the World 2010*, stated "... the government tightly monitors mosques and controls the appointment of Muslim clergy. All nonworship meetings of religious groups require permits, and religious fundraising is closely scrutinized. The Alawite minority dominates the officer corps of the security forces." [14a] (Political Rights and Civil Liberties)

## RELIGIOUS GROUPS

- 19.05 The USSD IRF Report 2009 reported, "The Constitution provides for freedom of faith and religious practice, provided that religious rites do not disturb the public order. Government policies and the judicial system allowed many groups to worship freely, although some restrictions were imposed. The Government bans Jehovah's Witnesses, and they must conduct their activities without attracting its attention." [7c] (Section II) Further:

"All religions and religious orders must register with the Government, which monitors fundraising and requires permits for all religious and nonreligious group meetings, except for worship. The registration process can be complicated and lengthy, but the Government usually allows groups to operate informally while awaiting approval.

“For issues of personal status, the Government requires its citizens to be affiliated nominally with Christianity, Judaism, or Islam. Religious affiliation is documented on the birth certificate and is required on legal documentation when getting married or traveling for religious pilgrimage.” [7c] (Section II)

See also [Judiciary](#), [Women](#) and [Children](#)

19.06 The same report also stated:

“Government policies and the judicial system allowed many groups to worship freely. However, the Government aggressively prosecuted persons for their alleged membership in the Muslim Brotherhood or Salafist movements. Human rights groups claimed that many of the accused were simply followers of a particular preacher or mosque. In addition, the Government required Jews to receive government permission to travel, applied extra scrutiny to their licenses, property and other government papers, and excluded them from employment in the civil service and armed forces.

“All groups, religious and nonreligious, are subject to surveillance and monitoring by government security services. The Government particularly considers militant Islam a threat to the regime and closely monitors those individuals it considers to be religious militants. While the Government allows mosques to be built, it monitors and controls sermons and often closes mosques between prayers.” [7c] (Section II)

19.07 An Amnesty International Urgent Action of July 2010, highlighted the case of Nader Nseir, a 38 year-old Syrian Jehovah’s Witness:

“While visiting Syria in 2009, Nader Nseir was summoned to the Political Security branch in Latakia, western Syria. Amnesty International has received reports that he was pressured to become an informer for them about the Jehovah’s Witnesses, but refused. He had his ID card confiscated by Political Security and, fearing he would not be allowed to cross the border as a result, returned to Lebanon clandestinely. In Lebanon, he was arrested for illegally entering the country and, on 7 May 2010, he was deported to Syria where he was arrested upon arrival. Since his arrest, his family has attempted to discover his whereabouts, including, it appears, by enquiring at the detention centres of a number of different security forces, but the authorities have reportedly not disclosed where he is or any other information about him.” [12f]

See also [Political affiliation](#)

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## PROSELYTISING

19.08 The USSD IRF Report 2009 stated:

“While there is no civil law prohibiting proselytizing, the Government discourages it and occasionally prosecutes missionaries for ‘posing a threat to the relations among religious groups’ when they engage in such activities. Most charges of this kind carry sentences of imprisonment from five years to life, although such sentences are often reduced to one or two years.

“There were no reported cases of the Government prosecuting anyone for posing a threat to the relations among religious groups during the reporting period. Instead,

there were several reports that the Government gave Shi'a favorable treatment and allowed Shi'a missionaries to construct mosques and convert Sunnis. Anecdotal reports claimed Shi'a missionaries, supposedly backed by Iranian interests, provided financial incentives to individuals converting from Sunni to Shi'a Islam. The Government does not consider this missionary activity as proselytizing because the country makes no legal distinction between Islamic sects." [7c] (Section II)

## CONVERSION

19.09 The USSD IRF Report 2009 stated:

"The Government does not recognize the religious status of Muslims who convert to Christianity. The reverse is not true. In the event of a conversion to Christianity, the Government still regards the individual convert as Muslim and still subject to Shari'a (Islamic Law). A Muslim woman cannot marry a Christian man, but a Christian woman can marry a Muslim man. If a Christian woman marries a Muslim man, however, she is not allowed to be buried in a cemetery for Muslims unless she converts to Islam. If a person wants to convert from Christianity to Islam, the law states that the presiding Muslim cleric must inform the prospective convert's diocese." [7c] (Section II)

19.10 The same report also noted, "Social conventions and religious proscriptions made conversion relatively rare, especially Muslim-to-Christian conversion, which is technically illegal. In many cases, societal pressure forced such converts to relocate within the country or leave the country to practice their new religion openly." [7c] (Section III)

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## 20. ETHNIC GROUPS

20.01 The US Department of State *2009 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices* (USSD Report 2009), released 11 March 2010 stated, "The government generally permitted national and ethnic minorities to conduct traditional, religious, and cultural activities; the government's actions toward the Kurdish minority remained a significant exception." [7b] (Section 6) Further:

"During the year [2009], according to the IWPR [Institute for War and Peace Reporting], authorities began enforcing a years-old ruling that requires at least 60 percent of the words on signs in shops and restaurants to be in Arabic. Officials enforcing the ruling reportedly sent patrols into commercial districts to threaten shop owners with closure if they refused to change the names of their stores into Arabic. Minority groups – especially Kurds, who the government appeared to target specifically – regarded the step as a further attempt to undermine their cultural identity." [7b] (Section 6)

20.02 On political representation, the same report noted:

"There was one Druze and one Kurdish minister in the parliament. Alawites, the ruling religious minority, held a large percentage of cabinet and parliamentary seats. According to human rights observers, ethnic and religious minorities outside the Alawite and Christian communities claimed they had no genuine representation in the

government and that minority representatives were often more responsive to the ruling party than to their minority constituencies.” [7b] (Section 3)

## KURDS

For recent information on the situation of Kurds in Syria, see the [Syria](#) and [Reports](#) web pages of the UK-based International Support Kurds in Syria Association – SKS. [48a-48b]

20.03 The USSD *Background Note*, last updated February 2010, reported “The Kurds, many of whom speak the banned Kurdish language, make up 9% of the population and live mostly in the northeast corner of Syria, though sizable Kurdish communities live in most major Syrian cities as well.” [7a] (People)

20.04 The May 2010 report, *Human rights issues concerning Kurds in Syria*, of a joint fact-finding mission by the Danish Immigration Service (DIS) and ACCORD/Austrian Red Cross to Damascus, Syria, Beirut, Lebanon, and Erbil and Dohuk, Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), noted:

“The vast majority [of the Kurdish population in Syria] is Sunni and speaks its own distinct language, Kirmanji. Kurds live in large numbers along the borders with Iraq and Turkey in three areas of concentration: the Jazira in the northeast, the ‘Ain ‘Arab region in the north, and the highlands in the northwest around ‘Afrin (also known as Kurd Dagh (Mountain of the Kurds)). There are also sizeable Kurdish populations in Aleppo and Damascus.” [60a] (p7)

20.05 The USSD Report 2009 stated, “Although the government contended there was no discrimination against the Kurdish population, it placed limits on the use and teaching of the Kurdish language. It also restricted the publication of books and other materials in Kurdish, Kurdish cultural expression, and at times the celebration of Kurdish festivals.” [7b] (Section 6)

20.06 The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) *Annual Report on Human Rights 2009*, reported:

“Syria’s estimated 1.7 million Kurds continue to suffer from discrimination, lack of political representation, and tight restrictions on social and cultural expression. In particular, there are a number of measures in place repressing Kurdish identity, through restricting the use of the Kurdish language in public, in schools and in the workplace. Kurdish-language publications are banned and celebrations of Kurdish festivities, such as Nowruz, the traditional Kurdish New Year, are prohibited.

“In addition, as many as 300,000 Kurds continue to be denied recognised citizenship. Presidential Decree 49, which was passed in October 2008, still remains in force. This questions the rights of Syrian citizens to hold property rights in the border areas of the country and particularly affects the Kurdish population. Kurds in Syria claim that it effectively prohibits them from selling, buying or inheriting land.” [5b] (p159)

For more information, see the International Support Kurds in Syria Association – SKS August 2010 report, [Decree 49 – ethnic cleansing of Kurds in Syria](#). [48c]

20.07 Amnesty International’s *Annual Report 2010* stated, “Kurds, who comprise up to 10 per cent of the population and reside mostly in the north-east, continued to face identity-based discrimination, including restrictions on use of their language and culture. Thousands were effectively stateless and so denied equitable access to

social and economic rights.” [12b] (p316) Human Rights Watch’s (HRW) *World Report 2010*, released January 2010 also reported that “Kurds, Syria’s largest non-Arab ethnic minority, remain subject to systematic discrimination, including the arbitrary denial of citizenship to an estimated 300,000 Syria-born Kurds. Authorities suppress expressions of Kurdish identity, and prohibit the teaching of Kurdish in schools.” [39b] (p4)

- 20.08 The May 2010 DIS and ACCORD/Austrian Red Cross fact finding mission report, *Human rights issues concerning Kurds in Syria* reported, “According to representatives of the UN Development Programme (UNDP), Syria, there is no discrimination of ethnic groups, including Kurds, concerning their access to health or education since the fees for these services are very small and nobody is required to present ID in order to access the services.” [60a] (p58) The report went into more detail concerning the ability of stateless Kurds to access public services, see [Stateless Kurds](#). [60a]

See also [Children](#) and [Medical issues](#)

- 20.09 Freedom House’s *Freedom in the World 2010*, stated:

“The Kurdish minority faces severe restrictions on cultural and linguistic expression. The 2001 press law requires that owners and top editors of print publications be Arabs. ... In 2009, the government made it more difficult to hire noncitizens, resulting in the dismissal of many Kurds. While one demonstration to demand more rights for the Kurdish community was allowed to take place in northern Syria, security forces stopped four demonstrations in February and March, detaining dozens of people and referring some to the judiciary for prosecution. Intelligence services generally monitor Kurdish leaders closely, sometimes excluding them and their families from public-sector employment. At least 15 such leaders are barred from leaving Syria.” [14a] (Political Rights and Civil Liberties)

- 20.10 The Kurdish Human Rights Project (KHRP) *Impact Report 2009* noted, “In 2009, the arrest and incommunicado detention of Kurds peacefully attempting to promote Kurdish culture, was an ongoing concern. So too were the continued violations of the rights to free expression and association against political activists.” [61a] (p24)

See also [Surveillance](#) and [Political affiliation](#)

- 20.11 The USSD Report 2009 stated, “Security services arrested hundreds of Kurdish citizens during the year [2009], and the SSSC [Supreme State Security Court] prosecuted them, in some cases on charges of seeking to annex part of Syria to another country.” [7b] (Section 6)

The report went on to relate over a dozen specific instances when the Syrian authorities detained, arrested and/or prosecuted Kurds, some but not all known political activists, during 2009. The report also noted that the reasons for arrest and whereabouts of many of these Kurds remained unknown at the end of 2009. [7b] (Sections 1b, 1c, 1d, 1e, 2a, 2b, 6)

- 20.12 The FCO *Annual Report on Human Rights 2009* related brief details of the arrest and abuse of Kurds during 2009 for political reasons, or ostensibly for expression of their cultural identity at events, such as the celebration of the Kurdish New Year (Newroz). [5b] (p159)

- 20.13 Sources consulted for the May 2010 DIS and ACCORD/Austrian Red Cross fact finding mission report, *Human rights issues concerning Kurds in Syria*, noted the difficulty in separating Kurdish cultural and political activities in terms of the perception of the Syrian authorities:

“... a Western diplomatic source stated that the government and state security services undoubtedly are quite sensitive to any cultural or political sign of Kurdish nationalism which could be perceived by the state as a threat to the national integrity, or any form of resistance to the state authorities. That is the reason why the government reacts harshly to Kurdish cultural activities.

“[The same source] went on to explain that Kurdish cultural activities are generally perceived as political by the government, and it is therefore difficult to distinguish between political and non - political activities. When Kurdish cultural activities are banned by the authorities, they also politicise ordinary people participating in those activities. Participants in Kurdish cultural activities are therefore at risk of being criminalized and exposed to persecution by the authorities.” [60a] (p40)

See the full DIS and ACCORD/Austrian Red Cross fact finding mission report, [Human rights issues concerning Kurds in Syria](#), of May 2010 for more detailed information. [60a]

See also [Human rights violations by the security forces](#), [Fair trial](#) and [Kurdish political activists](#)

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## Death of Kurdish conscripts

- 20.14 The FCO *Annual Report on Human Rights 2009* noted the reporting of 19 cases of Kurdish deaths during military service in the last five years, “The Syrian authorities say the deaths are suicides, but human rights defenders say autopsy evidence points to death by torture or shooting that could not have been self-inflicted.” [5b] (p159)

- 20.15 The USSD Report 2009 noted:

“During the year [2009] at least 18 Kurdish soldiers died under mysterious circumstances while performing their required service in the military, bringing the total number of Kurdish conscript deaths over the last five years to at least 36. Authorities frequently attributed the deaths to suicide or accidents, but Kurdish human rights activists and victims’ families asserted the deaths were deliberate government killings and demanded the government investigate them. In many cases security agents reportedly monitored preburial proceedings and prevented autopsies. In at least one case, according to a Kurdish human rights organization, authorities warned the family not to ask questions about the soldier's death or to discuss it publicly. Authorities failed to provide documentary evidence to families of the men who reportedly committed suicide.” [7b] (Section 1a)

- 20.16 Sources consulted for the May 2010 DIS and ACCORD/Austrian Red Cross fact finding mission report, *Human rights issues concerning Kurds in Syria*, noted that 16-20 Kurdish conscripts had died during 2009, and 33-35 Kurdish deaths had occurred during military service between 2004 to 2009. [60a] (p66) A Kurdish journalist and human rights activist informed the fact finding mission that, “While these incidences

were explained to be suicides by the government, the deceased person's families indicated that they were killed. Some of the families to deceased Kurdish soldiers testified to human rights organisations that the bodies of the dead soldiers showed two or three bullet holes, each of which being lethal." [60a] (p66)

- 20.17 A 10 June 2010 communiqué by the non-governmental organisation Alkarama reported:

"Since the 2004 incidents [in Qamishli], dozens of ethnic Kurds have died while performing their compulsory Syrian military duty, however the authorities claim that their deaths were caused either by heart attack, injury during the breakdown of military vehicles or a health crisis. However, the families of the victims have proof indicating otherwise; they confirmed that they saw gunshot wounds and bruises caused by torture on the bodies of their loved ones.

"The phenomenon of ethnic Kurds dying while on Syrian military duty has become the cause of major concern amongst the families of ethnic Kurdish soldiers. Military service is compulsory in Syria and many now fear that for their lives in a place which is supposedly intended to be safe." [49a]

See also [Military service](#)

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## Stateless Kurds

See also [The census of Al-Hasakah province: 1962, and Arabization: 1960s–1970s](#) and [Citizenship and nationality](#)

- 20.18 The USSD Report 2009 stated:

"Following the 1962 census, approximately 120,000 Syrian Kurds lost their citizenship. As a result, those individuals and their descendants remain severely disadvantaged in terms of social and economic opportunities and in receiving government services including health and education, as well as employment open only to citizens. Stateless Kurds had limited access to university education, and lack of citizenship or identity documents restricted their travel to and from the country. The UNHCR and Refugees International estimated there were approximately 300,000 stateless Kurds.

"Despite the president's repeated promises to resolve the matter of stateless Kurds, most recently in his 2007 inauguration speech, there was no progress during the year [2009]." [7b] (Section 2d)

- 20.19 The same report also noted, "In general, ... noncitizens, including stateless Kurds, can send their children to school and universities. Stateless Kurds are ineligible to receive a degree documenting their academic achievement." [7b] (Section 6)

- 20.20 The May 2010 DIS and ACCORD/Austrian Red Cross fact finding mission report, *Human rights issues concerning Kurds in Syria*, stated:

"An international organisation pointed out that stateless Kurds are a very vulnerable group in Syria. Stateless Kurds are excluded from owning land, access to basic public health care services and having any public jobs. In practice though, stateless

persons have access to the private health care system or to the public health care system if they have the right personal connections and sufficient financial means to pay the necessary bribes.” [60a] (p58)

- 20.21 Reporting further on access to health care, the report noted that UNDP representatives had remarked “... that stateless Kurds have unconditional access to education and health, as they are not required to show any ID either.” [60a] (p58) Conversely, other sources consulted by the fact finding mission indicated that stateless persons were not entitled to or were unable to access any, or all but basic free, health care. [60a] (p58)
- 20.22 On education, various sources consulted by the DIS and ACCORD/Austrian Red Cross reported that, while primary education was free and compulsory for all, secondary and higher education was not. [60a] (p61) Also, an international organisation “...stressed that most stateless Kurds face certain socioeconomic difficulties which makes them less likely to enrol their children in school. Furthermore, stateless Kurds have no ID cards and stateless children are not issued school certificates or exam papers.” [60a] (p61) Section 10 of the [fact finding mission report](#) recounted the differing views concerning the extent of illiteracy among persons who have finished primary school. [60a] (p62-63)

See also [Children](#) and [Medical issues](#)

- 20.23 A diplomatic source consulted for the May 2010 DIS and ACCORD/Austrian Red Cross fact finding mission report, *Human rights issues concerning Kurds in Syria*, noted, “Most stateless Kurds generally do not have the economic means to travel to Europe in order to apply for asylum.” [60a] (p14) Also, “A representative of an international relief organisation confirmed that due to poverty it is more difficult for the stateless Kurds to find the means to leave the country compared to other Syrian Kurds.” [60a] (p14) The same report also noted, on internal movement, that “Stateless persons are restricted in their movement in the country as they cannot check in hotels without permission by the security services.” [60a] (p59)
- 20.24 Underlining the economic disadvantages faced by stateless Kurds in Syria, the May 2010 DIS and ACCORD/Austrian Red Cross fact finding mission report, *Human rights issues concerning Kurds in Syria*, stated:
- “According to a prominent Kurdish political leader stateless persons are subjected to various forms of discrimination. Following a new law, it is now prohibited to employ persons who have no ID card in the private sector as has been the case in the public sector. This means that if a stateless Kurd from al - Hassakeh goes to Aleppo, Damascus or other places in Syria, he cannot get employment in restaurants, hotels etc.” [60a] (p59)

See also [Freedom of movement](#) and [Exit and return](#)

### Ajanibs (‘foreigners’) and Maktoumeen (‘concealed’)

- 20.25 Chatham House’s January 2006 paper, *The Syrian Kurds: A People Discovered*, noted that Ajanibs were Kurds who took part in the 1962 census but were stripped of their nationality whilst Maktoumeen were Kurds who did not take part in the census or were born of at least one Ajanib parent. [59a] (p4)

- 20.26 The April 2009 United States Institute for Peace (USIP) special report, *The Kurds in Syria – Fueling Separatist Movements in the Region?*, stated:

“Since 1962, the Syrian state has divided Kurds in Syria into three major demographic categories: Syrian Kurds, foreign Kurds [Ajanib], and ‘concealed’ Kurds [Maktoumeen]. Syrian Kurds have retained their Syrian nationality. Foreign Kurds were stripped of citizenship and registered in official archives as foreigners; in 2008, there were about 200,000 of them. Concealed Kurds are denationalized Kurds who have not been registered in official records at all and whom Syrian authorities characterize as concealed. Nearly 80,000 people belong to this category. Among the concealed Kurds are persons whose fathers are classified as foreigners and whose mothers are citizens, persons whose fathers are aliens and whose mothers are classified as concealed, and persons whose parents are both concealed. In addition, there are about 280,000 undocumented Kurds who reside in Syria but have no citizenship, according to Kurdish sources. No government statistics are available on this group.” [13b] (p2)

See also [The census of Al-Hasakah province: 1962, and Arabization: 1960s–1970s](#)

- 20.27 Refugee International’s January 2006 paper *Buried Alive: Stateless Kurds in Syria* reported that Ajanib’s and Maktoumeen were issued different identity documents to Syrian citizens:

“Most denationalized Kurds and their descendents are labeled Ajanib (‘foreigners’) and issued red identity cards by the Ministry of Interior, stating they are not Syrian nationals and are not entitled to travel. Even some children listed on red cards are listed under the statement, ‘His name was not in the survey of 1962,’ an irony given that they were born long after the date of the census. Replacing such documents or obtaining them for the first time poses particular problems, as they often involve paying large bribes of up to SY P 3,000-5,000 (US \$60-100) and approaching several branches of security for authorization over the course of months or even years.

“A significant number of stateless Kurds in Syria do not possess even this identity document and are effectively invisible. Maktoumeen now number between 75,000 and 100,000. At one time, they were able to obtain certified ‘white papers’ recognizing their identity from their local mayor’s office (a Mukhtar or traditional village head), although these papers were not recognized legally by the government. However, this practice has now ended under special orders from the Syrian government.” [40b] (p3)

- 20.28 The USIP report of April 2009 also stated:

“Kurds classified as foreigners carry red identity cards that permit them to be recorded as aliens in official records. They cannot, however, obtain a passport or leave the country. Concealed Kurds carry only a yellow definition certificate, or residence bond, issued by a local mukhtar (chieftain) and used purely to identify the holders whenever authorities found it necessary to do so. Though authorities issue the certificates, official Syrian institutions do not accept them, so for all intents and purposes the holders of yellow documents have no official status in Syria at all.” [13b] (p3)

- 20.29 Refugee International’s January 2006 paper included a table detailing whether a marriage – and the children of such a union – can be legally registered:

WIFE	HUSBAND	Can their marriage be legally registered?	Can their children be legally registered?
Maktoumeen	National	NO	YES—under father
Maktoumeen	Ajanib	NO	YES—under father
Maktoumeen	Maktoumeen	NO	NO
Ajanib	National	YES	YES
Ajanib	Ajanib	NO	YES—under father
Ajanib	Maktoumeen	NO	NO
National	National	YES	YES
National	Ajanib	NO	YES—under father
National	Maktoumeen	NO	NO

[40b] (p6)

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## 21. LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL AND TRANSGENDER (LGBT) PERSONS

For recent reports on the situation of LGBT persons in Syria, see the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association's (ILGA) [Syrian Arab Republic: News](#) web page. [22a]

- 21.01 The US Department of State *2009 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices* (USSD Report 2009) released 11 March 2010 stated:

"The size of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) community was unclear, as many individuals feared identifying themselves as such due to societal discrimination. There were no NGOs focused on LGBT matters. There were several online networking communities, including Facebook.com sites (blocked in the country but easily accessed through proxy servers) that served the local LGBT community. According to an October article in Syria Today, 200 individuals formed a Facebook community called 'I'm Just Like You,' which 'published an appeal for tolerance' during the year [2009]." [7b] (Section 6)

### LEGAL RIGHTS

- 21.02 The ILGA web page on the Syrian Arab Republic: Law, last modified 26 March 2009, reported that both male to male and female to female relationships were illegal, although it did not contain details of the specific article of the penal code, or punishment for lesbians. [22b] The USSD Report 2009 noted:

"The law criminalizes homosexual conduct under penal code article 520, which states that each sexual act 'contrary to nature' is punishable by as long as three years in prison. Because homosexual conduct was both unlawful and considered shameful, the law made homosexuals and transgendered individuals vulnerable to honor crime retaliation. Penal code article 192 permits judges to reduce legal penalties in cases when an individual's motive for murder is a sense of honor. There were no reports of prosecutions under these laws during the year nor evidence of honor crimes against gays and lesbians; however, reports indicated that dozens of gay men and lesbians

have been imprisoned over the past several years after being arrested on vague charges such as abusing social values. There were no reports of punishment for female homosexual behavior.” [7b] (Section 6)

### Treatment by, and attitudes of, state authorities

21.03 In a web posting of 10 March 2010, ILGA provided the text of a [statement](#) read by Syria on 18 December 2008 on behalf of 57 countries. [22c] The statement was in response to the [General Assembly Statement Affirming Human Rights Protections Include Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity](#) (SOGI) signed by 66 countries and read by Argentina on the same day. [22d] Below is an extract from the statement read by Syria:

“Mr. President, ... we are seriously concerned at the attempt to introduce to the United Nations some notions that have no legal foundations in any international human rights instrument. We are even more disturbed at the attempt to focus on certain persons on the grounds of their sexual interests and behaviors, while ignoring that intolerance and discrimination regrettably exist in various parts of the world, be it on the basis of color, race, gender, or religion to mention only a few.

