



21 May 2020



## *Southern Syria: Thousands of Survivors Fail to Register their Dead Relatives*

## **Southern Syria: Thousands of Survivors Fail to Register their Dead Relatives**

*Undeclared decision by the Civil Registry Departments prohibiting the issuance of death certificates for thousands died in south Syria between 2011 and 2018*

## Background:

More than a year after the Syrian government retook areas in Daraa and al-Qunaitra, in southern Syria, from Islamist and armed opposition groups under a “settlement agreement”,<sup>1</sup> thousands of survivors (from the immediate and extended families) haven’t yet been able to obtain a [declarations of death](#),<sup>2</sup> for their relatives,<sup>3</sup> who were killed while fighting for the rebels or by the hostilities occurred in southern Syria, during the opposition’s period of control.<sup>4</sup>

Actively, STJ followed up and investigated the matter, and it was able to get to the fact that the Civil Registry departments and offices of the Syrian Interior Ministry in southern Syria,<sup>5</sup> had made oral and unannounced decision, in early August 2018, (they are still applicable at the date of this report) provides for not issuing death certificates for those died of unnatural causes; in the sense of being killed while fighting for the opposition groups, including the Islamic, or during the exchange of fire or by landmines. Mayors (Mukhtars) of the villages and towns in southern Syria had been instructed not to issue death certificates for those died between 18 March 2011 and August 2018, unless died of natural causes.<sup>6</sup>

**STJ’s legal expert explained that the decision issued with regard to deaths in southern Syria, wasn’t circulated to other Syrian provinces, citing examples of survivors who were able to complete their relatives’ death procedures and ultimately obtain declarations.**

<sup>1</sup> The Syrian government re-took the Syrian south (Daraa and al-Qunaitra) from the opposition armed groups, under a settlement agreement in July 2018. The agreement was conducted in three stages under Russian Military Police’ safeguards. The first stage included the norther countryside and the Lajat area in Daraa; the second stage included the remaining areas of the province, except for the Yarmouk Basin (the Syrian government took it in August 2018); the third stage included the province of al-Qunaitra).

<sup>2</sup> The declaration of death: is a document confirming the death incident officially, given to the dead’s survivors by the Civil Registry or the Citizen Service Center.

The death certificate: is a document under which the death is registered in the Civil Registry, and it is given by hospitals or mayors.

<sup>3</sup> The declaration: is a document issued by the Civil Registry on specific incidents.

The incident: here means vital events of citizens and residents (births, deaths, marriages, divorces and others).

<sup>4</sup> The armed opposition controlled south Syria in the period between April 2012 and August 2018.

<sup>5</sup> It is directly affiliated with the Directorate of Civil Affairs of the Ministry of Interior. There are 16 Civil Registry offices in Daraa and 4 in al-Qunaitra, and they are all affiliated with the Directorates of Civil Affairs in each province. For more info see: <http://www.civilaffair-moi.gov.sy/site/arabic/index.php?node=5518&cat=14768&>

<sup>6</sup> Natural death: is the death that occurs from natural causes, as disease or old age, etc. while unnatural death: is the death that occurs from violence, accident etc. Thus, the deaths occurred in south Syria are unnatural, because they resulted from hostilities; bombardments, landmines, stray bullets and fire exchanged with Syrian Army (fighting alongside rebels).

Article 36 of the Syrian Civil Code, promulgated by Legislative Decree No. 26 of 2007, stipulates that reporting the death incident and registering it according to due procedures are the duties of the “reporter” who must be one of the “heirs of the deceased”; his/her ascendants (mother and father), descendants (sons and daughters), husband/wife or relatives (brothers, sisters or others).

The aforementioned law obliged the “reporter” to present a death certificate with associated documents within thirty days from the incident if the death occurred inside Syria and ninety days if abroad (Paragraph A - Article 14).<sup>7</sup>

The first death procedural step is provided for in Article 37, chapter VI/deaths:

**“Death registration requires the submission of a certificate from the mayor attached with a medical report proving the death was natural. In areas where there are no doctors, the mayor’s certificate is considered a proof.”**

(We may note here that the Article stipulates that the death must be natural. The law made no mention to the kind of deaths in question in our present report, which primarily related to the context of non-international armed conflicts).

