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On World Health Day: the  
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politicized

## **On World Health Day: the response to the Corona pandemic must not be politicized**

*After nine years of politicizing and weaponizing health and health services in Syria, the response to the Corona pandemic must not be politicized nor used to overlook crimes committed in Syria*

Since 2011 more than 180 health workers were killed under torture in the detention centers of the Syrian government, in addition to over 500 attacks on health facilities in Syria, more than 90% of them by the forces of the Syrian government, its allies and militias. These acts are war crimes committed systematically in violation of all international laws, regulations and UN Security Council (UNSC) resolutions, while resolution No 2286 (2016) failed to put an end to these attacks or provide any kind of protection to health workers.

In addition, whole communities were systematically deprived from the right of health within the sieges imposed by the Syrian government in several areas for many years in which the Syrian government used the right to access health services as a means of pressure on both communities and individuals; as well as prohibiting medical equipment from reaching besieged cities and towns including cesarean operation kits, infant medicines, and even delaying delivery of vaccines to many regions. This continues today with other stakeholders using access to basic needs and services as political bargaining chips. UNSC de-authorized use of Aljarabieh crossing point for aid delivery due to veto threats by Russia, depriving 2 million people in northeast Syria from getting cross border medical aid, and leaving them at the mercy of the Syrian government – which obstructed medical aid for years – as their only means of accessing supplies. Furthermore, water, electricity and other basic needs have been weaponized. The Turkish authorities have failed to provide adequate water supplies due to several interruptions to operations at Allouk water station, which provides water to almost 460,000 people in northeast Syria, which cannot be allowed, especially given the growing need for water to tackle the corona pandemic.

The Syrian government has a long record of depriving detainees, particularly opinion and political detainees, from the rights of minimum health conditions in the detention centers. Many reports issued by rights groups have documented the practice of torture in many military health centers. Furthermore detainees and their relatives have been deprived of accessing their medical records, while many death cases in detention centers were attributed to "health problems" without sharing any medical records with the families of the victims. These procedures culminated in preventing UN bodies and the ICRC teams from visiting detention centers to monitor the health conditions of the detainees.

Today, on the 70th Annual World Health Day, which also coincides with the anniversary of the establishment of the World Health Organization (WHO), which this year is dedicated to thanking the nurses and midwives who, today, stand bravely in the face of the Corona pandemic. Thanking them in Syria should be embodied in protecting them from any politicization of their actions in response to this pandemic, and from any political intervention to overlook the crimes committed against them, or the rights of over 900 of their colleagues who have lost their lives at duty.

The organizations signing this statement have real fears that the humanitarian health response to Corona pandemic may be exploited politically in a way that ignores the crimes committed by the Syrian government, its allies and all the other parties to the conflict over many years, particularly the crimes related to health issues. The absence of statistical transparency by the Syrian government on Coronavirus cases is very clear. The irresponsible conduct of the Syrian government in facing the pandemic, in addition to the long history of the Syrian security services' involvement in the medical humanitarian response increase fears the response being politicized, either through discriminating between Syrians

according to the party in control of their region of residence, or by exploiting the pandemic to distort the long record of crimes and violations against the right to health. The real obstacle to responding meaningfully to the corona pandemic is these practices by the Syrian government, as well as other actors in Syria, and nothing else. Therefore, we demand that:

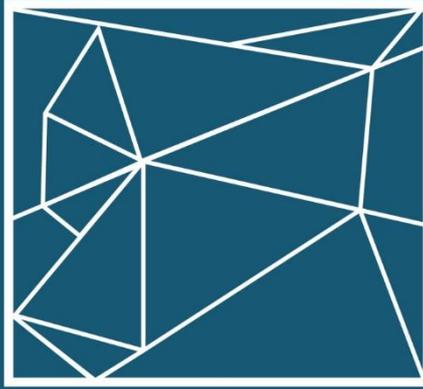
1. *WHO lead the response against Corona regardless of the party in control of the Syrian regions, to guarantee the provision of all health requirements in terms of diagnosing, responding and spreading awareness which are basic needs in health response, in a way that guarantees access to all health services in all the geographic regions in Syria and to all Syrians in Syria and in neighboring countries.*
2. *Member states in the Human Rights Council, judicial bodies, investigation committees, and other bodies working in Syria, not to turn a blind eye to any violations committed in the health sector in Syria during the last nine years and to ensure that providing a better response to Corona pandemic does not mean overlooking any crimes, accountability or justice procedures towards the criminals.*
3. *The immediate release of all detainees, especially political and opinion detainees, and those who were detained on the background of engagement in the humanitarian response in Syria. Full access for ICRC teams to detention facilities should be guaranteed.*
4. *The UN leadership of the humanitarian response in Syria to work to improve the response to the aggravated health needs, and to increase the response to other humanitarian sectors, in a way that guarantees the maximum engagement of Syrian civil society, and the protection of humanitarian workers and infrastructure.*

**Accordingly, we sign:**

1. Access Center for Human Rights - ACHR
2. Al-Kawakibi Center for Transitional Justice and Human Rights
3. ASML/Syria
4. ASO Center for Consultancy and Strategic Studies
5. Association of German Syrian Organizations (VDSH e.V.)
6. Baytna Syria
7. Bercav Organization
8. Big Heart Foundation
9. Caesar Families Association
10. Center for Civil Society and Democracy
11. Collective of Missing Families in Algeria (CFDA)- Collectif de Familles Disparues en Algérie
12. Dawlaty
13. Detainees' Voice Team
14. Fédération euro-méditerranéenne contre les disparitions forcées
15. Fraternity Foundation for Human Rights FFHR-Biratî
16. Hand in Hand for Aid & Development – HIHFAD
17. Hurras Network
18. Impunity Watch
19. Inmaa Alfour Organization
20. International Service for Human Rights
21. Jana Watan

22. Justice for Life
23. Local Development and Small-Projects Support (LDSPS)
24. Local Development Organization
25. SEMA
26. Shafak
27. Shaml Syrian CSOs Coalition
28. Start Point
29. Still There
30. Syria Legal Network in the Netherlands
31. Syria Relief
32. Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression (SCM)
33. Syrian Coalition for Development and Relief
34. Syrian Lawyers Aggregation
35. SYRIAN LEAGUE FOR CITIZENSHIP
36. Syrian Network for Human Rights
37. Syrians for Truth and Justice-STJ
38. TEVN
39. The Asfari Foundation
40. The Arabic Network for Human Rights Information
41. The Day After
42. The Syria Campaign
43. UOSSM
44. Urnammu For Justice & Human Rights
45. Women Now for Development

سوريون  
من أجل  
الحقيقة  
والعدالة  
Syrians  
For Truth  
& Justice



## 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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