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**On the International Day in  
Support of Victims of Torture:**

New Information Reveals the Deaths of Thousands  
of Forcibly Disappeared Persons in the Detention  
Centers of the Former Syrian Regime Raising the  
**Death Toll to 45,342**

Thursday 26 June 2025





The Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR), founded in June 2011, is a non-governmental, independent group that is considered a primary source for the OHCHR on all death toll-related analyses in Syria.

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## **FIRST: DOCUMENTING THOUSANDS OF DEATHS UNDER TORTURE AFTER THE OPENING OF DETENTION CENTERS FOLLOWING THE FALL OF THE ASSAD REGIME:**

Since 2011, the network has devoted continuous, systematic efforts to documenting torture practices that have been a cornerstone of repressive policies and contributed to the spread of enforced disappearances and deaths in detention centers. Over the past fourteen years, the network has created a massive database based on the testimonies of thousands of survivors and relatives of victims, supported by visual and documentary evidence. This database has served as a primary reference in numerous international investigations and UN mechanisms.

Between March 2011 and the fall of the regime in December 2024, Syria witnessed one of the most widespread and systematic campaigns of repression, with torture used as a structural tool of state policy and a central means of arrest, revenge, and liquidation of opponents. The four security and military agencies (Air Force Intelligence, Military Security, State Security, and Political Security), along with military and civilian prisons and unofficial detention centers, have committed violations amounting to crimes against humanity, within the framework of a policy adopted at the highest levels of command. SNHR documented [at least 72 methods](#) of physical, psychological, and sexual torture, including: severe beatings, electric shocks, stress positions, simulated drowning, deprivation of food and medical care, sexual violence, prolonged solitary confinement, and more. These methods affected all categories of detainees without exception, including children, women, the elderly, and people with disabilities.

These methods were practiced systematically and continuously from the moment of arrest and throughout the duration of detention, often without any legal basis or judicial oversight, reflecting the institutional nature of this crime. As a result of the accumulation of these violations over the years, detention centers have become sites for the liquidation of political opponents and peaceful dissidents, and sometimes entire regions.

Despite the Syrian Arab Republic's commitments to the 1984 Convention against Torture, which it ratified in 2004, the former Assad regime failed to take any effective steps to prevent torture or hold perpetrators accountable. On the contrary, it provided legislative and security cover to protect perpetrators, refused to cooperate with UN mechanisms, and barred independent international organizations from accessing its detention centers.

On the occasion of the International Day in Support of Victims of Torture, which falls on June 26 of each year, the Syrian Network for Human Rights issues its annual report to shed light on one of the most heinous systematic crimes to which Syrians have been subjected since March 2011. The 2025 report comes at a pivotal moment following the fall of the Bashar al-Assad regime on December 8, 2024, and the subsequent disclosure of information from documents, records, and contact with thousands of families. All of this has proven to us that a large number of forcibly disappeared persons have died in regime-run detention centers, leading to a sharp increase in the documented toll of victims who died under torture or in inhumane detention conditions, according to the Syrian Network for Human Rights' database.

With the fall of Bashar al-Assad's regime, the human rights situation in Syria, particularly the issue of torture, is entering a new phase. Uncovering the truth, ensuring criminal accountability, providing redress for victims, and reforming the security and institutional apparatuses are imperatives that cannot be postponed. This 2025 annual report serves both a documentary and an analytical role, highlighting the catastrophic toll of torture in Syria over the past decade and calling for urgent national and international action to provide justice to victims, hold perpetrators accountable, and build new security and judicial institutions based on respect for the law and human rights.

## **SECOND: DATA ON VICTIMS WHO DIED UNDER TORTURE SINCE MARCH 2011 AND THEIR DISTRIBUTION ACCORDING TO SNHR'S DATABASE:**

The year 2025 witnessed a significant increase in the number of documented victims of torture in Syria. This is primarily due to the availability of thousands of testimonies, documents, and evidence revealing the deaths of tens of thousands of forcibly disappeared persons in previous periods. Their deaths were confirmed through official documents, data issued by civil registry offices, reports from detention centers, and testimonies from survivors inside these centers, following the collapse of the security system that had systematically withheld this information.

It's worth noting that the majority of the victims added to this year's tally were not killed in 2025 itself, but rather occurred in previous years, specifically between 2011 and 2014, the period that witnessed the peak of the campaign of arrests and enforced disappearances. However, documenting their deaths was impossible at the time due to the strict security grip and the authorities' refusal to hand over the bodies or acknowledge the deaths. The Syrian Network for Human Rights documented thousands of cases before the fall of the Assad regime, and we issued numerous reports and statements. However, due to these challenges, thousands of cases remained undocumented. We were able to document them after the fall of the Assad regime.

Therefore, the increase recorded in 2025 does not reflect an escalation in practices, but rather a qualitative development in detection and documentation capabilities, which has enabled us to prove the deaths of thousands of people previously recorded as forcibly disappeared.

SNHR confirms that a large portion of these victims are still legally considered to be forcibly disappeared, given the failure to return their bodies, the failure to fully disclose the circumstances of their deaths, and the failure to hold accountable those responsible for their torture and murder.

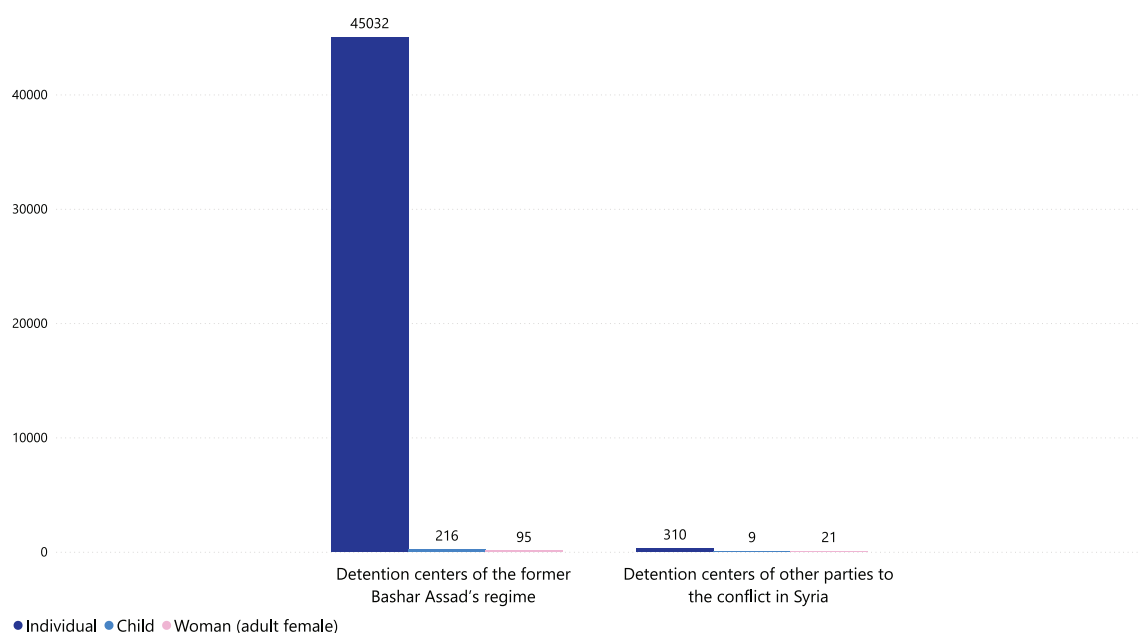
According to SNHR's database, at least **181,244 individuals**, including 5,332 children and 9,201 women, remain detained or forcibly disappeared in detention centers run by various entities inside Syria from March 2011 to June 2025. Of these, at least **177,021 individuals**, including 4,536 children and 8,984 women, are classified as forcibly disappeared. Data shows that the vast majority of them were arrested in connection with the popular movement and were arbitrarily detained without due process or fair judicial proceedings.

