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## *The Smell of Corpses Permeated the Place*

*Statement of The Survivor Ahmed Asa'ad  
Hindawi after Six Years of Detention in Syrian  
Security Branches*

## **“The Smell of Corpses Permeated the Place”**

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of Detention in Syrian Security Branches*

## Introduction:

It's impossible for Ahmed to forget the appalling sight of the bodies thrown near him in the same cell. They were left for days before having a mass burial in the prison yard. That was a horrible experience Ahmed went through during his detention at Aleppo Central Prison in July 2013, witnessing a slaughter of 35 inmates. He couldn't imagine something like this to happen! On the charge of financing terrorism, Ahmed spent 6 years in custody moving among security branches. That was confirmed to STJ by Ahmed<sup>1</sup> personally:

**"A month after my detention, specifically on September 25, 2011, I was driven from the State Security branch in Aleppo, along with other detainees, to Aleppo International Airport, where we were placed in a transport plane. I mustered up my courage and asked the agents about our destination, and I was shocked to hear that answer which made me speechless: "Your death order came, we will kill you and throw you in the sea". I will never forget how an agent dragged me to the plane rear and tried to throw me out to intimidate me", he said.**

### I. Who is Ahmed Asa'ad Hindawi

Ahmed Asa'ad Hindawi born in 1985 in Ehsim town, located in Jabal Zawiya region, Idlib countryside. He used to work as a farmer before the onset of the Syrian conflict in 2011 to support his parents, wife, and two children. He then moved to Aleppo province to work as a maintenance and electrical technician for a company located in Al Sukkari neighborhood, from where he was arrested on November 22, 2011;

**"It was around 11:00 PM, I was buying some stuff for the house from a nearby shop when a vehicle of the State Security stopped there. About six heavily armed men got out and came in the shop, they tied my hands behind my back, me and the shop owner, and dragged us into the vehicle which drove us to the State Security branch in al-Sukkari neighborhood in Aleppo, without us knowing the charges.", Ahmed said.**

In a dungeon at the State Security branch, Ahmed was suspended from the ceiling (shabh) with his wrists tied. He hadn't been that scared before, as he couldn't speak or even ask about the reason of being brutally arrested. He was left in that gloomy cell for four days during which

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<sup>1</sup> The interview conducted by STJ's field researcher in June 2018.

he was barely served food and water. They used to untie him in the meal time and re-suspend him in (Shabh) position again, when finished.

**“On Sunday, November 27, 2011, after four days suspended from the ceiling in a dungeon, a prisoner came and dragged me out where he started, along with other 4 soldiers, beating and torturing me savagely with rods and electrical cables on every part of my body ignoring my pleas and screams, which got more hysterical and shook the whole prison when they broke my right toe. I was been beaten for about half an hour and left as a dead body unable to move. Then someone came and dragged me back to the same dungeon where I spent a whole month, during which state security agents went and searched my house four times and on one of those times they emptied a 50 liters barrel of fuel ‘Mazut’ they found, citing that it contained chemical substances, as one of those agents mentioned to me later.”**, said Ahmed.

## **II. The harrowing journey in the Air Force Intelligent Directorate**

On December 25, 2011, a month after his arrest, Ahmed was driven along with other inmates, blindfolded and handcuffed, to Aleppo International Airport in a military vehicle, where the accompanied agents took turns beating and humiliating him. About half an hour after arriving the airport, the inmates were placed in a transport airplane without knowing the destination.

**“Despite my deep fear and pain, I got the courage and asked, “Where are we going?” and some agent answered in a tough tone “Your death order came, we will kill you and throw you in the sea”. His words shocked me and made me tremble and speechless. However, I then realized how ruthless and heartless government agents are. An agent dragged me to the rear of the plane threatening to throw me out while I was completely immobilized since I was shackled and handcuffed. They kept humiliating us during our transport until we landed on a place that we couldn’t recognize where other government agents welcomed us with hits and insults. Half an hour later we were taken to an underground cell where we were whipped and beaten with sticks by other agents who took turns in torturing us for six hours straight. Screams and the smell of blood filled the air, many prisoners got fainted due to severe beat. I was placed along with 35 other detainees in a cell no more than 3m<sup>2</sup> with no air vents or a nearby toilet. An agent came and brought us water in a bottle cap; only few drops, which was another way of insult.”** Ahmed added.