The Syrian conflict, which has been continuing for years, interrupted the work of the State institutions in the trouble areas (seized by rebel groups), especially in the south. Thus, deaths occurred there were no longer registered according to due process. Immigration and fear of arrest at checkpoints, prevented many families from going to the institutions in regime-held areas to submit for death declarations for their relatives.

## Introduction:

Conducting investigations for the purpose of this report, STJ met 12 witnesses (males and females), who were among those denied death certificates for their sons, spouses, etc. in south Syria.

STJ field researcher confirmed that thousands of those killed during the hostilities in southern Syria were not registered officially and thus their families couldn’t obtain death certificates, under which they can submit for a “deed of determination of inheritance”,<sup>8</sup> which allows them to deal with money and property left by the dead. Statistics suggest that 17500 deaths had taken place in the provinces of Daraa and al-Qunaitra between March

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<sup>7</sup> The Syrian Civil Code, promulgated by Legislative Decree No. 26 of 2007, the website of the Ministry of Interior of the Syrian government 4 December 2007. (Last visit: 17 April 2020), <http://www.syriamoi.gov.sy/portal/site/arabic/index.php?node=55333&cat=1831&>

<sup>8</sup> A copy of the dead’s family civil record is a prerequisite to initiate this transaction.

2011 and August 2018,<sup>9</sup> during which the settlement agreement was signed. Among those dead in southern Syria there were 13000 men, 5530 of them were fighters for armed opposition groups in Daraa and more than 5380 were civilians, who died in fire exchanges.

**The inability to officially prove the fact of death, impacted children and women primarily, as the latter became breadwinner moms, and while they couldn't access inheritance, their burden became heavier, added to being unable to marry again.**

Nevertheless, there are families-though few- managed to obtain death certificates for their relatives-though died of unnatural causes. Three witnesses, including two ladies, testified that they were able to obtain death certificates for their dead sons or husbands, by bribing the police station personnel in order to change the cause of death in the report to be “killed by armed terrorist groups’ hostile activities”. That would contribute to concealing the human rights violations occurred in the Syrian south and building a narrative far from reality and truth.

STJ conducted online interviews with local lawyers in southern Syria, who revealed that some people ask the assistance of lawyers or brokers who are known to have links with the Syrian security to register their relatives’ deaths, under fake medical reports- obtained for sums reaches 300 dollars- claiming the death was of a heart or brain attack or other health causes. In case the death of someone is known in the area to be as a result of regime’s bombardment, his/her family bribes the personnel at the police station to write in the report that he/she was killed by “terrorist groups”

## The methodology of the report:

The methodology used in this report based on a total of 12 statements and interviews. STJ field researcher met 6 mayors of villages and towns in southern Syria, one of them admit that he had been ordered not to register deaths of unnatural causes. STJ also heard matching statements from activists, reporters, former media workers, and Syrian centers specialized with casualty recording, on the death toll (civilians and militaries) in the Syrian south between 2011 and the date of signing the “settlement agreement”.

For this report we met 12 witnesses, including six women from southern Syria, who recounted how they were affected by the new decision-on registering the deaths. However, four of them asked us not to publish their statements.

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<sup>9</sup> These figures include men, women and children, according to statistics provided by [Horan Free League](#) and the [Violations Documentation Center in Syria](#).



In this report we will also cite a statement of an employee in the Civil Registry in Daraa, who explained the reason behind these decisions saying: **“They were made to prevent forgery, since it is not easy to know if those are really died or they are hiding for being wanted or fled illegally outside the country.”**

In addition, we listened to commentaries from STJ’s law advisors and a Syrian lawyer based abroad, talking about the severe consequences of such decisions on the dead’s families especially the women and children.

The interviews were conducted by STJ’s field researcher in southern Syria, in person and online, during the period between early January and late March 2020.

