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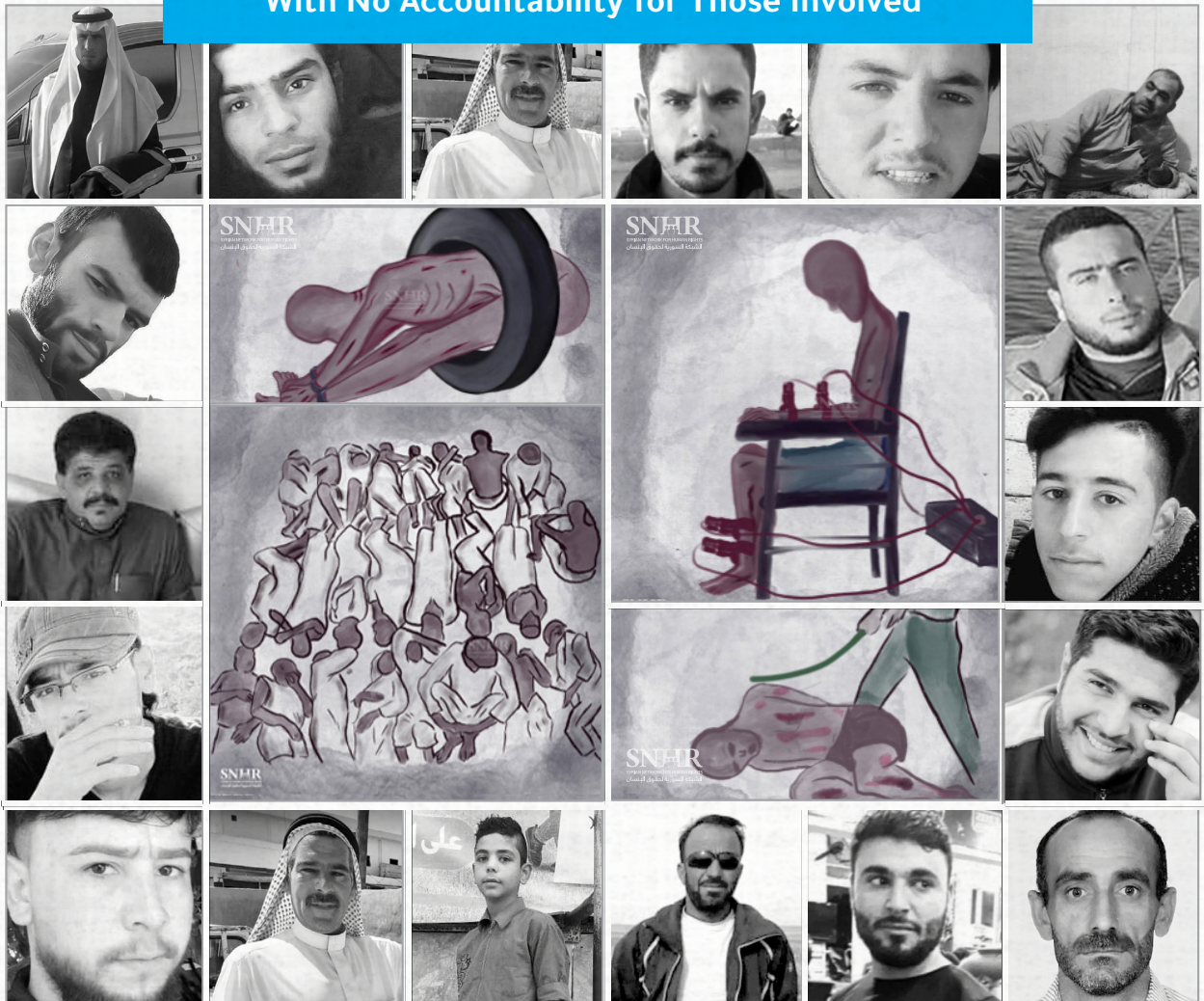
Bilagsnr.:	1912
Land:	Syrien
Kilde:	The Syrian Network for Human Rights
Titel:	SNHR's 12th Annual report on torture on the International Day in Support of Victims of Torture - A Total of 15,281 Deaths Due to Torture and Medical Negligence Documented, Including 198 Children and 113 Women, As Torture Practices Continue in Syria With No Account-ability for Those Involved
Udgivet:	26. juni 2023
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	8. september 2023

SNHR's 12th Annual Report

on Torture in Syria

on the International Day in Support
of Victims of Torture

**A Total of 15,281 Deaths Due to Torture and Medical
Negligence Documented, Including 198 Children and
113 Women, As Torture Practices Continue in Syria
With No Accountability for Those Involved**



Monday 26 June 2023

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 analyzes in Syria.

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I. Restoring Relations With the Syrian Regime Further Emboldens it to Kill Thousands of Syrian Citizens Under Torture

Torture is organically related to the process of arbitrary arrest and enforced disappearance, but is not restricted to those multi-faceted crimes. Since the start of the popular uprising in March 2011, the practices incorporated by the regime's security apparatus have exponentially expanded. In effect, security forces can detain, degrade, abuse, torture, and, if they so wish, release any Syrian citizen, since they possess unrestricted powers, thanks to which it is impossible to hold any of the regime's personnel accountable. In cases of arbitrary arrest, which can last for years, the levels of torture increase and become more compounded as time passes, potentially leading to death under torture or due to medical negligence, which is a form of torture in and of itself.

The torture practices inflicted by the regime's security services can be seen across all Syrian governorates. This is not unusual since the system used by the regime's security authorities is based on subservience to a centralized authority that practices deliberate, calculated, and unified torture policies. The fact that hundreds of thousands of Syrians endure horrific torture, which has been fatal in thousands of cases, only further confirms that this is a deliberate, calculated policy by the Syrian regime which constitutes a crime against humanity against the Syrian people, invalidating any attempt at claiming a legitimate right to power. In theory, since protecting the Syrian people is a fundamental part of the ruling authority's responsibilities, ensuring the people's safety and wellbeing should always be paramount and rank higher than any ruler. In reality, however, the Syrian regime has failed to launch even one investigation, or hold even one officer accountable for unspeakably horrific violations by any of its personnel even after the deaths of at least 15,000 Syrian citizens due to torture in recent years. Indeed, as we have observed, some of the officers and individuals involved in torture practices have been promoted as a reward for their loyalty, implicating themselves along with the regime in the systemic practice of torture.

As mentioned earlier, torture is a violation that is organically related to the multi-faceted violations taking place in the regime's detention centers, as well as being inflicted by the other parties to the conflict and controlling forces. Torture has been practiced routinely for over 12 years. Today, over 155,000 people are still arrested and/or forcibly disappeared at the hands of the parties to the conflict and controlling forces in Syria according to the information contained on databases stored by the Syrian Network of Human Rights (SNHR). The Syrian regime is responsible for 88 percent of all cases of enforced disappearance, and the overwhelming majority of these detainees are political prisoners who have been detained in the context of the popular uprising, with all of them having been subjected to one or multiple form(s) of torture for years. It is important to remember that there is no time limit or other limit to the torture inflicted on detainees, which starts from the very first moment after the victim's arrest, which is carried out without any parameters that can be, even remotely, described as 'legal'. What follows is endless suffering under the regime's systemic and vast machinery of torture of various forms; we will outline these in this report which is the result of our ongoing monitoring of torture cases and our extensive communication with survivors and victims' families, which have enabled us to compile large quantities of information and evidence, every item of which has been carefully verified and cross-checked in order to ensure scrupulous levels of credibility and objectivity, with SNHR documenting and storing all this information on a special database designated specifically for the victims of torture.

Among the worst, most shameful aspects of these torture-related violations, which we will also summarize here through the use of cumulative graphs, is the fact that these violations continue to this day with no accountability for anyone involved, even for the lowest-ranking perpetrators. This impunity has led to an increase in the torture figures documented over the years, further emboldening the perpetrators to intensify and even flaunt the level and magnitude of brutality used in detention centers. Simultaneously, this shameful impunity has created a sense of pessimism and despair among the Syrian people, coupled with an overwhelming feeling of hopelessness and lack of belief that the perpetrators will ever face justice or be held accountable while in Syria, or that their violations against Syrians will ever end.

While one cannot deny the positive significance of the trials and convictions of a handful of regime personnel in other nations under the universal jurisdiction principle, the Syrian regime feels no real concern about such cases due to their limited effect.

One of these cases is that of Anwar. R., who was convicted by the Higher Regional Court in Koblenz, Germany on January 13, 2022. Anwar. R. was tried for his part in the Syrian regime's machinery of torture, having headed the interrogation department at Branch No. 251 (al-Khatib Branch), which is affiliated with the Syrian regime's General Intelligence Directorate, between January 2011 and September 2012. In that trial, SNHR provided a file containing the details of 58 Syrian citizens who died due to torture in al-Khatib Branch during Anwar R.'s tenure as head of interrogation.

SNHR also provided supporting data in the trial of doctor Alaa. M. who was accused of crimes that amounted to crimes against humanity. A total of 18 charges were named in his indictment, which included killing, torture, and inflicting physical and mental harm upon detainees arrested by the Syrian regime on the grounds of their political opposition, with the crimes taking place between 2011 and 2012 in military hospitals in Homs and Damascus, as well as the 261 Military Intelligence Prison 261 in Homs.

Fadel Abdul Ghany, SNHR Executive Director says:

“This report comes at a time when some Arab states have decided to restore relations with the Syrian regime. We want this report to show those states and other states that the Syrian regime is still practicing the most horrendous methods of torture against women, children, and all arbitrarily detained victims, currently numbering approximately 136,000. Restoring relations with the Syrian regime before releasing detainees is giving the regime a green light to eliminate those detainees. It is well-known that the regime has an atrocious history involving the killing of thousands of political dissidents.



1. Taken from:

The UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.
<https://bit.ly/3PfnQZ4>

Methodology

On June 26 of each year, SNHR releases its annual report on torture in Syria in observance of the International Day in Support of Victims of Torture. Our team works tirelessly to document new cases of torture every year and to monitor the methods of torture used by the parties to the conflict and controlling forces in Syria, so as to assess if torture practices have continued at the same rate or have decreased. Such an assessment is usually conducted by comparing the more recent statistics with those included in last year's report. While SNHR regularly reports news on torture survivors or deaths due to torture, our annual report gives a more comprehensive picture of torture in Syria since it includes an update on the death toll of victims who have died due to torture since the beginning of the popular uprising in March 2011 up until the date of the release of this annual report (in this case, until June 2023). This comprehensive update draws upon the new figures and cases documented throughout the previous year. It is our hopes that this periodic report can inform decision-makers worldwide on the reality of torture in Syria.

In our work, we use the definition of torture stated in the 1984's Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. Article 1 of the Convention states that torture **"means any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person for such purposes as obtaining from him or a third person information or a confession, punishing him for an act he or a third person has committed or is suspected of having committed, or intimidating or coercing him or a third person, or for any reason based on discrimination of any kind, when such pain or suffering is inflicted by or at the instigation of or with the consent or acquiescence of a public official or other person acting in an official capacity. It does not include pain or suffering arising only from, inherent in or incidental to lawful sanctions."**¹

This report draws upon interviews we conducted with victims' families and torture survivors who were released from detention centers controlled by the different parties to the conflict. We have conducted the interviews with our customary utmost care and consideration for the safety and wellbeing of the victims, as well as for the members of SNHR's team. We used various means to conduct the interviews, including phone calls and various communication applications, as well as personal visits in Syria and abroad. This report contains 20 accounts, all of which we obtained directly, rather than from second-hand sources. In some of the interviews, we used aliases to preserve the privacy of the eyewitnesses and protect them from persecution or pursuit by security forces. The eyewitnesses have received no compensation or promises of compensation for agreeing to the interviews. We have informed them of the purpose of the report and received their permission to use the information they provided in service of the purposes of this report and our documentation efforts in accordance with our internal protocols to which we have strictly adhered for years, and which we always strive to update to ensure the optimal levels of psychological care for the victims.

It is important to note that all the figures included in this report reflect cases of different nature, which is natural in the Syrian context and the extraordinary challenges we face in the course of our work. Regardless of the incident, we ensure that the following details are included for each case: name, date and place of detention, circumstances of detention, the party responsible for the arrest, enforced disappearance, and torture, the last time the victim was seen, and the most recent documents available on the victim, in addition to other particulars.

Our IT team has designed special software to maintain a database for each party to the conflict, which includes features for categorizing cases according to governorate, gender, social/academic status, age group, and place of arrest. All data are entered automatically. As such, SNHR's database allows us to sort cases based on the governorate where the arrest took place, or the victim's governorate of origin. In this report, we have sorted cases according to the governorate of origin, rather than the governorate where the torture took place, since the place of the incident or violation, in the overwhelming majority of cases, are the detention centers located in Damascus city. A second reason for this decision is to give a sense of the magnitude of loss and violence that each governorate has suffered compared to other governorates. We have protocols in place to secure the data included on SNHR's databases, in addition to the backup copies in our possession.

In light of the extraordinary difficulties faced in documentation and the magnitude of the violations in Syria, this report only reflects the bare minimum of the violations that have actually taken place there. The actual numbers of victims are far higher. This report also does not cover the psychological ramifications suffered by torture survivors. For more details, please see our [methodology](#).

II. Sixty Two Cases of Torture/Death due to Torture Sent in One Year (June 2022-June 2023) to the Special Rapporteur on Torture

As we are aware of the importance of maintaining regular channels of communication with the various UN organs to report on what is happening in Syria at the UN level, SNHR has been working regularly with the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (COI) since the first weeks of its establishment, and regularly corresponds with UN special rapporteurs within the framework of certain conditions that involve communicating with the victims and their families to build comprehensive and separate cases for each victim, so we can correspond with the special rapporteurs only after we have acquired the complete information on a case. As such, we make sure to regularly remind families to work in cooperation and coordinate with us, so we can submit as many cases as possible. Special rapporteurs contact the Syrian regime regarding some of the cases that they have been able to verify, and also include said cases in the appendixes to the reports on torture released by the UN team on torture. Furthermore, in most cases of death due to torture, the victims' bodies are not returned to their families, meaning that these individuals are still classified as forcibly disappeared, which is why we send two messages to the Special Rapporteur on torture for each of these cases.

We have spared no effort to make our team accessible via all communication channels available to the Syrian people. We also have [a form](#) on our website for victims' families to report their cases; once completed, this is sent automatically to our team dealing with arrest and torture, who then follow up on each case and contact the family to complete the documentation process.

