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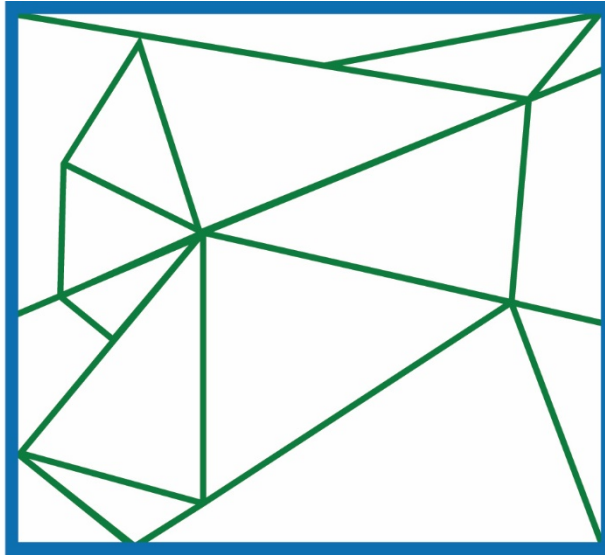
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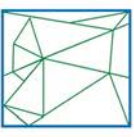
[Syrians for Truth and Justice /STJ](#) is a nonprofit, nongovernmental, independent Syrian organization. STJ includes many defenders and human rights defenders from Syria and from different backgrounds and affiliations, including academics of other nationalities.

The organization works for Syria, where all Syrians, without discrimination, should be accorded dignity, justice and equal human rights.

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& Justice





On “the International Day in Support of Victims of Torture”, Syrian Survivors Talk about the Experiences of their Arrest and the Mental and Physical Effects

“The United Nations, Governments and International Organizations Should Develop Long-term Strategies to Deal with the Issue of Survivors of Detention in Syria”



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Background

26th June of each year marks [the International Day in Support of Victims of Torture](#). The General Assembly, in [the resolution 52/149](#), December 12, 1997, proclaimed an International day for support for victims of torture with a view to total elimination of torture and effective functioning of [the Convention against Torture](#), and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.

Torture is a crime under international law. It is strictly prohibited by all relevant instruments and cannot be justified under any circumstances. It is a prohibition that forms part of [Customary International Law](#), which means that every member of the international community is abided, without regard to whether it has ratified or not ratified the international treaties that explicitly prohibit torture. The systematic and widespread practice of torture constitutes a crime against humanity.

With the beginning of the protests in Syria in March 2011, the Syrian government and its security agencies began arresting tens of thousands of demonstrators randomly. Although most of the arrests in the first months of the uprising were less severe than the months and years later, the overwhelming proportion of detainees were subjected to systematic ill-treatment and torture within Syrian secret and public detention facilities, before other agencies, which are different from the Syrian security sector, joined those who insult, strike and torture detainees in Syria.

[The Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Syria](#), established in August 2011, issued an extensive report on systematic torture in Syria in February 2016, entitled "[Out of Sight, Out of Mind... Deaths in Detention in the Syrian Arab Republic](#)" it detailed how detainees by the Syrian government were beaten to death or died as a result of injuries sustained due to torture. Many other detainees perished as a consequence of inhumane living conditions. The report determined that the government of Syria had further committed the crimes against humanity of murder, rape or other forms of sexual violence, torture, imprisonment, enforced disappearance and other inhumane acts. These violations constitute war crimes.

Several international organizations had issued dozens of reports about the horrors of places of detention, torture and killings to which detainees are subjected in Syria. In December 2015, Human Rights Watch/HRW issued a report entitled "[If the Dead Could Speak... Mass Deaths and Torture in Syria's Detention Facilities](#)" a report reveals the stories of some of the victims who died in Syrian government custody and appeared in the images of the defector, code-named "Caesar". The nine-month research by HRW documents names of the victims and their appalling conditions of detention, through interviews with former detainees, defectors and relatives of victims, as well as forensic techniques and geographic positioning.



The legal framework:

First: Relevant international laws:

1. International Human Rights Law:

International human rights law is applicable in peacetime and some cases in wartime. Although many differ about what are the human rights applicable in wartime, the prohibition of torture is applicable both in times of peace and during war. Here are the most important conventions with regard to the prohibition of torture:

A. Convention against Torture

Article 1 of [Convention against Torture](#) adopted by the General Assembly in its resolution 39/46 on December 10, 1984; defines the term of torture as following:

"Any act resulting by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person for such purposes as obtaining from him or a third person information or a confession, punishing him for an act he or a third person has committed or suspected of having committed, or intimidating, coercing him or a third person, or for any reason based on discrimination of any kind, when such pain or suffering is inflicted by or at investigation of or with the consents or acquiescence of a public official or other person acting in an official capacity."

The Convention also seeks states to prohibit any further acts of cruel, inhuman, degrading treatment or punishment that does not amount to torture.

The Convention is also one of the most signed agreements, with 144 States parties, including Syria that signed the Convention in 2004 with reservations to one of the articles/items in the Convention.

B. International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights

Article 7 of [The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#) adopted on December 16, 1966, affirms that no one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading Treatment or punishment. Article 10, reiterates that all persons deprived of their liberty shall be treated with humanity. The Covenant is the first universal human rights treaty that explicitly prohibits torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading Treatment or punishment.



C. Universal Declaration of Human Rights

The 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights- although it was a non-binding declaration- was the first in the discourse on the prohibition of torture. Article 5 states that no one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading Treatment or punishment.

D. Arab Charter on Human Rights

The Arab Charter on Human Rights of 2004 prohibits torture, both physical and psychological. It states in its article 8, as follows:

1. No one to be shall subjected to physical or psychological torture or to cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment.
2. Each State party shall protect every individual subject to its jurisdiction from such practices and shall take effective measures to prevent them. The commission of, or participation in, such acts shall be regarded as crimes that are punishable by law and not subject to any statute of limitations. Each State party shall guarantee in its legal system redress for any victim of torture and the right to rehabilitation and compensation..

2. International Humanitarian Law:

International humanitarian law applies to international and non-international armed conflicts (such as those in Syria). This law is binding on all States parties to the conflict, whether they signed to the relevant conventions or not. This is due to the fact that international humanitarian law is considered to be part of Customary Law, which is a source of international law, according to article 38 of the Statute of the International Court of Justice.

In non-international conflicts such as those in Syria, torture is prohibited under the common article III of the four Geneva Conventions which are the most important conventions on international humanitarian law.

According to the study of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in customary law "Torture, cruel or inhuman treatment, and outrages upon personal dignity, in particular, humiliating and degrading treatment are prohibited" (Rule 90). It should be noted that torture is prohibited against civilians and combatants alike.

According to rule 152 of the ICRC study, the responsibility for the acts is not only of those who commit acts torture, but also of the leaders who ordered the commission of such acts. Rule 153 builds on the previous rule and adds:

"Commanders and other superiors are criminally responsible for war crimes committed by their subordinates 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".



Finally, according to rule 154 “every combatant has a duty to disobey a manifestly unlawful order” such as torture.

3- Security Council Resolutions

Many Security Council resolutions have also condemned torture. In the Syrian context resolutions 2193, 2332 and 2258 condemned torture in a strong and rigorous language.

Second: Torture and the Prohibition of Refoulement:

In addition to criminalizing torture, international human rights law prohibits states from returning persons to States where they may be subjected to torture. Article 3(1) of the Convention against Torture clarifies that:

“No State Party shall expel, return (“refouler”) or extradite a person to another State where there are substantial grounds for believing that he would be in danger of being subjected to torture.”

Third: Torture and International Courts

The most prominent international criminal tribunals, such as the International Criminal Court, the International Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia and the International tribunal for Rwanda all criminalize torture. Articles 7 and 8 of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court classify torture as a war crime, or a crime against humanity if committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack directed against the civilian population.

Here again, it must be emphasized that not only those who torture are responsible for the act. Article 28(a) of the Rome Statute, regulating the responsibility of leaders and other superiors, reads as follows:

“A military commander or person effectively acting as a military commander shall be criminally responsible for crimes within the jurisdiction of the Court committed by forces under his or her effective command and control, or effective authority and control as the case may be, as a result of his or her failure to exercise control properly over such forces, where:”

A) That military Commander or person either knew, or owing circumstances at the time, should have known that the forces are committing or are about to commit such crimes; and

B) That military commander or person failed to take all necessary and reasonable measures within their power to prevent or repress their commission or to submit the matter to the competent authorities for investigation and prosecution.



Fourth: Torture and Universal Jurisdiction:

Universal jurisdiction means that national courts of some States accept jurisdiction over crimes that have not been committed within their territory. The Convention against Torture obliges States parties to exercise their jurisdiction over a person suspected of having committed torture, or to extradite that person to a state where he will be tried. The Committee against Torture has increasingly focused on this issue in its discussions with States parties, and now regularly adds in its observations concluding recommendation calling on States parties that have not yet done so to introduce legislation providing for universal jurisdiction for the crime of torture¹.

In the Syrian context, a former opposition combatant was tried in Sweden for torturing one of the detained fighters in Syria, which shows that torture even against combatants is forbidden.

In addition, the offence of torture cannot be extinguished by a general amnesty law as reflected in the judgment of a French court in a case involving a Mauritanian combatant.

Fifth: The Role of the Trust Fund for victims in international law

Both the United Nations Convention against Torture and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights impose an obligation on States parties to provide reparation to victims of torture or ill-treatment.

1. Convention against Torture (CAT): Article 14 of the Convention against Torture states that:

“Each State Party shall ensure in its legal system that the victim of an act of torture obtains redress and has an enforceable right to fair and adequate compensation, including the means as full rehabilitation as possible. In the event of the death of the victim as a result of an act of torture, his dependents shall be entitled to compensation”.

2. International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights: Article 2(3) states:

Each State party to the present Covenant undertakes:

1. To ensure any person whose rights or freedoms as herein recognized are violated shall have an effective remedy, notwithstanding that the violation has been committed by persons acting in an official capacity;
2. To ensure that any person claiming such a remedy shall have his right thereto determined remedy by a competent judicial, administrative or legislative authority, or by any other competent authority provided for by the legal system of the State, and to develop the possibilities of judicial remedy;
3. To ensure that the competent authorities shall enforce such remedies when granted.

¹ The Committee against Torture also considers the effectiveness of any such legislation. For example, in its concluding observations on Belgium in 2003, the Committee expressed concern about changes to rules on universal jurisdiction that allowed the Minister of Justice to remove judges from certain situations. Source: Torture in International law, Handbook of Jurisprudence. Book published in 2008 jointly by the Association for the Prevention of Torture (APT) and the Centre for Justice and International Law (CEJIL).



Introduction

The file of arbitrary arrest, enforced disappearance, torture and murder in detention facilities has become one of the most important and significant files left by the Syrian armed conflict. The Syrian as well as international rights-based organizations and some UN organs have estimated the number of citizens who have been arrested since 2011 in tens of thousands, possibly in hundreds of thousands. However, there is no precise statistic for the numbers of the categories mentioned, nor for all those who stand behind these violations, which has complicated the file greater, especially after the emergence of other parties during the past six years of conflict. The all estimates point to the responsibility of the Syrian government and its security apparatus that carried out the largest proportion of arrests, enforced disappearances and torture. On the other side, there are similar violations committed "even in less numbers" by other parties such as extremist Islamist organizations like Hayat Tahrir al-Sham and [the Islamic State organization \(ISIS\)](#), formerly al-Nusra Front, in addition to armed factions affiliated to [the Syrian opposition](#). Apart from documenting cases of arbitrary arrests by [the security apparatus affiliated to the Autonomous Administration](#) in northern Syria, particularly the Asayesh forces.

The report sheds the lights deeply on the suffering of detainees, enforced disappeared and the tortured in particular after their release. Despite shedding light on the practices committed against detainees inside detention facilities and reasons of the arrest, the report will also tell accounts of the survivors and will focus on the physical, mental, economic and social effects, as well as the efforts made to support them mentally or physically.

Methodology and Challenges

The report-based team interviewed more than 15 detainees along with interviewing several organs designated to support survivors of the detention physically or mentally, as well as numbers of experts aware of arbitrary arrest and torture in Syria, in addition to an international legal expert. In terms of choosing the survivors, the team attempted to take into account the standards of diversity and difference whether geographically or chronologically, or according to the part that committed the violation, all of these contributed to enrich the report. However, the team faced many other challenges, including, but not limited to, the difficulty of reaching a larger number of survivors from detention facilities, for reasons that cannot be mentioned now, in addition to the difficulty of communicating with many parts scattered in the neighboring countries that work to provide physical or mental support to the survivors.

On the anniversary of the International Day in Support of Victims of Torture, the report attempts to shed light on their suffering, which lasts for many months, perhaps for years, after the end of the detention experience. We will include some of the team's recommendations at the end of the report, as well as some findings and conclusions.



First: The Effect of Torture on the Victims

The effects of arbitrary detention in Syria vary, as well as the accompanying serious violations, such as deprivation of liberty, torture and enforced disappearance, starvation, denial of health care and other violations. In many cases, these effects are not confined to the detainee himself, but to the surrounding environment, whether his family or society as a whole, and in the following paragraphs we will try to include some effects of the arrest that the survivors agreed to talk about.