Ahmed was shocked to know from another detainee that he was held at The Air Force Intelligence Directorate in Damascus. At noon on February 2, 2012, a week after his detention,

a huge explosion shook the cell, where Ahmed was, and the whole Air Force Intelligence building which walls demolished blocking the dungeon's vents completely and cut off the power, Ahmed along with other inmates rushed to the door of the cell to find out what happened but they could know nothing. He said:

**“On February 4, 2012, two days after the incident two prisoners came and took me to a scary room for interrogation, where 5 agents started beating me severely with stun batons and copper cables while one was using a tube of a car tyre, he made for torture. I lost consciousness for seconds and recovered to a sound of an agent who was stomping on my head with his boots while saying “you are an armed opponent, we would show you no mercy until you confess your cooperation with the ‘terrorist’ armed opposition groups”. However, I maintained my innocence, so they dragged me back to the cell where I spent 5 more days and on February 9, 2012 the investigator came to me and said “you would agree on the contents of this paper over your head” and he was accompanied by another agent who stood ready to start torturing me if I refused, so I thumped the paper unhesitatingly, for fear of the unbearable torture.”**

On March 15, 2012, the inmates were gathered in the Air Force intelligent branch yard where an official gave them a speech saying that they would be released the day after by a presidential amnesty. The inmates never cared about his saying, since they knew that it was mere promises coincided with the news of a possible entry of an international mission delegation headed by Kofi Annan, who was taking over the peace talks on Syria, according to Ahmed.

### III. Siege of Aleppo Central Prison and consequences

The following morning, Ahmad was driven in a military vehicle to the military police branch in Al Qaboun neighborhood in Damascus city where he was held in a small cell, with other old and new inmates, for a week. On March 23, 2012 he was moved to al-Ballowna prison<sup>2</sup> in Homs province, by a refrigerated van.

**“As soon as we got into the prison, the prisoners began torturing and beating us brutally using iron water pipes. After more than an hour of beating and torture, they forced us to take off all our clothes, even the underwear, and placed us naked inside an underground cell where we stayed for a whole**

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<sup>2</sup> Located behind Al-Baath University on the Damascus-Homs international highway.

**week during which we were subjected to all forms of torture; beating, insult, hunger, thirst and lack of basic life requirements. On April 2, 2012, we were placed again in a refrigerated van and taken back to Aleppo, specifically to the military security branch to be treated for the false accusations they had already prepared for me. I remained patient remembering my wife and child who were waiting my return. In the day after, they transferred me along with other detainees to Aleppo Central Prison.”, said Ahmed.**

On April 3. 2012, Ahmed was transferred to Aleppo Central Prison where he spent the hardest days of his life that the prison lacks the minimum living standards. As the detainees living on moldy bread and water and the prisoners’ leftovers. They were completely isolated from the outside world with phone calls and visits from relatives banned for months before the armed opposition groups surrounded the prison;

**“I appeared before the court judge several times during that period, who would claim in each time that my document hadn’t completed yet and that they need to take note of my security situation before the trial, as he claimed. During April 2013, the prison guards took the inmates to a building adjacent to the prison wall and placed them in the third floor to be used as human shields against the opposition attacks. In the mid of the same month, armed opposition groups including Al-Nusra Front and Harakat Ahrar al-Sham al-Islamiyya initiated a blockade of Aleppo Central Prison. During the first few days of the siege we would hear fierce clashes and bombardments with all types of weapons which resulted in the withdrew of the government forces stationed outside the prison to the inside. The same forces used to come heavy armed to cells to torture the inmates in reprisal for the opposition groups’ siege of the prison and their attempts to break into it. Our suffering increased day by day due to starvation. I still remember how a prisoner used to stand at the cell door and say, “there is no food or drink in the prison, those who prefer death could stand against the wall to be shot.” It is an unforgettable scene.”, Ahmed said.**

