



الشبكة السورية لحقوق الإنسان  
SYRIAN NETWORK FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

# Branch 300 of The General Intelligence Directorate: A Central Instrument of Repression, Surveillance, and Persecution in Bashar al-Assad’s Former Regime

At Least 17,438 Cases of Arbitrary Arrest and 2,463 Cases of Death due to Torture Have Been Attributed to Branch 300

Monday 15 December 2025

At Least

# 17,438

Cases of Arbitrary Arrest

# 2,463

Death due to Torture





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.

## Contents:

<b>First: Introduction:</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>Second: Methodology of the Report:</b> .....	<b>2</b>
<b>Third: Background on the Security Apparatus in Syria:</b> .....	<b>3</b>
The most prominent systematic violations committed by the security services after 2011:.....	4
Enforced Disappearance .....	5
Torture.....	6
<b>Fourth: The General and Functional Structure of the General Intelligence Directorate and the Role of the Counter-Espionage Branch (Branch 300):</b> .....	<b>8</b>
The General and Functional Structure of the General Intelligence Directorate.....	8
Branch 300: Origins and Specialization in the Context of Security Repression.....	10
1. The Hierarchical and Organizational Structure of Branch 300 .....	10
2. Geographical Location and Physical Structure .....	11
3. The Actual Role of Branch 300 in the System of Repression.....	11
4. Functional Relations with Other Branches .....	13
5. Secrecy and Institutional Isolation.....	13
<b>Fifth: Patterns of Violations Resulting from the Work of Branch 300</b> .....	<b>15</b>
Arbitrary Arrest and Enforced Disappearance:.....	16
Torture, Cruel Treatment, and Deaths Due to Torture: .....	16
Additional Violations .....	16
Survivors' testimonies about the abuses they suffered at Branch 300.....	17
<b>Sixth: The Legal and Command Responsibility of Branch 300</b> .....	<b>18</b>
Prominent leaders and officers implicated in violations stemming from the work of Branch 300.....	19
<b>Seventh: Legal Conclusions and Recommendations</b> .....	<b>20</b>

## **FIRST: INTRODUCTION:**

This report offers an in-depth analytical examination of the Counter-Espionage Branch (Branch 300) of the General Intelligence Directorate in Syria, as a central component of a security apparatus that systematically repressed civilians during the era of the former regime (the Bashar al-Assad regime). The report aims to define the branch's identity, function, and position within the security structure, highlight the patterns of violations attributed to it, particularly arbitrary arrest, torture, and enforced disappearance, and link these to the general policies that governed the conduct of the security services. This allows for a more precise understanding of the nature of the leadership and hierarchical responsibility within this system.

The report was based on a comprehensive set of sources, including security documents, internal correspondence, relevant administrative records, testimonies from survivors and victims' families, and the Syrian Network for Human Rights' database, including its accumulated reports and field investigations. This material was analyzed according to internationally recognized documentation standards for monitoring grave violations and based on the principles of international humanitarian law and international human rights law. Accordingly, the report seeks to demonstrate the relationship between the officially declared tasks of Branch 300 and its actual role within the network of repression. It also addresses the legal responsibilities of its leaders and officers within the chain of command.

In conclusion, the report offers practical recommendations to the relevant authorities and stakeholders to promote accountability, reparation, and guarantees of non-repetition, within a transitional justice process that restores the rights of victims, preserves the right to truth, and establishes structural reform that places security work under effective legal and institutional oversight.

This report is part of the network's ongoing efforts to document the activities of lesser-known security branches, complementing a series of reports that addressed other branches such as Branch 215, with a focus on violations related to torture, arbitrary arrests and enforced disappearances, and linking them to the systematic security policies of the former regime (the Bashar al-Assad regime).

Fadel Abdulghany, Executive Director of the Syrian Network for Human Rights, says:

**“The documents we have, and the testimonies of survivors show that Branch 300 was not a marginal administrative unit, but a central link in the machinery of repression employed by the State Security apparatus; where censorship was intertwined with arbitrary arrest, torture, and enforced disappearance within a systematic state policy. Opening the archives, holding leaders accountable within their chain of command, and guaranteeing the victims' right to truth and justice are legal obligations that do not expire with time.**



## SECOND: METHODOLOGY OF THE REPORT:

The report adopts a multi-source methodology to ensure the collection and analysis of accurate and reliable evidence regarding the activity of Branch 300, with a particular focus on the period following 2011 due to the escalation of systematic violations committed by the security services at that stage and the role of the central branches, including Branch 300, in carrying them out.

In this, SNHR is guided by international standards adopted in human rights documentation, including the United Nations Principles on Documentation and Investigation of Gross Human Rights Violations, the 1999 Istanbul Protocol on the Documentation of Torture, as well as the guidelines of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on field verification methodologies.

Based on these references, the report relied on a set of complementary steps as follows:

- 1. Analysis of Official and Unofficial Documents:** SNHR obtained a large number of documents issued by Syrian intelligence branches and agencies. These documents underwent systematic verification processes, including confirming their authenticity, source, and chronological order. They were then sorted according to criteria that included identifying the issuing branch and classifying them thematically (such as arrest warrants, transfer orders, investigation reports, and administrative instructions). The Network utilized its own proprietary AI-based system to automatically read and analyze texts and link their content to the Network's database of victims, detainees, and documented incidents. This enabled the identification of recurring patterns in security orders and instructions, linking them to previously documented field practices. From this large volume, a group of documents directly related to Branch 300, as well as others that refer to or are connected to it, were identified and reviewed and analyzed in detail as part of the preparation of this report.
- 2. Field Testimonies:** SNHR conducted interviews with survivors, witnesses, and families of victims to document firsthand experiences related to arbitrary arrest, torture, enforced disappearance, and the resulting harm. These interviews were conducted according to strict ethical standards that respect confidentiality and psychological safety, in accordance with the United Nations guidelines for the protection of witnesses and victims.
- 3. Database Reliance:** SNHR's database was used to extract accurate statistics on violations related to the security services and Branch 300, including cases of enforced disappearance, torture, and arbitrary arrests.
- 4. Comparison with previous reports:** SNHR's reports, international organizations' reports, and judicial documents were taken into account in order to identify the pattern of violations and link them to systematic security policies.
- 5. Legal Analysis:** The extent to which the practices of Branch 300 comply with the provisions of Syrian law and international law, particularly international humanitarian law and international human rights law, was examined, along with an analysis of individual and leadership criminal responsibility in accordance with the principles of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, including serial responsibility for serious crimes.

