



Prisoners get executed in areas prone to break out of government forces' control

The lives of more than 115,000 prisoners are at risk

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First: Introduction and Executive Summary

Al-Fath Army (an alliance formed by a number of armed opposition factions and An-Nusra Front) managed to take over Idlib city completely including detention centers, security bases, and the other governmental and vital institutions.

Government forces field-executed many prisoners at the Military Security branch and Al-Iyadat complex in Idlib suburbs – Jesr Ash-Shoughour before it withdrew from the city. SNHR documented 42 cases including one woman of an Asian heritage and two government forces soldiers. The retaliatory executions were carried out in a quick manner before the armed opposition managed to reach the detention centers and set the prisoners free. About 530 prisoners survived and were all released by armed opposition factions on Friday and Saturday 27 and 28 March, 2015. Over the course of April, 2015, SNHR documented their names and cross-checked it against its prisoner archive to find out that many of those prisoners were arrested for crimes such as theft and murder.

What happened in Idlib has happened many times before and it might happen again as the lives of no less than 115,000 documented prisoners (even though we believe that the actual number of prisoners at government forces detention centers is vastly higher) are at risk. Government forces treat those prisoners as hostages who will be executed if the armed opposition got close to certain areas or it might execute them before withdrawing to other areas like what happened in Idlib.





When armed opposition factions took over detention centers in Ar-Raqqa (March 2013) and Gharz prison in Daraa (March 2013), it investigated the charges of the detainees in Ar-Raqqa and Daraa where all the political prisoners and revolutionary activists were released while criminal prisoners' charges were investigated. This is different to how the armed opposition treated the prisoners in Idlib where all the prisoners were released regardless of their charges.

This report includes interviews with members of the civil-defense teams in Jesr Ash-Shoghour city, which were the ones who oversaw the release of prisoners, and we contacted some of the victims' families. Also, this report includes some of the pictures and video footages that we received. We relied on SNHR prisoner archive that we have been updating regularly since 2011. Our prisoner archive includes the names of approximately 115,000 prisoners.

Second: Incidents of prisoners executed at government forces detention centers in Idlib

Our investigations show that the executions took place inside the prison cells where prisoners were shot at from a close distance.

On Saturday 28 March, 2015, government forces executed 15 prisoners at the Military Security branch in Idlib before it withdrew from the city. Among the prisoners was an Asian woman.

One of the armed opposition soldiers recorded a video from inside the Military Security branch. The video shows dead bodies of prisoners and there are also other prisoners who were wounded.



[Picture of victims](#) who were executed inside their cells at the Military Security branch by government forces.

On Tuesday 28 April, 2015, civil-defense teams in Jesr Ash-Shoughr city found 27 dead bodies at the lower floors of Al-Iyadat complex. Al-Iyadat complex consists of two buildings which are located near the National Hospital in Jesr Ash-Shoghour. Since the beginning of the protests in March 2011, government forces have been using the lower floors to interrogate arbitrarily-arrested prisoners. The complex was supervised directly by the head of Military Security branch in Idlib.





Among the victims were two individuals who had military uniforms. All the victims were shot at from close distances.

The civil defense teams buried the dead bodies in a mass grave in Zarzour village, located near Jest Ash-Shoghour, before all the dead bodies were identified.

SNHR interviewed Mohammad Al-Khdier, a member of the civil-defense teams in Jest Ash-Shoghour:

“Two days before they withdrew, government forces killed the prisoners. We examined the dead bodies and found out that they died after they were shot in the head and chest from close distances. The smell of death was everywhere. Four prisoners, who were in critical conditions, survived and were taken to hospitals. One of the survivors told me that the regime army killed them on 25 April, 2015 and immediately withdrew to Al-Iyadat complex afterwards.”

Pictures obtained by SNHR of [the dead bodies](#)



Third: Conclusions and Recommendations

These evidences prove that government forces are detaining huge numbers of Syrian citizens inside official and unofficial detention centers that don't respect the most basic standards of the norms of the international law as systematic torture take place inside these prisons on a daily basis. Systematic torture is classified as a crime against humanity under Chapter VII of the International Criminal Court Rome Statute.





The systematic and intentional murder of prisoners, whether they were armed or not, is a blatant violation of the international humanitarian law and can be considered a war crime.

Recommendations

The Security Council

The Security Council should work on finding effective ways to protect the prisoners whom government forces are using as hostages.

The Security Council should insure the implementation of the resolutions:

Resolution 2042 (adopted on 14 April, 2012), resolution 2043 (adopted on 21 April, 2012), and resolution 2139 (adopted on 22 February 2014) which was adopted in order to put an end to the practices of enforced-disappearance.

Human Rights Council

To highlight and address the prisoners issue.

Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic

The Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic should address these cases and investigate the killing of prisoners at the hands of government forces inside its detention centers.

Acknowledgment

We would like to thank the local activists and the civil-defense teams in Idlib whose testimonies enriched this report. It should be noted that some of them put their lives at risk in order to testify. Additionally, our most heartfelt condolences go out for the victims' families and friends.

