

The Syrian Regime Records Forcibly Disappeared Persons as Dead in Civil Registration Offices

Around 82,000 Syrian Citizens
Are Forcibly Disappeared at
the hands of the Syrian Regime

SNHR

SYRIAN NETWORK FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

الشبكة السورية لحقوق الإنسان

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



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I. Introduction and Methodology

Many Syrian families were shocked when they went to civil registration offices to finish a paperwork related to their children or relatives who have been forcibly disappeared at the hands of the Syrian regime for long times that can amount to years as they found out that their beloved ones have been written off as dead. SNHR team has recorded a number of similar incidents, particularly in the governorates of Hama, Homs, Latakia, Damascus suburbs, Damascus, and Hasaka. SNHR's records contain the names of approximately 81,652 Syrian citizens who has been forcibly disappeared solely at the hands of the Syrian regime since March 2011 (at the time of this report). As always, we should stress the fact that this is the bare minimum, which we have been able to record, due to the challenges and difficulties we have encountered for seven years in the course of our daily, ongoing work. These challenges include difficulties to access the victims' family, some families' refusal to speak to us, and transportation-related difficulties among others which has become well known to anyone who is even slightly familiar with the Syrian issue. As such, this national catastrophe for which the Syrian regime is responsible constitutes, beyond any doubt, crimes against humanity, as its ramifications extend to the level of deliberately shattering the Syrian society in order to submit and undermine the people in their strive to fight the oppression of the one-family, totalitarian rule. According to our investigations, which included thousands of released detainees, all of the detainees, including forcibly-disappeared ones, are subjected to various patterns of torture. Between March 2011 and June 2018, the Syrian regime killed 13,066 Syrian citizens inside its official and secret detention centers according to SNHR's database. This toll, as all other tolls, is just a minimum estimation. The Syrian regime's extensive and excessive torture constitutes crimes against humanity and war crimes.



The families of the 82,000 forcibly disappeared persons have avidly tried to find information about their relatives and children which involved in many cases paying large sums of money to mafia-like organized networks that were the by-product of this catastrophe. However, only a very few were able to acquire merely information. The Syrian authorities, on the other hand, deny constantly and not only they have yet to launch any investigation or hold any official accountable, but they protect said officials and legalize the crime, if not being directly involved in it, in addition to working on moving the parts so it come out exactly like this. We have shed light in a wide range of past reports on enforced-disappearance at the hands of the different parties. Those reports can be found [here](#). In this report, however, we will document, and for the first time, cases of citizens who are presumably forcibly disappeared at the hands of Syrian regime but have been registered at civil registration offices as dead without the knowing of any of their families. These cases were notably frequent in the governorates of Hama, Latakia, and Damascus.

We have contacted a number of families who accidentally found out that their detained relative was registered as dead in the state's civil registry. This report includes five accounts. We have concealed the witnesses' real names, and we haven't published all information so their real identity is not exposed to the oppressive apparatuses. We have explained to the witnesses the purpose of taking their accounts and they gave us permission to use the information they provided in this report.

Fadel Abdul Ghany, chairman of SNHR, says:

“The Syrian regime is tampering with civil records, as well as the names of the deceased and the forcibly-disappeared, in addition to the dead bodies and estates. This barbarian behavior exceeds and surpasses how things were in the ages of slavery. Putting an end to this terrorism and the destabilization that have afflicted the Syrian people for decades is an essential part of the responsibility of the international community, the General Assembly, and the Security Council, on historical, moral, and legal levels.”

II. Procedures for Recording Deaths inside Prisons in the Civil Registration

There are steps and stages in place that each case of death inside the state's prisons has to go through before being registered in archives of the civil record. Article 38 of the Syrian Law of Personal Status states, “Deaths occurring at prisoners, detentions, and hospitals shall be recorded pursuant to a certificate submitted by the directors of said institutions, or their representatives, to the relevant civil registrar. These institutions shall maintain special registries for such incidents”. Also, Article 39 of the same documents states, “When a death sentence



is to be executed against an individual, the general attorney or their deputy shall arrange a proceedings record for the incident and send said record to the civil registrar to record the incident in registries” while the executive instructions related to Article 37 of this law stipulates that, “The civil registrar shall not divulge the cause of death in the civil registry”.

As such, every death case has to undergo these steps. What SNHR documented, however, was a deliberate and planned infringement to all these stages and laws by the Syrian regime's apparatuses. We also have to always note that a deceased's family must be informed and the deceased's dead body must be delivered, so their family can bury it properly and arrange the funeral service, which lasts for three days as per Syrian costumes. The Syrian regime and its security apparatuses violating the most basic rights of human dignity deepens the suffering of the victim's family which will have major repercussions in the future within the Syrian society.