This methodology reflects SNHR's commitment to objectivity and accuracy, and allows for a comprehensive assessment of the role of Branch 300 within the network of central security agencies that committed systematic violations after 2011, thus supporting efforts to promote justice and accountability in the current transitional phase in Syria.

## **THIRD: BACKGROUND ON THE SECURITY APPARATUS IN SYRIA:**

The security apparatus in Syria is the cornerstone upon which the Assad regime has relied to consolidate its power for decades, becoming the most influential and powerful system within the state structure. Since the Ba'ath Party seized power in 1963, and Hafez al-Assad assumed the presidency in 1970, a sprawling and interconnected security apparatus was built, its primary goal being to protect the political regime and ensure its survival, rather than to protect citizens or enforce the rule of law.

Although the outlines of these security agencies began to take shape after independence in 1946, they acquired their institutional character after the Ba'athist coup and the issuance of the Emergency Law in the same year. This law granted the agencies broad powers of arrest, investigation, and surveillance without effective judicial oversight. With the consolidation of Hafez al-Assad's rule, these agencies transformed into a comprehensive instrument of political and social control, permeating the details of Syrians' daily lives through networks of branches and informants spread throughout the country.

During the 1980s, as the confrontation between the regime and the Muslim Brotherhood escalated, Hafez al-Assad consolidated the power of the security apparatus, making it the primary instrument of repression and control, thus entrenching a culture of fear and constant surveillance. When power passed to Bashar al-Assad in 2000, the security apparatus continued with the same approach, and its powers even expanded with the outbreak of the popular uprising in March 2011, as it assumed a central role in suppressing peaceful demonstrations through arbitrary arrests, torture, and extrajudicial killings.

The number of employees in these agencies, including members of informant networks, was estimated at about **300,000 people**, with a clear dominance of members of one sect (the Alawites) within the upper leadership levels; this gave the security system a discriminatory and sectarian character that contributed to deepening the division within Syrian society.

The security apparatus consists of four main intelligence agencies, each with dozens of central and regional branches spread throughout the provinces. Despite their various names and nominal mandates, they essentially perform the same role: protecting the ruling regime, monitoring society, and controlling political, media, and economic activities. These agencies report directly to the National Security Bureau in Damascus, which oversees them and reports to the President of the Republic, effectively granting them greater power and influence than the legislative, executive, and judicial branches. This organizational framework has transformed into a closed, authoritarian structure that monopolizes security and political decision-making and imposes comprehensive control over all aspects of public life.

### Syrian security apparatus under Bashar al-Assad: Functional and operational characteristics

The Branch	Foundation	Stated Purpose	Actual Purpose / distinguishing features
General Intelligence Directorate	1963	Monitoring society, arresting dissidents, and overseeing political and media activities.	A vast network of branches and informants, comprehensive coverage of all cities, a key tool for political control
Military Intelligence Directorate	The oldest security entity, linked to the army, with roots dating back to the French Mandate period, was re-established in its current form in 1969.	Monitoring the military and ensuring their loyalty	Its powers have been expanded to include civilians, especially in sensitive areas, and it includes branches such as the Palestine branch, which is notorious for serious violations against detainees.
Air-force Intelligence Directorate	1963	Protection of the Air-force	Its tasks extend beyond the military sphere to include monitoring civilians, political and economic interference, direct participation in suppressing protests, and the Mezzeh military airport facility is one of its most prominent detention centers.
Political Security Directorate	1971	Monitoring political and social activities	Widespread in all governorates, monitoring of citizens' daily transactions (licenses, business, travel), an effective tool for restricting public freedoms and subjecting society to constant surveillance.

### The most prominent systematic violations committed by the security services after 2011:

Since 2011, the Syrian Network for Human Rights has been monitoring and documenting the violations committed by the security services under the former regime, emphasizing that these violations were not limited to any one agency, but rather constituted a common systematic characteristic among the four agencies: Military Intelligence, Air Force Intelligence, General Intelligence, and Political Security. The most prominent patterns of violations were as follows:

- 1. Arbitrary Arrest and Enforced Disappearance:** Security forces carried out mass arrest campaigns targeting demonstrators and civil activists, often without warrants or legal procedures, and in many cases, included children and women. This was accompanied by the enforced disappearance of thousands of detainees, whose whereabouts and legal status were systematically concealed from their families.

2. **Systematic Torture:** Security branches systematically practiced torture within detention centers, resulting in the deaths of tens of thousands of detainees. These practices amount to crimes against humanity under international law.
3. **Excessive use of force and extrajudicial killings:** Security forces opened fire directly on peaceful demonstrators, including funeral procession participants, acting on explicit central orders to use «all necessary means,» resulting in thousands of casualties.
4. **Policies of intimidation:** Security forces implemented comprehensive policies of surveillance and intimidation, relying on extensive networks of informants to monitor the population, nighttime raids on homes, and the targeting of medical personnel and paramedics who provided aid to the wounded. This reflects an absolute security grip on the details of citizens' daily lives.

SNHR database has shown since 2011 that enforced disappearance and torture were among the most common systematic violations among the four security agencies in Syria.

