

In the Nine Months Since the ICJ Issued its Order, the Syrian Regime Has Killed at least **43 Individuals due to Torture, and Arrested At least **756 Civilians**, Including Nine Children and 24 Women**

SNHR's Third Periodic Monitoring Report Proves the Syrian Regime's Blatant Violation of the ICJ's Order: the ICJ Must Conduct an Evaluation of the Regime's Compliance



Thursday 15 August 2024

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 analyzes in Syria.

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I. The Syrian Regime Continues to Disregard the ICJ Order and all UN Procedures on Ending Torture

This is the third report in a series of reports and news articles released by the Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) as part of its regular efforts to monitor the Syrian regime's compliance with [the Order issued by the International Court of Justice \(ICJ\) on November 16, 2023](#). [The first report](#) was released on February 22, 2024, three months after the Order was issued, [followed by the second](#), on May 23, 2024, six months after its issuance. In both the first two reports, we concluded that the Syrian regime had failed to take any actual action to comply with the requirements of the ICJ Order. As such, we emphasized, drawing upon the data we have documented, that the Syrian regime continues to blatantly and repeatedly contravene the UN Convention Against Torture.

The data contained in this report shows a continuation of the same pattern; that is to say, the Syrian regime continues to blatantly violate international law. Despite the binding legal obligations upon the Syrian regime, it has failed to take any actual steps to end torture in its detention centers. On the contrary, we have documented that the Syrian regime is noticeably targeting residents, and refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) returning to areas under its control, showing an utter disregard for the ICJ Order, as the regime continues to commit crimes and violations against detainees and forcibly disappeared persons.

On August 13, Alice Edwards, the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture, [published the letter](#) she had sent to the Syrian regime on June 14, 2024, after two months had passed without any response from the regime. Ms. Edwards noted that since May 2011, the Mandate of the Special Rapporteur had submitted either individually, or jointly with other UN Special Procedures mandate holders, roughly 30 communications to the Syrian Arab Republic involving allegations of torture and related ill-treatment affecting numerous alleged victims. The Syrian government only replied to eight of those letters in brief messages which did not address the torture allegations, she revealed.

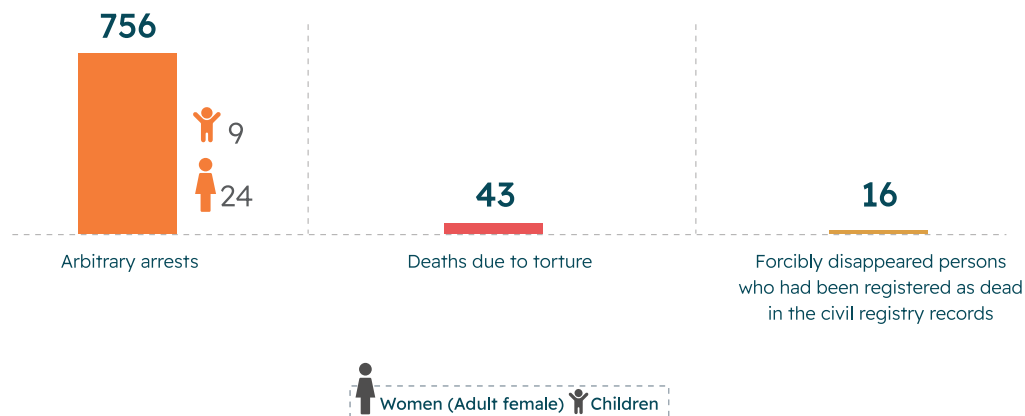
The Syrian regime has persistently demonstrated utter disregard for the ICJ's Order and the demands of most of the mandates of the special procedures at the UN Human Rights Council (HRC), as well as the resolutions adopted by the UN Security Council and the UN General Assembly, especially on the issue of detention and torture. Despite thousands of items of evidence and accounts proving and documenting the continuing nature of these practices, the regime has not taken even one step to end them. All these points underline the imperative need to take decisive action to put pressure on the Syrian regime, including imposing sanctions and enforcing a diplomatic blockade, in order to compel respect for human rights, and ensure that those responsible can no longer be shielded by their impunity.

