



## Statement

### **Convicting Security Officer Anwar. R. of Crimes against Humanity Constitutes a Condemnation of the Syrian Regime's System of Torture, Killing under Torture and Sexual Violence**

[Today, January 13, 2022, the Higher Regional Court in Koblenz, Germany, convicted Anwar. R.](#), who from January 2011 to September 2012, headed the Investigation Department in Security Branch 251 (Al Khatib Branch), affiliated with the Syrian regime's General Intelligence Service, of torture, 27 murders and a case of sexual assault, sentencing him to life imprisonment.

Prosecutors filed an indictment which included Anwar R.'s supervision of the torture of nearly 4,000 individuals during their interrogation, in addition to citing his involvement in arbitrary detention, sexual assault, and the killing of 58 people by torture. The Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) contributed to the case by sharing a file containing data on 58 of the Syrian citizens who died as a result of torture in al Khatib Branch during the period of the convicted Anwar R.'s tenure at the Investigation Department, with this file handed over to the German Public Prosecutor through our partner, the [European Center for Constitutional and Human Rights](#), who, with its lawyers, supported 14 plaintiffs against the convicted man, Anwar. R.

Anwar R.'s conviction is for crimes against humanity, which, according to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, means that they are crimes of a systematic or widespread nature, and therefore cannot be carried out by individuals in the Syrian regime without being a central policy of the Syrian regime, involving leadership officials at the highest levels. The International Court of Justice has affirmed that "According to a well-established rule of international law, which is of customary character, the conduct of any organ of a State must be regarded as an act of that State." Commanders bear criminal responsibility on a personal level, not only for the acts and abuses they personally commit, but also for the actions of their subordinates, which makes Bashar al Assad, as commander-in-chief of the Syrian state's army and armed forces, the heads of his regime's security branches, and his interior ministers, directly responsible for and involved in crimes of torture, killing under torture and sexual assault; this sentence also constitutes a severe blow to anyone considering restoring any form of relations with the Syrian regime, and to anyone who supports it, led by Russia, China and Iran.

The Syrian regime has practiced arbitrary arrest and enforced disappearance since the early days of the popular uprising against the regime, and it is still detaining at least 131,469 individuals, including 86,792 forcibly disappeared persons, as well as being responsible for the deaths of at least 14,360 individuals who were killed under torture, according to the Syrian Network for Human Rights database. These horrific statistics prove the Syrian regime's widespread and systematic practices of torture and enforced disappearances, which constitute crimes against humanity.

This conviction represents just one step in the long and painful path of achieving accountability in Syria, but it will not, unfortunately, constitute any deterrent for the Syrian regime to end its use of torture and sexual assault, or to reveal the fate of the forcibly disappeared, with arbitrary arrests and killings under torture continuing since Anwar R.'s defection, because these are not isolated incidents but integral parts of a policy of state terror, which will not end until the upper ranks of the Syrian regime are ousted and held fully accountable, and until the realization of the political transition towards a just and democratic system which prioritizes respect for human rights. We sincerely hope, therefore, that this conviction will revive the political process in Syria from its current state of moribund stagnation.

We would like to extend our heartfelt thanks to the witnesses, the victims, the experts, and all the organizations that contributed to this case, especially our partners in the European Center for Constitutional and Human Rights, and we seek to work on other cases against the perpetrators of violations in Syria based on the principle of universal jurisdiction, the most prominent means currently available within the criminal justice system.