## 1. Current procedures for obtaining a death certificate in southern Syria:

Six mayors in the Syrian south,<sup>10</sup> confirmed being ordered by relevant authorities,<sup>11</sup> not to register deaths of unnatural cause, otherwise they would be subject to liability. A mayor-he asked anonymity- of a village in western rural Daraa explained:

**“Western Daraa, with all its villages and towns, was one of the Syrian areas which were mostly affected by war. During the period of rebels’ control; thousands of people fell in battles waged by armed opposition groups with one another or with the Syrian regular forces backed by Auxiliary Forces (al-Quwat al-Radifa) or by the Islamist groups when seized control, including the Islamic State (also known as Daesh). We were firmly told not to register the deaths of unnatural causes, like those who died either while fighting alongside the armed opposition groups against the Syrian Army, or by bombardments by the latter or by landmines, otherwise we’ll be brought to account.”**

He detailed the registration procedures saying:

**“Several people, mostly women, come to me every single day and entreat me to register deaths of their relatives, so that they can access their related legal rights. The legal procedures of the death registration begin from the Syariah Court,<sup>12</sup>**

<sup>10</sup> For this report, STJ field researcher met 6 mayors in Daraa; 3 of them from Yarmouk Basin, 2 from the town of al-jaidoor and 1 from western Daraa.

<sup>11</sup> The researcher meant by “relative authorities”, the body/entity that issued the decision prohibiting the issue of death certificates. Mayors said that they received the decision orally; some from the security branches in their towns, others from the police stations and the rest said they received it from the Civil Registry offices (Directorates of Civil Affairs).

<sup>12</sup> Here, we must distinguish between two different processes through which the death incident can be confirmed; the “Syariah Court process” and the “administrative process”. In the Syariah Court process, a death confirmation suit filed before the Syariah Court, under which the court confirmed that death by a judicial decision binding the Civil Registry to register it. The “administrative process” is easier and less complicated as it only requires a police report on the death incident and a death certificate from the mayor (as provided for in the laws governing the process).

where the dead's family are questioned in three or four sessions over about three or four months-time would be cut if bribes paid. Then the death registration request will be transmitted to the district directorate in the dead's place of residence and from there it will be passed to the police station in the same district in order to write a report on the incident and thus investigate the cause of death and make an inquiry about the dead. If it is found that the cause of death was natural, they will ask the dead's family to go to the mayor to complete the death transaction procedures, but if the cause was found unnatural the application would be rejected."

Families of the deceased fear to follow the process recited by the mayor for the legal liability they may be subjected for, especially if the dead was a former combatant in the ranks of the opposition or fought for Islamic armed groups. Witnesses confirmed to STJ researcher that while following the death registration procedures through the Syriah Court, they were summoned to security branches (in specific cases).

#### Recommendations:

The Syrian government and its executive bodies should provide real and clear guarantees of omitting the death cause from the registration document, in order to encourage thousands of hesitant and worried families to register their deaths through a judicial decision. In fact, the insistence on registering unreal causes for deaths, would make thousands of families lose their rights and would also erase the realities from the Syrian war context where thousands of human rights violations were committed.

17500 deaths had taken place in the provinces of Daraa and al-Qunaitra between March 2011 and August 2018,<sup>13</sup> during which the "settlement agreement" was signed. Among those dead in southern Syria there were 13000 men, 5530 of them were fighters for armed opposition groups in Daraa and more than 5380 were civilians who died in fire exchanges. Thousands of those killed during the hostilities in southern Syria were not registered officially and thus their families couldn't obtain death certificates, under which they can submit for "deed of determination of inheritance" which allows them to deal with money and property left by the dead.

<sup>13</sup> These figures include men, women and children, according to statistics provided by [Horan Free League](#) and the [Violations Documentation Center in Syria](#).

## 2. Statements from victims of this decision:

STJ met 12 victims of the decision (males and females), eight of them recounted their stories, including six women, under conditions of confidentiality.