III. The Syrian Regime's Tampering with the Civil Registration and Recording Forcibly Disappeared Persons as Dead

In early-2018, we started receiving information with regard to the Syrian regime tampering with civil registration. We haven't been able to verify this information until the start of May 2018, when we managed to access a number of families who has members that were arrested by the Syrian regime from different areas and on different charges. When the families in question went to the civil registration offices (Al Nofous, or the registry, is the record in which a civil status incident is recorded in accordance with the documents of each incident. This record can be either on paper or digitized.) in the areas where they live to obtain some documents, such as a family statement, or a civil registration form, they were shocked to learn that the person's name was recorded as one of the death cases even though he was previously arrested by the Syrian regime before disappearing. None of the family members were aware of their death. Usually, a family has to present government documents to certify a person's death so the death is recorded in the civil registry. We've also recorded cases where families found out through friends or acquaintances who work at the civil registration office. We have been able to access families in Hama, Homs, Latakia, Damascus suburbs, Damascus, and Hasaka governorates as the investigation continues to access cases from other governorates. It is worth noting that we have recorded an unprecedented rise in the number of victims who had died due to torture inside Syrian regime detention centers [in June](#). The families of those victims were informed of their relatives' death through the civil registration offices. Since May 2018, we have been able to document 161 individual cases so far at the time of this report, distributed by governorates as follows:



Damascus suburbs governorate: 94 forcibly disappeared persons at the hands of the Syrian regime who were recorded as dead in the civil registry.

Hama governorate: 32 forcibly disappeared persons at the hands of the Syrian regime, including 17 individuals from the neighborhood of al Aiden Camp for Palestinian Refugees and four cases in Salamiya city, eastern suburbs of Hama governorate. All of them were recorded as dead in the civil registry.

Latakia governorate: 17 forcibly disappeared persons at the hands of the Syrian regime who were recorded as dead in the civil registry.

Damascus governorate: 8 forcibly disappeared persons at the hands of the Syrian regime who were recorded as dead in the civil registry.

Homs governorate: six forcibly disappeared persons at the hands of the Syrian regime who were recorded as dead in the civil registry.

Hasaka governorate: four forcibly disappeared persons at the hands of the Syrian regime who were recorded as dead in the civil registry.

We've noticed that security agencies or the neighborhood's mukhtar were who inform families exclusively verbally via a phone call when one of relatives dies at a Syrian regime detention center. This has been the norm in most of the cases we have monitored in the past seven years, about 90%. When the family is informed, which is also a rarity, the family is prompted to go to the Military Police branch to acquire a death certificate, as well as the deceased's clothes and any personal belongings he might have had. More often, however, the family never receives any information about the disappeared person, so they have to check with the Military Police branch in Damascus city regularly to inquire about the forcibly-disappeared person in question. The Syrian regime, in most cases, doesn't deliver the dead bodies to their families or tell the families where their relatives were buried. On the other hand, most families fear going public with the news of their beloved ones' deaths inside Syrian regime prisons, or even arranging a funeral service in fear of security pursuit. SNHR can confirm that this is a deliberate and intentional method adopted by the Syrian regime in order to terrorize and humiliate more families whose beloved one's disappearance and death inside detention centers, seemingly, wasn't enough for the Syrian regime in a glaring act of sadism and relishing in other's tragedies that is almost unprecedented in the modern age.

SNHR contacted Mr. (K.A.), via phone, from Kafr Zita city, northern suburbs of Hama governorate. He is a relative to three forcibly-disappeared victims and a friend of a fourth one. Their families learned of their death through the civil registration office in Hama. The four victims were arrested in one incident by Syrian regime forces on November 1, 2012, from al Hal Market in Damascus city, where they used to work as drivers delivering vegetables. Their families lost touch completely with them as they have been declared forcibly-disap-



peared. On May 10, 2018, the four families acquired information confirming their relatives' death inside a detention center on January 13, 2015, after they were recorded as death in the civil registry. Mr. (K.A.) tells SNHR, **“A friend called to tell us that the civil registry in Hama has just received tens of death certificates for detainees who had died. They told us that we have to go to the civil registration office in Hama to see if they know of the fate of my relatives inside detention centers. A few days later, one of the victims' sisters went there and found the death certificate for the four of them as they were arrested together from the same place. Their death date was also the same. We haven't been able to obtain any new information regarding their death, and why they declared them dead without their families as should be.”**

SNHR team noticed that individuals who were arrested together, or in the cases of first-degree kin, have the same death date. This leads us to believe that they all received the same sentence that might have been issued by a secret court.

