



Special report on the 55th session of the UN Human Rights Council, And the Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression (SCM) Activities

Summary:



The 55th session of the Human Rights Council (HRC) activities and events was launched on 26 February and continued until 5 April 2024, in which the Council discussed a range of civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights, On the margins of the session's activities, and in the context of communication and interaction with states concerned with the situation of human rights in Syria, especially the member states of the Human Rights Council and non-governmental organisations (NGO), The Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression (SCM) held several bilateral and multilateral meetings with representatives of States Permanent Mission in Geneva in addition to representatives of international and UN organisations. In addition to that, SCM also prepared and submitted seven Oral Interventions (OI) in collaboration with several Syrian victim groups and associations (VA) and Syrian civil society organisations (CSO), five of which were on item /3/, one on item /4/, and one on item /7/.

Agenda and Annotations

During this session and according to the Council's standing agenda, the following was addressed:

Under the **2nd item** on the agenda dedicated for the “**Annual Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR) and the Reports of the Office of the High Commissioner and the Secretary-General**”, the Council considered the reports of the human rights situation in the occupied Palestinian territories (oPt) including East Jerusalem, Sri Lanka, Eritrea, Cyprus, Guatemala, Honduras, Colombia, Myanmar, South Sudan, Nicaragua, and Afghanistan. The Council was also presented with the Secretary-General's report on the conclusions and recommendations of the special procedures.

Under the **3rd item**, which focuses on “**the promotion and protection of all human rights, civil, political, economic, social and cultural, including the right to development**”, the Council discussed the issue of implementing these rights in all countries and addressing religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence.

The Council decided to extend the mandates of the **Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights**, the **Special Rapporteur on the right to food**, and the **Special Rapporteur on adequate housing** for three years.

The Council also presented the report of the Secretary-General on the **The United Nations Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture**. In the same context, the Council decided to extend the mandate of the **Special Rapporteur on the issue of torture and other cruel, degrading or inhuman treatment or punishment** for another three years.

The Council also requested the **Special Rapporteur on freedom of peaceful assembly and of association** to participate in global and regional consultations and to develop specific technical and practical tools based on international standards and best practices to assist law enforcement officials in promoting and protecting human rights in the context of peaceful protests.

In relation to the **rights of journalists**, the General Secretariat has requested the Secretary-General to submit a report on the safety of journalists and media workers, specifically emphasising the safety of **female journalists**, both online and offline.

The Council also held a full day on **children's rights** on the topic of “Children's rights and comprehensive social protection for all.”

As for the issue of terrorism and human rights, the Council decided to extend the mandate of the **Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism** for a period of three years.

Under the **4th item**, which focuses on “**human rights situations requiring the Council's attention**”, the situation of human rights in the Syrian Arab Republic was addressed as well as several states, such as Myanmar, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Belarus, the Islamic Republic of Iran, and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, in addition to the human rights situation in Ukraine resulting from Russian aggression.

The **6th item**, on the **universal periodic review**, included consideration of the final results of the review of several countries, including Turkmenistan, Germany, Canada, Bangladesh, Russia, Azerbaijan, Cuba, and others.

Under the **7th item** of the agenda of this session, which concerns the “**situation of human rights in Palestine and other occupied Arab territories**”, the Council considered reports on the human rights situation in the occupied Syrian Golan, the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, and the Israeli settlements in the Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem.

Human Rights Council Resolution on “The Situation of Human Rights in the Syrian Arab Republic”

SCM attended the discussion session on the draft Human Rights Council resolution on the situation of human rights in the Syrian Arab Republic on March 13 and submitted a number of written observations and proposals to be taken into consideration when issuing the report.

On the 4th of April, draft resolution No. [\[A/HRC/55/L.21\]](#) was issued on the situation of human rights in the Syrian Arab Republic, in which 27 countries had voted in favour of the resolution, while 5 objected and 15 countries abstained from voting.

The text of the draft resolution condemned the dangerous situation of human rights in the Syrian Arab Republic and called on the Syrian government to assume its responsibilities in protecting Syrians and respecting and protecting human rights, as the data presented in the report of the Secretary-General and the United Nations High Commissioner indicated that war crimes and crimes against humanity may have been committed in Syria.

The resolution welcomed the work of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (CoI) and the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism (IIIM), which work to investigate and prosecute people who committed crimes in Syria, and extended the CoI mandate for an additional year.