“Our alarm does not merely stem from concern about the lack of legal grounds, or that the said statement delves into matters which fall essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of States counter to the commitment in the United Nations Charter to respect the sovereignty of States and the principle of non-intervention. More importantly, it arises owing to the ominous usage of those two notions. The notion of orientation spans a wide range of personal choices that expand way beyond the individual’s sexual interest in copulatory behavior with normal consenting adult human beings, thereby ushering in the social normalization and possibly the legitimization of many deplorable acts including pedophilia. The second is often suggested to attribute particular sexual interests or behaviors to genetic factors, a matter that has been scientifically rebuffed repeatedly.” [22c]

21.04 In July 2010, on *The Guardian’s* online Comment is free, the editor of Gay Middle East (GME) Dan Littauer noted, “Gay life in Syria is still underground. Private parties and meeting places are essential for LGBT people across Syria. There are no openly gay bars or organisations. People hold private parties in remote places where they hope to go unnoticed and be inoffensive. The authorities know of these gatherings and have tended to overlook them.” [65a]

21.05 In June 2010, GME reported that, in addition to raiding ‘cruising’ areas:

“Syrian authorities have raided more than four different private gay parties over five weeks between March and April [2010], arresting more than 25 men on their last raid. Indictments have been officially submitted against them; most of the arrested guys are charged with ‘having a homosexual act’, others are charged with dealing and/or buying and consuming illegal drugs, a few are charged with organising illegal ‘obscene’ parties, facilitating drug dealing and consuming, and encouraging homosexual acts.” [66b]

21.06 On 22 July 2010, GME reported:

“Syrian authorities finally released more than 25 men that have been under police custody for over three months for attending/organising allegedly private gay parties. Strong threats were made to them explicitly by a secret police office: “We won’t

tolerate any future gay parties!" GME is investigating the circumstances of their release and the well-being of the men who are now returning to their homes and families." [66a]

### Societal treatment and attitudes

- 21.07 The USSD Report 2009 stated, "In a November 22 [2009] article from Middle-East-Online.com, Muhammad Habash, the head of the now-closed Center for Islamic Studies in Damascus, stated that some Muslim clerics overtly incited the killing of homosexuals and that others recommended providing gay men and lesbians with social support to help them 'overcome their illness.'" [7b] (Section 6)
- 21.08 In noting the March and April 2010 arrest of 25 men for attending/organising alleged private gay parties (see [Treatment by, and attitudes of, state authorities](#)) GME cautioned, "The fact that the Syrian secret police has accused them of homosexuality is enough to put them in grave danger from their families and neighbours even if they are released without charges." [66b]
- 21.09 Following the men's release in July 2010, "Whilst GME welcomes this development we feel that the men are not yet out of danger as their families were informed of their 'offences'; this puts them in direct danger, and GME urges the Syrian police to take further steps to guarantee their safety, for example, they could publicly dismiss the allegations brought against them, or announcing they were acquitted from suspicious activities." [66a]

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## 22. WOMEN

- 22.01 The United Nations Development Programme – Programme on Governance in the Arab Region's (UNDP-POGAR) undated page on Gender in Syria reported:
- "The [Baath] party, which utilizes women as a political base of support, has promoted gender equality. In the 1970s, women were actively recruited into the armed forces, which included a female special parachuting unit. At the same time, Syria remains an Islamic country with a strong commitment to religious tradition. Deeply felt social codes discourage women from entering the public realm or making political demands. While a minority of women has entered the workforce and politics, the majority continues to live a traditional lifestyle." [4b]
- 22.02 Freedom House's special report, *Women's Rights in the Middle East and North Africa 2010*, released 3 March 2010, stated:
- "Over the years, the Ba'ath regime has invested some efforts to improve the rights of women. The 1973 constitution, for example, calls for equality among all citizens and includes an article that obliges the state to remove all obstacles to women's advancement. Government policies have also encouraged women's education and participation in the workforce. Reflecting these measures, women's literacy increased from 37 percent in 1981 to 76 percent in 2007, while women's labor participation rates grew from 12 percent to 31 percent during the same period.

“Nevertheless, legal reforms necessary to ensure equality between genders have been very limited, and women lack channels through which they may challenge discriminatory laws and practices.” [14c] (Introduction)

22.03 Syria acceded to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) on 28 March 2003. (United Nations Committee Against Torture, Forty-fourth session, 26 April – 14 May 2010) [57a] (Para 4) “However, the country filed several reservations affecting key provisions of the covenant. Although officials have indicated their willingness to revisit these reservations and more thoroughly implement the convention, few concrete changes have been instituted to date.” (Freedom House, *Women’s Rights in the Middle East and North Africa 2010*, 3 March 2010) [14c] (Introduction)

22.04 The US Department of State *2009 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices* (USSD Report 2009), released 11 March 2010, reported “The Commission for Family Affairs, the MOJ [Ministry of Justice], and the MSAL [Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour] all shared responsibility in ensuring the legal rights of women.” [7b] (Section 6)

22.05 UNDP-POGAR’s undated page on Gender in Syria reported:

“The central political organization for women in Syria is the General Union of Syrian Women. Founded in 1967 by a coalition of political and social women’s groups, the Women’s Union is a nationwide organization with an active membership. Although not formally part of the government, the Union is supported by the state and has implemented a number of social development projects in the areas of childcare and education.” [4b]

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## LEGAL RIGHTS

22.06 Freedom House’s women’s rights report of March 2010 stated:

“Although there have been efforts to reform discriminatory legislation and promulgate new laws that would protect women from discrimination, very few practical changes have been made in recent years. The government took a major step forward by ratifying CEDAW in 2003, which has increased the amount of attention paid to women’s rights issues. However, the reservations Syria filed upon ratification eviscerated much of the purpose of the treaty. Access to justice for all Syrians remains limited, and the penal code contains multiple provisions that discriminate against women with respect to the definition, evidentiary requirements, or sentencing for certain crimes.

“Article 25 of the constitution stipulates that ‘citizens are equal before the law in regard to their rights and obligations.’ Moreover, Article 45 states that women are guaranteed ‘all the opportunities that enable them to participate fully and effectively in political, social, cultural, and economic life. The state works to remove the restrictions that prevent women’s development and their participation in building socialist Arab society.’ The emergency law enacted in 1963, however, has eclipsed many of the legal protections offered by the constitution.

“No legislation specifically prohibits gender-based discrimination, and no complaint mechanisms are available to women who have been denied the aforementioned rights and opportunities.” [14c] (Nondiscrimination and Access to Justice)

- 22.07 The UNDP-POGAR undated page on Gender in Syria stated, “Islamic law governs the personal status of women in Syria. Several civil laws have been reformed over the past 30 years to create gender equity. Many of these reforms have not been put into force as social convention prevents enforcement of statutory code.” [4b]
- 22.08 The June 2007 concluding comments of the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (UN CEDAW) noted, “The Committee is concerned that the right to equality between women and men and the prohibition of both direct and indirect discrimination against women has not been reflected in the Constitution or any other law.” [32b] (para 15)
- 22.09 The USSD Report 2009 noted, “The government has not changed personal status, retirement, or social security laws that discriminate against women. Under criminal law, if a man and woman separately commit the same criminal act of adultery, the woman’s punishment is double that of the man’s. For Muslims, personal status law is based on the government’s interpretation and application of Shari’a, which treats men and women differently.” [7b] (Section 6)
- 22.10 The Freedom House women’s rights report of March 2010 added, “Article 307 [of the personal status law] establishes certain rules that apply to the Druze community, such as the prohibition of polygamy, and increases the discretionary powers of religious judges over marriages and divorces. Article 308 entitles each Christian sect to adopt its own personal status law.” [14c] (Autonomy, Security and Freedom of the Person)
- 22.11 The Human Rights Watch’s (HRW) *World Report 2010*, released January 2010 stated:
- “On June 5 [2009] the Syrian media revealed that the Ministry of Justice had submitted a new draft personal status law that still kept discriminatory clauses against women intact, such as denying women married to non-Syrians the right to pass on their nationality to their husbands and children, and requiring women to receive male permission to travel abroad and to work outside the home. After numerous protests from Syrian women’s rights groups, President Bashar al-Asad cancelled the draft law in July.” [39b] (p4)
- 22.12 Freedom House’s survey *Freedom in the World 2010* also reported:
- “Personal status law for Muslim women is governed by Sharia (Islamic law) and is discriminatory in marriage, divorce, and inheritance matters; church law governs personal status issues for Christians, in some cases barring divorce. A draft personal status law introduced in 2009 was subsequently withdrawn after women’s rights activists criticized its content and Christians denounced it as an attempt to take authority away from their respective churches.” [14a] (Political Rights and Civil Liberties)
- 22.13 The same organisation’s 2010 report on women’s rights noted:
- “The evidentiary worth of a woman’s testimony depends on which system of courts is hearing her case. Women are treated as full persons before the civil and criminal courts, which are secular and come under the umbrella of the Ministry of Justice. Similarly, the civil and commercial codes grant women the same legal capacity as men. In Shari’a courts, however, a woman’s testimony is worth only half that of a man.” [14c] (Nondiscrimination and Access to Justice)

22.14 The USSD Report 2009 stated:

“Husbands and wives can claim adultery as grounds for divorce; criminal law discriminates against women in this regard. A man can be charged with adultery only if his actions occur in the home he shares with his wife, but a woman can be accused of adultery regardless of venue. The court accepts any evidence a man presents when claiming adultery; if a woman attempts to file for divorce based on adultery, her husband must admit to the crime or there must be a witness to the act. During the year [2009] there were no reported cases in which a woman successfully filed for divorce based on adultery.” [7b] (Section 6)

22.15 When using adultery as an example of provisions in the penal code that are discriminatory against women, the Freedom House 2010 report on women’s rights additionally noted, “To prove his case, a man may present any form of evidence before the judge, while a woman may submit written evidence only, such as a written confession by the husband. ... And if convicted, a man faces sentences ranging from one month to one year in prison, while a woman faces three months to two years.” [14c] (Nondiscrimination and Access to Justice)

22.16 Freedom House’s women’s rights report of 2010 also stated:

“Women were admitted to practice law in 1975, but their representation within the judiciary remains low even today. Women constitute 13 per cent of judges and public prosecutors, and these are concentrated overwhelmingly in Damascus, where their representation is about double the national average. This male dominance makes women less trustful of the judicial system and less likely to turn to the courts for justice.” [14c] (Nondiscrimination and Access to Justice)

See also [Social and economic rights](#)

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## POLITICAL RIGHTS

See also [Political system](#) and [Political affiliation](#)

22.17 Freedom House’s report, *Women’s Rights in the Middle East and North Africa 2010*, stated:

“Women in Syria have a relatively long history of emancipation, and the country is one of the more advanced in the Arab world when it comes to women’s rights. Women obtained the right to vote in 1949, and their involvement in politics dates to the struggle for independence from the Ottoman Empire at the beginning of the last century. However, the effects of their participation have been stifled by the realities of the repressive political climate.” [14c] (Introduction)

22.18 The UNDP-POGAR’s undated page on Gender in Syria reported:

“President Bashar Al-Asad appointed Dr. Najah Al-Attar as a second vice president for cultural affairs on March 23, 2006. This makes Mrs. Al-Attar the first Arab female to hold the position of vice president. Dr. Al-Attar, 73 years old, was minister of culture in Syria for a period of 24 years. She holds a Ph.D. in English literature from a British university. Mrs. Al-Attar is not a member of the ruling Ba’th party.” [4b]

22.19 The USSD Report 2009 stated, “Women and minorities generally participated in the political system without formal restriction. During the year [2009] a female vice president and two female cabinet ministers were in office. Thirty of the 250 MPs were women.” [7b] (Section 5) The Inter-Parliamentary Union’s (IPU) Women in National Parliaments page reported, as of 31 May 2010, 31 of the 250 MPs were women, which ranked Syria 86 out of 186 countries. [9b] Freedom House’s survey *Freedom in the World* 2010 noted, “The government has appointed some women to senior positions, including one of the two vice presidential posts. However, women remain underrepresented, holding 12.4 percent of the seats in the legislature.” [14a] (Political Rights and Civil Liberties)

22.20 Freedom House’s women’s rights report of 2010 remarked:

“Female politicians have had less success at the local level. On August 26 and 27, 2007, a total of 32,058 candidates competed for 9,687 council seats. Only 319 female candidates were elected to office, making up 3.2 percent of local council members. Women are often hesitant to run for local council seats, partly because of societal norms that discourage female leadership in public life, but also because citizens have little confidence in the local councils’ integrity or effectiveness.” [14c] (Political Rights and Civic Voice)

22.21 The June 2007 concluding comments of the UN CEDAW reported:

“While appreciating the State party’s goal of 30 per cent women in decision-making levels in both the Ninth and Tenth Five-Year Plans, the Committee is concerned about the lack of measures adopted towards the realization of this goal and the continuing low levels of representation of women in public and political life and in decision-making positions, particularly in municipal, town and village councils.” [32b] (para 25)

22.22 The Freedom House 2010 report on women’s rights reported:

“Although the government’s ninth five-year plan aims to raise the participation of women in public life and in decision-making positions to 30 percent, civil society actors are limited in their ability to lobby against discriminatory laws and policies. The only legal women’s organization is the General Union of Syrian Women (GWU), an affiliate of the Ba’ath Party that receives state funding. According to party philosophy, the GWU represents all Syrian women, obviating the need for independent women’s groups. In practice, this monopoly excludes dissenting views on government policies and delays action on specific problems, since initiatives and complaints have to filter up through the unwieldy, multilayered administrative structure of the Ba’ath Party.

“Despite their illegal status, independent groups do operate in varying degrees of secrecy. The Syrian Women’s League, for instance, has carried on its work continuously since 1948. However, this precarious existence has made it difficult for such groups to function. Unregistered groups have problems raising funds, particularly in light of a ban on accepting grants from abroad. They also face significant obstacles in attracting members and mobilizing women to claim their rights.” [14c] (Nondiscrimination and Access to Justice)

22.23 The USSD Report 2009 stated:

“On March 8 [2009], security forces raided several International Women’s Day celebration sites in Qamishli, forcibly breaking up at least one group of approximately 100 women, according to human rights observers. Security authorities had reportedly

informed local social clubs that had announced Women's Day events that they would be closed down if they did not cancel scheduled celebrations." [7b] (Section 2b)

See also [Freedom of association and assembly](#) and [Human rights institutions, organisations and activists](#)

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## SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC RIGHTS

22.24 The Freedom House 2010 report on women's rights stated:

"The single greatest legal obstacle to gender equality remains the personal status law, which limits women's autonomy in matters such as marriage and divorce. The prevalence of domestic violence in Syrian society, and the permissive attitude toward so-called honor killings in some areas, mean that women also face threats to their physical security. The government has begun to acknowledge the need to amend the laws and alter deep-rooted societal attitudes toward these issues, and in 2009 it took steps to stiffen the penalties for honor killings, but women have yet to feel change in their day-to-day lives." [14c] (Autonomy, Security, and Freedom of the Person)

22.25 The same report also noted:

"Opposition to increased women's rights comes from Islamic fundamentalist groups as well as from conservative customs that relegate women to a secondary position in society and continue to hold greater sway than formal law for many Syrians. Society expects women to shoulder domestic responsibilities, and it imposes on them the burden of upholding the family's honor. Failure to conform to social norms draws sharp pressure from within the family and from society at large, culminating in murder in some cases. The government often appeases such sentiments on women's rights for broader political purposes." [14c] (Introduction)

See also ['Honour' crimes](#)

22.26 Freedom House's survey *Freedom in the World 2010* reported, "A husband may request that the Interior Ministry block his wife from traveling abroad, and women are generally barred from leaving the country with their children without proof of the father's permission." [14a] (Political Rights and Civil Liberties) The USSD Report 2009 stated, that although women over the age of 18 have the legal right to travel without the permission of male relatives, "A woman's husband or any other male relative may request that his wife's and his minor dependents' travel abroad be prohibited. Although official statistics were not available, foreign embassies reported a number of such incidents during the year [2009]." [7b] (Section 6)

22.27 The USSD Report 2009 also noted:

"The UNHCR observed that there was a growing practice of muta'a, a temporary 'pleasure marriage' conducted by some Shiite clerics. These marriages are of predetermined duration and become null and void once the agreed-upon term has passed. They can last as little as one day and primarily serve individuals seeking to legitimize patronizing prostitutes. Most Shiite clerics viewed the practice as suspect and did not conduct such marriages." [7b] (Section 6)

22.28 The same report continued:

“The law prohibits prostitution, but it was not strictly enforced. During the year [2009] there was evidence that Iraqi women residing in the country, including minors, were increasingly resorting to prostitution. Police assigned criminal liability in nearly all the cases to the person in prostitution, not others involved. Anecdotal evidence also suggested that the country was a destination for sex tourism for men from other countries in the region.” [7b] (Section 6)

22.29 The Freedom House report on women’s rights stated:

“Articles 509 through 516 of the penal code prohibit prostitution, harshly punishing the prostitutes while treating their clients merely as civil witnesses. Pressuring or tricking women into prostitution is prohibited, as is the trade in women generally, but Syria lacks specific antitrafficking legislation that would treat trafficked persons as victims. Instead, trafficking is only addressed through antiprostitution legislation. A committee was established in 2005 to draft an antitrafficking law, but the legislation has yet to be enacted.” [14c] (Autonomy, Security, and Freedom of the Person)

See also [Trafficking](#)

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## Education and employment

22.30 The Freedom House 2010 report on women’s rights noted, “State-funded education is free under Article 37 of the constitution, but attendance is only mandatory through the primary level, and dropout rates for both boys and girls are particularly high at the secondary level. This is partly because children who would otherwise enter secondary school are pressured to begin earning money or working in the home or on the family farm.” [14c] (Economic Rights and Equal Opportunity)

22.31 UNDP-POGAR’s undated webpage on Gender in Syria reported, “While the gender gap across schooling cycles has decreased, there is no clear evidence that educational policy is gender-sensitive. The relatively high rate of female enrolment in the education system has not had a great impact on employment. The gender bias in the private sector is even more marked for graduates with only technical or intermediate education.” [4b]

22.32 The June 2007 concluding comments of the UN CEDAW stated:

“While appreciating the efforts of the State party to revise school curricula to remove stereotyped images of women and men, the Committee is concerned about the persistence of patriarchal attitudes and deep-rooted stereotypes regarding the roles and responsibilities of women and men in the family and society. These stereotypes present a significant impediment to the implementation of the Convention and are a root cause of the disadvantaged position of women in all areas, including in the labour market and in political and public life.” [32b] (para 27)

See also [Political rights](#)

22.33 The Freedom House 2010 report on women’s rights remarked:

“School curriculums and textbooks have long reinforced gender stereotypes, though the Ministry of Education has been developing CEDAW-compatible materials for

grade schools and universities in recent years. Perceptions of women's roles with respect to education and employment have also been changing at the societal level, especially as worsening economic conditions encourage some conservative families to allow their daughters to pursue degrees and jobs in the formal sector.

"Women now represent about 46 percent of university students, though they continue to be concentrated in fields associated with their traditional gender roles, such as education and literature." [14c] (Economic Rights and Equal Opportunity)

- 22.34 The USSD Report 2009 stated, "The constitution provides for equality between men and women and guarantees that 'every citizen has the right to earn his wage according to the nature and yield of the work.' The government sought to overcome traditional discriminatory attitudes toward women and encouraged women's education by ensuring equal access to educational institutions, including universities." [7b] (Section 6)
- 22.35 The USSD Report 2009 noted:
- "Women participated actively in public life and were represented in most professions, including the armed forces. Women were not impeded from owning or managing land or other real property. Various sources observed that women constituted 16 percent of lawyers, 65 percent of teachers below the university level, 27 percent of university professors, and 49 percent of university graduates. In addition, women accounted for 170 judges, 30 MPs, two cabinet ministers, and one vice president." [7b] (Section 6)
- 22.36 UNDP-POGAR reported, "Women comprised 27 percent of the labor force in 2000, primarily concentrated in agriculture, medicine, and teaching. Very few women own their own businesses. All women are entitled to eight weeks paid maternity leave with additional leave possible at less pay. The government also provides national childcare for a small fee in schools and workplaces." [4b]
- 22.37 The Freedom House 2010 report on women's rights reported:
- "... the employment options available to women are limited by overlapping legal restrictions and cultural norms. For example, not only must a woman ask her husband for permission to work outside the home, but Articles 131 and 132 of the labor law (Employment Act, No. 91 of 1959) prohibit women from working at night or in fields that are injurious to their health or morals. This rules out jobs in heavy industry, but there are exceptions to the night-work rule for jobs in fields like medicine, entertainment, and air travel." [14c] (Economic Rights and Equal Opportunity)
- 22.38 The June 2007 concluding comments of the UN CEDAW stated:
- "The Committee expresses concern about the occupational segregation between women and men in the labour market and the persistent gap in wages between women and men. It is also concerned at the concentration of women in the informal sector with no social security or other benefits. The Committee is concerned about impediments to women's employment, such as the lack of adequate child care facilities. It is further concerned that the Employment Act does not prohibit sexual harassment." [32b] (para 31)

### Marriage/temporary marriage, divorce, child custody and inheritance

- 22.39 The June 2007 concluding comments of the UN CEDAW reported that:

“While noting that the State party is in the process of reforming its Personal Status Act to remove discriminatory provisions, the Committee is concerned about the delay in the reform process and about the State party’s statement that reform may be undertaken in a piecemeal manner. The Committee is concerned, in particular, about unequal rights of women and men to marriage, divorce, custody and inheritance under the existing laws and about the existence of polygamy and child marriages.” [32b] (para 33)

22.40 The Freedom House 2010 report on women’s rights stated:

“The government drafted a new personal status law in 2009 that, if adopted, would have upheld the most oppressive of the existing provisions while adopting new, retrogressive measures. ... Civil society actors unleashed a firestorm of criticism after the draft was leaked to the public, with activists utilizing social networking and electronic communication devices in a campaign against its adoption. Efforts concentrated on online outreach and successfully compelled the government to cancel the draft law.” [14c] (Autonomy, Security, and Freedom of the Person)

See also [Internet freedom](#) and [Human rights institutions, organisations and activists](#)

22.41 UNDP-POGAR’s undated page on Gender in Syria reported:

“The Syrian Code states that if a woman over 17 years of age wishes to marry, the judge must ask her guardian for his opinion. If the guardian does not object within a specified period or makes a spurious objection, then the judge may proceed with the marriage as long as the husband is eligible. Another provision states that if an adult woman marries without her guardian’s consent, the guardian may demand that the marriage be annulled if the husband is not eligible, unless the woman has conceived.

“Under the Syrian Code, a wife’s right to maintenance ceases when she works outside the home without her husband’s permission. A woman who leaves her marital home without legitimate reason is defined as having violated marital law, and the price she pays for doing so is loss of the right to maintenance for the duration of her absence.” [4b]

22.42 The Freedom House 2010 report on women’s rights noted:

“Many marriages continue to be arranged between families rather than between the bride and groom. While the phenomenon is difficult to quantify, women may be placed under pressure to consent to a marriage they are not completely comfortable with, either for economic reasons or because their family desires the match.