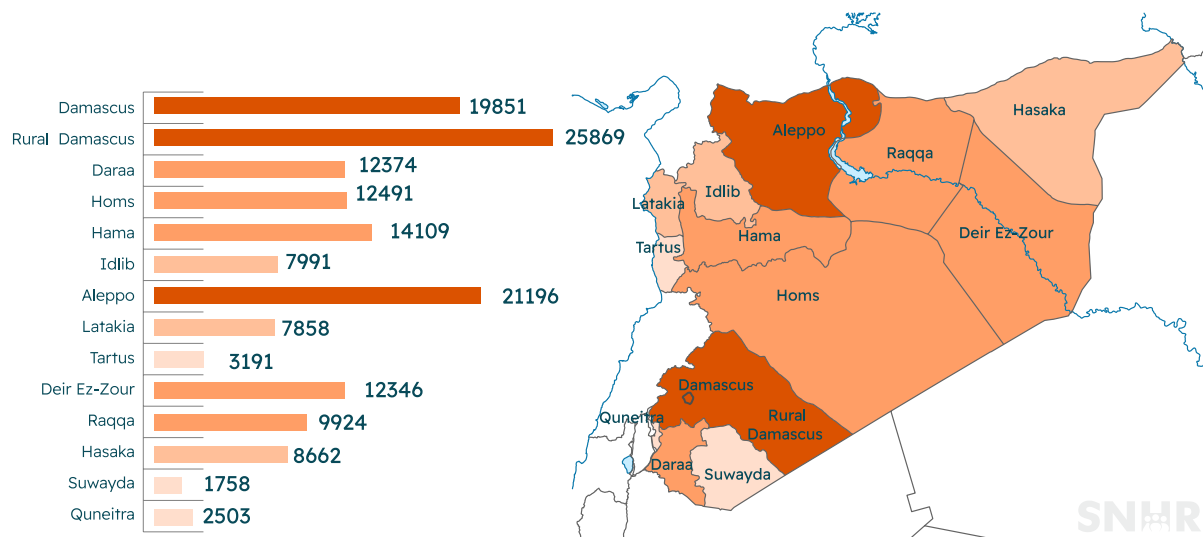
## Enforced Disappearance

SNHR documented cases of enforced disappearance involving thousands of citizens, including children and women, who were arbitrarily arrested without any legal basis, often without their families being informed of their whereabouts or legal status. This practice has been used as a central tool to spread fear and intimidate society, and hundreds of cases have persisted for years without any accountability or disclosure of the fate of the disappeared. The Network publishes an annual report on enforced disappearance in Syria, which includes a comprehensive breakdown of cases, their geographical and temporal distribution, and the targeted civilian groups, reflecting the scale of the violations and their profound societal impact.

According to SNHR's database, at least **160,123 people**, including **3,736 children** and **8,014 women**, remain forcibly disappeared in Syria from March 2011 to October 2025 in detention centers run by the former regime (the Bashar al-Assad regime). This is the highest number of such disappearances in modern Syrian history and reflects the scale of the human tragedy created by the previous security apparatus.

A graphic of the distribution of enforced disappearances in Syria by governorates as follows:

At least **160,123** people remain forcibly disappeared in Syria from March 2011 to October 2025 in detention centers belonging to the former Bashar al-Assad regime.



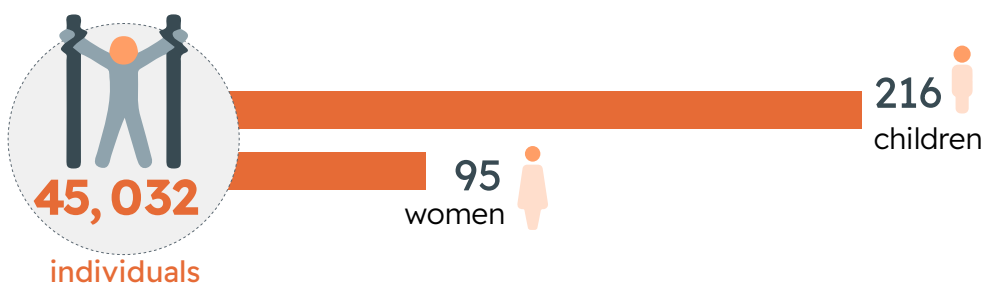
The graph above shows that the Rif Dimashq Governorate leads the rest of the governorates in terms of the number of victims of enforced disappearance, followed by Aleppo, then Damascus, then Hama.

## Torture

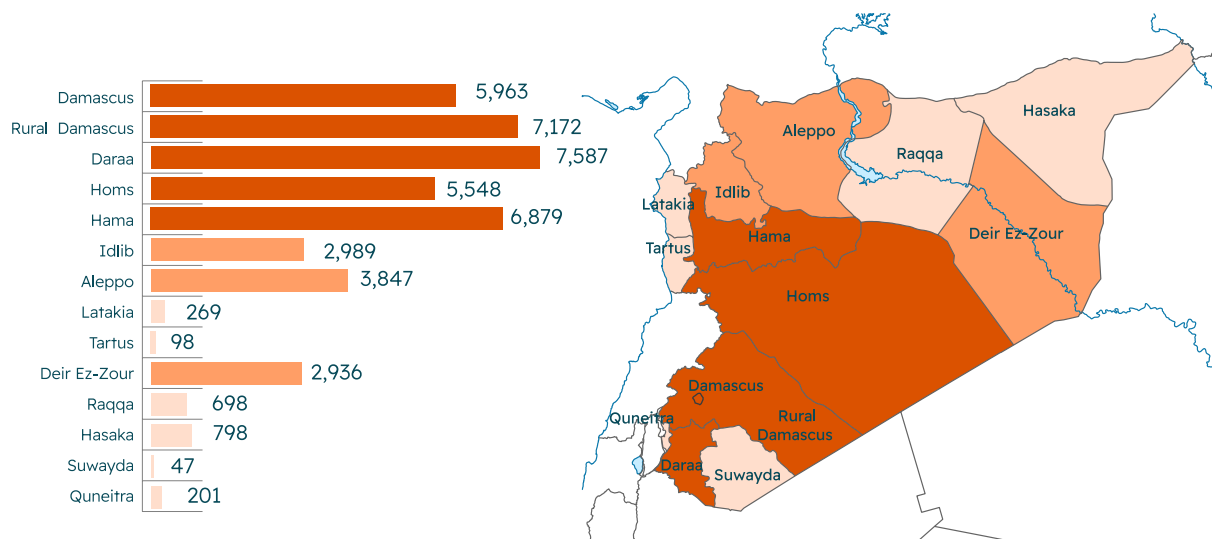
Security forces employed a systematic policy of torture in detention centers, including electric shocks, severe beatings with sticks and metal wires, suspension in painful positions known as “ghosting,” sleep deprivation, food and water deprivation, and sexual assault and threats thereof. This torture led to the deaths of dozens of detainees, whose bodies were returned to their families bearing signs of extreme violence, classifying these practices as crimes against humanity. It is worth noting that SNHR has previously reviewed [a detailed report on the torture](#) methods used in the detention centers of the former regime, documenting the examples and techniques used by the security services.

This background reflects the systematic nature of human rights violations in Syria and illustrates the central role of all security branches, including Branch 300, in implementing policies of repression after 2011, underscoring the need for a comprehensive accountability process for security leaders and personnel within the framework of transitional justice.

According to SNHR's database, the number of victims killed as a result of torture in Syria from March 2011 to October 2025 in detention centers belonging to the former regime of Bashar al-Assad was at least:



The graphic of the distribution of victims who died as a result of torture according to Syrian governorates:



SNHR

We note from the previous map that the governorates of Daraa and Rif Dimashq, then the governorates of Hama and Damascus, are at the forefront of the governorates that lost their families due to torture. We have observed that elements of Bashar al-Assad's regime often practice torture on the basis of the victim's affiliation with a region opposed to his regime, as a kind of collective revenge in his detention centers.

