



The Syrian Regime Acknowledges the Death of 1,056 Syrian Citizens Forcibly Disappeared by the Regime Through the Civil Registry Departments, Including 54 from Deir al Asafeer, Whose Fate the Regime Revealed in February and March 2022

Serious Concerns over the Fate of 86,792 Syrian Citizens Who Remain Forcibly Disappeared by the Syrian Regime

Thursday 14 April 2022

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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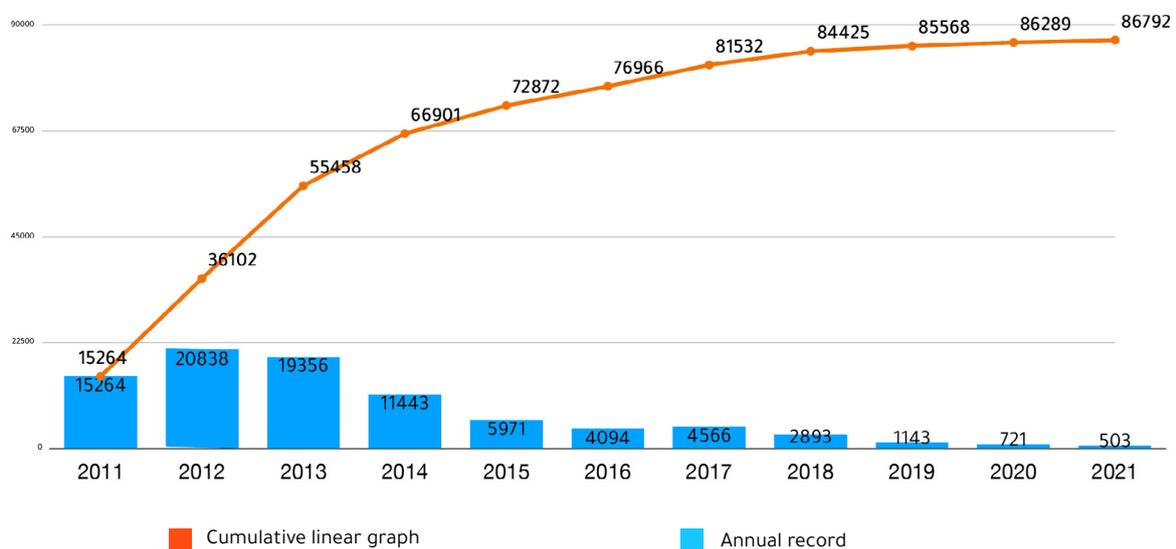
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I. Methodology and Background for the Syrian Regime's Acknowledgment of the Death of 1,056 Persons Forcibly Disappeared Since the Beginning of 2018 to Date:

The Syrian regime has been deliberately concealing the fates of tens of thousands of detainees in order to inflict as much agony, trauma, and degradation as possible upon their families. Many of those still documented as forcibly disappeared have been 'disappeared' for years, with the Syrian Network for Human Rights' (SNHR) database including data on at least 86,792 persons forcibly disappeared by the Syrian regime, including 1,738 children and 4,966 women. The following chart shows the cumulative linear graph of the record of the persons forcibly disappeared by the Syrian regime between March 2011 and August 2021:



The previous chart shows that 2012 was the worst year to date in terms of the record of the forcibly disappeared, followed by 2013, 2011, and 2014. That is, the first four years of the popular uprising for democracy saw the highest waves of enforced disappearances, which aimed to break and destroy the popular uprising and to terrorize those supporting freedom into silence and submission.

Since early 2018, the Syrian regime has been registering many of the detainees previously forcibly disappeared in its detention centers as dead in the records maintained by the state-run Civil Registry departments, with the Syrian regime having harnessed several echelons of the Syrian state institutions which it controls to implement this procedure in violation of Syrian law, and to manipulate the data on the forcibly disappeared recorded at the Civil Registry. This blatantly illegal manipulation starts with the ministries of Interior and Justice, and extends to Civil Registry officials in all Syrian governorates.

The regime's officials who have signally failed to comply with the rules and procedures for registering those dying in detention centers include the attorney general and his deputy, who should, according to law, coordinate reports on the death incident and notify the Civil Registry of deaths in custody within the legal period "within thirty days of its occurrence", as stipulated in Article 14 of the Civil Status Law/ 2007.