According to the Syrian Network for Human Rights database, the number of victims killed due to torture in Syria from March 2011 to June 2025 was at least:

● **45,342 individuals, including:**

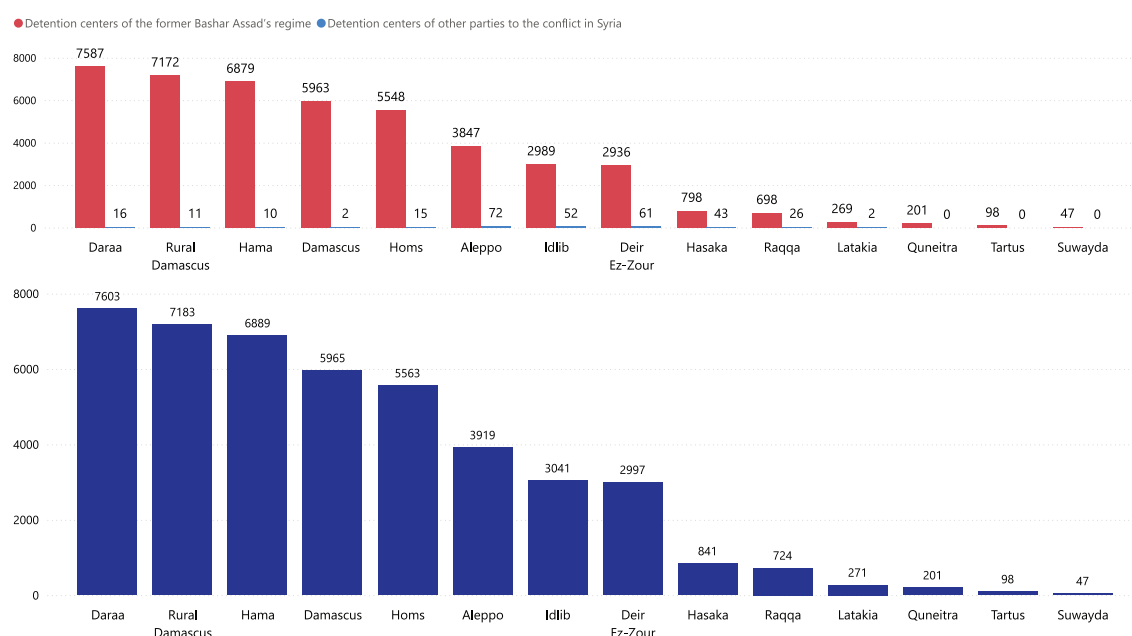
- 225 children
- 116 women

This toll was distributed as follows:



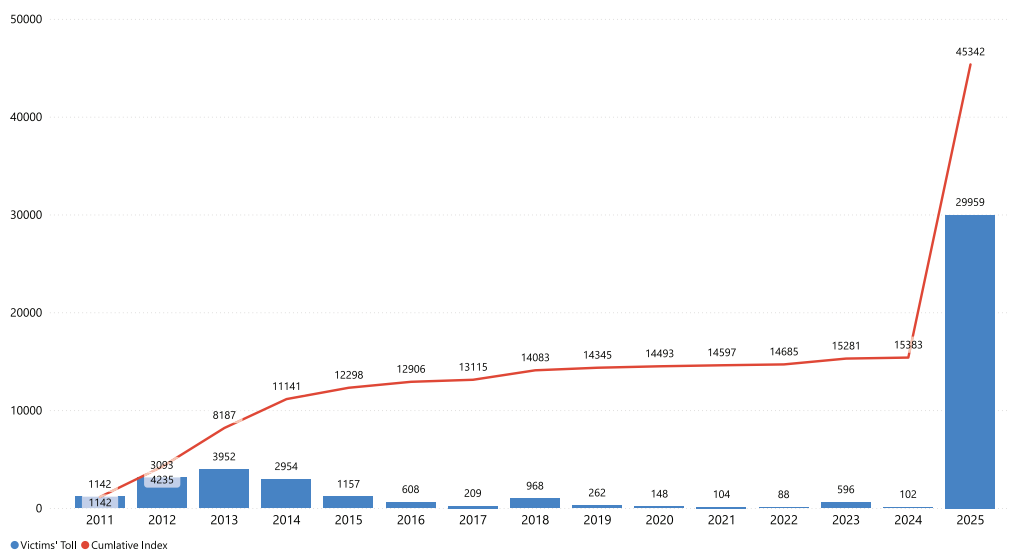
Data shows that at least 99% of deaths under torture occurred in detention facilities run by the former Syrian regime (Bashar al-Assad's regime), which ran the country's central security and military infrastructure during the years of conflict. This percentage indicates that torture was not the result of individual transgressions or isolated incidents, but rather a systematic, planned practice, implemented on a widespread scale, and with direct or implicit support from senior levels of power. According to international standards, particularly Article 7 of the Rome Statute, this pattern of abuse amounts to a crime against humanity, as it was committed as part of a general policy targeting civilian groups in a repeated and systematic manner.