A-The Physical Impact of Detention and Torture

The effect of physical torture on detainees is usually clearer than psychological torture, given the brutal methods of torture inflicted on detainees during the detention. Although most beatings and torture against detainees occur in the early hours of their arrest and in the first days of detention during interrogations and the attempts to pull a confession by coercion, many detainees told STJ about several detention facilities where physical torture was ongoing even after the end of the interrogation period.

Ahmed, a pseudonym of a survivor who refused to disclose his identity for security purposes, said in his testimony to STJ that some traces of torture still exist on his body, the torture he was subjected to during his detention at Tadmor Military Prison in Homs province in 2012. Ahmed indicated that there was a hernia in the diaphragm, stomach and esophagus, as well as other respiratory problems as a result of torture. He added:

"I still have problems in the memory and breathing that prevent me from running currently and cause severe stress while climbing the stairs; unfortunately, I have not received any financial, health or psychological support after my release neither in Syria nor in the neighboring countries."

Ahmed Samir, another former detainee who spoke in his testimony to STJ about his first arrest in 2011 and his second arrest in 2012. Ahmad spoke of the involvement of Jamea Jamea, the Head of the Military Security Branch in Deir az-Zor personally in the strikes and torture, saying:

"Jamea Jamea, the Head of the Branch personally supervised the torture process, and then participated directly when he beat me and broke all my lower teeth with his fist."

The second arrest of Ahmed was by the Air Intelligence Sector in Damascus in September 2012, before being transferred to Sednaya Military Prison. According to Ahmed, the torture in Sednaya Military Prison was carried out on a daily basis and without reason, i.e. there was no interrogation or investigation during the beatings. Ahmed described the "Confession Chair" as a method of torture:

"I was beaten, electrocuted more than once, but the Confession Chair was "special", as it is a chair with animated hinges on the back of the chair where the detainee sits on. During beatings and forced confessions, the back of the chair comes back and the detainee feels that his back is being broken, I still have pain in my back so far."



The "Confession Chair" that the witness Ahmed spoke about in his testimony is similar to the "German Chair", which is turned around the body of the detainee in reverse so that the back of the head becomes closer to the feet and causes terrible pains that may lead in many times to a fracture of the spine.



Another expressive image illustrates the method of torture called the "German Chair". Although there are multiple testimonies on how to put the chair, all the testimonies confirmed that the primary objective is to invert the detainee's body (headed down towards the feet), which constitutes unimaginable pain in addition to severe bodily harm, which may sometimes cause fractures in the vertebrae.

Ahmad spoke about other torture traces left over his body that he still suffers from, he said:

"There are several traces of torture on my body that are still clear, as I am still suffering from damage to the left kidney, and so far I am suffering from some blood coming down during the process of urinating. Let alone losing my lower teeth and a permanent pain in the back. All these effects require attention as well as health and medical care."



Image provided by Ahmad Sameer, a former detainee, illustrates some of torture traces over his body; this photo was taken months after his release. He was released in December 2013. Photo credit: STJ



Ammar, a pseudonym of a former detainee who was arrested by the Syrian Security Apparatus three times. The first time was for nine days in 2011, the second arrest was for 11 days in 2012, and the third- which was the longest- lasted for 11 months in 2015. The Security Branches where Ammar was moved during his detention were:

- The Criminal Security Department in Damascus, Bab Musalla Square.
- Palestine Branch in Damascus, also known as the Branch 235, virtually affiliated to the Department of Military Intelligence (Military Security)
- The Political Security Directorate in Damascus countryside.

Ammar summarized the arrest experiences he has undergone:

"I suffered from hardships of arrest and torture in the three detention experiences, having been subjected to numerous practices of torture, humiliation and beatings. Methods of torture varied between the "dulab/tyre technique" and extinguishing of cigarette on my body. The most painful thing was the issue of insult; as many methods were inflicted on us, such as long-term incarceration in toilets, and the bad languages they used to inflict on us. Besides, they forced me to sign on false confessions, including being the head of an Islamic militant group, although I am a peaceful secular civil activist and this charge was one of the biggest charges being directed at me and tortured me the most."

Ammar's arrest left no permanent disability, but left some traces on his body, such as burning with cigarette butts and wounds, according to Ammar, they are still a reminder of his detention until this day.



"Tire technique" is one of the methods of torture used in various basements of the Syrian Security Apparatus, where the detainee is placed in an empty wheel and the process of investigation begins with a large amount of insults and beatings all over the body by various means such as whips, sticks and electrocution. When the detainee is put in the tire, he becomes unable to make any movement or act.

Loss/underweight in large quantities is also a prevalent phenomenon among detainees due to starvation and the small amount of food that was provided to them, all those interviewed in this report confirmed that they lost weight depending on the length of the detention.

Mohammed, an alias of one of the detainees who was arrested in 2013, by the Military Intelligence Service, Branch 215, also known as the Raid Squad, located on 6 Ayar Street, Damascus. He spoke about his experience, saying:

"I lost 14 kilograms of my weight during the arrest, and I was suffering too much from scabies that spread throughout my body with the appearance of skin stains. After my release, it took 10 days to be treated with the help of a dermatologist, but the effects of cigarette butts and skin stains are still apparent on my body to date.

• Inflicting the Greatest Amount of Abuse Intentionally

Ayman (alias) was arrested in February 2015 at a checkpoint operated by the National Defense² in Qudsseya, Damascus countryside, and then taken to the National Defense Branch, a modern branch, located at the former headquarters of the Republican Guard in the Mezzeh Mountains. According to Ayman, this branch has two prisons: the Central (al-Merkazi) Prison and the Main (al-Raeisi) Prison.

Ayman spoke to STJ about the experience of his arrest, saying:

"I have tasted various types of torture in the security branches I was been transferred to, and the means of torture have varied from Shabah position³ to Tyre technique⁴ and electrocution, in addition to beatings by whips/cables and sticks. Deprivation of sleep, food and denial of "the need to pee" were also methods of torture practiced in those branches. I suffered from lots of diseases during and after the arrest, and it was clear that during the beatings, the jailers were trying to inflict maximum abuse against the detainees. For example, we were beaten on the back as well as on the testicles, and because of that, I suffered from a blood leak during urination for a whole month, apart from pains in the back, chest and stomach, as well as skin diseases and the break of one bone and one tooth. Unfortunately, I have not been able to get any treatment yet. "

² The National Defense are almost-regular militias that appeared at the beginning of the armed conflict by the Syrian government in order to provide a militarily and security back up to the army as well as to the security sectors.

³ Shabah, a common method of torture by the Syrian Security Apparatus during interrogation. The detainee is hanged from the wrist for long hours while his feet hardly reach the ground, sometimes the legs are far from the earth.

⁴ Tyre technique is also a method of torture practiced in vaults of the Syrian Security Apparatus. The detainee is placed in an empty wheel and the interrogation process begins with a large amount of insults and beating on all over the body with different means like sticks, whips and electrocution. When the detainee is put in the wheel, he becomes unable to make any movement or act. A photo is attached above for illustration.



