



# Amman Center for Human Rights Studies statement On the Syrian Presidential Elections

## IN A NUTSHELL

President Bashar al-Assad set to win a fourth seven-year term in today's Syrian presidential elections in what has been condemned by the Syrian opposition and Western countries as a sham. The vote will further extend Assad's grip over Syria after several years of bloody conflict.

Human rights violations: Freedom of speech, freedom of assembly/participation.

The Amman Center for Human Rights Studies condemns that lack of democratic guarantees that the Syrian presidential elections offer, namely the lack of a genuine opposition to Assad.

Voters in government-held parts of Syria are heading to the polls to cast ballots in an election that is set to lead to a fourth term for Bashar al-Assad. This is the second time that Syria has elections after the uprising in 2011, in which al-Assad won nearly 89 percent of the vote in the 2014 elections.

This election is marked by the lack of a genuine opposition to Assad. Assad is running against two government-approved candidates, the only two who have been approved by the high court out of a list of 50 applicants. The first, Abdullah Salloum Abdullah, former state minister of parliamentary affairs; the second, Mahmoud Ahmad Marei, head of the National Democratic Front, a small state-endorsed party. Consequently, these elections have been widely condemned as a sham by the Syrian opposition and Western countries.

The election is being held in a Syria that has been ravaged by conflict, with hundreds of thousands of deaths, millions of refugees and internally displaced persons and where the grip of the government over the country is ever tighter. These are not the conditions for democratic elections.

The Syrian government has systematically violated essential rights to participation, assembly and freedom of speech. The elections being held today are but a manifestation of the lack of basic freedoms in the country. For example, Syrian security forces continue to arbitrarily detain, disappear, and mistreat people across the country. According to the Syrian Network for Human Rights at least 100,000 Syrians remain forcibly disappeared.

The Amman Center for Human Rights Studies condemns the Syrian presidential elections as undemocratic and illegitimate. The expected outcome is not a consequence of President Assad's claimed widespread popularity across Syria, but the absence of an opposition, be it because it has been forcibly expelled by war or silenced by fears.

Democracy in Syria will only be possible if Syrian parties to the conflict are confronted in free and democratic elections on an equal footing. This entails that Syrians living in Syria or refugees abroad do not fear reprisals from the government for expressing dissent.