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II. Summary of the Violations Related to Regime Detention Centers in the Period from November 16, 2023, Until August 15, 2024

Throughout this period, we have documented the commission of serious human rights violations in a systematic manner in Syrian regime detention centers. These include torture and physical and psychological assaults against detainees, who have also been subjected to enforced disappearance and arbitrary arrests with no trial. Furthermore, some of the forcibly disappeared persons were registered as dead in the civil registry records. Lastly, a number of individuals implicated in war crimes and crimes against humanity have been appointed to leadership positions in the various security agencies, as well as other senior positions.

Violations related to Syrian regime detention centers since the ICJ Order was issued on November 16, 2023, up until August 15, 2024



A. arbitrary arrests and enforced disappearances

Since the ICJ Order was issued on November 16, 2023, up until August 15, 2024, SNHR has documented **756 cases** of arbitrary arrest at the hands of Syrian regime forces, including of nine children and 24 women, with all those detained being held in various regime detention centers. Of these **756 arrested**, 97 have been released, while the remaining **659** have been categorized as enforced disappearance cases.

These cases also include a number of arrests involving ‘refugees and IDPs’ who returned to regime-held areas. This pattern of arrests spiked in May 2024, in tandem with a crackdown by Lebanon’s General Security and the Lebanese Army against Syrian refugees in Lebanon, with those arrested being forcibly deported to Syria, putting them at serious risk of becoming victims of the widespread arrests by the various Syrian regime’s security agencies. These arrests even included children and women. Similarly, we documented arrests targeting refugees and IDPs who were trying to return to their original areas, now under regime control. Some refugees returned from Lebanon and Türkiye via the Kasab Border Crossing and Damascus International Airport in Damascus city. As of this writing, we have recorded at least 156 arbitrary arrests/detentions by Syrian regime forces targeting refugees/IDPs who were attempting to return to regime-held areas, including two children and five women (adult female), since the start of 2024. Most of these 156 were arrested by the Syrian regime’s Military Security division in the al-Masna border area.

Most arrests by the Syrian regime are carried out at checkpoints or during raids without any judicial warrants being presented. In most cases, personnel from one of the Syrian regime’s four intelligence agencies are responsible for the arrest, with no involvement or oversight by the judiciary. Usually, detainees are subjected to torture from the very first moment of their arrest, and are denied any opportunity to contact their families or lawyer. Authorities also usually deny their involvement in these arbitrary arrests, with most detainees subsequently categorized as forcibly disappeared persons as a result.

These arbitrarily arrested people suffer brutal forms of torture, [with as many as 72 various methods of physical, psychological, and sexual torture](#) being inflicted in a widespread and deliberate manner against arbitrarily arrested detainees in all regime detention centers. Even more horrifying is the fact that no detainee is spared this gruesome torture, even women, children, elderly people, sick people, and individuals with special needs. These unimaginably inhuman conditions shape every moment of incarceration for detainees, including large numbers who have been imprisoned for many years. Almost every detainee, past or present, has been subjected to at least one method of torture during their detention, even if their detention ‘only’ lasts for a few hours in some cases.

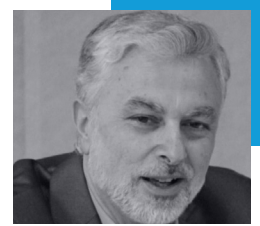
B. Deaths due to torture

Since the ICJ Order was issued on November 16, 2023, up until August 15, 2024, we have documented no fewer than 43 deaths due to torture in regime detention centers. Only four of the victims’ bodies have been returned to their families. Among those 43 victims were at least four former refugees who had either been forcibly deported or had returned to regime-held areas.

Some notable examples of deaths due to torture:

[Dr. Majd Marwan Kamalamz](#) was an American psychotherapist known for his extensive humanitarian activism. Dr. Kamalamz helped many Syrian refugees in Lebanon by providing humanitarian and medical services. Originally from Damascus city, he was aged 59 at the time of his arrest. On February 14, 2017, Dr. Majd arrived in Damascus city from Lebanon; he was arrested the next day by regime forces at a checkpoint in Damascus city's al-Mazza neighborhood.