“Although women are legally entitled to negotiate their rights within the marriage contract, social constraints limit their ability to do so. Article 14 of the personal status law permits a woman to make stipulations in the marriage contract that guarantee her right to work outside the marital home, continue her education after marriage, or obtain a divorce. Most stipulations are valid so long as they do not violate the word or intent of Shari’a. However, as a practical matter, many women—particularly those who are poor or illiterate—are not aware of these possibilities, and social customs pressure women not to demand too much.” [14c] (Autonomy, Security, and Freedom of the Person)

The same report also remarked that, "Polygamy is legal, and the consent of the first wife is not a necessary precondition for a valid second marriage." [14c] (Autonomy, Security, and Freedom of the Person)

22.43 On divorce, the USSD Report 2009 stated:

"A divorced woman is not entitled to alimony in some cases, such as if she gave up her right to alimony to persuade her husband to agree to the divorce. In addition, under the law a divorced mother loses the right to physical custody of her sons when they reach the age of 13 and of her daughters at age 15. Guardianship or control over exercise of the legal rights of the children always goes to the paternal side of the family after the age of 13 and 15, respectively." [7b] (Section 6)

22.44 The Freedom House 2010 report on women's rights noted:

"Men and women have unequal divorce rights. Men enjoy the right to talaq, or unilateral repudiation, which can be revocable or irrevocable and requires only that the man inform the authorities of his decision. By comparison, women's access to divorce is time consuming and arduous. One option is khula, or a consensual divorce in which the wife returns her dowry to her husband and forfeits her right to financial maintenance. Alternatively, women may initiate divorce proceedings in the courts by showing injury, invoking a justification such as 'dissension, prejudice, lack of affinity, absence, or ailments.' Women's rights within marriage, including grounds for divorce, are governed less by law and more by each couple's marriage contract. In the case of a divorce by the husband, women are entitled to continued financial support for a period of four months only.

"Upon divorce, the mother is the primary custodian of children until boys reach 13 and girls reach 15, unless she remarries, in which case she automatically loses custody to the father. Should a divorced mother be unfit or unable to fulfill [sic] her custodial role, the paternal grandmother is next in the succession, followed by other female relatives. While married women are prohibited from traveling with their children without permission from the children's guardian, typically the father, divorced mothers who hold custody of their children need no such permission. If a mother holds custody of the children, the father or other guardian must secure her permission before traveling with the children." [14c] (Autonomy, Security, and Freedom of the Person)

See also [Exit and return](#)

22.45 Elsewhere, the same report remarked:

"Women are socially stigmatized by divorce, and because they tend to work informally, at home, or in low-paying jobs, they have difficulty supporting themselves without their husband's financial maintenance. This problem is compounded by the fact that divorcees have no legal right to live in the marital home. Instead, a divorced woman must return to the home of her parents or a male relative. Although women have the legal right to rent or own houses and to live on their own, it is relatively rare for either married or single women to do so even when they have the means, as it has traditionally been considered unsafe or improper. Still, the number of young women living on their own is slowly increasing, mainly in urban areas." [14c] (Social and Cultural Rights)

22.46 The USSD Report 2009 stated:

“Inheritance for all citizens except Catholics is based on the government's interpretation of Shari'a. Accordingly, Muslim women usually were granted half of the inheritance share of male heirs. In all communities, male heirs must provide financial support to the female relatives who inherit less. If they do not, females have the right to sue. During the year [2009] there were reports that in some regions custom prevailed over the law, and women were denied any inheritance.” [7b] (Section 6)

- 22.47 The Freedom House 2010 report on women's rights provided more detail on the issue of inheritance:

“Women's inheritance rights are limited by law as well as in practice. In accordance with Shari'a, a woman receives only half of her brother's share of the parental estate. Male relatives from another branch of the family may compete for a share with the deceased's daughters if there is no direct male heir. These practices are based on the idea that men are culturally and legally responsible for the financial maintenance of the women in their family. Muslim women who are predeceased by their husbands receive their deferred dowry, followed by their legal share of the estate under Shari'a. However, non-Muslim women do not inherit from their Muslim husbands. As a practical matter, even the limited inheritance rights granted to women are frequently violated, particularly when it comes to inherited land, as women are pressured to cede their inheritance to male family members. The Muslim inheritance laws apply to followers of all religions except Catholics.” [14c] (Economic Rights and Equal Opportunity)

### Catholic Personal Status Law

- 22.48 The Freedom House 2010 report on women's rights noted:

“In 2006, a personal status law was adopted for Syria's Catholic community. Under its provisions, women enjoy inheritance rights on par with men, parents have equal guardianship rights over children during marriage (although upon divorce, guardianship is offered to a father first and the mother second), and individual property acquired prior to marriage belongs solely to the original owner upon the dissolution of a marriage. Although Catholic women represent only a small fraction of the population and it is unclear the extent to which these provisions have been enforced, this law represents an improvement to women's rights at the legislative level.” [14c] (Autonomy, Security, and Freedom of the Person)

See also [Freedom of religion](#)

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### VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

- 22.49 UNDP-POGAR's undated page on Gender in Syria reported, “While it is known that violence against women occurs, no reliable statistics on domestic violence or sexual assault are available. The vast majority of cases are not reported.” [4b] Freedom House's survey *Freedom in the World 2010* stated, “Violence against women is common, particularly in rural areas.” [14a] (Political Rights and Civil Liberties)
- 22.50 The Freedom House 2010 report on women's rights noted, “Patriarchal values in society and the authoritarian political system leave women vulnerable to gender-based violence, both inside and outside the home. Recent studies have shown that domestic violence is common throughout Syria, but such abuse is not

specifically outlawed; spousal rape is excluded as a punishable offense under the legal definition of rape.” [14c] (Introduction)

See also [Rape](#)

22.51 The June 2007 concluding comments of the UN CEDAW stated:

“While noting the preparation of a draft National Plan for the Protection of Women, the Committee is concerned that this plan does not contemplate specific legislation to criminalize violence against women, including domestic violence. The Committee is further concerned that several provisions in the Penal Code condone acts of violence against women by exempting perpetrators from punishment.” [32b] (para 19)

22.52 The USSD Report 2009 noted:

“The law does not specifically prohibit domestic violence, and violence against women occurred during the year [2009]. A 2006 study reported that as many as one in four women surveyed had been victims of domestic violence. The majority of domestic violence and sexual assault cases went unreported; victims have traditionally been reluctant to seek assistance outside the family for fear of social stigmatization. Observers reported that when some abused women tried to file a police report, the police did not respond to their claims aggressively, if at all. Women reported incidents at police stations of sexual harassment, verbal abuse, hair pulling, and slapping by police officers when attempting to file police reports, particularly at the criminal security branch at Bab Musallah in Damascus. Victims of domestic violence have the legal right to seek redress in court, but few did so because of the social stigma attached to such action.” [7b] (Section 6)

22.53 The Freedom House 2010 report on women’s rights stated:

“No laws prohibit domestic violence, and a 2005 survey of 1,891 rural and urban families indicated that it is a prevalent practice throughout Syria. Of the women surveyed, 67 percent said they had been ‘punished’ in front of their families, either through verbal insults, revocation of pocket money, or, in 87 percent of these cases, physical beatings. In the same survey, 21.8 percent of women claimed to have been ‘exposed to violence. Of those who had been beaten, family members—particularly husbands and fathers—were the perpetrators 80.4 percent of the time. Women have little redress in such situations, as police tend to be unsympathetic to victims of domestic violence and there are few public shelters. Families tend to discourage women from making formal complaints so as to avoid public attention, though they may confront the perpetrator behind closed doors. When the police do become involved, they generally attempt to reconcile the husband and wife, and only very rarely do women press criminal charges against men.” [14c] (Autonomy, Security, and Freedom of the Person)

22.54 The June 2007 concluding comments of the UN CEDAW remarked:

“While appreciating that the Tenth Five-Year Plan calls for the provision of shelters and counselling services for women victims of violence and that the Ministry of Social Affairs is working to establish a centre for protection of battered women and planning to establish two family guidance centres, the Committee is concerned about the acute lack of shelters and services for victims of violence against women. It is also concerned that existing laws such as those relating to women’s rights to maintenance and work may impede the ability of victims of violence against women to seek protection in the shelters.” [32b] (para 21)

See also [Social and economic rights](#)

22.55 The USSD Report 2009 stated:

“In the beginning of August [2009], the Sisters of the Good Shepherd opened a 24-hour emergency shelter and launched a telephone hotline for female victims of domestic violence. The shelter estimated that it received more than 300 telephone calls during the year and provided direct legal or psychological counseling to approximately 50 women. Shelter workers said police had been increasingly helpful in referring women to the shelter. The Association for Women’s Role Development and the Syrian Family Planning Association also provided counseling. There were at least two private shelters open to battered women in Damascus.” [7b] (Section 6)

22.56 The USSD Report 2009 also noted, “The country was a destination and transit point for women trafficked from South and Southeast Asia and Africa for the purpose of domestic servitude and from Eastern Europe and Iraq for sexual exploitation. There were few statistics available on the scope and type of trafficking that exists.” [7b] (Section 6)

See also [Trafficking](#) and [Foreign refugees](#)

## Rape

22.57 In raising its concerns regarding violence against women in the Syrian Arab Republic, the June 2007 concluding comments of UN CEDAW stated, “In particular, it is concerned that the definition of rape in article 489 of the Penal Code excludes marital rape; article 508 of the Penal Code exempts rapists from punishment if they marry their victims ...”. [32b] (para 19)

22.58 The USSD Report 2009 stated:

“Rape is a felony. There are no laws against spousal rape. According to article 439 of the penal code, ‘rape is considered to occur when a man forces a woman who is not his wife to have intercourse.’ The punishment for this is at least 15 years in prison. Marital rape is not a crime. Article 508 of the penal code stipulates that ‘If there is a contracted marriage between the man who commits rape, sexual abuse, kidnapping, sexual harassment and the victim, then there is no charge or the punishment is stopped.’ If the individual who commits the crime agrees to marry the victim, he faces no punishment. The victim’s family sometimes agrees to this arrangement to avoid the social stigma attached to rape. If the victim is too young for marriage, the rapist receives a longer prison sentence.” [7b] (Section 6)

22.59 The Freedom House 2010 report on women’s rights noted:

“Women lack protection against gender-based violence that occurs outside the home, such as rape. Article 489 of the penal code provides a minimum sentence of five years of hard labor for rapists and 21 years in prison if the victim was less than 15 years old. However, under Article 508 of the penal code, the perpetrator can avoid punishment by marrying his victim, and the code’s definition of rape specifically excludes the rape of a spouse.” [14c] (Autonomy, Security, and Freedom of the Person)

## ‘Honour’ crimes

22.60 In raising its concerns regarding violence against women in the Syrian Arab Republic, the June 2007 concluding comments of UN CEDAW stated, "... it is concerned that ... article 548 of the Penal Code exonerates perpetrators of 'honour crimes'." [32b] (para 19)

22.61 The Freedom House 2010 report on women's rights reported:

"Although such ['honour'] killings are most often prompted by real or perceived illicit sexual activities, they have also been used to punish marriage outside the family's religion. The premeditated honor killing of 16-year-old Zahra Ezzo by her brother in 2007 elicited public debate over the issue and drew condemnation of the practice from prominent religious leaders in Syria. At that time, Article 548 of the penal code permitted the complete exoneration of a man who kills or injures his wife, sister, or other close female relative, along with her lover, if they are caught in an illicit sexual act. Additionally, Article 192 permits a large measure of discretion for judges in sentencing those convicted of any crime associated with restoring family honor. While Article 548 was amended in 2009 to replace the maximum one-year prison sentence with a minimum two-year sentence, Article 192 remains unchanged. An estimated 200 women are killed each year in honor-crime cases." [14c] (Autonomy, Security, and Freedom of the Person)

22.62 The USSD Report 2009 also noted:

"On July 1 [2009], President al-Asad amended article 548 of the penal code, which had permitted courts to waive or reduce punishment for perpetrators of honor killings. The article's new language stipulates a mandatory two-year minimum sentence for anyone convicted in an honor killing; the minimum sentence is less severe than sentences prescribed for other forms of homicide. The government kept no official statistics on honor crimes, and when cases were reported, full names were rarely given. Advocacy groups did not release full names to protect victims. There were numerous press and anecdotal reports of honor crimes throughout the year. The MOI [Ministry of Interior] estimated that 38 honor crimes took place from June 2008 to June 2009, while the Syrian Women Observatory (SWO) estimated there were 200 to 300 such killings annually. Other women's rights activists agreed that the actual numbers were high but that reporting was low. As in previous years, human rights observers reported the exact dates of honor killings were often difficult to obtain. Further, families or friends willing to discuss the cases refused to divulge names for reasons of privacy or fear of retribution." [7b] (Section 6)

The report went on to relate three specific instances of honour killings in the Syrian Arab Republic during 2009. [7b] (Section 6)

22.63 In relation to the amendment of article 548 of the penal code, Amnesty International's *Annual Report 2010* noted, "..., no amendment was made to other Penal Code articles prescribing reduced sentences for crimes deemed to have been committed in the name of 'honour'." [12b] (p315) The report also stated, "At least 13 women and one man were reported to have been victims of 'honour killings' [during 2009]." [12b] (p315)

22.64 Human Rights Watch's (HRW) *World Report 2010*, noted, "While the number of honor crimes is unknown, the Syrian Women's Observatory, an unlicensed group, documented at least 12 in 2009, including the killing in August of an 18-year-old by her father because a neighbor had tried to rape her." [39b] (p4-5) Freedom House's survey *Freedom in the World 2010* reported, "State-run media estimate that there are 40 such killings each year, whereas women's rights groups put the figure at 200." [14a] (Political Rights and Civil Liberties)

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## 23. CHILDREN

### OVERVIEW

- 23.01 The United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) undated *At a glance: Syrian Arab Republic* [19a], accessed 6 April 2010, and the World Health Organisation’s (WHO) *Syria Country Profile*, last updated September 2009 [25a], provided the following statistical information on the population of Syria:

Total population (thousands), 2008	21,227
Population (thousands), 2008, under 18 [19a] (Statistics)	8,843
Total population in thousands, 2008	19,880
% Urban population out of total population, 2008	54
% Population below 15 years, 2008 [25a] (Demographic indicators)	37.9

- 23.02 The Save the Children (STC) Sweden report, *Child Rights Situation Analysis for MENA Region*, of August 2008 stated:

“The government claims that the Syrian legislature protects all children without distinction as to race, origin, religion or nationality, and that it provides access to services to persons of Kurdish origin from countries such as Iraq and Turkey. ‘Although these persons are residing illegally, the Syrian Government has shown concern for the rights of their children to obtain an education in accordance with the terms of the Convention on the Rights of the Child’. The Committee on the Rights of the Child claims that children of Kurdish parents who are stateless continue to be denied Syrian nationality and are subject to discrimination.” [33a] (p111)

- 23.03 The same report also noted, “The Committee on the Rights of the Child has expressed its concern that traditional attitudes towards children in society may limit the respect for their views, especially within the family and schools, and that children are not systematically heard in court and administrative proceedings in matters that affect them.” [33a] (p111)

- 23.04 The Executive Summary of a 2010 Fafo Institute for Applied International Studies report – based on a sample survey of 1050 Syrian university youth – entitled *Youth engagement in Syria – Expected but not encouraged*, noted:

“While ‘social responsibility’ is a cornerstone of Syria’s ‘social market economy’ reforms where citizens are increasingly expected to rely on themselves, this report finds that in practice: youth participation in public is rather low; and youth are often discouraged from public participation either directly by their families or indirectly by environments which do not facilitate and encourage their participation. ... 80% of Syrian youth seldom, if ever, participate in extra-curricular activities. Low social trust amongst youth, combined with the closeness of youth organizations to the state and the lack of civil ethos or environment in the university (where a broader commitment to the polity might develop), were stated as key deterring factors.” [35b] (p5)

- 23.05 The STC Sweden report of August 2008 remarked, “The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child was signed by Syria on 18 September 1990 and entered into force on 14 August 1993. In October 2003, Syria acceded to the Optional Protocols to the CRC on the involvement of children in armed conflict, and on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography.” [33a] (p112) STC Sweden’s report also summarised the findings of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child

(UN CRC) in its review of the second periodic report of the Syrian Arab Republic, which:

“... indicated that greater efforts need to be made by Syria to ensure the integration of CRC principles: best interest, respect for the views of the child and nondiscrimination, particularly of children born out of wedlock, girls, children with disabilities, children belonging to minority groups, children of Syrian-born Kurdish parents who are stateless and children in rural north and north-east in the case of Syria.” [33a] (p112)

For more information, refer to the original documents submitted at the UN CRC’s [33rd Session](#) of May 2003. [50c]

## Basic legal information

- 23.06 The US Department of State 2009 *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices* (USSD Report 2009), released 11 March 2010, stated “The legal age for marriage is 18 for males and 17 for females. However, a male 15 years or older and a female 13 years or older may be married if a judge deems both to be willing parties to the marriage, both are ‘physically mature,’ and the father or grandfather consent.” [7b] (Section 6)
- 23.07 The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) database entry on the Syrian Arab Republic, last updated 14 August 2009, noted that, to be eligible to vote in the Syrian elections a person must have reached the age of 18 years and be a Syrian citizen. [9a] (Electoral system)

See also [Political system](#), [Political affiliation](#) and [Women](#)

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## LEGAL RIGHTS

- 23.08 The Concluding observations of the UN CRC reported:

“The Committee notes that the State party has undertaken a commitment to review national legislation vis-à-vis the Convention. It further notes various recent and proposed legislative measures with respect to child rights (e.g. amendments to the Personal Status Code and higher penalties sought for infringements of the Compulsory Education Act), but the Committee is concerned that they do not sufficiently reflect a comprehensive human rights-based approach to the implementation of the Convention. Moreover, it is concerned that in the area of personal status matters, the application of different laws (e.g. 1953 Law of Personal Status) governing different religious communities (i.e. Muslims, Druze, Christians and Jews), and consequently recourse to the different court systems (i.e. Shariah, madhabi, and ruhj courts), may lead to discrimination in the enjoyment of children’s rights.” [50c] (Concluding observations – p3)

## Judicial and penal rights

23.09 The USSD Report 2009 stated “Human rights organizations reported multiple cases in which security services detained minors and placed them in adult prisons.” [7b] (Section 6)

23.10 The Human Rights Watch (HRW) February 2009 report, *Far From Justice – Syria’s Supreme State Security Court*, reported:

“Human Rights Watch has identified at least four defendants whom the SSSC has tried since 2005 who were not yet 18 at the time of the alleged commission of their offense. Under international law, children younger than 18 years can be subject to penal law procedures, but these procedures must be in full compliance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), to which Syria is a state party. Recognizing the vulnerability and specificity of juveniles, Syrian law states that minors must be tried in special juvenile courts by judges who ‘have experience with juvenile issues.’” [39c] (p48)

See also [Judiciary](#) and [Prison conditions](#)

### VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN

23.11 The STC Sweden report of August 2008 stated:

“In recent years, the Syrian government has been increasingly focusing on child protection issues. In 2003, a national conference on child protection was held, and subsequently, the Syrian Commission on Family Affairs, in cooperation with relevant institutions and ministries, had submitted a draft National Plan of Action for the protection of children from violence, neglect and abuse, which was approved by the Council of Ministers in October 2005. Subsequently, 56 million Syrian pounds, or approximately US \$1 million, were allocated for the plan for the year 2006.” [33a] (p112)

23.12 The USSD Report 2009 noted:

“The country lacked a formal law protecting children from abuse. However, the penal code stipulates penalties for those found guilty of certain forms of child abuse associated with trafficking crimes – namely kidnapping and forced prostitution, which both carry a penalty of up to three years in prison. Rape of a child under the age of 15 is punishable by up to 21 years in prison. According to a 2005 Damascus University study supported by the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF), secondary school students reported that ‘violent teacher behavior’ was common.” [7b] (Section 6)

23.13 The STC Sweden report of August 2008 continued:

“There are severe information gaps on the prevalence of sexual abuse and violence in homes, schools and institutions, and the Committee on the Rights of the Child has recommended Syria to conduct a comprehensive study to assess the nature and extent of ill-treatment and abuse of children. The Committee has also recommended necessary measures are put in place to ensure that child victims of any of the crimes under the Optional Protocol of the CRC are neither criminalised nor penalised, and that child victims receive all appropriate assistance, including full social reintegration and physical and psychological recovery. Issues of concern also include the phenomenon of ‘marriages of pleasure’, in which young girls were married off to older men and then left with children to care for and no financial support and the phenomenon of ‘honour killings’.” [33a] (p114)

23.14 On early marriage, the USSD Report 2009 noted, “Although underage marriage has declined considerably in the past decades, it was still common. Underage marriage occurred in all communities, but was more prevalent in rural and less developed regions.” [7b] (Section 6)

23.15 In its consideration of the report submitted by Syria under Article 12, Paragraph 1, of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography, the Committee on the rights of the child stated that it was:

“...concerned at the information reporting the practice of temporary marriages, which occurs especially in some areas of the country, involving girls as young as 12 years who are given in marriage in exchange for money. The Committee is further concerned that these girls, when abandoned by their husbands after a short time, are deprived of the rights acquired with legal marriage, stigmatized and have little access to measures of physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration.” [50b] (p6)

See also [Women](#)

23.16 The STC Sweden report of August 2008 also reported:

“In addition to children victims of abuse, UNICEF has identified the following groups as particularly vulnerable: child workers, children of divorced parents, abandoned children, orphans, disabled children, children in conflict with the law, and the girl child.