The following is a distribution of victims who died due to torture across Syrian governorates:



We note from the previous chart that the governorates of Daraa and Rif Dimashq, followed by Hama and Homs, are at the forefront of the governorates that have lost their citizens due to torture. We have observed that personnel of the Bashar al-Assad Regime frequently practice torture based on the victim's affiliation with an area opposed to his regime, as a form of collective revenge in its detention centers.

A chart showing the distribution of torture victims in Syria by year since March 2011:



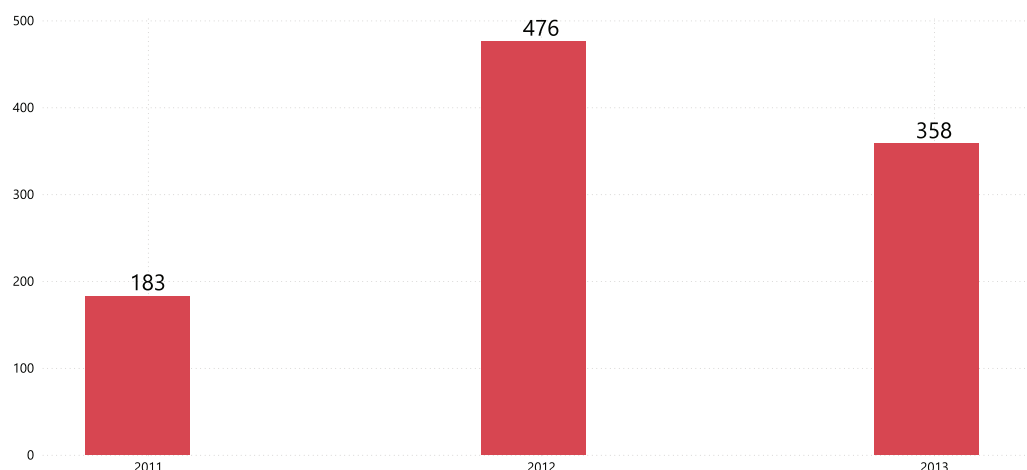
The chart shows that 2025 recorded the highest number of documented deaths due to torture, due to additional information becoming available during that year. Such as official documents and records, which revealed the deaths of a large number of detainees who had been forcibly disappeared. This was followed by 2013 and 2012, the years that witnessed the highest rates of arrest and enforced disappearance.

### Identifying victims in leaked photos from military hospitals:

The leaked photographs from military hospitals, known as the “Caesar Photos,” represent some of the most striking visual evidence of the systematic torture practices associated with the detention centers of the former Bashar al-Assad regime. Since 2015, the Syrian Network for Human Rights has identified 1,017 victims in these photographs through a complex and cross-referenced process. Of the approximately 6,786 victims who appeared in the leaked photos and cross-referenced the 1,017 identities with those we previously recorded in our database of those killed by torture, we found that 836 cases were previously recorded, while 181 cases had not been recorded.