## **FOURTH: THE GENERAL AND FUNCTIONAL STRUCTURE OF THE GENERAL INTELLIGENCE DIRECTORATE AND THE ROLE OF THE COUNTER-ESPIONAGE BRANCH (BRANCH 300):**

Since the Ba'ath Party seized power in 1963, the Syrian regime has relied on security agencies to consolidate a rule based on repression, surveillance, and absolute control over society. The General Intelligence Directorate (State Security) was one of the cornerstones of this system; it was officially established by Legislative Decree No. 14 of 1969, but in practice, under Hafez al-Assad, it evolved into a direct instrument for protecting the ruling regime, not the state or its citizens.

This approach continued under Bashar al-Assad, with the administration expanding through a network of specialized branches that collectively formed a comprehensive apparatus for monitoring, tracking, and arresting individuals, operating outside any effective judicial or institutional oversight. According to its legal framework, the administration is officially a civilian body; however, the military officers working within it are seconded from the Ministries of Defense and Interior, making them subject to these ministries in terms of both financial and organizational status, while civilian employees are governed by the Unified Labor Law. Consequently, military officers control command, decision-making, and priority setting, while the role of civilians is limited to administrative tasks within branches that are effectively under military supervision.

### **The General and Functional Structure of the General Intelligence Directorate**

The General Intelligence Directorate comprises central and regional branches spread throughout the governorates, sharing the tasks of surveillance, arrest, and torture. The most prominent of these are:

- 1. Information Branch (No. 255):** This branch gathers information from religious, political, and media sectors. It serves as a central point of contact for data received from other branches and regional branches. It also issues administrative decisions such as travel bans or mandatory reporting in specific cases.
- 2. Office of the Director of the General Administration/Branch 111:** This branch reports to the Information Branch and is responsible for organizing files under the direct supervision of the Director of the Administration. It also intervenes in various files from other branches.
- 3. Investigation Branch (No. 285):** This branch specializes in investigating information referred from various branches and sources. Most detainees are referred to this branch after initial investigations in the provincial branches.
- 4. Counterterrorism Branch (No. 295):** This branch trains personnel in military and security skills and carries out field operations, including raids, assassinations, and arrests, under the banner of «counterterrorism.»
- 5. Counter-Espionage Branch (No. 300):** Specializes in monitoring foreigners and those suspected of dealing with foreign entities. It is considered a vital branch in gathering intelligence related to external threats.
- 6. Foreign Branch (No. 279):** Manages intelligence stations abroad through diplomatic missions or other networks. It monitors expatriate affairs and matters related to the state's foreign operations.

7. **Domestic Branch (No. 251):** Focuses on counterintelligence within the country, particularly in the capital. It participates in the appointment of government and administrative officials and monitors institutions politically.
8. **Technical Branch (No. 280):** Handles wiretapping, jamming, and technical surveillance operations. It provides technical and logistical support to other branches.
9. **Training Branch (No. 290):** Responsible for qualifying and developing the skills of agency personnel.
10. **Economic Branch (No. 260):** Monitors economic issues related to citizens, companies, and institutions. It conducts investigations into financial and economic matters.
11. **Regional branches:** Sections similar to the central branches are spread throughout the governorates, providing local security coverage through agents, informants, and detachments that include cities, towns, and institutions.

The following table illustrates the functional structure and main branches of the General Intelligence Directorate (State Security):

Level	Branch/Unit	Number	Main Objective	Details
Highest-level	Director of the General Directorate of Intelligence	-	General oversight of all branches and strategic decision-making	The top official in charge of the security structure
Direct	Director Office	111	Organizing files under the manager's supervision, interfering in other branch files	Supervise all branches and acts as the link between them.
Main	Information Branch	255	Gathering information from religious, political, and media sectors; issuing administrative decisions.	Information convergence point from branches and regional branches
Main	Investigative Branch	285	Investigating information referred from different branches, receiving detainees after the initial investigation	Coordinates with other branches
Main	Counter-Terrorism Branch	295	Training personnel in military and security skills, and carrying out field operations such as raids and arrests.	The slogan "counter-terrorism" is applied
Main	Counter-Espionage Branch	300	Monitoring foreigners and those suspected of dealing with foreign entities	A vital branch of foreign intelligence
Main	External Branch	279	Managing intelligence stations abroad, monitoring expatriates and foreign affairs	Operate through diplomatic missions or secret networks.
Main	Interior Branch	251	Counterintelligence within the country, monitoring of the capital, political surveillance of institutions	Participate in government and administrative appointments
Main	Technical Branch	280	Wiretapping and technical surveillance operations, supporting branches with technical equipment	Covers all branches
Support	Training Branch	290	Training and developing the competencies of agency personnel	Support all branches
Support	Economic Branch	260	Monitoring economic and financial issues, investigating the files of citizens and companies	Coordinate with all branches
Regional	Regional Branches	-	Local security coverage in the governorates, management of departments and detachments in cities and towns	It operates as an extension of the central branches at the local level

## Branch 300: Origins and Specialization in the Context of Security Repression

Branch 300 (the Counter-Espionage Branch) is one of the central branches of the General Intelligence Directorate. It was likely established in the late 1970s or early 1980s to enhance the regime's security capabilities in monitoring political and social activity connected to foreign entities. A memo issued by the branch on March 2, 2011, and based on Decision No. 598 of 2002, indicates that Branch 300 circulated a decision to form counter-espionage groups affiliated with it in all governorates.



Despite its official designation as a “preventive intelligence” branch, its actual function revolved around monitoring Syrians’ foreign relations, pursuing political opponents, and accusing activists and civilians of “espionage” or “dealing with foreign entities” as a pretext for arbitrary arrest and torture. The branch became a key instrument for entrenching a climate of fear, combining internal and external surveillance and participating in security coordination networks employed to silence society rather than protect the state.

### 1. The Hierarchical and Organizational Structure of Branch 300

- **Affiliation:** Branch 300 reports directly to the General Intelligence Directorate and is considered one of its central branches, linked to the Directorate’s Director and his office (Branch 111).
- **Supervision:** It operates under the direct guidance of the Directorate’s Director, who reports to the National Security Bureau, thus linking the branch’s work to the regime’s highest security leadership.
- **Level:** A central branch, higher in rank than the regional branches, exercising broad powers at the national level.

#### Internal Structure (Main Departments):

- Central Investigation Department
- External Follow-up Department
- Analysis and Correspondence Department
- Arrest and Investigation/Interrogation Department

The branch is typically run by an officer with the rank of brigadier general or major general, assisted by a number of department heads and security personnel. It coordinates with other branches, most notably: Branch 251 (Internal), Branch 285 (Central Investigation), and Branch 279 (External), making it part of an integrated repressive network operating under centralized orders issued by the highest security command.