"Shabah Position" is one of the most common methods of torture during the interrogation sessions in the Syrian Security Agencies and other parties to the conflict in Syria; the detainee is suspended from his wrists for prolonged periods, his feet hardly touch the earth, whereas sometimes the legs are far from the ground.



• Torture Does not Discriminate Between Men and Women

The survivor Sabah, a pseudonym of a detainee, was arrested in February 2012. While she was transporting medical relief from Damascus to the afflicted areas in Homs, the military elements at the checkpoint in Qara town halted her then arrested her and took her to the Central Prison in Homs, after that to the Political Security Branch in Homs, Sabah says in this regard:

"I was beaten while on the way, from the Qara checkpoint to Homs Central Prison. When they transferred me to the Political Security Branch in Homs, I was blindfolded, and they kept me in a room smelled of acid, which caused me to vomit."

She was severely tortured; it was not different from the torture which male detainees were usually subjected to, Sabah said describing the investigation (interrogation) with her:

"When they started the investigation, they beat me so hard, they caused a fracture in my nose and hairline fracture (lower degree of fracture) in the cheekbone; they extinguished cigarette butts in my body, synchronized with a large torrent of insults and bad languages. In addition, they threatened to dissolve me with acid before accusing me of spying given having the American citizenship".

• Torture Does not Differentiate Between Elders or Children

Childhood was not exempt from torture inside the vaults of the security apparatus, many children were subjected to torture practices similar to those of adults.

Abdullah (alias) was a 17-year-old child when he was arrested in August 2011 in Sahnaya located in Damascus countryside. Like other tens of thousands of detainees, Abdullah was subjected to brutal torture, he said in his testimony to STJ:

"I was 17 years old and I was still a student at school when the security agents in Sahnaya arrested me. The elements put me in a vehicle (Jeep) and they started beating me "during the journey" that lasted two hours before putting me in a deserted place, the blows were directed to my head and my back, they used the rifle to hit me too. All of these coincided with a large torrent of insults and bad language. Then, we arrived at an abandoned building where they went on beating and torturing me. After that, I was transferred to the Khateeb Branch affiliated to the State Security Service in al-Khateeb area located in Baghdad Street, Damascus, where I was subjected to other types of torture. I still have up to now a ruptured of muscle in my right shoulder, a wedge stuck between two bones in the shoulder, and backache. I found out that I was in the Khateeb Branch through former detainees."



Image of Abdullah, a former detainee, illustrates traces of torture on his body, particularly on the back.
Photo credit: STJ

- **No Exceptions in Torture Even for Persons with Special Needs**

Shahir Younis, a political activist and a former detainee in several security branches of the Military Intelligence Service, was arrested in 2011 in Aleppo. He remained incarcerated for four consecutive years; he was transferred among several security branches, including the Military Security Branch in Aleppo, Palestine Branch among others. Despite suffering from a disability in the feet as a result of poliomyelitis (a person with special needs), it did not prevent the jailers from torturing and ill-treating him. Shahir said in this regard:

"In the Military Security Branch in Aleppo they were using Shabah Position for three continuous days; Shabah Position is a method differentiates the Military Security Branch from the rest branches where the hands are tied behind the back to the top. They would let me down from Shabah Position in complete coma, and the pains resulted from this method were terrible, because this method of torture was causing dislocated shoulders. However, some of the detainees were medical students from Aleppo University and they were helping me to bring the shoulder joints back to normal. I was also exposed to the basin style, which is also called the Bathtub, it is a water basin where the detainee sits and the water covers his entire body except the head, then the jailer would put an electrical wire in water to electrocute the detainee and this method causes many burns. I have suffered many black spots in my body for a whole year after my release."



Image illustrates "Balango" method of torture. The "Ghost" detainee's hands are tied behind the back to the top. It is not like a normal method (Shabah Position). This method is very common with ISIS, and the picture taken in order the reader understand the "Shabah Position" method that Shahir spoke about in his testimony.

Shahir was being moved between several security branches and secret detention facilities in Aleppo and Damascus during his long detention period. He spoke in his testimony that he was treated mercilessly even though he was a person with special needs, on the contrary, he was ridiculed and being beaten more for this reason, he says:

"I was brutally pulled and kicked by the Air Force Intelligence elements at Aleppo Airport, as we were walking in queue with a metal wire "chain", blindfolded, while our hands tied to the back. They asked us to run, but because of my handicap, I could not run and I fell on the ground, so, the jailors started mocking and kicking me. After that, they asked the rest of detainees to continue running, and then I was being pulled and lots of damage was caused to the shoulders, elbows and knees and my skin abraded so that a part of the bone of my right knee was uncovered with severe bleeding."



Shahir spoke about the traces of torture that he still suffers from, such as the hurt of his knee and a severe setback in the hinge, as well as the loss of eyesight.

"Being a disabled, I suffer from hurt in my knees. The hurt increased dramatically during the period of detention and torture, as the jailers were targeting strikes on my knees because they knew I was handicapped, they were concentrating the strikes on my legs and the sensitive areas because I was trying to protect the sensitive areas with my knees. As for my right knee now, the doctors told me that I had a severe relapse in the hinge, and I desperately need a medical device to be installed in the hinge and a surgery operation. During the jail time, I lost a large part of my eyesight, too, which had no problems before the arrest. I now suffer from lack of eyesight two and three degrees in my right eye and two degrees and a quarter in my left eye because of the conditions of detention and the long periods that I spent in the darkness."

B-The Psychological Impact of Torture and Detention

The psychological and mental impact of detention may be invisible unlike the physical, economic or other impacts. It may cause catastrophic consequences not only to the survivors, but also to his family, his surrounding environment, and the society in general. Either the survivor or his family given the lack of knowledge of seriousness of this situation, and lack of awareness as well often neglects the psychological impact of arrest and torture. As we're talking about large numbers, ten thousands and possibly hundreds of kidnapping, detention and torture issues in Syria, this fact places greater responsibility on governments and organizations operating in providing the physical, moral and psychological support to detainees. In addition, it constitutes an important challenge during the transitional justice period that is hoped-for in Syria. Through some interviews, we will talk about the psychological effects that survivors have suffered after their release.

STJ noticed through the testimonies of the survivors whom were interviewed that all of them shared some of the symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder "PTSD". Many of those survivors interviewed confirmed the need and the importance of psychological support that the survivor has to receive just like what Masoud Aqil, a survivor and a journalist, emphasized. Aqil was arrested by the Islamic States also known as ISIS for 280 days and was transported among many secret detentions. He said in his testimony to [STJ](#) that he witnessed numerous cases of torture and summary executions.