Since then, he has been categorized as a forcibly disappeared person, with the Syrian regime denying holding him and refusing to allow anyone, even a lawyer, to visit him. In May 2024, Dr. Kamalamz' family, who had been tirelessly attempting since his arrest to find out anything about his whereabouts, began receiving reports that he had died in a Syrian regime detention center. According to intelligence received by SNHR from his family, Dr. Kamalamz was in good health at the time of his arrest indicating a strong probability that he died due to torture and medical negligence in a regime detention center. SNHR can also confirm that regime forces failed to disclose Dr. Kamalamz' death to his family at the time it took place, nor have they returned his body to his family.

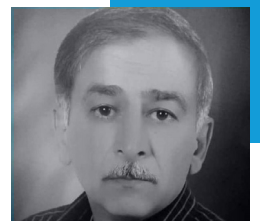


↑ 👁 Dr. Majd Marwan Kamalamz

[Jamal Shahin al-Matni](#), born in 1952, was a naturalized US citizen originally from Suwayda city in Syria. He was abducted by armed personnel affiliated with the Syrian regime's Military Security Intelligence Directorate on Monday, July 5, 2021, in a raid on his home near al-Tha'la Roundabout in Suwayda city. He was then taken to an undisclosed location. Jamal has been forcibly disappeared ever since with the regime denying holding him and refusing to allow anyone, even a lawyer, to visit him.

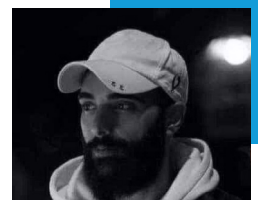
According to intelligence received by SNHR, Jamal was abducted by the locally known, regime-affiliated militia known as 'Raji Falhout's Militia Group', which then handed him over to the regime's Military Security Intelligence branch in Damascus city. During the abduction itself, militia members also beat his family members. Jamal's family believes he was abducted over his American citizenship.

On May 26, 2024, Jamal al-Matni's family obtained a death certificate form the civil registry office in Suwayda, which states that he died in Damascus city on December 23, 2021, with no other details provided regarding the cause of death, meaning that he died about six months after his arrest. SNHR can confirm that Jamal was in need of medical assistance and was taking medication on account of suffering from several illnesses at the time of his abduction, indicating a strong probability that he died due to torture and medical negligence in a regime detention center. SNHR can also confirm that Syrian regime forces has failed to disclose Jamal's death to his family at the time it took place, nor have they returned his body to his family.



↑ 👁 Jamal Shahin al-Matni

[Ahmad Nemer al-Halli](#), from the Barza neighborhood of Damascus city, was arrested in early-June 2024 by Syrian regime forces at a checkpoint in Damascus city. He was taken to the Military Security Intelligence Directorate's infamous Palestine Branch, or Branch 235, in Damascus city.

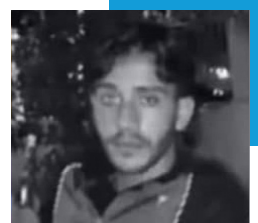


↑ 👁 Ahmad Nemer al-Halli

According to intelligence received by SNHR from local activists in Damascus city, Ahmad, who had been a refugee in Lebanon, was forcibly deported by personnel from Lebanon's General Security to the Lebanese-Syrian border along with a group of fellow refugees in June 2024. These deportations form part of a continuing security crackdown by the Lebanese authorities against Syrian refugees in Lebanon that has been going on since the start of 2024. It should be noted that Ahmad had previously agreed to settle his security situation with the Syrian regime before seeking asylum in Lebanon.

Ahmad was arrested as soon as he was deported from Lebanon, without any legal arrest warrant being presented. His family was not informed of his arrest, and he was denied any opportunity to contact his family or a lawyer. At the end of June 2024, we documented his transfer from the Palestine Branch to a hospital elsewhere in Damascus city. At the time of his transfer to the hospital, he was extremely unwell due to the brutal torture to which he had been subjected in detention. He remained in the hospital's intensive care unit until his death on Saturday, July 6, 2024, as we recorded previously.

[Ahmad Adnan Shamsi al-Haydar](#), from al-Boukamal city in eastern Deir Ez-Zour governorate, was arrested in April 2024 by Syrian regime forces at a checkpoint in Damascus city. He was then taken to the Military Security Intelligence Directorate's Palestine Branch, or Branch 235, in Damascus city.