Since the earliest days of the uprising, when the Syrian regime began to adopt these terrible practices in a systemic manner, we have worked to obtain and collate the documentation on those people who were registered as dead in the Civil Registry departments in the various Syrian governorates; during this work, we have sometimes obtained lists including many names, which we cross-check with our database of forcibly disappeared people that we have built over nearly eleven years. We try in all cases to communicate with the families of these victims, or their friends wherever possible. We have already issued [two separate reports](#) on this catastrophic phenomenon; since the beginning of 2018 up until April 2022, we have been able to document at least a, with all being registered by name and personal details.

In general, the regime has failed to disclose the cause of death among these 'disappeared' individuals to their families or to provide any relevant documents, with the families also not being given their loved ones' bodies or even being informed of the place of their burial. The regime also failed to notify the families of their loved ones' deaths when they occurred; through use of this policy, the Syrian regime has been able to avoid providing any definitive clarification of the fate of the forcibly disappeared. We at the SNHR can confirm that the crime of enforced disappearance is still taking place, and according to international law, these people will remain classified as forcibly disappeared, with the main party held responsible for their disappearance being the Syrian regime.

What prompted us to update and issue a new report on this dangerous phenomenon is recent events affecting the townspeople of Deir al Asafeer in Damascus Suburbs. We have communicated with the relatives of local victims and with local activists from the town, through various means of communication such as phones, smartphone applications, and social media platforms, with the information they gave us about the details of the bereaved families' knowledge of their loved ones' death being similar to the information obtained through the Civil Registry departments. All of these accounts were obtained directly rather than from open sources. Witnesses received no financial compensation or promises in exchange for interviews. We explained the purpose of the report beforehand to all the interviewees we spoke with, and obtained their consent to use the information they provided to serve the purposes of the report and the documentation processes. All this is in accordance with our internal protocols, which we have worked on for years, and we strive constantly to develop these to keep pace with the best levels of psychological care for victims.

We have repeatedly emphasized in our reports that one of our principal concerns regarding this issue is that the Syrian regime will register tens of thousands of forcibly disappeared persons as dead in the Civil Registry departments, with their deaths gradually revealed only when the victims' families visit the departments or through periodically released lists, which is what actually happened at the beginning of 2022 in Deir al Asafeer town in the Damascus Suburbs.

The Syrian regime is wholly responsible for revealing the fate of those whom it forcibly disappeared, and for informing the Syrian people of how they were killed, who killed them, and of the whereabouts of their remains, more especially since the Syrian regime has always denied their detention; based on all of these facts, these lists - published through the Civil Registry departments - constitute an indictment and solid evidence of the Syrian regime's involvement in the killing of these people who we believe died as a result of torture, except for those cases of death due to death sentences issued by the Military Field Court, which constitute only a small percentage of the total, not more than 5%, according to the data we have been able to document.

We stress that these figures represent the bare minimum that we were able to document, and the real number of cases of people forcibly disappeared by the Syrian regime whose deaths the regime subsequently documents in this way is likely to be far greater. To date, however, the regime has only announced this limited number, and while we believe that there are some cases about which we have been unable to obtain information, these remain limited.

Fadel Abdul Ghany, Director of the Syrian Network for Human Rights, says:

“Although the Syrian regime has always denied that it has forcibly disappeared thousands of Syrians, the Civil Registry incidents reveal that dozens of these people have died, and the Syrian regime has not informed their families, or handed over their bodies, even though it may have been years since their death. There is hardly a regime worldwide similar to the Assad regime in its barbaric dealings with the people except for North Korea. The international community must help 86,792 forcibly disappeared Syrian citizens, for every delay means more deaths among the Syrian people.”

II. At Least 54 Persons Forcibly Disappeared from Deir al Asafeer town, Whom Families Learned in February and March 2022 That They Had Been Registered in the Civil Registry Departments as Dead:

Deir al Asafeer is a town which is administratively a part of al Mleiha district in the Eastern Ghouta in Damascus Suburbs governorate, whose population was about 7,000 people before the outbreak of the popular uprising for democracy in Syria in March 2011. The town, which was under the control of factions of the armed opposition along with the other villages and cities of Eastern Ghouta in November 2012, was subjected to a siege by Syrian regime forces along with the rest of the towns of Eastern Ghouta since October 2013. The siege gradually turned into a form of collective punishment, with the regime inflicting continuous aerial and artillery bombardment in parallel with the comprehensive policy of starvation.

