



Cairo Institute
for Human Rights Studies
Institut du Caire pour les études des droits de l'Homme
مركز القاهرة لدراسات حقوق الإنسان

United Nations Human Rights Council: 58th Session

Item 4 – Interactive Dialogue with the COI on Syria

Oral Intervention

Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS)

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Syrian government imposes severe restrictions on Syrian civil society organizations

CIHRS expresses its continued support and appreciation for the critical work of the COI on Syria.

A peaceful, stable Syria is in everyone's interest. Yet, ongoing human rights violations—extrajudicial killings of civilians, including members of minorities, and illegal military interventions by Israel, Turkey and others —pose an immediate threat to this goal..

The newly announced national body investigating recent killings must be independent, impartial, transparent, protect witnesses, victims, and evidence - and must be seen in light of the lack of a functioning and independent justice system in the country.

Now is not the time to abandon international accountability and other efforts to protect civilians.

Any sustained institutional progress on the national level in the areas of rule of law, accountability and inclusive governance will depend, in large part, on national civil society actors and their capacity to engage in the transition.

However, two days ago the Syrian government issued a notice concerning an executive order made last month which imposes severe restrictions on Syrian civil society organizations concerning their relations with international organizations, United Nations agencies and other international actors.

Such restrictions are reminiscent of Assad era policies and constitute a severe violation of freedom of association and freedom of expression. In effect, these

restrictions provide the government with the capacity to decide if and when CSOs will be allowed to communicate and interact with the UN and IOs in any way.

Such laws have been used time and again by authoritarian governments to curtail the basic rights of CSO actors, cut national civil society off from the world and restrict their capacity to cooperate with and seek funding from external actors.

How might these regulations negatively impact the capacity of the COI to carry out its work? And would the COI recommend that the Syrian government rescind this decree if it conflicts with international standards on freedom of association and expression for local CSOs?