## IV. The kill of 35 inmates for their revolt

Inmates in the two wings next to Ahmed's, at Aleppo Central Prison, started a rebellion, for cutting off food because of the siege, on which the prison guards responded so brutally, as they opened direct fire at prisoners killing 35, whose bodies left for days before they were buried in a mass grave dug in the prison yard. That was one of the cruelest incidents Ahmed has ever witnessed. Ahmed said:

**“After this incident, machine guns and snipers were deployed on the prison roof for fear of any further revolt attempts. During the siege period, government helicopters used to drop foodstuffs to prison guards who in turn took advantage of the grave security situation and inmates’ starvation to sell the one loaf of bread for S.P.1500, and the one kilo of any vegetable kind, for S.P. 2000. The government forces managed to lift the siege on May 22, 2014, that lasted for a whole year, during which the inmates’ suffering was dramatically increased. After that, I was transferred with many other inmates to al-Wahda prison in New Aleppo neighborhood, while our files and documents transferred to the Anti-Terrorist Court in Damascus which I appeared before several times, before my family assigned me a lawyer who asked for a large sum, S.P.1.000.000. I was then summoned two times to the criminal security forces, Damascus branch, for my case to be followed. On December 10, 2014 I was transferred alone to Adra Central Prison to receive treatment, since I had got TB during my detention at al-Wahda prison, and I spent a whole year there before I was transferred on December 24, 2015 to Hama Central Prison, my last detention station where I spent a year and two months.”**



A satellite image for Aleppo Central Prison. Taken early 2011





**A satellite image for Aleppo Central Prison. Taken early 2017**

Violations Documentation Center/VDC in Syria prepared a special report<sup>3</sup> on Aleppo Central Prison in April 2014 entitled “The Execution and Fatal Starvation of Dozens of Prisoners Violation Documentation Center in Syria April 2014”. The report provided satellite images illustrate where inmates’ bodies were buried in the prison yard, report said.

in all the testimonies conducted by VDC, witnesses and former detainees were asked about the numbers of those killed by the regime forces and where they had been buried, considering that the prison is besieged by anti-government forces. The last time a detainee, whose name remained anonymous, made a call from the prison was on 14-2-2014. He confirmed that the number of victims had reached up 639, excluding the number of regime casualties. 10 were killed during the last battle of Wa Motasimah and 23 others were injured. Two other detainees were killed by unknown fires. The witness also stressed that food stopped for four days during the fierce fighting attempting to break into the prison.

Eyewitnesses also confirmed that the prisoners who died under torture or out of hunger were buried in the eastern yard of the prison. There is a gap between the burial ground of the regime and the place where prisoners were buried. VDC provided a satellite company with accurate locations and specific dates, which enabled the company to take its first picture on 31-10-2013. This shows the following:

<sup>3</sup> “The Execution and Fatal Starvation of Dozens of Prisoners”, VDC; <http://www.vdc-sy.info/index.php/en/reports/1398197682#> (Last edit: September 1, 2018).

**First:** Area no.1 shows burned materials, probably garbage bags.

**Second:** Area no. 2 shows a burial ground. This was the area where the witnesses said the regime forces had been burying their casualties from clashes with the Free Amy.

**Third:** Area no 3 shows another, relatively large, burial ground. This was the area where witnesses said the regime forces had been burying dead prisoners. According to the witnesses, about 300 prisoners had been buried up until the date of the picture.

VDC took another picture on 6 March 2014 and previewed the above-mentioned areas again. The results shows:

**First:** no changes took place in area no.2

**Second:** the space of the prisoners' burial ground has dramatically increased in square (3), having now reached about 700 m<sup>2</sup>, and it became more organized. This picture of mass graves corresponds to a great extent with witnesses' descriptions of where prisoners have been buried.