At the beginning of 2016, Syrian regime forces sought to control the towns in the southern sector of Eastern Ghouta because of their strategic importance in terms of their location and importance as rich agricultural lands that formed, over the years of the siege, an important source of goods and foodstuffs, which alleviated the impact of the siege on the area's residents.

On March 31, 2016, SNHR recorded 14 airstrikes carried out by Syrian regime fixed-wing warplanes, which killed 31 civilians, including 12 children and nine women. These attacks constituted the most prominent violations of the statement of cessation of hostilities that was agreed upon on February 27, 2016, under the auspices of the Russian forces. We issued a [report on the attack](#) on April 9, 2016.

In May 2016, Syrian regime forces were able to impose full control over most of the villages and towns in the southern sector, including Deir al Asafeer town, after military operations that lasted nearly four months. These military operations caused the displacement of most of the town's residents towards the cities of Saqba, Kafr Batna and Hamouriya.

As of the end of 2018, we documented a limited return of residents to the town, which have not witnessed any restoration or rehabilitation of services by the Syrian regime.

At the end of January 2022, dozens of people from Deir al Asafeer town gathered in front of the municipality building to protest against the suspension of their electronic cards (Smart Card),¹ with one of the municipality employees² instructing the protesters to visit the body³ responsible for issuing the cards to find out the reason for their suspension and to file a complaint about this suspension of support⁴ for them. Within days of submitting the complaint, a number of families learned that the reason for the suspension of their cards was that the name of these families' heads (that of the father) had been registered in the Civil Registry department as dead,⁵ and they were asked to go to the Civil Registry department to obtain death statements. Since the beginning of February 2022 until the 21st of March, many of the families of those forcibly disappeared in the Syrian regime's detention centers in Deir al Asafeer town obtained information from the Civil Registry confirming the deaths of their children/husbands, after extracting "family statement/death statement" documents from one of the Civil Registry department centers in Damascus Suburbs governorate.

During that period, we were able to document cases involving at least 54 forcibly disappeared people from Deir al Asafeer whose families learned of their deaths by obtaining death statements from the Civil Registry departments; all of them had been arrested by Syrian regime forces, which denied any information about them, and thus had been classified as being among the forcibly disappeared. We have obtained documents from the death statements provided by the Civil Registry to the families of the forcibly disappeared.

¹ Smart Card: A card issued to every family in the areas under the control of Syrian regime forces required to obtain foodstuffs, commodities and others, which the Syrian regime created to rationalize and legalize the sale of basic commodities according to the subsidized price through the regime-controlled Takamol company.

² We concealed the name at the request of witnesses.

³ Takamol Project Center in the Damascus Suburbs governorate.

⁴ At the end of January 2022, the Syrian regime excluded nearly 600,000 Syrian families from government support by stopping their smart cards.

