



Amman Center for Human Rights Studies statement on the Elections in Syria

IN A NUTSHELL

The Syrian government releases hundreds of social media critics in an attempt to cleanse its image as a repressive, undemocratic regime ahead of presidential elections this 26th of May.

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

The Amman Center for Human Rights Studies condemns the lack of a true democratic process in the upcoming Syrian elections by failing to include a real opposition to the Syrian regime.

The Syrian regime is attempting to cleanse its image as a repressive state. Syria has freed more than 400 civil servants, judges, lawyers, and journalists detained this year. Detentions followed a crackdown on social media dissent, as the Syria cyber-crime law was targeted at currency speculators, drug dealers, smugglers and kidnappers. However, this move by the Syrian regime has been seen by rights activists and former detainees as intended to win over public opinion ahead of presidential elections, in addition to efforts to fight inflation, and extending government grants to state employees in areas suffering from economic hardship.

Syrian presidential elections will be taking place the 26th of May. With President Bashar al-Assad expected to win a clear majority of votes and without any real opposition to the Assad regime, a significant part of the international community and human rights organisations have condemned the elections as illegitimate and a farce.

This operation is far from being a compromise to the Syrian opposition. Reports point out that most of the freed social media critics were supporters of Syrian authorities' handling of the uprising in 2011 that spiraled into a war that has killed hundreds of thousands. The amnesty excluded tens of thousands of Assad opponents and political detainees held for years without trial, many of whom are believed dead, rights groups say. Sara Kayyali, Syria researcher with U.S.-based Human Rights Watch, says "the auspicious timing of the release right before elections of a moderate loyalist camp ... is to generate a facade of entertaining some form of dissent to further make elections look credible".

The Amman Center for Human Rights Studies condemns the lack of freedom of expression that this episode reveals. Syria needs a genuine, long term political solution to a conflict that has lasted ten years, causing a lot of suffering to the Syrian people. Short-term solutions, such as undemocratic elections with no real opposition, or image-cleansing operations such as releasing prisoners ahead of elections, will not result in the restoration of legitimacy of Syrian political institutions towards its citizens or the international community. An inclusive political process has to be part of a future Syria. One which entails a new negotiated constitution, free and fair elections, and the release of all political prisoners.