

مافي للأبد



ANNUAL REPORT 2024

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Huquqyat is a women-led network of Syrian lawyers and legal practitioners founded in 2021 to advance gender-transformative justice and inclusive accountability for crimes committed in Syria. The organization was created to address the systematic exclusion of Syrian women's legal expertise from accountability and justice-seeking processes and to ensure that women play a leading role in shaping justice, rather than tokenised as victims alone.

Throughout the year, Huquqyat strengthened its engagement with international accountability mechanisms while remaining grounded in survivor-centered, feminist practice.

Huquqyat advanced key investigations, most notably its ongoing case-building on the use of starvation as a method of warfare in Yarmouk, South Damascus, building on its "Kneel or Starve" research. The organization continued submitting investigative findings to the IIIM and European prosecution authorities and supported an active universal jurisdiction case in the Netherlands. In parallel, Huquqyat delivered direct impact through its Syria Legal Aid Project, providing pro bono legal assistance to internally displaced and local women in Northwest Syria and enabling access to custody rights, civil documentation, and financial support.

Alongside investigations and legal aid, Huquqyat engaged in targeted advocacy, contributing to joint civil society statements, participating in international forums such as the 8th Brussels Conference, and amplifying public understanding of starvation crimes and gender-based violations. Through sustained capacity building, advanced training, and collective leadership, Huquqyat strengthened the role of Syrian women legal professionals in accountability efforts.

As Syria enters a new chapter, Huquqyat remains committed to ensuring that justice, legal reform, and accountability processes are built on equality, dignity, and the leadership of women—affirming that lasting freedom cannot exist without justice.

IN 2024, HUQUQYAT WORKED IN AN EXCEPTIONAL POLITICAL MOMENT MARKED BY THE FALL OF THE ASSAD REGIME AND THE BEGINNING OF A TRANSITIONAL PHASE IN SYRIA. WHILE THIS SHIFT CREATED NEW OPPORTUNITIES FOR JUSTICE, IT ALSO UNDERScoreD THE DEPTH OF UNRESOLVED HARMS OF THE CONFLICT, INCLUDING ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCE, STARVATION CRIMES, MASS DETENTION, AND SEXUAL AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE.

HUQUQYAT'S STATEMENT

Huquqyat emerged from a deep need to be a network of women legal professionals—carrying both memory and law, and working in the service of humanity. And here we are, three years after our founding, standing at the threshold of a historic moment unlike any before: 8 December 2024, when freedom rose over Syria after years of darkness, repression, and silent death.

Today, we members of Huquqyat stand with hearts full of gratitude and pride, because we were—and still are—part of this moment and this long road toward justice. We planted hope among the ruins of defeat, and walked side by side with inspiring women—lawyers, jurists, and rights defenders—who carried the message through the harshest conditions and refused to stay silent about injustice.

Today, as Syrians begin to write a new chapter of their story, we do not forget that injustice has not yet ended. There are still mothers waiting for their children behind bars. Mass graves still cry out for justice. Perpetrators still walk free. That is why our newly born freedom places upon us double responsibility: to protect it, and to continue advancing on the path of accountability and redress, because there is no true freedom without justice, and no country can be built on pardoning perpetrators.

At Huquqyat, we find our strength in the stories of our members, in the brave decisions they made, in the difficult choices they undertook, simply because they believe in a better world and in a Syria where rights are safeguarded and dignity is a term that will never be erased from our vocabulary.

To be together, in the midst of this challenge and hope, is a profound honor. We are grateful to all those who have accompanied us on this journey—organizations, partners, legal advisors, and supporters—those who believed in us and saw in us part of a more just and humane future.

This year, we hope that we have lit a candle within this growing light and left a small mark on the collective step towards a Syria that is worthy of us all: a Syria where dreams are not killed, where voices are not choked. A Syria where the banners of freedom are raised, where justice is realized, and where human beings are honored.

