

March 23, 2020

Serious Concern About Health Conditions in Detention Centers

Fears of a COVID-19 Pandemic in Syrian Detention Centers

The conditions of incarceration in the detention facilities of the Syrian government pose a great danger to the lives of the detainees, who number approximately 90212. This number has been confirmed by the Violations Documentation Center in Syria (VDC) but the true figure is likely to be greater than this. These detainees were arbitrarily arrested because of their participation in peaceful protests, or expression of opposing political opinions, furthermore, those arrests were largely made arbitrary with no cause. Thousands of arrests turned into enforced disappearances after the Syrian government refused to acknowledge their detention or reveal the fate or whereabouts of detainees. Armed groups throughout Syria are also arbitrarily detaining thousands of civilians without any legal justification. Other than depriving opinion detainees from the pardon decrees successively issued by the head of the regime excluding the majority of the opinion and political detainees from these decrees, detainees are being killed in detention centres as a result of systematic torture, denial of medical care, and from detention in cramped, unhygienic and unventilated cells. These factors threaten the immune systems of detainees. With the spread of the Coronavirus around the world, and despite the government denying it has spread in Syria, the situation will be disastrous if the virus spreads inside a detention center. Additionally, the Syrian government refusal of releasing health records of detainees is really concerning, either those who were killed in the past or recently arrested people who have chronic diseases or in need of specialized health care.

Based on the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners of 1955, which include the principles of providing healthcare during imprisonment including for prisoners held without charges, principles that were approved by the Economic and Social Council, And also, based on the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, that enshrine prisoners' right to safe and healthy places and their right to be provided with adequate healthcare services and medicines as well as special protection for prisoners at risk, we the signatory organisations demand that:

- 1- Official bodies of the Syrian government, immediately release detainees as well as political prisoners and human rights defenders. To limit the possibility of the virus infecting detainees, no new arrests should be made.*
- 2- All parties to the conflict must take urgent and effective measures to open all detention centers in Syria to the competent international authorities, and take the necessary measures to save the lives of detainees, in accordance with international human rights law and based on the relevant international resolutions.*
- 3- The UN Special Envoy and UN Agencies must pressure the Syrian government to release political prisoners and human rights defenders held in official and unofficial detention centers.*
- 4- The organizations signing this statement also call on all the authorities responsible for detention centers to take all precautionary measures to prevent the spread and the diffusion of Covid-19 inside the centers.*

5- The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the World Health Organization (WHO) to immediately take actions to improve health conditions in detention centers, and urgently visit the centers, to provide detainees with the means of disease prevention, treatment if necessary, and to ensure appropriate health conditions for those most vulnerable to the disease.

Accordingly, we sign:

1. "Shaml" Syrian CSOs Coalition
2. Access Center for Human Rights - ACHR
3. American Relief Coalition for Syria
4. ASML/Syria
5. Association of Detainees and Missing in Sednaya Prison
6. BADAEL
7. Baytna Syria
8. Bercav Organization
9. Caesar Families Association
10. Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies
11. center for Civil Society and Democracy
12. Dawlaty
13. Detainees Voice
14. Families For Freedom
15. Hurras Network
16. Jana Watan
17. Justice For Life
18. Kesh Malek Organization
19. Lawyers and Doctors for Human Rights (LDHR)
20. Local Development and Small-Projects Support (LDSPS)
21. Local Development Organization
22. MENA Rights Group
23. NoPhotoZone
24. Pro-Justice
25. Rahma Worldwide
26. Space of Hope Organization
27. Start Point
28. Still There
29. Swasia Charity Foundation

30. Syria for Relief and Development
31. Syria legal Network/ NL
32. Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression
33. Syrian Journalists Association
34. Syrian Lawyers Aggregation
35. Syrian League for Citizenship
36. Syrian Network for Human Rights
37. Syrian Women Committee
38. Syrian Women Network
39. Syrians for Truth and Justice-STJ
40. The Arabic Network for Human Rights Information
41. The Day After
42. The Gulf Centre for Human Right (GCHR)
43. Women Now for Development