## 2. Geographical Location and Physical Structure

According to multiple accounts, the headquarters of Branch 300 is located in Damascus, within the Kafr Souseh security district, near the State Security headquarters complex. Its internal structure consists of two main floors:

- **The lower floor:** contains individual and group cells, interrogation rooms, and torture chambers.
- **The upper floor:** houses the offices of officers and investigators, as well as the archives and communications departments.

The building's architecture is similar to that of other State Security branches in terms of its complete secrecy, high concrete walls, and the absence of official signage, thus reinforcing the institutional secrecy that characterizes Syrian security branches.

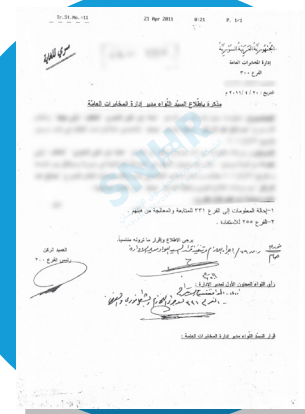
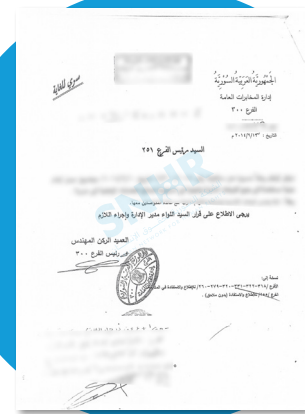
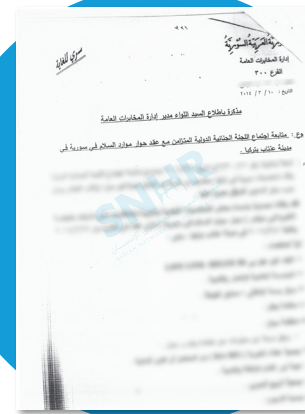
## 3. The Actual Role of Branch 300 in the System of Repression

- Monitoring foreigners and those suspected of dealing with foreign entities.
- Monitoring diplomats, employees of international organizations, and expatriates with any foreign connections, regardless of their nature, within a policy of constant suspicion.
- Monitoring the entry and movements of non-Syrian foreigners and Arabs into the country.
- Monitoring governmental and private institutions dealing with foreign entities.
- Pursuing the activities of political parties and figures with foreign ties.

Two documents dated November 30, 2011, confirm that Branch 300 monitored the activities of Lebanese parties, including the Lebanese Communist Party, and tracked meetings it held with Syrian opposition figures in Beirut as part of what the documents described as “gathering information on hostile foreign entities,” indicating that the branch’s powers extended to cross-border surveillance.

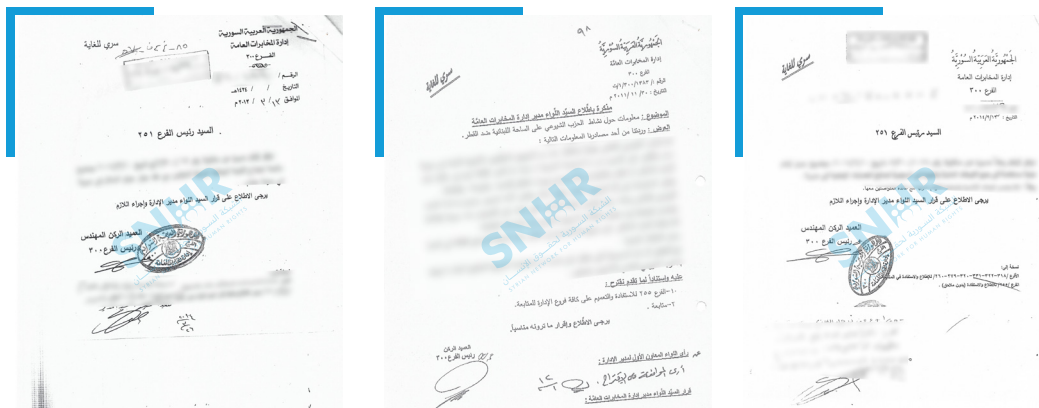


- Monitoring Syrians who interact with foreign media or human rights organizations and accusing them of “foreign funding” or “collaborating with hostile entities”: these are vague charges used to justify arbitrary arrest. A document dated March 10, 2014, shows that Branch 300 closely monitored the activities of international and human rights organizations, including a meeting of an international criminal committee in Gaziantep, and proposed punitive measures against some of the participants; this reflects the continued targeting of human rights and media outreach even outside Syrian territory.
- Information Gathering and Coordination with Other Branches: Branch 300 coordinates with the Information Branch (255), the External Branch (279), the Internal Branch (251), and others to collect and analyze data related to civil and political activity, and to transfer detainees to the central investigation branches. Documents dated September 2014 indicate the branch’s technical role in tracking and analyzing international communications; it conducted detailed surveys of numbers associated with foreign entities and sent Branch 251 digital media (CDs) containing data on financial transfers and foreign communications, revealing its possession of advanced technical surveillance tools that enabled the General Intelligence Directorate to expand its cross-border surveillance.
- Submitting security reports to justify arrests, travel bans, and asset seizures without any judicial process: With the start of the popular uprising in March 2011, the powers of the security branches expanded to include investigating the cases of demonstrators, journalists, and activists. Branch 300 was used as a transit center before detainees were transferred to larger branches such as Branch 285 or to Saydnaya Military Prison. A document issued on April 20, 2011, highlights the nature of this coordination; the branch sent a memo to the General Intelligence Directorate regarding a planned demonstration in the town of Sarmin/Idlib, proposing that the file be referred to Branch 331 for follow-up, thus confirming the branch’s early involvement in monitoring protest activity.



## 4. Functional Relations with Other Branches

Branch 300 did not operate in isolation from the other branches of the General Intelligence Directorate; rather, it was part of an interconnected security network that exchanged information and instructions and coordinated surveillance and arrest operations. The Directorate's structure was designed to ensure a continuous flow of data between local and central branches, both to and from each other, enabling comprehensive control over individuals and society. Within this framework, Branch 300 played a pivotal role in the intelligence-security coordination chain, acting as a liaison between internal and external branches and participating in drafting reports submitted to the Directorate's office, thus making it a critical component of the repressive apparatus. Numerous documents from 2011 to 2014 demonstrate the high volume of correspondence between Branch 300 and Branches 251, 325, 331, and others, which illustrates the integrated, network-based nature of the agency's operations.