INTRODUCTION

HUQUQYAT: A BRIEF HISTORY AND OVERVIEW

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OUR STRATEGIC APPROACH

Intersectional and gender-transformative approach: Huquqyat strives to advance transformative justice strategies for Syria that pursue justice for specific harms from a gender-lens, recognising and tackling forms of structural violence underpinning gender inequality. Huquqyat works to build gender-transformative cases, research, and advocacy strategies encouraging investigative authorities, courts, and other actors in the accountability field to stay attuned to the various ways in which women are affected by violence and conflict, and subsequently in- or excluded from accountability efforts, throughout legal proceedings. Huquqyat recognizes that certain crimes disproportionately affect individuals based on their gender and other parts of their identity. An intersectional analysis of these factors is crucial for a comprehensive understanding and an effective response. Huquqyat therefore aims to investigate cases with key gender or other identity elements, hoping to highlight larger and more complex patterns of crimes focusing on the differential ways in which women and marginalized communities are affected by violence and war.

Huquqyat also adopts a feminist approach in conducting legal consultancies and providing pro bono legal aid for the communities with which it works, whether through its Syria Legal Aid Project, investigation projects, or research and advocacy initiatives.

Survivor-centered work: Huquqyat also seeks to challenge the traditional, often extractive justice paradigm that often re-traumatizes survivors and neglects their agency, working based on a survivor-centered approach to conduct investigations, research, and advocacy with sensitivity, empathy, and respect for survivors' rights and preferences. This involves actively engaging survivors in decision-making processes, ensuring their voices and opinions on remedies and redress are heard, and providing support services to address their physical, psychological, legal and social needs. It also involves the broader engagement of affected communities, through community outreach activities and seeking input from those concerned from the early stages of any intervention, facilitating the affected communities' ownership of the justice-seeking process.

Huquqyat's survivor-centered investigations are interdisciplinary and involve collaboration with various stakeholders, including legal experts, psychologists, social workers, and community organizations. As a key part of its work, Huquqyat trains and supports Syrian women lawyers and legal practitioners to contribute to and lead such international investigations and accountability proceedings.

With the fall of the Syrian regime on December 8, 2024, Huquqyat is determined to carry on working within its strategic framework, navigating potential ways to engage with new actors. The organization will focus its advocacy efforts on the Syrian Interim Government's bodies and institutions while supporting victims and survivors groups, particularly on issues related to Huquqyat's ongoing legal cases.

OUR STRUCTURE AND MEMBERSHIP MODEL

As a membership-based organization, in 2024 Huquqyat consisted of 20 members who participated in the organization's work on a voluntary basis. The members are the main drivers as well as direct stakeholders of the organization. Through a horizontal decision-making structure, they are responsible for leading and developing the organization's work.

The Board of Directors is the governing body of our organization, holding legal and financial compliance responsibilities as well as a governance and leadership role. According to the Articles of Association, the Board comprises a minimum of two Huquqyat members elected by the general membership by majority vote every ten years. In 2024, the Board of Directors consisted of three members.

Huquqyat is committed to creating a safe and welcoming space where all members feel comfortable and supported, ensuring that every member is included and valued and encouraged to share their resources and expertise, ideas, and feedback with other members. Our members are situated in different countries around the world. However, with a shared leadership structure, we could bridge the physical distance and create a united community that comes together to discuss salient issues in the legal field and create a welcoming and inclusive environment for all members, regardless of location. Members were also granted the organization's resources, including bespoke technical training/s in Arabic, peer-to-peer mentorship, and networking opportunities. Additionally, Huquqyat provided members with access to tailored support to help them design, fund and kick-start their own projects under the organization's umbrella.

New members can join Huquqyat twice a year by applying for membership on Huquqyat's official website in January and June. The Membership Committee at Huquqyat is responsible for ensuring that new applicants meet the organization's membership criteria and for onboarding them.

HUQUQYAT IN 2024 (FACTSHEET)

WHO WE ARE

Huquqyat is a network of Syrian women lawyers and legal practitioners working to advance gender-transformative, survivor-centered justice for crimes committed in Syria. We support women to lead accountability efforts and shape inclusive justice processes at national and international levels.