“As for *child labour*, Syria has ratified ILO Convention No. 138 and following the recommendations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, it increased in 2000 the minimum age of admission to 15 years. The Labour Law regulates terms and conditions of employment of children above 15 years of age, such as number of working hours, and also punishes employers and minor’s parents who allow work or overlook the recruitment of their children. However, despite legislative reforms, approximately 7 per cent of children under 14 continue to be employed as workers. Moreover, the current Labour Law does not extend legal protection to children in the informal sector, including agriculture and family owned enterprises, where child work is concentrated.” [33a] (p114)

23.17 The Committee on the Rights of the Child, in its October 2007 concluding observations following consideration of the report submitted by Syria under Article 8 of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict, stated it appreciated:

“The State party’s declaration made upon the ratification of the Optional Protocol that the statutes in force and the legislation applicable to the Ministry of Defence do not permit any person under 18 years of age to join the active armed forces or the reserve bodies or formations and do not permit the enlistment of any person under that age, and that no derogation is permitted, even under exceptional circumstances;” [50a] (p2)

## CHILDCARE AND PROTECTION

23.18 The STC Sweden report of August 2008 reported:

“According to article 44, paragraph 1, of the Syrian Constitution: ‘The family is the nuclear unit of society and is protected by the State.’ Parents play the largest role in

family welfare and the raising of children, while the State, through government departments and with the assistance of different popular organisations, strives to provide for the education and welfare of children and to advise parents about ways of dealing with their children, whether or not the children are suffering from a disability. The National Committee for Children is responsible for the protection of child rights, and the Higher Committee for Child Welfare is responsible for policy development and intra-governmental coordination. Further research is needed on the effective coordination between these two government bodies, as well as their capacity to cooperate with civil society organisations.” [33a] (p115)

- 23.19 UNICEF’s undated *At a glance: Syrian Arab Republic*, accessed on 6 April 2010, stated:

“Several areas of concern [sic] in the area of child protection in Syria include child labour, children of divorced parents, abandoned children, orphans, disabled children, children in conflict with the law, children victims of abuse and violence, and discrimination of girls. At the same time, encouraging news is the co-operation with several Ministries and Civil Society Organizations working in areas related to child protection, mainly disabled children, juvenile delinquents and orphaned children. ... The great scarcity and lack of reliable data continue to pose a challenge in many areas of child protection, such as sexual abuse, violence and discrimination against children, disabled children.” [19a] (The big picture)

- 23.20 The STC Sweden report of August 2008 noted:

“In recent years, the Syrian government has been increasingly focusing on child protection issues. In 2003, a national conference on child protection was held, and subsequently, the Syrian Commission on Family Affairs, in cooperation with relevant institutions and ministries, had submitted a draft National Plan of Action for the protection of children from violence, neglect and abuse, which was approved by the Council of Ministers in October 2005. Subsequently, 56 million Syrian pounds, or approximately US \$1 million, were allocated for the plan for the year 2006.” [33a] (p113)

- 23.21 The same report also remarked:

“Thus far, Syria does not have a comprehensive set of law[s] to promote the survival, development and protection of children. However, there are a number of legislative measures in place to protect children from violence and abuse. The Syrian Penal Code protects minors from sexual abuse by prescribing severe penalties for perpetrators, for example, Article 489 of the Code stipulates 21 years’ imprisonment if the victim is under 15 years of age. The Suppression of Prostitution Act No. 10 of 8 March 1961 also protects children from sexual exploitation and trafficking, and the Penal Code provides that persons who abduct a minor for the purpose of committing an offence against their chastity shall be liable to a penalty of not less than 21 years of hard labour.” [33a] (p113)

- 23.22 Further, “Upon ratification of the CRC, Syria made reservations to the provisions of Article 14 of the CRC (freedom of thought, conscience and religion), and articles 20 and 21, which refer to adoption, with the declaration that these provisions are ‘incompatible with the precepts of the Islamic *Shariah*, the provisions of the Syrian Personal Status Code, and prevailing Syrian law’.” [33a] (p112)

- 23.23 UNICEF’s undated *At a glance: Syrian Arab Republic*, accessed on 6 April 2010, reported “All the evidence is that orphans are adequately taken care of within the

family or the private philanthropic system. There are 30 orphanages, run by civil society organizations. They provide care for 2,578 children, who receive their education at local schools. There is at least one orphanage in almost every governorate.” [19a] (The big picture)

23.24 The STC Sweden report of August 2008 noted:

“A number of CSOs provide services to children at risk, mainly disabled children, juvenile delinquents and orphaned children. ... Leading CSOs focusing on child protection include: the Rainbow for a Better Childhood Foundation, which organised in 2004 a Symposium on Child Protection, in association with the Syrian Arab Association of Psychiatrists and under the auspices of the Syrian Commission for Family Affairs. More through [sic] scoping exercise is needed to assess scope, impact and effectiveness of the CSOs, targeting their children, as well their knowledge and understanding of child rights programming.” [33a] (p116)

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## EDUCATION

23.25 The US Department of State (USSD) *Background Note*, last updated February 2010, reported, “Education is free and compulsory from ages 6 to 12. Schooling consists of 6 years of primary education followed by a 3-year preparatory or vocational training period and a 3-year secondary or vocational program. The second 3-year period of secondary schooling is required for university admission. Total enrollment at post-secondary schools is over 150,000. The illiteracy rate of Syrians aged 15 and older is 9.3% for males and 17.8% for females.” [7a] (People)

23.26 The STC Sweden report of August 2008 noted:

“Education is free of charge at all stages and compulsory at the primary stage, for children aged between 6 and 12 years, as stipulated by Article 2 of the Compulsory Education Act. In its 2002 Periodic Report, Syria claimed that approval has been granted to extend the period of compulsory education to 16 full years. The Ministry of Education supplies free school textbooks to all children in compulsory education.” [33a] (p114)

23.27 The US Department of State *2009 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices* (USSD Report 2009), released 11 March 2010, stated:

“The government provided free public education to citizen children from primary school through university. Education is compulsory for all children between the ages of six and 12. Noncitizen children could also attend public schools free but required prior permission from the Ministry of Education. According to a 2005 joint study by the UN Development Program and the State Planning Commission, 49.6 percent of students through the secondary level were female. Nevertheless, societal pressure for early marriage and childbearing interfered with girls' educational progress, particularly in rural areas, where the dropout rates for female students remained high.” [7b] (Section 6)

23.28 The World Health Organisation (WHO) included statistics on illiteracy and school enrolment as socioeconomic indicators in its Syria Country Profile, last updated in September 2009:

		Year
Adult literacy rate 15+ years, total (%)	81	2007
Adult literacy rate 15+ years, males (%)	na	2007
Adult literacy rate 15+ years, females (%)	na	2007
Gross primary school enrolment ratio - total (%)	99	2007
Gross primary school enrolment ratio - male (%)	99	2007
Gross primary school enrolment ratio - female (%)	99	2007
Gross secondary school enrolment ratio - total (%)	94	2007
Gross secondary school enrolment ratio - males (%)	94	2007
Gross secondary school enrolment ratio - females (%)	94	2007
[25a] (Socioeconomic indicators)		

23.29 The STC Sweden report of August 2008 noted:

“While primary school enrolment rates are high – 92 and 97 per cent for girls and boys respectively – the number of children who drop out of school shows a disturbing trend. An estimated 25 per cent of students leave school before finishing their primary level education, while 67 per cent of students do not finish secondary education. High school drop-out rates have been linked to poverty and economic necessity to find employment, low quality of education and various forms of violence in schools, including ill-treatment and verbal abuse by teachers. To address the issue of school drop-out, the Ministry of Education has called for a Bill providing for the infliction of higher penalties on any person who infringes the provisions of the Compulsory Education Act. The Committee on the Rights of the Child has also recommended that Syria undertake a process of curriculum and teaching methodology reform, with more emphasis on critical thinking, child-centred teaching methods and human rights education.” [33a] (p115)

23.30 UNICEF’s undated *At a glance: Syrian Arab Republic* reported:

“Although substantial progress has been made in ensuring the development of children, mainly through free and compulsory schooling, there are still some areas of concern including: quality of education; Integrated Early Childhood Development (IECD) and school dropout, especially among girls. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) is highlighting that Syria may be one of 57 countries not achieving the goals of providing adequate education for all children by 2015.” [19a] (The big picture)

23.31 The STC Sweden report of August 2008 stated:

“According to UNHCR and Syrian government officials, there are no restrictions preventing Iraqi children from attending schools in Syria. The Syrian government recognises the right of Kurdish children to a primary education. Stateless Kurds face difficulty enrolling in secondary schools. To guarantee access to education to girls and boys with special needs, special schools have been set up for children, and inclusive education programmes are increasingly being adopted by the Ministry of Education.” [33a] (p114)

23.32 The USSD Report 2009 remarked, “In general, Palestinians and other noncitizens, including stateless Kurds, can send their children to school and universities. Stateless Kurds are ineligible to receive a degree documenting their academic achievement.” [7b] (Section 6)

See also [Kurds](#), [Women](#) and [Foreign refugees](#)

## HEALTH AND WELFARE

- 23.33 The WHO included statistics on various socioeconomic and health indicators relevant to children in its Syria Country Profile, last updated in September 2009:

		Year
<b>Population with sustainable access to improved water source (%)</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>2007</b>
<b>Population with access to improved sanitation (%)</b>	<b>97</b>	<b>2007</b>
<b>[25a] (Socioeconomic indicators)</b>		
		Year
<b>Newborns with low birth weight (%)</b>	<b>9.7</b>	<b>2006</b>
<b>Children underweight (%)</b>	<b>9.7</b>	<b>2006</b>
<b>Perinatal mortality rate per 1000 total births</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>2004</b>
<b>Neonatal mortality rate</b>	<b>8.7</b>	<b>2008</b>
<b>Infant mortality rate (per 1000 live births)</b>	<b>18.1b</b>	<b>2008</b>
<b>Under five mortality rate (per 1000 live births)</b>	<b>22.0b</b>	<b>2008</b>
<b>[25a] (Health status indicators)</b>		
One year-olds immunized in 2008 with		
<b>Bacille Calmette-Guerin (BCG) (%)</b>		<b>99</b>
<b>Three doses of combined diphtheria–pertussis–tetanus vaccine (DPT3) (%)</b>		<b>98</b>
<b>Three doses of oral poliovaccine, not including supplemental immunization doses (OPV3) (%)</b>		<b>98</b>
<b>Measles vaccine (%)</b>		<b>98</b>
<b>Three doses of hepatitis 3 vaccine (HBV3) (%)</b>		<b>98</b>

- 23.34 UNICEF's *At a glance: Syrian Arab Republic*, "Infant and under-five mortality rates have declined. With high immunization coverage rates, the country is certified as polio-free: no polio cases have been reported since 1995." [19a] (The big picture) It continued:

"Although the country has been certified as polio-free, not enough attention has been paid to verticality and poor quality within the health services, nor to preventive and home-care aspects of child health. The adoption in 1999 by the Ministry of Health of the World Health Organization (WHO)/UNICEF-supported approach for Integrated Management of Childhood Illness (IMCI) was a step in the right direction. Some 200 awareness seminars were held for youth and health workers on HIV/AIDS." [19a] (The big picture)

See also [Medical issues](#)

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## 24. TRAFFICKING

- 24.01 The US Department of State *Trafficking in Persons Report 2010: Country Narratives – Countries Q Through Z* (USSD TiP Report 2010), released 14 June 2010, reported:

"Syria is principally a destination country for women and children who are subjected to trafficking in persons, specifically conditions of forced labor or forced prostitution. Thousands of women, mostly from Southeast Asia and East Africa – particularly Indonesia, the Philippines, Somalia, and Ethiopia – are recruited to work in Syria as domestic servants but are subsequently subjected to conditions of involuntary

servitude by their employers. Contracts signed in the employee's country of origin are often changed upon arrival in Syria, contributing to the employee's vulnerability to forced labor. Some of these women are confined to the private residences in which they work, and most have their passports confiscated, contrary to Syrian law, by their employer or the labor recruitment agency. The Government of Ethiopia's ban on its citizens accepting employment in Syria has not stopped the flow of workers into the country.

"Women from Eastern Europe – particularly Russia and Ukraine – Somalia, and Morocco are recruited legally as cabaret dancers in Syria; some 'entertainers' are subsequently forced into prostitution after their employers confiscate their passports and confine them to their hotels. Due to the economic desperation of Syria's large Iraqi refugee population, some women and girls are forced into prostitution by their families or, in some cases, by criminal gangs. Iraqi families arrange for young girls to work in nightclubs, to be temporarily 'married' to men for the sole purpose of prostitution, or to be sold to pimps who rent them out for longer periods of time." [7d] (SYRIA (Tier 2 Watch List))

See also [Women](#) and [Foreign refugees](#)

24.02 The June 2007 concluding comments of the United Nations on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (UN CEDAW) reported that:

"While welcoming the State party's ratification of the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, and noting the preparation of a draft bill on trafficking, the Committee is concerned that the victims of trafficking and exploitation are being treated as criminals and punished for prostitution or sent to reform centres for juvenile delinquents and there are no measures for their rehabilitation." [32b] (para 23)

24.03 The USSD TiP Report 2010 noted:

"The government made clear progress in strengthening its anti-trafficking legal framework during the reporting period. It did not, however, make significant efforts to investigate or punish trafficking offenses, or respond to requests for information on cases pursued by judicial and law enforcement agencies. Inadequate law enforcement training remained a significant impediment to combating trafficking crimes in Syria. In January 2010, the government published a comprehensive anti-trafficking law, Legislative Decree No. 3, which provides a legal foundation for prosecuting trafficking offenses and protecting victims, but does not lay out a clear definition of human trafficking. This law prescribes a minimum punishment of seven years' imprisonment, a penalty sufficiently stringent, but not commensurate with those prescribed for other serious crimes, such as rape. The law was scheduled to take effect on April 11, 2010, allowing relevant ministries time to develop protocols and standard operating procedures for carrying out its mandates; operational protocols were at the earliest stages of development at the end of the reporting period. There were no reports of authorities using existing statutes, including a statute prohibiting forced prostitution, to prosecute trafficking crimes during the reporting period. There were reports of low-level cooperation between trafficking offenders and local police elements during the year, particularly regarding the monitoring of women in prostitution." [7d] (SYRIA (Tier 2 Watch List)-Prosecution)

24.04 The same report further stated:

“During the year, the government made modest progress in protecting trafficking victims, while demonstrating improved partnerships with NGOs [non-Governmental organisations] and international organizations to identify and provide services to victimized women and children. As it did in Damascus during the previous reporting period, the government donated building space for a trafficking victims’ shelter in Aleppo, which opened in January 2010. These two shelters, operated by local NGOs, offered legal, medical, and psychological counseling services to approximately 30 female trafficking victims in 2009. The government continued to lack procedures for identifying potential victims among vulnerable populations; as a result, victims of trafficking may have been arrested and charged with prostitution or violating immigration laws before being deported or punished. There were reports, however, that some women arrested on such charges and subsequently identified as victims of trafficking were referred to shelters; this is a positive development. In 2009, for example, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor referred 21 Asian labor trafficking victims to the shelter in Damascus. Despite this, referral of victims to shelters remained ad hoc and inconsistent, at times requiring lobbying from NGOs or international organizations to secure their release from detention centers. In limited cases, immigration authorities worked with foreign embassies, international organizations, and NGOs to establish the identity and citizenship of victims and provide needed assistance. The government did not encourage victims to assist in investigations or prosecutions of their traffickers and did not provide foreign victims with legal alternatives to their removal to countries in which they may face hardship or retribution.” [7d] (SYRIA (Tier 2 Watch List)-Protection)

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## 25. MEDICAL ISSUES

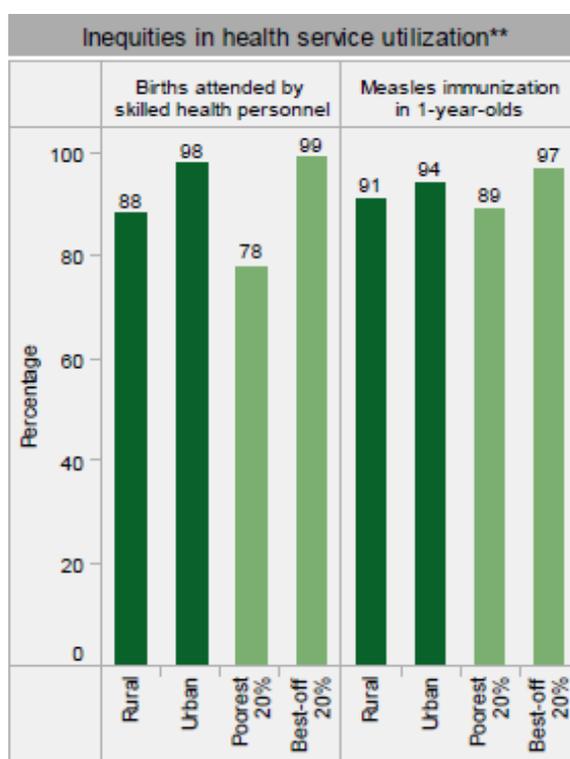
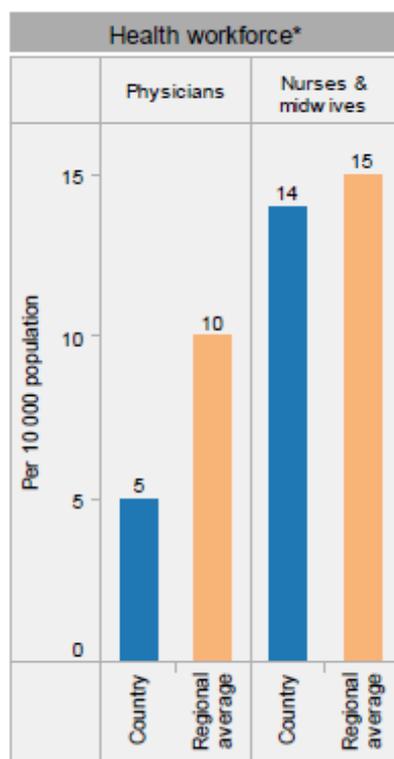
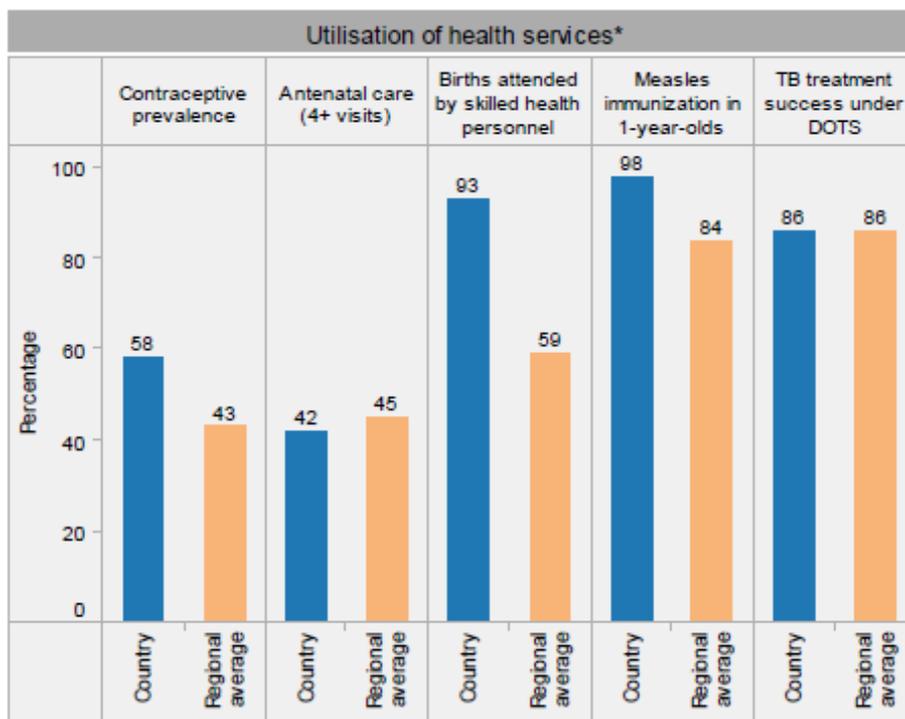
### OVERVIEW OF AVAILABILITY OF MEDICAL TREATMENT AND DRUGS

25.01 The World Health Organisation’s (WHO) Syria Country Profile, last updated September 2009, provided the following statistical information:

Health Expenditure indicators		Year
<b>GDP per capita US\$ exchange rate</b>	<b>1,819</b>	<b>2008</b>
<b>Total expenditure on health (per capita) US\$ exchange rate</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>2008</b>
<b>Government expenditure on health (per capita) US\$ exchange rate</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>2008</b>
<b>Total expenditure on health of % of GDP</b>	<b>4.0</b>	<b>2008</b>
<b>General government expenditure on health as % of total health expenditure</b>	<b>48.0</b>	<b>2008</b>
<b>Out-of-pocket expenditure as % of total health expenditure</b>	<b>52.0</b>	<b>2008</b>
<b>General government expenditure on health as % of total government expenditure</b>	<b>6.0</b>	<b>2008</b>
<b>Ministry of health budget as % of government budget</b>	<b>4.1</b>	<b>2008</b>
Coverage with primary health care services indicators		Year
<b>Population with access to local health services, total (%)</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>2006</b>
<b>Population with access to local health services, urban (%)</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>2006</b>
		<b>6</b>
<b>Population with access to local health services, rural (%)</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>2006</b>
Human and physical resources indicators Rate (R) per 10 000 population		Year
<b>Physicians</b>	<b>14.8</b>	<b>2007</b>
<b>Dentists</b>	<b>7.4</b>	<b>2007</b>
<b>Pharmacists</b>	<b>6.5</b>	<b>2007</b>
<b>Nursing and midwifery</b>	<b>18.8</b>	<b>2007</b>

Hospital beds 15.4 2008  
 Primary health care units and centres 1.0 2008

25.02 The WHO's undated *Syrian Arab Republic: Health Profile*, accessed on 8 August 2010, provided the following selected indicators:



(p2)

[25c]

### Access to contraception, reproductive health care and abortions

- 25.03 In addition to the WHO selected indicators above, the US Department of State *2009 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices* (USSD Report 2009) released 11 March 2010, stated:

“Couples and individuals generally have the right to decide freely and responsibly the number, spacing, and timing of their children and the means to do so free from discrimination, coercion, and violence. Although the supply of modern contraceptives was available to less than half of the public, most of the demand for family planning was satisfied in the country, according to the Population Reference Bureau (PRB). In Damascus, grocery stores openly sold condoms. Skilled personnel attended approximately 98 percent of all births, and more than 80 percent of women who gave birth had access to postnatal care, according to the PRB.” [7b] (Section 6)

- 25.04 The June 2007 concluding comments of the United Nations Committee on the Elimination against Women (UN CEDAW) reported:

“While noting the efforts made by the State party to improve reproductive health care for women, the Committee remains concerned about the lack of access to adequate health care of women and girls, particularly in rural areas. The Committee further expresses concern that women in certain parts of the country and belonging to certain social classes require, in practice, the permission of their husbands to access health facilities.” [32b] (para 29)

- 25.05 The Freedom House report, *Women’s Rights in the Middle East and North Africa – 2010: Syria*, released 3 March 2010, stated:

“Abortion is a criminal offense and carries a prison sentence of at least six months for the woman and at least a year for anyone who assists her, with harsher penalties depending on the circumstances. Despite these restrictions, it is possible to find doctors who will perform the operation, though often for a fee that is out of reach for many women, and in unsanitary conditions. In wealthier families, unmarried girls who become pregnant are pressured to have an abortion to maintain the appearance of family honor.” [14c] (Social and Cultural Rights)

See also [Women](#)

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## HIV/AIDS – ANTI-RETROVIRAL (ARV) TREATMENT

- 25.06 The United Nations General Assembly Special Session on HIV/AIDS (UNGASS) *Country Progress Report 2010 – Syrian Arab Republic (SAR) – Narrative Report (Draft) January 2008–December 2009*, dated 30 March 2010, reported:

“Similar to a number of countries in the region, the Syrian Arab Republic has a low-level concentrated HIV epidemic. This mentioned, it has to be noted that a trend of increasing rates have been observed in the past few years. For example, the number of registered new cases was under 20 between 1986 and 1993, this rate has increased to under 40 between 1993 and 2004 and more than 40 between 2004 and 2008. A more in-depth description of the nature of the disease and the response is presented in the sections below.” [43a] (p5)

- 25.07 The same report continued:

“A total of 627 HIV/AIDS cases have been reported from 1987 through 2009. AIDS cases comprised 41.0% (257); HIV cases were 370. 23 The majority of HIV/AIDS cases (54.8%) were reported among Syrians with the rest being among non-Syrians. Most cases occurred in the 20-39 age group with a slightly higher percentage of HIV cases occurring in females (205, 55.4%) and more males classified as AIDS cases (196, 76.3%). The main mode of transmission remains through heterosexual intercourse (86.5% of HIV cases and 69.3% of AIDS cases).” [43a] (p13)

- 25.08 In June 2010, the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) published the report, *Syria - National Composite Policy Index 2010*, which reported:

“The National AIDS center did not develop a comprehensive national strategic plan due to shortage of national experts in strategic development, lack of financial support and lack of commitment from key policy makers in the past for a national strategic plan. In absence of National strategic plan, AIDS National Center had conducted multiple activities and workshops with multi-sectors including educational ministry, Ministry of Interior, Tourism and Defense, Youth and women organizations and family planning organization. The financial support for such activities was provided in large part by different United Nation Organizations in addition to regular funding from Ministry of Health allocated to communicable disease directorate. These activities had targeted women and young girls through family planning clinics and family planning organization and targeted youth through Student Association and Youth organization. While drug users, female sex workers, men having sex with men were only tested for HIV at the time of incarceration in absence of pre and post test counseling most of the time. The activities in the last 2 years did not include orphans and vulnerable children or other vulnerable populations. The activities were selected based on source of funding rather than needs assessment.” [24a] (p4)

- 25.09 The UNGASS report further stated:

“In terms of treatment provision, Syria has a system where the patient prospectively chooses in which governorate AIDS office s/he would like to receive treatment. this [sic] procedure is installed to preserve anonymity, an issue of concern among PLHIV as revealed in previous assessments. ARV treatment in Syria is provided free of charge and available to all patients in need of medications. However, the available medication is limited to a combination of two nucleotide-reverse transcriptase inhibitor (NRTI) and one non nucleotide-reverse transcriptase inhibitor (NNRTI) and there are no alternatives in case of intolerance or resistance. The country is also in need of treatment prophylaxis and palliative therapy guidelines, as well as post-exposure prophylaxis guidelines. Furthermore, the number of physicians in HIV care and management is small, partly due to the small number of PLHIV/AIDS in Syria.