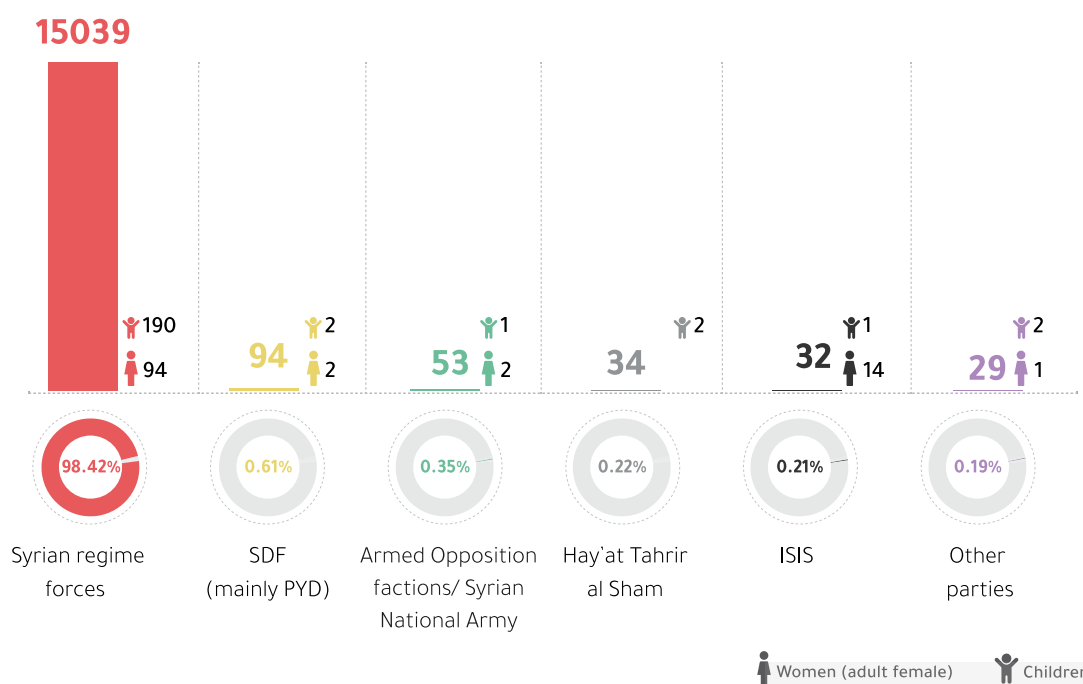
Since [our last annual report](#), we have submitted documents on 62 newly reported cases of torture/death due to torture to the UN Special Rapporteur on torture. It should be noted that we do not publish data on all the cases we have relayed to the UN Special Rapporteur on torture, either at the request of the victims or their families, or from psychological and security concerns for the wellbeing of the eyewitnesses. In other words, we only publish the cases that victims' families have agreed to be published.

III. Update of the Death Toll of Victims Killed due to Torture and Their Distribution According to SNHR's Database

According to SNHR's database, between March 2011 and June 2023, we documented the killing of no fewer than 15,281 individuals who died due to torture, including 198 children and 113 women (adult females), perpetrated by the parties to the conflict and controlling forces in Syria. The death toll is distributed as follows:

- **Syrian regime forces:**² 15,039 victims, including 190 children and 94 women.
- **ISIS:** 23 victims, including one child and 14 women.
- **Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS)**³ : 34 victims, including two children.
- **Kurdish-Led Syrian Democratic Forces "SDF" (Mainly the PYD):** 94 victims, including two children and two women.
- **All armed opposition factions/Syrian National Army (SNA):**⁴ 53 victims, including one child and two women.
- **Other parties:** 29 victims, including two children and one woman.

The graph below shows the distribution of arrest and/or enforced disappearance cases between March 2011 and March 2023 at the hands of the parties to the conflict and controlling forces in Syria.



2. We generally use the term 'the Syrian regime' rather than 'the Syrian government', because the nature of the ruling power in Syria is a totalitarian dictatorship where power is concentrated in the hands of a small circle of individuals, namely the President of the Republic and the heads of the security apparatus. As a result, the ministers, including the Prime Minister and the Minister of Interior, play a restricted, largely ceremonial role, which is limited to implementing precisely what the ruling regime orders, with no real decision-making power or active role of their own. Syria is under autocratic/family rule, with no independent decision-making structure. Rather, the government is an empty façade merely for show. The Minister of Interior receives orders from the security branches over which he supposedly presides. The Minister of Justice cannot even summon a low-ranking security office, let alone a security branch head. Syria is ruled by the president assisted by the heads of the security branches.

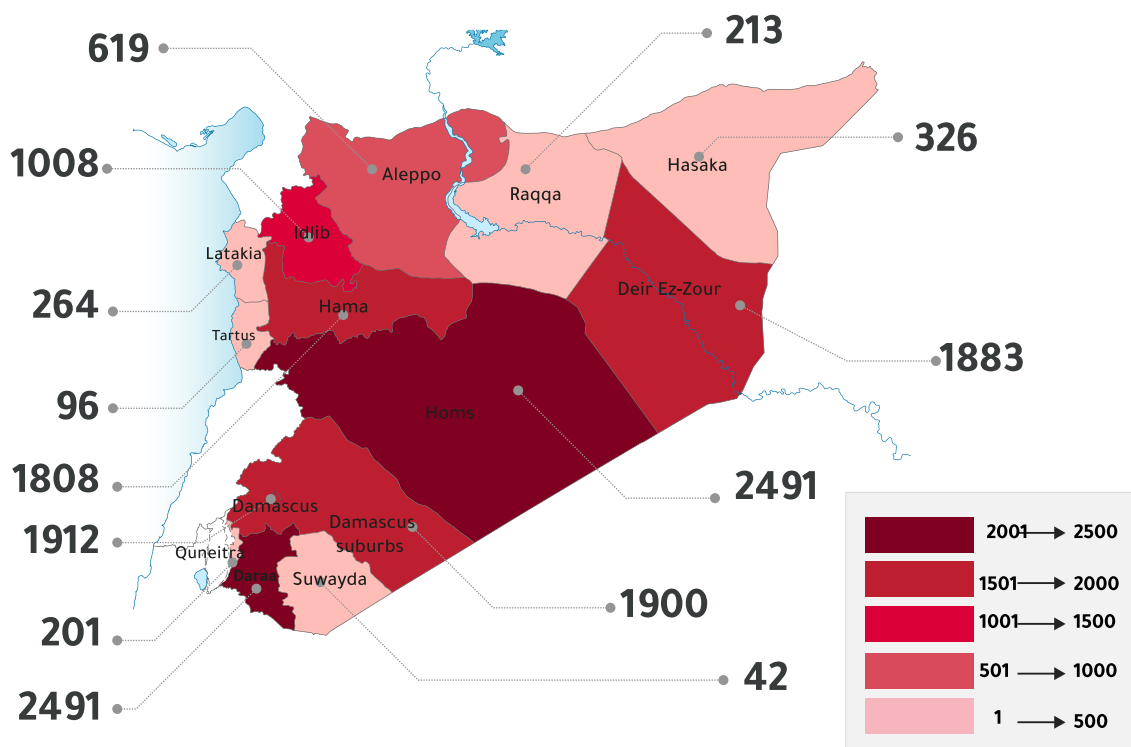
While we are aware that the United Nations and its agencies use the term 'the Syrian government', we believe that this is a completely inaccurate and misleading term in the Syrian context.

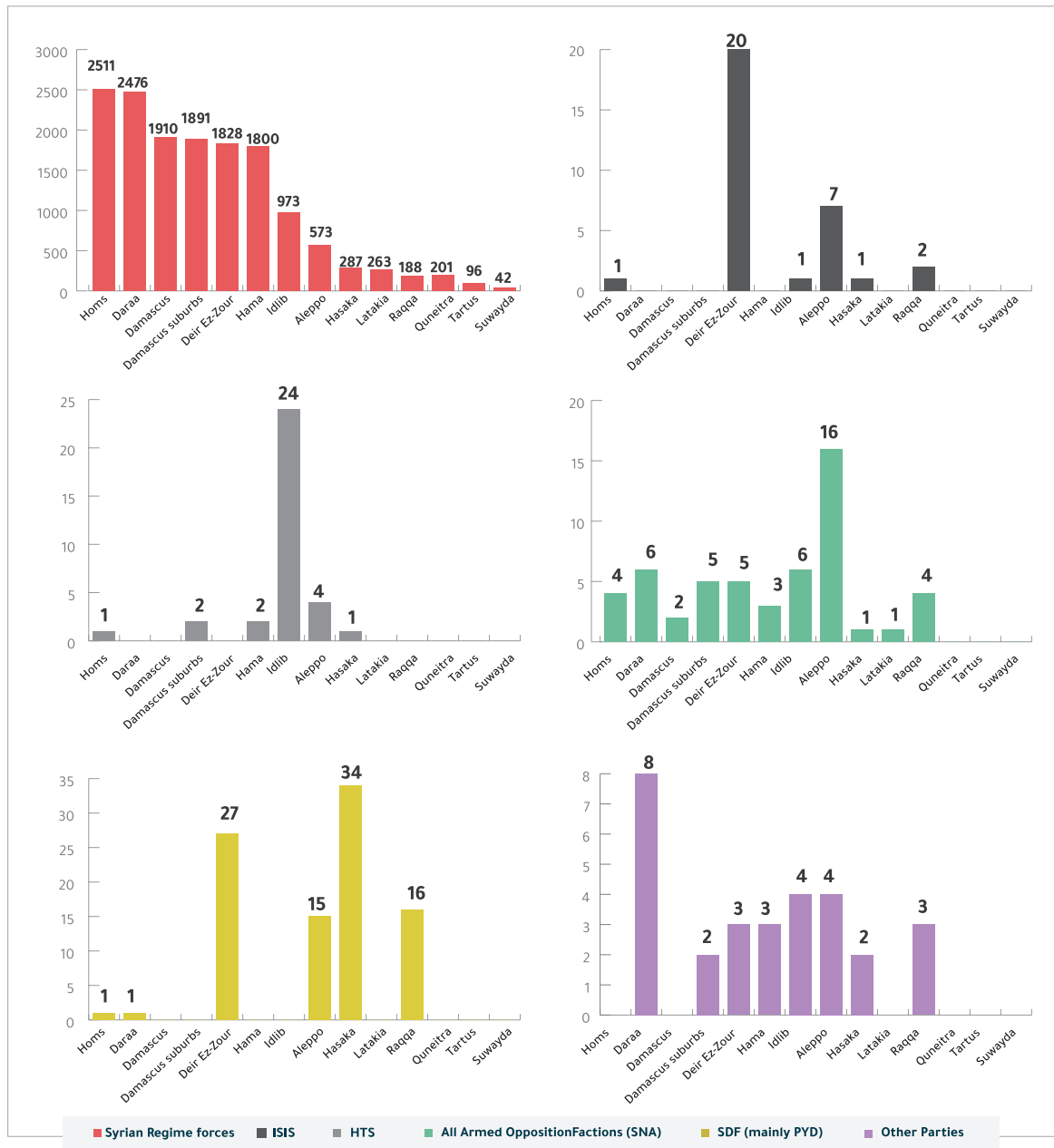
3. Designated by the UN as a terror group.

4. All armed opposition factions/SNA, whether active and defunct, that have been established since 2011 in all their current and previous areas of control.

As SNHR's data confirms, the Syrian regime is responsible for the vast majority of arrests of those detained and/or forcibly disappeared. Every detainee is subject to one or multiple form(s) of torture, which is consistent with the fact that the Syrian regime has been responsible for the majority of victims who have died due to torture. In fact, the chart on deaths due to torture shows that Syrian regime forces are responsible for no fewer than 98 percent of all deaths of this type. This large number of deaths due to torture confirms that torture is a systematic, calculated, and repeated practice for the regime, and has been used against tens, if not hundreds of thousands of detainees. As such, these actions constitute crimes against humanity. Most of these deaths occurred due to a combination of torture and lack of medical attention, with the detainees left to suffer agonizing pain until their death without receiving any form of medical treatment.

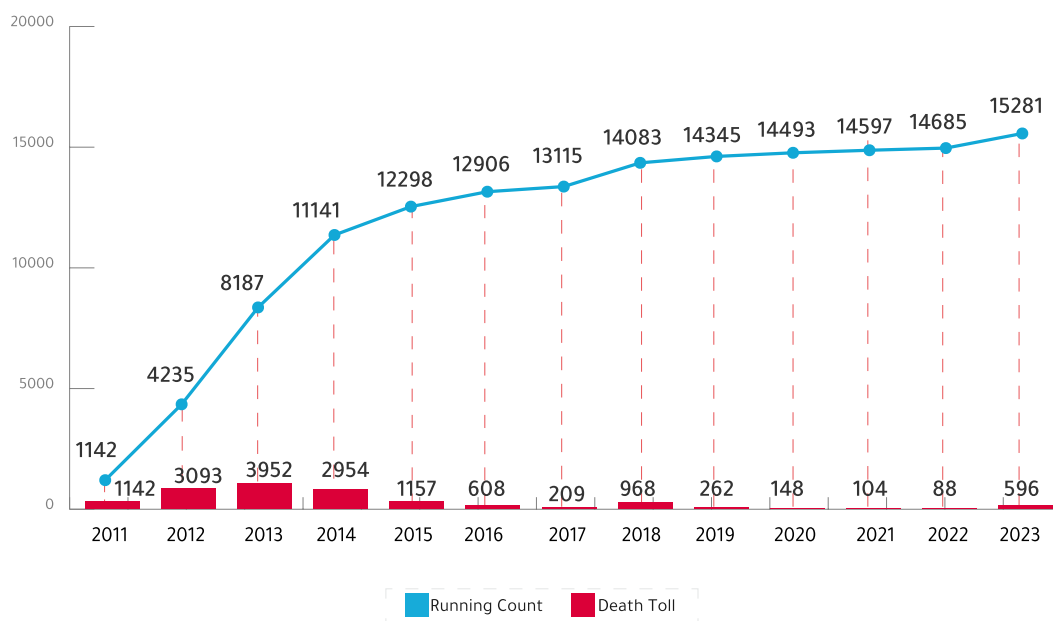
The map below shows the distribution of victims who died due to torture across Syrian governorates.





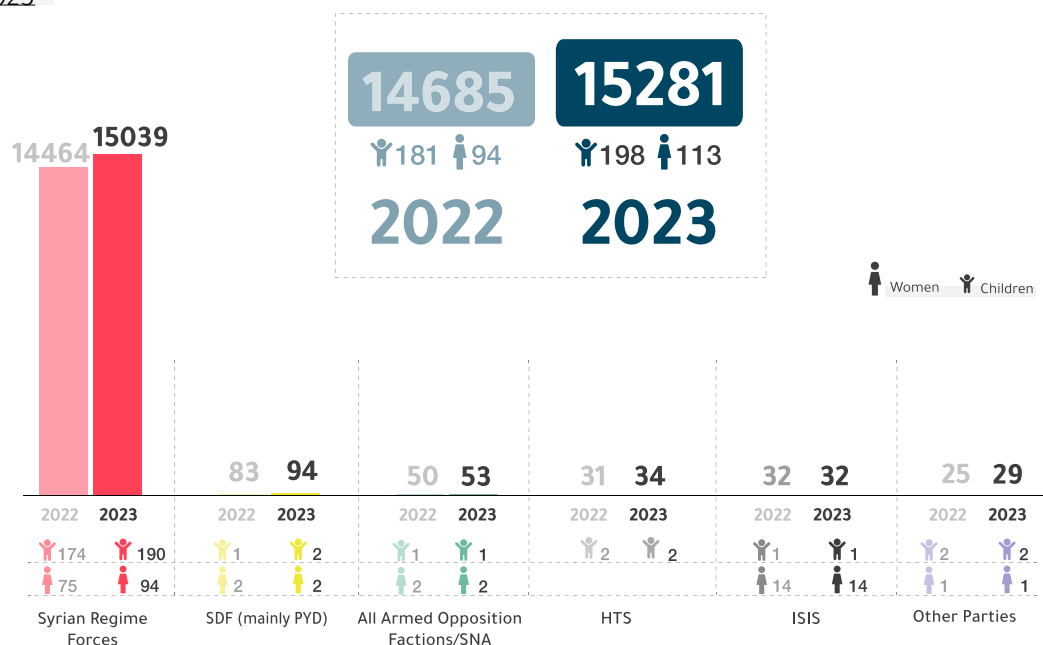
As the map above shows, the people of the two governorates of Homs and Daraa have experienced more bereavements as a result of deaths due to torture than any other governorate. We have documented repeated instances of the regime routinely inflicting torture on the basis of the victim originating from a certain area that was known for being anti-regime as a form of retaliatory collective punishment.

