

## **Statement of Farid N. Ghadry**

**Mr. Chairman**

**Honorable Members of the Helsinki Committee**

**Ladies and gentlemen**

Yesterday was the 43<sup>rd</sup> anniversary of the rise of Ba'athism in Syria. As a Syrian-American who has a particular interest to see a free and peaceful Syria, I stand before you seeking to help portray how much Syrians are hoping for democracy. 43 years of an oppressive regime has taken its toll on the society to such an extent that we can expect terrorism to rise in the Middle East rather than subside.

Syrians today live in poverty, unable to educate their children and marrying them young to help with additional wages that hardly can sustain a family. When the cost of two pounds of meat is equal to 10% of your salary, the United States should expect when it calls for freedom in Syria, that most people will heed the call.

Allow me to share with you a snapshot of the regime of Assad in Syria:

- In 1982, the guns of Rifaat al-Assad turned against his people in Hama that leveled the small city. When the smoke cleared, up to 30,000 innocent people were killed.
- Over the years the Assad family has built the most elaborate drug and counterfeiting operations in the Beka'a valley in Lebanon.
- It is estimated that 85% of Syrian oil is sold directly by agents of the Assads with the billions in proceeds distributed amongst them and the top intelligence people to keep them loyal. We intend to recover these funds one day to rebuild our country with.
- The Assads are building schools of hate in the Beka'a valley that will produce the next generation of terrorists. Most peaceful people hedge their bets around a negotiating table, but the Assads hedge their bet upon the future killings of their enemies.
- The Assads recently struck a deal with Russia to purchase dangerous shoulder-held SA-18, which dramatically raises the stakes in the Middle East. The SA-18 is capable of downing an aircraft flying at up to 900 miles per hour.
- The Assads are supporting terrorism in Iraq, in Lebanon, and most recently they helped in the attack against four innocent youths in Tel Aviv.
- On March 8, 1963, the Assads installed a series of Emergency Laws that have stifled our liberties. Demonstrations are not allowed and

anyone who speaks against the regime is imprisoned, tortured, and sometimes killed.

- The Assads keep the people of Syria busy by preaching hate and enmity against our neighbors and the United States. If given the chance to think freely, most Syrians will thank the United States for helping bring about their freedom.
- According to the Syrian Human Rights Committee, the Syrian Ba'athists in Damascus have killed about 17,000 prisoners. I would like to bring to the attention of this honorable committee the names of the following prisoners of conscience and champions of human rights, accountability, and transparency who are languishing under horrible conditions in Syrian jails today:
- Riad Seif (Member of Parliament) - Aref Dalilah (Economist) - Ma'mun al-Homsi (Member of Parliament) - Abdul Aziz Al-Khayer (Physician) - Habib Issa (Lawyer) - Walid Al-Bounni (Physician) - Mohammad Bashir al-Arab (Student leader) - Mohanad al-Debs (Student leader) - Mahmoud Ammo - Mahmoud Abou Sader - Mazid Ali Al-Terkawi (Businessman) - Fawaz Tello (Engineer). There are over 800 prisoners of conscience in Syrian jails today.
- The Assyrians and Caledonians, in addition to other Christians that have lived in Syria even before the birth of Christ, have been emigrating from Syria for decades for lack of opportunity, because of discrimination, and because of stifling of their religious rights. We appeal to this committee to understand their plight. Only freedom and democracy can restore their rights and celebrate their contribution to our society.
- Furthermore, the Kurds in Syria have been abused by the Ba'athist regime, their lands confiscated, and their culture and language stifled. We will celebrate on March 12 their uprising a year ago against the regime, which culminated in the imprisonment of 2000 of them, many under the age of 18. We ask the Committee to honor these people for their courage and help free the 200 Kurds still languishing in Ba'athist jails.

We hope this snapshot gives this honorable committee the kind of people that are ruling Damascus today and helping sow the seeds of violence all around them.

The Ba'athists have us believe that if they go, the extremists would take over. I am here to dispel this notion and tell the US Government that without a shadow of a doubt, most Syrians are either secular (Thanks to the Assads, the only credit I give them) or Muslim moderates such as the Grand Mufti Kaftaro followers in Aleppo. The Muslim Brotherhood would, under normal conditions and free elections in Syria, get between 10 and 15% of

the votes, a minority that will not be able to impose its will on the rest of the majority. That is exactly the representation they have in Jordan today.

When Syria is free of the Assad rule, Syria will be peaceful, democratic, and embracing of the international community of nations. The world can no longer afford the Ba'athists in Damascus with their "scorch the earth" policies. The Reform Party, with many other Syrian reformist leaders that I cannot name to protect them are able and willing to help ease Syria into democracy if given the chance.

Finally, we received this message from a democratic Syrian inside Syria:

**"Please tell the Commission that Syrians are waiting for your help impatiently".**

Thank you for giving us this opportunity.