

The Fall of the Assad Regime



On 8 December 2024, Syrians woke up to a Syria free from the yoke of the criminal Assad regime. After decades of tyranny that violated every Syrian's right to life in freedom and in dignity, the Assad family's 53-year rule has finally come to an end. Congratulations to all! Today is a triumphant day that brings us much hope.

Former dictator Bashar Al-Assad is responsible for the killing of over half a million Syrians since the outbreak of the war. His regime, which is characterized by widespread corruption and sheer brutality, decided to respond to peaceful protests in 2011 and 2012 with bullets, and soon after, bombs. Throughout the conflict, the Assad regime, alongside its allies Russia and Iran, had deployed a whole range of means to kill, besiege, and starve Syrians and punish them for daring to confront his regime, including with chemical weapons and barrel bombs. The regime's deliberate targeting of civilians and civilian infrastructure, such as hospitals, markets, and residential areas, is well-documented. Over 6 million Syrians were made refugees, and over 7 million internally displaced.

Another defining practice of this police state was its systematic policy of enforced disappearance, arbitrary detention, and industrial-scale torture in its notorious detention facilities. According to SNHR, over 100,000 Syrians have been forcibly disappeared and arbitrarily detained by the regime, many of whom have died in these facilities either as a result of torture or executions. We have been overjoyed to see the release of tens of thousands of forcibly disappeared political prisoners, including women and children, from detention facilities across territory formerly controlled by the ousted regime. At the same time, we stand in solidarity with families of the disappeared, sharing in their pain and suffering caused by the inaction of international bodies in promptly addressing this

humanitarian crisis. Immediate and effective responses are imperative, as any further delay risks causing irreparable harm to the right to the truth of families and exacerbates the enduring anguish of not knowing the fate and whereabouts of their loved ones or what has happened to them.

The oppression and violence of the Assad regime did not commence with Bashar, but rather his father, Hafez. In 1982, Hafez Al-Assad killed over 40,000 Syrians in the city of Hama. Hundreds of political prisoners were executed in their prison cells by forces loyal to Hafez's brother, Rifaat Al-Assad. These legacy-defining massacres shaped much of Syria's political memory, identity, and history.

Moreover, under the Syrian regime, the intertwining of crony capitalism and the war economy had entrenched economic inequality and reinforced regime power structures. Crony capitalism flourished as the regime rewarded loyalists and insiders with lucrative business opportunities, monopolies, and preferential treatment, creating an elite class deeply tied to the state. The war economy exacerbated these dynamics, as networks of regime-affiliated businessmen and militia leaders profited from wartime smuggling, reconstruction contracts, and control over vital resources like fuel and food supplies. These actors exploited the conflict to accumulate wealth at the expense of ordinary Syrians who faced soaring poverty and the collapse of basic services. This symbiotic relationship between the regime and its cronies was designed to preserve authoritarian control rather than address the needs of the Syrian people.

Our work on promoting human rights and the rule of law in the country has just begun. As the nation seeks to transition to democracy, rebuild institutions, and forge an inclusive society, we will continue to support civil society groups, victims, survivors, families' associations, humanitarian organizations, businesses, and other entities to ensure respect for the human rights of all groups and the protection of the environment. We will also work to ensure that war criminals and profiteers are not rewarded with contracts for procurement or reconstruction. We will continue to support victims, survivors and families' associations to fully exercise, access, and fulfill their rights to justice, truth, and remedy - including their right to participate in future truth and justice processes - for the well-documented atrocities committed by members of the Assad regime and their allies, including local and foreign business actors, as well as other parties that have violated the rights of the Syrian people.

We know there are a multitude of challenges that lie ahead, but we are committed and prepared to tackle them. We hope to see the day that all peoples are free from unjust political, economic, and social systems of subjugation and discrimination on the basis of gender, ethnicity, religion, or any other grounds.