

**Health Crisis: Syrian Government Targets the Wounded and Health Workers** Amnesty International Report  
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The Syrian authorities have turned hospitals and medical staff into instruments of repression in the course of their efforts to crush the unprecedented mass protests and demonstrations that have wracked the country since March 2011. People wounded in protests or other incidents related to the uprising have been verbally abused and physically assaulted in state-run hospitals, including by medical staff, and in some cases denied medical care, in gross breach of medical ethics, and many of those taken to hospital have been detained.

As casualties from the current unrest have mounted, so President Bashar al-Assad's government has intensified its hunt for the wounded, who are generally deemed to be opponents and outlaws. Some army soldiers and members of the security forces loyal to the government have also been killed or injured while combating the unrest but Amnesty International has received no reports of medical abuses in their cases.

In Homs, one of Syria's major cities and governorates, government security forces have obstructed ambulances on their way to pick up wounded people and when ferrying the wounded to hospital, threatened Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC) workers with violence or detention and interrogated wounded patients while they were still being conveyed in ambulances. They have ordered all those with firearm or other injuries related to the unrest to be directed to the military hospital, which is controlled by the Ministry of Defence, and such patients have been treated effectively as detainees while in hospital and held incommunicado.

Hospitals have increasingly come to be seen as dangerous places for people whom the authorities suspect of opposing the government, and both private and public hospitals have been instructed to report to the authorities any patients who have sustained firearm or other unrest-related injuries. The security forces have regularly entered state hospitals in search of people injured during the protests, who are liable to be arrested, detained incommunicado and subjected to torture or other ill-treatment. In consequence, unsurprisingly, many people are now reportedly avoiding state-run hospitals if they or their relatives have been wounded during the protests and unrest, and turning instead to private hospitals where they may obtain treatment without exposing themselves to likely arrest or to the makeshift field hospitals that have been set up by some local communities to treat people shot or otherwise wounded by the army and security forces. (...)

Amnesty International was not able to conduct research on the ground in Syria; like other international human rights organizations and most international journalists and other independent observers, the organization has been effectively barred by the government from visiting Syria since the current protests and unrest broke out in mid-March. Likewise, by early October 2011 the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights was still awaiting permission from the Syrian authorities to visit the country to "investigate all alleged violations of international human rights law and to establish the facts and circumstances of such violations and of the crimes perpetrated", as mandated by the UN Human Rights Council on 29 April 2011.

This report is based on research conducted in August and September 2011. Interviews were conducted with individuals wounded during the ongoing disturbances; relatives of those wounded and subsequently detained; relatives of people with firearm and other injuries related to the ongoing unrest; and health professionals and medics, including surgeons, doctors, nurses and other hospital employees. Government surveillance and restrictions on means of communication, and the poor quality of the internet connection in Syria were among the obstacles to research. The deteriorating security situation also meant that health professionals were often too busy treating patients to speak to Amnesty International or were too afraid to do so.

Despite these challenges, the patterns of abuse recorded in this report and the evidence garnered from other sources provide a compelling picture of how the Syrian authorities are blocking access to health care for people wounded during the unrest and preventing health care professionals from treating such patients freely and without fear. Such actions flagrantly violate Syria's obligations under international human rights law.

Amnesty International is calling on the Government of Syria, among other things, to:

- Give strict and clear instructions to all public and private hospitals to accept and treat all wounded patients without delay, and to prioritize the interests of the patients over any other priorities set by the security and other authorities;
- Hold to account any health professional or employee at hospitals and other health facilities who violates medical ethics by misusing their position to subject vulnerable individuals, including wounded patients, to verbal or physical abuse, torture or other ill-treatment, or to deny them necessary medical care;
- Instruct all members of the military and security forces to prioritise the treatment of wounded individuals over interrogation, treat such individuals humanely, allow without any interference medical treatment of these and other patients, and hold to account anyone proved to have delayed, obstructed or interfered in the work of health workers providing treatment to the wounded;
- Stop arbitrary detentions of health professionals for performing their duty of attending to persons with medical needs or for exercising their right to freedom of expression or other peaceful activities, and release without delay all wounded persons, health workers and other detainees unless they are promptly charged with internationally recognizable crimes and tried in full conformity with international standards for fair trial. (...) **Read the full [article](#)**