WHY IT MATTERS

- Syrian women's experiences and legal expertise have been systematically excluded from accountability efforts
- Gendered crimes such as starvation, enforced disappearance, and detention-related violence remain under-addressed
- Justice processes that exclude women risk reproducing discrimination and injustice

2024 IMPACT AT A GLANCE

- 100+ women received direct legal support
- 550+ women reached through camp outreach
- 54 court cases supported
- 67 civil status procedures completed
- 3 cases submitted into events taking place during the siege of the South of Damascus informing starvation investigation to international accountability mechanisms and European and international authorities.

INVESTIGATIONS & ACCOUNTABILITY

- Gender-sensitive investigations into Core International Crimes
- Ongoing case-building on starvation as a method of warfare (Yarmouk)
- Engagement with IIIM and European prosecution authorities
- Support to universal jurisdiction cases in Europe

SYRIA LEGAL AID PROJECT

- Pro bono legal assistance to women in Northwest Syria
- Legal clinics, camp outreach, court representation
- Focus on custody, civil documentation, and protection from violence

ADVOCACY & PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

- Participation in international forums (e.g. Brussels Conference)
- Joint civil society statements and public campaigns
- Public discussions linking Syria and Palestine on starvation crime

CACPCITY BUILDING

- Advanced trainings on investigations and universal jurisdiction
- Mentorship and leadership development for Syrian women lawyers
- Annual convenings and peer-to-peer learning

OUR PROGRAMS

2024

Huquqyat continued to implement its organizational strategy in 2024 to achieve its goal of reshaping accountability processes and pathways to be more inclusive of the several ways in which women are exposed to and affected by injustice. As a result, Huquqyat adopted a gender-sensitive approach during investigations and case building, research, and advocacy. Additionally, Huquqyat started new projects aiming towards raising visibility of its members' expertise and developing the organization's digital security system.

- **Investigations and case-building**

Huquqyat was established after an independent investigation conducted by two of Huquqyat's founding members under the supervision of Center for Justice and Accountability (CJA). In 2022, this led to the development of several case files concerning alleged crimes committed during the siege of the South of Damascus area in 2014, on which Huquqyat's members continued to work throughout 2023 and until 2024. This was the foundation of Huquqyat's investigation program and has guided Huquqyat's focus on siege investigations. In September 2024, this work expanded to the team's main current investigation into the use of starvation as a method of warfare in Yarmouk, South Damascus, in collaboration with Global Rights Compliance (GRC), as highlighted below.

Huquqyat also developed an investigation manual outlining its gender-sensitive approach and methodology in the context of these investigations, considering how gender can intersect with other aspects such as religion, ethnicity, economical situation, and societal stigma to shape the experiences of survivors. This also fed into developing a survivor-centered approach that includes survivors in the core of the investigation process by prioritizing their wellbeing, dignity, and involvement from the outset.

Building on this investigative work, Huquqyat engages with European prosecution authorities and the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism (IIIM) through the regular submission of investigation findings to these bodies.

- **Investigation into the Use of Starvation as a Warfare Tactic in the South of Damascus**

Following its "Kneel or Starve" research report published in 2023, Huquqyat and Global Rights Compliance (GRC) launched a comprehensive investigation into the use of starvation as a method of warfare in Yarmouk, South Damascus. The process began with a community forum that invited survivors of the Yarmouk siege to discuss challenges and opportunities facing community engagement with legal proceedings, views on potential accountability pathways, and priorities for an investigation. The case-building strategy is expected to continue until early 2026.

As part of the Yarmouk investigation and outreach efforts, Huquqyat and GRC have held meetings with various European prosecution authorities to explore legal avenues for accountability.

SYRIA LEGAL AID PROJECT (SLAP)

Through the SLAP program, Huquqyat in 2024 provided critical, pro bono legal support to internally displaced women and local women in different areas across Northwest Syria, empowering them with access to justice in an environment where legal barriers and financial hardship often block the path to rights. The program established three legal clinics, conducted camp visits, and covered legal fees in 54 court cases, in addition to working on civil status procedures like marriage and children registration. Three young women lawyers were trained and one of them was integrated into the Huquqyat legal network, ensuring sustainability and local capacity building. Complementing this, legal awareness workshops were held for internally displaced women and local women, covering their rights under Syrian personal status, civil, and criminal law. The program thereby fostered legal empowerment for women, and helped create safer paths to justice for women who face everyday injustices.