The chart below shows the distribution of deaths due to torture in Syria by year, since March 2011:



The graphs above shows that the years 2013 saw the most deaths due to torture, followed by 2012, then 2014.

Comparison between deaths due to torture from March 2011 until last year's report in June 2022 and until June 2023



As the tables above show, there has been an increase in the number of deaths due to torture documented, mainly in the detention centers of the Syrian regime, which suggests that torture practice never stopped, and that more victims than previously continue dying due to torture. SNHR has been able to acquire hundreds of new death certificates for persons forcibly disappeared by the Syrian regime, which has contributed to the increase in the number of documented deaths due to torture.

IV. Torture and the Syrian Regime (Army, Security forces, and local and foreign militias)

A. No fewer than 136,000 detainees and forcibly disappeared persons in regime detention centers are still being subjected to various forms of torture

The entire process of unlawful detention/arbitrary arrest is an interconnected series of actions which constitute multiple forms of torture, starting with the Syrian regime's failure to adhere to the arrest conditions specified in the Syrian Constitutions and the Syrian laws.⁵ These 'arrests' are more akin to abductions and involve an excessive use of violence, verbal and physical abuse, and vicious beatings, which usually start from the very first moment of arrest, with the level of violence peaking during interrogations that usually take place inside the detention centers operated by the regime's four main security apparatuses. Moreover, this torture continues as long as the detainee remains in detention, being exacerbated through subjecting detainees to cruel and inhumane conditions of imprisonment, in addition to referring them to [extraordinary security courts](#), whose procedures are similar to the interrogations seen in security branches.

According to SNHR's database, no fewer than 135,481 individuals, including 3,693 children and 8,478 women, arrested between March 2011 and June 2023 are still under arrest in regime detention centers. Of these, at least 96,096 individuals, including 2,327 children and 5,739 women, are still classified as being forcibly disappeared. There is no doubt that all of these individuals - those who've survived to date - are subjected to one or multiple form(s) of torture. In a previous, extensive report, SNHR detailed the most notable methods of torture used by Syrian regime forces in their detention centers and military hospitals - we catalogued [a total of 72 methods](#) of physical, psychological, and sexual torture regularly practiced in a deliberate and widespread manner in the regime's various detention centers. Moreover, these 72 torture methods are used against all detainees, including women, children, elderly people, invalids, and detainees with special needs, with no exceptions whatsoever. Detainees must endure these atrocious conditions every moment of every day for long years. Almost every current and former detainee has experienced at least one form of torture during their detention, even if they were only detained for a few hours.

Torture is practiced inside regime detention centers in line with a well-planned, central, comprehensive, and calculated policy in which the overwhelming majority of detention centers are implicated, and involves all the different echelons of power among the regime's security apparatus, from the lowest to the highest-ranking officers. Torture is used for different goals and motives, such as:

- To extract confessions which are later used to bring various charges against the detainees, given a lack of any tangible evidence to convict them except for such 'confessions' coerced through torture.
- To take collective retaliation and revenge against all dissidents who dared to oppose the ruling authority (with detainees automatically classified in this category simply by virtue of being arrested), or because of their dissident activism.
- To spread mass terror and fear among the public.
- To exact revenge based on geographical, sectarian, or ethnic grudges against people from certain areas known for their involvement in the popular uprising against the Syrian regime.

5. We include an outline of the arrest conditions specified in the Syrian law [in our monthly report on arrest and detention in Syria](#).

Part of the torture process, including the different methods and atrocious imprisonment conditions, is the total absence of sanitary conditions, basic hygiene and ventilation, with large numbers of detainees packed into small, filthy, unventilated cells without the capacity to accommodate the numbers crammed into them, to the extent where all the prisoners cannot simultaneously sit or lie down. Furthermore, detainees are deprived of proper clothing, and are deliberately starved, receiving only miniscule portions of food, in addition to being denied any medical care or transfer to medical facilities for treatment of injuries or serious illness if required. Even in rare cases when detainees who've suffered critical injuries or chronic medical conditions are transferred, they are subjected to further torture in the regime's military hospitals. We shed light on the torture practices against prisoners taken to military hospitals in a study [on the photographs of torture victims that were leaked from military Syrian hospitals](#). In fact, the medical personnel at these military hospitals are themselves involved in inflicting torture, [which, needless to say, goes against the Hippocratic oath and the hallowed fundamental ethical principles of the discipline of medicine that healthcare workers, more especially doctors, should uphold, more especially since they are also compelled to protect prisoners and detainees from torture and other forms of cruel, inhumane, or degrading treatment by a UN resolution](#) approved by the UN General Assembly (UNGA) and adopted on December 18, 1982.

B. Law No. 16 'The Law on Criminalizing Torture', promulgated by the Syrian regime in March 2022, is meaningless, with more victims of torture documented since its promulgation

On March 30, 2022, the head of the Syrian regime formally passed Law No. 16 criminalizing torture.⁶ SNHR has already released a report in which we detailed the legal loopholes that the Syrian regime deliberately included in the texts of the law. In the report, we also examined the dysfunction at the level of the regime's torture machine and the legalizing institutions of the Syrian regime used to legitimize it. That [report](#) stressed at the time that this law would prove to be nothing more than empty words, and would do nothing to deter the regime's security apparatus from its systemic practice of torture for long as the ruling regime's other oppressive laws remain in effect,⁷ which provide the regime's security apparatus with official impunity against prosecution, despite contradicting with many of the articles of the Syrian Penal Code and the current constitution. To make matters worse, the law lacks any genuine or clear mechanism that victims' families and surviving torture victims can use to report the torture being inflicted or take legal action given the absolute hegemony of the regime's security apparatus, and the absence of any guarantee of safety or protection for a complainant, such as ensuring they maintain anonymity or of any protection for witnesses, experts and their family members.

Over one year has passed since Law No. 16 of 2022 was passed. In that time, SNHR has documented the deaths due to torture of no fewer than 48 individuals in regime detention centers (between March 30, 2022 and June 2023). Not one family member of those victims was able to make any form of complaint to any judicial or executive entity against those who took the lives of their loved ones under torture. Instead, we recorded many summons issued by security forces in all Syria's governorates to the relatives of torture victims to bring them in for interrogation and order them not to publicize the news of their loved ones' deaths, threatening them with arrest for failure to comply. We also documented a number

6. Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA). (2022, March 30). "President Assad Passes a Law Criminalizing Torture" [Alra'ais allasad yuldir qinwnan ltjrym al-taldhlb]. Syrian News Arab Agency (SANA). Retrieved June 15, 2023, from <https://bit.ly/3Nw8LRj>

7. For an overview of those laws, see our [monthly reports on arrest and detention in Syria](#).

of arrests/detentions targeting civilians for voicing their demands to implement the regime's own Law on Criminalizing Torture, following the appearance of some videos online in which regime personnel were shown torturing civilians in public places. Given these coercive policies, the bereaved families found themselves forced to remain silent about their loved ones' death and abstain from holding any type of funeral service. Naturally, this complicated SNHR's work in documenting victims of torture, as victims' families were understandably afraid of putting themselves at risk of being persecuted and hunted by security forces for getting in touch with us. Finally, the Syrian regime has never acknowledged the killing of any of its victims under torture in its detention centers and has never launched any investigation into their deaths.

C. We believe that no fewer than 1,609 forcibly disappeared persons whose deaths were acknowledged by the Syrian regime in its civil register offices, died due to torture.

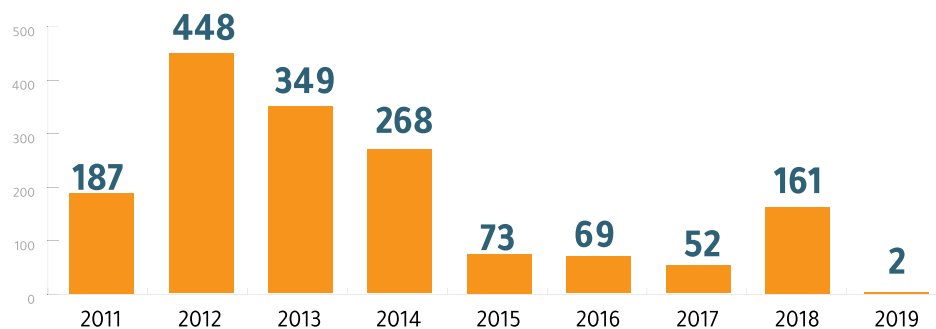
Since early 2018, SNHR has been working to document the Syrian regime's practice of documenting forcibly disappeared persons as dead in the civil registry's records without notifying their families. We have been closely monitoring this unconscionable phenomenon. The starting point for our investigation was the means by which victims' families became aware of the death of their beloved ones, which show the strategy adopted by the Syrian regime of tampering with civil records, as well as with the records of the institution involved. As another part of the investigative process, we've been conducting analysis of the death certificates issued for the victims. We have [released several reports](#) detailing these practices by the regime and their psychological and legal impact on the victims' families. Since 2018, SNHR has received hundreds of death certificates concerning forcibly disappeared persons.

The beginning of 2022 saw a significant and important development in this regard, with SNHR being able to acquire new death certificates for hundreds of forcibly disappeared persons whose families had not yet been made aware of their death. The victims in these cases, which had also not been made public by civil register offices, included prominent activists in the popular uprising, as well as women and children. We have shed light on some of those cases in an [extensive report](#) released on December 20, 2022. To this day, we are still receiving new cases through our network of trusted and credible sources which we have built up over the years. As such, our team, at this point, has gained a great deal of experience in examining and verifying the authenticity of such documents.

The Syrian regime's horrific practice of documenting forcibly disappeared persons as dead without notifying their families has further exposed the callous and profoundly fascist nature of this regime for everyone to see. The Syrian regime treats Syrian citizens with chilling and reprehensible barbarism that violates all norms and laws. It is important to note that these practices are wholly deliberate and aimed at inflicting as much psychological distress as possible upon the families of the forcibly disappeared as part of the regime's vindictive policy against everyone involved in the popular uprising for freedom that began in March 2011. As more and more deaths are registered as dead, we have grave concerns for the fate of thousands of forcibly disappeared persons in the detention centers of the Syrian regime.

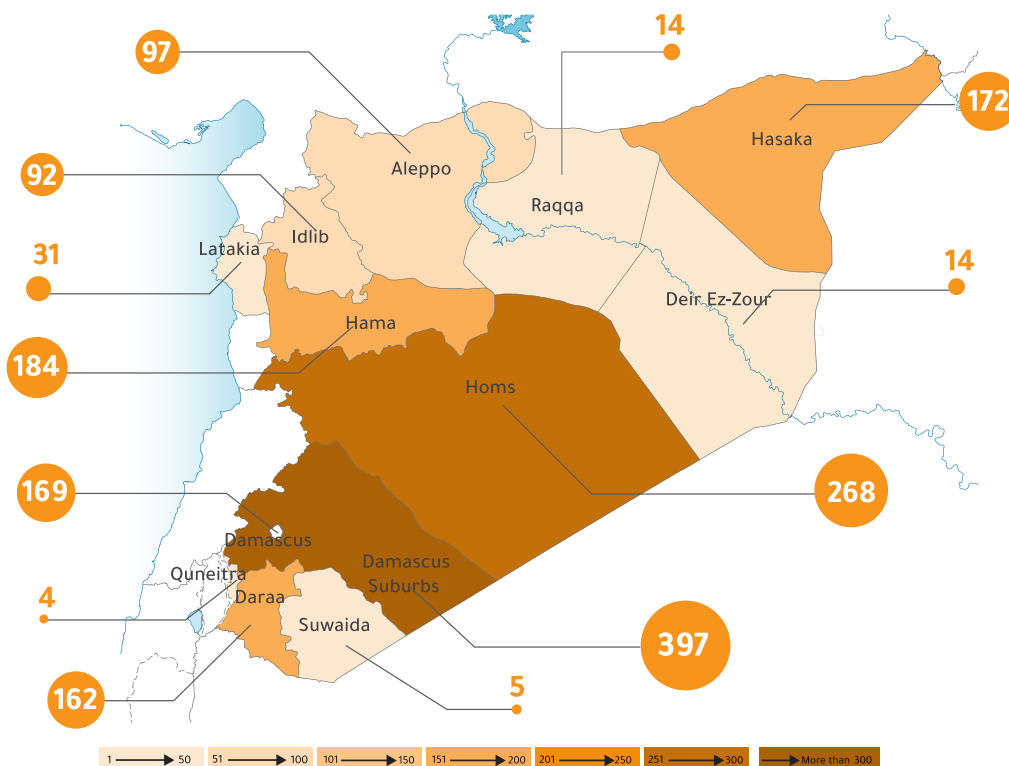
Between the start of 2018 and June 2023, SNHR documented no fewer than 1,609 cases, including 24 children, 21 women, and 16 medical personnel, of forcibly disappeared persons who have been registered as dead in the civil registry's records. No cause of death was disclosed in any of these cases, the victims' bodies have not been returned to their families, and none of the deathss were announced at the time they took place. Among these cases are four whose victims were identified from the photographs leaked from the Syrian regime's military hospitals.

The graph below shows the distribution of persons forcibly disappeared by the Syrian regime who have been registered as dead in the civil registry's records according to the year they were arrested.

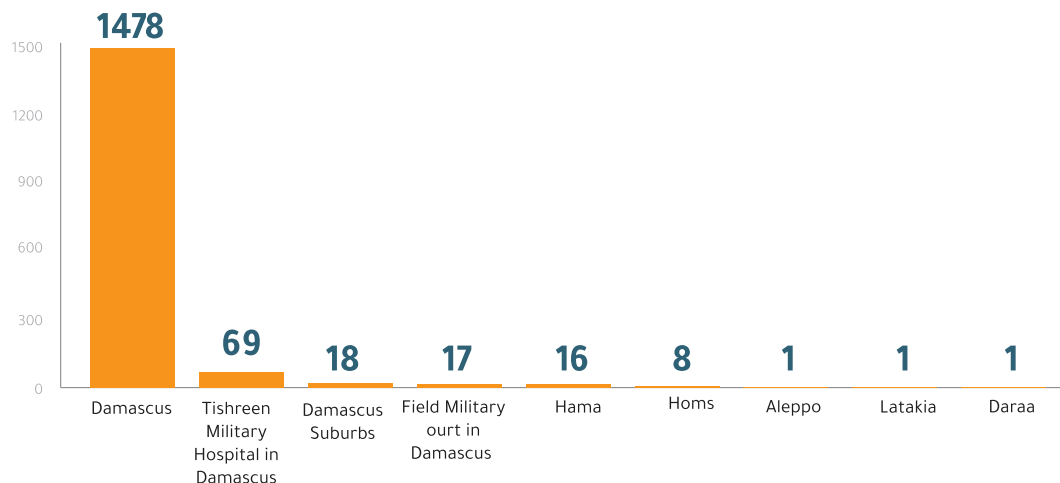


As shown in this graph, the largest proportion of the 1,609 victims whose deaths by torture we have been able to document were arrested by Syrian regime forces in 2012, followed by 2013 and then 2014, which are the years that witnessed the largest wave of enforced disappearances in regime detention centers.

