

Arab League: Ensure Effective Syria Monitoring Mission Human Rights Watch 19
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The Arab League should ensure that Syria grants its monitoring mission unhindered access to conflict zones and detention facilities, and that it can operate independent of Syrian security services and other authorities, Human Rights Watch said today.

On November 18, 2011, Syrian diplomatic sources told media outlets that their government had “conditionally” accepted an Arab League mission to observe implementation of the League’s initiative to end the violence that has killed thousands since March.

“The Arab League’s effort to send monitors to Syria is commendable, but whether this mission can make a difference depends on whether the Syrian government lets it do its job,” said Sarah Leah Whitson, Middle East director at Human Rights Watch. “The Syrian people don’t need another guided tour for foreign observers – what’s needed is an independent and effective monitoring presence that can finally shed light on the serious human rights violations on the ground.”

The monitors should be able to address all serious human rights violations and look at abuses by all parties, including armed groups and protesters as well as security forces, Human Rights Watch said. As part of their mandate, they should document patterns of abuse, identify individuals responsible for carrying out or ordering human rights violations, and recommend steps to end violations and address impunity.(...)

The monitors should include people with specialized expertise, including forensic experts who can examine those injured and killed in the violence or in detention, and arms experts who can analyze the types of weapons that have been used.

The Arab League should insist that Syrian authorities grant its monitors unhindered access to all parts of the country, allow them to operate independently, and guarantee the safety of witnesses and staff members, Human Rights Watch said. The Syrian government has insisted on sending “escorts” when journalists and a UN humanitarian team have been allowed to visit since the violence began, contending it was for security.

Arab League monitors need to be able to interview victims and witnesses privately, and Syrian authorities should not be able to observe these meetings, Human Rights Watch said. The monitors should immediately report to the League any obstructions they face, and the League should make clear to the Syrian government that it will be held responsible for the safety of witnesses and victims who meet with the monitors. (...)

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