It also welcomed the progress made towards establishing the IIMP, as stated by the Secretary-General in his report on the implementation of General Assembly Resolution No. [77/301](#), regarding the establishment of the institution. In addition to that, the resolution called on all parties to the conflict and other actors to cooperate with the IIMP in good faith.

The report expressed deep concern about the continuation of gross human rights violations in Syria, such as enforced disappearance, murder, sexual and gender-based violence, torture, ill-treatment, neglect, and the weakness or absence of basic services such as access to food, water, education, sanitation, and others. These violations affect all Syrians, especially children, women, and internally displaced people, as they are the most vulnerable groups in the country.

Voting Results

Meeting Title: HRC 55

A/HRC/55/L.21 - Situation of human rights in the Syrian Arab Republic					
YES	ALBANIA	NO	ERITREA	YES	MALAWI
NO	ALGERIA	YES	FINLAND	ABST	MALAYSIA
YES	ARGENTINA	YES	FRANCE	ABST	MALDIVES
ABST	BANGLADESH	YES	GAMBIA	YES	MONTENEGRO
YES	BELGIUM	YES	GEORGIA	ABST	MOROCCO
YES	BENIN	YES	GERMANY	YES	NETHERLANDS (KINGDOM OF THE)
ABST	BRAZIL	YES	GHANA	YES	PARAGUAY
YES	BULGARIA	YES	HONDURAS	YES	QATAR
NO	BURUNDI	ABST	INDIA	YES	ROMANIA
ABST	CAMEROON	ABST	INDONESIA	ABST	SOMALIA
YES	CHILE	YES	JAPAN	ABST	SOUTH AFRICA
NO	CHINA	ABST	KAZAKHSTAN	ABST	SUDAN
YES	COSTA RICA	YES	KUWAIT	ABST	UNITED ARAB EMIRATES
YES	COTE D'IVOIRE	ABST	KYRGYZSTAN	YES	UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
NO	CUBA	YES	LITHUANIA	ABST	VIET NAM
YES	DOMINICAN REPUBLIC	YES	LUXEMBOURG		
	YES	27	ABST	15	NO
					5

SCM activities during this session, in cooperation with Syrian civil society organisations and victim associations:



Within its plan and focusing on two basic issues, namely the enforced disappearance and the forced return of refugees, SCM organised several activities on the Margin of this session's activities. These activities included:

1- Visits and Meetings:

Holding several meetings (individually and/or in cooperation with partner Syrian and international human rights and Civil Society NGOs, and Victims groups) in the context of communication and interaction with states concerned with the situation of human rights in Syria, especially the member states of the Human Rights Council, and United Nations' mechanism and special procedures, SCM held several bilateral meetings with representatives of States Permanent Mission in Geneva, and United Nations' Working Group, in addition to international NGOs in consultative status with the Social and Economic Council (ECOSOC).



2- Oral Interventions:

Formulating and presenting oral interventions on several items on the session's agenda, individually and/or in cooperation with partner Syrian human rights and Civil Society NGOs, and Victims groups.



3- Side Events:

Organizing and holding a side event to shed light on the issue of the conditions of Syrian refugees in countries of asylum and the issue of refoulement.

In addition, Mazen Darwish, founder and director of SCM, was a guest speaker at the side event entitled “Navigating the Unknown: State Responsibility and Global Efforts to Locate Missing Syrian Migrants and Victims of Human Trafficking,” which was organised by the Syrian Forum and sponsored by the Permanent Mission of the European Union (EU) to United Nations in Geneva.