Branch	Relation with Branch 300
Information Branch (255)	Providing Branch 300 with field data and analyses from the internal, partisan, religious and media sectors.
External Branch (279)	Exchanging information about expatriates and foreign entities, and coordinating information gathering operations outside the country.
(Internal branch 251)	Coordination on internal intelligence issues related to espionage and external influence on internal security.
Technical Branch (280)	Supporting surveillance and wiretapping operations on suspects using modern security technologies.
Director's Office (111)	Supporting surveillance and wiretapping operations on suspects using modern security technologies.

## 5. Secrecy and Institutional Isolation

Branch 300 is one of the most opaque branches in terms of available information. It is rarely mentioned by name in official media or even UN reports, given the highly secretive nature of its operations. Most available testimonies about it come from detainees temporarily transferred there during investigations, or from former employees who served in State Security agencies before 2011. Despite the scarcity of publicly available information, a 2005 circular reveals that the branch exercised direct executive powers, ordering the arrest of a car with Lebanese license plates and the transfer of its occupants to the General Intelligence Directorate. This reflects its broad powers to operate outside the judicial framework even before 2011.

A review of the databases of Syrian organizations concerned with documentation shows that the branch was receiving detainees directly from the State Security apparatus without judicial decisions or arrest warrants, and that it exercised almost absolute powers in terms of investigation and interrogation.



## **FIFTH: PATTERNS OF VIOLATIONS RESULTING FROM THE WORK OF BRANCH 300**

Information gleaned from documents and field investigations indicates that Branch 300 of the General Intelligence Directorate (State Security) was no exception to the general rule governing the behavior of security agencies under Bashar al-Assad. Rather, it represented an additional model within a systematic framework of arbitrary arrest, torture, and enforced disappearance. Its role was not limited to gathering information or monitoring foreign relations, as its official name, “Counter-Espionage Branch,” suggests. Instead, it actively participated in carrying out repressive field operations that included arbitrary arrests, interrogations under torture, and enforced disappearances of civilians, including activists, journalists, and employees of government institutions. The branch also served as an intermediary link within a comprehensive network of detention centers belonging to the State Security apparatus, all of which share systematic patterns of torture, cruel treatment, and enforced disappearance.

### The branch's practices were characterized by two main elements:

- Undefined and arbitrary nature of arrests and interrogations: The branch broadened the scope of “suspicion of dealing with foreign entities” to include anyone suspected of engaging in opposition activity or communicating with foreign entities, without requiring concrete evidence. This is demonstrated by branch documents dated November 30, 2011, concerning the monitoring of the Lebanese Communist Party’s activities and the reception of Syrian opposition members.
- Vertical security coordination with higher and lower branches: Hundreds of detainees were transferred to other detention centers after initial interrogations at Branch 300 without any judicial procedures. The documents also revealed that Branch 300 issued direct instructions/proposals to other branches to carry out arrests or pursue specific cases, reflecting its central role in the security apparatus’s repressive network.

### **Arbitrary Arrest and Enforced Disappearance:**

Since 2011, the State Security apparatus has adopted a widespread policy of arrests without warrants, targeting political and civil activists, journalists, and government employees. Many of these individuals passed through Branch 300 before being transferred to other branches or larger detention centers such as Saydnaya Military Prison. Analysis of documents reveals that Branch 300 directed other branches to carry out these arrests, demonstrating the broad powers it wielded in security decision-making. According to data from the Syrian Network for Human Rights, at least **17,438 cases** of arbitrary arrest passed through Branch 300 before the detainees were transferred to other branches, including individuals of foreign nationalities.

### **Torture, Cruel Treatment, and Deaths Due to Torture:**

Survivors reported that interrogation sessions at Branch 300 focused on questions related to foreign funding and relationships with media or human rights organizations, and that these sessions were often accompanied by physical torture to coerce detainees into giving pre-prepared confessions. Data also shows that the branch employed sophisticated surveillance techniques to facilitate information gathering, linking interrogation methods with technical monitoring. One survivor, who was temporarily detained at the branch in 2012, stated that officers “**focused on questions related to foreign funding and relationships with foreign journalists,**” and that interrogation sessions “**were always accompanied by physical torture to force detainees to sign pre-prepared confessions.**” The Syrian Network for Human Rights documented at least **2,463 cases of torture** perpetrated by Branch 300, including cases involving individuals of foreign nationalities.

### Additional Violations:

- **Denial of Healthcare:** Witnesses reported that some detainees were left to bleed or suffer from infections without treatment.
- **Denial of a Fair Trial:** Most detainees in Branch 300 were not brought before a judge. Some were referred months later to the Military Field Court or the Terrorism Court, while others were released days or weeks after their detention, either directly from the branch or from the security branches to which they were transferred.
- **Financial Extortion:** In several cases, families of detainees were asked to pay large sums of money in exchange for information about their relatives or promises of release.
- **Monitoring Communications Without Judicial Procedure:** The branch monitored telephone calls and international communications and collected information about citizens without any judicial warrant or legal process, thus reinforcing the arbitrary nature of its activities.

### Survivors' testimonies about the abuses they suffered at Branch 300

SNHR contacted **Mr. Ahmed Al-Fateh Al-Sharif Ibrahim**, a Sudanese national who resided in the United Kingdom prior to his arrest. Born in 1985, he told SNHR that he was arrested in Damascus in 2011 by agents of the Bashar al-Assad regime while conducting business related to transporting goods between Damascus and UK. He was accused of spying for the United Kingdom and detained in several security branches, including Branch 300 (Counter-Espionage) of the General Intelligence Directorate in Damascus.

Mr. Ibrahim confirmed that during his detention in Branch 300, he was subjected to severe torture to pressure him into confessing to dealing with foreign entities, which led to a significant deterioration in his health. In 2024, he was released from Saydnaya Military Prison in the Rif Dimashq Governorate, but his official documents proving his legal residency in the United Kingdom were not returned to him.

After the fall of Bashar al-Assad's regime, Mr. Ibrahim tried to contact a number of lawyers to help him recover his documents, but they informed him that most of the documents in the detention centers had been damaged or burned as a result of the chaos that followed the collapse of the regime.

SNHR interviewed **Ms. Leila Khaled**, a Syrian citizen from Homs, born in 1987. According to her account, she was arrested in 2012 by members of Branch 300 while visiting a relative in Damascus.

Leila confirmed that she was held in solitary confinement at the branch, where she was subjected to severe psychological and physical pressure to force her to divulge information about her family's activities. She also faced repeated threats of longer detention periods. After several weeks, she was transferred to Adra Central Prison, where she remained in detention until her release by order of the Terrorism Court.

