

Syria: Armed Opposition Groups Committing Abuses Human Rights Watch 19 March 2012

Ar

med opposition elements have carried out serious human rights abuses, Human Rights Watch said today in a public letter to the Syrian National Council (SNC) and other leading Syrian opposition groups. Abuses include kidnapping, detention, and torture of security force members, government supporters, and people identified as members of pro-government militias, called shabeeha. Human Rights Watch has also received reports of executions by armed opposition groups of security force members and civilians.

Leaders of Syrian opposition groups should condemn and forbid their members from carrying out abuses, Human Rights Watch said. Some of the statements collected suggest that certain armed attacks by opposition groups were motivated by anti-Shia or anti-Alawite sentiments arising from the association of these communities with government policies. (...)

(...) The protest movement in Syria was overwhelmingly peaceful until September 2011. Since then, an increasing number of media and other reports have said that a growing number of military defectors and local residents have decided to resort to arms, saying they are defending themselves against security forces' raids or attacking checkpoints and security facilities in their cities. The intensity of the fighting has increased since early February 2012, when the government began large-scale military attacks against opposition strongholds throughout the country.

Many of the antigovernment groups reported to be carrying out abuses do not appear to belong to an organized command structure or to be following Syrian National Council orders. But Syria's opposition leadership has a responsibility to speak out and condemn such abuses, Human Rights Watch said. On March 1 the SNC created a military bureau to liaise with, unify, and supervise armed opposition groups, including the Free Syrian Army (FSA).

Everyone in the custody of the FSA and other opposition forces, including members of the Syrian security forces and shabeeha, should be treated humanely in accordance with international human rights standards, Human Rights Watch said.

Everyone in the custody of the FSA and other opposition forces, including members of the Syrian security forces and shabeeha, should be treated humanely in accordance with international human rights standards, Human Rights Watch said. (...) **To read the full article, see [here](#) .**

To read the Human Rights Watch Open Letter to the Leaders of the Syrian Opposition, see [here](#) .