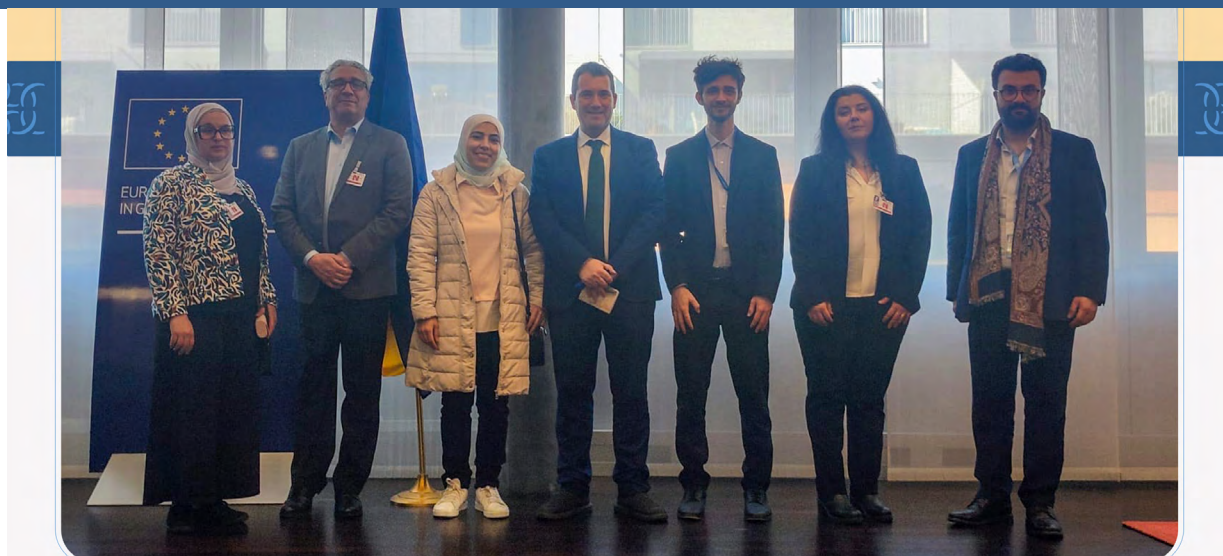


4- Facilitating access:

Cooperating with and providing the necessary administrative and logistical support to colleagues from Syrian human rights/ Civil Society NGOs, and Victims groups to secure their access to the “Palais des Nations” in Geneva to hold bilateral meetings, delivering oral interventions, attending HRC sessions, and/ or participating in and attending side events on the margin of the HRC activities.



1- Visits and meetings



SCM cooperated with Syrians for Truth and Justice, Caesar Families Association, Ta'afi Initiative, the Coalition of Families of Persons Kidnapped by ISIS (Massar), and Release Me Association to arrange and carry out two visits to Geneva to hold /4/ official meetings with representatives of States' Permanent missions to the UN in Geneva and teams from UN organisations.

18 March Visits:

Meeting with the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (CoI)

Representatives from SCM, Ta'afi Initiative, Release Me Association, Caesar Families Association, Syrians for Truth and Justice, and the Coalition of Families of Persons Kidnapped by ISIS (Massar) held a meeting with several members of the International Commission of Inquiry (COI) at their office in Geneva. The delegation addressed several key points in their interventions, including the issue of renewing the committee's mandate and its relationship with the International Institution on Missing Persons in Syria.

They also discussed the issue of detainees in Syria and revealing their fate within the framework of the provisional measures issued by the International Court of Justice (ICJ), as well as areas of cooperation with VAs on the issue of enforced disappearance. The situation in Al-Hawl and Al-Roj refugee camps, and the role of states in repatriating the children in them was also discussed.

Meeting with the International Institution on Missing Persons in Syria (IIMP) startup team

The head and the coordination officer of the International Institution on Missing Persons in Syria (IIMP) startup team met with representatives from SCM, Syrians for Truth and Justice (STJ), Caesar Families Association, Ta'afi Initiative, the Coalition of Families of Persons Kidnapped by ISIS (Massar), and Release Me Association. The IIMP representatives discussed the institution's relationship with other UN bodies, Syrian CSOs, and VAs and outlined its vision for cooperation avenues between the aforementioned parties especially in regards to supporting victims' families and survivors.

They also discussed the mechanism for information exchange with organisations documenting human rights violations in Syria. Additionally, funding for the IIMP and the efforts needed to support its work and benefit from lessons learned from other countries' experiences in the field of missing persons' search were discussed.

19 March Visits:

Meeting with the Permanent Mission of the European Union (EU) to the United Nations in Geneva

Representatives from SCM, Syrians for Truth and Justice, Caesar Families Association, Ta'afi Initiative, the Coalition of Families of Persons Kidnapped by ISIS (Massar), and Release Me Association held a meeting with members of the European Union (EU) Permanent Mission. The members of the Permanent Mission, led by the mission's representative Mattia Toldo, reiterated their support for the decision on the human rights situation in Syria and expressed their anticipation for the commencement of the IIMP work in April. He also reaffirmed their commitment to its stance against the forced return of Syrian refugees due to the lack of necessary conditions allowing their return.

The delegation addressed several important topics related to human rights in Syria, inquiring about the best advocacy methods to support the work of the IIMP. They also discussed the spectrum of allies and opponents to the decision on the human rights situation, the future of the CoI, and highlighted the importance of supporting the Coalition of Families of Persons Kidnapped by ISIS (Massar) in European courts.