Concerning the months following the release and the type of support that Masoud received, he said:

"There was not any care to my psychological statue after my release, neither by international organizations nor by the local ones. Being a journalist who works in the press (the reason for my



detention), I expected to receive support. I have never demanded any financial support, but associations and organizations should pay greater attention to the health and psychological conditions of the survivors, especially those who have been arrested by ISIS⁵."

- **POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER (PTSD)**

It is a disorder affects a person who is exposed to a frightening experience that is out of control, such as arrest, torture, shelling, rape or any other types of violations. Most of those affected persons may overcome these experiments over time, even without a psychological assistance, if the incident is less severe. However, in some cases, especially those who suffered from severe violations, these violations may cause reactions that last for months or even years, and this is what we call Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.

Symptoms of PTSD

1. **Suffering from nightmares and re-experiencing the trauma**: The patient feels that he is undergoing the experience in all its details, this may occur during the day through certain stimuli that may be (acoustic, visual, and a rainy day or etc...) the stimuli reminds the patient of his previous experience. He may undergo the whole experience again through the nightmares he sees while sleeping. The patient may not imagine the full events but he may feel the same feelings that he felt such as fear, voices and pain.

Ammar, a pseudonym of a former detainee who was arrested by the Syrian Security Apparatus, was subjected to three arrests. His first detention was in 2011 that lasted nine days, followed by the second arrest in 2012 for 11 days, and the third arrest-the longest- lasted for 11 months in 2015. Ammar speaks in his testimony to STJ about the psychological effects of his arrest, and his biggest problems are nightmares, he says:

"I have been released for more than a year, I travelled to Turkey then to Europe, but I still suffer from nightmares that let me experience the detention in detail once again, including methods of torture. Every night I live all these details and sensations, it is exhausting. I am in a poor psychological situation and nowadays I am looking for a psychiatrist to help me."

Ahmed, pseudonym of a survivor who refused to disclose his identity for security purposes, said in his testimony to STJ that he suffered from nightmares after his release from Palmyra Military Prison in Homs province:

"I believed that I need no psychological support after my release, until I left Syria travelling to Turkey, where I began to have very distressing nightmares that make me live the whole experience of arrest and torture once again, and I feel the same pain."

⁵ For the full testimony of Masoud Aqil , please visit the following link: <https://stj-sy.com/en/view/35>



Mohammed al-Abdullah is one of the former detainees, detailed to STJ his arrest experience by elements of the Kabbas checkpoint located in Damascus. He was subjected to severe beatings, insults and other ill-treatment, Muhammad mentioned small details in his daily life as a reminder of the conditions of detention, he said:

"One day my four-year-old son was playing when he started spitting and laughing, so I experienced the flashback when the jailor was beating and spitting me. I could not bear that voice and I felt stress. I shouted at my child to stop spitting, but neither he nor his mother understood the reason of my shouts. This is a problem that I suffer from because it irritates me and gets me angry whenever I come across anything that reminds me of the detention."

He talks about experiencing nightmares everyday:

"Nightmares are the worst symptoms. They usually begin with a happy vision with my family and friends, but suddenly turns into a nightmare that I am wanted and that some people follow me while I run away, then I feel too much panic. The nightmare has significant impact that I woke up many times having (a Panic Attack) and I felt suffocation and shortness of breath; once they transferred me to the hospital where doctors used the breathing equipment and oxygen to enable me breathe normally. Sometimes I get these Panic Attacks when I'm awake and experience distressing memories such as detention and siege."

2. Avoiding expose to certain situations and places: In this condition, the PTSD patient avoids certain situations/places that reminds him of the trauma, which may cause a lot of inconvenience. This may prevent the patient from doing a lot of activities, hobbies and many other jobs, for example, avoiding the police fearful of them, etc...

The witness Abdullah was arrested by the General Intelligence when he was a 17-year-boy, his friends, who were communicating with the intelligence service, contacted him and asked to meet him in order to put him in the trap. Abdullah is talking about his suffering from nightmares, concerns and fearing of receiving calls from unknown numbers, he says:

"I still have panic (phobia) of receiving calls from unknown numbers, which sometimes embarrasses me, and also causes losing opportunities. In addition, I still have nightmares in which I experience the whole detention experience again; sometimes I dream that I am running away from people following me. I need a psychiatrist but unfortunately, I cannot speak the German language and it causes a barrier for me in Germany. "



Ahmed Samir is also one of the former detainees who testified to STJ and spoke about the psychological effects of his two arrests in 2011-2012:

"I suffered from nightmares for a long time before but they have stopped now. But still here in Germany I have a great fear of the police, for example, there is a police station near my home, every day I walk a long way to avoid seeing and remembering anything that may bring me back to the arrest terrific memories."

Mohammed, a pseudonym of one of the detainees who was arrested in 2013 by the Branch 215 affiliated to the Military Intelligence Service, also known as the Raid Squad, which is located on 6 Ayar Street in Damascus, he spoke about his suffering from some psychological effects that greatly affected him, especially the electrocution that left a significant impact:

"I still have a lot of psychological effects such as nightmares and distressing memories, and I still sleep the same way that I used to sleep in the prison which is called (Tasseif⁶), like a sword. After my release, I have had lots of worries, memories, and psychological problems for a while, but I managed to get rid of most of them. However, I still have fear and panic when I hear the bell, because the jailers used to ring the bell before beginning the electrocution, whenever I hear the sound of any bell, I feel as if electricity is running within my body and I experience the torture experiment once again."

3. Constant alert and Anxiety: The patient suffers from disorder, accompanied with insomnia and anxiety as if he is always at risk, and it is difficult for him to relax.

Mohammed al-Abdullah lists the psychological effects he still suffers because of his arrest, such as constant anxiety, and the difficulty to relax, he says:

"I still have a lot of turbulence, including lack of focus and constant anxiety, and I am constantly stressed as I cannot stand up hearing loud voices or scream or even if someone talks a little bit loudly. Moreover, I suffer from distraction, and I am under-performing at school because of my low concentration, the sound of a car, or having a fly in the room or any voice or factor may distract my attention."

4. Other symptoms: such as muscle pain, spasm, diarrhea, arrhythmia, headache, panic trauma, depression, drinking a lot of alcohol, as well as addiction to painkillers.

⁶ Tasseif is a slang term that refers to a specific way of sleep (like a sword) in which the detainees sleep on their side and are well pressed because of the overcrowding of these places with too many detainees.



In February 2015, Ayman, pseudonym of a detainee, was arrested at a checkpoint operated by the National Defense in Qudsseya in Damascus countryside. He still suffers from some psychological problems as a result of detention and torture, he says:

"I still suffer from some psychological problems such as severe and permanent depression, distraction that greatly affects the ability to learn, accompanied by extreme insomnia and stress, I also suffer from speed in the heart pulse as well as arrhythmia."