[Pictures](#) of what appears to be [copies of the original](#) document which is [a death certificate for forcibly-disappeared](#) persons inside Syrian regime forces detention centers, issued by Kafr Zita Municipality in Hama governorate. We've obtained the document on May 10, 2018

[Ali Omar Shamma](#), from Salamiya city, eastern suburbs of Hama governorate, born in 1994. On July 30, 2011, he was arrested by Syrian regime forces in Salamiya city. A recorded confession of him was aired on the official TV channel on September 10, 2011, in which he said that he carried out acts of terrorism. After this coerced statement, SNHR, not his family, has been able to know where he is being kept as he has been declared forcibly disappeared. On September 11, 2011, Syrian regime forces arrested Ali's father, [Omar Ali Shamma](#), who is the imam and khatib of al Tawhid Mosque in Salamiya city. The cause for the arrest was solely the fact that he is Ali's father. On May 10, 2018, we received information confirming that they both died due to torture inside a detention center. Their family learned of their death by accident in a big shock through the civil registration office in Salamiya city.

Mr. (D.S.), a relative of Omar Shamma and his Son Ali, told us via phone that his friend told him that a death telegram in the name of Ali Shamma arrived at the civil registry office in Salamiya city, **“When I went to check, I saw Ali's death certificate. I was shocked also to find another one in the name of his father Omar. Both of them had the same day**



as their death date. They didn't allow us to have the death certificate or reveal any details about his death. We didn't do any procedures to declare his dead at the civil registration. Also, in the death certificate, there was no mention of the whereabouts or the cause of death. They didn't even mention that they had him as a detainee. We have doubts that they were executed."

We contacted, via phone, Mrs. (R.B.) from Latakia city. She told us that she was informed of the death of her forcibly disappeared son inside a Syrian regime force detention center by the government employee at the civil registration office in Latakia city on May 6, 2018, as she was trying to acquire a family statement and a civil registration form for her family, **"The employee told me that my detained son, who has been detained by the Military Security since 2013 and we haven't known anything about him ever since, is recorded as dead. I was shocked and I told him we don't know of his death and we never recorded his death at the civil registration office, and that he was arrested by the Syrian regime agencies. He told me that they received death certificates for many prisoners from the relevant authorities."** (R.B.) added that the employee asserted that the certificates they received are accurate but without specifying how they received them or who exactly those relevant authorities are. He also asked her to not ask for any additional details since he is merely an employee whose job is to carry out routine tasks and he has no details.

Saed Mohammad Balawat, a media worker, from Bab al Qebli neighborhood, western Hama city, born in 1983. On Monday, June 6, 2011, he was arrested by Syrian regime forces from his place of work in Hama city. On Sunday, June 3, 2018, we received information confirming that he had died due to torture in 2013 at Saydnaya Prison in Damascus suburbs governorate.



Saed Mahmoud Balawat

SNHR visited Mr. Ahmad Balawat, Saed's brother, at his place of residence in Turkey. He told us, **"My brother has been forcibly-disappeared and we haven't found out anything about him almost ever since his arrest. When some news surfaced about lists of names received by the civil registration in Hama city, one of my female relatives went there to ask about him. The female employee there, who was in charge of the lists, let her see his death certificate without letting her take a copy. There were tens**



of families who had detained relatives waiting to check on the fate of their relatives who have been forcibly-disappeared for years.” Ahmad added “The employee told my relative that they have received tens of names of detainees who died. She didn’t tell her anything more than that.”

Abdul Mu’in Ghazwan Fahd, from Homs city, born in 1993, recruit. Abdul Mu’in was arrested in 2013 in Damascus city. He was last seen in al Mazza Air Force Intelligence branch in 2014. He has been forcibly disappeared ever since, until his family were summoned to the civil registry office where they were informed that he died on November 14, 2014. We were able to acquire the death certificate for Abdul Mu’in, and we have it stored in our archives. SNHR contacted Mr. Abdul Ilah Fahd, Abdul Mu’in’s uncle, and he told us, **“When we heard news about names being sent to the civil registry office, Abdul Mu’in’s mother went to the office and they told her that he died and gave her a civil registration statement certifying that he had died with a death date, but with no any other information.”**

IV. Conclusions and Recommendations

Legal conclusions

The Syrian regime has undoubtedly perpetrated a large number of violations in these incidents, most notably deliberately disappearing 90% of its detainees and torturing them using the most horrendous methods of sadism and brutality, which only results in a certain painful death, humiliating and terrorizing the society and detainees’ families by depriving them of the most basic standards for rights and human dignity through abstaining from informing them of their beloved ones’ death, refusing to surrender their dead bodies, and lastly recording them as dead without their knowledge. The Syrian regime has used the resources and institutions of the Syrian state as a weapon of war against anyone who dares to oppose it.