“In 2009, there were 99 individuals who were receiving ARV treatment. Of those, 3 were males younger than 15 and 63 were males 15 years of age and older. On the other hand, there were 33 females receiving ARV treatment, 5 younger than 15 and 28 who were 15 years and older.” [43a] (p16-17)

- 25.10 On HIV/AIDS discrimination the USSD Report 2009 noted, “There were no reports of violence or discrimination against persons with HIV/AIDS. Human rights activists believed that the extent of the problem was widely underreported.” [7b] (Section 6) The International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (ILGA) Syrian Arab Republic: Law web page, last modified 26 March 2009, reported that Syria can expel foreigners who are HIV positive. [22b]

25.11 The UNAIDS June 2010 report, *Syria - National Composite Policy Index 2010*, noted:

“At the present, drug use, homosexuality and extramarital sex work is considered illegal and not accepted in the society. This represents a major barrier in reaching these most at risk groups to provide education and HIV test counseling as well [as] prevention. Also, given the conservative makeup of Syrian society, homosexuality and extramarital sex work is not acceptable which constitute[s] a barrier to reach homosexuals and female sex workers for prevention education.” [24a] (p7)

25.12 The UNGASS report of March 2010 stated that Government support:

“... has been historically tilted towards endorsing activities targeting education and prevention of the general public, rather than addressing the impact of the disease in the most vulnerable groups, e.g. MARPs, or affected population (PLHIV). The latter has been addressed by a Ministry of Health regulation (Regulation No 38, Ministry of Health) that was passed in 1997 specifically mentioning that civil rights of all Syrian Citizens infected with HIV are protected including their rights of access to medical care, social care, education and employment. However, studies done recently with [People Living with HIV] PLHIVs indicated a continuing concern over the rights mentioned in the decree, especially as it relates to obtaining medical treatment and job opportunities.” [43a] (p15)

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## MENTAL HEALTH

25.13 The undated WHO *Mental Health Country Profile: Syrian Arab Republic*, accessed 8 August 2010, which also contained information from the *Mental Health Atlas 2005*, noted, “There is a paucity of epidemiological data on mental illnesses in Syrian Arab Republic in internationally accessible literature.” [25b] (Summary update (*Mental health atlas, 2005*) – Epidemiology) Further, “Mental health is a part of primary health care system. Actual treatment of severe mental disorders is available at the primary level. Regular training of primary care professionals is carried out in the field of mental health. About 110 nurses and general physicians have been trained in the last 10 years. There are no community care facilities for patients with mental disorders.” [25b] (Summary update (*Mental health atlas, 2005*) – Mental health resources)

Total psychiatric beds per 10 000 population	0.8
Psychiatric beds in mental hospitals per 10 000 population	0.78
Psychiatric beds in general hospitals per 10 000 population	0.02
Psychiatric beds in other settings per 10 000 population	0
Number of psychiatrists per 100 000 population	0.5
Number of neurosurgeons per 100 000 population	0.6
Number of psychiatric nurses per 100 000 population	0.5
Number of neurologists per 100 000 population	0.9
Number of psychologists per 100 000 population	0
Number of social workers per 100 000 population	0

(WHO *Mental Health Country Profile: Syrian Arab Republic*) [25b] (Summary update (*Mental health atlas, 2005*) – Table 1. Number of psychiatric beds and professionals)

25.14 The undated WHO *Mental Health Country Profile: Syrian Arab Republic*, accessed 8 August 2010, also stated:

“There are 800 beds at Ibn Sina Psychiatric Hospital in Damascus distributed over 18 wards, allotted for the treatment of 600 male patients and 200 female patients—of whom 100 are under legal confinement. Treatment of such patients is mainly conducted through the use of psychoactive drugs and rehabilitation through work and other social and artistic activities.

“Ibn Khaldoun Psychiatric Hospital, in Aleppo, has 400 beds, 250 of which are for male patients and 150 for female patients, receiving more or less the same type of medical treatment used at Ibn Sina Hospital in Damascus. In addition a psychiatric department providing therapeutic psychiatric services at the Ministry of Health Hospital of Ibn Al-Nafees; a teaching psychiatric department which provides similar services at Al-Moassat Hospital of Damascus University; as well as two more mental health departments providing such services at two military hospitals affiliated to military medical services are operating in Damascus.

“In addition to these hospitals, there are special foundations attached to the Ministry of Work and Social Affairs, which provide treatment and rehabilitation to the mentally handicapped and delinquents, under the supervision of licensed psychiatrists. Over 60 primary care personnel have been trained in mental health.” [25b] (**Mental Health Facilities**)

- 25.15 On care for specific sections of the population, WHO reported, “The country has specific programmes for mental health for refugees and elderly. Services for mentally retarded are available.” [25b] (**Summary update (*Mental health atlas, 2005*) – Mental health resources**) The organisation also noted that the therapeutic medicines included in the following list were “generally available at the primary health care level of the country”:

<b>Carbamazepine</b>	<b>Diazepam</b>
<b>Phenobarbital</b>	<b>Fluphenazine</b>
<b>Phenytoin sodium</b>	<b>Haloperidol</b>
<b>Sodium valproate</b>	<b>Carbidopa</b>
<b>Amitriptyline</b>	<b>Levodopa</b>

**Chlorpromazine**  
[25b] (**Summary update (*Mental health atlas, 2005*) – Mental health resources**)

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## 26. FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT

- 26.01 The US Department of State *2009 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices* (USSD Report 2009), released 11 March 2010 stated “The constitution provides for freedom of movement ‘within the territories of the state unless restricted by a judicial decision or by the implementation of laws.’” [7b] (**Section 2d**) The report also noted, “The government restricted travel near the Golan Heights, and it often objected to foreign diplomats traveling to areas along the Turkish and Iraqi borders. In June the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) declared that foreign diplomats traveling outside Damascus must notify the MFA in advance.” [7b] (**Section 2d**)

- 26.02 The *Annual Report 2008* of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) stated:

“Travel to the Syrian Arab Republic for academic or religious purposes by students and pilgrims living in the occupied Golan, as well as their return home, was facilitated

by the ICRC, in coordination with the UN Disengagement Observer Force and the Israeli and Syrian authorities. Similarly, betrothed couples living on opposite sides of the demarcation line were able to wed under ICRC auspices in the separation zone (Kuneitra).” [18a] (p363)

26.03 Further, “The government maintained security checkpoints, primarily in military and other restricted areas. There were few police checkpoints on main roads or in populated areas. Security services used checkpoints to conduct searches without warrants for smuggled goods, weapons, narcotics, and subversive literature.” (USSD Report 2009) [7b] (Section 2d)

26.04 Freedom House’s special report, *Women’s Rights in the Middle East and North Africa 2010*, released 3 March 2010, stated:

“Married women face ... restrictions on their freedom of movement under the personal status law. Specifically, a disobedient wife is not entitled to financial support from her husband for the duration of her disobedience, which can be broadly defined to include leaving the conjugal home for reasons that contravene Shari’a or preventing the husband from entering their home before petitioning to be moved to another residence.” [14c] (Autonomy, Security, and Freedom of the Person)

See also [Exit and return](#)

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## 27. INTERNALLY DISPLACED PEOPLE (IDPs)

For recent information pertaining to the situation of IDPs in the Syrian Arab Republic, see the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre’s (IDMC) [List of Documents](#) [51b]

27.01 The US Department of State *2009 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices* (USSD Report 2009), released 11 March 2010, stated:

“During the year [2009] there were numerous reports in local, regional, and international media outlets on the sudden surge of internally displaced persons. An IWPR [Institute for War and Peace Reporting] article estimated that extreme drought and unemployment since 2003 had forced 200,000 persons from northeastern Syria to abandon their homes. Other press reports put the number closer to 300,000. Outmigration from the al-Jazeera region to urban areas strained already limited resources in cities, increased urban unemployment, and led to the erection of tent communities on cities’ fringes. The government provided limited food relief through the Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC). In cooperation with the SARC, international NGOs [non-governmental organisations] like the World Food Program and Danish Red Cross provided additional food and medical assistance. There were no government resettlement efforts for internally displaced persons.” [7b] (Section 2d)

27.02 The IDMC’s October 2007 *Overview: Forty Years on, people displaced from the Golan remain in waiting*, reported:

“The Syrian government estimates that around 305,000 people remain displaced today, a figure which includes the descendants of those displaced in 1967. Forty years on, the Golan’s internally displaced population has largely integrated in their

current places of residence across Syria. But while they do not face particular humanitarian risks, many continue to express a wish to return to the Golan. The issues of the restitution of their property and compensation for lost or destroyed property are also unresolved. A more immediate concern is that many displaced Syrians continue to be prevented from maintaining ties with their relatives living in the occupied Golan.” [51a] (p1)

27.03 The Save the Children (STC) Sweden August 2008 report, *Child Rights Situation Analysis For MENA Region*, stated, “As a result of the Israeli occupation of the Golan in 1967, 275,000 persons were displaced and forced to relocate to other locations inside Syria. An estimated 22,500 Syrians continue to live in the occupied Syrian Golan, and do not have access to services provided by the Syrian government.” [33a] (p111)

27.04 The *Annual Report 2008* of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) recorded its efforts in relation to persons displaced and separated by the Israeli-occupation of the Golan Heights. “Family members cut off from one another for decades by the separation zone between the occupied Golan and the Syrian Arab Republic were able to maintain minimum contact through the ICRC, acting as a neutral intermediary with the authorities concerned.” [18a] (p362-363) Further:

“Visits by Syrians living in the occupied Golan to family members who had fled to the Syrian Arab Republic when the region was occupied by Israeli forces in 1967 could not resume despite numerous diplomatic efforts to this end by the ICRC. Such visits had not been allowed by the Israeli authorities since 1992. ...

“Syrian nationals in the occupied Golan and the Syrian Arab Republic continued to rely on the ICRC to convey official papers, such as power of attorney documents and birth, death and marriage certificates, back and forth between them. Such documents often enabled the recipients to qualify for pensions or to settle personal issues such as inheritance or property rights.” [18a] (p363)

Refer to [The ICRC in Syria](#) [18b] and the comprehensive October 2007 report of the [Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre](#) for recent and detailed information on the situation of IDPs in Syria. [51a]

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## 28. FOREIGN REFUGEES

28.01 The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) undated page on the Syrian Arab Republic, accessed 31 March 2010, remarked:

“The Syrian Arab Republic hosts a large number of displaced people from Iraq, including some Palestinians. Indeed, Iraqi refugees in Syria constitute one of the largest urban refugee populations in the world. Syria also hosts some 10,000 refugees and asylum-seekers from other countries, mainly Afghanistan, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Somalia and Sudan.

“The generous attitude of the Government and people of Syria has allowed UNHCR, with the support of the international community, to build a favourable protection environment in the country. In the absence of a formal legal framework, a tacit

understanding allows refugees access to assistance, basic education and primary health care. ...

“Nonetheless, the lack of a proper legal framework in Syria, coupled with an ongoing insecurity in the countries of origin, has given rise to uncertainty among many refugees about their future.” [10a]

- 28.02 The US Department of State *2009 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices* (USSD Report 2009), released 11 March 2010, stated:

“The government is not a party to either the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees or its 1967 Protocol. Several laws regulate the legal status of Palestinian refugees in Syria, including the 1957 law that stipulates Palestinian refugees have the same rights as Syrians, except for those rights dependent on nationality. The law allows for the issuance of identity cards and the same government protections due to Syrian citizens. A 1963 law regulates the issuance of travel documents to Palestinian refugees residing in the country, on condition that they registered with the General Administration for Palestine Arab Refugees and hold Syrian provisional identity cards. It generally cooperated with the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) in assisting internally displaced persons, refugees, stateless persons, and asylum seekers, and it respected the UNHCR's eligibility determinations regarding asylum seekers.

“In practice the government provided some protection against the expulsion or return of refugees to countries where their lives or freedom would be threatened on account of their race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion. During the year [2009] the government returned some Iraqi female refugees whom authorities had arrested on charges of prostitution, depositing them across the border in Iraq, where traffickers often subsequently brought them back into the country. There were also reports that the government deported Iraqi refugees operating illegal Internet cafes. UN agencies reported security services continued the practice of detaining Iraqi refugees for working without a permit.” [7b] (Section 2d)

- 28.03 The Save the Children (STC) Sweden report, *Child Rights Situation Analysis for MENA Region*, of August 2008 noted:

“Syrian Arab Red Crescent is UNHCR's main implementing partner in the country, in addition to which a number of small local charities have also been working to provide assistance to Iraqi refugees. In May 2008, UNHCR signed a contract with the International Medical Corps (IMC), paving the way for the aid agency to become the first international non-governmental organisation (INGO) to work with Iraqi refugees in Syria. IMC will run three health clinics for refugees in Damascus under the agreement. It is also intended that the Danish Refugee Council and Premier Urgence will start work in Syria in support of UNHCR community services and education programmes.” [33a] (p116)

- 28.04 UNHCR's Syrian Arab Republic web page, accessed 31 March 2010, reported, “The authorities have shown some tolerance towards refugees working in the informal market, although they are barred from formal employment. Officials have also grown more receptive to UNHCR-issued documents.” [10a] The United States Committee for Refugees' (USCR) *World Refugee Survey 2009* reported:

“Syria’s Labor Law of 1959 restricts work permits for foreigners to those with residence permits who obtain the permission of the Ministry of Social and Labour and whose countries allow Syrians to work. The law also prohibits employing foreigners without work permits and bans foreigners from working in positions other than the one for which they obtained a permit. Foreigners holding work permits are subject to the same protection as Syrian nationals under the country’s labor laws and are eligible for social security.

“Very few refugees obtain work permits, relegating most to low-paying jobs in the informal sector or dependence on aid.” [26a]

“There are no direct provisions in the law giving refugees the right to work. According to the UNRWA, the rules for employment of citizens were applicable to Palestinian refugees provided that they have been living in the country for at least 10 years. Obtaining a work permit was a lengthy and complicated process; the government rarely granted refugees a permit. Many refugees found daily labor in the informal sector mainly as guards, construction workers, street vendors, and other manual labor jobs.” [7b] (Section 2d)

See also [Palestinians](#)

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## IRANIAN AHVAZIS

28.05 The USSD Report 2009 stated:

“There were no reports of Ahvazis forcibly repatriated to Iran at year's end [2009]. Anecdotal evidence suggested that the situation of Ahvazi refugees in the country remained precarious. The government reportedly continued to deny departures for resettlement in other countries. As a result of these denials, Ahvazi refugees sometimes attempted illegal border crossings, usually to Turkey, Lebanon, or Jordan. Authorities apprehended and detained some of the refugees for illegal border crossing or use of forged documents. International NGOs knew of at least two Ahvazi refugees the government accepted for resettlement, but both remained in detention at year’s end.” [7b] (Section 2d)

28.06 Amnesty International’s Annual Report 2010 remarked, “Iranian Ahwazi Arab asylum-seekers remained at risk of forcible return to Iran.” [12b] (p316)

## IRAQI REFUGEES

28.07 The STC Sweden report of August 2008, stated, “Since March 2003, nearly 1.5 million Iraqis have taken up refuge in Syria, placing a heavy burden on the country, with the government estimating that the burden, including accommodation of Iraqi children in schools, has cost it US \$1 billion each year.” [33a] (p111) Refugees International’s undated web page on Syria, accessed 19 August 2010, reported “Syria has received the largest number of Iraqi refugees – at least 1.2 million according to the UN refugee agency, and has made services available to them.” [40a]

28.08 The USSD Report 2009 recounted:

“As of December [2009] approximately 23,000 new Iraqi refugees had registered for assistance with the UNHCR, bringing the total number of registered refugees to

218,363. Most received legal and material assistance from the UNHCR and other international and nongovernmental humanitarian organizations. The UNHCR estimated in September that approximately 1,105,000 displaced Iraqis lived in the country. It was unknown how many Iraqis were in the country without visas. The government generally continued to honor the UNHCR's request that states maintain temporary protection for all Iraqi asylum seekers and persons whose applications were rejected, and it recognized refugees whose cases resettlement countries had suspended during the year. Since 2007 the government required all Iraqis to obtain a visa before entry; citizens of other Arab League countries were able to enter the country without a visa for a renewable period of as long as three months. The extent to which authorities enforced the policy at the border remained unclear."

[7b] (Section 2d)

- 28.09 UNHCR's undated web page on the Syrian Arab Republic, accessed 31 March 2010, reported, "While new and stricter visa requirements were introduced for Iraqis at the end [of] 2007, and residence permits are only issued for short periods of time, Iraqis have largely been able to remain in the country. However, there have been reports of some detention and deportation in 2009." [10a]
- 28.10 The USCR *World Refugee Survey 2009* reported, "Since December 2007, UNHCR has granted refugee status prima facie to Iraqis from the central and southern portions of the country and issued asylum seeker certificates to those from the Kurdish-controlled north." [26a]
- 28.11 Human Rights Watch's *World Report 2010*, released January 2010, stated:
- "Syria hosts more Iraqi refugees than any other country. Resurgent violence in Iraq caused Iraqis to continue to arrive in Syria: During the first six months of 2009 the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR] officially registered 19,000 new Iraqi refugees, bringing the total number of registered Iraqi refugees to 210,000. This represents only a portion of the Iraqis in Syria, the actual number being an estimated 1–1.5 million." [39b] (p5)
- 28.12 UNHCR's Syrian Arab Republic web page reported, "The number of Iraqis approaching UNHCR for registration has gone down, but still amounts to thousands each month. Some 39 per cent of those registered have specific needs. Although some refugees have returned home spontaneously, there have not been any large-scale returns, and UNHCR has only helped some 1,200 individuals in this regard. In 2009, a survey of return intentions confirmed that most refugees are not yet ready to return to Iraq.
- "From 2007 to mid-2009, UNHCR referred some 33,000 Iraqis for resettlement; another 32,000 who have not yet been referred are considered eligible for this durable solution. Local integration is not an option in Syria. As their stay in Syria lengthens, many Iraqi refugees are becoming vulnerable because their savings are running out and the cost of living is rising, while they have few or no opportunities for employment. UNHCR is concerned that this is leading to unsustainable returns to Iraq. International assistance is needed so that the basic needs of more than 168,000 people registered with UNHCR can be met and their protection space preserved."
- [10a]
- 28.13 Amnesty International's *Annual Report 2010* stated, "Hundreds of thousands of Iraqi refugees remained in Syria, many of whom faced economic and other problems because they did not have the right to work or did not possess valid visas, so opening them to the possibility of deportation to Iraq." [12b] (p316) Human Rights Watch's

(HRW) *World Report 2010*, released January 2010, noted, “Syria gives Iraqi refugees, registered or not, access to public hospitals and schools, but prohibits them from working. While Syria has generally maintained its doors open to Iraqi refugees, it has implemented since 2007 more restrictive entry requirements. Syria has forcibly returned to Iraq some Iraqi refugees whom Syria accused of committing criminal acts or working illegally.” [39b] (p5)

28.14 The website of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies provides information on the assistance it provided to the displaced Iraqi population in Syria in [2009](#) and [2010](#). [54a-54b]

28.15 The USCR *World Refugee Survey 2009* reported, “While Syria traditionally allowed Arab nationals visa-free access to its territory, since October 2007, it has required Iraqis to obtain visas before entering the country. It grants one-month visas (renewable for up to three months) for \$50 to Iraqis who fall into any of 13 categories:

“business people, members of chambers of commerce, industry, or agriculture, along with their spouses and children;

“members of scientific or educational institutions and their spouses and children;

“students registered at Syrian schools and their parents;

“truck and taxi drivers working between the two countries;

“expatriates who have valid residence in a third country;

“Iraqi women married to non-Iraqis eligible for Syrian visas;

“Iraqi men married to non-Iraqis eligible for Syrian visas, along with their children;

“Iraqi men married to Syrian women, their children, and children from the man’s previous marriages;

“Iraqi women married to Syrian men and their children;

“Iraqis traveling through Syria who have valid visas for third countries;

“persons seeking medical treatment who have a prescription ratified by Iraq’s ministries of health and foreign affairs and the Syrian embassy;

“experts and technicians on official business; and

“art groups, sports teams, and trade unions.

“Iraqis with strong political connections could also usually obtain visas.

“Visas were initially available only at the Syrian embassy in Baghdad, but are currently available at border posts. At the start of the year [2008], Iraqis generally could squeeze into one of the 13 categories and gain access to the country, but since May 2008 Syria has strictly enforced the categories and rejected more applicants in an attempt to limit access to the country. Iraqis who leave after spending three months in Syria cannot return without permission from the head of the immigration department.” [26a]

### Palestinians from Iraq

28.16 Human Rights Watch’s (HRW) *World Report 2010*, released January 2010, stated “Syria continues to refuse entry to Palestinians fleeing Iraq. At this writing, at least 2,700 remain at makeshift camps in the no-man’s-land between Iraqi and Syrian border checkpoints. Chile and Sweden have accepted to resettle some of these refugees.” [39b] (p5) The USSD Report 2009 noted:

“At year’s end [2009] there were approximately 320 Iraqi Palestinian refugees registered at al-Hol. Another group of 550 Iraqi Palestinians remained stranded between the Iraq-Syria borders at the al-Tanf crossing. Unlike in previous years, the

government attempted to prevent security services from deporting some Palestinian refugees in Damascus, where they sometimes tried to blend into the larger Palestinian community or to pass themselves off as Iraqis, to the camp at al-Tanf.” [7b] (Section 2d)

- 28.17 Amnesty International’s *Annual Report 2010* remarked, “Palestinian refugees who were long-term residents of Iraq were not permitted entry and some remained at a desolate camp at al-Tanf, in the border area between Iraq and Syria.” [12b] (p316) The USCR *World Refugee Survey 2009* noted, “Palestinians from Iraq ... do not enjoy freedom of movement. Al Hol residents cannot leave the camps without permission, except to attend school, and Al Tanf camp residents cannot enter Syria except to obtain medical treatment, after which they have to return the camp.” [26a]
- 28.18 UNHCR’s undated web page on the Syrian Arab Republic, accessed 31 March 2010, reported, “... many Palestinian refugees in the Al Tanf and Al Hol camps are entirely dependent on humanitarian assistance for their survival.” [10a] The USCR *World Refugee Survey 2009* reported, “Al Hol camp residents have access to Syrian schools and medical services.” [26a] Also, “UNHCR and UNRWA provide education for children in Al Hol and Al Tanf.” [26a]

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## PALESTINIANS

- 28.19 The USSD Report 2009 stated:

“The UNRWA reported there were approximately 460,000 registered Palestinian refugees in the country during the year, approximately 153,000 of whom resided in UNRWA-administered camps. The General Authority of Palestinian Arab Refugees in Syria, the government agency established to coordinate assistance and protection to refugees, continued to provide assistance to Palestinian refugees during the year. Palestinian refugees with Syrian travel documents generally reported little difficulty traveling in and out of the country. The government refused to permit the full integration of these Palestinians into Syrian society.” [7b] (Section 2d)

- 28.20 UNRWA’s official figures, as of 31 December 2009, reported there were 472,109 registered Palestinian refugees in Syria, of which 127,831 – or 27.1 per cent – lived in the UNRWA-administered camps. [11a]

“The Agency benefits from operating in a stable political environment and Palestine refugees have the same rights and privileges as Syrian citizens, except citizenship.