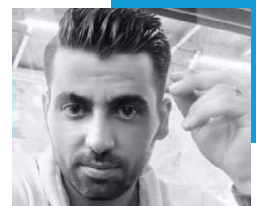
↑ 👁 Ahmad Adnan Shamsi al-Haydar

According to intelligence received by SNHR from local activists in Deir Ez-Zour, Ahmad, who had been a refugee in Lebanon, was forcibly deported by personnel from Lebanon's General Security to the Lebanese-Syrian border along with a group of fellow refugees in April 2024. This came as part of a continuing security crackdown by the Lebanese authorities against Syrian refugees in Lebanon that has been going on since the start of 2024.

Ahmad was arrested as soon as he was deported from Lebanon, even though no legal arrest warrant was issued. He was denied any opportunity to contact his family or a lawyer. The last known information about Ahmad was his transfer from Palestine Branch in Damascus to the Military Security Intelligence's branch in Deir Ez-Zour. He had been forcibly disappeared ever since.

On June 25, 2024, Ahmad's family received notification from a Syrian regime officer that Ahmad had died inside the Military Security Intelligence Directorate's branch in Deir Ez-Zour city. His body was returned to his family at the Ahmad al-Hwyedi Military Hospital in Deir Ez-Zour city the next day, June 26, 2024. SNHR can confirm that Ahmad was in good health at the time of his arrest, indicating a strong probability that he died due to torture and medical negligence inside the Military Security Intelligence Directorate's branch in Deir Ez-Zour city.

[Abdullah Hussein al-Akhras](#), a defector from the Syrian regime army, originally from Ghabagheb town in northern rural Daraa governorate, was arrested in September 2023 by regime forces at a checkpoint in Aleppo governorate while trying to return to his hometown in Daraa governorate.



↑ 👁 Abdullah Hussein al-Akhras

According to intelligence received by SNHR from people close to the victim, Abdullah, who was born in 1991, had been living as a refugee in Türkiye until he was forcibly deported to northwestern Syria in mid-2023. Soon afterwards, as he tried to make his way back to his hometown, regime forces arrested him at the aforementioned checkpoint in Aleppo. His family later learned that he was being held in the regime's infamous Sednaya Military Prison in Rural Damascus governorate. He has been classified as forcibly disappeared ever since.

On August 5, 2024, Abdullah's family received notification from a regime military official that he had died. His body was returned to his family at the Harasta Military Hospital in Harasta city in eastern Rural Damascus governorate on the same day. SNHR can confirm that Abdullah was in good health at the time of his arrest, indicating a strong probability that he had died due to torture and medical negligence in Sednaya Military Prison.

C. More forcibly disappeared persons have been registered as dead in the civil registry records

With the start of 2024, SNHR was able to obtain death certificates for newly discovered enforced disappearance cases that had not previously been publicly disclosed, leading us to believe that the Syrian regime is sending newly released information about forcibly disappeared persons to the civil registry offices to register their deaths. Since November 16, 2023, up until August 15, 2024, we have documented the registration of the deaths of no fewer than 16 forcibly disappeared persons in the civil registry records. Among these cases are victims from the same families, political activists, and university students. In all the cases, the cause of death was not given, and the Syrian regime has not returned the victims' bodies to their families or notified the families of their loved ones' deaths at the time they took place.

III. Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

All the points above and the other data collected by SNHR show that the Syrian regime is still committing acts of torture of every variety, beginning with arbitrary arrest, which is, in and of itself, a form of torture since it is carried out in a manner more akin to an abduction than a legitimate arrest with no judicial warrant being shown. The process of arrest also involves the use of excessive violence and beatings of various types and degrees, which usually begin from the very first moment of the arrest, and continue throughout the detention period, which also includes subjecting detainees to cruel and inhumane detention conditions, as well as [referring them to exceptional security courts](#), where trials are conducted in a way that is closer to a interrogation at a security facility than a legitimate courtroom trial.

As proven by our database on cases of arbitrary arrest, torture, and enforced disappearance at the hands of regime forces, no indication can be seen of any willingness by the regime to cease torture, or even to undertake the most minimal and basic of measures mentioned above in response to the ICJ's ruling. Furthermore, at least **136,192 people** are still arbitrarily detained and/or forcibly disappeared by the regime, and enduring torture in regime detention centers. Despite being responsible for such unimaginably terrible suffering, the Syrian regime has not launched even one investigation into the disappearance or torture of detainees by its personnel. On the contrary, the regime has enacted 'laws' shielding them from accountability.