**Mr. Karim Abdul Rahman**, a Syrian citizen from Damascus, born in 1982, reported that he was arrested in 2013 by members of Branch 300 while at his business office. He stated that the investigations focused on his connections with foreign media organizations and that he was subjected to harsh interrogation sessions accompanied by electric shocks before being transferred to Branch 285 without any official arrest warrant or court order. He was released from Branch 285 after his family paid a sum of money.

SNHR interviewed **Ms. Mariam al-Hassan**, a Syrian human rights activist from Idlib province, born in 1990, who reported that she was arrested in 2014 while traveling between Idlib and Damascus. According to her testimony, members of Branch 300 monitored her phone calls, accused her of "espionage for foreign entities," and forced her to sign pre-prepared confessions while being severely beaten.

**Mr. Samer Nasser**, a government employee from rural Damascus, born in 1979, reported that he was arrested in 2011 from his office as part of a widespread campaign of arrests targeting government employees and activists. He explained that he was immediately transferred to Branch 300, where he underwent intensive interrogations for several days, including sleep deprivation, denial of water and food, and constant threats of harsher punishments against his family, before being transferred to Branch 285 for further investigation.

SNHR reported, based on an interview with **Mr. Youssef Al-Ali**, a civil activist from Hama Governorate, born in 1985, that he was arrested in Damascus in 2012 while attending a civil meeting, and was detained in Branch 300. He confirmed that he was under constant surveillance and was subjected to severe pressure to confess to receiving funding from abroad, in addition to being denied contact with a lawyer or his family, before being transferred to Adra Central Prison.

## **SIXTH: THE LEGAL AND COMMAND RESPONSIBILITY OF BRANCH 300**

Branch 300 is a structural component of the General Intelligence Directorate, an entity historically associated with a series of grave and systematic human rights violations in Syria. According to the principle of command responsibility in international humanitarian law and international human rights law, the chain of command within this branch imposes criminal responsibility on its commanders and officers for the orders they issued, as well as for violations committed by their subordinates if they were aware of them or should have been aware of them and failed to take the necessary measures to prevent them or punish the perpetrators.

Documents analyzed by the Syrian Network for Human Rights show that Branch 300 is administratively and organizationally subordinate to the Director of the General Intelligence Directorate, and therefore subject to the authority of the National Security Bureau and the Presidency. This makes these levels responsible for the policies and practices that included arbitrary arrest, torture, and enforced disappearance within the branch's jurisdiction. Furthermore, leaked official correspondence reveals that Branch 300 directed its reports and security memos to other central branches, particularly Branch 285, reflecting a comprehensive command structure based on a division of roles, rather than isolated individual transgressions.

In accordance with the principle of chain of command, all parties involved in drafting, executing, or overlooking the orders are criminally liable, whether from the senior leadership of the General Intelligence Directorate or from the direct officers in Branch 300. A review of judicial files and security correspondence indicates that officers in this branch exercised powers that exceeded the legal framework, including issuing arrest and detention orders outside the judicial process.

This responsibility does not lapse with time, as it relates to violations such as murder, torture and enforced disappearance, which amount to crimes against humanity according to Article 7 of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, given their systematic and repeated nature and their connection to a state policy that targeted categories of the civilian population in a broad and systematic manner.

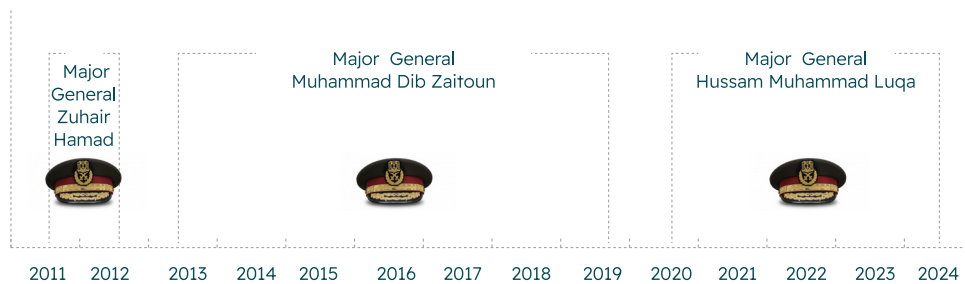
### **Prominent leaders and officers implicated in violations stemming from the work of Branch 300**

Since 2011 and for a period of fourteen years, only three individuals have led the General Intelligence Directorate:

- 1. Major General Zuhair Hamad: 2011–2012**
- 2. Major General Muhammad Dib Zaitoun: 2013–2019**
- 3. Major General Hussam Muhammad Luqa: 2020–2024**

The limited number of leaders and the remarkable continuity of each leader, especially Major General Mohammed Dib Zeitoun who held the position for seven consecutive years, reflect the regime's reliance on a reliable and stable leadership to ensure the implementation of top security policies, especially during the period of popular uprising that began in March 2011. The lack of changes in the leadership of the agency also indicates the concentration of power within a narrow circle, which makes essential decisions hostage to specific individuals rather than the product of a broad institutional system.

### Leadership Responsibilities by Period



At the outset of the protests in 2011, Major General Zuhair Hamad assumed leadership of the agency during the first two years of the popular uprising. His responsibilities centered on formulating initial security policies to counter the protests, including arbitrary arrests, enforced disappearances, and the early surveillance and prosecution of activists and civilians. During this period, the first cases of enforced disappearance were recorded, and these escalated until the end of his tenure in 2012.

This was followed by Major General Mohammad Deeb Zaitoun assuming command from 2013 to 2019, a period that coincided with the peak of the armed conflict in Syria. During this time, the General Intelligence Directorate's responsibilities multiplied, and its operations expanded to encompass various forms of security control, including managing detention centers and directly directing security operations in regime-held areas. The agency bore direct responsibility during this period for systematic violations such as enforced disappearances, torture, and arbitrary arrests, thus increasing the legal and moral responsibility of its leadership.

From 2020 to 2024, Major General Husam Mohammad Loqa took over the leadership, and during his tenure the agency focused on establishing internal stability and restructuring security operations, while continuing arrests, searches, and tightening control in the phase of restoring security control over the areas that the regime regained control of before its fall on January 8, 2024. His responsibility remains in place within the framework of supervising the implementation of security policies and ensuring the continuity of the agency's work.

The limited change in the leadership of the General Intelligence Directorate throughout these years reflects the regime's reliance on a centralized and "trusted" leadership, and places direct responsibility on the three leaders for the security decisions, policies, and violations committed by the agency during their tenures, including violations resulting from the work of Branch 300.

