

Imposing Sanctions in Defense of Human Rights in Syria

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The United States is taking action to promote accountability for entities and individuals that have perpetuated the suffering of the Syrian people. The United States is sanctioning eight Syrian prisons, five Assad regime officials in the institutions that run those facilities, two militia groups, and two militia leaders. These actions underscore the U.S. commitment to promote respect for human rights and accountability for abuse against Syrians.

Many of the prisons designated today were highlighted in the pictures provided by Caesar, a Syrian regime defector who worked as an official photographer for the Syrian military and exposed the regime's ruthless and cruel treatment of detainees. Today's action furthers the goals of the Act named after him, the Caesar Syria Civilian Protection Act of 2019, which seeks to promote accountability for the Assad regime's abuses.

The Assad regime has detained and abused a vast number of Syrians since the start of the conflict, as has been well documented by the UN Commission of Inquiry (COI) and human rights groups. More than 14,000 detainees have reportedly died after being tortured at the hands of the Assad regime, according to the Syrian Network for Human Rights, while 130,000 Syrians are reportedly still missing or detained.

- The United States is imposing sanctions on Saydnaya Military Prison pursuant to Executive Order (E.O.) 13894 for having engaged in the commission of serious human rights abuse, including torture or other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment and extrajudicial executions, since the start of the Syrian crisis. The United States is also designating seven additional prisons operated by the Syrian General Intelligence Directorate and Syrian Military Intelligence for being owned or controlled by entities blocked pursuant to E.O. 13572, and five regime officials in charge of Syrian prisons.
- Additionally, the United States is imposing sanctions on Saraya al-Areen, a militia affiliated with the Syrian Arab Army that participated in the 2020 offensive operation to return Idlib to regime control. This operation contributed to the mass displacement of Syrian civilians and untold human suffering. Nearly one million Syrians remain displaced from that operation and ongoing artillery attacks continue to harm civilians along the frontlines.

The United States is also imposing sanctions on armed Syrian opposition group Ahrar al-Sharqiya, for being responsible for serious human rights abuses, including abduction and torture, as well as on two of its leaders. Ahrar al-Sharqiya is reportedly involved in looting private property from civilians and barring displaced Syrians from returning to their homes. The group has been implicated in the unlawful killing of Hevrin Khalaf, a Syrian Kurdish politician, in October 2019. Ahrar al-Sharqiya has also integrated numerous former ISIS members into its ranks. Both militias were designated today pursuant to E.O. 13894.

The world must renew its shared resolve to promote the dignity and human rights of all Syrians. We urge the international community to join our calls for a nationwide ceasefire, the immediate release of those arbitrarily detained, and for information about the fate of the missing. The Assad regime must know that these steps are critical to any lasting peace or economic prosperity in Syria.

Even as we work to make sure our sanctions do not impede humanitarian aid delivery, early recovery or humanitarian resilience programs, or COVID 19 relief, today's action makes clear that the United States will not forget the victims of human rights abuses in Syria and will use appropriate tools to target and single out those responsible, regardless of the perpetrator.

For more information on today's action, please see the Department of the Treasury's [press release](#).