Satellite images illustrate the burial sites in Aleppo Central Prison

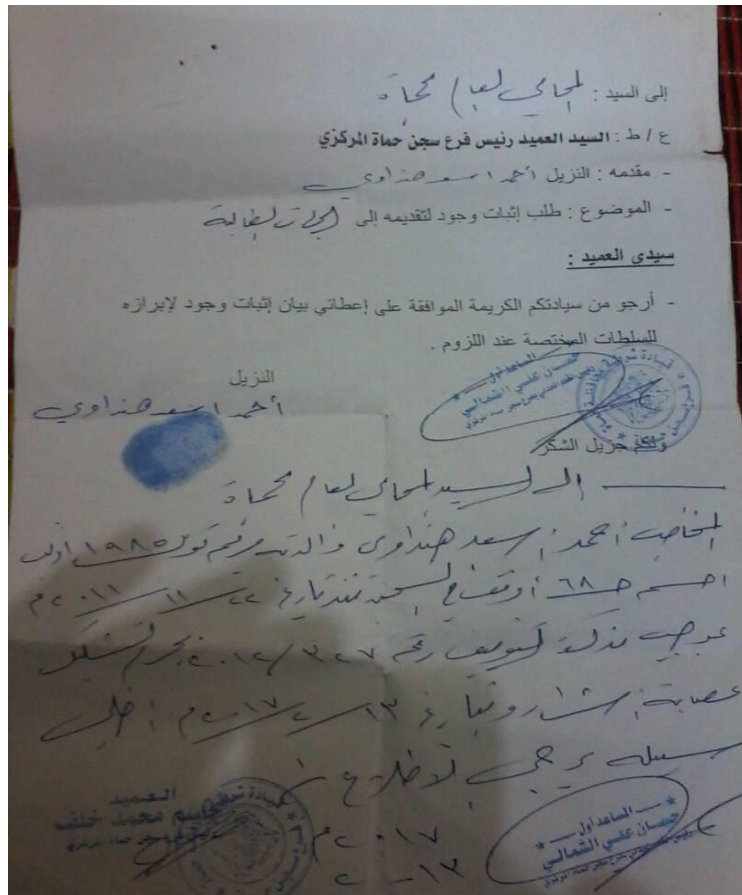
Photos credit: VDC

## V. Freedom after paying bribes

On February 13, 2017 Ahmed was released after paying a bribe of 6 million S.P. to a judge. His family obliged to sell everything it had to secure his release. After six years in detention on false accusations, Ahmed's release document was signed

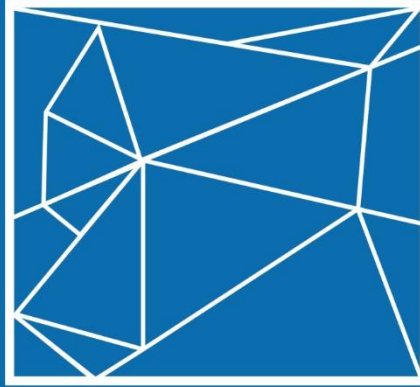
**“Although I was released carrying diseases and painful memories, I still seeking the freedom we, Syrians, have been deprived for decades. and the freedom that has been robbed from my people and Syria for decades. I have really learned a lot from this experience and came to realize that Syria has been ruled with an iron fist for ages, however, I believe this rule will**

shortly come to an end, and Syrians of all sects and faiths will live under a unified Arab state", Ahmed concluded.



The release document of Ahmed Asa'ad Hindawi, issued on February 13, 2018. Photo credit: Ahmed Asa'ad Hindawi.

سوريون  
من أجل  
الحقيقة  
والعدالة  
Syrians  
For Truth  
& Justice



## About Syrians for Truth and Justice:

**STJ** is an independent, nongovernmental organization whose members include Syrian human rights defenders, advocates and academics of different backgrounds and nationalities.

The initiative strives for SYRIA, where all Syrian citizens (females and males) have dignity, equality, justice and equal human rights.

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