“Nevertheless, the Agency is struggling to cope with the needs of an increasing refugee population coupled with a decrease in the regular budget from US\$46.3 million in 2008 to \$41 million in 2009.” (Where UNRWA works – Syria, accessed 31 March 2010) [11b]

- 28.21 A Fafo Institute for Applied International Studies report of 2007, *Keeping Up – A Brief on The Living Conditions of Palestinian Refugees in Syria*, provided comprehensive information on the situation of Palestinians in Syria; including a study of the population, housing and infrastructure, education, health and access to medical services, work and working conditions, and income and poverty. [35a] The report’s introduction noted, “Although *Keeping Up* portrays the situation as it was in 2001, we believe most findings and conclusions are still valid.” [35a] (p10)

28.22 The USCR's *World Refugee Survey 2009* reported, "Palestinian refugees who have lived in the country for 10 years can work in Syria with rights nearly on par with Syrians. Palestinian refugees who arrived in Syria after 1956, however, cannot hold civil posts in the Syrian Government." [26a] The Survey also noted "Primary education is free for Palestinian children, who can attend the 118 UNRWA elementary and preparatory schools as well as Syrian elementary schools. UNRWA also operates a vocational training center for Palestinian refugees." [26a] Further, "Long-term Palestinian refugees generally use UNRWA health services. They are referred to Syrian hospitals for urgent services, which they receive at subsidized rates." [26a]

STC Sweden's August 2008 report, *Child Rights Situation Analysis For MENA Region*, noted, "The majority [of Palestinians] still face economic difficulties, with 26 per cent of the refugee population living below the poverty line." [33a] (p111)

28.23 The USCR's *World Refugee Survey 2009* stated:

"A 1963 law entitles Palestinian refugees to Syrian travel documents if they register with the General Authority for Palestinian Arab Refugees and hold Syrian provisional identity cards. The documents are valid for six years, renewable at Syrian consular offices abroad, and allow return to Syria without a visa. Additionally, long-term Palestinian refugees can travel between Syria and Lebanon using state-issued identity cards or Arab League travel documents. Those from Iraq cannot travel." [26a]

See also [Palestinians from Iraq](#)

28.24 A Chatham House paper, *Palestinian Refugees: The Regional Perspective*, of April 2009 reported:

"Syria too has high stakes in the outcome of the peace process, and the refugee issue is one area where it has considerable influence. It is the only Arab state with land still occupied by Israel. The competition between the Syrian and Palestinian tracks of the peace process in the 1990s was a significant factor in Syria's negotiations with Israel. Syria also led the opposition to the 'Oslo process' ..., and organized and sponsored Palestinian groups. Since the mid-1970s, the Syrian regime has been in conflict with the PLO in Lebanon, where they have competed for control of the Palestinian camps. Of all the host countries, Syria has the fewest problems with the refugees resident in its territory: they have the same rights as Syrian citizens, are well integrated and controlled in the country, and constitute less than 5% of the population." [59b] (p4)

The [UNRWA page on the Syrian Arab Republic](#) provided further information on the organisation's health, education and social services programmes in Syria, as well as [camp profiles](#). [11b]

## REFUGEE CHILDREN AND EDUCATION

28.25 The USSD Report 2009 stated:

"Most public schools were unable to accommodate the large number of children of Iraqi refugees. The government allowed Iraqi children to attend schools, and according to a UNHCR estimate, approximately 33,000 Iraqi children were enrolled in public schools during the 2008-09 academic year. Many Iraqi children did not attend

school for various reasons, including overcrowding, difficulties with the curriculum, and previous psychological trauma of parents and children.” [7b] (Section 2d)

- 28.26 The USCR’s *World Refugee Survey 2009* reported, “Syria allows Arab refugee children to attend public schools free or for minimal fees. UNHCR gives uniforms to Iraqi students, funds schools, and helps the education ministry refurbish school buildings. UNHCR also offers Arabic classes for non-Arab refugee children, to allow them to follow the Syrian school curriculum.” [26a]

See also [Education](#) and [Palestinians](#)

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## 29. CITIZENSHIP AND NATIONALITY

- 29.01 The March 2001 United States Office of Personnel Management’s (OPM) comprehensive record of *Citizenship Laws of the World* reported the following information on Syrian citizenship:

- “● **BY BIRTH:** Birth within the territory of Syria does not automatically confer citizenship.
- “● **BY DESCENT:**
  - “● Child born of a Syrian father, regardless of the child’s country of birth.
  - “● Child born of a Syrian mother and an unknown or stateless father.
- “● **BY NATURALIZATION:** Naturalized citizenship may only be acquired upon marriage to a Syrian citizen and by living in the country for over 10 years.

“**DUAL CITIZENSHIP:** RECOGNIZED.

“**Exception:** Though Syrian law recognizes dual citizenship, it also states that a Syrian citizen with dual citizenship is considered a Syrian first.

“**LOSS OF CITIZENSHIP:**

- “● **VOLUNTARY:** Though voluntary renunciation of Syrian citizenship is permitted by law, the Syrian Information Office stated that it is so complicated that it is best not to attempt the process. In effect, according to that Office, the process is complicated in order to discourage renunciation of Syrian citizenship. Former citizens of Syria probably maintain an unofficial dual citizenship status and would be subject to Syrian law as citizens should they return to Syria.
- “● **Exception:** Persons of military service age are not permitted to renounce citizenship.
- “● **INVOLUNTARY:** *No information was provided* [to the US OPM].” [27a] (p192)

- 29.02 Freedom House’s special report, *Women’s Rights in the Middle East and North Africa 2010*, released 3 March 2010, stated, “The nationality law continues to prohibit women from passing on their citizenship to their children, while placing no such restrictions on men. This particularly affects the assimilation of the Palestinian population of about half a million and the more recent influx of about 1.5 million Iraqi refugees.” [14c] (Introduction)

- 29.03 The USSD Report 2009 noted, "Palestinian refugees have the same rights as Syrians, except for those rights dependent on nationality." [7b] (Section 2d)

See also [Foreign refugees](#)

### STATELESS KURDS

- 29.04 The US Department of State *2009 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices* (USSD Report 2009) stated:

"Following the 1962 census, approximately 120,000 Syrian Kurds lost their citizenship. As a result, those individuals and their descendants remain severely disadvantaged in terms of social and economic opportunities and in receiving government services including health and education, as well as employment open only to citizens. Stateless Kurds had limited access to university education, and lack of citizenship or identity documents restricted their travel to and from the country. The UNHCR and Refugees International estimated there were approximately 300,000 stateless Kurds.

"Despite the president's repeated promises to resolve the matter of stateless Kurds, most recently in his 2007 inauguration speech, there was no progress during the year [2009]." [7b] (Section 2d)

See also [Kurds](#)

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## 30. FORGED AND FRAUDULENTLY OBTAINED OFFICIAL DOCUMENTS

- 30.01 The US Department of State's (USSD) undated Syria Reciprocity Schedule, accessed 20 August 2010, provided information on Syrian documents, including certificates of birth, marriage, divorce and death; police, prison and military records; and passport and other travel documents. [7f] (Documents) On passports, the Reciprocity Schedule stated:

"The Syrian Government has started the issuance of the new photo-digitized machine-readable passport with newly introduced security features. In addition to the standard security features, new ultra-violet features have been added. The passport has been resized to a smaller passport size 5 inches by 3.5 inches (the size of the new Lebanese passport). The color of the passport remains navy blue and has the standard golden eagle seal in the middle.

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"There are four different types of Syrian passports:

- “1. Service (green),
- “2. Diplomatic (red),
- “3. Special (light brown), and
- “4. Regular (navy blue).” [7f] (Documents)

- 30.02 The May 2010 report, *Human rights issues concerning Kurds in Syria*, on a joint Danish Immigration Service (DIS) and ACCORD/Austrian Red Cross fact-finding mission to Syria, Lebanon and the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), noted information from informal sources indicated, “While it requires a couple of thousand US dollars to bribe an immigration official into issuing a new Syrian passport with a false name, a genuine Schengen visa could be issued and inserted into the passport for approximately 10,000 US dollars.” [60a] (p16)

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## 31. EXIT AND RETURN

- 31.01 The US Department of State *2009 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices* (USSD Report 2009), released 11 March 2010, stated, “Although citizens are ostensibly free to travel internationally, the government limited freedom of movement in practice by requiring citizens to apply for exit visas.” [7b] (Section 2d)

- 31.02 The World Organisation Against Torture’s (OMCT) *Steadfast in Protest – Observatory for the protection of human rights defenders: Annual Report 2009*, released 19 June 2009, noted “In 2008, the practice of travel bans was further developed: from September 2008, expanded lists were drawn up and circulated by Syrian security services and, as of the end of 2008, more than 414 individuals would have been included in those lists.” [34a] (p483) The report continued:

“During the year [2009] the government increased the use of travel bans to prevent more than 400 critics of the regime, human rights activists, political reformers, and civil society leaders from leaving the country, according to a 2009 study by the Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression. The study named 400 individuals whose travel has been restricted; human rights observers believed the actual number of activists affected by a travel ban was in the tens of thousands, partly because many citizens learned of the ban against their travel only after they were prevented from departing the country. The government also prohibits specific types of individuals from foreign travel based exclusively on the kind of work they do. ... The government usually applied travel bans without explanation for their basis or duration, including cases when individuals needed to travel for health reasons.” [7b] (Section 2d)

- 31.03 Freedom House’s special report, *Women’s Rights in the Middle East and North Africa 2010*, released 3 March 2010, stated, “Women constituted 10 percent of more than 400 activists under travel bans as of May 2009.” [14c] (Autonomy, Security, and Freedom of the Person) Freedom House’s survey *Freedom in the World 2010* also noted that at least 15 Kurdish leaders were banned from leaving Syria and stated, “Opposition figures, human rights activists, and relatives of exiled dissidents are similarly prevented from traveling abroad, and many ordinary Kurds lack the requisite documents to leave the country. Other Syrians are generally allowed greater freedom of movement, residence, and employment.” [14a] (Political Rights and Civil Liberties)

31.04 Further, the USSD Report 2009 noted that the lack of citizenship or identity documents of approximately 300,000 stateless Kurds restricted their ability to travel to and from the country. [7b] (Section 2d)

31.05 The USSD Report 2009 noted that travel to Israel was illegal. [7b] (Section 2d) [7b] (Section 2c) The same report also stated, “Jews were the only religious minority group whose passports and identity cards noted their religion. Jewish citizens had to obtain permission from the security services before traveling abroad ...”. [7b] (Section 2c)

See also [Political affiliation](#), [Freedom of religion](#) and [Ethnic groups](#)

31.06 On other specific groups, the USSD Report 2009 reported, “Women older than 18 have the legal right to travel without the permission of male relatives, but a husband or a father may file a request with the MOI [Ministry of Interior] to prohibit the departure of his wife or minor dependents from the country.” [7b] (Section 2d)

31.07 The Freedom House 2010 report on women’s rights noted:

“Women’s ability to travel and move freely is subject to legal and social restrictions. Although Article 33 of the constitution protects freedom of movement within Syria for all citizens, it is silent regarding international travel. Consequently, husbands may prevent their wives from leaving the country with their children, though women on their own are able to obtain a passport and leave without their husbands’ permission.” [14c] (Autonomy, Security, and Freedom of the Person)

See also [Women](#)

31.08 The May 2010 report, *Human rights issues concerning Kurds in Syria*, on a joint Danish Immigration Service (DIS) and ACCORD/Austrian Red Cross fact-finding mission to Syria, Lebanon and the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) stated, “According to a Western diplomatic source (1) Syrians are required a passport to travel to Turkey, but there is no visa requirement between the two countries. Syrians can travel to Lebanon using their ID card or their passport.” [60a] (p15)

## ILLEGAL DEPARTURE

31.09 The May 2010 DIS and ACCORD/Austrian Red Cross fact-finding mission report stated:

“According to a Western diplomatic source (1) there are many routes for Kurdish asylum seekers who wish to travel to Europe. These routes can be complex and go not only via Turkey and Greece. Numerous networks of human smuggling have been established inside and outside of Syria in recent years. The Syrian security services are aware of these networks and in some cases might even be facilitating some of the smuggling networks.” [60a] (p15)

The same report also noted a variance, amongst the sources consulted, in the estimated cost of illegal travel from Syria to various other countries, ranging from 8,000 to 15,000 US dollars to reach Europe, and 20,000 US dollars to travel to Canada. [60a] (p15-16) The aforementioned Western diplomatic source, relying on information from informal sources, “... added that Syrians can enter into Iraq by paying a small amount of money to the Iraqi border guard.” [60a] (p16)

See also [Trafficking](#)

## RETURN

31.10 In terms of returning to Syria, the USSD Report 2009 stated:

“Syrian emigrants who did not complete mandatory military service could pay a fee to avoid conscription while visiting the country. Persons of Syrian origin who were born in a foreign country but were able to demonstrate service in the army of the country of birth were exempt from military service without payment.

“The constitution prohibits forced exile, and there were no reports of forced exile during the year [2009].

“The law provides for the prosecution of any person who attempts to seek refuge in another country to escape a penalty in Syria. Persons who have unsuccessfully sought asylum in other countries and who have past connections with the MB [Muslim Brotherhood] have been prosecuted upon their return to Syria. The government routinely arrested dissidents and former citizens with no known political affiliation who tried to return to the country after years or even decades in exile.” [7b] (Section 2d)

See also [Military service](#) and [Political affiliation](#)

## Failed asylum seekers

31.11 The Kurdish Human Rights Project’s (KHRP) June 2010 *Submission to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance*, reported “... some Syrian nationals who have been returned to the country after living abroad have been arbitrarily detained on arrival or shortly after their return. To seek asylum abroad is perceived as manifestation of opposition to the Syrian government, so returned asylum seekers face the likelihood of arrest.” [61b] (p42)

31.12 In its *Impact Report 2009*, the KHRP remarked that it was:

“... increasingly concerned by the arbitrary detention of Kurds who were forcibly returned to Syria. In September [2009], Khaled Kenjo was held incommunicado and charged with ‘spreading ‘false’ news abroad’ under Article 287 of the Syrian Penal code after his failed appeal for political asylum in Germany. Similarly, Berzani Karro, forcibly returned from Cyprus to Syria in June, was arrested at Damascus Airport, held incommunicado and reportedly tortured.” [61a] (p25)

31.13 A June 2010 release by the International Support Kurds in Syria Association – SKS, *Call to Cyprus Government to stop deportation of Kurds to Syria*, noted:

“On 11 June 2010, twenty-seven people including women and children, were forcibly removed by authorities in Cyprus, back to Damascus airport. They had been on hunger strike along with many others for some time in Cyprus. Others remain in Cyprus. On return to Damascus, they were each interviewed by the authorities, and were issued with a summons to report to intelligence security a week later.” [48d]

- 31.14 In the May 2010 DIS and ACCORD/Austrian Red Cross fact-finding mission report a number of sources agreed that failed asylum seekers and persons who had left Syria illegally would generally face detention and investigation upon return. [60a] (p55-56)

“[A Western diplomatic source] mentioned that the computer system employed at border controls to screen persons upon their entry into Syria works well. Border guards check whether the name of someone who enters Syria can be found on one of the wanted persons lists of the security services. These lists contain information from the various security services’ offices from all parts of the country, including from Qamishli. Immigration authorities are thus able to see whether a returnee has a file with the security services somewhere, and can subsequently inquire about the file’s details with the authorities from these cities or municipalities. It was added that there is no single list of wanted persons but that every security agency maintains its own list. If one of the security services has a file concerning a returnee, he or she would be transferred from the immigration services’ detention facilities to the security agency’s detention centre.

“A[nother] Western diplomatic source stated that if somebody is called in for interrogation by the security services and the person does not show up, he would be arrested, and if his absence is due to the fact that he has left the country, he would be put on the list of wanted persons. Upon return to Syria, such a person would be arrested and interrogated by the security service. However, it was emphasized that it is very hard to say what exactly would happen in such cases.” [60a] (p56)

- 31.15 An Amnesty International Urgent Action of April 2010 reported:

“Hassan Baroudi (aged about 23) and Kutiba al-Issa were returned to Damascus around 17 March and have not been heard from since. Hassan Baroudi was studying electrical engineering in Malaysia; according to the Syrian Human Rights Committee in London, Kutiba al-Issa was studying political science.

On 21 January [2010], Hassan Baroudi, Kutiba al-Issa and at least 47 others attended an Islamic religious class held by Muslim preacher and Syrian national Sheikh Aiman al-Dakkak, in Malaysia’s capital, Kuala Lumpur. Police raided the class, detaining all those present under Malaysia’s Internal Security Act, which allows for detention without charge for two years or more. According to the Malaysian human rights group SUARAM (an acronym for Voice of the Malaysian People in Malay), the detainees were later released, apart from 12 foreign nationals including Hassan Baroudi, Kutiba al-Issa and Sheikh Aiman al-Dakkak.

“Hassan Baroudi’s mother visited him in detention in Malaysia. He told her that he had been questioned once but not charged with any offence. Later, he and Kutiba al-Issa were deported to Damascus via Dubai. According to Hassan Baroudi’s family, the Malaysian authorities said they had released him without charge or condition. The last Hassan Baroudi’s family heard from him was an SMS message sent while on board a plane to Damascus.

“Sources in Syria suggest that Hassan Baroudi may be held by Syria’s State Security department while Kutiba al-Issa is thought to be detained in the Military Intelligence-run Palestine Branch interrogation and detention centre in Damascus, which are both known as places where detainees are tortured.” [12g]

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## Annexes

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### ANNEX A – CHRONOLOGY OF MAJOR EVENTS

Reproduced from the BBC Timeline, last updated 22 July 2010 [28a]

- 1936** France agrees to Syrian independence in principle but signs an agreement maintaining French military and economic dominance.
- 1940** World War II: Syria comes under the control of the Axis powers after France falls to German forces.
- 1941** British and Free French troops occupy Syria. General De Gaulle promises to end the French mandate.
- 1945** Protests over the slow pace of French withdrawal.
- 1946** Last French troops leave Syria.
- 1947** Michel Aflaq and Salah-al-Din al-Bitar found the Arab Socialist Baath Party.
- 1949** Army officer Adib al-Shishakhli seizes power in the third military coup in the space of a year.
- 1952** Al-Shishakli dissolves all political parties.
- 1954** Army officers lead a coup against Al-Shishakli, but return a civilian government to power.
- 1955** Veteran nationalist Shukri al-Quwatli is elected president. Syria seeks closer ties with Egypt.
- 1958** **27 February** - Syria and Egypt join the United Arab Republic (UAR). Egyptian president Gamal Abdul Nasser heads the new state. He orders the dissolution of Syrian political parties, to the dismay of the Baath party, which had campaigned for union.
- 1961** **28 September** - Discontent with Egyptian domination of the UAR prompts a group of Syrian army officers to seize power in Damascus and dissolve the union.
- 1963** **8 March** - Army officers seize power. A Baathist cabinet is appointed and Amin al-Hafez becomes president.
- 1966** **February** - Salah Jadid leads an internal coup against the civilian Baath leadership, overthrowing Amin al-Hafez and arresting Salah al-Din al-Bitar and Michel Aflaq. Hafez al-Assad becomes defence minister.
- 1967** **June** - Israeli forces seize the Golan Heights from Syria and destroy much of Syria's air force.
- 1970** **November** - Hafez al-Assad overthrows president Nur al-Din al-Atasi and imprisons Salah Jadid.
- 1971** **March** - Assad is elected president for a seven-year term in a plebiscite.

- 1973** Rioting breaks out after Assad drops the constitutional requirement that the president must be a Muslim. He is accused of heading an atheist regime. The riots are suppressed by the army.
- 1973 6 October** - Syria and Egypt go to war with Israel but fail to retake the Golan Heights seized during the 1967 Arab-Israeli war.
- 1974 May** - Syria and Israel sign a disengagement agreement.
- 1976 June** - Syrian army intervenes in the Lebanese civil war to ensure that the status quo is maintained, and the Maronites remain in power.
- 1978** In response to the Camp David peace agreement between Egypt and Israel, Assad sets out to gain strategic parity with Israel.
- 1980** After the Islamic Revolution in Iran, Muslim groups instigate uprisings and riots in Aleppo, Homs and Hama. Assad begins to stress Syria's adherence to Islam.
- 1980** Muslim Brotherhood member tries to assassinate Assad.
- 1980 September** - Start of Iran-Iraq war. Syria backs Iran, in keeping with the traditional rivalry between Baathist leaderships in Iraq and Syria. [28a]
- 1981 December** - Israel annexes the Golan Heights.
- 1982 February** - Muslim Brotherhood uprising in the city of Hama. The revolt is suppressed by the military.
- 1982 June** - Israel invades Lebanon and attacks the Syrian army, forcing it to withdraw from several areas. Israel attacks the PLO base in Beirut.
- 1983 May** - Lebanon and Israel announce the end of hostilities. Syrian forces remain in Lebanon.
- 1987 February** - Assad sends troops into Lebanon for a second time to enforce a ceasefire in Beirut.
- 1990** Iraq invades Kuwait; Syria joins the US-led coalition against Iraq. This leads to improved relations with Egypt and the US.
- 1994** Assad's son Basil, who was likely to succeed his father, is killed in a car accident.
- 1998** Assad's brother Rifaat is 'relieved of his post' as vice-president.
- 1999 December** - Talks with Israel over the Golan Heights begin in the US.
- 2000 January** - Syrian-Israeli talks are indefinitely postponed.
- 2000 June** - Assad dies and is succeeded by his son, Bashar.
- 2000 November** - Bashar orders the release of 600 political prisoners.
- 2001 April** - Outlawed Muslim Brotherhood says it will resume political activity, 20 years after its leaders were forced to flee.
- 2001 June** - Syrian troops evacuate Beirut, redeploy in other parts of Lebanon, following pressure from Lebanese critics of Syria's presence.
- 2001 September** - Detention of MPs and other pro-reform activists, crushing hopes of a break with the authoritarian past of Hafez al-Assad.

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- 2001 November** - British PM Tony Blair visits to try shore up support for the campaign against terror. He and President Assad fail to agree on a definition of terrorism.
- 2001 November** - More than 100 dissidents amnestied. Campaigners say hundreds of political prisoners remain in jail.
- 2002 May** - Senior US official includes Syria in a list of states that make-up an 'axis of evil', first listed by President Bush in January. Undersecretary for State John Bolton says Damascus is acquiring weapons of mass destruction.
- 2003 April** - US threatens sanctions if Damascus fails to take what Washington calls the right decisions. Syria denies US allegations that it is developing chemical weapons and helping fugitive Iraqis.
- 2003 October** - Israeli air strike against alleged Palestinian militant camp near Damascus. Syria says action is 'military aggression'.
- 2004 January** - President Assad visits Turkey, the first Syrian leader to do so. The trip marks the end of decades of frosty relations.
- 2004 March** - At least 25 killed in clashes between members of the Kurdish minority, police and Arabs in the north-east.
- 2004 May** - US imposes economic sanctions on Syria over what it calls its support for terrorism and failure to stop militants entering Iraq.
- 2004 September** - UN Security Council resolution calls for all foreign forces to leave Lebanon.
- 2004 December** - Authorities say they have amnestied 112 political prisoners.
- 2005 February-March** - Tensions with the US escalate after the killing of former Lebanese PM Hariri in Beirut. Washington cites Syrian influence in Lebanon. Damascus is urged to withdraw its forces from Lebanon.
- 2005 April** - Syria says it has withdrawn all of its military forces from Lebanon.
- 2005 October** - Interior minister and Syria's former head of intelligence in Lebanon, Ghazi Kanaan, commits suicide, officials say. UN inquiry into assassination of former Lebanese PM Rafik Hariri implicates senior Syrian officials.
- 2005 December** - Exiled former vice president, Abdul Halim Khaddam, alleges that Syrian leaders threatened former Lebanese PM Hariri before his assassination.
- 2006 February** - Danish and Norwegian embassies in Damascus are set on fire during a demonstration against cartoons in a Danish newspaper satirising the Prophet Muhammad.
- 2006 July** - Thousands of people flee into Syria to escape Israel's bombardment of Lebanon.
- 2006 September** - Attack on the US embassy in Damascus. Four gunmen open fire and throw grenades but fail to detonate a car bomb. Three of them are killed, one is captured.
- 2006 November** - Iraq and Syria restore diplomatic relations after nearly a quarter century.
- 2006 December** - Aid agencies say they are struggling to cope with the growing numbers of Iraqis fleeing into Syria to escape the violence.
- 2006 December** - The Iraq Study Group report making recommendations to the US government says neighbours should form a support group to reinforce security and national reconciliation in Iraq. Syria welcomes the chance to participate.
- 2007 March** - European Union reopens dialogue with Syria.
- 2007 April** - US House of Representatives Speaker Nancy Pelosi meets President Assad in Damascus. She is the highest-placed US politician to visit Syria in recent years.