Meeting with representatives of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)

The meeting was held at the headquarters of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in Geneva between representatives from OHCHR and SCM, as well as representatives from the Caesar Families Association, Caesar Families Association, the Coalition of Families of Persons Kidnapped by ISIS (Massar), and Ta'afi Initiative.

The meeting addressed the issue of refoulement of Syrian refugees, particularly from Lebanon and Turkey (the subject of a side event organised by SCM), and the violations faced by refugees, whether in the host country or upon return to Syria, including arbitrary detention. The work of the IIMP, its expected start date, funding, and optimal ways to advocate for and support its launch were also discussed extensively. The OHCHR advised the delegation to reach out to Latin American countries to benefit from their previous experiences in this context.

The delegation also highlighted aspects of their activities regarding journalists and human rights defenders, as well as their cooperation with the United Nations Special Procedures, in addition to several influential international organisations in the field.

2- Oral interventions

Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and of Association - item /3/:

Omar Al Asaad, SCM's Policy, Advocacy and Communication Manager, delivered an OI via video prepared in collaboration with Fraternity Foundation for Human Rights (FFHR). During the OI, he pointed out that the Syrian government topped the list of violators of the right to peaceful assembly and association in Syria, followed by Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham, then the armed opposition factions, and finally the Autonomous Administration Forces, each according to its area of control.

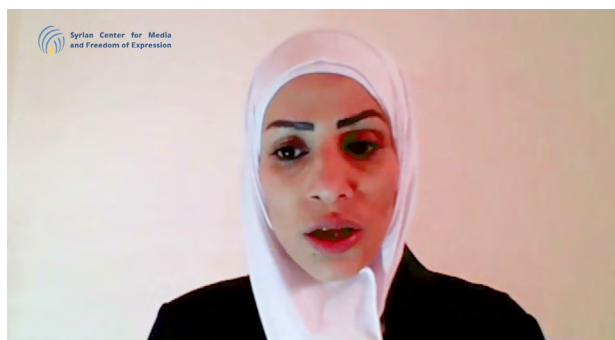


Al Asaad then concluded his intervention by calling on the parties to the conflict to stop violating this right and demanding the international community to take action to put pressure on the parties to the conflict in order to provide the appropriate legal environment for the establishment and work of Syrian civil society organisations to be able to contribute to the stability and peace of Syria.

*The intervention was not broadcast during the session due to the limited time granted to CSOs during interactive dialogue sessions. The recorded video can be viewed [here](#).

Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment - item /3/:

In a video OI recorded by Samar Al Saad from the Caesar Families Association on behalf of SCM, she expressed her suffering, which reflects the suffering of hundreds of thousands of Syrian families searching and striving to uncover the fate of their forcibly disappeared sons and daughters over the years of conflict. Al Saad's brother was arrested by the Syrian government forces, and his picture to appear years later among the photos of Caesar, with traces of torture and starvation clearly visible on him.

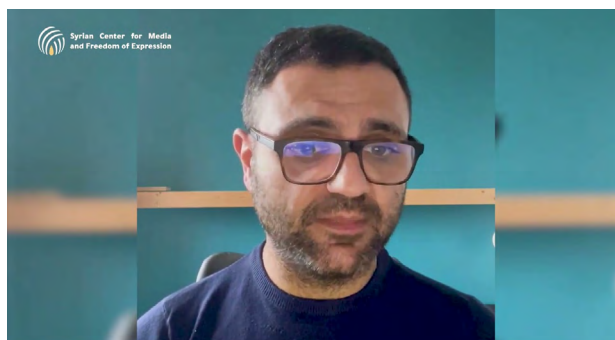


Al Saad then denounced the Syrian government's failure to adhere to the provisional measures of the International Court of Justice (ICJ), as acts of torture are still continuing in Syrian prisons according to human rights reports. In addition to that, the Syrian government's efforts to bulldoze mass graves and obliterate their landmarks to hide the crimes committed there is still ongoing. She concluded her intervention by hoping the Syrian people will achieve what they came out demanding in terms of freedom and democratic life.

*The intervention can be viewed [here](#).

Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on Counterterrorism and Human Rights - item /3/:

In this intervention, Issam Al Khatib, Deputy Director of SCM, condemned acts of terrorism in all its forms and manifestations and whoever commits them, and denounced the continuation of both the Syrian government and the Syrian Democratic Forces in violating human rights in Syria under the pretext of combating terrorism. The Syrian government exploits the broad provisions of the Anti-Terrorism Law to condemn peaceful activists and human rights defenders



and to practice violations of arbitrary detention, extrajudicial killing, enforced disappearance, torture, rape, and sexual violence. Similarly, the Syrian Democratic Forces detains hundreds of women and children in unsafe detention camps, characterised in the lack of food, water, and healthcare amid international silence and reluctance to hold the perpetrators accountable.

