

# Letter to the Committee on Detainees and Kidnapped Persons in Syria

Recommendations to the committee "Syrians for Detainees and Abductees" created at the initiative of the Syrian Democratic Council

20 May 2020

Syria Justice and  
Accountability Centre 

سوريون  
من أجل  
الحقيقة  
والعدالة  
Syrians  
For Truth  
& Justice 

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Justice and Human Rights

منظمة العدالة من أجل الحياة  
Justice for Life Organization



20 May 2020

To: Syrians for Detainees and Abductees  
Syrian Democratic Council

In a press release on 5 April 2020, the Syrian Democratic Council announced the formation of a committee to follow-up on the file of detainees and kidnapped persons in Syria, calling on the parties to the conflict in Syria to abide by international human rights law and all relevant international laws and conventions. It stressed that the file of the detainees, kidnapped, missing, and forcibly disappeared is a humanitarian issue that is above negotiations and should not be used as an instrument for blackmail or bargaining by any party.

Afterward, the announced committee established a platform under the name "[Syrians for Detainees and Abductees](#)." It identified itself as an independent Syrian committee that is working on the file of detainees, kidnapped persons, and the forcibly disappeared with all parties to the conflict in Syria. The committee stressed that it is not for profit and operates with full impartiality.

The signatories to this letter firstly welcome the formation of the committee "Syrians for Detainees and Abductees." They think that the committee which arose from the Syrian Democratic Council's statement can achieve practical steps on several issues related to the question of detainees and the disappeared in Syria. First, the signatories note to the committee the need to distinguish between two major eras, separate them, and follow up on them. They are:

A. The era of control by the Islamic State (ISIS) over large areas of Syria (Raqqqa and Deir ez-Zor governates and parts of the governorates of Aleppo, Al-Hasakah, and Homs). During this era, ISIS killed and caused the disappearance of thousands of persons according to dozens of reports. This era was preceded by the era of control by the Syrian armed opposition factions and the Syrian government forces.

B. The era of control by the Syrian Democratic Forces over ISIS areas. Other new challenges have emerged related to the violations carried out by some agencies affiliated with the Autonomous Administration itself, such as arbitrary and extralegal arrests and a number of unfair trials in northeastern Syria.

Therefore, the organizations that are signatories to this letter believe that it is important for the formed committee and the Syrian Democratic Council to consider the following recommendations:

## First: To the Newly Formed Committee

1. Share with the public, especially families of the missing, detained, and kidnapped, information about the modus operandi of the committee and the tasks assigned to it in order to manage expectations and so that the families of the detained and human rights advocates, whether individuals or organizations, can monitor the work of the committee. This includes appointing an employee to maintain official communication, as the public needs to know what is happening and what the committee is doing periodically.
2. Pledge to work in an independent and impartial manner and to adhere to the rules of international law and the guiding principles of the United Nations on the search for disappeared persons and not to show bias toward any political entity at the expense of another in order to make sure that the issue remains a humanitarian and rights issue par excellence.
3. It is necessary to have representatives from all regions and all political, religious, and ethnic backgrounds, as this would boost confidence in the committee by all parties.
4. Cooperate and coordinate with local and international civil society organizations, especially those that are capable of helping the committee to have access to lists of detainees, missing persons, and the forcibly disappeared. This cooperation would save a lot of time, effort, and resources and provide the committee with additional experiences from specialized organizations, ensuring that previous efforts are not repeated.

5. Ensure that the lists that the committee will receive from families or organizations will not be disclosed or shared with third parties without the prior consent of the sources and provide guarantees of serious work to reveal the fates of those people. Guarantee the confidentiality of the shared information and save and archive it in a safe place and encrypt it to protect it from hacking.
6. Examine the objective conditions that led/lead to the arrests and unfair trials of Syrians in the areas in northeastern Syria after the era of ISIS, and issue recommendations on this to the agencies that are affiliated with the governing local authorities, and ensure implementation and monitoring to prevent repeated arbitrary arrests and improve the conditions of detention.
7. Select the workers with the committee based on competence and specialization and publish and clarify the selection criteria, which should require workers with the committee to possess integrity, behave transparently, and not have prior involvement in any previous violation.

## Second: To the Syrian Democratic Council - Autonomous Administration

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1. Provide clear and public guarantees to not interfere with the work of the committee and maintain its independence.
2. Provide pledges regarding cooperation by the specialized/executive agencies, especially judicial agencies, and protect the members and work of the committee and anyone who cooperates with it.
3. Allow the committee to submit an interrogation or request for information from the Autonomous Administration each time the committee receives information or a complaint from families or from civil society organizations.
4. Deal seriously and responsibly with the decisions and recommendations issued by the committee and ensure their implementation and that practices will not be repeated.

## Third: Concerning the Issue of ISIS Detainees

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1. Treat the file of ISIS detainees as a rights file, and not only a security file, work to remove work on it from issues of political interests or gains, and guarantee the rights of the detainees in accordance with the rules of international law.
2. Take advantage of ISIS detainees to know the fate of the thousands who went missing when ISIS controlled large areas of Syria.
3. Involve Syrian and international civil society organizations in the discussions and solutions on the question of ISIS detainees and their future and do not develop a vision and make decisions unilaterally.

## Signatory Organizations:

- 1- [Syrians for Truth and Justice \(STJ\)](#)
- 2- [Justice for Life \(JFL\)](#)
- 3- [Urnammu for justice & human rights](#)
- 4- [Syria Justice and Accountability Center \(SJAC\)](#)