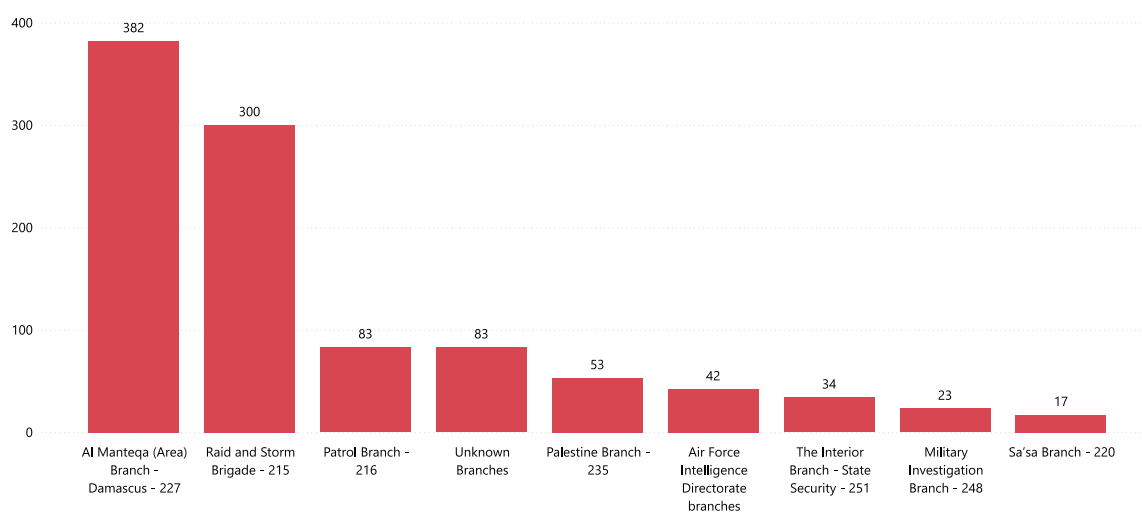


A chart showing the distribution of torture victims identified by the Syrian Network for Human Rights through leaked photos from military hospitals, according to the date of their arrest by Bashar al-Assad's regime forces:



The data indicates that the highest percentage of identified victims were arrested in 2012, 2013, and 2014, a period that witnessed an unprecedented escalation in arrests and enforced disappearances, reflecting the security forces' aggressive approach to suppressing the popular movement in its early stages.

A chart showing the distribution of torture victims whose identities we were able to identify through leaked photos from military hospitals, according to the security branches where they were killed:



The chart of the death toll we were able to identify through leaked photos from military hospitals shows that the majority were killed in Branch 227 (known as the Area Branch) and Branch 215 (known as the Raid and Storm Brigade). This is consistent with the Syrian Network for Human Rights' database, which shows that these two branches are among the main security branches where detainees and forcibly disappeared persons died.

### **THIRD: ACCOUNTABILITY AND JUSTICE AS A GATEWAY TO ENDING IMPUNITY AND PREVENTING THE RECURRENCE OF TORTURE IN SYRIA:**

The crime of torture is one of the most egregious violations of human dignity, and continued impunity in this context poses a direct threat to any serious effort to build a state based on the rule of law. The rule of the former Bashar al-Assad regime was characterized by a systematic policy of impunity. No security or political official was held accountable for hundreds of thousands of incidents of torture and resulting deaths, despite the gravity of these violations and Syria's ratification of the Convention against Torture in 2004. However, the regime has flagrantly violated its international obligations by providing legal and practical protection to perpetrators, refusing to cooperate with UN mechanisms, and preventing independent international oversight of its detention centers.

In this context, the fall of the regime and the beginning of the transitional phase place a historic responsibility on the new authorities, and with them on Syrian society as a whole, to dismantle this legacy and address it in a serious and institutional manner. This requires adopting a comprehensive plan to address the issue of torture, based on the following:

#### **1. Comprehensive criminal accountability:**

- Opening independent and credible national investigations into torture crimes committed since 2011 and before.
- Empowering the judiciary to prosecute perpetrators of these crimes at all levels, without exception or impunity.
- Cooperating with international mechanisms (such as the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism (IIIM)) and national courts with universal jurisdiction.

#### **2. Truth disclosure and institutional transparency:**

- Disseminate the results of investigations into incidents of torture and enforced disappearance to the public.

- Facilitate victims' families' access to information about the fate of their loved ones and enable them to claim their legal rights.