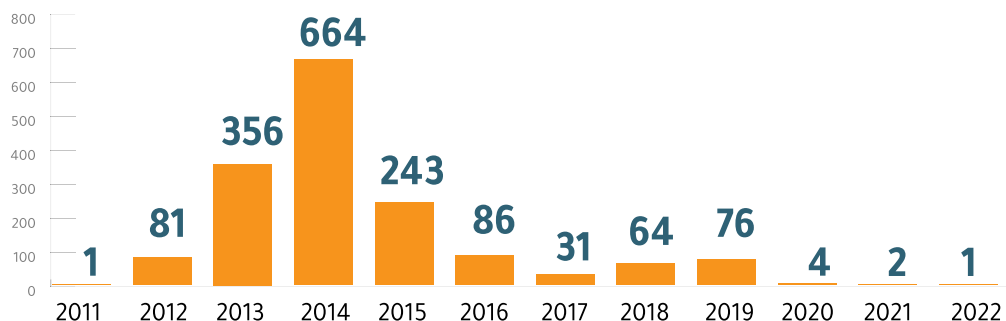
A Map showing the distribution of the forcibly disappeared persons who have been registered as dead in the civil registry according to their governorate of origin



A chart showing the distribution of the forcibly disappeared persons who have been registered as dead in the civil registry according to the place of death recorded on their death certificate by Syrian regime forces.



A chart showing the distribution of the forcibly disappeared persons who have been registered as dead in the civil registry according to the year of death recorded on their death certificate by Syrian regime forces.



As the graph shows, the largest proportion of the deaths of the 1,609 victims whose cases we have been able to document were recorded as dead in 2014, according to the death certificates issued, followed by 2013 and then 2015.

D. No fewer than 1,017 victims who have died due to torture identified in the pictures that were leaked from military hospitals from early-2015 until June 2023

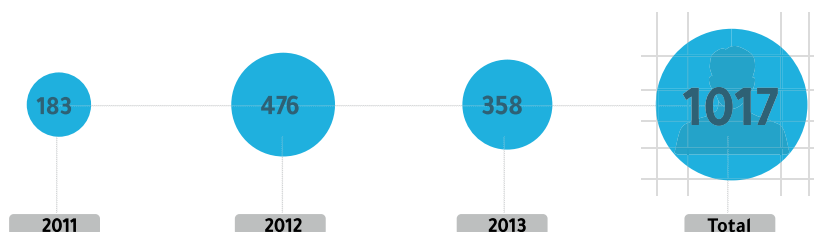
SNHR stores copies of the photographs leaked from the Syrian regime's military hospitals, commonly known as the 'Caesar Pictures'. Since acquiring those pictures, we have set our sights on two goals:

1. Analyze and study any information that can be deduced from the pictures, such as place, time, circumstances. We are proud to say that we achieved this goal within a short time, and released an extensive study on the photos in September 2015 entitled, '[The Photographed Holocaust](#)'. However, our work did not stop there, as we have also been able to obtain new intelligence, either related to the pictures themselves or regarding the general torture strategy used in the regime's detention centers, through victims and eyewitnesses, incorporating our new findings in many reports.
2. Identify the victims that appeared in those pictures. SNHR has given great care to this matter due to its delicate and complex nature, as well as the difficulties found in such tasks. Fully achieving this goal might require years of work and the use of many tools, such as data tools, technical tools, and analytical tools, as well as involving forensic experts and utilizing any information provided by potential victims' families. To reliably identify any victim, we need to utilize our expertise and knowledge to their fullest extend, as we have learned from experience while working on this issue that we cannot rely solely on use of only one tool, except in a very few cases where the victim appears with minimal disfigurement or changes to their face and body, and can be conclusively identified by their loved ones. This is also the case if a victim has distinctive or unusual features on their bodies. Again, however, such cases remains rarities.

As such, making progress in identifying victims from these photos has slowed down since we first began this work. We have been able to add only a limited number of victim identifications annually, in addition to incorporating new identifying tools and standards that we have also utilized in identifying older cases. Currently, we are in the process of verifying around 611 more cases that we are still working to identify.

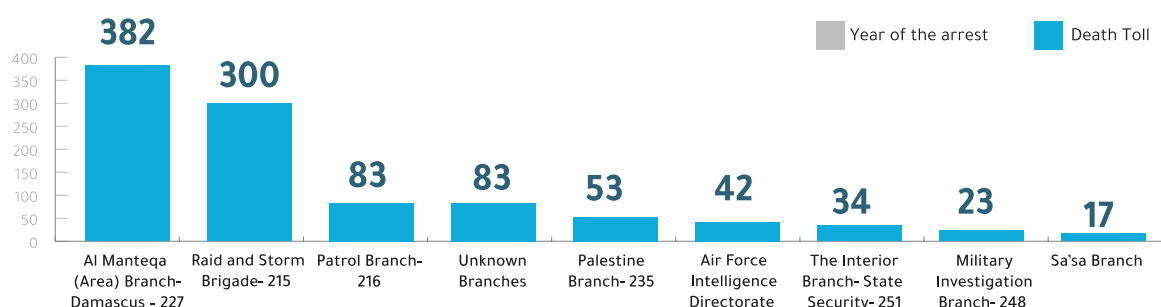
Since the beginning of 2015, we have been able to identify 1,017 of the 6,786 victims who appeared in the Caesar Pictures. On cross-checking the 1,017 identified victims against our database on the victims who died due to torture, we have found out that 836 of these deaths had already been registered in our records, while the remaining 181 were not found on our database.

The chart below shows the distribution of the victims who died due to torture who SNHR has been able to identify to date from the leaked photos of Syrian regime victims by the year of their arrest by the regime.



As the graph shows, the largest percentage of the victims identified in the photographs leaked from the Syrian regime's military hospitals were arrested by Syrian regime forces in 2012, followed by 2013, and then 2014, which are the years that witnessed the largest waves of enforced disappearance into regime detention centers according to SNHR's database.

The chart below shows the distribution of victims who died due to torture who SNHR has been able to identify from the leaked photos of Syrian regime victims by the year of their arrest, according to the security branch in which they died.



As the graph shows, the largest proportion of the victims identified from the leaked photographs taken in the Syrian regime's military hospitals were killed in Branch 227, known as the al-Manteqa Branch, and Branch 215, known as the Sarriyet al-Mudahma wa al-Eqteham (Raid Squad), with these findings being consistent with our data that shows that those two branches are among the main security branches where detainees and forcibly disappeared persons are known to have died.

E. Most notable incidents of death due to torture at the hands of Syrian regime forces during the last year (since our most recent annual report on torture, which was released on this date last year).

Yahya Ali al-Eissa, born in 1962, from Khattab town in the northern suburbs of Hama governorate, was arrested on Friday, May 9, 2014, by Syrian regime forces during a raid on his father's house in the town. He was initially taken to Arza village and then to Deir Shmiel village in the northern suburb of Hama governorate, before being transferred to Hama Military Airbase. He has been classified as forcibly disappeared ever since, with the Syrian regime forces denying any knowledge of his whereabouts and refusing to let anyone visit him, even a lawyer. On Friday, January 6, 2023, his family learned that he had died in a regime detention center in December 2017. SNHR can confirm that he was in good health at the time of his arrest, indicating a strong probability that he died due to torture and medical negligence. SNHR can also confirm that Syrian regime forces have not returned Yahya's body to his family.

SNHR spoke with a friend of Yahya's named Mahmoud al-Jasim,⁸ who told us:

8. Via phone on February 2, 2023/

“Syrian regime forces arrested Yahya during a raid on his family’s home in Khattab town. He was first taken to Arza village, where they tortured him, causing fractures to his leg and hand. Then, he was transferred to the prison in Deir Shmeil village, and then to Hama Airbase, before he was transferred to Damascus. In 2015, a former prisoner who was released from Branch No. 235 told us that he was with Yahya in the same branch. After searching for him, we found out he was transferred to Sednaya Military Prison. Every time his family hears of a prisoner being released from Sednaya, they would go and ask that prisoner about Yahya, but they never received an answer. Subsequently, his family contacted figures with close ties to regime officers to mediate a release in exchange for \$39,000, but they learned that he had died in December 2017.”



Yahya Ali al-Eissa

Ahmad Taysir al-Eissa al-Khatib, from al-Jiza town in the eastern suburbs of Daraa governorate was a 27-year-old media activist and university student at the Media Department in Damascus University at the time of his arrest by Syrian regime forces in late-2018 in Damascus city; he was arrested, despite having previously agreed to a security settlement with the regime. He has been classified as forcibly disappeared ever since, with the Syrian regime forces denying any knowledge of his whereabouts and refusing to let anyone visit him, even a lawyer. On Saturday, July 16, 2016, his family learned that he had died in Sednaya Military Prison in Damascus suburbs governorate. SNHR can confirm that he was in good health at the time of his arrest, indicating a strong probability that he died due to torture and medical negligence. SNHR can also confirm that Syrian regime forces have not returned Ahmad’s body to his family.

SNHR spoke with activist Bassam al-Hadmou,⁹ who is also a friend of Ahmad’s. Bassam told us:

“Ahmad was arrested due to a report written with malicious intents by one of the people residing with him in the university dormitory in al-Mazza area, where he was doing some paperwork related to his mandatory military service and university situation. He was arrested in Damascus city. All attempts to find out any information about him failed, until 2020, when Ahmad’s father, who was arrested two months prior to Ahmad’s arrest, was released. Ahmad’s father told me he’d met Ahmad in Branch No. 248, or the Military Interrogation Branch, in Damascus city, two years before he was released. His family spared to effort to find his whereabouts and get him released, but to no avail. Subsequently, they received the news of his death in Sednaya Military Prison through a regime officer in exchange for a sum of money.”



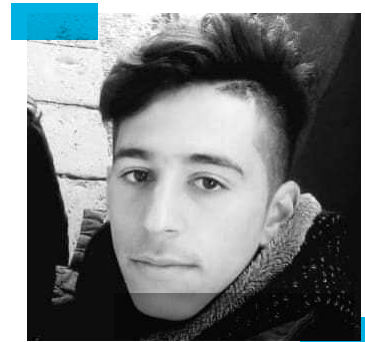
Ahmad Taysir al-Eissa al-Khatib

9. Via phone on December 9, 2022.

Mohammad Ammar al-Zou'bi, born in 1998 from Tafas city in the western suburbs of Daraa governorate, was arrested in January 2019 by Syrian regime forces at a checkpoint on the road connecting the cities of Damascus and Daraa, even though he had previously agreed to a security settlement with the regime. He has been classified as forcibly disappeared ever since, with the Syrian regime forces denying any knowledge of his whereabouts and refusing to let anyone visit him, even a lawyer. On Wednesday, March 2, 2022, his family was informed by regime officials that he had died inside Sednaya Military Prison in Damascus suburbs governorate. On April 3, 2022, his body was returned to his family, bearing signs of torture. SNHR can confirm that he was in good health at the time of his arrest, indicating a strong probability that he died due to torture and medical negligence.

SNHR spoke with a relative of Mohammad's named Mr. Jalal,¹⁰ who told us:

“Mohammad was arrested by personnel affiliated with the Air Force Intelligence Directorate in Dael city. He was transferred to the Air Force Intelligence Directorate in Damascus, and then to Sednaya Military Prison. His family hired a lawyer to follow on the case, and paid him large sums of money in the hopes he could get [Mohammad] released, but that did not work. After regime forces told the family that he had died, however, the family instructed the lawyer to negotiate with the regime to obtain his body. The body was delivered on April 3, 2022, with signs of torture.”



Mohammad Ammar al-Zou'bi

Osama Hussein Za'tour, born in 1977 from Helfaya city in the northern suburbs of Hama governorate, was resident in Lebanon when he was arrested on Wednesday, November 6, 2019, by personnel from the Syrian regime's Air Force Intelligence Directorate at a checkpoint set up at the entrance to Homs city, while he was returning to Lebanon. His family was able to visit him in Sednaya Military Prison in Damascus suburbs governorate in 2020. On Saturday, July 23, 2022, his family was informed by regime personnel through a lawyer that he had died in a regime detention center on Thursday, October 7, 2021. SNHR can confirm that she was in good health at the time of her arrest, indicating a strong probability that he died due to torture and medical negligence. SNHR can also confirm that Syrian regime forces have not returned Osama's body to his family.

SNHR spoke with a relative of Osama's named Ahmad Faraj,¹¹ who told us:

“Osama was arrested at an Air Force Intelligence checkpoint on his way back from Lebanon to Helfaya city in Hama suburbs to visit his family. This is according to the taxi driver he was with. Osama was living and working as a laborer in Ma'ad area, which is administratively a part of the Byblos District in Lebanon before the start of the uprising in Syria. After his arrest, we tried to find out his fate or any information about him through intermediaries and through paying money, but

10. Via phone on April 6, 2022.

11. Via phone on September 25, 2022

with no success. This involved us getting scammed multiple times: The first time we paid 8 million S.P., and the second time 55 million S.P. to intermediaries from the regime. After that, we hired a lawyer. In 2020, his brother was able to visit him in the Black Prison inside Sednaya Military Prison, after which point we received no new information about him. Subsequently, an intermediary told us he died in 2021 without mentioning the cause or place of death.”



Osama Za'tour

Khaled Sheikhmous Qasim, born in 1991 from Ras al-Ein city in the northwestern suburbs of Hasaka governorate, was living in Babbila area in Damascus suburbs governorate at the time when he was arrested in 2019 by Syrian regime forces while he was leaving Babbila on his way to arrange a security settlement with the Syrian regime. He has been classified as forcibly disappeared ever since, with the Syrian regime forces denying any knowledge of his whereabouts and refusing to let anyone visit him, even a lawyer. On Friday, November 25, 2022, his family found out that he had been registered in the civil registry as having died on February 6, 2020, in a regime detention center in Damascus city. SNHR can confirm that he was in good health at the time of his arrest, indicating a strong probability that he died due to torture and medical negligence. SNHR can also confirm that Syrian regime forces have not returned his body to his family.

SNHR spoke with a relative of Khaled's named Mohammad Aref,¹² who told us:

“Khaled was living in the Babbila area in Damascus suburbs. After the Syrian regime lifted the siege on the area and unveiled it is accepting settlements, someone told the men there that it is necessary that they go and rectify their security situation with the regime. As such, Khaled decided to comply, so he can get his mother and siblings and return to his home city of Ras al-Ein [in Hasaka]. However, he was arrested by the regime on the pretext that he is wanted for mandatory military service. After his arrest, we lost any contact with him. We were trying to find out any information about him, and whether he was in the military or had been detained. Subsequently, we found out that he was being held in Sednaya Military Prison, and so we tried by all means to obtain permission to visit him, with no success. Then, we hired a lawyer and she told us that he'd been designated as a terrorist. The lawyer checked with the civil register office and obtained a death certificate, which showed that he was registered as having died on February 6, 2020.”