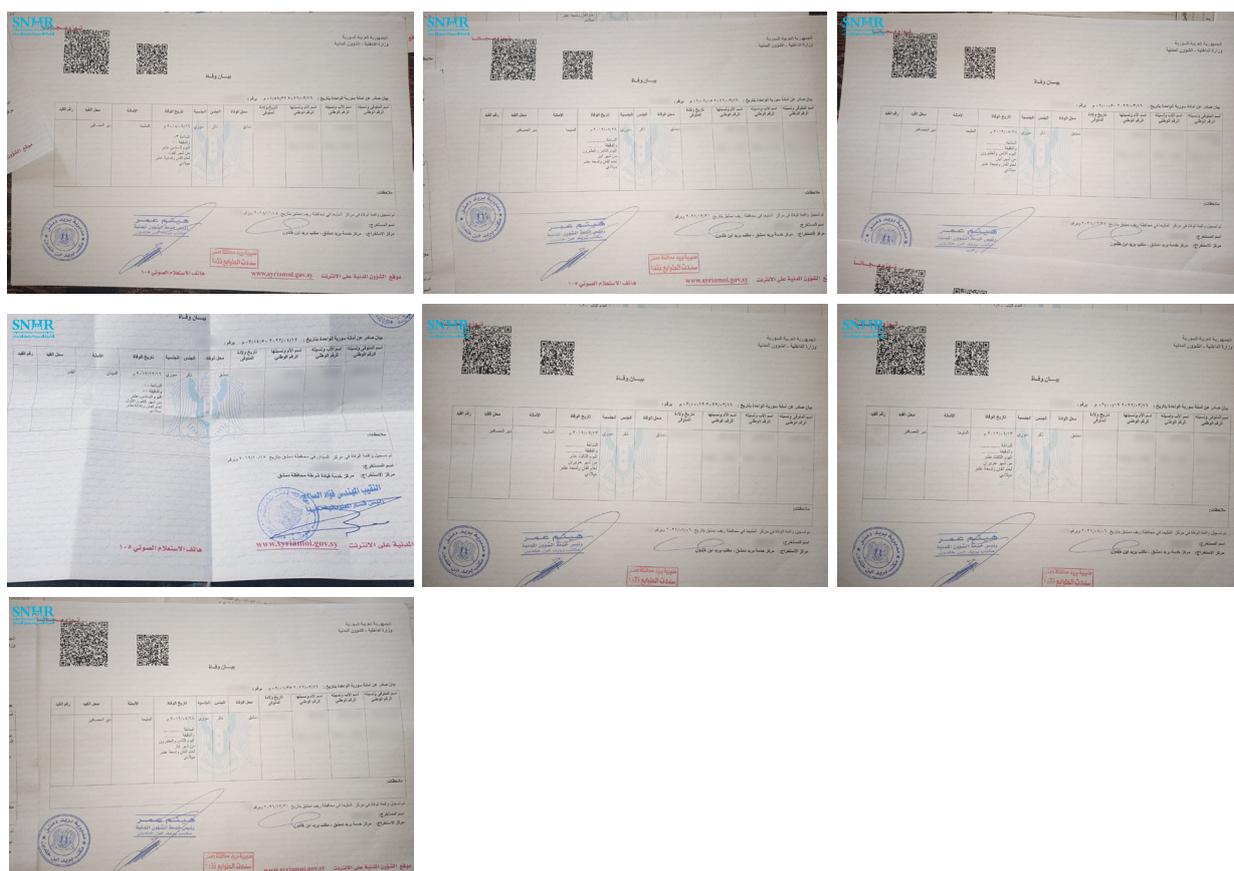
⁵ This raises the possibility that revealing the fate of these people was an unplanned matter by the Syrian regime, as it did in 2018 and 2019, and for this reason, after a short period of time, it stopped providing the families with any death statements and pursued the families of the forcibly disappeared who obtained documents from the Civil Registry that their disappeared loved ones had died.

The witnesses we contacted told us that many of the disappeared who were registered as dead in the Civil Registry Department had been held in Seydnaya Military Prison, and their families visited them constantly until mid-2020, when they were subsequently prevented from visiting, after being notified of this by the Military Police in Damascus city, who told them that the reason for this was that the detainees were being transferred to the Military Field Court, without providing them with any other information or details.

A number of death statements that the SNHR obtained copies of through witnesses showed that the same date of death had been recorded in 21 of these forcibly disappeared individuals' cases, which leads us to believe that death sentences were issued against them by the Military Field Court in Damascus city; according to witnesses, the last time their families were able to visit them, they were detained in Seydnaya Military Prison.

During the investigation process, we obtained information stating that approximately 70 other additional deaths were recorded among individuals forcibly disappeared from Deir al Asafeer town at Civil Registry Department in Damascus Suburbs governorate, but we were unable to obtain these death statements. Upon verifying these cases or some of them, we will publish an update of the record of those who were registered as dead among the forcibly disappeared.

Photocopies showing a number of death statements obtained by SNHR for a number of forcibly disappeared persons from Deir al Asafeer town, whose deaths were registered in a Civil Registry center in Damascus Suburbs governorate, all of which were issued in February and March 2022:



In addition to the 54 forcibly disappeared persons who were registered in the Civil Registry department as dead, we recorded the cases of two individuals whose families learned of their death by obtaining a death certificate issued by the Tishreen Military Hospital in Damascus in February 2022, but whose deaths were not registered by the Syrian regime in the Civil Registry department, bringing the documented death toll among people from Deir al Asafeer town, whose families learned of their deaths in the Syrian regime's detention centers in February and March 2022 to 56.

