

New Syria anti-torture law a 'whitewash': Amnesty International

Author:

Fri, 2022-04-01 21:52

LONDON: Syrian President Bashar Assad is trying to “whitewash decades of state-sanctioned human rights violations” by passing a new anti-torture law, Amnesty International has said.

The Assad regime is accused of widespread torture against its own citizens since the start of the Syrian conflict in 2011, as well as myriad other human rights abuses, including forced disappearances, sham trials and extra-judicial killings.

The regime passed the new law on Wednesday, having first proposed it just two days prior. It outlaws the use of torture, with penalties starting at three years' imprisonment for those convicted of the offense.

But human rights organizations have condemned it, saying it gives no real recourse to justice for victims or their families, leaving many in Syria acutely vulnerable.

“While we welcome any legislative steps towards complying with internationally recognized anti-torture conventions, the new law effectively whitewashes decades of state-sanctioned human rights violations,” said Lynn Maalouf, Amnesty’s deputy regional director for the Middle East and North Africa.

“It fails to offer redress to past victims of torture, include any protection measures for witnesses or survivors of torture, nor does it state whether torture survivors, or in the event of their death, their families would receive compensation,” she added.

“Crucially, it fails to mention any measures that could be taken to prevent torture from occurring in detention centres and prisons in the future.”

Maalouf said without greater international scrutiny and openness from the Assad regime, the new law does not amount to a genuine attempt to rectify its history of committing atrocities against ordinary Syrians.

Moreover, she added, the Assad regime would need to get serious about bringing known perpetrators of torture to trial whilst ensuring they were fair.

“Amnesty International calls on the Syrian authorities to urgently allow independent monitors to access the country’s notorious detention centres – where torture leading to death has been taking place at a mass scale for years – as a first step to signalling any genuine intent to curtail the practice of torture by state agents,” she said.

“Furthermore, the anti-torture law must align with international human rights law – and that means, as a first step, ensuring that the perpetrators of torture, cruel, inhuman or other ill-treatment face justice in fair trials before ordinary civilian courts and without recourse to death penalty.”A



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Middle East](#)

[Syria](#)

[Amnesty](#)

[torture](#)

[Bashar Assad](#)

Syrian torture chambers brought to life in haunting drawingsIran torture victim warns of sexual abuse if UK acts upon asylum offshoring plan

[Yemen government to open Sanaa airport, help with release of prisoners: Foreign minister](#)

Fri, 2022-04-01 17:51

LONDON: Yemen’s legitimate government said on Friday it would take steps to arrange for the release of prisoners, open the airport in Sanaa and facilitate the release of oil ships via the port of Hodeidah.

The foreign minister announced the moves in a tweet and said they came in support of calls for a truce during the holy month of Ramadan.

The minister also announced the release of the first two fuel ships through Hodeidah, after orders from President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi.

UN and US envoys on Wednesday welcomed unilateral truce moves by the Yemeni forces and the Iranian-backed Houthis in the conflict as encouraging steps, while stressing the need for a more comprehensive cease-fire.

Both sides agreed to a two-month cease-fire starting Saturday to allow fuel ships to enter the Houthi-held Hodeidah port and select flights from Sanaa airport, the UN special envoy for Yemen confirmed on Friday.

Hans Grundberg said in a statement that the nationwide cease-fire could be renewed with the consent of the parties.

On Thursday, the Coalition to Restore Legitimacy in Yemen said it was

committed to stopping military operations inside the country in response to a request from the secretary-general of the Gulf Cooperation Council.

It also said its air forces had not carried out combat operations inside Yemen, adding it was taking all steps to make the cessation of military operations a success and to achieve comprehensive peace.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Middle East](#)

[Yemen](#)

[Sanaa](#)

[Houthis](#)

[Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi](#)

Coalition says committed to halting military operations in YemenYemen talks focus on aid, care for wounded and opening of roads

[**Israeli forces kill Palestinian as**](#)

protests turn violent

Author:

Associated Press

ID:

1648822880202294300

Fri, 2022-04-01 17:23

RAMALLAH: Israeli forces shot and killed one Palestinian and injured dozens of others on Friday during clashes in the occupied West Bank city of Hebron.

Violent confrontations erupted between Palestinians and Israeli forces during rallies in several West Bank locations to commemorate the 46th anniversary of Land Day, according to Palestinian medical sources.

Ahmad Al-Atrash, 28, a freed prisoner who spent six years in Israeli prisons, died in Hebron Governmental Hospital from a gunshot wound to the chest, doctors said.