Ali, pseudonym, was arrested at the Air Intelligence Branch in 2013; he talks about the psychological effects of detention and torture and losing self-confidence, and some sexual dysfunction:

"Even after my release for more than a year, I am ashamed to be alone with the girl whom I love because of lack of confidence, fearful of the unknown (Xenophobia), as well as losing the sense of libido or the attraction to anyone accompanied by a sexual dysfunction."

Shahir Younis, a person with special needs, a political activist and one of the former detainees in several security branches affiliated to the Military Intelligence Service, speaks about the psychological impact of his detention experience, he says:

"Regarding the psychological effects, well, it is a big matter and should never be neglected. However, after the arrest I suffer from amnesia, forgetfulness, anxiety, and depression in addition to nightmares and insomnia, and some other psychological problems."

C-the Economic Impact of Detention and Torture

The prolonged and harsh conditions of detention affect the physical and mental health of the detainee, and because of his prolonged absence, which may last for months or years, the professional or educational level of most detainees are in danger of retreating, and that may directly threaten their economic situation. Moreover, the detainee's remoteness from the sphere of life, and living in very harsh humanitarian conditions may deprive him of keeping up to date with the developments that have emerged during the detention period or even deprive him of human contributions, new inventions, especially the technological ones.

In countless cases, the former survivor/detainee, especially those who have been detained for long periods, face the inevitable danger of deportation from their work, which is the main source of living. Thousands of students suffered from deprivation of completion their undergraduate or postgraduate studies, as well.



The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) and the University of St. Andrews issued a report concluded that the number of Syrians who live below the poverty line had tripled since the war broke out five years ago. The report concluded that about 83,4 % of Syrians live below the poverty line, compared with 28 % in 2010, and about 13, 5 million people in Syria are badly in need of humanitarian aid by the end of 2015, and more than 4 million live in Damascus and Aleppo⁷.

• Blackmail and Bribery in Millions of Syrian Pounds

Large numbers of families of forcibly disappeared and kidnapped detainees in Syria are forced to pay very large sums either to release their children or just to know their fate or merely for few minute-visit, exactly the same as what families and relatives of the detainees in Sednaya Military Prison told us. These payments range from 8 to 20 thousand US dollars, they pay them as ransom or bribe. This may seem relatively a small sum for people who live outside Syria, but it is a very large amount during the years of conflict in Syria, especially after the collapse of the Syrian currency. These bribes are paid to the kidnapers themselves, often elements of the security branches themselves, or they are from the Shabiha, or unknown armed groups who are common nationwide, in addition to that, similar amounts are often paid to judges and lawyers, particularly in the Counter-Terrorism Court in Syria.

Ahmed Samir, one of the former detainees who talked in his testimonies to STJ about the bribes that his parents were obliged to pay to set him free in 2012, he said:

"In 2012 my family paid 1.5 million Syrian pound, which is equal to \$15,000 in order to tear my file and my confessions, and to be secretly smuggled from outside the branch. Given being still wanted, my family paid about 750 thousand Syrian pounds, which equals \$7,500 to drive me out of Syria. I have lost all my money and what I have collected throughout out my youth time."

• Deprivation of Many Fields Such as Work and Study

As previously reported, the impact of arrest, abduction or enforced disappearance in Syria is not limited to the length of detention alone, but extends to the post-release period, and this suffering may extend to many months and years, especially at the economic or educational level.

⁷ United Nations: Levels of poverty in Syria have tripled since the outbreak of war, Source

http://www.bbc.com/arabic/middleeast/2016/04/160430_syria_poverty_escwa



Naji, a pseudonym of one of the detainees who refused to disclose his identity for security purposes, spoke in his testimony to STJ the details about his "second" detention when some Shabiha at the university arrested and threatened him, the matter that led to lose his university study:

"I was in Damascus University doing exams, when Shabiha, self-called "the student security" arrested me, drove me to their room at the university and began interrogating, beating and insulting me, then they confiscated a camera, a hard drive and the money that I had. They threatened me and ordered me to go and not to enter the university once again; consequently I could not do exams so I left Damascus University."

Mohammed, a pseudonym of one of the detainees arrested in 2013, by the Military Intelligence Service, Branch 215, also known as the Raid Squad located on 6 Ayar Street in Damascus, spoke about his economic suffering and the loss of his job and study after the arrest:

"The detention affected my family's economic status and mine as well, since I was one of the breadwinners of my family. After my release, I lost my job and was expelled from Damascus University."

Shahir Younis, one of the special needs, a political activist and a former detainee in several security branches affiliated to the Military Intelligence Service, spoke about the economic impact of his detention experience:

"I still have great economic consequences as result of my detention. I lost my job, and the chance to get work again now is almost impossible given the injuries afflicted to me. Moreover, I live in Idlib which lacks jobs, knowing that I am a breadwinner for a family that consists of a mother and three children."

• Losing Fatigue of Scores of Years:

Some families of detainees and abductees were forced to pay bribes and large sums of money comparing to the bad economic situation in Syria, so many families lost property and earnings that may have spent ten years to obtain them. Many families whom were interviewed said they were forced to sell their houses for millions of Syrian pounds in order to seek their children a release.

In February 2015, Ayman, a pseudonym of one of the detainees, was arrested at a checkpoint operated by the National Defense in Qudsseya located in Damascus countryside. He was transferred to many branches, and his family was obliged to sell their house and pay multiple bribes to prevent his transferring to Sednaya Military Prison, and to be released in two batches. Ayman said:



"My situation in the investigation was very bad, and they decided to transfer me to Sednaya Military Prison to be brought in front of a military trial. Fortunately, my parents followed the arrest from the beginning, and they paid many bribes to relieve my case. After my release, I was on my way home but the Political Security checkpoint in Qudsseya stopped me and arrested me on new charges, so I was arrested again for two months until my parents paid new sums of money for my release. "

Ayman lost his job and study as well:

"I suffered too much from economic consequences of the arrest. After the detention, I lost my job and my study as well; I was even prevented from presenting the Master's thesis in Political Science. Unfortunately, my parents had to sell a house they owned in order to pay bribes to save my life and get me out of the prison."

D-the Social Impact of Torture and Detention

The social impact of detention or enforced disappearance and the accompanying torture on survivors' lives and on their relatives is not less than the economic, physical, and psychological impact that the detainee or the relative suffer from. That may be extremely tougher in certain Syrian conservative communities. It is good to mention here that women detainees and survivors are the most affected ones.

STJ team faced many challenges and difficulties in contacting with former women detainees because of the social habits that hunt them in the Syrian society because just mentioning that she was a detainee is sometimes equivalent to an incident of a rape or a sexual abuse.

Hanan Halima, an activist who works in PDC organization on a project designated to help women and men detainees by linking the operating organizations in this field, spoke about the social effects and difficulties that she faces in dealing with women detainees:

"There are many psychological and social effects that we can observe with many women detainees, especially the elders and the non-active women in the Civil Society because of the social pressure practiced over her merely being a detainee. She becomes afraid of a stigma that she was raped during detention."