Khaled Sheikhmous Qasim

12. Via phone on December 13, 2022.

Ali Walid al-Masri, born in 1999 from al-Mazyreeb town in the western suburbs of Daraa governorate, was arrested on Thursday, September 24, 2020, by Syrian regime forces on the road between the town and Daraa city. He has been classified as forcibly disappeared ever since, with the Syrian regime forces denying any knowledge of his whereabouts and refusing to let anyone visit him, even a lawyer. On Tuesday, November 29, 2022, his family received information confirming that Ali had been executed by Syrian regime forces in a detention center in accordance with the sentence passed against him by the Field Military Court in May 2022. SNHR can confirm that Syrian regime forces have not returned Ali's body to his family.

SNHR spoke with a relative of Ali's named Ref'at al-Ashqar,¹³ who told us:

"Ali was arrested only a few hours after he'd been released by the State Security branch in Aleppo city. He was transferred to Kuweires Military Airport in the suburbs of Aleppo governorate, and then to al-Mazza Military Airbase in Damascus city. He was held for one year and one month at the Air Force Intelligence branch, before he was transferred to Sednaya Military Prison on November 11, 2021. During that time, his family tried to get him released by any means available, but to no avail. They hired a lawyer to follow up his case, and she informed them that he'd been referred to the Field Military Court and was executed. She was able to provide a copy of the court's sentence and the month in which Ali was executed, which was May 2022."



Ali Walid al-Masri

Emad al-Haj Rahmoun, born in 1966 from al-Zallaqiyat village in the northern suburbs of Hama governorate, was arrested in September 2020 by personnel from the Syrian regime's Military Intelligence Directorate at a checkpoint on the road between the cities of Hama and Mharda in the northwestern suburbs of Hama governorate, while he was travelling to his home village. He was taken to the Military Intelligence branch in Hama city. He has been forcibly disappeared ever since, with the Syrian regime forces denying having him and refusing to let anyone visit him, even a lawyer. On Monday, August 30, 2021, his family learned he had died on August 8, 2021. SNHR can confirm that he was in good health at the time of his arrest, indicating a strong probability that he had died due to torture and medical negligence inside a regime detention center in Damascus city. SNHR can also confirm that Syrian regime forces have not returned Emad's dead body to his family.

On April 2, 2022, SNHR spoke with Emad's brother, Ayman Abdul Hamid Haj Rahmoun¹⁴, who told us:

"Emad was married and the father of three children (two young men and one young woman). One of his children was shot dead by Syrian regime forces in Hama suburbs. Emad was summoned multiple times to the Military Intelligence branch in Damascus (Branch No. 48). After he returned

13. Via phone on December 20, 2022.

14. Via WhatsApp on April 2, 2023

from Jordan and settled in Hama, he was arrested by regime forces at a checkpoint on the road between the cities of Hama and Mharda in Hama suburbs while he was travelling to al-Zallaqiyat village. He was taken to the Military Intelligence branch in Hama city, and 20 days later he was transferred to Branch No. 248 in Damascus, and then to the Palestine Branch (Branch No. 235), and once again to Sednaya Military Prison in Damascus suburbs. We were informed by a regime official that he had died in Sednaya Military Prison.” Ayman added that the family has not received Emad’s body or been given any document confirming his death, adding that the family was never able to visit him throughout his detention period despite many attempts to do so.



Emad al-Haj Rahmoun

Ahmad Hassan al-Nzami, born in 1997 from Erehia village, administratively a part of al-Bseira subdistrict in the eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour, was working as a repairman when he was arrested on Tuesday, March 30, 2021, by Syrian regime forces at a checkpoint in Homs governorate on his way back from Lebanon. He has been classified forcibly disappeared ever since, with Syrian regime forces denying any knowledge of his whereabouts and refusing to let anyone visit him, even a lawyer. On Tuesday, May 17, 2022, his family learned he had died inside a regime detention center. SNHR can confirm that he was in good health at the time of his arrest, indicating a strong probability that he died due to torture and medical negligence. SNHR can also confirm that Syrian regime forces have not returned Ahmad’s body to his family.

SNHR spoke with a relative of Ahmad’s named Aboud al-Mustafa,¹⁵ who told us:

“Ahmad was arrested at a checkpoint that was jointly operated by personnel from the Political Security and personnel from the Military Intelligence. The arrest was made after he entered Syria, coming from Lebanon, while he was heading to visit his family in Erehia village in Deir Ez-Zour. We lost contact with him until April 2021, when a former prisoner who was being held in the Political Security branch in Homs city told us that Ahmad was held with him in the same facility in the State Security branch. Ahmad gave the released prisoner our number when they were in the same cell, so that he can find us when he gets out and tell us about Ahmad.” Aboud added that, after this development, they started the search for Ahmad in the different regime detention centers, but could not find anything, until they were informed by a regime officer that Ahmad had died.



Ahmad Hassan al-Nzami

15. Via phone on September 23, 2022.

Moayed Mohammad al-Ibeid and his son Abdul Aziz, born in 1976 and 1996 respectively from al-Qaryatein city in the eastern suburbs of Homs governorate, they were arrested by Syrian regime forces on Saturday, February 5, 2022, in a raid on their home city. They were taken to the Military Intelligence branch in the badiya or 'desert' area of Tadmur in the eastern suburbs of Homs city. They have been classified as forcibly disappeared ever since, with the Syrian regime forces denying any knowledge of their whereabouts and refusing to let anyone visit them, even a lawyer. On Monday, October 31, 2022, their family learned they had died in Sednaya Military Prison in Damascus suburbs governorate. SNHR can confirm that both men were in good health at the time of their arrest, indicating a strong probability that they died due to torture and medical negligence. SNHR can also confirm that Syrian regime forces have not returned Moayed's and Abdul Aziz's bodies to their family.

SNHR spoke with a friend of Moayed named Mohammad Badr al-Din,¹⁶ who told us:

"Moayed was married and a father to three daughters and two sons. One of his two sons is a 13-year-old with special needs, while the other is Abdul Aziz who was arrested with him. Before the family was displaced, Moayed and Abdul Aziz worked as bakers at a bakery owned by the family. In 2016, Moayed and his family fled the bombardment and the ongoing clashes between the Syrian regime and armed opposition in their home city and went to al-Rukban Camp. However, due to the poor living conditions in the Camp, Moayed decided to rectify his security situation and return to al-Qaryatein city. He and his family left the camp on August 15, 2020, and headed towards Batma point in Damascus suburbs, where those wishing to rectify their security situation were instructed to gather. However, instead of only staying there for 14 days, they had to stay for one month and a half, until September 25, 2020. After the security settlement was agreed, they were transferred to a school in al-Qosour neighborhood in Homs city, which was repurposed as a shelter center supervised by State Security personnel who carried out interrogations. Moayed and his son stayed there for two months, and were interrogated, and subsequently told that they were wanted by the Political Security and Criminal Security on charges of possessing drugs. On December 1, 2020, they were arrested for the first time from the shelter center and taken to the Military Police branch in Homs city, and then to Adra Central Prison in Damascus city, where they were referred to the Counterterrorism Court. In accordance with their settlement, they were released on January 1, 2021, and then returned to al-Qaryatein city. On February 5, 2021, however, while Moayed was in front of his home, Military Intelligence personnel raided his house and arrested him and his son Abdul Aziz for a second time, and took them to the Military Security branch in the Tadmur badiya. They were held there for roughly three months (until early-May 2021). They were transferred to the Palestine Branch in Damascus city. On October 25, 2021, a former prisoner told us that they saw them in the Palestine Branch. In early-December 2021 we received information confirming they were transferred to Sednaya Military Prison. We hired a lawyer, but we could not achieve anything because they were not put on trial. We learned however that they received multiple charges, including cooperating with foreign entities, even though they never left the camp because of the siege imposed, not to mention that Moayed is illiterate. Subsequently, we received verified information that Moayed and his son Abdul Aziz died in Sednaya Military Prison in mid-October 2022. They were executed along with eight other prisoners.

16. Via phone on November 3, 2022



Moayed Mohammad al-Ibeied

Abdul al-Aziz al-Ibeid, Moayed's son

Walid Khaled al-Hussein, born in 2001 from Hatla town in the eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate, was arrested on Friday, April 15, 2022, by personnel from the Syrian regime's Criminal Security who raided his home in the town. He was taken to a regime detention center in Deir Ez-Zour city, and was then transferred to al-Balouna Prison in Homs governorate. He has been classified as forcibly disappeared ever since, with the Syrian regime forces denying any knowledge of his whereabouts and refusing to let anyone visit him, even a lawyer. On Wednesday, February 1, 2023, Syrian regime forces informed his family that he had died in al-Balouna Prison. Walid's body was returned to the family on February 3, 2023. SNHR can confirm that he was in good health at the time of his arrest, indicating a strong probability that he had died due to torture and medical negligence.

SNHR spoke with a relative of Walid's named Mohammad al-Omar,¹⁷ who told us:

"Around 02:00 am after midnight on Friday, personnel from the Criminal Security raided Walid's house and arrested him. He was taken to Deir Ez-Zour Central Prison, and then we learned that he had been transferred to Aleppo Central Prison, and then once again to al-Balouna Prison in Homs governorate. We contacted many regime officers and offered to pay money in exchange for Walid's freedom, but to no success. Subsequently, his family was notified by Homs National Hospital that he had died in al-Balouna Prison. They received his body two days after they were notified by Homs National Hospital."



Walid Khaled al-Hussein

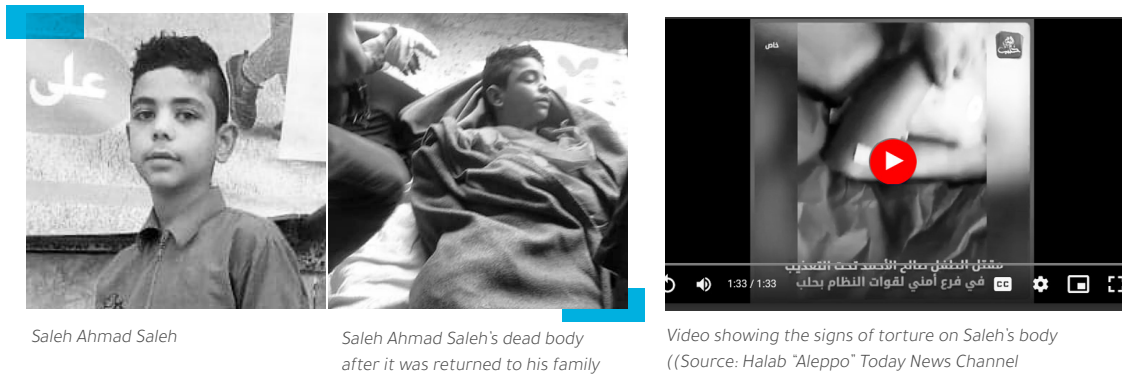
*Walid Khaled al-Hussein after
his dead body was returned to
his family*

17. Via phone on February 3, 2023

Saleh Ahmad Saleh, a child born in 2008 from al-Qameshli city in the northern suburbs of Hasaka governorate, was living with his family in al-Ashrafiya neighborhood in Aleppo city when he was arrested on Saturday, August 13, 2022, by police officers from al-Aziziya neighborhood's Police Station in Aleppo city (affiliated with the Syrian regime) in the area between al-Ashrafiya neighborhood and Masaken al-Sabil in Aleppo city on charges of theft, after they viciously beat him all over his body.

On Sunday, August 14, 2022, Saleh's family received a notice from the al-Aziziya Police Station summoning his father. When Saleh's father arrived at the Police Station, he was informed that his son had committed suicide. The father was asked to receive Saleh's dead body without a medical report, but he refused to receive the body without first obtaining a medical report. The next day, August 15, 2022, Saleh's father received his son's body from the forensic department in Aleppo city after they supported the claims made by the police station that Saleh had taken his own life.

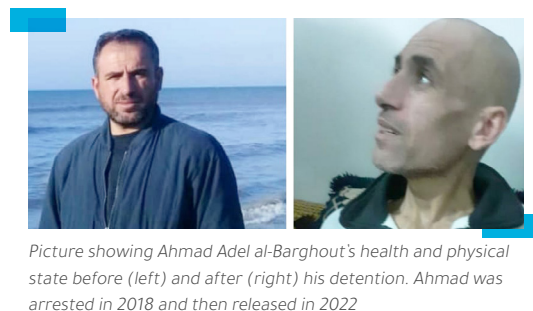
On August 18, 2022, SNHR received photos and videos confirming explicitly and categorically that Saleh had been brutally tortured. SNHR released [a statement](#) condemning the killing of this young boy, a defenseless child.



We have received dozens of pictures contrasting the health and physical condition of detainees before and after their detention. These photos clearly show the regime's utter negligence in failing to provide any health and medical care, which is a grave ongoing risk threatening the physical and mental wellbeing of hundreds of thousands detainees still in detention.

Picture of a detainee after he was released from a regime detention center in late-2022. The picture shows the effects of the medical negligence during detention.

Ahmad Adel al-Barghout, born in 1980 from Khattab town in the northern suburbs of Hama governorate, was arrested by Syrian regime forces in July 2018 at a checkpoint in Misyaf city in western Hama governorate as he was returning from Lebanon. Ahmad was transferred multiple times among different prisons, the last of which was Sednaya Military Prison in Damascus suburbs governorate. He was held for nearly four years and a half. On Tuesday, December 13, 2022, he was released from Sednaya Military Prison.



F. The most notable apparatuses and individuals involved in torture practices inside regime detention centers

The laws put in place by the Syrian regime cannot be used to justify or hide the perpetration of crimes, because those laws, at their core, are not laws but texts that violate the very the foundation of law. We, at SNHR, rely on the definitions found customary humanitarian law in order to hold commanders and high-ranking individuals accountable responsible for the war crimes committed by their subordinates based on their orders,¹⁸ or if it was the case that those commanders “knew, or had reason to know, that the subordinates were about to commit or were committing such crimes and did not take all necessary and reasonable measures in their power to prevent their commission, or if such crimes had been committed...”¹⁹ The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC) expands the confines of this responsibility to include crimes against humanity, whether committed in times of peace or times of war, and war crimes. The Rome Statute holds commanders, including civilian ones, responsible for such crimes.²⁰ Conversely, fighters are responsible for such crimes, even if they were simply executing the orders of higher-ranking officers, for this is not a sufficient justification, since individuals who perpetrate war crimes and crimes against humanity are criminally responsible on the personal level for their actions.²¹ Moreover, the Rome Statute states that, “The fact that a crime within the jurisdiction of the Court has been committed by a person pursuant to an order of a Government or of a superior, whether military or civilian, shall not relieve that person of criminal responsibility...”²² Even though this might be grounds for relieving a punishment, it does not fully relieve the perpetrator of the punishment of their crimes. SNHR has repeatedly stressed in dozens of reports and statements, that it is imperative to abstain from committing any actions that may ultimately lead to the commitment of war crimes or crimes against humanity. In fact, there is a precedent in international law that argues that duress does not afford a complete defence to a soldier charged with a crime against humanity and/or a war crime involving the killing of innocent human beings, except in extreme situations where it is a matter of choice for the accused between complying with orders of killing or be killed themselves.²³

The Syrian regime is implicated in committing widespread and systematic violations, including all its institutions. Many of those violations constitute crimes against humanity²⁴ and war crimes.²⁵ Any and everyone who gave an order, enticed, encouraged, justified, participated, and assisted in or facilitated those crimes is considered involved in said crimes. On the top of those institutions are the regime’s military and security. Truth-finding and international investigation commissions tend to expose the names of individuals implicated in violations. SNHR has been a proponent of this view for years and called on the COI to expose the names of individuals that have been conclusively identified as being involved in horrific violations that constitute war crimes and crimes against humanity.