*The intervention was not broadcast during the session due to the limited time granted to CSOs during interactive dialogue sessions. The recorded video can be viewed [here](#).

Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on Human Right Defenders - item /3/ :

In an OI by Omar Al Asaad, SCM's Policy, Advocacy and Communication Manager, the situation of human rights defenders in Syria, their oppression, persecution, and violation of their basic rights such as the freedom of expression especially when it is in opposition to the Syrian government was presented. This is similar to SCM's missing colleagues, whose fate has been unknown for years with the Syrian government and other parties to the conflict



refusing to cooperate or respond to reveal their fate. It also highlighted the complex violations that female human rights defenders are exposed to in particular.

The OI then demanded that the Syrian government and all parties to the conflict immediately stop targeting human rights defenders, men and women, take all measures to protect them from arbitrary measures, reveal the fate of forcibly disappeared human rights activists, and allow for independent monitors and UN experts to have access to all places of detention in Syria in order to seriously and independently investigate the violations and attacks targeting them, and to prosecute their perpetrators.

*The intervention was not broadcast during the session due to the limited time granted to CSOs during interactive dialogue sessions. The recorded video can be viewed [here](#).

Interactive Dialogue with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict - item /3/:

In cooperation with SCM, Riyad Al Najm from the Syrian Child Protection Network (Hurras) presented an OI in which he denounced the violations committed by all parties to the conflict, especially the Syrian government, against children. As the group most affected over the years of the conflict, children continue to face horrific levels of violence and gross violations of their basic rights, such as their rights to life, education, and others. The Syrian government failed to fulfil its obligations towards them before and during the earthquake disaster, which increased their suffering. It also rejected during the comprehensive periodic review the recommendations that could alleviate the impact of the conflict on the human rights situation in Syria in general, and thus on the rights and lives of children there. Accordingly, in his intervention, Al Najm called for pressure on the parties to the conflict in Syria, especially the Syrian authorities, to fulfil their international contractual and customary obligations, and to hold them responsible for violations committed against children.



*The intervention was not broadcast during the session due to the limited time granted to CSOs during interactive dialogue sessions. The recorded video can be viewed [here](#).

Interactive dialogue with the International Commission of Inquiry on Syria (CoI) - item /4/:

In cooperation with SCM, Reem Fadel from Ta'afi Initiative gave an OI before the CoI on Syria from inside the Palais des Nations in Geneva, where she praised the Commission's efforts to monitor, document and investigate the human rights situation in Syria and its contribution to ending the state of impunity in the country. On behalf of SCM and the Initiative, she welcomed the decision of the ICJ in the case of "Syria's violation of the Convention against Torture," and stressed the aspiration of the VAs for the IIMP to begin its work in Syria, and its important role in alleviating and ending the suffering of the victims' families.



The intervention also condemned the cases of normalisation with the Syrian government and stressed that ending the state of impunity is the only inevitable path to a settlement in Syria.

*The intervention can be viewed [here](#).

Interactive dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on the Occupied Palestinian Territories (oPt) - item /7/:

SCM prepared an OI in which it pointed out the violations committed by the state of Israel during its retaliatory war on the Gaza Strip, including the destruction of the Strip and the displacement of its residents, and presented the numbers of dead, injured, and destroyed infrastructure, based on the numbers of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in the oPt. In this intervention, which was recorded by Ayman



Menem, Director of SCM's Legal Office, and uploaded through the official platform of the OHCHR, SCM called on the international community to assume its responsibilities and fulfil its obligations represented by humanitarian intervention to protect the Palestinian people, and to stop the attacks and crimes committed by Israel against the Palestinians in the oPt. He also affirmed the necessity of ending the state of occupation and realising the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, the right to self-determination, the right to national independence and sovereignty, and the right of return.

*The intervention was not broadcast during the session due to the limited time granted to CSOs during interactive dialogue sessions. The recorded video can be viewed [here](#).

3-Side Events

“Syrian Refugees and Refoulement”



SCM organised a side event titled “**Syrian Refugees and Refoulement**” to launch a report titled “Refoulement of Syrian Refugees from Lebanon and Turkey” on the margins of the 55th session of the Human Rights Council. This event was organised in cooperation with Syrians for Truth and Justice (STJ), the Voices for Displaced Syrians Forum (VDSF), the Syrian Civil Society Networking Platform (SCNP), and We Exist Alliance.

