The Syrian Regime Is Holding the Criminal Amjad Yousef, Who Killed Dozens of Syrians and Raped Dozens of Women in al Tadamun Neighborhood in Damascus

There Are Fears That the Fate of the 87,000 People Forcibly Disappeared in Regime Prisons Will Be Similar to That of al Tadamun Neighborhood’s Detainees
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The Syrian Regime Is Holding the Criminal Amjad Yousef, Who Killed Dozens of Syrians and Raped Dozens of Women in al Tadamun Neighborhood in Damascus:

At the end of April 2022, New Lines magazine published an investigation that proved that Amjad Yousef, an officer in the Syrian regime’s security forces, specifically the ‘227 Region Branch’ of the Military Intelligence Division, was among those responsible for the arrest/kidnapping of dozens of Syrians in al Tadamun neighborhood in Damascus, 41 of whom were taken to a pit dug for the purpose of serving as a mass grave, where they were thrown in and shot dead before their bodies were set alight. The investigators managed to persuade Amjad Yousef into confessing to this terrible crime.

Amjad Yousef and his partners (Najib Halabi, Bassam al Hasan, Fadi al Qasr) have been involved in the arrest and forcible disappearance of hundreds of Syrians, and the execution of some of those, in addition to the rape of several wives or relatives of those detainees whom he kidnapped and forcibly disappeared, coercing some of the distraught women into sex by promising to obtain information about their husbands’ or loved ones’ fate. These are only a few of the innumerable violations committed by the security services against Syrian citizens, who were also subjected to looting of their properties, in addition to every form of degradation of human dignity at their hands.

In early May 2022, the Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) received information that the Syrian regime had detained Amjad Yousef, and we believe that he has been retained in custody. This term indicates, according to the concepts of the Syrian regime, that the person remains detained within the branch in which he works and is prevented from leaving. Amjad Yousef worked in Branch 227. A media report subsequently confirmed that Amjad Yousef had been detained, further substantiating the information that we obtained with difficulty. This is because the detention process was not carried out according to a judicial warrant based on a specific charge. According to our information, Yousef has not been referred to the judiciary, and the Syrian regime has not issued any information indicating his arrest.
II. There Are Fears That the Fate of the 87,000 People Forcibly Disappeared in Regime Prisons Will Be Similar to That of al Tadamun Neighborhood’s Detainees:

According to the SNHR’s database that we have been building for nearly 12 years to date on a methodological daily basis, the Syrian regime (including the army, security services, local militias, and foreign Shiite militias) has detained, and continues to detain, at least 131,469 of the people arrested since March 2011, with 86,792 of this number classified as forcibly disappeared persons, including 1,738 children and 4,986 women (adult female). Further confirming that the vast majority of arrests go on to become enforced disappearances. Following New Lines’ publication of the investigation, which revealed that regime security forces executed dozens of detainees/forcibly disappeared persons, without any legal or judicial deterrent, and using barbaric methods, we are concerned about the fate of these 86,792 forcibly disappeared Syrian citizens. Additionally, we must note the Syrian regime had not announced the identity of those who were killed by Amjad Yousef and his partners or informed the victims’ families of their deaths, with the families of most of these victims believing their loved ones were still alive and had been forcibly disappeared by the Syrian regime, although the investigation further confirmed that at least some of the forcibly disappeared are being liquidated in an unspeakably brutal manner with their bodies burned and buried in pits that serve as unmarked mass graves.

Since we obtained high-resolution videos of the people who were killed in this massacre, we are making great efforts to try to identify these victims, endeavoring to cross-check the information we’ve obtained since the investigation was published along with the data gathered on the forcibly disappeared since their initial disappearance. We are facing immense difficulties in this task, caused most notably by the passage of years since these incidents took place, and secondly by the displacement of most of the residents of al Tadamun neighborhood during that period, which adds to the difficulty in contacting relatives of the victims, along with survivors and witnesses.

For years, the Syrian regime has systematically used enforced disappearance as one of its most prominent tools of repression and terrorism aimed at crushing and annihilating political opponents simply for expressing their opinion, harnessing the capabilities of the security services, which have tens of thousands of members, to hunt down those who participated in the popular uprising, and to arrest, torture and forcibly disappear them. Under international criminal law, according to the statute of the International Criminal Court, the systematic practice of enforced disappearances is by its very nature a crime against humanity,1 which applies to the acts of the Syrian regime.

1 International Criminal Court, Article 7, paragraph 1, https://www.icc-cpi.int/sites/default/files/Publications/Rome-Statute-Arabic.pdf
III. Conclusions and Recommendations:

1. Amjad Yousef Yousef was involved with many Syrian regime bodies in carrying out these terrible crimes, and it seems that the regime fears that more of those involved will be exposed, and, for this end, may ‘disappear’ Amjad Yousef for life or kill him after he confessed his crimes in order to thwart further investigation.

2. The Syrian regime would not have detained Amjad Yousef if regime bodies had not been involved in this atrocity at the highest levels. Amjad Yousef remained at large for years after committing these brutal atrocities, with thousands of other personnel in the regime army and security services involved in committing similar atrocious violations, but the Syrian regime did not arrest any of them, nor did it hold anyone accountable.

3. The Syrian regime protects the perpetrators of violations, and in some cases promotes them, so that they’re aware that their own fate is always organically linked to the regime’s fate, and so that defending it becomes an essential part of defending themselves.

4. Amjad Yousef and thousands of other members of the regime’s security services and army forces would not have committed such atrocious violations had they not been part of a deliberate policy implemented at the direct orders of the head of the Syrian regime, Bashar al Assad, the Commander-in-Chief of the Army and Armed Forces (army and security). Such large-scale violations need the coordination and cooperation of dozens of individuals and institutions, and while the Syrian regime must be aware of them, it has not only failed to institute any deterrence or accountability, but given the orders and facilitated their commission.

5. Commanders and other superior officers are criminally responsible for war crimes committed pursuant to their orders, or 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.

Recommendations:
The UN Security Council and the United Nations:

• Hold an emergency meeting to discuss the fate of the forcibly disappeared persons in Syria, as there is a serious concern that the Syrian regime has killed the vast majority of them.
• The Security Council should act to end torture and deaths due to torture inside Syrian regime detention centers, and to save whoever is left among the detainees as quickly as possible.
• Take action under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations to protect the detainees from certain death inside detention centers, and to put an end to the epidemic of enforced disappearance that continues to plague Syria, posing a grave threat to the security and stability of Syrian society.

1 ICRC, customary international humanitarian law, Rule 152, https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/customary-ihl/eng/docs/v1_rul_rule152
· Compel the Syrian regime to open all detention centers for inspection by the International Committee of the Red Cross and all United Nations committees.

The International Community:
· In the event of the inability and paralysis of the Security Council, the civilized countries of the world must act urgently to reveal the fate of the forcibly disappeared persons in Syria and take all possible measures to protect those who remain from suffering a fate similar to that which befell the detainees in al Tadamon neighborhood.
· The international community must assume its responsibilities in protecting the lives of the forcibly disappeared persons in Syria, and there must be serious pressure to achieve a political transition to eradicate brutality and terrorism, contributing to revealing the fate of the disappeared.

Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR):
· Issue a strongly worded condemnation of the Syrian regime's brutal practices against detainees and forcibly disappeared persons, calling on the Security Council to take effective and serious action to save their lives.

Arab and International Human Rights Organizations:
· Advocate for the issue of the forcibly disappeared in Syria, condemn the Syrian regime and expose its brutal practices, and be resolute and constant in demanding that the fate of all the forcibly disappeared be revealed.