- **Impact Stories**

Access to Justice and Women's Empowerment

Through its Syria Legal Aid Project, Huquqyat supported women like C.K. and Y.A. in overcoming systemic legal barriers caused by unregistered marriages and gender-based violence. C.K., trapped in an abusive relationship with no formal legal protection, was represented by a lawyer supported by Huquqyat in multiple claims under Syrian Personal Status Law. The court awarded her deferred dowry, full custody of her daughter, and monthly child support. With this judgment, she was also able to obtain a family statement, enroll her daughter in school, and access basic services. Today, she is engaged, living independently, and enjoying newfound stability. Similarly, Y.A. faced divorce from an unregistered marriage that threatened her rights and her children's future. Huquqyat's lawyer filed for custody and child support, successfully arguing the marriage's de facto existence. The court ruled in Y.A.'s favor, enabling her to secure custody and monthly financial support. She later opened a small business, taking her first steps toward financial independence. Both stories illustrate how pro bono legal aid can serve as a pathway to dignity and economic empowerment, and how strategic legal action can mitigate the consequences of legal precarity for Syrian women.

ADVOCACY

Advocacy is a core pillar of Huquqyat's work and a natural extension of its investigations, legal aid, and survivor-centered approach. Through strategic advocacy, Huquqyat seeks to translate legal analysis, documentation, and lived experiences of survivors into concrete pressure on decision-makers, accountability mechanisms, and international actors. In 2024, Huquqyat's advocacy focused on amplifying gendered harms, addressing under-recognized international crimes such as starvation as a method of warfare, and ensuring that Syrian women's voices and legal expertise informed international policy and justice discussions. By engaging in joint civil society initiatives, participating in high-level international forums, and contributing to public dialogue, Huquqyat worked to keep justice, accountability, and the rights of survivors at the center of conversations shaping Syria's future.

Joint statement: Syrian Civil Society Organisations Mark One Year Since the Syria-Türkiye Earthquakes

Huquqyat regularly takes part in advocacy initiatives, open letters and joint statements with other Syrian civil society organizations. February 2024 marked one year after catastrophic earthquakes devastated regions of northwestern Syrian and southern Türkiye, affecting many Syrians, including the displaced and Huquqyat members, families, friends and partners. At this occasion, Huquqyat signed a joint statement calling for the localization of aid and increased cross-border assistance to effectively respond to the affected population in the aftermath of the earthquakes

• Eighth Brussels Conference

Huquqyat was represented by one of its members at the Brussels 8th Conference Day of Dialogue on 30 April 2024, with participation in the keynote session and the 6th Round Table on justice, missing persons, and the right to truth. Discussions highlighted the ongoing humanitarian and accountability crisis in Syria, the launch and challenges of the IIMP, and the critical role of civil society amid political obstruction. The session emphasized data access, OSINT, and cross-border cooperation, including for migrants who disappeared along migration routes. The event offered valuable insights and opened avenues for future collaboration with Syrian civil society and international actors.

The Urgent Need to End Starvation Atrocity Crimes: Lessons from Syria to Palestine

One of our co-founders participated in an impactful online event hosted by The Syria Campaign 16 April 2024. The event brought together a group of experts and human rights advocates, including Dr. Nahed Samour, Catriona Murdoch, and Uğur Ümit Üngör, and was moderated by Arwa Damon. The discussion focused on pressing human rights issues in Gaza and Syria. During the event, they presented new evidence of the Syrian regime's starvation policy affecting Palestinians in Yarmouk, proposed pathways for states to pursue accountability, and called for an end to the ongoing starvation of Palestinians in Gaza.

ADVOCACY

Podcast recording (published in March 2025)

Mariana Karkoutly and Dalia Qumsieh (Huquqyat's member and head of the advocacy committee) were hosted on Oyoun Al-Kalam on 12 December 2024, to be published later in March 2025. The podcast was designed to raise awareness about the crime of starvation by siege as a method of warfare, drawing comparative insights from the Syrian and Palestinian contexts, specifically, the sieges of Yarmouk Camp (Damascus) and Gaza. This initiative responded to the increasing need to frame such practices as international crimes, promote public understanding particularly with Arabic speakers, and encourage engagement in accountability efforts. The activity forms part of a broader strategy to expand the outreach of Huquqyat's Kneel or Starve report and to foster collaboration between Syrian and Palestinian human rights actors as well as Huquqyat's survivor-centered approach by reaching out to victims and survivors on different platforms and sharing with them legal knowledge in relation to this crime.