Our database also showed that 43 persons from Deir al Asafeer town who were registered in the Civil Registry department as dead were arrested in one incident in March 2018, when Syrian regime forces launched a campaign of raids and arrests in shelters for displaced people in Damascus and Damascus Suburbs governorates. At that time, the SNHR documented the arrest of about 263 people displaced from the Eastern Ghouta after Syrian regime forces took control of it, most of whom were former members of the armed opposition factions and who conducted settlements to their security status while they were in these 'shelters'.

III. Cross-Checking 54 Deaths of Persons from Deir al Asafeer with Data of 86,792 Forcibly Disappeared and 14,449 People Killed under Torture by the Syrian regime:

We at the SNHR carried out a complex series of cross-checking processes with our databases, in which we cross-checked the 54 cases of Deir al Asafeer persons, whose fate the Syrian regime recently revealed, finding that:

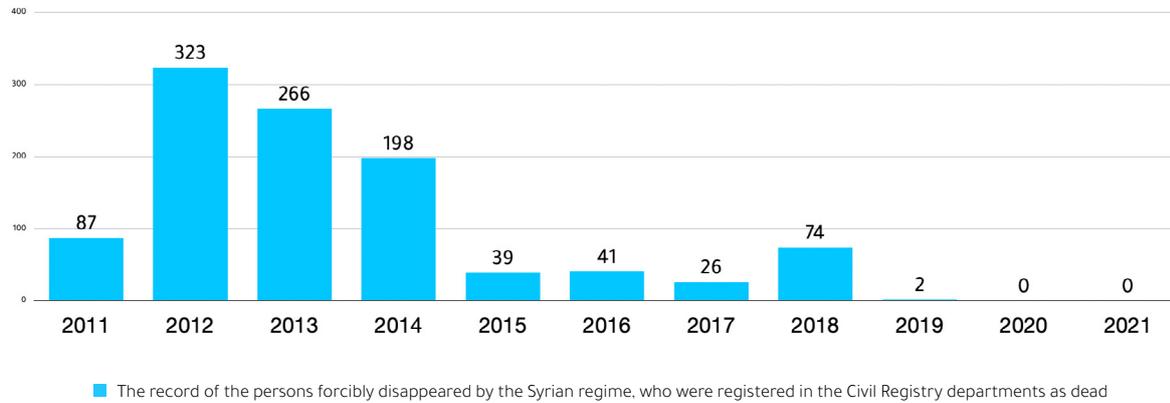
One: The database of detainees and forcibly disappeared persons (86,792 persons who are still subject to enforced disappearance by the Syrian regime):

The cross-checking processes showed that 36 persons from Deir al Asafeer, whose fate was recently revealed by the Syrian regime, were previously registered in the SNHR's database of forcibly disappeared individuals, while 18 of these individuals are new cases that were not previously documented in our database.

Two: Database of victims of torture (14,449 individuals killed under torture in the Syrian regime's detention centers):

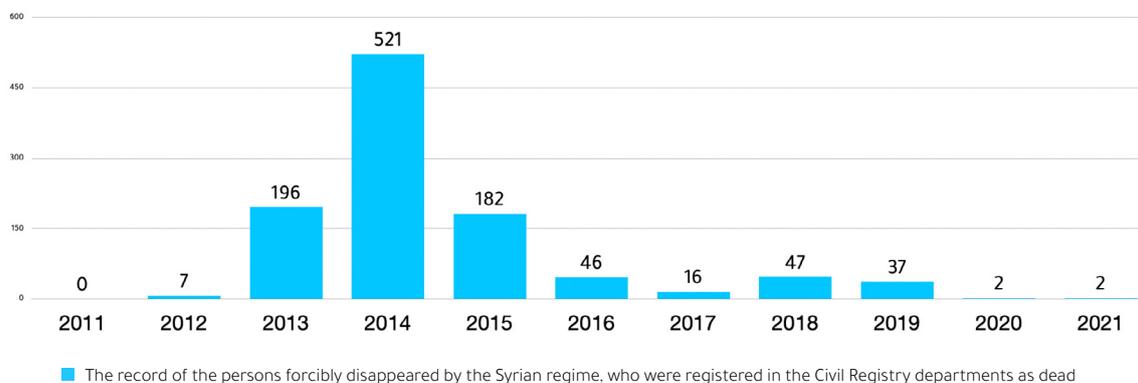
The cross-checking processes showed that only five persons were previously registered by SNHR as having died due to torture, and therefore 49 of the new deaths were among the forcibly disappeared.