**3. Redressing harm and providing justice to victims:**

- Officially recognize victims' rights and consider them victims of grave violations.
- Launching psychological, health, and social support programs for torture survivors.
- Providing fair material and moral compensation to victims and their families, including symbolic reforms and appropriate exemptions.

**4. Institutional reform and ensuring non-recurrence:**

- Dismantle the security agencies implicated in torture crimes and restructure them in accordance with human rights and the rule of law.
- Purge institutions of individuals implicated in serious violations and bar them from holding public office in the future.

**5. Amend national legislation to comply with the Convention against Torture and criminalize all forms of torture without statute of limitations or legal exemption.**

**6. Transitional justice as an integrated process:**

- Integrate the torture case into a comprehensive national transitional justice strategy that includes accountability, reparations, truth-telling, and institutional reform.
- Involve civil society and victims in formulating and implementing this strategy to ensure that the true interests of those affected are represented.

## **FOURTH: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS: TOWARDS ADDRESSING THE LEGACY OF TORTURE AND BUILDING AN EFFECTIVE TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE PROCESS:**

### **Conclusions**

- The torture practices committed in detention centers of the former Bashar al-Assad regime, including death under torture, constitute a crime against humanity under Article 7 of the Rome Statute, given their widespread and systematic nature and the targeting of civilians as part of a state policy.
- The continued use of torture in some detention centers that were or continue to be operated by other parties to the conflict reflects a failure to respect international human rights law and places the responsible parties at risk of international accountability.
- Statistics confirm that more than 99% of deaths under torture occurred in detention centers run by the former Bashar al-Assad regime, highlighting the institutional nature of this crime and calling for urgent action at the national and international levels.

### **Recommendations:**

#### **First: The Transitional Government:**

1. Officially recognize the crimes of torture and abuse in detention centers as part of the gross human rights violations suffered by Syrians and take clear steps to address them within the transitional justice process.
2. Conduct a comprehensive inventory of official and unofficial detention centers used by the former Bashar al-Assad regime and investigate the nature of the violations committed within them, including interviewing former employees and witnesses.
3. Protect evidence and records related to detainees and torture victims, and ensure they are not tampered with or destroyed, given their legal and human rights importance for any subsequent investigations.
4. Review and suspend all legislation and administrative orders that legislate or provide legal protection for perpetrators of torture, and work to enact laws consistent with the Convention against Torture.
5. Preventing the conclusion of any political or judicial settlements that perpetuate impunity or legitimize past violations.

6. Ensure the cooperation of transitional institutions with relevant UN mechanisms, particularly the International Commission of Inquiry and the International Impartial Mechanism (IIIM) and provide them with necessary documents and evidence upon request.
7. Launching a comprehensive national reparations program for victims and their families, including material and moral compensation, psychological and social support, and symbolic recognition of victims' status in the public sphere.
8. Include the torture issue in educational curricula and the public narrative of the new state, as part of national reconciliation, preventing the recurrence of violations, and promoting a culture of human rights.
9. Ensure that those directly or indirectly involved in torture crimes are not permitted to hold any security or administrative positions and implement strict institutional vetting procedures as part of the reform process.

## **Second: The Syrian Judiciary and Concerned Legal Institutions:**

1. First, we must work to ensure the independence of the judiciary, then open judicial investigations into torture-related crimes in accordance with international standards and prosecute those responsible at all levels without statute of limitations or exceptions.
2. Develop the tools of the national judiciary to enable it to prosecute crimes against humanity, including crimes related to torture and enforced disappearance, and establish specialized units for these cases.
3. Strengthening cooperation with local and international human rights organizations that possess databases and documented testimonies of victims and survivors, to be used as evidence in accountability processes.

## **Third: The International Community and UN Entities:**

1. Continue supporting documentation and accountability efforts related to torture crimes in Syria and provide technical and logistical assistance to independent Syrian bodies working in this field.
2. Expand the jurisdiction of international and national courts with universal jurisdiction to prosecute those involved in torture crimes in Syria, including those residing outside the country.
3. Supporting psychosocial rehabilitation programs for victims, especially those who have been subjected to severe forms of torture and sexual abuse, and providing specialized, long-term services.



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*No justice without accountability*

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