

Physicians for Human Rights

Torture, Former Combatants, Political Prisoners, Terror Suspects, & Terrorists

<https://phr.org/news/syrias-new-anti-torture-law-fails-to-address-regimes-crimes-against-humanity-phr/>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

In response to Syrias [passage](#) of anti-torture legislation on March 30, the following statement is attributable to [Houssam al-Nahhas, MD, MPH](#), Physicians for Human Rights (PHR) Middle East and North Africa (MENA) Researcher:

Physicians for Human Rights would welcome any systemic measures that prevent the torture and ill-treatment of people in Syria, provide meaningful pathways to accountability, and offer redress to survivors. Sadly, this new anti-torture law does not do that. While the law purports to criminalize torture and states that evidence gathered through torture is invalid, it does nothing for the thousands of Syrians who have been victims of torture in the past. It fails to offer them redress, security, or compensation, nor does it explain how such torture will be prevented from occurring in the future.

At least 100,000 Syrian civilians have been forcibly disappeared in the past decade and tens of thousands of Syrians have died in detention, according to the United Nations. Yet this new law ignores these years of systematic torture that now stretch over a decade, and which amount to crimes against humanity.

PHR has long [documented](#) different forms of torture and abuses perpetrated by the Syrian governments security forces, particularly against health care providers. Health workers have been tortured by the Syrian government specifically because of their status as health care providers, and their real or perceived involvement in the provision of health services to opposition members and sympathizers. Health workers who were detained for providing medical care were 400 percent more likely to die in detention than political detainees, according to a PHR [report](#) published last year. The [story](#) of the three student medical volunteers who were tortured, killed, and burned in detention in Aleppo in 2012 is a harrowing example of these horrifying practices.

If the new law is an effort by the Syrian government to convince the global community that it now takes its international legal obligations seriously, then governments should see through this ruse. Meaningful reform begins with accountability for past torture crimes, investigations into the fate of those who have been disappeared, release of those currently detained, and access to detention centers throughout the country by independent monitors.

As a physician who survived detention in Syria and was subjected to torture, I will not consider it safe to return to my country until those who tortured me and thousands of other civilians are brought to justice. Until then, Syrias new so-called anti-torture law does little to advance human rights in the country.

Physicians for Human Rights (PHR) is a New York-based advocacy organization that uses science and medicine to prevent mass atrocities and severe human rights violations. [Learn more here.](#)

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