

“By All Means Necessary!” Individual and Command Responsibility for Crimes against Humanity in Syria

Human Rights Watch

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Former Syrian soldiers identified by name 74 commanders and officials responsible for attacks on unarmed protesters, Human Rights Watch said in a report released today. The report names commanders and officials from the Syrian military and intelligence agencies who allegedly ordered, authorized, or condoned widespread killings, torture, and unlawful arrests during the 2011 anti-government protests. Human Rights Watch has urged the Security Council to refer the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court (ICC) and impose sanctions against the officials implicated in abuses.

The 88-page report, “[By All Means Necessary!: Individual and Command Responsibility for Crimes against Humanity in Syria](#),” is based on more than 60 interviews with defectors from the Syrian military and intelligence agencies. The defectors provided detailed information about their units’ participation in attacks, abuses against Syrian citizens, and the orders they received from commanders and officials at various levels, who are named in the report.

“Defectors gave us names, ranks, and positions of those who gave the orders to shoot and kill, and each and every official named in this report, up to the very highest levels of the Syrian government, should answer for their crimes against the Syrian people,” said [Anna Neistat](#), associate director for emergencies at Human Rights Watch, and one of the authors of the report. “The Security Council should ensure accountability by referring

[Syria](#)

to the

[International Criminal Court](#)

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The defectors’ statements leave no doubt that the Syrian security forces committed widespread and systematic abuses, including killings, arbitrary detention, and torture, as part of a state policy targeting the civilian population, Human Rights Watch said. These abuses constitute crimes against humanity. (...)

Arbitrary Arrests, Torture, and Executions Information provided by the defectors corroborates Human Rights Watch’s findings of widespread arbitrary arrests and torture of detainees across Syria. The defectors described large-scale, arbitrary arrests during protests and at checkpoints, as well as “sweep” operations in residential neighborhoods across the country that have resulted in hundreds, and at times, thousands, of arrests.

Defectors told Human Rights Watch that they routinely beat and mistreated detainees and that their commanders ordered, encouraged, or condoned these abuses. Those who had worked in or had access to detention facilities told Human Rights Watch that they witnessed or participated in torture. (...)

Command Responsibility

Under international law, commanders are responsible for international crimes committed by their subordinates if the commanders knew or should have known about the violations and failed to investigate and stop them.

Human Rights Watch said that given the widespread nature of killings and other crimes committed in Syria, scores of statements from soldiers about their orders to shoot and abuse protesters, and the extensive documentation of these abuses by international and local organizations and the media, it is reasonable to conclude, at minimum, that Syria’s senior military and civilian leadership knew about them. The ongoing killings, arrests, repression, and general denials of responsibility by the Syrian government also make clear that officials have failed to take any meaningful action to address these abuses.

Furthermore, Human Rights Watch has collected information indicating that the Syrian military and civilian leadership have been closely involved in the violent crackdown on protesters. (...)

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