



Refugee Documentation Centre (Ireland)
LEGAL AID BOARD

Syria - Researched and compiled by the Refugee Documentation Centre of Ireland on Thursday 1 & Friday 2 May 2014

Is 26 February 2011 seen as the official starting date of the present civil war/revolution

In March 2014 *BBC News* states:

“The conflict has its roots in protests that erupted in March 2011 in the southern city of Deraa after the arrest and torture of some teenagers who painted revolutionary slogans on a school wall” (BBC News (14 March 2014) *Syria: The story of the conflict*).

A report published in August 2011 by the *UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights* notes that

“Dar’a witnessed the first large-scale protests in Syria, triggered by the continued detention of a group of youths and children arrested in February 2011, accused of having written anti-government slogans on the walls” (UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (August 2011) *Report of the Fact-Finding Mission on Syria pursuant to Human Rights Council resolution S-16/1*, p.6).

Reuters in April 2011 points out that:

“Syrian troops and tanks poured into Deraa on Monday, seeking to crush resistance in the city where a month-long uprising against the autocratic 11-year rule of President Bashar al-Assad first erupted” (Reuters (25 April 2011) *Syria sends tanks into Deraa where uprising began*).

A report published in December 2011 by *Human Rights Watch* states:

“Protests in Syria broke out on March 18 in response to the arrest and torture of 15 school children by the Political Security Directorate, one of Syria’s intelligence agencies, in the southern city of Daraa. Attempting to suppress the demonstrations, security forces opened fire on the protesters, killing at least four. Within days the protests grew into rallies that gathered thousands of people. Protests quickly spread to the rest of the country in a show of sympathy with the Daraa protesters. The government’s violent response only further fueled demonstrations” (Human Rights Watch (15 December 2011) *“By All Means Necessary!”, Individual and Command Responsibility for Crimes against Humanity in Syria*, p.13).

A timeline issued in April 2011 by *IRIN News* notes:

“Syria has been under emergency law since the Ba’ath Party seized power in 1963 and banned all opposition parties. Since early March 2011, there have been regular protests in a number of towns and cities, with the southern town of Dera’a a focal point. About 200 people have died in recent clashes. Below is a timeline of some key developments since 16 March: 16 March - “Silent” protest in Damascus by 150 members of imprisoned families and friends. Four protesters killed and dozens

wounded by security forces in Dera'a, near the border with Jordan" (IRIN News (13 April 2011) *Timeline of key events since mid-March*).

In June 2011 a document published by *Human Rights Watch* points out that:

"Syria, a repressive police state ruled under an emergency law since 1963, at first seemed immune to the popular uprisings that swept the Arab world starting December 2010. Protests began in February, but failed to attract crowds large enough to outnumber the ever present security forces. The situation changed in mid-March, when thousands of people took part in anti-government demonstrations in the city of Daraa, located in the southern Hauran region near the Jordanian border...Protests broke out on March 18 in response to the arrest and torture by political security, a branch of Syria's notorious mukhabarat, or security services, of 15 school children (see below). Security forces opened fire, killing at least four protesters and within days the protests grew into rallies that gathered thousands of people" (Human Rights Watch (1 June 2011) "*We've Never Seen Such Horror*", *Crimes against Humanity by Syrian Security Forces*, p.8).

Amnesty International in July 2011 notes:

"As part of the wave of protests sweeping the Middle East and North Africa region in recent months, relatively small demonstrations in Syria in February developed into widespread mass protests in the country from mid-March" (Amnesty International (6 July 2011) *Syria: Crackdown in Syria: Terror in Tell Kalakh*, p.5).