Recommendations

International Court of Justice (ICJ)

- This case is a genuine test of the credibility and power of the ICJ. As such, the ICJ must take immediate and effective measures to address those violations and ensure the realization of justice and accountability. All possible measure must be taken against the Syrian regime, including the UN Security Council issuing a binding resolution calling for ending systematic torture, all of which constitute crimes against humanity, and unequivocally condemning the Syrian regime's breach of the ICJ Order.
- The ICJ must issue a statement assessing the Syrian regime's commitment to the provisional measures indicated by the Court, as nine months have passed since the most recent Order.
- Take more decisive action against the Syrian regime in light of the abundance of evidence of the regime's lack of commitment to the previous provisional measures.
- The UN Security Council must adopt a resolution binding the Syrian regime to implement the ICJ Order.

UN Security Council

- Impose targeted sanctions on Syrian officials who have been directly involved in torture and arbitrary arrest, or those responsible for such practices.
- Refer the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court (ICC) to initiate proceedings for investigation and potential prosecution for war crimes and crimes against humanity.
- Take action under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations to rescue detainees from impending death in detention centers, and put an end to the nationwide epidemic of enforced disappearance practices, which threatens the foundations of societal security and stability, put an end to torture and deaths due to torture in regime detention centers, and save the remaining detainees as soon as possible.

International community

- All ICJ members, namely every state in the world, must cut all and any forms of political and military association with the Syrian regime over its blatant breach of the ICJ Order.
- Take additional action against the Syrian regime, and intensify sanctions, in order to ensure compensation for victims and the protection of human rights in Syria.
- More work must be done to ensure the implementation of UN Security Council resolution 2042, adopted on April 14, 2012; UN Security Council resolution 2043, adopted on April 21, 2012; and UN Security Council resolution 2139, adopted on February 22, 2014, which provides for putting an end to enforced disappearance.
- Take action under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations to rescue detainees from impending death in detention centers, and put an end to the nationwide epidemic of enforced disappearance practices, which threatens the foundations of societal security and stability, put an end to torture and deaths due to torture in regime detention centers, and save the remaining detainees as soon as possible.

Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (COI) and the UN Human Rights Office (OHCHR)

- Conduct a thorough and comprehensive investigation into the torture and arbitrary arrests practices carried out by the regime since the issuance of the ICJ Order, and issue a detailed report on the extents of the Syrian regime's breaches of the ICJ Order.
- Call on the UN Human Rights Council to condemn the Syrian regime by name for its failure to comply with the ICJ Order, and call on member states to impose sanctions on the regime for its failure to comply.

UN Special Rapporteur on Torture

- Continue to monitor the Syrian regime's compliance with the ICJ Order, and release periodic statements stressing and clarifying the regime's failure to comply.

International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)

- Engage in serious negotiations to expand the scope of access to detention centers in Syria, in order to conduct regular and unannounced inspections.
- Establish a system for communication between detainees and their families.
- Establish a network of health and psychological care providers to support survivors of torture in Syria and in neighboring countries that are hosting Syrian refugees.

Arab League

- Take a clear stance against the Syrian regime's brutal practices that are killing the Syrian people under torture, and re-suspend the Syria's membership at the Arab League until it demonstrates greater compliance with the ICJ Order.

Syrian regime

- Comply with the ICJ's Order and hand over those accused so they can be fairly tried.
- Arbitrary arrests and enforced disappearances, which are still going on as this report shows, must be immediately halted. The fate of all detainees and forcibly disappeared persons must be revealed, and their families must be allowed to visit them immediately, while the bodies of those killed due to torture must be returned to their families.
- Unconditionally release all detainees who have been detained for simply exercising their political and civil rights, and release all women, children, persons with special needs, sick people, and elderly people, as well as ceasing the use of detainees as prisoners of war.
- Stop manipulating the records of forcibly disappeared persons in the civil registry and end the use of state resources in the service of security policies.

Acknowledgment & Solidarity

SNHR wishes to sincerely thank all the victims, their families, and all local activists from all fields for their invaluable contributions to this report. We stand in solidarity with detained victims, forcibly disappeared persons, and all their families.



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No justice without accountability

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August 2024

