

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Druten Arrest Case

Case against Syrian man suspected of heading the interrogation department of the National Defence Force in Syria.

Investigation Name	Shildon
Country	Syria
Court	District Court of The Hague
Year	2023

1. Who is the accused in this case?

The accused is a 55-year-old Syrian man, whose name remains undisclosed to the public. The accused arrived in the Netherlands in July 2021 and was granted temporary asylum. Following a tip-off about a person with a similar name being the chief interrogator at the National Defence Force (NDF) in Salamiyah, the Dutch National Police's International Crimes Unit (TIM) initiated an investigation. The accused was arrested in Druten, in the Netherlands, in December 2023.

In the context of the case against him, the man was recently examined at the Pieter Baan Centre, a specialized forensic psychiatric facility in the Netherlands, to assess whether he suffers from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). This evaluation found no indications that the accused has a psychological disorder. The evaluation did not assess the risk of reoffending or the potential influence of psychological disorders on the alleged crimes, as the accused had not cooperated sufficiently for such determinations to be made.

2. What specific charges have been brought against the accused?

Based on an investigation by the International Crimes Unit of the Dutch National Police (hereafter: TIM), the accused is facing charges related to his tenure as the head of the interrogation department of the NDF in Salamiyah, Syria, during 2013-2014. The NDF is a paramilitary group aligned with the Assad regime. The NDF has been implicated in numerous human rights abuses during the Syrian civil war.



The accused is suspected of having committed serious crimes against civilians, including torture, physical abuse, and sexual violence, while overseeing the interrogation department. The charges pertain to the allegation that the accused, as head of the NDF's interrogation department in Salamiyah, both oversaw and participated in these crimes, perpetrated against civilians detained by the NDF. The prosecution classifies these acts as "crimes against humanity."

What was the conflict about?

The Syrian conflict began in 2011 as a popular uprising against decades of authoritarian rule under the Assad government (1971-2024), driven by demands for political reform, accountability, and an end to repression. The state's violent response to these protests rapidly transformed the unrest into a protracted armed conflict involving a multiplicity of state and non-state actors. By 2013, the conflict had escalated into a full-scale, multi-actor armed conflict.

The National Defence Forces (NDF) were established in late 2012 as a regime-aligned paramilitary force to compensate for manpower shortages within the Syrian Arab Army. Operating as a locally recruited auxiliary force, the NDF consisted primarily of civilians mobilised from their own towns and communities, including in and around Salamiyah. Salamiyah, located east of Hama in central Syria, constituted a strategically sensitive area due to its proximity to contested regions, key supply routes, and, from 2013 onwards, the expansion of ISIS towards central Syria. The town largely remained aligned with, or dependent on, regime protection, particularly as opposition and jihadist groups gained ground in the surrounding rural areas.

3. What is the legal justification for conducting a trial in the Netherlands for crimes committed in Syria?

Dutch courts can hear cases about the most severe crimes committed abroad, such as war crimes or crimes against humanity, under the principle of 'universal jurisdiction.' Universal jurisdiction allows national courts to prosecute individuals for serious crimes, regardless of where the crime was committed, if the suspect is present within its borders. This principle is based on the understanding that crimes like genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity harm everyone in the global community, and helps to ensure accountability, especially if the country where the crimes occurred is unwilling or unable to prosecute.

Article 2(1)(a) Dutch International Crimes Act provides for universal jurisdiction. According to this article, universal jurisdiction applies when "jurisdiction is based solely on the nature and gravity of the crime, regardless of whether there is a direct link to the legal order of the state claiming that jurisdiction". On this basis, Dutch authorities can prosecute the most severe crimes, such as the crime of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity, committed outside of the Netherlands if (a) the perpetrator is in the Netherlands, or (b) the crime is committed against a Dutch national and/or (c) the crime is committed by a Dutch national.

In this case, the accused entered the Netherlands in 2021, where he continued to reside on a temporary residence permit. Therefore, he falls under Dutch jurisdiction, enabling the Dutch authorities to prosecute the accused for the crimes he allegedly committed in Syria. This aligns with the Netherlands' commitment to upholding international human rights standards and ensuring accountability for grave violations of international (criminal) law.

4. What is the broader significance of this case?

This case is significant on multiple levels.

Primarily, it offers victims an opportunity to seek justice and potential reparations for the severe harm they have suffered. Beyond their individual cases, this case is potentially groundbreaking as it is the **first case in the Netherlands involving crimes against humanity in the form of sexual violence**, and is the **first Assad regime-related case concerning a high-level perpetrator**. This marks an important step in reinforcing international legal norms and in acknowledging the experiences of survivors of sexual violence during armed conflict, helping to ensure that perpetrators of sexual violence face justice.

A successful prosecution could also pave the way for similar cases in the future. It would create an important legal precedent in Dutch and international courts, showing that national courts can successfully enforce international laws against serious crimes like crimes against humanity. Overall, this case sends a strong message that such crimes will not be tolerated, and that perpetrators, regardless of their rank or position, will be held to account.

5. When is the trial scheduled?

The substantive trial in the Druten arrest case will take place in April-May 2026:

- April 8, 9, 13, 14, 21, 22 & 23 | May 12 & 26.

The verdict will be delivered on **9 June 2026**.

6. What is the role of the Nuhanovic Foundation in this case?

Together with two Syrian partner organisations, **Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression (SCM)** and the **Syrian Centre for Legal Studies and Research (SCLSR)**, the Nuhanovic Foundation cooperates with the Public Prosecutor's Office and supports victims and witnesses in the investigation with logistical and legal aid.

It also actively monitors the ongoing investigation and trial hearings, and communicates about the latest developments through its public channels.

Stichting The Nuhanovic Foundation

Contact

mail@nuhanovicfoundation.org
www.nuhanovicfoundation.org

Address

Amsterdam Law Hub
Nieuwe Achtergracht 164
1018 WV Amsterdam