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Concerns over Possible Arbitrary Executions against Prisoners in As Suwayda

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*The last Five prisoners held for the Military Field Court in Damascus,
have been transferred from the As Suwayda Civilian Prison to
Sednaya Military Prison on November 25, 2019*

STJ has obtained credible inside information from the [Civilian Prison](#) in the province of As Suwayda confirming that on November 25, 2019, a military police patrol transferred five detainees- all of them are held for the Military Field Court of Damascus- to Sednaya Military Prison-one of Syria's most notorious prisons-, after being informed that the "court" summoned them to a hearing.

It is the first time that detainees transferred collectively from a prison to another this way. Those five detainees were the remaining from the 25 detainees who were held for the Military Field Court in Sednaya Military Prison and then transferred to the Civilian Prison in As Suwayda. During the previous years, ten detainees were returned, respectively, to Sednaya prison, while the other 15 detainees remained in custody, without any change in their statuses.

During 2017 and 2018, the Military Field Court ordered the administration of the As Suwayda prison to release ten of the fifteen detainees held for it respectively, while the five detainees who remained were recently transferred to Sednaya Military Prison on November 25, 2019. There are real concerns that arbitrary death sentences will be carried out against them.

The Civilian Prison in As Suwayda currently houses about 200 detainees/arrestees who are serving different sentences after trial by the Anti-Terrorism Court and the Military Field Court, which rendered them arbitrary judgements, ranging from ten years to life imprisonment. A number of arrestees who were sentenced by the Syrian Military Field Court expressed their fear that at any moment the court will issue a decision to return them to Sednaya Military Prison to serve their sentences there.

It should be noted that the Syrian authorities have already imposed arbitrary death and life imprisonment sentences - with or without hard labor- against detainees of the Military Field Court in civilian prisons. However, some of those sentences were executed while others were reduced or abolished. STJ had prepared several reports on conditions of the arrestees in Hama Central Prison,¹ and a report about detainees held for the First Military Field Court in Adra Central Prison.²

Statements by detainees from As Suwayda prison:

The five detainees: Abdul Rahman Matar, Sameer al-Farra, Zakaria Khariba, Zakaria Juheem and Abdou al-Moussa were transferred from Sednaya Military Prison to the Civilian Prison in As Suwayda before about four years. None of them, however, was summoned to appear before any court until November 25, 2019, the day they were transferred back abruptly to Sednaya Military Prison.

¹ "Syria: 38 of Hama Prison Detainees Released following Special Presidential Pardon", STJ, March 13, 2019 (last visit: December 4, 2019) <https://stj-sy.org/en/1220/>

² "Syria: Unknown Fate Awaits Detainees Beyond Expiry of their Unfair Sentence", STJ, November 13, 2018, (last visit: December 4, 2019) <https://stj-sy.org/en/966/>

A detainee in As Suwayda Central Prison told STJ field researcher:

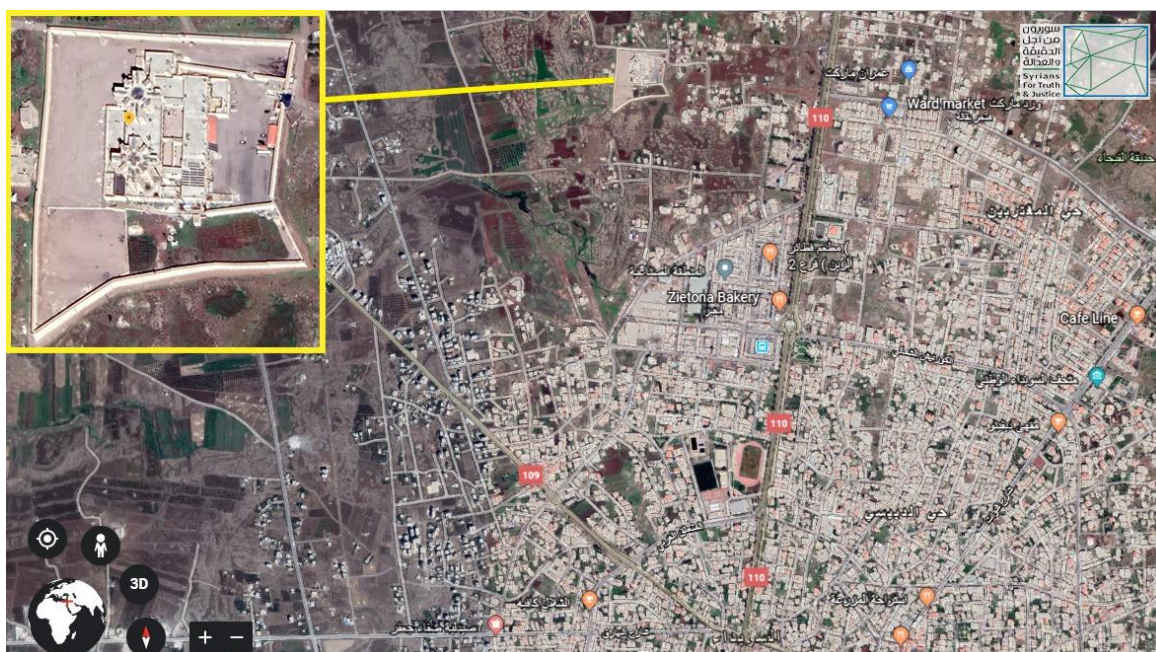
“The day before their transfer, the five detainees were summoned for investigation by the prison administration. They were interrogated for several hours before returning to the cells. They didn’t know that sentences will be issued against them or even that they will appear before a field court, as it has been three years since the court last summoned them. However, they were transferred the next morning abruptly.”

Another detainee from the central prison of As Suwayda said to STJ:

“A large number of military policemen came to the ward and took the five detainees after handcuffing them and covering their heads with black cloths. A state of panic and fear prevailed in the prison then. They also did not allow the prisoners to take any of their personal belongings and searched them to ensure that, which increase the fears that they would be summarily executed.”

A third prisoner from the central prison of As Suwayda- he was tried by the Military Field Court- said to STJ:

“During previous years, the prison used to house about 25 detainees held for the Military Field Court, some of whom were released after paying astronomical sums, others were returned to Saydnaya and executed there, and their families later received their ID cards. Only these five prisoners were left here, and the way they were transferred was worrying.”



A satellite image shows the location of the Civilian Prison in As Suwayda.

Several media reports indicated the poor conditions of detention in the Civilian Prison in As Suwayda, where there is a "detachment" belonging to the Political Security Branch whose agents treat the prisoners violently along with humiliating and blackmailing them. There is also lack of healthcare and hygiene in the prison which allow the spreading of skin diseases and lice. Besides, the food provided to the prisoner is not sufficient.³ Some pro-state media reported the provision of spoiled expired food to prisoners, and the commit of several corruption offences inside the prison.⁴

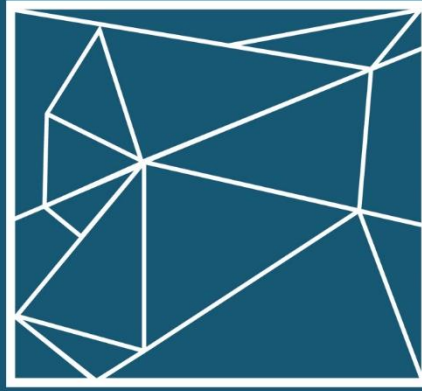
³ "Prisoners of Conscience in As Suwayda Civilian Prison: an open strike", Al Modon, April 25, 2018, (last visit: December 4, 2019)

<https://www.almodon.com/arabworld/2018/4/25/%D8%B3%D8%AC%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%A1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B1%D8%A3%D9%8A-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%B3%D8%AC%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%88%D9%8A%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%A1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%AF%D9%86%D9%8A-%D8%A5%D8%B6%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A8-%D9%85%D9%81%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%AD>

⁴ "Spoiled Food in As Suwayda Central Prison", Sham Times, September 1, 2019, (last visit: December 4, 2019)

<https://shaamtimes.net/198501/%D8%A3%D8%BA%D8%B0%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%81%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AF%D8%A9-%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%AE%D9%84-%D8%B3%D8%AC%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%88%D9%8A%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%A1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B1%D9%83%D8%B2/>

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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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