18. “Commanders and other superiors are criminally responsible for war crimes committed pursuant to their orders.”

International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), [Rule 152](#) of international humanitarian law.

19. “Commanders and other superiors are criminally responsible for war crimes committed by their subordinates if they knew, or had reason to know, that the subordinates were about to commit or were committing such crimes and did not take all necessary and reasonable measures in their power to prevent their commission, or if such crimes had been committed, to punish the persons responsible.”

International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), [Rule 153](#) of international humanitarian law.

20. Article 28 of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

See: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/rome-statute-international-criminal-court>

21. “Individuals are criminally responsible for war crimes they commit.”

International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), [Rule 151](#) of international humanitarian law.

22. Article 33 of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

See: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/rome-statute-international-criminal-court>

23. See:

International Tribunal for the Prosecution of Persons Responsible for Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law Committed in the Territory of the Former Yugoslavia since 1991, PROSECUTOR v. ERDEMOVI, paragraph 17. <https://www.icty.org/x/cases/erdemovic/tjug/en/erd-tsj980305e.pdf>

24. For what constitutes crimes against humanity, see Article 7 of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/rome-statute-international-criminal-court>

25. For what constitutes war crimes, see Article 8 of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/rome-statute-international-criminal-court>

With regard to arbitrary arrest, enforced disappearance, torture, and any related violations, the regime's four main security apparatuses -Military Intelligence Directorate, Air Force Intelligence Directorate, General Intelligence Directorate, and Political Security Directorate- are the ones primarily responsible for the acts of arrest, torture, and enforced disappearance inside their detention centers, as well as a number of military and civilian prisons. We possess a database that include thousands of items of data on individuals who are involved in committing violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law, the positions they have held, the most notable violations we have documented for which they were responsible. We make sure to regularly update our data. We have talked about many of those individuals in our [reports and statements](#) over the past 12 years.

Torture has been practiced in line with a broad methodology that has been deliberately put in motion through a decision made by a hierarchy that begins from the President of the Republic, related to him directly are the ministers of defense and interior and the National Security Bureau, and their affiliated security apparatuses. It should be noted here that decisions of appointments, promotions, and transfers concerning officers that are made by the heads of the security directorates are approved through resolutions and decrees issued exclusively by the President of the Republic. Within the security institutions, the process of executing those decisions is extremely complex and obtuse for a number of reasons, not the least of which is the regime abstaining from making such appointments public. As such, we rely on cross-checking our archives and databases against databases containing the names of individuals involved in human rights and the accumulation of information we obtain from detainees and former officers, as we make sure to regularly contact detention survivors.

As we have been undertaking this process, we have included in past reports an outline on many of the regime's leaderships that we believe are involved in enforced disappearance and torture practices. In this report, we will be publishing a new list of names involved in torture practices inside the main detention centers and the military units.

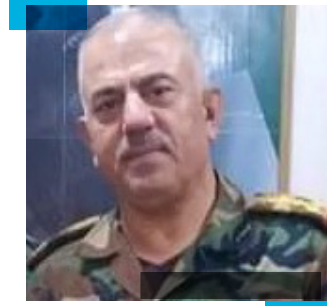
Osama Mohammad al-Ali

A Brigadier general [Amid], born in 1971, from Safita city in the eastern suburbs of Tartus governorate, graduated from the Military College in Homs in 1971 as an infantry 2nd Lieutenant [Mulazim]. He was promoted to Lieutenant colonel [Muqaddam] in 2010. He was deployed as an officer to the Sednaya Military Prison in Damascus suburbs governorate. In 2016, he was appointed as the commander of the Military Police branch in al-Qameshli city in the suburbs of Hasaka governorate, a position he held until 2018, when he was appointed as a deputy-director of the Sednaya Military Prison with a military rank of a Colonel [Aqid]. He has been the director of the Sednaya Military Prison since 2020, and he was promoted to a Brigadier general.

Haytham Majed Barakat

Major general [Liwa], born in 1966, from al-Qerdaha city in the eastern suburbs of Latakia governorate, graduated from the Military College in Homs governorate as a 2nd Lieutenant. In 2011, he was promoted to a Colonel and was deployed to Branch No. 248 (Military Interrogation Branch) in the Kafrsousa area in Damascus city. During his time there, he was involved in many violations against civilians during interrogation at the branch. In 2016, he was promoted to a Brigadier general and was appointed as the

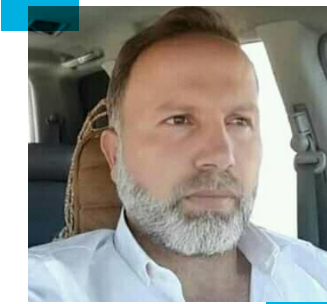
head of the Military Interrogation Branch until 2020, and is the individual primarily responsible for the crimes committed in the branch under his tenure. In 2020, he was appointed as the Commander of the 123 Infantry Regiment, Commander-in-Chief of the Seventeenth Division which is stationed in Kawkab Mountain on the outskirts of Hassaka city. In 2022, he was promoted to a Major general and is currently the Commander of the Eleventh Division after he was Deputy Commander of the Twelfth Division.



Haytham Majed Barakat

Isam Fayez Tlas

Colonel, born in 1977, from al-Rastan city in the northern suburbs of Homs governorate, graduated from the Military College in Homs governorate as a 2nd Lieutenant in 1999. In 2011, he was promoted to a Captain [Naqib] and deployed to the Air Force Intelligence branch in Daraa governorate. In 2012, he was promoted to a Major [Raid] and appointed as an interrogation officer in the same branch, and was one of the officers responsible for the raids, arrest, and interrogation operations in Daraa governorate. He rose within the ranks of Syrian military, and is currently the head of the Air Force Intelligence branch in Daraa governorate with a military rank of a Colonel.



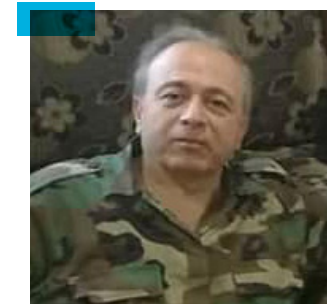
Isam Fayez Tlas

Badr Taha al-Ahmad

Lieutenant colonel, born in 1982, from Idlib governorate, graduated from the Military college in Homs governorate in 2003 from the Air Force Department as a 2nd Lieutenant. He was deployed as an officer to the Third Division. In 2013, he held the position of deputy director of the Air Force Intelligence in Suwayda governorate. In 2014, he was appointed as an interrogation officer at the al-Mazza Military Airbase in Damascus governorate. He has been a Lieutenant colonel in the Third Division since 2020.

Kefah Mohammad Melhem

Major general, born in 1964, from Jneinat Raslan in the suburbs of Tartus governorate. In 2011, he was promoted to a Brigadier general and appointed as the director of the Military Interrogation (Branch No. 248). In 2012, he headed the Military Security branch in Aleppo governorate. In 2014, he was appointed as the head of the information department at the Military Intelligence. In July 2014, he was promoted to Major general and was appointed as the deputy director of the Military Intelligence Directorate. In March 2019, he was appointed as the head of the Military Intelligence Directorate, and has been holding this position ever since after his tenure was renewed for one year back in November 2022.



Kefah Mohammad Melhem

Loay al-Ali

Brigadier general, born in 1968, from Tartus city, graduated from the Military College in Homs governorate as 2nd Lieutenant. In 2011, he was promoted to Colonel and appointed as the head of the Military Security in Daraa governorate. He was involved in storming the al-Omari Mosque in Daraa city. In 2018, he was promoted to Brigadier general and has been the head of the Military Security branch in the al-Janoubiya area ever since.



Loay al-Ali

V. Torture and HTS

Through years of monitoring the practices of Hay'at Tahrir al Sham (HTS), we determined that the group's extremist security-centered mindset shapes the management of its detention centers as well as the design of its detention centers and the structure of its security apparatus, which is similar to the Syrian regime's. HTS has practiced torture in a widespread and violent manner against its detainees. What is more, we have counted no fewer than 162 HTS-affiliated detention centers, both permanent and temporary, in the areas controlled by the group. According to accounts from dozens of detention survivors previously held in HTS detention centers, Harem Prison in the western suburbs of Idlib is one of the group's most notorious prisons where torture and enforced disappearance are routine. We have been told that this center is so infamous in the region that even Harem Prison's name causes fear and alarm among survivors and the families of forcibly disappeared people. Meanwhile, the 700 Prison in the western Aleppo suburbs and al-Uqab Prison in the southern suburbs of Idlib are among the worst detention centers that have been moved or relocated.

HTS uses various methods of torture in its detention centers. Drawing upon the many interviews we have conducted with dozens of detention/torture survivors over the years, we have been able to identify the most notable methods of torture used by the group, which are largely similar to those used by the Syrian regime. This similarity also extends to the torture strategies used to extract confessions from a detainee, who is then tried based on confessions extracted under the duress of torture. Many former detainees have told us that they have been subjected to torture even before being taken for interrogation. We also were told by former detainees that the HTS gives detainees the choice of simply confessing to the charges made against them or suffering torture until they do. Moreover, a detainee might be subjected to more than one torture method. There are, however, a number of torture methods unique to HTS devised by the group itself. As with our detailing of the 72 methods of torture used by the Syrian regime in a past report, we provided details of roughly 22 methods of torture unique to HTS and categorized these into three main types in [a detailed report we published previously](#) on HTS' most notable violations.

While readers can refer to the link above to read a more detailed breakdown of the torture methods unique to the HTS, it bears mentioning that each of these 22 methods falls into one of three types of torture, namely:

1. 13 physical methods of torture.
2. Eight psychological methods of torture.
3. Forced labor

SNHR team has documented the killing of no fewer than 34 individuals, including two children, in HTS detention centers since the group's initial emergence in early 2012 up to June 2023. In 26 of the 34 cases, the group returned the victims' bodies to their families, bearing signs of torture.

Most notable torture victims killed by the HTS

Taher Muddar Sarhan, born in 2000 a former member of the 'Jund al-Aqsa' (Soldiers of the Aqsa) foundation, from Ihsim town in the southern suburbs of Idlib governorate, was arrested by personnel from the Turkish Border Guard (Gendarmerie), on the Turkish-Syrian borders while he was trying to unofficially cross into Turkey. In September 2021, he was delivered to the HTS's Border Guard force in the Heer Jamous area in the suburbs of Salqin, which is located in the western suburbs of Idlib governorate. He was informed that he was wanted by the HTS's General Security authorities, which then took control of his case.

On Sunday, March 19, 2023, his family learned that Taher had been sentenced to death and executed by firing squad (on charges of collaborating with Syrian regime forces and the international coalition) on January 30, 2023, in an HTS detention center. His body has not been returned to his family.

SNHR spoke with a relative of Taher's named Mousab,²⁶ who told us:

"Taher was a well-liked person known for his good manners. After he got engaged and in light of the poor living situation in Syria, he decided to travel to Turkey through smugglers. On September 6, 2021, the Turkish Gendarmerie captured him and he was delivered to the HTS's Heer Jamous Police Station which then took him to the HTS's General Security. His family was able to see him 10 months after he was arrested, and he seemed in a good condition. However, his family were not able to visit him again for a year. On the second visit, he also was in a good condition and he told them that it would be a matter of time before he is released, but he needed to be sponsored by an HTS amir. His family tried to visit him a third time, but could not. Subsequently, when the family requested a visit, they were told that he had been executed on January 30, 2023, but his body was not returned at the time."



Taher Muddar al-Sarhan

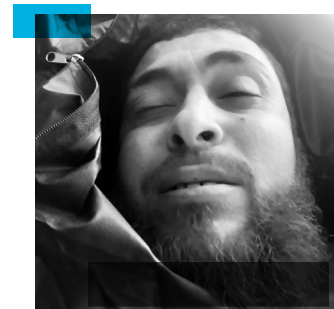
26. Via phone on May 12, 2023.

Abdul Karim Ahmad al-Shabib, from Mardikh village in the eastern suburbs of Idlib, was 33 years old at the time of his arrest by HTS personnel in November 2021, in a raid on his residence in the gathering of Atma Camps near Atma village in the northern suburbs of Idlib governorate.

On Sunday, March 12, 2023, his family learned that the HTS delivered Abdul Karim's dead body to the forensic department in Idlib city after he was executed by shooting (on charges of consuming marijuana and using prostitutes) in an HTS detention center. The family refused to take his body from the forensic department.

SNHR spoke with a friend of Abdul Karim's family's named Kamal,²⁷ who told us:

"Abdul Karim is a father of four - three girls and one boy. He has a brother who has been detained by the Syrian regime since 2012. The HTS personnel arrested him from his tent in Atma Camp, and we did not know why. His family tried multiple times to visit him [but were unsuccessful] despite many meditations by individuals with close ties to HTS. On March 12, 2023, HTS informed [Abdul Karim's] family of his death. His brother was not involved in the uprising but is detained by the regime to this day, and Abdul Karim faced fabricated charges that don't fit with our values and norms as Muslims."



Abdul Karim Ahmad al-Shabib's body after it was returned to his family

Maher al-Ahmad, a media activist from Heesh village in the southern suburbs of Idlib governorate, was arrested on Wednesday, February 9, 2023, by HTS personnel in Atma city in the northern suburbs of Idlib governorate. His wife, named Nour al-Salim, was also arrested in a raid on her place of residence in Idlib city. His wife was released a few hours after her arrest, while Maher was released on Friday, April 28, 2023.

SNHR spoke with Maher after his release.²⁸ He told us:

"I left my house in Idlib city and was heading for work in Atma area, and on my way personnel from the HTS's General Security stopped me in southern Atma area and took me to a prison located in a Gas Factory in northern Sarmada city, which is located directly under the factory. The prison consists of four rooms and three cells for solidarity confinement. I was put in a dorm with other prisoners who are being held on various charges. The first time I was interrogated was six-and-a-half months into my detention. The interrogator accused me of collaborating with the international coalition, as well as embezzlement charges, and my personal e-mail and accounts were opened, and they [HTS] showed me messages with Syrian news centers, which they considered collaborating with the [international] coalition, not to mention the fraud and embezzlement cases. I denied all the charges. I appeared before a judge, and was sentenced to one year in prison with no chance of appeal. All my properties were seized, including my funds and car, and I suggested that they take them as a fine in exchange for my release, but they refused, and the seizures were denied."

27. Via phone on May 12, 2023.

28. Via phone on May 12, 2023.

My health condition worsened after I contracted a urinary tract infection from staying in solitary confinement for a long period of time, and I had prostate episodes, but they refused to give me any medication or anything to heal me or ease my pain. I was then transferred to the 77 Prison in a hilly area near in Kafr Daryan town in the suburbs of Idlib, where I stayed for roughly two-and-a-half months. After the earthquake, some colleagues of mine met al-Joulani [the head of the HTS] and they appealed to him to have me released, and he agreed. Had they not met with him, I would have been one of the many forgotten detainees who were in my cell. Now, since I was released, I'm dealing with health issues and going through treatment. I was banned from working in journalism. The HTS is still monitoring me and my posts on social media according to what I have been told by people close to them."

Hassan Yousef, born in 1995 from Qatana city in southwestern Damascus suburbs governorate, was living in Idlib city when he was arrested on Friday, May 13, 2022, outside his house. He was taken to an HTS detention center where he was tortured to death. On Sunday, May 15, 2022, his family was informed by HTS personnel that he had died. His body was returned to the family bearing signs of torture.