Palestinian youths threw stones at Israeli troops, who responded with live bullets, tear gas canisters and sound bombs.

Eyewitnesses said that the army had deployed snipers in areas overlooking Bab Al-Zawiya, Al-Shuhada Street and Al-Shalala Street in anticipation of clashes.

Palestinian groups called for a day of official mourning in Hebron on April 2.

In the Israeli towns of Umm Al-Fahm and the Northern Triangle, dozens of Palestinian youths waving Palestinian flags joined a protest march.

The Red Crescent Society said its crews were among 150 Palestinians wounded in confrontations in Nablus, Beita and Beit Dajan.

Beita Mayor Mahmoud Barham told Arab News that the clashes in the township were the most violent in months, with hundreds of young men involved and at least 120 injuries.

Nine civilians, including two children, were injured by live bullets and tear gas canisters during rallies in the West Bank town of Qalqilya.

Dozens of protesters, including deputy leader of the Fatah movement Mahmoud Al-Aloul, received treatment after inhaling tear gas.

Later Aloul vowed that "popular resistance" will continue.

"It is our choice and there is no turning back from it in light of the expansion of settlements we are witnessing at the expense of our lands," he said.

Osama Al-Qawasmi, a Palestine Liberation Organization official, told Arab

News: "It is clear that Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett has made a decision to clear the path for the killing of Palestinians in cold blood."

Al-Qawasmi described deaths over the past two days as "field executions."

Labelling the killing of Palestinians a "war crime," the PLO official accused Bennett's government of "trying to silence the Israeli people at the expense of Palestinian blood."

Israel is dragging the region into a "cycle of action and reaction, which will not serve anyone at all," Al-Qawasmi said.

"Nobody can control a Palestinian people being killed by Israel, which bears full responsibility for this violence and escalation. If Bennett thinks that killing Palestinians can bring security to Israel, he is delusional."

Israeli military sources confirmed to Arab News that the Israeli army had deployed two military battalions to the West Bank and two more beside the Gaza Strip in the past few days amid fears of escalating violence at the start of Ramadan.

Mustafa Barghouti, secretary-general of the Palestinian National Initiative Movement, who took part in a rally at Bilin, west of Ramallah, said that the protest was an "escalation of the popular resistance to end the (Israeli) occupation and bring down the racist apartheid regime."

He added: "The Palestinian people have nothing but the path of struggle and resistance to achieve their freedom."

Barghouti said that the presence of foreign observers at the rally highlighted the international interest in the Palestinian cause, and encouraged Palestinians to press their demands for global sanctions on Israel.

Israeli military sources confirmed to Arab News that the Israeli army had deployed two military battalions to the West Bank and two more beside the Gaza Strip in the past few days amid fears of escalating violence at the start of Ramadan.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Israel](#)

[Palestinians](#)

[West Bank](#)

[killing](#)

Three Palestinians killed as Israeli extremist visits Al-Aqsa in 'provocation'
2 Palestinians killed in Israeli raid on West Bank: Ministry

[Tunisia crisis escalates as police summon opposition figures](#)

Author:

Reuters

ID:

1648813188061357600

Fri, 2022-04-01 10:35

TUNIS: Tunisian anti-terrorism police summoned the country's main opposition figure for questioning on Friday, as a political crisis deepens in the wake of President Kais Saied's move to dissolve parliament and impose one-man

rule.

Rached Ghannouchi, head of the Islamist Ennahda party and speaker of the dissolved parliament, was summoned to appear later on Friday, his office said, after investigations were opened into other members of the chamber who had defied Saied.

Saied demanded that investigations be carried out after members of parliament held an online session on Wednesday and voted to revoke all the emergency measures he has imposed – despite his decree last summer suspending the chamber.

The president accused those who took part in the session, along with Ghannouchi whose office had announced the move, of conspiring against state security and he ordered the justice department to open legal proceedings against them.

Last month Saied took control of the judiciary, replacing a top council whose job was to ensure judicial independence, with judges he selected himself. Saied's moves raise the prospect of a crackdown on the opposition as Tunisia's main players grow more active in opposing his attempts to remake the political system in what they call a coup.

"It's a turning point in targeting his opponents," said deputy parliament speaker Samira Chouachi.

Saied has defended his seizure of most powers last summer as necessary to save Tunisia from a corrupt, self-serving elite he paints as responsible for years of political paralysis and economic stagnation.

He has also vowed to uphold the rights and freedoms won in a 2011 revolution that brought democracy, and so far there have been few arrests or attempts to silence critics.

