



Special Report on the 57th Session of the UN Human Rights Council, And the Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression (SCM) Activities

Summary:



The activities and events of the 57th session of the Human Rights Council were launched from 9th of September to 11th of October 2024. During this session, the Council discussed a range of civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights.

The Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression (SCM) prepared and delivered four oral interventions independently and in collaboration with partner Syrian civil society organizations. Three of these interventions were submitted under Item 3, and one under Item 4. SCM also made an advocacy visit to Geneva to meet with a UN body and facilitated the arrival of a number of partners to the Palais des Nations to attend side events on the sidelines of the session. The Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression submitted comments related to the provisions of the Human Rights Council resolution on the "Human rights situation in the Syrian Arab Republic" to the member states of the core group for inclusion and/or consideration in the final resolution.

The Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression participated in two side events on the sidelines of the 57th session of the Human Rights Council. The first was organized by the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) and a number of international human rights organizations to discuss the challenges facing UN justice mechanisms in achieving sustainable justice under the title: "Securing Sustainable Justice: Future Directions for UN Investigative Mechanisms." The second was organized by the Syrian Forum in the US, which discussed the opportunities for referring the Syrian file to the International Criminal Court under the title "Referring Syria to the International Criminal Court: Exploring Current Options."

Agenda and Annotations

During this session, according to the permanent agenda of the Council, the following were addressed:

Under **Item 1** on the agenda concerning **“Organizational and Procedural Matters”**, the council discussed the “Date and venue”, the “Composition of the Human Rights Council”, and the “Bureau of the Human Rights Council” for this session, as well as the “Selection and Appointment of Mandate Holders”.

While under **Item 2** of the agenda dedicated to **“The Annual Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and Reports of the Office of the High Commissioner and the Secretary-General”**, the Human Rights Council decided, by its resolution 2/39, to establish an independent, ongoing mechanism to collect evidence of the most serious international crimes and violations of international law committed in Myanmar since 2011. The Council also decided, in its resolution 1/51, to expand and strengthen the capacity of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to collect, consolidate, analyze and preserve information. It also decided, in its resolution 2/54, to expedite the establishment of an independent international fact-finding mission to the Sudan.

Under **Item 3**, which focuses on **“The Promotion and Protection of All Human Rights, Civil, Political, Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, Including the Right to Development”**, the Council decided to extend the mandates of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion of Truth, Justice, Reparation and Guarantees of Non-recurrence, the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances, the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, the Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights to Safe Drinking Water and Sanitation, the Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights Implications of the Environmentally Sound Management and Disposal of Hazardous Waste and Materials, the Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Slavery and the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples for three years.

Regarding **“Rights of Peoples and Specific Groups and Individuals”**, the Council decided to hold a discussion session on providing accessible, inclusive, equitable and quality education that takes into account a culture of peace and tolerance for every child, especially the most vulnerable children.

Regarding the **“Youth and Human Rights”**, the Council requested the Secretary-General to conduct a detailed study on solutions to enhance digital education for young people and ensure their protection from online threats. while in the context of **“Human Rights of Migrants”**, the Council requested in its resolution 54/13 the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to hold a session on ways to prevent and address human rights violations and abuses committed against transit migrants and to ensure access to justice for victims and their family members.

Under **Item 4**, which focuses on **“Human Rights Situations that require the Council’s Attention,”** the Council decided to extend the mandate of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine for another year, and also decided to extend the mandate of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic for an additional year, provided that the Commission submits an updated report during the oral update session at its fifty-seventh session, in accordance with its resolution 22/55.

Under **Item 6**, concerning the “**Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of States**”, the Working Group on the UPR held its forty-sixth session from 2nd April to 10th May 2024, and at its 57th session, the Council examined and adopted the final results of the UPRs of: New Zealand, Afghanistan, Chile, Viet Nam, Uruguay, Yemen, Vanuatu and North Macedonia Comoros, Slovakia, Eritrea, Cyprus, Dominican Republic and Cambodia

No reports were submitted under **Item 7** which concern “**The Human Rights Situation in Palestine and Other Occupied Arab Territories**”

Under **Item 8**, which concern “**The Follow-up and Implementation of The Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action**”, the Council held a discussion session on the integration of a gender perspective into all its work and the work of its mechanisms.

Regarding **Item 9**, which focuses on “**Racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related forms of intolerance, follow-up and implementation of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action**”, the Council requested the High Commissioner to provide it with an oral update on the progress made in the implementation of the resolution and decided to extend until its sixty-sixth session the mandate of the International Mechanism of Independent Experts on the Advancement of Racial Justice and Equality in the Context of Law Enforcement.

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

A resolution on the situation of human rights in Syria was adopted by the member states of the core group responsible for drafting resolutions on the situation of human rights in Syria under item 4 of the Council’s agenda.

The Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression submitted observations regarding the provisions of the resolution and its language to the member states of the core group to include and/or take into consideration in the final resolution. The resolution in this session focused on the following:

- * the ongoing violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law, including attacks on civilians and civilian objects.
- * Recalling all obligations of the Syrian government and parties to the conflict towards children’s rights and to prevent all forms of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment and all forms of violence, including sexual and gender-based violence, child marriage, early marriage and forced marriage.
- * Condemning attacks on civilian objects, including schools, and the negative impact of the ongoing conflict on children’s rights and well-being, including their access to schools, medical and health care, education and humanitarian assistance, and expressing its growing concern about the repeated attacks on students, teachers, schools and universities.

- * It is worth noting that the Council's decision for this session took into account all the recommendations included in the letter addressed by the Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression and partners from Syrian civil society organizations to the core group at the HRC 56th session, including highlighting the issue of forced return and that there is no safe part of Syria, especially in light of the continued violations of enforced disappearance and arbitrary detention of forcibly returned persons from countries neighboring Syria in particular.
- * On October 10, 2024, the member states of the Human Rights Council voted on draft resolution A/HRC/57/L.11, which condemned the Syrian regime's continued systematic and widespread gross violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law. The resolution passed with a majority of 26 countries, 4 countries opposed (China, Cuba, Eritrea, Brunei), and 17 countries abstained from voting.

A/HRC/57/L.11 - Situation of human rights in the Syrian Arab Republic

YES	ALBANIA	NO	ERITREA	YES	MALAWI	
ABST	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	ABST	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	26	ABST	17	NO	4

SCM ACTIVITIES DURING THIS SESSION, IN COOPERATION WITH SYRIAN CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS AND VICTIM ASSOCIATIONS:



SCM undertook several activities on the sidelines of the 57th session of the Human Rights Council. These activities included:

1. Oral Interventions:

Drafting and delivering four oral interventions on various agenda items of the session, either individually or in collaboration with Syrian human rights organizations, civil society, and partner victim associations and groups.

2- Advocacy Mission:

SCM organized a visit to Geneva to meet with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization team (UNESCO) to discuss the issue of educating Syrian refugee children in Lebanon, and the emerging calls to deprive those without residency papers from pursuing education.

3. Facilitating Access:

Collaborating and providing the necessary administrative and logistical support to colleagues from Syrian human rights and civil society organizations, and partner victim associations and groups to ensure their access to deliver oral interventions, and/or participate in and attend side events on the sidelines of the session activities.

4. Participation in Side Events:

At the sidelines of the HRC57, the Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression participated in the side event organized by the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) with a number of international partners under the title: "Ensuring Sustainable Justice: Future Directions for UN Investigative Mechanisms" and the side event organized by the Syrian Forum under the title: "Referring Syria to the International Criminal Court: Exploring Current Options"

1-Oral Interventions

Oral interventions during the interactive dialogues at the 57th session of the Human Rights Council:

1. Interactive Dialogue with the Working Group on the use of mercenaries as a means of violating human rights and impeding the exercise of the right of peoples to self-determination - Item 3:

The Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression (SCM) delivered an oral intervention during the interactive dialogue session with the Working Group on the Use of Mercenaries. The intervention emphasized the responsibility of states to completely prohibit mercenary recruitment activities and hold those responsible accountable, as well as to ensure that security and military companies and their personnel are subject to civil liability and enforceable criminal accountability for human rights violations they commit or participate in. It stressed the need for military cooperation and advisory services provided by private companies in the security field at the international level not to lead to the infringement or violation of human rights. It also called on states involved in the recruitment of mercenaries in the Syrian conflict to immediately cease recruitment operations and investigate violations committed by mercenary groups or their affiliated private military and security companies, which may amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity. The intervention was presented during the interactive dialogue session with the Working Group on 12 September 2024. It was recorded by SCM colleague Eva Sheikh Moussa



*Video recording of the intervention can be accessed [here](#).

2. Interactive Dialogue with the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances- Item 3:

The Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression (SCM) and Association Sans Menottes (ASM) delivered a joint oral intervention during the interactive dialogue session with the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances. Colleague Faten Ramadan, Director of Association Sans Menottes, shared part of her story, the story of thousands of Syrian families who are experiencing the bitterness of enforced disappearance and the violations associated with it, which are practiced by the parties to the conflict, headed by the Syrian government, against Syrians in Syria and against those who were forcibly returned to it. She called for action to immediately and comprehensively stop the violations of enforced disappearance and hold those responsible accountable, and to work to redress the victims and their families and support the Independent Institution for Missing Persons in Syria to enable Syrians to have the right to know the truth. The intervention was delivered from the Palais des Nations during the interactive dialogue session on September 16, 2024.