Recommendations

Security Council and United Nations

- Hold an emergency meeting to discuss this critical matter that threatens the fates of nearly 82,000 individuals and terrorizes the whole Syrian society.
- Find methods and mechanisms to prevent the Syrian regime from tampering with the living and the dead, as this poses a major threat to the security and stability of the Syrian state.
- The Security Council should act to stop torture and deaths due to torture inside Syrian regime detention centers, and save whoever detainees left as quickly as possible.
- Take action under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations to protect the detainees from a certain death inside detention centers.



OHCHR

- Issue a statement to condemn and clarify this blatant violation of the most basic standards for human dignity.

Commission of Inquiry (COI)

- Start investigating this critical issue. We are willing to provide all additional information and data

International, Impartial and Intendent Mechanism (IIM)

- Add this critical issue to the main investigation agenda.

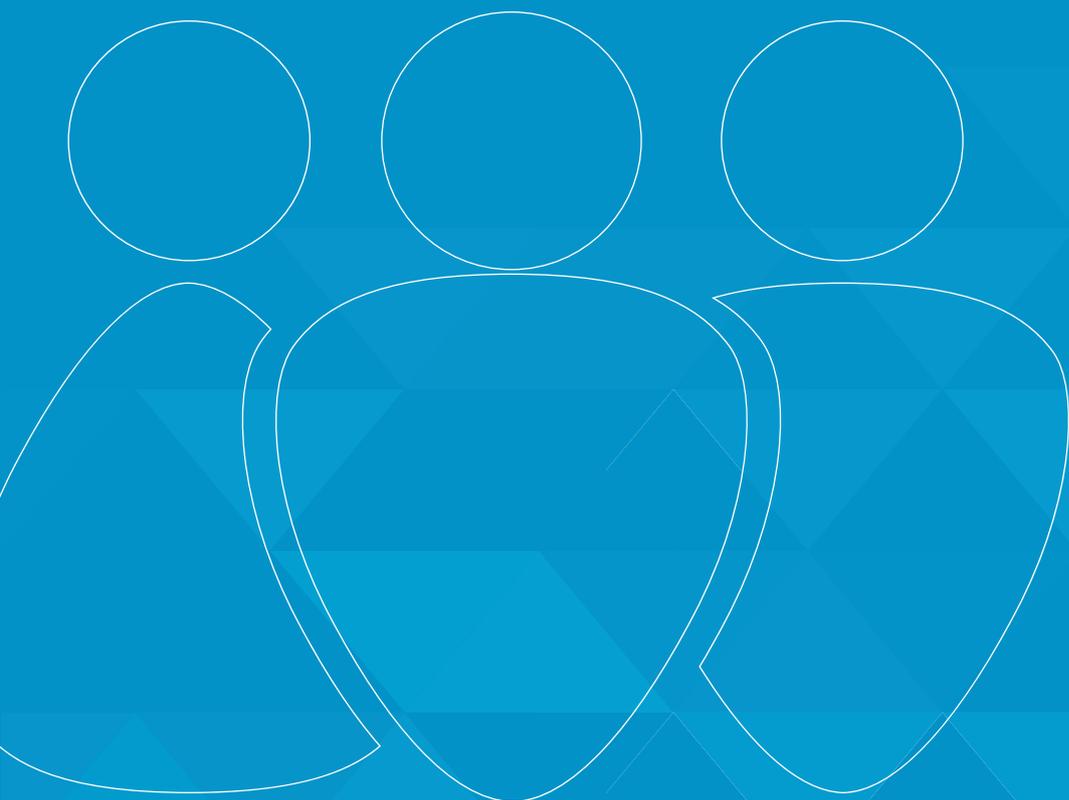
Syrian regime

- Stop treating the Syrian state as a private family property
- Stop terrorizing the Syrian people through enforced-disappearance, torture, and death due to torture.
- Stop tampering with civil records and exploit them to serve the goals of the ruling family.
- Shoulder the legal and material repercussions completely and compensate the victims and their families from the resources of the Syrian state.

Acknowledgment and Condolences

We would like to thank all the residents and witnesses who contributed to this report. Special thanks go to the lawyer Ghazwan Koronful. Lastly, our most heartfelt condolences to the victims' families and friends.





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