- 2007 April** - Parliamentary elections.
- 2007 May** - US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice meets Foreign Minister Walid Muallem, the first contact at this level between the two countries in two years.
- 2007 May** - Leading dissident Kamal Labwani and prominent political writer Michel Kilo are sentenced to a long jail terms, only weeks after human rights lawyer Anwar al-Bunni is jailed.  
Al-Assad endorsed as president for a second seven-year term.
- 2007 September** - Israel carries out an aerial strike against a military site in northern Syria.
- 2007 October** - Syria imposes tough visa restrictions on Iraqis, saying it can't cope with the influx of refugees.
- 2008 January** - Diplomatic row between Damascus and Paris over Lebanon's quest for a consensus president.
- 2008 March** - Syria hosts Arab League summit. Many pro-Western states send lower-level delegations in protest at Syria's stance on Lebanon.
- 2008 April** - The US accuses North Korea of helping Syria build a secret nuclear reactor. The site was bombed by Israel in 2007.
- 2008 May** - President Assad announces a 25% pay rise for public sector workers to offset effects of rising food and heating oil prices.
- 2008 July** - President Assad meets French President Nicolas Sarkozy in Paris. The visit signals the end of the diplomatic isolation by the West that followed the assassination of former Lebanese PM Rafik Hariri in 2005.  
While in Paris, President Assad also meets the recently-elected Lebanese president, Michel Suleiman. The two men agree to work towards the establishing of full diplomatic relations between their countries.
- 2008 September** - Damascus hosts four-way summit between Syria, France, Turkey and Qatar, in a bid to boost efforts towards Middle East peace.  
Explosion kills 17 on the outskirts of Damascus, the most deadly attack in Syria in several years. Government blames Islamist militants.
- 2008 October** - Syria establishes diplomatic relations with Lebanon for first time since both countries established independence in 1940s.
- 2009 March** - Jeffrey Feltman, acting assistant US secretary of state for the Near East, visits Damascus with White House national security aide Daniel Shapiro in first high-level US diplomatic mission for nearly four years. Met Foreign Minister Walid Muallem.  
Trading launches on Syria's stock exchange in sign of gradual liberalisation of state-controlled economy.
- 2009 April** - A key suspect in the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri was arrested in Dubai. Mohammed Zuhair al-Siddiq, a former Syrian intelligence officer, was a witness to Hariri's killing.
- 2009 May** - Syrian writer and pro-democracy campaigner Michel Kilo was released from prison after serving a three-year sentence.
- 2009 June** - The UN nuclear watchdog, the IAEA, said traces of undeclared man-made uranium were found at a second site in Syria - a reactor in Damascus. The IAEA was investigating US claims that the site destroyed in the 2007 Israeli raid was a nuclear reactor.
- 2009 July** - US special envoy George Mitchell visits for talks with President Assad on Middle East peace.
- 2009 August** - Iraq and Syria recall their envoys in a deepening rift over charges of responsibility for a string of deadly bomb attacks in Baghdad.
- 2010 February** - US posts first ambassador to Syria after a five-year break.

- 2010 May** - US renews sanctions against Syria, saying that Damascus supports terrorist groups, seeks weapons of mass destruction and has provided Lebanon's Hezbollah with Scud missiles in violation of UN resolutions. Syria
- 2010 June** - Eminent defence lawyer Mohannad al-Hassani, head of the Syrian Organisation for Human Rights, is jailed for three years for 'spreading false information and weakening national morale' nearly a year after his arrest.
- 2010 July** - Syria and Iran deny US media reports that Iran has given Syria an advanced radar system that could hamper Israel's ability to overfly Syria and hit Iran's nuclear facilities.
- Higher Education Minister Ghiyath Barakat introduces a bill to ban face-covering veils in universities, saying they run counter to the academic values and traditions of Syrian universities.

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## ANNEX B – POLITICAL ORGANISATIONS

*The lists below should not be viewed as exhaustive*

Jane's *Sentinel Country Risk Assessments: Syria*, latest updates 10 September 2009–16 August 2010, reported:

“The Baath Party, or technically speaking the Syrian branch of the Arab Socialist Renaissance Party (Hizb al-Baath al-Arabi al-Ishtiraki), dominates Syria's political system and society. Some other parties are tolerated, but they are essentially the remnants of formerly significant political forces that have been co-opted into the National Progressive Front (Al-Jabha al-Wataniyya al-Taquadumiyya: NPF), which is led by the Baath Party. Independent candidates are also allowed to stand in elections to the People's Assembly. The system of candidate selection and seat allocation is heavily rigged by the regime in favour of the Baath Party and its allies in the NPF.” (29 April 2010) [8a] (Internal Affairs)

See also [Political system](#) and [Political affiliation](#)

### THE NATIONAL PROGRESSIVE FRONT (NPF—AL-JABHA AL-WATANIYAH AT-TAQADUMIYAH)

Europa World's Syria: Directory – Government & Politics, last accessed 16 August 2010, reported the NPF was “... headed by the late President Hafiz al-Assad, was formed in March 1972 as a coalition of five political parties. The Syrian Constitution defines the Baath Arab Socialist Party as ‘the leading party in the society and the state’. At mid-2007 the NPF consisted of 10 parties:” [1b] (Political Organizations)

#### *Listed alphabetically*

##### **Arab Democratic Unionist Party (Hizb al-Ittihad al-'Arabi ad-Dimuqrati)**

“Founded 1981, following split from the Arab Socialist Union; considers the concerns of the Arab world in general as secondary to those of Syria itself in the pursuit of pan-Arab goals. “Chair. Ghassan Ahmad Osman.” [1b] (Political Organizations)

##### **Arab Socialist Movement ( Harakat al-Ishtiraki al-'Arabi)**

“Founded 1963, following split from Arab Socialist Union; contested the 2007 election to the People's Assembly as two factions (see also National Vow Movement [below]). “Leader Ahmad al-Ahmad.” [1b] (Political Organizations)

##### **Arab Socialist Union (al-Ittihad al-Ishtiraki al-'Arabi)**

“Founded 1973, following the separation of the Syrian branch from the international Arab Socialist Union; Nasserite; supportive of the policies of the Baath Arab Socialist Party. “Leader Safwan al-Qudsi.” [1b] (Political Organizations)

##### **Baath Arab Socialist Party (al-Hizb al-Ba'th al-'Arabi al-Ishtiraki)**

“Founded 1947, as a result of merger between the Arab Revival (Baath) Movement (f. 1940) and the Arab Socialist Party (f. 1940); in power since 1963; supports creation of a unified Arab socialist society approx. 1m. mems [approximately one million members] in Syria; brs [branches] in most Arab countries. “Pres. Lt-Gen. Bashar al-Assad.” [1b] (Political Organizations)

Jane's *Sentinel Country Risk Assessments: Syria*, latest updates 10 September 2009–16 August 2010, reported:

“At the grass roots level, the party is organised into small groups or cells (reflecting the party's clandestine roots), which are spread throughout Syria. Several of these groups form a division, and several divisions form a section representing a neighbourhood. The sections come under 19 branch commands, representing the 13 provinces, Aleppo, Damascus and four universities. Every four years these branches elect deputies to the Party Congress. In turn, the Party Congress elects the party's top decision-making bodies: the 99-member Central Committee (Al-Lajna al-Markaziyya) and the 21-member Regional Command (Al-Qiyada al-Qutriyya). The Regional Command is Syria's most important decision-making body.

“The party's presence in the military is organised in a similar way with cells formed at the battalion level and led by a political guide. Although officers do not have to be members of the Baath Party, it is generally considered a necessity for career advancement. The civilian and military party apparatuses are only combined at Regional Command level.

“In theory, the National Command should be the Baath Party's most important body. Referring to the Arab nation as a whole, the National Command was established to reflect the Baath Party's pan-Arab aspirations and should include representatives from the Baath Party regional commands of various Arab states. However, rivalries between the Syrian and Iraqi branches of the Baath Party ensured that the National Command was never a viable institution. The Lebanese and Jordanian regional commands remain dominated by Syria.

“The party controls a variety of organisations through its Peoples' Organisations Bureau. These include the party's militia, the Revolutionary Youth Organisation, the Union of Students and the General Federation of Trade Unions.” (29 April 2010) [8a] (Internal Affairs)

Europa World's Syria: Directory – Government & Politics list of members of the NPF continued:

#### **Democratic Socialist Unionist Party (al-Hizb al-Wahdawi al-Ishtiraki ad-Dimuqrati)**

“Founded 1974, following split from the Arab Socialist Union;

“Chair. Fadlallah Nasr ad-Din.” [1b] (Political Organizations)

#### **National Vow Movement ( Harakat al-'ahd al-Watani)**

“[A] breakaway party from the Arab Socialist Union; a faction of the Arab Socialist Movement; awarded three seats in 2007 election to the People's Assembly.

“Leader Ghassan Abd al-Aziz Osman.” [1b] (Political Organizations)

#### **Socialist Unionists ( Al-Wahdawiyyun al-Ishtirakiyyun)**

“Founded 1961, through split from the Baath Arab Socialist Party following that organization's acceptance of Syria's decision to secede from the United Arab Republic; Nasserite; aims for Arab unity, particularly a new union with Egypt; produces weekly periodical Al-Wehdawi .

“Chair. Fayez Ismail.” [1b] (Political Organizations)

#### **Syrian Arab Socialist Union Party**

“Nasserite.

“Sec.-Gen. Safwan Koudsi” [1b] (Political Organizations)

#### **Syrian Communist Party (Bakdash) (al-Hizb ash-shuyu'i as-suri)**

“Founded 1924 by Fouad Shamal in Lebanon and Khalid Bakdash (died 1995); until 1943 part of joint Communist Party of Syria and Lebanon; party split into two factions under separate leaders, Bakdash and Faisal (q.v.), in 1986; Marxist-Leninist; publishes fortnightly periodical Sawt ash-Shaab .

“Sec.-Gen. Wissal Farha Bakdash.” [1b] (Political Organizations)

**Syrian Communist Party (Faisal) (al-Hizb ash-shuyu'i as-suri)**

“Founded 1986, following split of Syrian Communist Party into two factions under separate leaders, Faisal and Bakdash (q.v.); aims to end domination of Baath Arab Socialist Party and the advantages given to mems [members] of that party at all levels; advocates the lifting of the state of emergency and the release of all political prisoners; publishes weekly periodical An-Nour .

“Sec.-Gen. Yousuf Rashid Faisal.” [1b] (Political Organizations)

**Syrian Social Nationalist Party (Centralist Wing) (al-Hizb as-Suri al-Qawmi al-Ijtima'i)**

“Founded 1932 in Beirut, Lebanon; joined the NPF in 2005; also known as Parti populaire syrien; seeks creation of a ‘Greater Syrian’ state, incl[uding]. Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, the Palestinian territories, Iraq, Kuwait, Cyprus and parts of Egypt, Iran and Turkey; advocates separation of church and state, the redistribution of wealth, and a strong military; supports Syrian involvement in Lebanese affairs; has brs [branches] world-wide, and approx. 90,000 mems [approximately 90,000 members] in Syria.

“Chair. Issam Mahayiri.” [1b] (Political Organizations)

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**LEFTIST/REFORMIST OPPOSITION PARTIES AND ALLIANCES – OVERVIEW**

The February 2010 European Strategic Intelligence and Security Center’s (ESISC) paper, *Does the Syrian opposition have the resources to match its ambitions?*, reported:

“The Syrian opposition is not a new phenomenon. For more than forty years following the military coup d’état of 1963, the Baath regime in Syria faced domestic dissidence, followed by an opposition movement operating outside the country. First of all, opposition came from the Muslim Brotherhood, which had established itself in Syria at the end of the 1930s and led a ferocious struggle against the regime before being reduced to silence in 1982.

“Since the accession of Bashar al-Assad to power, the opposition, both within Syria and abroad, formed around a mix of different organisations fighting for human rights, political parties, groups from civil society and individuals. They were very disperse and divided among themselves. In the past few years, there were several attempts made at joining together these various components, but they were all abortive.” [38a] (p1)

Europa World’s Syria: Directory – Government & Politics, last accessed 16 August 2010, reported “There are numerous opposition parties, within Syria or in exile, which are forced to operate on a clandestine basis.” [1b] (Political Organizations)

**Parties****Listed alphabetically****Communist Action Party**

Europa World’s Syria: Directory – Government & Politics noted this is a Marxist-Leninist party “...which regards itself as independent of all Arab regimes.” [1b] (Political Organizations)

**Reform Party of Syria (RPS)**

The February 2010 ESISC paper, *Does the Syrian opposition have the resources to match its ambitions?*, reported:

“The RPS has a website which is constantly exposing violations of human rights in Syria. Its leader, Farid Ghadry, has worked these past few years to position himself in the United States, in Europe but also in Israel. He in fact published many articles in the Israeli press and

even visited the Knesset (the Israeli parliament) in June 2007 at the invitation of the chairman of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, deputy Tzachi Hanegbi. This was an 'affront' to the regime in Damascus which cost him his Syrian nationality several weeks later.

"Though the RPS is well organised, it must be said that it does not represent many people and that its influence and its ability to upset the Syrian regime are very limited. Furthermore, Farid Ghadry – otherwise totally taken by democracy – looks like an American stooge. The fact that he supported the American move into Iraq obviously strengthens this image which, in the Middle East today, is not a guarantee of success." [38a] (p5)

### **Syrian Democratic People's Party (al-Hizb ash-Sha'ab as-Suri ad-Dimuqrati)**

Europa World's Syria: Directory – Government & Politics, last accessed 16 August 2010, reported "A current member of the NDR, ... founded in 1973 as the Syrian Communist Party (Political Bureau), following the decision by founder Riad at-Turk to split from that party after its leader, Khalid Bakdash, decided to allow the organization to join the NPF [see Syrian Communist Party (Bakdash) above]. The party adopted its current name in 2005. The party publishes an online newsletter (www.arrae.com)."

[1b] (Political Organizations)

Leader Abullah Hosha [1b] (Political Organizations)

## **Alliances**

### **Listed alphabetically**

#### **The Damascus Declaration for National Democratic Change**

<http://www.nidaasyria.org/en/home>

The February 2010 ESISC paper, *Does the Syrian opposition have the resources to match its ambitions?*, reported:

"In October 2005, some twenty parties, organisations, formations and Arab and Kurdish personalities following different political lines joined forces around a platform entitled the 'Damascus Declaration for Democratic National Change.' The objective was clear: to achieve regime change for the purpose of introducing a 'rule of law.' Joined by the Muslim Brotherhood, the signatories intend to establish 'a democratic regime peacefully, progressively, by means of dialogue, understanding and recognition of others (...). The 'Damascus Declaration' is certainly the most important opposition movement because it succeeded in uniting Arabs, Kurds and even the Muslim Brotherhood! The initiative led to the creation of a National Council in February 2006. Since then, apart from several meetings and some declarations and communiqués, the 'Damascus Declaration' has not succeeded in reorienting the regime and many of its leaders have been imprisoned." [38a] (p4-5)

#### **National Democratic Rally (NDR—Tajammu' al-Watani ad-Dimuqrati)**

Europa World's Syria: Directory – Government & Politics, last accessed 16 August 2010, stated the NDR was "Formed in 1980, ... [and] is an alliance of banned, secularist opposition parties, several of which are opposition wings of parties that joined the ruling NPF." [1b] (Political Organizations)

The February 2010 ESISC paper, *Does the Syrian opposition have the resources to match its ambitions?*, stated:

"Founded shortly before the disappearance of the Muslim Brotherhood (1979), the National Democratic Rally (NDR) has long constituted the sole 'organised' framework of the Syrian opposition. The NDR unites six opposition parties of the Left which are not recognised by the authorities and are, thus, illegal. It has its own website, which disseminates tracts, documents and a journal in Arabic. Many managers of the various parties in this coalition played a role

during the 'Damascus Spring,' including, in particular, Riad Al Turk, a Syrian opposition figure and veritable kingpin of the 'Damascus Declaration.'" [38a] (p4)

### **National Salvation Front (NSF)**

The February 2010 ESISC paper, *Does the Syrian opposition have the resources to match its ambitions?*, reported:

"In the spring of 2006, after years of speculation about the future of the Syrian opposition – long weakened and divided – the initiative of former Vice President Abdel Halim Khaddam to merge his forces with Ali Sadreddin Bayanouni (the leader of the Muslim Brotherhood) elicited interest and hope among a goodly number of dissidents and opponents of the regime of Bashar al-Assad.

"It is true that the *National Salvation Front* (NSF) set as its main objective setting up a government of transition in Syria. At the end of two days of working meetings which ended in the creation of the NSF in Brussels in March 2006, one delegate said that *'the role of the NSF is to be ready to fill the void if the Assad government falls.'*

"This improbable alliance – even against nature – which was constituted in 2005 on the occasion of the signing of the 'Damascus Declaration' – was dissolved three years after the creation of the NSF without eliciting much emotion either in Syria or abroad, where it finally became clear that both the opportunism of Khaddam and his thirst for revenge did not allow the Front to fulfill [sic] the difficult mission which was assigned to it." [38a] (p5-6)

Refer to the original [ESISC report](#) for more information on Abdel Halim Khaddam, The report also provides information on President Bashar al Asad's uncle and cousin, Rifat al-Asad and his son Ribal al-Asad, both of whom are involved with the political opposition. [38a] (p5-7)

### **Organisation for Democracy and Freedom in Syria (ODFS)**

The February 2010 ESISC paper, *Does the Syrian opposition have the resources to match its ambitions?*, noted the ODFS, "...recently created by Ribal al-Assad [President Asad's cousin] is not intended to serve as a unifying platform like the NSF or the RPS. Its objective is to denounce the tyranny of the regime in Damascus with a view to combining with international pressures and a domestic mobilisation so as to lead the regime to make ever broader concessions in the domain of human rights and freedom of expression." [38a] (p7)

### **Syrian Democratic Coalition (SDC)**

The February 2010 ESISC paper, *Does the Syrian opposition have the resources to match its ambitions?*, stated:

"Farid Ghadry announced the creation of the Syrian Democratic Coalition (SDC) with great pomp during a ceremony arranged in the National Press Club of Washington on 17 November 2003 in the presence of specialised correspondents from the American press. This movement was born two years after the creation of the Reform Party of Syria (RPS) by the same Farid Ghadry, and from the beginning it gathered together various small groups from the pro-Kurdish to pro-Christians and pro-Sunnis, all wishing to see the end of the regime of the al-Assad family.

The *Syrian Democratic National Gathering* (SDNG), an organisation founded in Syria in 1986 and directed by Marwan Hammoud in Austria, finally joined the coalition of Farid Gahdry in July 2006 following disagreements within the NSF of which it formed a part. The *Solidarity Council*, a Kurdish organisation based in Syria, joined the SDC in 2006." [38a] (p5)

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## ISLAMIST/SALAFIST OPPOSITION PARTIES AND GROUPS – OVERVIEW

A Jamestown Foundation GTA article of 15 August 2005 reported, “The rise of political Islam in Syria can be traced to the 1940s, when a Muslim group called al-Gharra entered parliament, creating an Islamic Bloc to oppose the secular and civilian regime of President Shukri al-Quwatli.” [63b]

A footnote in the Human Rights Watch (HRW) February 2009 report, *Far From Justice – Syria’s Supreme State Security Court*, provided information on Salafis:

“Salafis strive to imitate and replicate the Islam of the Prophet’s generation (al-salaf al-salih), aiming to rid Islamic practice of the innovations accrued over centuries of human practice. They aspire to follow the literal meanings of Qur’anic injunctions[.] Issues of salafi beliefs frequently involve questions of ritual and everyday life, but more important are questions involving social norms and laws derived from the Prophet Muhammad’s reported words and deeds.” [39c] (p21, footnote 65)

The February 2010 ESISC paper, *Does the Syrian opposition have the resources to match its ambitions?*, stated:

“Generally speaking, the concept of a state based on the Sharia does not receive a warm welcome in Syria, a lay state similar to Iraq under Saddam Hussein. Various Islamist groups (a dozen or so at present) – which have broken with the [Muslim] Brotherhood – like that of al-Attar or of Jaoud al-Said, both signers of the ‘Declaration of Damascus,’ – try to take their place in an opposition which is now divided. They are promoting not the establishment of an Islamist state but a democratic model and parliamentary elections.” [38a] (p3)

Jane’s *Sentinel Country Risk Assessments: Syria*, latest updates 10 September 2009–16 August 2010, reported:

“Group names used in connection to the Islamist opposition movement in Syria include the Syrian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood (Ikwan al-Muslimin), the Fighting Vanguard (Al-Talia al-Muqatalia), the Islamic Liberation Party (Hizb al-Tahrir al-Islamiyya), the Islamic Liberation Movement (Harakat al-Tahrir al-Islamiyya), Muhammad’s Youth (Shabab Muhammad), God’s Soldiers (Jund Allah) and more recently, Al-Qaeda.” (29 April 2010) [8a] (Non-State Armed Groups)

## Parties/groups

### Listed alphabetically

#### Fatah al-Islam

A footnote in HRW’s February 2009 report, *Far From Justice – Syria’s Supreme State Security Court*, recounted that this group “...is considered a Salafi group that is ideologically linked to al-Qaeda. They have a presence in northern Lebanon and Lebanon’s army fought a three-month battle last year to dislodge the group from the Palestinian refugee camp Nahr al-Bared.” [39c] (p22, footnote 72) The same report also stated “... on September 27, 2008, a car bomb exploded in Damascus, killing 17 people and wounding 14 others in one of the deadliest

attacks in Syria in a dozen years. On November 6, 2008, Syrian state television broadcast statements by men it said were part of the Islamist Fatah al-Islam, in which they admitted carrying out the bomb attack and stating that the aim of the attack was to ‘harm the regime in Syria.’” [39c] (p22)

### **Islamic Liberation Party (Hizb al-Tahrir al-Islamiyya)**

The February 2010 ESISC paper, *Does the Syrian opposition have the resources to match its ambitions?*, stated this is “... a radical organisation which calls for the introduction of an Islamist state but refuses to consider any kind of violent action.” [38a] (p3) HRW’s February 2009 report, *Far From Justice – Syria’s Supreme State Security Court*, noted this “... is an international pan-Islamist Sunni political party whose goal is to combine all Muslim countries in a unitary Islamic state or caliphate, ruled by Islamic law and with a caliph head of state.” [39c] (p21, footnote 65)

A Jamestown Foundation Global Terrorism Analysis (GTA) article, *Hizb-ut-Tahrir’s Growing Appeal in the Arab World*, of December 2006 reported:

“Hizb-ut-Tahrir (or Hizb al-Tahrir) is an ostensibly non-violent Islamic political movement dedicated to the recreation of a global caliphate. Although founded in Jordanian-ruled Jerusalem in 1953, it has traditionally been strongest in Europe and Central Asia. Today, however, it is becoming increasingly popular in the Arab world. Hizb-ut-Tahrir (HT) works covertly to convince Muslims to overthrow their present governments peacefully and establish a worldwide caliphate, which will then impose conservative Islam over all Muslim majority countries. Once this is accomplished, HT hopes that the caliphate will make the whole world Islamic through conversion in the first instance and, as a last resort, offensive jihads against all non-Muslim states. HT is highly organized and has national leaderships as well as an overall leader, Abu Rashta, who lives in secret in Lebanon. The group says that it will take power peacefully by persuading influential members of the elite to overthrow the government. The organization is illegal in all Arab countries except for Lebanon, Yemen and the UAE where it is tolerated. The group does not believe in using either elections or violence to take power and there is no evidence that HT members have carried out any attacks in the Arab world.” [63a]

### **Islamic Movement for Change (IMC)**

Europa World’s Syria: Directory – Government & Politics reported, “An illegal Syrian-based organization, ... [that] claimed responsibility for a bomb attack in Damascus in December 1996.” [1b] (Political Organizations)

### **Muslim Brotherhood (Al-Ikhwan al-Muslimun)**

A May 2008 paper by Dr. Radwan Ziadeh, a Senior Fellow at the US Institute for Peace (USIP), stated, “The first political conflict within the political establishments, especially in the Parliament, came with the negotiations about the form of the constitution of 1950, in the texts of which are discussed the relation between religion and the state. ...