## **SEVENTH: LEGAL CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Legal Conclusions**

This report is based on a thorough analysis of Branch 300's operations, survivor testimonies, and available internal documents, revealing the branch's central role in the systematic repression carried out by the General Intelligence Directorate. The report highlights the systematic nature of the violations, the extent to which legal powers were exceeded, and the coordination with other branches, thus holding the security leadership and its affiliated branches responsible for the abuses committed against civilians.

- **Systematic nature of violations:** Analysis of documents and testimonies reveals that Branch 300 carried out arbitrary arrests, enforced disappearances, and systematic torture as part of a state policy aimed at monitoring civil society and controlling dissidents, amounting to crimes against humanity under international law.
- **Command responsibility:** Branch commanders and leaders of the General Intelligence Directorate bear direct responsibility for the violations, whether through issuing orders, condoning them, or participating in their planning and execution, within the framework of the principle of chain of command criminal responsibility.
- **Exceeding legal authority:** Documents show that Branch 300 exercised powers exceeding the legal framework, including extrajudicial detention and investigation, in clear violation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and the fundamental principles of transitional justice aimed at ending impunity.
- **Central role in the network of repression:** It is evident that Branch 300 was not an isolated entity, but rather a key link in an interconnected network of security branches that collectively contributed to entrenching systematic repression. This reinforces the need for comprehensive accountability at all leadership levels involved in these violations.
- **The crime of enforced disappearance continues:** Enforced disappearance is a continuing crime as long as the victim's fate remains unknown or their place of detention is not disclosed. Therefore, the statute of limitations does not apply to the case, and its time limits only begin to run once the truth is revealed.
- **The invalidity of superior orders:** Invoking orders from superiors or security necessities to justify serious violations is not valid. Criminal responsibility remains, although coercion may be considered as a mitigating circumstance when necessary.
- **The inadmissibility of evidence obtained under torture:** Any confessions or information obtained through torture or cruel treatment are inadmissible as evidence in court. Their use constitutes a further violation of victims' rights and due process.

- No amnesty or reconciliation without accountability: General amnesties or political settlements that disregard serious international crimes are incompatible with international obligations, do not preclude prosecution at the international and national levels, and do not negate the victims' right to redress.
- The right to truth and the preservation of archives: Victims and their families have an independent right to know the truth. Authorities have a duty to preserve records, ensure judicial access to them, and prevent their destruction, including the archives of the relevant security branches.
- Obligations of comprehensive reparation: International compliance requires adopting a comprehensive package of reparations for victims (restitution, compensation, rehabilitation, satisfaction, and guarantees of non-repetition) and linking it to structural reforms that include civilian and judicial oversight of security agencies.

## Recommendations

These recommendations stem from the need to strengthen accountability and oversight during the transitional phase, ensure the protection of victims and witnesses, and restructure security agencies to guarantee that violations are not repeated. They also aim to support transitional justice processes by documenting violations, holding perpetrators accountable, and developing clear and transparent oversight mechanisms for the new security apparatus, thereby reinforcing the principles of the rule of law and respect for human rights.

### A. To the Syrian authorities and the executive branch:

#### a. Judicial Accountability:

- Documenting all violations committed by Branch 300 and linking them to specific leadership responsibilities to enable prosecution at both the national and international levels.
- Bringing former officers, directors, and subordinates involved in violations to justice in accordance with national laws and international legal standards, including crimes of torture, enforced disappearance, and arbitrary detention.

#### b. Enhancing Transparency and Institutional Oversight:

- Restructuring security agencies to reduce the excessive concentration of power and subjecting any intelligence apparatus to rigorous judicial and oversight review.
- Documenting all files related to past arrests and making them available to national and international human rights bodies for review, to ensure that violations are not repeated.

**c. Legal Protection for Victims and Witnesses:**

- Providing comprehensive protection programs for survivors and witnesses, including confidentiality and logistical support throughout the investigation and prosecution processes, and preventing any form of reprisal.
- Providing psychological and legal support to victims to ensure their rehabilitation and support restorative justice.

**d. Strengthening Transitional Justice:**

- Including violations attributed to Branch 300 within transitional justice programs, including official investigations and independent fact-finding commissions.
- Utilizing this documentation as an educational and historical tool to illustrate the effects of systematic repression on civil society and ensure that those responsible do not escape accountability in the future.

**e. Developing oversight mechanisms for new security agencies:**

- Ensuring that any new intelligence agency adheres to the principles of the rule of law and is subject to effective parliamentary and judicial oversight to prevent a recurrence of past abuses.
- Adopting clear standards for civilian oversight of security operations and defining the powers of officers to prevent security agencies from becoming instruments of repression.

**B. To the Legislative Authority**

- Enact a law explicitly criminalizing enforced disappearance and torture, and eliminating any conflict with exceptional legislation or broad definitions of security or terrorism.
- Establish a permanent parliamentary committee to oversee intelligence services, with the power to summon and question officials and the right to access classified documents, and to submit periodic public reports.
- Enact a law to protect witnesses and whistleblowers, and another to protect personal data and public archives.

### C. To the Judiciary and the Public Prosecution

- Establish specialized departments or prosecution offices for serious crimes, with protocols for the chain of command for preserving evidence, and an absolute prohibition on the use of confessions obtained under torture.
- Issue procedural guidelines for investigating historical violations in accordance with the Istanbul Protocol, the Minnesota Protocol, and open-source digital methodologies.
- Implement immediate appearance orders and conduct periodic judicial reviews of all previous and current arrest and detention orders.

### D. To the media and academic institutions:

Develop editorial policies for multi-source verification in cases of detention and disappearance, avoiding stigmatization and disseminating sensitive information to families.

### E. To the United Nations and international mechanisms:

- Strengthen the resources and mandates of existing mechanisms for documentation, analysis, and judicial support, and expand psychosocial and legal support programs for victims.
- Fund for forensic programs and national capacity-building in the search for missing persons.

### F. To donors and funding institutions:

- Multi-year funding for information and evidence management systems, the establishment of national forensic laboratories, and witness protection programs.
- Support community awareness programs on basic rights and legal procedures.

## Acknowledgments

The Syrian Network for Human Rights extends its gratitude to all who contributed to the completion of this report, including survivors and witnesses who shared their testimonies, and legal and field experts who provided analytical insights that contributed to a deeper understanding of the role of Branch 300 within the Syrian security apparatus. This collective collaboration is the foundation of our ongoing work to document violations and promote justice and accountability in Syria.



SYRIAN NETWORK  
FOR HUMAN RIGHTS



[info@snhr.org](mailto:info@snhr.org)  
[www.snhr.org](http://www.snhr.org)

