

December 1992

HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION IN THE SYRIAN ARAB REPUBLIC

ISSUE

Canada remains concerned about alleged violations of human rights in Syria, notably the large number of political prisoners, detention conditions and the failure to apply due process of law. However, over the last years, hundreds of political prisoners have been released from Syrian jails.

BACKGROUND

Syrians are ruled by an authoritarian regime. There are few signs of progress towards a freer political system through democratic elections or greater respect for individual human rights. However, there are indications that President Assad is conscious of the challenge that the changing international political and economic environment poses to continued Ba'ath rule in Syria.

Over the last year, hundreds of political and other prisoners have been released without fanfare. In April, Syrian officials informed the leaders of the Syrian Jewish community that, from now on, they would facilitate their travel abroad as family groups. Since then, hundreds of Syrian Jews have emigrated. However, more recently, it appears that the number of new travel permits has been curtailed.

CANADIAN POSITION

Canada has continued to voice its concern over human rights in Syria. Recently, these representations again focused on the right of members of the Syrian Jewish community to travel abroad.

Syria was last year removed from consideration under CHR confidential procedure 1503 - evidence of wide support among the CHR membership.

At UNGA 47, Canada noted in its statement before the Third Committee positive developments including the release of political prisoners and the decision to facilitate travel abroad of members of religious minorities, but reiterated its concern over allegations of violations of human rights and called for improved conditions of detention and for due judicial process for detainees.

In spite of some recent improvements with regard to political prisoners and members of the Syrian Jewish community, there still remains room for improvement in a number of

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