*Video recording of the intervention can be accessed [here](#).

3. Interactive Dialogue with the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention - Item 3:

The Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression (SCM) and the Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) delivered a joint oral intervention during the interactive dialogue session with the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention where the two organizations pointed out that the Syrian government and its militias have systematically practiced arbitrary detention and its associated violations, as part of a systematic policy that amounts to war crimes and crimes against humanity.



Other parties to the conflict, including opposition factions, the Syrian Democratic Forces, and extremist groups, have also used arbitrary detention as a tool of war to pressure opponents and for purposes of intimidation and punishment. Accordingly, the two organizations called for an immediate and comprehensive halt to arbitrary detention and enforced disappearance, and for national and international monitoring bodies to be granted access to detention centers in Syria. We also call for an end to the ongoing impunity and for the perpetrators to be held accountable. They emphasized the centrality and priority of the issue of detainees and the forcibly disappeared in any peace process or transitional justice program. The intervention was recorded by colleague Fadel Abl Al-Ghani, Executive Director of the Syrian Network for Human Rights.

*Video recording of the intervention can be accessed [here](#).

4. Interactive Dialogue with the International Commission of Inquiry on Syria - Item 4:

The Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression (SCM) and The Day After Organization (TDA) delivered a joint intervention during the interactive dialogue session with the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Syria (SOI Syria), expressing their deep appreciation for the work of the Commission of Inquiry in supporting accountability efforts in Syria. They also expressed their concern about the continued violations in Syria by the parties to the conflict in Syria, primarily the Syrian government, and their severity, impact, and obstruction of achieving peace.



They called on member states to end impunity and support efforts to hold those responsible for violations accountable. They emphasized that Syria is unsafe across its entire geography and called for ceasing forced return practices. They also called on the Syrian government and the countries involved in the conflict to halt violations and advance a political process that achieves democratic transition and establishes a pathway for transitional justice. They also called for referring the Syrian file to the International Criminal Court. (ICC). The intervention was recorded by colleague Anwar Majanni, Program Director at The Day After.

*Video recording of the intervention can be accessed [here](#).

2- Advocacy Mission

SCM organized a visit to Geneva to meet with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) team during the 57th session of the Human Rights Council to discuss the challenges facing Syrian refugee children in Lebanon, in terms of their access to equal opportunities for sustainable education that guarantees their future. This visit was conducted by colleague Omar Al-Asaad, Manager of the Policy, Advocacy and Communications Department, who shared with the team a legal paper that included recommendations for the international community and UN agencies to support the education file in Lebanon in a way that guarantees the right of Syrian children to sustainable education free from discrimination.

3- Securing Access and Logistical Support

During the 57th session of the Human Rights Council, SCM provided necessary administrative support to colleagues from partner Syrian human rights and civil society organizations to ensure their access to the Palais des Nations in Geneva. This included securing Access permits/temporary accreditations for /7/ NGO representatives to:

- * Hold bilateral meetings, deliver oral interventions, Attend session meetings and Participate in and attend side events on the margin of the HRC57.

4- Participation in Side Events



Mazen Darwish, Director General and Founder of the Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression (SCM), participated as a speaker in the hybrid side event sponsored by the missions of Gambia, Liechtenstein, Finland, Chile, the Netherlands, Sierra Leone, Austria and Switzerland, and organized by the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) in cooperation with Oxford University, Legal Action Worldwide (LAW) and Armed Conflict on the sidelines of the 57th session of the Human Rights Council under the title: "Securing Sustainable Justice: Future Directions for UN Investigative Mechanisms", held on the 4th October 2024 at the Palais des Nations in Geneva. It addressed the issue of achieving sustainable justice by examining current political and financial challenges and exploring ways to enhance the integrity of UN accountability mandates.



SCM, represented by its General Director, also participated in the side event that was co-organized and held by the Syrian Forum and Legal Action Worldwide (LAW) entitled: “Referring Syria to the International Criminal Court: Exploring Current Options” which was held physically at the Palais des Nations in Geneva on October 3, 2024. The side event, which was conducted in Arabic and English, focused on the available and possible options for referring the Syrian file to the International Criminal Court and the challenges that may hinder this path and ways to overcome them in light of the ongoing conflict in Syria and the absence of a unified international will to find a solution to stop it, which would achieve a step towards sustainable peace in Syria.



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:

[Syrian Network for Human Rights \(SNHR\)](#)

[The Day After \(TDA\)](#)

[Syrian Legal Development Program \(SLDP\)](#)

[The Syrian Forum -USA \(SF\)](#)

[Association Sans Menottes](#)

[International Service for Human Rights \(ISHR\)](#)

[Cairo Institute For Human Rights Studies \(CIHRS\)](#)

