

Deadly Reprisals Amnesty International 13 June 2012 The 70-page report, “ [Deadly Reprisals](#) ,” provides fresh evidence of widespread as well as systematic violations, including crimes against humanity and war crimes, being perpetrated as part of state policy to exact revenge against communities suspected of supporting the opposition and to intimidate people into submission.

Introduction

Syrian government armed forces and militias are rampaging through towns and villages, systematically dragging men from their homes and summarily executing them. They are burning homes and property and sometimes the bodies of those they have killed in cold blood. They are recklessly shelling and shooting into residential areas, killing and injuring men, women and children. They are routinely torturing detainees, sometimes to death. (...)

In recent field investigations in Syria, Amnesty International has found disturbing new evidence of grave abuses – many of which amount to crimes against humanity and war crimes – committed by the Syrian army in towns and villages around Idlib, and Aleppo, as well as in the Jebel al-Zawiyah and Jebel al-Wastani areas (north-west of Hama) between late February and late May 2012. Towns and villages are being kept under virtual siege by troops who fire indiscriminately into these areas and target those moving in and out of them.

The patterns of abuses documented by Amnesty International in these areas are not isolated. Indeed, they have been widely reported elsewhere in the country, including in the attack by Syrian forces on Houla on 25 May 2012. According to the UN, 108 individuals, including 49 children and 34 women, were killed.¹ Some were killed during the shelling of the village by Syrian security forces using heavy artillery and tanks, the use of which was confirmed by UN monitors; but most were summarily executed in cold blood by men in military clothing, believed by the residents to be state-armed militias.

In the face of increasingly brutal repression against peaceful protesters calling for freedom and reforms since February 2011, the unrest has turned increasingly violent. (...)

In recent months, the situation appears to have evolved into an armed conflict in parts of the country. As armed confrontations between government forces and armed opposition groups have become more common, the frequency and brutality of government reprisals against towns and villages supportive of the opposition has escalated, in an apparent bid to punish the inhabitants for their known or suspected support for armed opposition groups, and to frighten them into submission.

(...)

The army crackdown has been targeting towns and villages seen as opposition strongholds. In most of the places visited by Amnesty International, soldiers had deliberately and unlawfully killed (extrajudicially executed) civilians not involved in any fighting, as well as armed opposition fighters who had been captured or were otherwise hors de combat – having surrendered or been captured or wounded. They had deliberately, wantonly and systematically destroyed homes, shops, medical facilities and other property. They had indiscriminately fired bullets and shells in civilian residential areas. They had prevented injured people from receiving life-saving medical treatment. They had tortured most of those they detained – sometimes to death – and subjected others to enforced disappearance.

From interviews with dozens of residents of different towns and villages, a consistent pattern of military operation emerged. Large and heavily armed contingents of soldiers – often accompanied by shabiha militia members – approached the towns in the morning in scores of tanks, armoured personnel carriers and other armoured vehicles, shooting and shelling in a reckless and indiscriminate manner. These actions often killed and injured civilian bystanders and damaged homes and properties.

(...)

The persistent, serious and widespread human rights violations by Syria's security forces since March 2011 have been widely condemned by many members of the international community, but to date no effective action has been taken to stop the lethal repression. The failure of the international community to agree on an effective course of action has undoubtedly emboldened those committing and ordering the abuses, and has left many Syrians feeling that they have been abandoned by the rest of the world.

Amnesty International has long been calling on the UN Security Council to not only condemn the violations, but also to take measures to prevent further violations and to hold those responsible to account. These include referring the situation in Syria to the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC), immediately imposing a comprehensive arms embargo and freezing the assets of the President and his associates. However, effective action by the Security Council has been blocked by China, the Russian Federation and other states.

(...)

Concrete steps are urgently needed to stop the growing spiral of violence in Syria. Among other things, Amnesty International is calling on the international community to:

- Ensure that the UN observer mission has an adequately resourced and strong human rights component with the mandate and the capacity to monitor, investigate and publicly report on all human rights abuses.
- Immediately impose an arms embargo on Syria with the aim of stopping the transfer of arms and equipment to Syrian government forces.
- Implement an assets freeze against President Bashar al-Assad, his close associates and any others who may be involved in ordering or perpetrating crimes under international law.
- Demand that Syria grant prompt and unfettered access to the independent international Commission of Inquiry, humanitarian and human rights organizations, and to international media.
- Refer the situation in Syria to the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court to investigate crimes under international law, including crimes against humanity.
- Amnesty International is calling on all states to:
 - Take all necessary measures to exercise universal jurisdiction over crimes against humanity and other crimes under international law before national courts in fair trials and without recourse to the death penalty.
- Amnesty International is calling on China and the Russian Federation to:
 - Halt immediately all arms transfers and military assistance to the Syrian government as there is a significant risk they could be used to commit serious human rights violations of the kind described in this report.
- Amnesty International is calling on the Syrian authorities, with immediate effect, to:
 - End extrajudicial executions, direct attacks on civilians, and indiscriminate and disproportionate attacks by its forces, and make clear that such violations will not be tolerated.
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End indiscriminate fire in or into residential areas.

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End the use of torture and arbitrary detention, inform detainees' relatives of their whereabouts, allow detainees access to their families and lawyers without delay, and allow international human rights organizations access to detention centres.

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Co-operate fully with the UN observer mission and grant monitors access to all places of detention.

Further sections include:

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Deliberate Killings

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Indiscriminate Attacks Causing Civilian Casualties

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Wanton Destruction of Homes and Property

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Torture and Arbitrary Arrest

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Applicable International Law

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Conclusions and Recommendations

Read the press release, “ [Syria: Fresh evidence of armed forces' ongoing crimes against humanity](#) .” Download the [full report](#) .