A report issued in November 2011 by the *United Nations Human Rights Council* in November 2011 states:

"In February 2011, limited protests broke out around issues such as rural poverty, corruption, freedom of expression, democratic rights and the release of political prisoners. Subsequent protests called for respect for human rights, and demanded far-reaching economic, legal and political reforms. By mid-March, peaceful protests erupted in Dar'a in response to the detention and torture of a group of children accused of painting anti-Government graffiti on public buildings. Following the suppression by State forces of peaceful protests, including firing at a funeral procession, civilian marches in support of Dar'a spread to a number of cities, including some suburbs of Al Ladhqiyah, Baniyas, Damascus, Dayr Az Zawr, Homs, Hama and Idlib" (United Nations Human Rights Council (25 November 2011) *Report of the independent international commission of inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic*, p.8).

A publication released in July 2011 by the *International Crisis Group* points out that:

"Well before mid-March and the onset of serious disturbance, the impact of regional turmoil could be felt in the changed behaviour and outlook of ordinary Syrians – a preview of what suddenly would turn into far-reaching unrest" (International Crisis Group (6 July 2011) *Popular Protest in North Africa and the Middle East (VI): The Syrian People's Slow-motion Revolution*, p.8).

This report lists a number of incidents occurring in February 2011 including:

"Security services focused on preventing or, if need be, dispersing public gatherings. On 2 February, civil society activists organised a vigil in support of the Egyptian revolution, in front of the Egyptian embassy in Damascus. Plainclothes security

agents were deployed nearby, ready to intervene – though in this case the threat itself proved dissuasive. Demonstrators renewed their attempt soon thereafter in the Christian neighbourhood of Bab Toma; this time, participants were roughed up” (ibid, p.9).

This document also states:

“By mid-March, protests appeared poised to spread to the heart of Damascus. On the 15th, youth groups organised a small yet energetic demonstration in the central market of Hamidiya” (ibid, p.10).

It is also noted in this report that:

“When on 18 March, Friday prayers at the Omeyyad Mosque grew into anti-regime chants and were met with brutal force by the security services, it was clear smallscale forms of mobilisation were turning into a more generalised pattern. Increasing numbers of Syrians were galvanised by the regime’s repression. Some were encouraged by the still bearable level of state violence: if a little beating was the price to pay for expressing frustration, they deemed it worthwhile. Others were incensed by the authorities’ response; a largely unknown civil society figure such as Souheir Atassi suddenly became a symbol, when security forces allegedly dragged her by the hair during the crackdown. The events were recorded by the protesters’ numerous mobile phones, extinguishing any hope participants might have had that they could remain anonymous. That they nonetheless continued protesting demonstrated a high level of commitment and suggested the phenomenon was far from a passing fad; in turn, the exposure gained through the recordings helped the movement maintain and gain momentum. At that time, there was neither evidence nor indication that this growing rebelliousness was anything but a spontaneous and fully indigenous affair. Plans emanating from abroad, such as the early February call for a “Day of Anger”, failed miserably when compared to home-grown initiatives. If anything, the initial demonstrations reflected the slow remobilisation of small segments of the capital’s middle class, whose lack of prior protest experience was evidenced by the uncoordinated and tentative nature of their efforts. Soon, however, the regime’s gross mishandling of a localised crisis in the southern city of Deraa would shift the focus away from the capital toward the provinces” (ibid, p.10).

This document also states:

“A critical turning point occurred on 18 March 2011. That day, in both the Mediterranean coastal city of Banyas and the southern city of Deraa, crowds took to the streets to express local grievances. Residents of Banyas, a town renowned for its Sunni conservative outlook, took aim at regime measures that discriminated against female employees of the education ministry wearing a niqab (fullface veil). In Deraa, resentment focused on a number of officials who were seen as particularly incompetent, brutal or corrupt. Protesters simultaneously aired various other complaints suggesting that dissatisfaction ran much deeper. Although there are significant differences between the provinces, and each possesses its own sources of anger, most have in common a profound sense of distress, which explains why demonstrations gradually spread to a majority of towns across the country. In Duma, just north of the capital, the precipitating factors were a tightlyknit conservative society, strong local identity and history of rebelliousness, combined with the harmful effects of economic liberalisation on the manufacturing trade. In other cities, the uprising was shaped by a variety of other ingredients: age-old grievances; recent cases of abuse by security services; growing religiousness; the drought’s devastating