Hanan adds that the idea of the project, which she works on, is to link former detainees to any parts that may support the detainees, based on the fact that the initiatives that provide aid to the detainees are unknown and exist in a small and narrow range.

The Military Intelligence Service, Branch 215, also known as the Raid Squad located on 6 Ayar Street in Damascus, arrested Mohammed, a pseudonym, in 2013. Mohammed spoke about the social consequences of his detention:



"My character changed dramatically after my release, as I became completely introvert, and I was no longer an outgoing person as I used to be before my detention. Moreover, my friends and relatives changed their dealings with me so much; some of them avoided me out of fear, whereas others believed the terrorist charges that I was accused of."

Ammar spoke about the social consequences he faced after the three arrests, respectively in the years 2011-2012-2015, he said:

"The social effects were very great, as I lost most of my friends who were afraid of communicating with me. What hurts more is that some of them believed the charge that the security branch forced me to admit, as being an armed man with Islamic orientation, despite knowing me well, whereas others were afraid to contact me fearful that I might be monitored, especially after arresting one of my friends in charge of communicating with me. I lived in Damascus deprived of all my civil and social rights like marriage among others. This curse still haunts me even after I traveled out of Syria as one of my female friends told me that she preferred not to communicate with me and now she pretends that she does not know me. I am shocked and wondering how could a person believe the alleged accusations by the Security Intelligence, regardless of its absurdity, and how can particularly my friends believe that I am an armed man with Islamic orientation when knowing very well that I am a peaceful secular civil activist and I completely reject holding guns and its consequences. Some of my friends keep saying the popular proverb "There's no smoke without fire".

- **Initiatives and Projects to Support the Survivors**

Ahmed Helmi, one of the team operators in "Recovery Project" that was launched in April 2017 in Turkey and the western countryside of Aleppo, which supports survivors of the political charges. Ahmed said that this project is based on solidarity and establishing a basic nucleus for detainees with a view to link and connect the detainees in need to the donate parties. In addition, the project provides training opportunities and attempts to keep the detainees act within the civil society. Ahmad attributes the ineffectiveness of support programs of detainees in the proper way to the singularity of the Syrian situation, the significant decrease in the number of workers in the Syrian civil society in general, and that everybody is concerned with other matters that do not address, particularly and directly, the issue of detainees.

Faten al-Saraj, works in the Istanbul-based KADAV a women's advocacy organization and the self-defined as a feminist organization that fights violence against women and homosexuals. This organization provides psychological and legal support to women. With regard to those in need of support among Syrians, Faten says that it is a small Turkish organization, conducts home visits to the Syrian gathering sites, works to raise awareness, and distributes brochures.



Second: Conclusion and Recommendations:

This report intends solely to shed a profound light on the suffering of detainees whom had been tortured particularly in Syrian detention facilities. It also aims to highlight the suffering of the detainees themselves and the impact accompanies their children for many months and years; we can sum up conclusions and recommendations in several points:

1. to the Survivors, the Released and to their Families

- Former detainees and survivors should not underestimate the impacts of detention, disappearance and torture experiences, especially in case the detainee had been subjected to numerous forms of torture and ill-treatment, spent prolonged periods in detention facilities, and witnessed dozens of atrocities. The survivor must undergo assessment sessions by specialists in order to identify the level of damage, and then initiate specific remedial steps and appropriate medical interventions depending on the degree of the psychological and the physical harm.
- Families of former detainees and survivors bear an important part of responsibility to follow up the mental and physical health steps of the detainees, particularly the children and the women. Families should never neglect this aspect, especially in case of significant psychological and physical harm inflicted on the detainees. In addition, the survivor's parents as well as the surrounding environment should be a bridge to bring him back to his normal life, not the other way. The family, friends and society should be an incubator environment that support and assist the survivors to eliminate effects of the arrest and torture.
- It is very important for the survivors and families of the victims to be aware of the previous experiences of other states, with the assistance and support of the Syrian as well as the international civil society organizations in order to benefit from them on how to address torture and its impacts, or the issues relevant to prosecution and equity.



2. To the Syrian Operating Groups Involved in Documenting and Providing Psychological Support to the Survivors:

- To creating a “special system” for data sharing, a system that allows knowing the number of survivors from torture and enforced disappearances, as well as knowing the categories that received different types of support being medical, psychological, etc. Moreover, this system should not be biased to detainees depending on the party that conducted the violation, and it should take into account the unit of criteria in this regard.
- Syrian groups operating in providing psychological and medical support to Syrian survivors should create effective coordination mechanisms, firstly in the areas of work within Syria, and secondly in the neighboring states like Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, and Iraq. It is important that international organizations or national associations that have the nationality of the neighboring countries to be added to this mechanism.
- Local and international organizations should create and develop simple efficient and effective communication mechanisms with the survivors to enable all of them communicate in a comprehensible language with the organizations, and to gain a clear knowledge of the type of services provided by those organizations. Therefore, STJ recommends creating a "**mutual transfer system**" between all the organizations, initiatives and human rights associations operating in the field of documentation on one hand, and the personnel in the field of medical and psychological support on the other side in order to provide transferring and sharing information among them. The aim is to avoid repetition and ensure the highest level of coordination to enable the survivors getting the effective psychological, medical and legal support.
- Personnel in the field of documentation should be trained in the best way to make them able to interview survivors. In addition, they should be equipped well with tools and answers to most of the survivors’ enquiries, as well as train them on ways how to manage the expectations during talks with former detainees and documenting their testimonies.



3. to Donor Governments, International Organizations and United Nations Entities:

- Prioritize the issue of risks related to arbitrary arrest, enforced disappearance, and torture, as well as the psychological, physical and social consequences in the current and future plans while working on the Syrian file. In this regard, the United Nations particularly and its affiliated agencies must issue periodical sheets explaining the provided services to the survivors in Syria in the neighboring states.
- United Nations entities, governments and international organizations must care about raising the awareness of the detainees' surrounding environment, study the impact of arrest, torture and enforced disappearances on the society as a whole whether in the short or the long term, in addition to devote effective programs for this purpose.
- United Nations organs, donor governments and concerned organizations should facilitate procedures relevant with gifts to those who survived detention or torture, as well as facilitate procedures to the organizations that work in this regard, besides to bear in mind that Syria has been currently going through one of the worst crises since the Second World War.
- United Nations organs, donor Governments and organizations must develop long-term strategies to deal with the issue of arbitrary detention, torture, enforced disappearance and death in custody, and not settle on limited and short-term programs.
- United Nations organs, donor governments and organizations must not neglect the legal support to survivors, especially in the absence of any documents for the released persons, besides help to guide them to ways that ensure their minimum legal protection.
- United Nations agencies, donor governments and organizations should develop rehabilitation programs for the released persons and reintegrate them into society through qualifying them professionally or helping them to complete their education.
- All States, especially those bordering Syria, must not forcibly return any Syrian refugees, particularly after the massive torture the detainees are subjected to. STJ has [recently published a report on large-scale repatriation operation](#) carried out by the Jordanian

authorities which violates the Article III of the Convention against Torture and "the Principle of non-Refoulement In International Law".