Legal Action Worldwide (LAW) event

A Huquqyat member contributed to an event hosted by LAW by presenting findings from a report documenting the systematic use of sexual and gender-based violence against Syrian women and girls in detention. She situated these violations within a broader context of legal discrimination, social stigma, and state repression, and highlighted that such violence—also inflicted on men and boys—has been used by the Syrian regime since 2011 as a tool to punish communities and suppress dissent, often in secret and makeshift detention sites.

She emphasized the severe barriers survivors face in reporting these crimes and their long-term impacts, including social exclusion, family breakdown, and ongoing harm. The intervention also underscored that these violations continue to affect Syrian women beyond Syria, including in refugee settings, and amount to crimes under international human rights, humanitarian, and criminal law.

HUQUQYAT MEMBERSHIP

Our members

In 2024, Huquqyat welcomed four new members, who met the membership in person/in video during the annual convening.

During the annual convening, members elected a new Board of Directors.

A new members' committee was created to guide strategically the investigation pillar of the organisation.

Annual convening

From 28 to 30 November, Huquqyat held its annual convening in Berlin. The convening was hybrid, gathering members residing in Europe and connecting with members residing in Syria online, successfully engaging all members. Huquqyat's annual convening is a central event in Huquqyat's activities, as it allows members to meet and connect, enhancing the sense of belonging and ownership over the organisation, while serving as a platform for longer discussions on organisational matters and important decision-making. The convening also allowed the members and the operations team to meet, connect, and exchange knowledge. Sessions were held on topics such as the current projects and their alignment with the organisation's strategy, Huquqyat's vision and implementation of transformative justice, advocacy planning and social media strategy, the organisation's newly developed investigation manual, and Huquqyat's committees' work and challenges. A second set of sessions engaged external experts on the topics of transitional and transformative justice and digital security and risk management.

QUOTES FROM OUR MEMBERS

"What makes Huquqyat different is trust. We lead together, challenge each other, and share responsibility. In a field shaped by hierarchy and ego, this collective model is both radical and necessary."

"The investigation training gave me tools I never had access to before—practical, ethical, and grounded in survivor care. For the first time, I felt prepared to lead an investigation, not just assist one."

"For years, accountability spaces spoke about Syria without truly seeing women. Through Huquqyat, I learned how to investigate crimes in a way that centers women's experiences without reducing them to victims. This changed how I understand justice—and my role in shaping it."

HUQUQYAT MEMBERSHIP

- **Training on Universal Jurisdiction Investigations and Case Strategy**

In 2024, Huquqyat focused on bringing members together for trainings based on the organisation's focus on investigations and the members' interests in developing their capacities. In January 2024, Huquqyat and Civil Rights Defenders held their first joint training in Berlin, Germany, on the topic of investigations and case-building under universal jurisdiction in Europe. Twelve members and a friend of Huquqyat attended a 2.5 days training aimed at building capacity towards case-building and investigations on international core crimes and bringing them before the competent European authorities. Sessions covered the topics of different jurisdictional bases, reaching out to prosecution authorities, investigation planning, documentation of the elements of crimes, and open source investigation.

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Defenders Days

- Huquqyat is regularly invited to attend Civil Rights Defender's Defenders Days, a conference organised for human rights defenders to come together, share their knowledge and experience, and learn from each other to enhance their work in a restful environment. In October 2024, two Huquqyat members, different from those having attended the 2023 Defender Days, participated in various workshops on topics such as digital security, investigation of core international crimes, psychosocial first aid, and storytelling for the purpose of advocacy. Following her participation in the storytelling activity, one member was invited to share a speech as part of the conference closing ceremony. Huquqyat members took the opportunity to network with other civil society organisations from Syria and the SWANA region, as well as human rights defenders from othe

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