By adding the 54 people from Deir al Asafeer who were registered as dead in the Civil Registry departments to the cases we documented in previous years, the total number becomes 1,056 people, distributed according to the years in which they were arrested by Syrian regime forces as follows:



The chart above shows that the highest number among the 1,056 cases that we have recorded, was arrested by Syrian regime forces in 2012, then 2013, followed by 2014, the years that witnessed the largest wave of enforced disappearance in the Syrian regime's detention centers.

The 1,056 cases were distributed by the year of death that was mentioned in the death notifications issued by the Civil Registry as follows:



The chart shows that the highest number among the 1,056 deaths was recorded in 2014, according to death notifications issued by the Civil Registry departments, followed by 2013 and 2015.

IV. Threatening and Summoning the Families of the Forcibly Disappeared Who Were Registered in the Civil Registry as Dead to Security Branches:

At the end of March 2022, we noticed that the Civil Registry department⁶ in Damascus Suburbs governorate stopped issuing family statements to a number of the forcibly disappeared persons' families, instead instructing them to return at a later time to obtain these documents. This policy was introduced in conjunction with summonses being issued by the security services in Damascus Suburbs for the families of the disappeared individuals for whom death statements were issued in February and March. On complying with these summonses, the families of the disappeared were interrogated about the contacts they had made after obtaining the death statements for their loved ones, and about the parties or persons who reported the deaths of their loved ones, and were warned against announcing their loved ones' deaths, and threatened with being arrested or rearrested if they did so. We recorded that a number of families of the disappeared, who were summoned, remained for days under arrest before their release.

We stress that these intimidating practices epitomize one of the main challenges we face in our documentation work, making it more difficult and complicated. We also note that these threats are a standard policy used by the Syrian regime, which aims to harass and persecute the families of the victims in order to deter them from reporting the violations they and their loved ones are exposed to, and to intimidate them against delivering information to human rights or media organizations; we record numerous arrests of citizens by personnel from Syrian regime security branches in areas under their control on a [monthly](#) basis over individuals merely expressing an opinion or possibly communicating with media and human rights organizations.

This confirms that Syrian regime forces have continued to persecute and target Syrian citizens in areas under regime control in connection with their political dissent and expression of opinions, despite the right to both being nominally guaranteed by the Syrian constitution and international law. This proves once again the truth of the crucial point which we have reiterated several times previously, namely that no Syrian citizen can feel safe from arrest since these are carried out without any basis in law or any oversight by any independent judiciary, and are perpetrated by the security services with no involvement by the judiciary. Following these arrests, detainees are routinely classified as forcibly disappeared persons.

⁶ We didn't specify it on purpose for security reasons.

V. Conclusions and Recommendations:

Legal conclusions:

The Syrian regime has undoubtedly committed a large number of violations through these acts, primarily the deliberate concealment of the fate of 85 percent of the detainees who it imprisons and tortures using the most barbaric, cruel and sadistic methods, leaving them to suffer to death, as well as subjecting the detainees' families and wider society to trauma, humiliation and terror by depriving them of the most basic rights and fundamental human dignity by not informing them of the deaths of their loved ones, or by refraining from handing over their bodies and finally registering them as dead without the families' knowledge. The Syrian regime has weaponized the resources, wealth and institutions of the Syrian state as tools of persecution and war against anyone who dares to oppose it.

SNHR believes that the Syrian regime has also demonstrated a complete lack of commitment to the international agreements and treaties it has ratified, in particular the International Covenant on Political and Civil Rights. In addition, the Syrian regime has violated a number of articles of the Syrian constitution itself as hundreds of thousands of detainees have been detained for many years with no arrest warrants being issued or any charges brought against them. The Syrian regime has also denied those detainees the right to an attorney and barred their families from visiting them. Seventy percent of all detainees have gone on to be documented as forcibly disappeared, with the Syrian regime never informing their families of their whereabouts. Any attempt by detainees' family members to inquire about their loved ones' whereabouts or wellbeing may put the families themselves at risk of being arrested.