The discussion centred on the issue of **forced return of Syrian refugees from countries of asylum**, the situation of refugees in both Lebanon and Turkey, their protection in law and practice, and the extent to which the adopted legal frameworks and actual practices observed are compatible with their international obligations were discussed.

The side event was held at the Palais des Nations in Geneva on March 19, 2024 and the panel was moderated by Rand Sukhaita, Coordinator of SCNP. The panel included Dr. Omar Hammady, Expert in Constitutional and Political Affairs and a Former Advisor to the UN, Bassam Al Ahmad, Co-founder and Executive Director of STJ, and Kenan Diab, Coordinator of VDSF.



A Side Event to the Human Right Council, Session 55
Titled:

“Syrian Refugees and Refoulement”

Date: Tuesday 19 March 2024. Language: Arabic with English interpretation.
Time: 15:00 CET (Geneva). Duration: 60 minutes (one hour).
Location: Palais des Nations in Geneva, Room No. 25

Speakers



Dr. Omar HAMMADY

UN Constitutional and Political Affairs
Advisor.



Bassam ALAHMAD

Co-Founder & Executive Director of
Syrians For Truth and Justice (STJ)



Kinan DIAB

Coordinator of the Voices for Displaced
Syrians Forum (VDSF).

Moderator



Rand Sukhaita

Coordinator of the Syrian Civil Society Network's
Platform (SCNP).



The event also addressed the issue of **disguised forced return**, its dangers to Syrians, and the violations they are exposed to before, during, and after the return. It also shed light on the necessary conditions required for the voluntary and safe return of Syrian refugees.

Navigating the Unknown: State Responsibility and Global Efforts to Locate Missing Syrian Migrants and Victims of Human Trafficking



During this HRC session, the Syrian Forum hosted a side event titled “Navigating the Unknown: State Responsibility and Global Efforts to Locate Missing Syrian Migrants and Victims of Human Trafficking,” sponsored by the Permanent Mission of the EU to the UN in Geneva.

Mazen Darwish, the Founder and General Director of SCM, participated as a speaker on the panel, alongside Andreas Kleiser, Jasmin Lilian Diab, and Batoul Karbijha. The discussion, moderated by Sandra Alloush, focused on the responsibilities of states and the collaborative efforts required to address the crisis of missing Syrian migrants and human trafficking victims. It emphasized that Syrians are not mere statistics but individuals in urgent need of assistance.



European Union



The Delegation of the European Union to the UN and other international organizations in Geneva invites you to a 55 HRC side event

Navigating the Unknown

State Responsibility and Global Efforts to Locate Missing Syrian Migrants and Victims of Human Trafficking

Organized by **The Syrian Forum**

Speakers:

- **Mazen Darwish**
Founder & General Director of the Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression
- **Andreas Kleiser**
Director for Policy and Cooperation, ICMP International Commission on Missing Persons
- **Jasmin Lilian Diab**
Institute for Migration Studies, Lebanese American University
- **Batoul Karbijha**
Human Rights Defender

Moderator:

- **Sandra Alloush**
Journalist and Human Rights Defender

March 19 at 15:30 - 16:30 Room XXVII, Palais Nation

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4-Securing Access and Logistical Support

SCM cooperated with human rights organisations, Syrian CSOs, and Syrian VAs, to implement activities during the 55th session of the Human Rights Council, which lasted from February 26 to April 5, 2024.

SCM provided the necessary administrative and logistical support to 15 individuals from partner organisations and associations to secure their access to the Palais des Nations in Geneva and issuing entry permits/temporary accreditations with the aim of holding bilateral meetings, giving OIs, and/or attending session, and/or participating in and attending side events on the sidelines of the session's activities.



Special Thanks

SCM would like to extend its sincere gratitude to all the partner organisations, associations, and coalitions for their cooperation in planning and implementing the aforementioned activities, and in particular thanks to:

[Caesar Families Association](#)

[The Coalition of Families of Persons Kidnapped by ISIS \(Massar\)](#)

[Release Me Association](#)

[The Syrian Child Protection Network \(Hurras\)](#)

The Syrian Civil Society Networking Platform (SCNP)

[Syrians for Truth and Justice \(STJ\)](#)

[Syrian Forum](#)

[Ta'afi Initiative](#)

[The Voices for Displaced Syrians Forum \(VDSF\)](#)