- Governments and international organizations should continue to pressurize the Syrian government to allow access to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the Red Crescent, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and other organizations working on prison and detention cases, to access to all secret and non-confidential detention facilities, in order to identify the violations occurring in these places as well as to identify the fate of the forcibly disappeared and then to communicate with their families.
- United Nations agencies and funds (including the [United Nations Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture/UNVFT](#)) should open additional avenues with international and Syrian institutions working on cases of support for victims of torture and their families directly, particularly in the neighboring countries like in Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon and Iraq.
- The Office of the [United Nations Special Rapporteur on torture](#) and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment must issue periodic reports on cases of torture occurring in Syria, and consider the possibility of sending field missions to the neighboring countries for direct interviews with survivors and victims. In addition to:
 1. Refer the urgent appeals to states in respect of individuals whom are said to be in danger of being subjected to torture, as well as correspondence concerning alleged cases of torture in the past.
 2. Access to a country fact-finding visit.
 3. Submit annual reports on its activities, mandate and [working methods](#) to the Human Rights Council and the General Assembly.



Third: Annexes

The Full Testimony of the Survivor Shahir Younis

My name is Shahir Younis, born in 1974; I studied Political Science and worked previously in the field of advertising and designing. I am married with four children. At the beginning of the revolution, I joined an opposition party called the al-Ansar Party, a peaceful political party that was registered by the regime under the Party Law. I also worked as an accountant in field hospitals and in the Medical Council of Aleppo, because of my work, elements of the Military Intelligence Division in Aleppo arrested me in May 2013. I stayed in comunicado for several months before being transferred by a military aircraft to Damascus and then to the Palestine Branch, after that to the Air Forces Intelligence Branch at Mezzeh Military airport and then to the Military Police Department in the Qaboun neighborhood located in Damascus.

Conditions of my detention were so harsh, I spent several months during the summer in solo, which was merely a toilet, let alone the methods of torture inflicted on me, in the Military Security Branch of Aleppo, torture by Shabah used to last three full days. This method was called the Ghost and it is distinctive as the hands are tied behind the back to the top while the detainee is hanging. It was causing coma that sometimes lasted several days, accompanied with body damage including dislocating of both shoulders; some detainees who were students at the Faculty of Medicine used to help me to bring the shoulder joints back to normal.

I was also subjected to a method of torture called "Bathtub", which is a water basin where the detainee sits in and water covers his entire body except the head, and then the jailor puts an electrical cable to electrocute the detainee. This method causes large burns to the skin. I suffered from black skin for a whole year.

At Aleppo airport, I was subjected to brutal pull and kicks by elements of the Air Intelligence Department. They tied our hands behind the back, cuffed our feet, blindfolded us and tied all of us to one chain, an iron wire, and they pulled the chain to make us run. I fell on the ground but everyone continued running and pulled me behind them. This caused hurts in my shoulders, elbows and my knees. I also suffered from skin abrade and exposure of part of the bone of my right knee and severe bleeding. As usual, the jailers mocked my situation very much and laughed at me.

We were always beaten, however, all these methods of torture were instantaneous sufferings compared to hunger and deprivation of food in addition to infectious diseases given we were about 110 to 115 persons in one cell. Particularly at Palestine Branch, we stayed in a small room of 5×4 meters, it was impossible to accommodate all of us, so we shifted sitting and sleeping. Some were standing for eight consecutive hours whereas others slept for only two hours.



Moreover, the jailers used to strike everybody who slept being sitting or standing. Throwing the food into the toilets was sometimes a method of punishment as well.

In terms of food, it was usually a quarter of a loaf of bread and a grain of potatoes for the entire day. Even this small portion was sometimes denied or dumped in toilets. The detainees suffered some diseases such as eczema, abscess, wounds, sores, scabies, and lice.

Concerning deaths at Palestine Branch, I was in dormitory No. 10, also called the Death Dormitory, as on average, from 5 to 10 detainees used to die daily, either as a result of torture or diseases. Above all, sometimes the elements gather around the detainee and start striking him with water pipes that is called al-Akhdar al-Ibrahimi, they kept beating him until he bleeds from all over his body and dies in half an hour. The number of deaths was very large in this dormitory; it is worth mentioning that on the day when I was released, we were only two "released persons" accompanied by 11 corpse wrapped in a blanket. We can imagine the rate of deaths that occurred in only one dormitory out of 28 dormitories and 56 solitary confinement.

My knees still hurts me up to now, I am originally a special needs person, and the jailors used to concentrate on my disability by hitting my feet and the sensitive areas, but I was trying to protect these areas with my knees. Doctors told me before a while that I had a severe setback in the joints and I needed a medical device to fasten the joints, otherwise I have to undergo a surgery operation to install the joints, or at the minimum choice, I need a new joint given it is almost damaged. In addition, my eyesight is weak now, before the arrest, I had a good sight but now I have three degrees lack of eyesight in my right eye, and two degrees and a quarter in the left eye. This was because of the conditions of detention and the prolonged periods that I spent in complete darkness.

I was sentenced for 10 years, which was later reduced to four and a half years after being accused of several charges, including: profaning the ruling Baath Party, undermining and slandering the Russian Federation, using the social media with a view to overturn the regime in Syria, and rousing to topple the President of the Syrian Arab Republic.

After my release, I learned that there was a new arrest warrant issued on August 5, 2012, this time by the General Intelligence Directorate, Branch 255, so I was obliged to flee to Idlib countryside, which is out of the regime control. Then I was reunited with my family while we were stuck on the Turkish-Syrian border within Syrian territory. We are having very poor living conditions that lacks safety, in addition to accusations of being a secular many times."

In terms of aid, I have not received any help although many organizations promised to provide help, contacted with a view to document, and insert the data, however, none of them kept their words. Currently, I am in such dire need of financial support to make a living or to have a computer to work on it as a graphic designer, which is my career; these demands are more important than health care right now. I had already halted medical treatment due to financial situation despite I need a metal device for my knee but I do not have any money to get it. Moreover, I still suffer some physical effects. In terms of the psychological effects of detention,



my memory becomes very weak, and I suffer from forgetfulness, constant anxiety, nightmares, insomnia, and some other psychological problems.

I was released in October 2014.



The survivor Shahir Younis and his kids

Source: [Al-Jazeera channel report](#)

End...