

30 August 2017 – International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances

Syria - Justice for the thousands of victims of enforced disappearances

We, the undersigned civil society organisations, commemorate the victims of enforced disappearances in Syria and support their families, urging the international community to support their demand to ensure justice, truth and reparation and the immediate release of all those enforcedly held in secret detention. As the world marks today the International Day of Victims of Enforced Disappearances, our organisations condemn the continued and systematic use of enforced disappearance which [amounts to a crime against humanity](#) committed by the Syrian government. To silence its critics and instil fear among communities, the Syrian government adopted this practice towards its civilians and deployed it systematically after the start of the peaceful protests in 2011. We also call upon all armed groups to the conflict to promptly release all those held disappeared and disclose their fates and whereabouts.

Since the rise of the peaceful protests in Syria, our organisations have been monitoring, documenting and campaigning on cases of hundreds of Syrian individuals who have been subjected to enforced disappearance. Many of those are women and children. Thousands of family members of those disappeared are struggling for justice in their dangerous and impossible quest to find the fate and whereabouts of their loved ones. They experience mental and emotional anguish, while placed outside the protection of the law, and are often blackmailed, manipulated and used by brokers. The struggle for justice must not cease, accountability towards enforced disappearance must be high on the agenda of all international peace making and negotiations on Syria which might take place.

We call for justice for Bassel Khartabil, a Syrian-Palestinian software engineer and free speech activist, who was subjected to extrajudicial execution by a military field court in October 2015 and whose fate only became known in August 2017. On 15 March 2012, Military Intelligence had arrested Bassel Khartabil and held him incommunicado for eight months.

We urge the Syrian government to immediately disclose the fate and whereabouts of tens of thousands of victims of enforced disappearances including Syrian lawyer Khalil Maatouk, whose whereabouts are unknown since he was arrested at a government military checkpoint in October 2012. We call on the armed opposition groups to release Syrian human rights defenders, including Razan Zaitouneh Samira Khalil, Wael Hamadeh and Nazem Hammadi, who were kidnapped from the Violations Documentation Center (VDC) offices by armed, masked gunmen in Douma on 9 December 2013.

We collectively call for the immediate release of all detainees held in Syria for peacefully exercising their legitimate rights to freedom of expression and association. We urge both the Syrian government and armed opposition groups to immediately disclose the fate of those

disappeared and stop arbitrarily arresting, abducting and detaining people for their peaceful, journalistic, and humanitarian activities – in line with United Nations Security Council resolution 2139, which demands ‘the release of all arbitrarily detained’ in Syria.

We specifically call on the Syrian government to:

1. Ensure that no further executions of detained human rights defenders occur, and cease their subjections to any military or ad-hoc court such as the Counter-Terrorism Court;
2. Transfer all detainees to known and recognised places of detention, and allow visits to prisons by their families, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and other relevant committees;
3. Allow access to UN officials including the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Syria to conduct impartial investigations into the tens of thousands of enforced disappearances in Syria since 2011;
4. Ensure the registration of all detainees' data, inform them of their detention grounds, and ensure that they have access to the necessary healthcare;
5. Promptly accede, without making any reservation, to the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance; and implement it fully under national law. In addition, Syrian authorities should recognize competence of the Committee on Enforced Disappearances to receive and consider communication from or on behalf of victims or other states parties;
6. Ensure that all participants in the search for victims of enforced disappearance, in particular relatives of detainees, are protected from ill-treatment, smuggling, retaliation, arrests and enforced disappearance;
7. Ensure that all survivors of enforced disappearance, released persons, families of deceased victims, and their relatives receive justice, truth and reparation - including material compensation, rehabilitation and restitution of property; ensure that such a crime does not recur and that all those suspected of criminal responsibility are brought to justice in fair trials before ordinary civilian courts and without recourse to death penalty.

We specifically call on armed opposition groups to:

1. Promptly release any person subject to enforced disappearance;
2. Submit lists of the names of the kidnapped and disappeared to their families and to relevant international organisations

Signed:

1. Amnesty International
2. Badael Foundation
3. CIVICUS
4. EuroMed Rights (EMR)
5. Front Line Defenders
6. Families for Freedom
7. Gulf Centre for Human Rights (GCHR)
8. HIVOS
9. Human Rights Guardians
10. Impunity Watch
11. International Federation for Human rights (FIDH)
12. International Service for Human Rights (ISHR)
13. Justice for Life Organization (JFL)
14. Palestinian Center for Development and Media Freedoms (MADA)
15. PAX for Peace
16. PEN international
17. Syrian Center for Legal Studies and Research (SCLSR)
18. Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression (SCM)
19. Syrian Institute for Justice and Accountability (SIJ)
20. Syrians for Truth and Justice (STJ)
21. Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR)
22. The Day After (TDA)
23. The Syrian Archive
24. URNAMMU
25. Violations Documentation Center in Syria (VDC)
26. World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT)