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من أجل
الحقيقة
والعدالة
Syrians
For Truth
& Justice



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I Want My Voice to Reach the Whole
World

"I Want My Voice to Reach the Whole World"

The testimony below belongs to an inmate of the Hama Central Prison, who is sentenced to death

Introduction:

Ali¹ is yet hoping for someone to hear him; someone to prevent putting him and 10 other detainees of the Hama Central Prison on the death row; he who has been detained and moved from one Syrian security branch to the other for a sum of eight bitter years; he who was arrested at a military checkpoint in the city of Muhradah in 2011, while a 16 years old child, embarking on a journey of pain and suffering in one of the cruelest Syrian security branches. Ali never thought of spending the longest and the most brutal time of his life in the Palestine Branch and the Sednaya Prison, all for no obvious crime, but a bunch of charges which he was blamed for, admitting them under torture. On top of these charges, he is accused of, are "protesting against the ruling regime and murdering security personnel," Ali told Syrians for Truth and Justice/STJ on the online interview, conducted with him in November 2018, during his detention in the Hama Central Prison.

Early in November 2018, the Single Military Judge in Hama, affiliated with the Military Field Court in Damascus, passed a decision, providing for the transfer of 11 civil detainees from the Hama Central Prison to the Sednaya Military Prison, where a "delayed death sentence, passed against them," is to be executed. The decision was made two days into the Syrian government officials' visit to the prison, where they met the detainees and presented them with lists of various sentences passed against 68 of them.²

Seeing the lists, detainees of the Hama Central Prison embarked on a hunger strike on November 11, 2018, on Monday night, protesting the arbitrary rulings passed against them by the Military Filed Court and the Anti-terrorism Court. It is worth mentioning that STJ managed to obtain three documents, including the names of the detainees and the sentences involving them. However, it refrains from publishing them for security concerns.³

Eight days form starting the hunger strike, two of the Hama Central Prison's striker inmates were reported as have fainted, in addition to a general state of fatigue that overcame the rest. The Syrian authorities, for their part, continued to procrastinate and did not show the slightest response to the striking inmates' demands, represented by the need to reassess their cases and the canceling of the death penalty involving several of them.⁴

In November 2011, Ali, on the way to work, was stopped by a Syrian regular forces-affiliated checkpoint. Later on, he came to know that the personnel of the checkpoint belong to the Air Force Intelligence Branch in Hama city, where he was held captive on the allegation of name resemblance. He was, then, transferred to the Military Security Branch in the city of

¹ The true identity of the witness has been undisclosed based on an internal assessment by STJ and experts' advice, given that the witness has consented to reveal his name and true personal information.

² "Serious Concerns of Executing 'Suspended' Death Sentences in Hama Central Prison," STJ. November 9, 2018. Last visited August 23, 2019. <https://www.stj-sy.com/ar/view/949>.

³ "Inmates in Hama Prison Embark on a Hunger Strike to Protest their Unfair Trial," STJ. November 13, 2018. Last visited: August 23, 2019. <https://stj-sy.org/en/958/>.

⁴ "Syrian Authorities Continue to Procrastinate in Resolving Hama Central Prison Inmates' Issue," STJ. November 20, 2018. Last visited: August 23, 2019. <https://stj-sy.org/en/990/>.

Muhradah, where the first hours of torture were to begin. Ali gave an account of the beginning. He said:

"I was first led to a small room, newly constructed within the checkpoint's borders, positioned at the gate to the Muhardah city in the direction of Halfaya city. The checkpoint's personnel ordered me to take all my clothes off. One of them hit me savagely and asked me to put my hands over my head for inspection. Again, they asked me to strip down. They went away, leaving me stark naked in that room. More than two hours later, while I was yet naked in the extreme cold, I was taken aback by two militants, who entered the room with hoses in hand; they started beating me. The beating created marks on my body. A militant then came in and asked me to put on a single piece of clothes to cover up my genitals. He handcuffed me with plastic stripes and blindfolded me. They threw me into a car. They kept beating me throughout the journey in the car. Arriving in their destination, they undid the cover on my eyes. I had no idea where I was. I turned right and left, I saw nothing but walls, for I was placed in a solitary cell. I spent three or four days like this. Every day, someone would throw me a piece of bread, right into the darkness and the dreariness of the place, which I later came to know that it was the Detachment of the Military Security in the city of Muhardah. I also understood that I was placed in a cell that no sound comes out of but that of torture. A few days later, a militant came into the cell and started beating me with something similar to a cane; two other militants dragged me and led me to the interrogation room. There, the detective started asking me about my relationship with the gunmen and if I had ever committed any crimes against the state, how many of the security personnel did I kill and the number of the protests I participated in. Once I told him that I was a mere worker and that I had no idea about what he is mentioning, 'hell' almost gaped its mouth at me, for the militants started beating me with solid stuff and hoses."

1. The Torture was Limitless at the Military Security Branch in Hama City:

One of the branch's militants, then, returned Ali to the cell, where he was subjected to Shabeh⁵ from a wall. Shortly after and so much in pain, he started screaming at the top of his lung. Blindfolded, a militant beat him with a scourge. Ali continued to suffer thus for two days, until a militant approached him, asking if that he was willing to change his answers. Urged by the tormenting pain, Ali replayed that he was responsible for all that Syria is bearing witness

⁵ The victim is hung by manacled wrists, or from a hook or over a door, or occasionally by the feet, often for long periods and usually beaten; sometimes in a stress position where the detainee must keep his toes on the floor, as defined by Amnesty in its publication called: 'I wanted to die': Syria's torture survivors speak out. First published in 2012. For further information refer to:

https://www.amnesty.nl/content/uploads/2016/12/2012_03_13_syria_-_torture_report_final_with_pictures.pdf?x45368.

to, to which a militant responded with laughter. And then, he was led to the interrogation room, where the following happened:

"They held my left hand and made me put my fingerprint on the confession. During this, the detective said: 'You dog, you should have been that reasonable from the very beginning.' I was, then, dragged to another place. It was a small room, however, bigger than my cell. In the room were about 17 detainees, who showed the effects of torture. About 20 days later, I was transferred, along with several detainees, to the Military Security Branch in Hama city, where they met us with beating and insults. There, we have been through all sorts of torture, which coerced me into signing new confessions, on top of which were protesting against the regime in power, carrying up arms, murdering security forces' affiliated personnel and dealing with informers."

Ali, accompanying dozens of detainees, arrived in the Military Security Branch in Hama city, where he was again met with sticks, canes and hoses, until he was finally deposited in a room, which area was no more than 6 meters. Inside it, there were more than 60 detainees, some standing up; others sitting down. Ali found himself coerced into standing for three days in a row. It was through the small prison window that Ali could distinguish night from daytime, through which the detainees could also see the boots of the branch's jailors, the officers and militants. Three days later, Ali made it, for he managed to lay his body down, on an area consisting of three tiles, after several detainees were taken to an unknown destination. Describing his feelings at the time, he said:

"Back then, I could not believe that I made it to the ground, lying my body even if partially. My feet were already swollen, incredibly swollen! One morning, a person came into the communal cell, where I was held. He was a doctor, coming to conduct checkups. However, he was nothing like a doctor, for every time we complained to him about our pain, he ordered that the complaining detainees be subjected to Shabeh for three days. One of the detainees was a man, more than 70 years old, from Homs' desert. The old man died in the cell, and his body perched there, among us, for more than four days while militants and officers could not care less. Triggered by the odor that emanated from the dead body, a detainee approached the door and shouted so high: 'The man died, why not take his body out.' The militants entered the cell, took the detainee, threw him into a solitary cell and beat him for eight days."

At the Military Security Branch, Hama city, Ali suffered all types of torture; he was often subjected to electric shocks during the integration process. Once, he was shocked five times, after which he blacked out and could not feel his body. To wake him up, the militants poured cold water on him, until he regained consciousness, with the sound of the detective in his ear,

telling him: 'how did you like the journey.' Ali again was forced to admit things he never committed.

"A few days later, they summoned me to the interrogation room once more. The detective said: 'Oh, Ali! You have been quite mischievous; I will have to put you through hell.' They tied both my hands and feet together and placed me on a wooden chair, the two ends of which started to draw nearer to each other. My backbone was going to be fractured, I felt. The jailors repeated this several times and subjected me to electric shocks. They then dragged me on a blanket and returned me to the cell. It was three months that I spent thus before they transferred me to the Military Police in Hama city, where starvation stands out as the branch's distinctive feature. There, food was a matter of trade, conducted by the jailors. And I had no money. The food allocated by the prison's administration, however, consisted of a few olives and small pieces of bread, which usually the jailor carelessly abandons at the door of the cell that contained more than 100 detainees. I had no food for five days until a detainee pitied me and shared his food with me."

2. "Shall I Bring in a Nurse to Give Your Feet a Massage":

Ali was detained at the Military Security Branch in Hama city for about 22 days, from where he was transferred to the Balloneh Branch in the city of Homs, where he spent additional 14 days, before he was sent to the Palestine Branch in the city of Damascus, where the jailors received him with beating and insults. There, the vicious cycle of suffering began again, in an attempt to coerce Ali into admitting committing acts against the sovereignty of the state. He said:

"The detective wanted me to provide [him] with the same confession I made at the Military Security Branch in Hama city, but, by then, I had forgotten what I had admitted since the confession was ripped out of my mouth under torture. The detective asked me: 'How many bullets have you shot at the security personnel?' The militants, then, started beating me with a cane on my head until I lost consciousness. [They] threw me in a cell, the dirtiest room I have ever seen in my life, for there I contracted tuberculosis with no one to take care of me or my worsening health. The suffering was long, for the disease was severe while I knew not what diseases I suffered. I remained thus until a doctor came, examined my case and gave me medicine, which was a mere painkiller. When he told me about the disease I had, I told him that I needed treatment. His answer was this: 'Shall I also bring you a nurse to give your feet a massage. If you die, we will piss on your body'."

3. Sednaya Military Prison in Rural Damascus:

Ali was held captive in the Palestine Branch, Damascus, for about four months, and, then, he was transferred, in the company of several detainees, to Branch 248 (Military Confinement) in Damascus city, where he spent 48 hours without a single piece of bread to eat. Later on, they were transferred to the Sednaya Military Prison in late 2012. Once they arrived in the prison, they were all gathered in a large square, where the jailers started beating them with a machine made of steel and a chain. Back then, the square was occupied by 170 detainees, some of whom died while being tortured, according to Ali, who said:

"Twelve days into captivity, I was transferred with several other detainees to the ground floor of the Sednaya Prison, where I spent about three months in a tiny room that could barely accommodate five persons. However, they stuffed it with more than 25 persons. The disease had got a stronger hold of me at the time until a doctor came and gave me some medications. I was transferred to the Tishreen Military Hospital along with other 27 detainees. When I reached the hospital, I was shocked with the ghastliness of what I saw, for the detainees were tortured in the hospital as well, and some of them were at the verge of death due to the severity of the torture. They returned me to the Sednaya Prison, where I agreed with a few of my comrades to tell our families in case one of us is released. Praised be Allah! I was lucky. My family knew where I was and paid a bribe of three million Syrian pounds to an influential officer. I was, then, brought before the Anti-terrorism Court, where the judge pointed out that I have confessed many charges, to which I replayed that they were taken from me under torture. He ordered that I be transferred to the Hama Central Prison."

The Bitterness of the Wait:

Having suffered a lot, Ali finally arrived into the Hama Central Prison, yet tormented by tuberculosis. As a result, he was placed at one of the prison's hospitals, where he received the needed treatment. More than five years into his detention in that prison, Ali was informed that he was to face a death sentence, along with several other detainees. The shock was unbearable, and he was at a loss. Nonetheless, Ali still hopes to find someone who would listen and help prevent the execution of the sentence passed against him and the other detainees, who have all been arrested while under 18 of age and who have all been coerced by torture into confessing, as Ali put it:

"I want my voice to reach the whole world, for how could they pass such a sentence against us. [We] who have not committed any crime, especially since that the majority, whom the sentence involves, were yet juveniles when arrested, only to be accused of acts we have never heard of in our lives before."



History

Syrians for Truth and Justice was conceived during the participation of its co-founder in the Middle-East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) Leaders for Democracy Fellowship program, who was driven by a will to contribute to Syria's future. Starting as a humble project to tell the stories of Syrians experiencing enforced disappearances and torture, it grew into an established organisation committed to unveiling human rights violations of all sorts.

Convinced that the diversity that has historically defined Syria is a wealth, our team of researchers and volunteers works with dedication at uncovering human rights violations committed in Syria, in order to promote inclusiveness and ensure that all Syrians are represented, and their rights fulfilled.

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