Enforced disappearance is a strategy which the Syrian regime has used to target anyone connected to the popular uprising that rose up against the regime's decades-long brutal dynastic rule. Analysis of the related data shows that this phenomenon has been most prevalent in the areas that were best known for support for the uprising; this suggests that strategic use of this method is based on a consistent and deliberate policy, including the recent revelations of some of the forcibly-disappeared individuals' fates, which was done in a similarly deliberate and calculating manner. The implications of the synchronization between the state institutions in a way that serves this criminal policy are clear, as seen by the initial arrests targeting figures supporting the popular uprising, which were followed by their forcible disappearance and then by issuing death certificates for them without any information about the place and cause of their deaths. This also suggests that large numbers of the regime employees, senior officials, and other personnel with state bodies were aware of this particular policy by the Syrian regime, as well as being aware of the true cause of death and the brutal acts of torture perpetrated. It is clear that some of these officials possess knowledge of the location of the dead bodies and the mass graves where these are disposed of, particularly given the appallingly large number of forcibly-disappeared persons and the number of cases of death by torture which we recorded which is estimated at nearly 14,000 deaths.

Enforced disappearance is prohibited by customary international humanitarian law according to rule 98 which prohibits enforced disappearance in international and non-international armed conflicts.

Rule 117 of the same law states, "Each party to the conflict must take all feasible measures to account for persons reported missing as a result of armed conflict and must provide their family members with any information it has on their fate."

Furthermore, international criminal law also prohibits enforced disappearance. According to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, systematic practice of enforced disappearances is by its very nature a crime against humanity (Article 7, paragraph 1-i), which applies to the acts of the Syrian regime.

Recommendations:

UN Security Council and United Nations:

- Hold an emergency meeting to discuss this critical matter that threatens the fates of nearly 86,000 individuals and terrorizes the whole of Syrian society, and take action under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations to protect the detainees from a certain death inside detention centers.
- Find a mechanism to compel the Syrian regime to end torture and enforced disappearances, and take all necessary procedures to prevent the Syrian regime from persecuting and tampering with the living and the dead, with such crimes posing a major threat to the security and stability of the Syrian state.
- The Security Council should act to end torture and deaths due to torture inside Syrian regime detention centers, and save whoever is left among the detainees as quickly as possible.
- The UN General Assembly must seize the initiative in the Syrian situation and resort to invoking the principle of Uniting for Peace, given the total paralysis affecting the Security Council due to the Russian-Chinese veto.
- Impose sanctions on the Syrian regime, starting with an arms embargo and diplomatic boycotts, rising to military sanctions in the event that it continues to commit such atrocious violations, as it is doing until now.

The International Community:

- States which are parties to the Convention against Torture must take the necessary measures to establish their jurisdiction over perpetrators of torture and make all the necessary material and security efforts for this objective.
- Impose further sanctions and boycotts on the Syrian regime and on the countries supporting it, and designate all those who support the Syrian regime as accomplices involved in committing gross violations.
- Take serious punitive measures against the Syrian regime to deter it from continuing to kill Syrian citizens under torture.

- Provide more funds, support and sufficient grants to local organizations concerned with the care and rehabilitation of torture victims and their families.
- Provide support to individual activists and local organizations that document violations without imposing tutelage or political directives.
- Expand the lists of sanctions for individuals to include hundreds of those involved in crimes of torture and enforced disappearance.

Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR):

- Issue a statement to condemn and address this blatant violation of the most basic standards for human dignity.
- Release an extensive report on this barbaric phenomenon, clearly condemn it, and call on the Security Council to take urgent action to find a solution that preserve the rights of the families, reveal the fate of the dead individuals' remains, and hold the criminals accountable.

Independent International Commission of Inquiry (COI):

- Launch investigations into this critical issue. We are willing to provide all additional information and data.

International, Impartial and Intendent Mechanism (IIIM):

- Add this critical issue to the main investigation agenda.

The Syrian regime:

- Stop treating the Syrian state as a private family property
- Immediately allow access to the Independent International Commission of Inquiry, the International Committee of the Red Cross and all objective human rights organizations.
- Stop terrorizing the Syrian people through enforced disappearance, torture, and death due to torture.
- Stop tampering with and exploiting civil records and in service of the goals of the ruling family.
- Assume responsibility for all legal and material consequences of its actions and compensate the victims and their families from the resources of the Syrian state.
- Ensure the immediate and unconditional release of all arbitrary detained individuals, particularly children and women, and reveal the fate of tens of thousands of forcibly disappeared persons.

Acknowledgment:

We wish to thank all the families and witnesses who contributed to this report. We extend our sincere condolences to the families and friends of the victims.



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