“The Muslim Brotherhood entered a completely new phase with the Ba’ath Party’s arrival in power in 1963, and this was demonstrated very clearly by what is known as the ‘Hama Rebellion’ in April 1964, lasting twenty nine days, which was led by Hama leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood headed by Marwan Hadeed and Saeed Hawa ...

“The Hama Rebellion was an early indicator of the rise of a ‘Jihadi movement’ within the Brotherhood, inconsistent with their political, peaceful and democratic theses. This movement, carrying the name ‘Battalion (Kata’b) of Mohammed’, is the same group later known as ‘Militant Vanguard’ who embarked upon the tragic events in Hama in 1982.” [64a] (p5-6)

The February 2010 ESISC paper, *Does the Syrian opposition have the resources to match its ambitions?*, reported:

“The Muslim Brotherhood was for a long time the sole opposition force violently acting against the regime of Hafez al-Assad. At the end of the 1970s, they claimed responsibility for numerous attacks which caused many hundreds of deaths. Following an assassination attempt against Hafez al-Assad, in June 1980, a thousand Islamist prisoners were eliminated. And in February 1982, when an insurrection broke out in the city of Hama under the direction of the Brotherhood, its suppression made many tens of thousands of victims. This episode put an end to the Islamist activity and to terrorist violence of the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria.” [38a] (p3)

The May 2008 paper by Dr. Radwan Ziadeh, a Senior Fellow of USIP, stated:

“The Muslim Brotherhood had ended up as a leadership outside the country which was ineffective on the inside, where it became a number of individuals scared to say, or even to hint, that they belonged to this ‘forbidden group’. After President Bashar Al Assad came to power in June 2000, the Brotherhood published what was called ‘Gentleman Statement for Political Action’, in which they announced their renunciation of all forms of violence and their support for the principle of a ‘civil state’, and then published their political programme, which can be seen as a ‘huge leap’ in the movement’s speech and actions. But despite these political steps, there was no change in the authority’s dealing with them.” [64a] (p10)

The February 2010 ESISC paper, *Does the Syrian opposition have the resources to match its ambitions?*, continued:

“Today the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood arouses both distrust and rejection by a good number of other opposition movements though they participated in the NSF adventure and adhered to the ‘Damascus Declaration’ [for National Democratic Change] ... Since it was crushed, belonging to the Brotherhood in Syria is theoretically still punishable by the death penalty.

“Based abroad, it nonetheless enjoys natural support within the Sunni Arab community, but its influence is weak because it is now far removed from the concerns of the population. Moreover, it has suffered a lot from internal divisions and from the permanent repression which weakened it considerably. The Syrian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood is organising and produces various publications from its base in London where its leader, Ali Sadreddin Bayanuni, took refuge after the Brotherhood was banned in Syria.” [38a] (p3)

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## KURDISH PARTIES AND ALLIANCES – OVERVIEW

The United States Institute for Peace (USIP) April 2009 report, *The Kurds in Syria – Fueling Separatist Movements in the Region?*, provided the background information on Kurdish political organisation in Syria:

“At the beginning of Syria’s existence as an independent state, politicians and officials of Kurdish descent occasionally boasted a modest yet noticeable presence in many state institutions, including high offices. Husni al-Zaim, who led the first military coup in Syria and became president in 1949, was Kurdish, as were Muhsin al-Barazi and other political luminaries of the 1940s and 1950s. Kurds maintained strong participation in political parties, particularly that of the communists, whose leader, Khaled Bakdash, was himself a Kurd. Many influential clerics, such as the former state mufti, Ahmed Kiftarro, were Kurdish as well.

“However, the Syrian government grew increasingly authoritarian, particularly with the rise of the Baath Party, and adopted increasingly discriminatory measures against the Kurds. The Kurdish movement began to experience internal cleavages. By 1965, the Kurdish parties had fragmented into numerous organizations divided over issues such as whether to work for Kurdish autonomy or work within the Communist Party and reject any Kurdish affiliation.” [13b] (p5)

HRW’s November 2009 report, *Group Denial – Repression of Kurdish Political and Cultural Rights in Syria*, noted:

“Today, at least 14 unlicensed Kurdish parties operate in Syria. Many of these parties are divided, and alliances between them are often short-lived and depend on personalities. The parties are fairly consistent in their calls for democracy in Syria and for recognizing Kurds as an ethnic group. Unlike the response of Kurds in Turkey or Iran to government repression, the Syrian Kurdish parties never took up arms against the government.” [39d] (p14)

The February 2010 ESISC paper, *Does the Syrian opposition have the resources to match its ambitions?*, also reported that the Kurdish “...opposition is particularly divided and splintered. In fact it numbers more than a dozen parties, most of which are active either in the Kurdish region of Syria or abroad (Germany, Netherlands etc.)” [38a] (p4)

The paper continued, “The Kurdish parties claim to be peaceful militants and obviously are hoping for greater civil liberties but, above all and in a most utopian fashion, they hope to gain autonomy for the Kurdish region. The eternal divisions which undermine the Kurdish opposition are principally due to rivalries among its leaders; they hinder the emergence of a unified platform and of clear, but above all shared demands.” [38a] (p4)

For more information on the history and divisions of Kurdish political parties in Syria, see the May 2010 report, [Human rights issues concerning Kurds in Syria](#), of the joint fact finding mission by the Danish Immigration Service (DIS) and ACCORD/Austrian Red Cross to Syria, Lebanon, and the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) from 21 January to 8 February 2010. [60a] (3. Targeted groups and persons in relation to political activities & Annex 3: Kurdish Parties in Syria)

The USIP April 2009 report, *The Kurds in Syria – Fueling Separatist Movements in the Region?*, noted:

“The Kurdish presence in the Damascus Declaration has provided a good starting point for the Kurds to move out of their isolation in cities such as Qamishli, Ein al-Arab, and Efrin, and begin to be players in the wider Syrian prodemocratic political scene. The declaration also has given the Syrian opposition a national dimension, as the source of its legitimacy came from both Arabs and Kurds. Today, the Kurdish Front and the Kurdish Alliance act in relative coordination with their Arab counterparts.” [13b] (p6)

## Parties

### *Listed alphabetically*

#### **Democratic Kurdish ‘Party’ – Syria**

Leader: Dr. Tawfeeq Hamadush (in Germany); prominent figure: Hassan Kamil (*Human rights issues concerning Kurds in Syria*, DIS and ACCORD, May 2010) [60a] (p84)

#### **Democratic Union Party (PYD)**

Leader: Fouad ‘Omar (*Human rights issues concerning Kurds in Syria*, DIS and ACCORD, May 2010) [60a] (p83)

A Western diplomatic source consulted for the May 2010 DIS and ACCORD report, *Human rights issues concerning Kurds in Syria*, stated that “The PYD is the best organised and disciplined Kurdish political party. While other Kurdish parties have more open and personality driven leadership processes, PYD is based on strict and secretive membership and leadership rules. PYD’s estimated 1,000 members in Syria are considered to be very active.” [60a] (p21)

#### **Kurdish Azadi Party**

Leader: Khair Al-Din Morad; prominent figures: Bashar Ameen, Mustafa Jam’aa (*Human rights issues concerning Kurds in Syria*, DIS and ACCORD, May 2010) [60a] (p83)

#### **Kurdish Democratic Equality Party**

Leader: ‘Aziz Dawood (*Human rights issues concerning Kurds in Syria*, DIS and ACCORD, May 2010) [60a] (p81-82)

#### **Kurdish Democratic Party**

Leader: Dr. Abdul Hakeem Bashar; prominent figures: Saoud Al-Mullah, Dr. Akram Al-Mullah, Tawfeeq Abdul Majeed, Ameen Kowali (*Human rights issues concerning Kurds in Syria*, DIS and ACCORD, May 2010) [60a] (p81)

#### **Kurdish Democratic Party**

Leader: Nasr Al-Din Ibrahim; prominent figure: Said Wadi (*Human rights issues concerning Kurds in Syria*, DIS and ACCORD, May 2010) [60a] (p80)

#### **Kurdish Democratic Party of Syria (KDP-S/al-Parti)**

A Western diplomatic source consulted for the May 2010 DIS and ACCORD report, *Human rights issues concerning Kurds in Syria*, stated this “... is the oldest and by far the largest Kurdish political party, and many Kurds have sympathy with this party. KDP-S has strong connections with Mustafa Barzani, the president of the Kurdish Regional Government in Northern Iraq and leader of KDP in KRI.” [60a] (p21)

HRW’s November 2009 report, *Group Denial – Repression of Kurdish Political and Cultural Rights in Syria*, stated:

“In 1957 a broad coalition of prominent Syrian Kurdish intellectuals calling for recognition of Kurdish rights, land reform, and democracy—but not Kurdish independence—founded the Kurdish Democratic Party of Syria (KDP-S). In addition to the KDP-S, the Syrian Communist Party, whose founder and many of its members were Kurds, often defended Kurdish ethnic rights. In 1960, however, the government launched a crackdown on Kurdish activists, arresting a number of KDP-S leaders and hundreds of supporters. Under the weight of severe government repression, the party quickly fragmented into competing factions and lost much of its support base.” [39d] (p13)

#### **Kurdish Democratic Unity Party**

Leaders: Muhi Al-Din Sheikh Ali and Ism’ail Omar; prominent figure: Hameed Ibrahim (*Human rights issues concerning Kurds in Syria*, DIS and ACCORD, May 2010) [60a] (p80)

#### **Kurdish Future Current**

Leader Meshal Tammo; prominent figures: Reizan Sheikmous, Harfain Awsi, Khaleel Hussein (*Human rights issues concerning Kurds in Syria*, DIS and ACCORD, May 2010) [60a] (p83)

#### **Kurdish Leftist Party**

Leader: Muhammad Mousa Muhammad (*Human rights issues concerning Kurds in Syria*, DIS and ACCORD, May 2010) [60a] (p81)

#### **Kurdish Patriotic Democratic Party**

Leader: Taher Sofuk. (*Human rights issues concerning Kurds in Syria*, DIS and ACCORD, May 2010) [60a] (p82)

#### **Kurdish Yeketi Party**

Leader Fouad Aliko; prominent figures: Hassan Salah, Abdul Baqi Al-Youssef, Abdul Samad Khalaf, Ism'ail Hami (*Human rights issues concerning Kurds in Syria*, DIS and ACCORD, May 2010) [60a] (p82)

#### **Kurdistani Liberal Party**

Leader: Abdul Kulo (in Iraqi Kurdistan) (*Human rights issues concerning Kurds in Syria*, DIS and ACCORD, May 2010) [60a] (p84)

#### **Progressive Democratic Party**

Leader: Abdul Hameed Darweesh; prominent figures: Faisal Youssef, Ali Shammadin; Tamr Mustafa, Ahmad Burakaat, Abdul Rahman Koujar (*Human rights issues concerning Kurds in Syria*, DIS and ACCORD, May 2010) [60a] (p80)

#### **Syrian Democratic Kurdish Party**

Leader: Jamaal Sheikh Baqi (*Human rights issues concerning Kurds in Syria*, DIS and ACCORD, May 2010) [60a] (p83)

#### **Syrian Kurdish Democratic Harmony (Party)**

Leader: Fawzi Shenghal; prominent figures: Naleen Qunbar, Salah Soufi Baro, Talal Muhammad (*Human rights issues concerning Kurds in Syria*, DIS and ACCORD, May 2010) [60a] (p84)

### **Alliances**

#### **The Kurdish Democratic Front (al-jabha)**

The February 2010 ESISC paper noted this alliance is "... led by Abdul Hamid Darwish, which brings together three Kurdish parties;" [38a] (p4) The May 2010 DIS and ACCORD report, *Human rights issues concerning Kurds in Syria* noted this alliance included:

The Kurdish Democratic Party (leader: Dr. Abdul Hakeem Bashar)

The Kurdish Democratic Equality Party

The Kurdish Patriotic Democratic Party

[60a] (Annex 3: Political Parties)

#### **The Democratic Kurdish Alliance in Syria (attakhafuf)**

The February 2010 ESISC paper noted this alliance "... unites four parties but has no leader;" [38a] (p4)

The May 2010 DIS and ACCORD report, *Human rights issues concerning Kurds in Syria* noted this alliance included:

The Progressive Democratic Party

The Kurdish Democratic Party (leader: Nasr Al-Din Ibrahim)

The Kurdish Democratic Unity Party

The Kurdish Leftist Party

[60a] (Annex 3: Political Parties)

### **The Kurdish Committee for Coordination**

The May 2010 DIS and ACCORD report, *Human rights issues concerning Kurds in Syria* noted this alliance included:

The Kurdish Yeketi Party  
 The Kurdish Azadi Party  
 The Kurdish Future Current party  
**[60a] (Annex 3: Political Parties)**

The February 2010 ESISC paper also noted the existence of “A small alliance of three independent parties -Yekiti (united), Azadi (liberty) and the Movement of the Future;” **[38a] (p4)**

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### **PALESTINIAN AND OTHER FOREIGN GROUPS WITH A PRESENCE IN SYRIA**

Jane’s *Sentinel Country Risk Assessments: Syria*, latest updates 10 September 2009–16 August 2010, noted that Syria hosted the following Palestinian organisations:

#### **Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP)**

**Hamas**

**Hizbullah**

**Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ)**

**Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP)**

**Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command (PFLP-GC)**

(29 April 2010) **[8a] (Non-State Armed Groups)**

Chapter 3: State Sponsors of Terrorism, of the United States Department of State *Country Reports on Terrorism 2009* (USSD Terrorism Report 2009), released 5 August 2010, reported:

“Designated in 1979 as a State Sponsor of Terrorism, Syria continued to provide safe-haven as well as political and other support to a number of designated Palestinian terrorist groups, including HAMAS, Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command (PFLP-GC). Several of these terrorist groups have claimed responsibility for terrorist acts in the past, but none over the past year. The operational leadership of many of these groups is headquartered or sheltered in Damascus, including Khaled Meshaal of HAMAS, Ramadan Shallah of PIJ, and Ahmed Jibril of PFLP-GC. The Syrian government provided Meshaal with security escorts for his motorcades and allowed him to travel freely around Damascus, attending numerous public events such as national day celebrations for Arab states. Though the Syrian government claimed periodically that it used its influence to restrain the activities of Palestinian groups, it allowed conferences organized by HAMAS to take place over the course of the year. In addition, the Syrian government has made no attempt to restrict the operation, travel, or movement of these groups’ leaders or members. Syria allows terrorist groups resident in its territory to receive and ship goods, including weapons, in and out of the country.

“Additionally, the Syrian government provided diplomatic, political and material support to Hizbullah in Lebanon and allowed Iran to supply this organization with weapons. Weapons flow from Iran through Syria, and directly from Syria, to Hizbullah despite UN Security Council resolution 1701 of 2006, which imposes an arms embargo on Lebanon except with the consent of the Lebanese government. Indeed, Hizbullah claims to have a larger arsenal today than it did in 2006.” **[7e] (SYRIA)**

#### **Kurdish Worker’s Party (PKK)**

HRW's February 2009 report, *Far From Justice – Syria's Supreme State Security Court* noted, "The last few years also have seen an increase in SSSC trials of members in the Kurdish Workers Party (PKK) [of Turkey]. This represents a reversal in Syria's policy as one of the main backers of the PKK against Turkey during the 1980s and 1990s. ... Since the reversal in policy, Syrian security services have arrested a number of PKK members and Kurds expressing support for the PKK." [39c] (p24-25)

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## ANNEX C – PROMINENT PEOPLE

Reproduced from Europa World, Syria – Directory: Government & Politics last accessed 16 August 2010, unless otherwise stated. [1b]

**President:** Lt-Gen. Bashar al-Assad (assumed office 17 July 2000).

Jane's *Sentinel Country Risk Assessments: Syria*, latest updates 10 September 2009–16 August 2010 reported:

“Second son of late president Hafez al-Assad, Bashar was born on 11 September 1965. He was uninvolved in Syria's politics until his elder brother, and Hafez's unofficial heir, Basil died in a car accident in 1994. Bashar had chosen a career in medicine and was studying to become an ophthalmologist in London when his brother's death led his father to recall him to Damascus. As a vast press campaign increased his popularity in Syria, Bashar underwent an accelerated grooming process to prepare him for the presidency. Graduating from the Military Academy in 1994 as a captain, Bashar made colonel by 1999 and had become increasingly involved in state affairs, specifically as the leader of a widely popular anti-corruption and modernisation campaign. Meanwhile, his father began to remove potential rivals and opponents, replacing them with Bashar loyalists.

“With the death of his father on 10 June 2000, the Damascus establishment, led by then vice-president Abd al-Halim Khaddam, immediately paved the way for Bashar's succession by amending the constitution to make the 34-year-old eligible for the presidency. Bashar was quickly appointed commander of the armed forces and nominated as the Baath Party's sole presidential candidate. On 25 June, the Syrian Parliament rubber-stamped his nomination, and succession was official after Bashar won 97.2 per cent approval in a referendum. Despite speculation that he was too politically weak and inexperienced to handle Syrian power politics, Bashar was sworn in as president on 17 July 2000, setting a precedent for hereditary republics in the Arab world. In May 2007 President Bashar was elected for a second seven-year term in a national referendum in which he was the only candidate. He won 97 per cent of the vote.

“Bashar married Asma al-Akhras, a Sunni Arab whose family is from the town of Hims. Her father, Fawaz al-Akhrass, is a cardiologist based in London who has become increasingly visible in his capacity as one of the founders of the entrepreneurial Syrian-British Society. Fawaz has become well-known in the UK as an unofficial channel to the president. Bashar and Asma have three children: their first son, Hafez, was born in December 2001; daughter Zein was born in October 2003; and a second son, Karim, was born in December 2004.” (13 August 2010) [8a] (Political Leadership)

**Vice-President, responsible for Foreign Affairs and Information:**

Farouk ash-Shara'.

**Vice-President:** Dr Najah al-Attar.

**Assistant Vice-President with rank of Minister:** Lt-Gen. Hassan at-Turkmani.

[1b] (Head of State)

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**COUNCIL OF MINISTERS**

**Prime Minister:** Muhammad Naji al-Otari.

**Deputy Prime Minister, responsible for Economic Affairs:** Abdullah ad-Dardari.

**Minister of Defence:** Lt-Gen. Ali Muhammad Habib Mahmoud.

**Minister of Foreign Affairs:** Walid Mouallem.

**Minister of Information:** Mohsen Bilal.

**Minister of the Interior:** Gen. Saeed Muhammad Sammour.

**Minister of Local Administration:** Tamer Fouad al-Hijeh.

**Minister of Education:** Ali Sa'd.

**Minister of Higher Education:** Ghiath Barakat.

**Minister of Electricity:** Ahmad Qusay Kayyali.

**Minister of Culture:** Riyad Na'asan Agha.

**Minister of Transport:** Yaarob Suleiman Badr.

**Minister of Petroleum and Mineral Resources:** Sufian Allaw.

**Minister of Industry:** Fouad Issa al-Joni.

**Minister of Finance:** Dr Muhammad al-Hussein.

**Minister of Economy and Trade:** Lamia Aasi.

**Minister of Housing and Construction:** Omar Ibrahim Ghalawanji.

**Minister of Justice:** Ahmad Hammoud Younis.

**Minister of Agriculture and Agrarian Reform:** Dr Adel Safar.

**Minister of Irrigation:** Nader al-Buni.

**Minister of Communications and Technology:** Imad Abd al-Ghani Sabouni.

**Minister of Health:** Rida Adnan Saeed.

**Minister of Awqaf (Islamic Endowments):** Muhammad Abd as-Sattar as-Sayyid.

**Minister of Labour and Social Affairs:** Diala Haj-Aref.

**Minister of Tourism:** Dr Saadallah Agha al-Qalla.

**Minister of Presidential Affairs:** Mansour Azzam.

**Minister of Expatriates:** Joseph Sweid.

**Minister of State for Environmental Affairs:**

Kawkab as-Sabagh Muhammad Jamil ad-Dayeh.

**Ministers of State:** Yousuf Suleiman al-Ahmad, Bashar ash-Sh'ar,  
Hussein Mahmoud Farzat, Hassan as-Sarri, Ghiath Jaraatly.

(May 2010) [1b] (Council of Ministers)

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**ANNEX D – LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

<b>ACCORD</b>	Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research and Documentation
<b>AI</b>	Amnesty International
<b>BBC</b>	British Broadcasting Corporation
<b>CIA</b>	United States Central Intelligence Agency
<b>CPJ</b>	Committee to Protect Journalists
<b>CSC</b>	Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers
<b>CSIS</b>	Center for Strategic and International Studies
<b>DIS</b>	Danish Immigration Service
<b>ECOI.net</b>	European Country of Origin Information Network
<b>ESISC</b>	European Strategic Intelligence and Security Centre
<b>FCO</b>	Foreign and Commonwealth Office (UK)
<b>FH</b>	Freedom House
<b>FIDH</b>	International Federation of Human Rights
<b>GME</b>	Gay Middle East.com
<b>GDP</b>	Gross Domestic Product
<b>HIV/AIDS</b>	Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
<b>HRW</b>	Human Rights Watch
<b>IBC</b>	International Blue Crescent Relief and Development Foundation
<b>ICG</b>	International Crisis Group
<b>ICJ</b>	International Commission of Jurists
<b>ICMC</b>	International Catholic Migration Commission
<b>ICRC</b>	International Committee of the Red Cross
<b>IDP</b>	Internally Displaced Person
<b>IDMC</b>	Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre
<b>IFRC</b>	International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
<b>ILGA</b>	International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association
<b>IMF</b>	International Monetary Fund
<b>IPU</b>	Inter-Parliamentary Union
<b>IRIN</b>	United Nations Integrated Regional Information Networks
<b>ITUC</b>	International Trade Union Confederation
<b>IWPR</b>	Institute for War and Peace Reporting
<b>KHRP</b>	Kurdish Human Rights Project
<b>KRI</b>	Kurdistan Region of Iraq
<b>MB</b>	Muslim Brotherhood
<b>MFA</b>	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
<b>MOI</b>	Ministry of Interior
<b>MOJ</b>	Ministry of Justice
<b>MRG</b>	Minority Rights Group International
<b>MSAL</b>	Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour
<b>NGO</b>	Non Governmental Organisation
<b>OHCHR</b>	Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
<b>OMCT</b>	World Organisation Against Torture
<b>POGAR</b>	Programme on Governance in the Arab Region
<b>RFE/RL</b>	Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty
<b>RI</b>	Refugees International
<b>RSF</b>	Reporteurs sans Frontières
<b>SAFI</b>	Syrian Air Force Intelligence
<b>SAR</b>	Syrian Arab Republic
<b>SCC</b>	Supreme Constitutional Court
<b>SEL</b>	State of Emergency Law
<b>SHRC</b>	Syrian Human Rights Committee

**SKS** International Support Kurds in Syria Association  
**SOLIDE** Support of Lebanese in Detention and Exile  
**SMI** Syrian Military Intelligence  
**SSSC** Supreme State Security Court  
**STC** Save The Children  
**TI** Transparency International  
**UN** United Nations  
**UNAIDS** Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS  
**UN CAT** United Nations Committee Against Torture  
**UN CEDAW** Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women  
**UN CRC** United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child  
**UNCS** United Nations Cartographic Section  
**UNDP** United Nations Development Programme  
**UNGASS** United Nations General Assembly Special Session on HIV/AIDS  
**UNHCR** United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees  
**UN HRC** United Nations Human Rights Committee  
**UNICEF** United Nations Children's Fund  
**UNRWA** United Nations Relief and Works Agency  
**UNSC** United Nations Security Council  
**UNSG** United Nations Secretary General  
**USCCB** United States Conference of Catholic Bishops  
**USCR** United States Committee for Refugees  
**USIP** United States Institute of Peace  
**US OPM** United States Office of Personnel Management  
**USSD** United States State Department  
**WBG** World Bank Group  
**WHO** World Health Organization  
**WRI** War Resisters' International

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