SNHR spoke with a relative of Hasan's named Mohammad al-Awad,²⁹ who told us:

"Hassan was displaced from Damascus suburbs. He was married with children. He worked at a restaurant in Idlib city. HTS security personnel arrested him, along with a friend of his, in Idlib city, without revealing the cause of the arrest. We contacted some members of the HTS we personally know so they could mediate a release, even in that required paying money, but that was no use. Two days after his arrest, a relative of ours received his body with signs of torture. His back was entirely black and blue and his neck had some marks on it. They told us he committed suicide in prison."

Mohammad added that his family was threatened with imprisonment if they published photos or any news about Hassan. He also revealed that the fate of Hassan's friend, arrested along with him, remains unknown.

SNHR received a video from the victim's family showing the signs of torture on Hassan's body. We have stored the video in our archive, and will not include it in this report at the family's request, and out of consideration for their emotional and psychological state.

29. Via phone on May 23, 2022.

VI. Torture and the Kurdish-Led SDF

The Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) have used various methods of torture in their detention centers, with varying degrees of severity and cruelty, depending on the accusations leveled against the detainees. Torture is routinely used as a mean to extract information from detainees, or as a way to punish detainees for their activism in protesting against SDF policies in their areas. Usually, activists, civilians criticizing the policies of the SDF, or individuals accused of 'terrorism', suffer more severe torture than those detained for violating local regulations enforced by the SDF. Nonetheless, torture has been used against children and adults alike during interrogation, in addition to being practiced on the basis of ethnicity and retaliation.

The SDF use many methods of torture similar to those employed by the Syrian regime in their detention centers. Those include al-Shabah, electrocution, severe beatings, drowning, and burning. Detainees are also kept in atrocious conditions that involve cramming large numbers of prisoners into small cells with a complete lack of proper hygiene, sanitation, ventilation, clothing, and showers, not to mention extremely poor access to food and healthcare. Moreover, SDF also used psychological torture methods such as denying detainees family visits, holding them in solitary confinement for long periods, often for months, depriving them of food rations or extorting money for these rations, and threatening to transfer detainees to secret detention centers, where they will be forcibly disappeared. Other torture methods used by the SDF could be described as deliberate degradation and humiliation, including shaving parts of their hair or beards, or ripping clothes, among other methods according to information we collected from former SDF prisoners.

SNHR's team has documented the killing of 94 individuals, including two children and two women, in SDF detention centers since the group's initial emergence (as the People's Protection Units in July 2012) until June 2023. Of these cases, we recorded that 57 of the victims' bodies have been returned to their families, all bearing signs of torture, though only after the families paid sums of money or through intermediaries, while the remaining victims' bodies have yet to be returned to their loved ones.

It should also be noted that SDF is still imprisoning tens of thousands of Syrian citizens, as well as thousands of other people of other nationalities, in the al-Hawl Camp in the desert with no legal justification or judicial arrest warrants being issued. Some of the people in the camp have been imprisoned there for years at this point. The abysmal detention environment and living conditions, such as lack of access to food and healthcare, constitute forms of psychological and physical torture. We have released [an extensive report on the al-Hawl Camp](#) and the detention conditions there.

Moreover, we have obtained dozens of pictures from SDF detention centers that show the effects on detainees of the medical negligence and lack of basic hygiene facilities during detention.

Ibrahim Mesleh al-Mdad, from al-Shaheil city in the eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate, was arrested on Monday, June 24, 2019, by SDF personnel near his house in the city. He was taken to an undisclosed location. His detention lasted for four years.

On Thursday, August 16, 2023, he was released by the SDF from one of its detention centers. The pictures below show the stark contrast between his physical conditions and health before and after his detention.



Safwan Belal al-Hebel, from Jdeed Ekidat town in the eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate, was arrested in 2018 by the SDF over charges of being affiliated with ISIS. He was taken to an undisclosed location, and was ultimately detained by the group for approximately five years.

On Friday, March 17, 2023, he was released by the SDF from its al-Kam al-Sini Prison in southern Hasaka governorate.

The pictures below show the stark contrast between his physical conditions and health before and after his detention.



Most notable incidents of death due to torture at the hands of the SDF

Khalaf Ahmad al-Harman, a retired government employee from Jazaret al-Bouhamid town in the western suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate who worked at the Electricity Company in the same town, was arrested by SDF personnel in 2021 over allegations of collaborating with Syrian regime forces. He was sentenced to 10 years in prison, and was taken to an SDF detention center in Hasaka governorate. On Wednesday, February 1, 2023, his family was informed by the SDF that he had died. His body was returned to the family from the SDF's Ghwayran Prison in Hasaka city.

SNHR can confirm that Khalaf was in good health at the time of his arrest, indicating a strong probability that he died due to torture and medical negligence inside an SDF detention center.

SNHR spoke with a friend of Khalaf's named Yousef al-Masri,³⁰ who told us:

"Khalaf worked in the Electricity Company and had a big family - seven sons and four daughters. He had asthma. SDF personnel raided his home and arrested him, even though he has no involvement with politics and despite the fact that he is an elderly man. He was taken to Allaya Prison, and his family was able to visit him five times. His family tried to have him released through tribal intermediaries or paying money, but to no avail. Subsequently, he suffered an asthma attack inside prison, which killed him. His body was returned to his family at the Hasaka National Hospital."



Khalaf Ahmad al-Hamran

Abdul Samad Mahmoud al-Sayel, a child born in 2005 from Theyban town in the eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate, was arrested by SDF personnel on Monday, July 27, 2023, in the town. His family was able to visit him in October 2022 at the Central Prison in Hasaka city.

On Monday, February 27, 2023, his family received notice from an SDF official that Abdul Samad needed to undergo surgery, for which his family members had to pay the SDF a sum of money, after contracting tuberculosis in detention.

On Sunday, March 5, 2023, Abdul Samad's family received another notification from an SDF official summoning them to the National Hospital in al-Aziziya neighborhood in Hasaka city to visit Abdul Samad. When they arrived at the hospital, they were informed that Abdul Samad had died of tuberculosis. His body was returned to the family.

SNHR spoke with a neighbor of Abdul Samad's family's named Ahmad al-Saed,³¹ who told us:

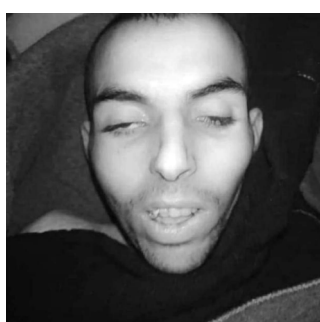
30. Via phone on May 13, 2023.

31. Via phone on March 9, 2023.

"Abdul Samad was arrested by an SDF patrol while farming in his family's land in the badiya [desert] of Theyban town. Two years after his arrest, we learned he was in the Allaya Prison in al-Qameshli. They allowed his family to visit him, and he seemed in good health at the time. In October 2022, however, he was transferred to the Central Prison in Hasaka city, and his family was able to visit him for a second time. After that, he was denied having visits. We sought through tribal intermediaries to have him released, but to no avail. We also tried to hire a lawyer, but they did not allow us since his case was related to terrorism. This is because, when he was 12-year-old, he was taken to an ISIS camp and he stayed there for one year, but we were able to get him back because he was a child. On February 28, 2023, they [the SDF] called the family via phone and told us we can visit him. When his father and mother went to visit him, they could not see him, and they were told he was in court and not in prison. When they went home, they [the SDF] called them [Abdul Samad's parents] again and told them that Abdul Samad requires surgery that would cost three million S.P. His father was able to secure 3.3 million S.P. and gave them the money, but he was not allowed to see him. When Abdul Samad's father returned, they called him and told him to come to the National Hospital at 5:00 pm. Abdul Samad's parents went to the hospital the next day. At the time designated for the visit, someone came and took information from them, and had Abdul Samad's father sign some papers even though he does not know how to write or read. They told them that Abdul Samad died the night before from a heart attack, and they would be receiving his body now. The body was extremely skinny compared to the last time they'd visited him, at which time he was in good health. There were no signs on Abdul Samad's body indicating that he had undergone surgery. In fact, they returned part of the sum of money to the family."



Abdul Samad Mahmoud al-Sayel, child



Abdul Samad Mahmoud al-Sayel's body after it was returned to his family on March 5, 2023



Video showing the body of Abdul Samad Mahmoud al-Sayel after it was returned to his family on March 5, 2023

Hassan Mohammad al-Asskar, born in 1993, from Theyban town in the eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate, was arrested by SDF personnel on Friday, October 28, 2022, after being shot by SDF personnel during a raid on the home of one of his relatives in the town. Hassan was taken to an SDF detention center in Deir Ez-Zour governorate. On Monday, October 31, 2022, his family was informed by the SDF that he had died. His body was returned to his family the following day. SNHR can confirm that Hassan was in good health at the time of this arrest, indicating a strong probability that he had died of his past injuries, which may suggest he died due to medical negligence.

SNHR spoke with a friend of Hassan's named Faris al-Ass'ad,³² who told us:

32. Via phone on May 14, 2023.

"Hassan worked as a shepherd. He was married and a father of five. Around 12:30 after midnight, SDF personnel raided the house of one of Hassan's relatives, named Abdul Jabbar Ahmad al-Askar, who also works as a shepherd. The soldiers opened fire directly at the door of the house, killing Abdul Jabbar's wife directly, and injuring Abdul Jabbar in his hand, while Abdul Jabbar's only son was also wounded. Hassan went outside after he heard the gunshot and was also shot. Hassan and Abdul Jabbar were taken to al-Omar Field even though they were injured. Three days later, a local official contacted a relative of Hassan's asking him to come and collect Hassan's body at a time when we were still holding the mourning ceremonies for Abdul Jabbar's wife. When the dead body was collected, we found two bullet holes, one in his mouth and one in his eye. We also found a vertical scar starting from his chest until his belly button, and another horizontal one dividing the lower part of his belly. Fifty days after the incident, Abdul Jabbar al-Askar was released, and they told him that his house had been mistakenly raided, as the raid was meant for someone else. SDF went through local officials to negotiate with Abdul Jabbar and pay compensation of 20 million S.P. [known as diyya] for the death of Hassan, his cousin, and his wife, but Abdul Jabbar refused."



Hassan Mohamamd al-Askar



Two scars were found on Hassan's dead body - a vertical one extending from his chest to his belly, while the second divided the lower part of his belly



Video showing the signs of torture on the body of Hassan al-Askar after it was returned by the SDF .((exclusive to SNHR

Diyar Khalil Omar, a 19-year-old man from Basouta village, administratively a part of Afrin city in northern Aleppo governorate, who had worked previously at the SDF's Culture and Art Department, was living in Afrin's al Sheikh Maqsoud neighbourhood when he was arrested on Sunday, August 14, 2022, by SDF personnel after being summoned to the SDF's National Security office in the neighborhood. He was taken to an SDF detention center in al-Sheikh Maqsoud neighborhood.

On Saturday, September 3, 2022, his family received notification from an SDF official informing them that he had died. When his family members went to the SDF headquarters, they were given a medical report indicating that he died on August 31, 2022, from hypoxia. His body was returned to the family from the detention center where he was detained in al-Sheikh Maqsoud neighborhood, bearing signs of severe torture. SNHR has obtained a number of pictures, some of which we have chosen not to show due to their distressing and graphic nature, which conclusively prove that Diyar was viciously tortured. SNHR has released [a statement](#) condemning the killing of the citizen Diyar Khalil Omar.



Diyar Khalil Omar

Diyar Khalil Omar's body

Picture showing the blueness in Diyar's fingers, which is a sign of hypoxia

A medical report from the SDF's forensics team confirming that he had died from hypoxia

Medical report by a forensic department-affiliated with the Syrian regime in al-Razi neighborhood clarifying the cause of Diyar Khalil Omar's death

Mheidi Hassan al-Khalaf, born in 1978, an agricultural worker from Ein al-Arous town, administratively a part of Tal Abyad city in the suburbs of Raqqqa governorate, was arrested in September 2022 by SDF personnel at a checkpoint near Ein Eisa city in the northern suburbs of Raqqqa governorate, while he was traveling to Raqqqa city for medical treatment. He was taken to an SDF detention center in Raqqqa city. On Monday, May 15, 2023, his family was notified of his death by SDF personnel. His body was returned at the National Hospital in Raqqqa city. SNHR can confirm that he was in poor health at the time of his arrest, as he suffered from cardiological issues, with this and other evidence indicating a strong probability that he died due to torture and medical negligence inside an SDF detention center.

SNHR spoke with Khaled al-Khalaf, Khaled Mheidi's uncle,³³ who told us:

"Mheidi Hassan al-Khalaf was married and had two daughters. He had a heart condition and was in need of a heart procedure, so he headed with his family to Raqqqa. On his way, in Ein Eisa camp in the suburbs of Raqqqa governorate, he was arrested by SDF personnel. The family and I looked for him for months, as the SDF denied having him. Eventually, a prisoner who'd been released told us he was in Ayed Prison in Raqqqa. We tried to press the SDF to allow us to visit him, and his wife and children visited him in late-April 2023. Sadly, he could not recognize them during the visit. It was clear that he'd lost his memory as a result of all the torture he'd suffered. Fifteen days later, his family was informed that he had died in prison and his body had been transferred to the National Hospital in Raqqqa, and they were asked to come and collect his body. We enlisted the help of some of our relatives to bring the body back to Tal Abyad in Raqqqa suburbs, so we could bury him there. When we saw the body, we were shocked by the clear signs of torture, such as his toenails being pulled out, and various scars and burns all over his body, and signs of electrocution, which we suspect was the reason why he lost his memory and could not recognize his family."

33. Via phone on May 17, 2023.



Mheidi Hassan al-Khalaf



*Photos of Mheidi Hassan al-Khalaf's body after it was returned to his family.
.Signs of torture are seen on the body*



Ahmad Mtallaq al-Ahmad, born in 1982 from Kherbat Shehab village, administratively a part of Khafsa town in the eastern suburbs of Aleppo governorate, was arrested on Sunday, March 3, 2019, by SDF personnel from his place of residence in Manbij city over accusations of collaborating with the SNA. He was sentenced to five years in prison and was taken to Raqqa Central Prison. In August 2022, his family was informed by the SDF that he had been admitted to a private hospital in Raqqa city after he contracted tuberculosis, although the SDF didn't allow family members to visit him or even tell them which hospital he'd beentaken to. On Saturday, September 10, 2022, his family was informed that he had died, with his body being returned to the family the following day. SNHR can confirm that Ahmad was in good health at the time of his arrest, indicating a strong probability that he died due to torture and medical negligence in Raqqa Central Prison.



Ahmad Mtallaq al-Ahmad

Mohammad Ahmad al-Qadi, a 32-year-old man from the Ghwayran neighborhood in Hasaka city, was arrested on Tuesday, July 12, 2022, by personnel from the SDF's internal security division, who raided his house in the neighborhood over accusations of collaborating with foreign entities. He was taken to an SDF detention center in another part of the city. On Friday, July 15, 2022, his family was informed by the SDF that he had died, with his body being returned to his family. SNHR can confirm that Mohammad was in good health at the time of his arrest, indicating a strong probability that he died due to torture and medical negligence in an SDF detention center in Hasaka city.