impact on the agricultural sector; the role of powerful smuggling networks; or persistent communal fault lines that fuelled sectarianism. What they all shared, however, was deep fatigue and frustration which gradually transformed disparate, disjointed and localised flashpoints into a national protest movement. The primary catalyst in this process, as will be further described in a companion report, was the regime's response. For weeks, it treated each and every instance of unrest as an isolated case, employing a mix of perfunctory negotiations, minor concessions and brutal repression. This approach produced a familiar cycle whereby the security forces' escalation and street radicalisation reinforced one another and led residents of other localities to rise up in solidarity with victims of state repression. Most often, the demonstrations involved small numbers, the hard core of the protest movement being drawn chiefly from underprivileged youth, who had little to lose. But the security forces' excessive use of force against them and resulting bloodshed inevitably broadened the protest movement's social base, as relatives, friends, colleagues and other citizens outraged by the regime's conduct joined in" (ibid, p.11).

References

Amnesty International (6 July 2011) *Syria: Crackdown in Syria: Terror in Tell Kalakh*
<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE24/029/2011/en>

Accessed Thursday 1 May 2014

BBC News (14 March 2014) *Syria: The story of the conflict*
<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-26116868>

Accessed Thursday 1 May 2014

Human Rights Watch (15 December 2011) *"By All Means Necessary!", Individual and Command Responsibility for Crimes against Humanity in Syria*
<http://www.hrw.org/reports/2011/12/15/all-means-necessary-0>

Accessed Thursday 1 May 2014

Human Rights Watch (1 June 2011) *"We've Never Seen Such Horror", Crimes against Humanity by Syrian Security Forces*
<http://www.hrw.org/reports/2011/06/01/we-ve-never-seen-such-horror-0>

Accessed Thursday 1 May 2014

International Crisis Group (6 July 2011) *Popular Protest in North Africa and the Middle East (VI): The Syrian People's Slow-motion Revolution*
<http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/middle-east-north-africa/egypt-syria-lebanon/syria/108-popular-protest-in-north-africa-and-the-middle-east-vi-the-syrian-peoples-slow-motion-revolution.aspx>

Accessed Thursday 1 May 2014

IRIN News (13 April 2011) *Timeline of key events since mid-March*
<http://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/timeline-key-events-mid-march>

Accessed Thursday 1 May 2014

Reuters (25 April 2011) *Syria sends tanks into Deraa where uprising began*
<http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/04/25/us-syria-idUSLDE73N02P20110425>

Accessed Thursday 1 May 2014

United Nations Human Rights Council (25 November 2011) *Report of the independent international commission of inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic*
<http://www.refworld.org/type,COUNTRYREP,,SYR,4edde9d02,0.html>

Accessed Thursday 1 May 2014

UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (August 2011) *Report of the Fact-Finding Mission on Syria pursuant to Human Rights Council resolution S-16/1*
<http://www.refworld.org/type,COUNTRYREP,,SYR,4e4e2ba72,0.html>

Accessed Thursday 1 May 2014

This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Refugee Documentation Centre within time constraints. This response is not and does not purport to be conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Please read in full all documents referred to.

Sources Consulted

Amnesty International
BBC News
Electronic Immigration Network
European Country of Origin Information Network
Freedom House
Google
Human Rights Watch
Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada
Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre
International Crisis Group
IRIN News
Lexis Nexis
Minority Rights Group International
Online Newspapers
Refugee Documentation Centre E-Library
Refugee Documentation Centre Query Database
Reliefweb
Reuters
United Kingdom Home Office
United States Department of State
UNHCR Refworld

This document was created with Win2PDF available at <http://www.win2pdf.com>.
The unregistered version of Win2PDF is for evaluation or non-commercial use only.
This page will not be added after purchasing Win2PDF.