

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

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## **Syria: End human rights violations against the Syrian Kurds**

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The Syrian government must put an immediate end to human rights abuses against Syrian Kurds, Amnesty International said in a report published today on the eve of the anniversary of the Qamishli clashes. The authorities must open investigations into the allegations of unlawful killings, deaths resulting from torture and ill-treatment in custody and torture of Kurds that have come to light since March 2004.

The report Kurds in the Syrian Arab Republic one year after the March 2004 events, examines human rights violations against Kurds since clashes at a football match between Kurdish and Arab teams in Qamishli, north-eastern Syria that led to demonstrations and riots across the country during which over 30 Kurds were killed. More than 2,000 people, almost all of them Kurds, were arrested. Kurdish detainees, including children as young as 12, women, teenage girls and elderly people, were reportedly tortured and ill-treated. Dozens of Kurdish students were expelled from their universities and dormitories, reportedly for participating in peaceful protests.

Since March 2004 there has been a significant increase in the number of reported deaths of Kurds as a result of torture and ill-treatment in custody: five of nine such deaths reported to Amnesty International in the seven months after March 2004 were of Syrian Kurds. There have also been a number of deaths in suspicious circumstances of Kurdish military conscripts during the same period: at least six died, reportedly due to beatings or shootings by military superiors or colleagues. No investigation is known to have been carried out into any of the deaths in either category.

The report, a result of several months' research, also describes the systemic identity-based discrimination suffered by the Syrian Kurds. It calls on Syria to end the prohibitions on the use and practise of the Kurdish language and culture. The report highlights cases of Kurdish human rights defenders who have sought to promote rights of the Kurdish population in Syria and suffered arrest, torture and unfair trial.

"The Syrian authorities must set up an investigation into the apparently disproportionate response of the security forces to the March 2004 events," said Amnesty International. "They must investigate the alleged unlawful killings and deaths as a result of torture and ill-treatment in custody and the widespread reports of torture, and propose remedies to deal with the systemic discrimination against Kurds as well as

other human rights violations that may have contributed to the tension and the outburst of violence."

**Background:**

The 1.5 to two million Syrian Kurds, who constitute the second-largest ethnic group in the country, behind Arabs, suffer from identity-based discrimination, including restrictions placed upon the use of the Kurdish language and culture. The report calls on the Syrian authorities to end the prohibitions on the use of the Kurdish language in education, the workplace, official establishments and at private celebrations, and to allow children to be registered with Kurdish names and businesses to carry Kurdish names.

Several hundred thousand Syrian Kurds are effectively stateless and, as such, are denied the full provision of education, employment, health and other rights enjoyed by Syrian nationals, as well as being denied the right to have a nationality and passport. Amnesty International calls on the Syrian authorities to amend legislation so as to find an expeditious solution to the statelessness of Syrian-born Kurds and to abolish the accompanying discrimination against them.

Public Document

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