However, late on Thursday Saied said he would not call new parliamentary elections yet despite dissolving the chamber, and railed against those who took part in Wednesday's session.

"There will be no dialogue with those who tried a coup and seek to divide Tunisians," he said, suggesting those who opposed his moves may not be allowed to run in future elections.

OPPOSITION

Ennahda and the Free Constitutional Party, which leads in opinion polls, have both said they will oppose Saied's plans for a referendum on a new constitution that he plans to introduce.

The parties are sworn ideological enemies and although there is no sign that they could work together against Saied, their more active opposition to his moves suggests the crisis is intensifying.

"Saied, who usurped power, should immediately end the exceptional measures," said the Free Constitutional Party's leader Abir Moussi.

The strongest opposition to Saied since last summer has come from Ennahda, which has been a main player in successive governments since the revolution. Moussi and her Free Constitutional Party decry Ennahda's Islamist background and praise the autocratic regime of the late Zine El Abidine Ben Ali who was ousted in 2011.

The United States, a major donor to Tunisia since the revolution, has voiced concern at Saied's dissolution of parliament and threats to investigate lawmakers, and urged "a swift return to constitutional government."

Saied is seeking international funding to avert a crisis in public finances

amid growing economic pain for Tunisians after years of political bickering. The UGTT labor union, the most powerful political body in the country with more than a million members, is meanwhile contemplating a general strike to demand a dialogue on both political and economic reforms. It had previously urged Saied to dissolve parliament but also to hold rapid elections afterwards.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Tunisia](#)

[Cash-strapped Lebanon struggles to turn lights on for polling day](#)

Author:

AFP

ID:

1648809289920898200

Fri, 2022-04-01 10:21

BEIRUT: Lebanon's electricity company is charging \$16 million to supply power on the day of the May 15 parliamentary polls, a sum that exceeds the overall election budget by nearly 30 percent, the interior minister said. Holding credible elections is one of the main steps Lebanon's major donors

are insisting on to deliver more assistance to the country, which is mired in a deep financial crisis fueled by endemic corruption.

The state-owned Electricite du Liban (EDL) presented a quote of \$16 million to the government, which is trying to provide just half a day's worth of power to polling stations for the critical vote.

"I held several meetings with EDL, which apparently couldn't provide electricity except at a very high cost," Interior Minister Bassam Mawlawi said.

"The entire elections, at home and abroad, don't cost this much," Mawlawi said, saying his total budget for the vote was capped at \$12.5 million. Mawlawi was adamant the government was working for the polls to go ahead as scheduled, despite persistent rumors they could be called off.

Lebanon, grappling with an unprecedented economic crisis since 2019, and which defaulted on its debt in March 2020, has suffered from severe power shortages for nearly a year – largely because the government can't afford fuel for power stations.

Power cuts last up to 22 hours a day in most regions, forcing many to rely on expensive generator subscriptions to keep the lights on.

The international community has long demanded a complete overhaul of Lebanon's loss-making electricity sector – which has cost the government more than \$40 billion since the end of the 1975-1990 civil war – as one of the basic conditions to disburse billions of dollars in desperately needed financial support.

EDL had asked for its payment in cash, Mawlawi said.

Mawlawi said the government may turn to private generators to power voting centers, which will need electricity to light the room at night when the votes are counted immediately after polls close.

"I can't rely on the state because despite the high cost demanded, EDL can't guarantee solid results... which may lead to a sudden blackout," the interior minister said.

"The issue of electricity is the biggest problem facing Lebanon... but we will be able to solve it for the day of elections," he added.

Lebanon's energy crisis is just one of its many economic woes, with the currency having lost more than 90 percent of its value.

Most of Lebanon's population lives below the poverty line.

Power outages mean streets are dark at night and surveillance cameras are effectively obsolete, leading to a spike in certain types of crime, Mawlawi said, who cited deepening poverty as another driving force.

Interior ministry figures show armed robberies surged by 135 percent in 2021 compared with the previous year, and car theft increased by nearly a quarter over the same period.

At the same time, Lebanon's security forces have been weakened because officers have quit to look for other work, since their salary barely covers enough to buy basic food for a family.

At least 478 security officers working for Internal Security Forces or the General Security Agency have quit ranks since the start of the country's crisis, documents provided by the ministry showed.

"There is a problem," Mawlawi said.

But "the number of those defecting is not large. We should not exaggerate the problem," he added.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Lebanon](#)

Lebanon's wheat crisis worsened by funding delays IMF deal breakthrough is within reach for crisis-hit Lebanon