Jasim Mohammad Khattab al-Bdiwi, a 48-year-old man from Abu Hammam town in the eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate, was arrested by SDF personnel on Saturday, October 8, 2022, in a raid on the house in Raqqa city where he was living, and taken to an SDF detention center elsewhere in the city. On Tuesday, October 11, 2022, his family was informed that he had died with his body returned to his family. SNHR can confirm that Jasim was in good health at the time of his arrest, indicating a strong probability that he died due to torture and medical negligence in an SDF detention center in Raqqa city.



Jasim Mohammad Khattab al-Bdiwi

VII. Torture and All Armed Opposition Factions/SNA

Torture practices are common in the detention centers operated by the various armed opposition factions. Usually, the conditions in such detention centers are similar to the Syrian regime's, in that, there is no central judicial authority with the power to issue arrest warrants based on investigations conducted by a prosecutor. Rather, arbitrary arrests and abductions are common practices for armed opposition factions, while enforced disappearances are common in their detention centers, being carried out for various motives, including revenge or extracting confessions. Furthermore, we have documented the torture of many detainees for ethnic and sectarian reasons. Armed opposition factions also routinely torture abductees and film their torture, to solicit ransom money from their families in exchange for their freedom. We have summarized the methods of torture used and the conditions in the detention centers operated by armed opposition factions in a report entitled, '[Awaiting Justice](#)'.

Moreover, we have recorded torture of activists and civilians voicing criticism against the policies of armed opposition factions at their checkpoints, in public places, and when attacking demonstrations. Torture has also been used against civilians, including children and women, to coerce them into agreeing to the demands made by armed opposition factions' personnel, such as the use or seizure of their properties. Torture has also been used against those suspected of collaborating with the SDF or ISIS.

In many cases, we have documented cases of armed opposition factions personnel repeatedly assaulting civilians, including children and women, which involves beating them, dragging them along the ground, or degrading them in public places, or even inside their shops and houses for the goal of spreading fear or forcing them to carry out their orders. Our archives contain numerous pictures and photos showing assaults and signs of torture on victims' bodies.

It should be noted that in response to many torture incidents, the SNA's Military Police have apprehended perpetrators accused of torture after they were exposed online or after residents protested against the faction responsible for the torture. Despite these arrests, however, the Military Police has failed to disclose the punishments or the measures to be taken against these individuals. We believe that judicial and executive bodies in the SNA's territories have limited powers, and do not enjoy the autonomy required to enforce deterring punishments against perpetrators of violations, or to protect the victims and their families from the abuse of power by military factions.

SNHR's team documented the killing of no fewer than 53 individuals, including one child and two women, in armed opposition factions' detention centers between March 2011 and June 2023. Of these, 28 of the victims' bodies were returned to their families, all bearing signs of torture, while the remaining 25 bodies have not been returned.

Most notable incidents of torture at the hands of all armed opposition factions

Ahmad Mohammad Sheikhou, born in 1968, from Sheikh Hadid town, administratively a part of Afrin city in the northern suburbs of Aleppo governorate, a Damascus University graduate with a degree from the Department of Literature's Geography Faculty, was the vice-head of the local council in al-Sheikh Hadid subdistrict, and a member of the Kurdistan Democratic Party - Syria, as well as working as a street vendor. He was arrested on Friday, June 8, 2018, by SNA personnel in a raid on his family's home in the town. He was taken to an SNA detention center in the same town. On Tuesday, June 12, 2018, he died a few hours after being released, due to the torture he suffered during his detention.

SNHR spoke with Mustafa Sheikhou,³⁴ Ahmad's brother, who told us:

"My brother was a street vendor and had a small shop in al-Sheikh Hadid town. On June 8, 2018, armed personnel from the SNA's al-Amshat faction raided a mourning ceremony for the family following a dispute between one of the faction's members and the father of a 13-year-old child who was arrested during a curfew. The raid took place at 9:30 pm. The armed personnel started beating the people there, including elderly people and men, and arrested my brothers along with others who were there. They also seized property, money, and jewelry from the family's home. On the following day, all those detainees were released except for five individuals, including my brother Ahmad, who were transferred to another detention center in Qarmatleq village, where they were beaten and tortured. My brother sustained a fractured rib, and was not transferred to the hospital according to a nurse who was there to attend to the detainees. We spared no effort to have him released and we contacted the relevant parties, but that all failed. On June 12, 2018, they released my brother and brought him home. He was in a poor health condition. We tried to transfer him to the hospital, but they told us that was forbidden on orders from the faction's commander. A few hours after he was released, at 5:00 a.m., my brother died. We tried to save him, and transferred him to Izaz hospital but he was already dead. Then, SNA personnel brought a forensic medic and forced him to write that the cause of death was asthma, even though my brother never had asthma."

34. Via phone on September 25, 2022.

Jasim Mohammad al-Mohammad, born in 1987, from Ma'dan city in the eastern suburbs of Raqqa governorate, was arrested on Friday, 14, 2021, by SNA personnel who raided his home in Tal Abyad city in the suburbs of Raqqa governorate. He was taken to an SNA detention center in Tal Abyad city, where he was tortured to death. On the following day, his family was informed of his death by the SNA. His body was returned to the family from the Tal Abyad City's Hospital.

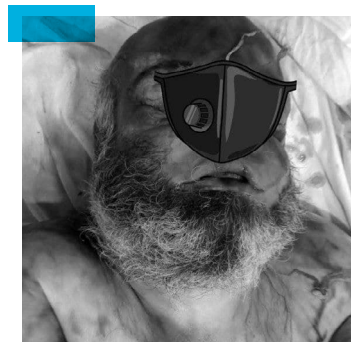
SNHR spoke with a relative of Jasim's, named Mousab,³⁵ who told us:

"Jasim worked at a place that sells used clothes and goods in Tal Abyad city. Some SNA personnel raided his house and arrested him without us knowing why, and without giving us a chance to understand what is happening. We then tried to track him down or find out any information about him through intermediaries, but they could not do anything. Two days later, we found through an intermediary that he'd died from the severe beating and torture, and that they'd forced him to drink chlorine, which caused his death. We collected his body and he was buried in Tal Abyad city without his body being examined by a forensic team."



Jasim Mohammad al-Mohammad

Mohammad Hassoun, a 61-year-old man from Homs governorate who was living in al-Bab city in the eastern suburbs of Aleppo governorate, was arrested on Wednesday, October 26, 2022, by personnel from 'Ahrar al-Sham' [The Levine Freeman], an armed opposition faction, from his place of residence in al-Bab city over a complaint by his wife who accused Mohammad of assaulting his daughter. On Thursday, October 27, 2022, Ahrar al-Sham informed the mukhtar of Homs governorate in al-Bab city that Mohammad Hassoun had died of a heart attack during interrogation in one of their detention centers in Qebbasin city in the suburbs of Aleppo governorate. His body was returned to the family the same day, bearing signs of torture. The body was taken to a forensic pathologist. Mohammad's family and the mukhtar of Homs governorate submitted a complaint to the SNA's Military Police in al-Bab city.



The body of Mohammad Hassoun after it was delivered to his family, bearing signs of torture

35. Via phone on May 16, 2023.

Luqman Hamid Hanan, born in 1977 from Haj Qasmou village, administratively a part of Afrin city in northern Aleppo governorate, was living in al-Mahmoudiya neighborhood in Afrin city when he was arrested on Monday, December 19, 2022, by personnel from al-Sultan Murad Faction, an SNA division, in front of his house in al-Mahmoudiya neighborhood. He was taken to an SNA detention center in Afrin city.

According to information we received from eyewitnesses, Luqman was arrested over a personal dispute between him and a member of al-Sultan Murad faction. Two days after his arrest, the SNA requested clothes and his medicine from his family, since he suffered from neurological and back issues.

On the morning of Thursday, December 22, 2022, SNA members transferred Luqman to the Military Hospital in Afrin city after he died inside a detention center. He was examined by the forensic team who determined the cause of death as a severe myocardial infraction (heart attack). His body was returned to his family on the same day.

On December 22, 2022, OSNHR received a number of pictures clearly showing and confirming that Luqman Hamid Hanan was brutally tortured by the SNA during his detention.



Picture 1 of the medical report issued by the forensic team at Afrin Military Hospital that clarified the cause of Luqman's death

Picture 2 of the medical report issued by the forensic team at Afrin Military Hospital that clarified the cause of Luqman's death

Pictures showing the signs of torture on Luqman's dead body

Picture showing the signs of torture on Luqman's feet

Ibrahim Abdullatif al-Najjar, a lawyer from Marea city in the eastern suburbs of Aleppo governorate, was arrested on Wednesday, May 3, 2023, by personnel from the SNA's civilian police when he went to the Command Center of Akhtarin city in the eastern suburbs of Aleppo governorate, after his vehicle documents were taken from him at one of their checkpoints in the city on the pretext of a traffic violation in his name (the car's license plate shows that it came from Idlib). He was released on the same day after being severely beaten and verbally abused by Civilian Police personnel at the Command Center, as well as being given a traffic fine of 300 Turkish Lira.



Statement by the Council of the Free Lawyers Association - Aleppo branch condemning the assault on the lawyer Ibrahim Abdullatif al-Najjar

Photograph showing the signs of beatings on the lawyer Ibrahim Abdullatif al-Najjar following his release from the Akhtarin Police Command Center in the suburbs of Aleppo governorate

V. Conclusions and Recommendations

Legal conclusions

- Despite the fact that torture and other forms of cruel and inhumane, or degrading treatment are completely prohibited internationally, insofar as this prohibition is now treated as a customary rule that is binding to all parties to the conflict, this report shows that all controlling forces in Syria have used torture against their opponents, and that those practices continue to this day. We do not believe that those practices will come to an end soon, as long as the same ruling entities remain in power.
- The Syrian regime is the party responsible for the vast majority of the torture documented in the conflict, perpetrating torture systematically to a degree far greater than all the other parties to the conflict individually or collectively. This report provides further evidence and confirmation that the Syrian regime practices torture in a systematic and widespread manner, violating the right to life, which constitutes a blatant breach of the international human rights law. Although it has been repeatedly proven that the Syrian regime has full knowledge of these practices, and is fully aware that these inhumane detention conditions will lead inevitably to detainees' deaths, the regime has failed to take any preventive action. Killing due to torture constitute crimes against humanity, according to Article 7 of Rome Statute, as well as being blatant violations of international humanitarian law, and qualifying as war crimes according to Article 8 of Rome Statute.
- The number of documented cases of people forcibly disappeared at the hands of Syrian regime forces has exceeded 96,000 to date, while the number of documented deaths due to torture has exceeded 15,000 deaths. The accounts we have collected from survivors, the Caesar Pictures, and the death certificates in the civil registry's records all show that the Syrian regime is involved in waging a systematic, widespread attack against the civilians of Syria, especially those who called for political transition to freedom and democracy. All these practices constitute crimes against humanity. Moreover, the fact that multiple government institutions are implicated in torture practices suggests that this is a deliberate strategy by the ruling class of the Syrian regime, who are heavily involved in and responsible for these acts.
- The Syrian regime has explicitly violated the texts of the Syrian Constitution, and the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, which Syria ratified in 2004. The Syrian regime has also manipulated and tampered with laws and legislative articles in order to shield its forces from any potential prosecution.
- The other parties to the conflict, namely the SDF, HTS, and armed opposition factions, have shown no regard for the principles of international human rights law or international humanitarian law. The torture practices by those parties against their opponents in the context of the non-international armed conflict in Syria constitute war crimes. Furthermore, none of these parties have launched honest, independent investigations into the torture practices and deaths that took place in their respective detention centers.

Recommendations

Security Council and the UN under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations

- Protect tens of thousands of persons forcibly disappeared at the hands of the Syrian regime from lethal torture, and save those who are still alive.
- Devise a mechanism to oblige all parties to the conflict, especially the Syrian regime, to put an end to torture practices, and to disclose the locations of the victims' bodies, and return these to their families.
- Russia must stop obstructing the referral of the case in Syria to the International Criminal Court.
- All UN organs concerned with humanitarian relief must look for the families that lost their provider or one of their members to the regime's machinery of torture, ensure that aid is continuously delivered to those in need, and start rehabilitation processes.
- Impose UN sanctions on the individuals and entities implicated in torture practices and death due to torture.

International community

- UN member states which are signatories to the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment must take the necessary measures to establish their universal jurisdiction over the perpetrator of the crimes of torture, and spare no material and security effort to achieve this.
- All of the world's states must ensure that the Syrian regime respects the Geneva Convention, and particularly Common Article 3, as well as upholding the rules of customary humanitarian law.
- Enact new punitive measures against the Syrian regime to deter it from killing Syrian citizens under torture, and put pressure on the other parties to the conflict, through all means possible, to put a true end to the use of torture.
- Allocate more funds, support, and adequate grants to local organizations working on rehabilitating and caring for the victims of torture and their families.
- Support individual activists and local organizations that document violations, without paternalism, enforcement of external agendas, or dictating their political views.
- Impose sanctions on the individuals and entities implicated in torture practices and deaths due to torture.
- The states that are signatories to the Geneva Conventions should act to fight crimes against humanity and war crimes, while those states which enjoy universal jurisdiction should make more effort to submit far more cases against perpetrators of violation in Syria.

COI

- Look into the cases included in this report. SNHR is willing to cooperate and provide more evidence and details.
- Arab League
- End the normalization of relations with the Syrian regime. In case Arab states feel they need to readmit the Syrian regime to the Arab League, this should only be approved on the condition that the regime immediately releases roughly 136,000 political prisoners, including 96,000 forcibly disappeared persons, discloses the names of the victims who died due to torture and those who were executed inside the regime detention center, as well as disclosing the location of their burials, and launching an independent accountability process for all implicated in the killings and torture practices against the Syrian people regardless of their rank or position in the military or the different security directorates.

Syrian regime

- Immediately cease all forms of torture and end the coercion of confessions under the duress of torture, adhere to the principles of international human rights law, and stop using the resources of the Syrian state to torture and terrorize Syrian society.
- Launch investigations into all torture practices and deaths due to torture, and compensate the families of those killed under torture and surviving victims.
- Repeal all the sentences issued on the basis of confessions extracted under torture, and dissolve extraordinary courts that are in reality another instrument of torture and oppression used against the regime's political opponents, especially those who have been detained.
- Immediately allow access to the COI, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), and all objective human rights groups.
- Grant the immediate and unconditional release of all arbitrarily arrested detainees, especially children and women, and disclose the fate of tens of thousands of forcibly disappeared persons.
- Other parties to the conflict (SDF, armed opposition factions, and the HTS)
- Abide by the principles of international human rights law, stop using torture against political or military opponents, and launch investigation into such crimes in order to hold their perpetrators accountable.
- Stop extracting confessions under torture, and repeal all sentences and decisions made on the basis of such confessions.

- Grant the ICRC and other human rights groups access to detention centers, with no preconditions.
- Disclose the names of all detainees, publish lists of their names, make the locations of secret detention centers known to the public, and allow families and human rights groups to visit these detention centers.

Acknowledgment and Condolences

We would like to express our most sincere gratitude to all the families, victims, and activists for their valued contribution to this report. Our most heartfelt condolences go to the families and friends of the victims who died due to torture.



No justice without accountability

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June 2023



*Supported with German Federal
Foreign office funds by the ifa
(Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen) Zivik Funding Programme*



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