Mounira M., 44, a breadwinner mom for six children, resides in western Daraa. Her husband was killed while fighting for the armed opposition, which he joined from 2016 to 2018, but she still, however, was unable to obtain a death certificate for him, though settling with the government. She shared details of her story saying:

**“My husband was killed in the last battle between the Syrian Army and armed opposition groups in 2018. Since then, I have struggled to obtain a death certificate for him, which would allow me to submit for a “deed of determination of inheritance”, under which my children and I can access our right to his estate and inheritance. I know that the Syrian government considers belonging to the opposition a serious crime, but why do my children and I have to pay for what my deceased husband did, despite the fact that I’ve settled with the government.”**

Mounira added:

**“I went to the mayor and begged him to change the cause of my husband’s death to a car accident for example, but he absolutely refused, fearing legal liability. Hence, I hired a lawyer to help me proceed with this case. In early 2020 that lawyer told me that the Sharia judiciary summoned me for an interrogation into the circumstances of my husband’s death. My family told me not to go, for fear of any legal consequences, though the lawyer said it was only a routine procedure. And yet, I’ve failed to obtain a death certificate for my deceased husband.”**

*Clearly, the “interrogation”, despite being conducted by a sharia judge, led many to refrain from initiating death registration interactions. Thus, the dead’s survivors need real assurances from executive and judicial bodies that no non-routine procedures would be taken in the context of the death registry transaction.*

*It’s important for the Syrian citizens to know that the sharia judge is not affiliated to security services and the mentioned “interrogation” contains questions about the date, way and cause of death. During it the judge also listens to the witnesses and requests a report on the dead’s departures from and entries to the country, from the Immigration and Passport Department.*

*Two main problems arise in this context; the first: people’s worrying about the incident to be faked which would resulted in the loss of the victims’ rights and the conceal of facts, as it is impossible for the sharia judge to register the death as caused by the Syrian government war acts, since that would made it liable to charges of violating the international humanitarian law.*



*The second: related to obtaining the report on the entries and exits of the dead from the country- from the Immigration and Passport Department- which the judge usually requests in order to ensure the person is truly deceased and not immigrated, as millions of Syrians have immigrated illegally, which means the records of the Immigration and Passport Department are not accurate.*

Fatima M., 30, a mother of three children from the city of As Sanamayn, is another witness who is-to date-unable to obtain a death certificate for her husband, who was killed by a landmine on the city outskirts in 2016. She recounted her story to STJ saying:

**“In mid-2019, I decided to file a request for a declaration of death for my deceased husband. The mayor, however, refused to register the death citing the security instructions he received. A relative of mine contacted a security official in the Military Intelligence to inquire about the possibility to register such a death, and the answer of the latter was: “Currently, it’s not possible to obtain a certificate for such a death according to instructions from the supreme command. You have to wait for a presidential pardon or a decree about this.”**

Fatima added:

**“I myself have inquired into this matter, and I heard from a relative, who also lost her husband in hostilities, that when she went to the Civil Registry in the city of Izraa to file a request for registering her husband’s death, the director told her that it is illegal and asked her to leave and never return otherwise she would be brought to account.”**

*Article 44 of Chapter VI of the Syrian Civil Code, promulgated by Legislative Decree No. 26 of 2007, forbids the burial of any deceased without obtaining a medical report for him/her first. In areas where there are no doctors, this report is issued by the mayor, upon making sure that the death was natural. The same Article also obliged the mayors to inform the judicial and administrative authorities in the event that the death is suspected to be unnatural.*

*It is useful to recall here again the inability of thousands of Syrian families to follow the procedures outlined in the "Law" for the aforementioned reasons related to the conflict and the fear of arrest.*

*Recommendations: Issuing a circular by the Minister of Interior or by other government bodies (such as the Directorate of Civil Affairs, but not limited to), to be addressed to the southern region's police stations, mayors, and civil registry departments, orders to facilitate the death registration procedures, with the omit of the cause included, and obliges the related authorities to run the transaction smoothly each in its respective competence and mandate.<sup>14</sup>*

*Such a circular would also release the mayors and police personnel from responsibility and accountability while dealing with this kind of death transaction.*

Israa S., 28, a witness from the town of al-jaidoor in Daraa; her husband was killed by a landmine while tilling his land, and to date, she hasn't obtained a death certificate for him. She recited:

**"My husband was an employee at the Health Directorate, but he was suspended because of war like other employees in the town. After the death of my husband I became the only breadwinner for my five children, and I can't afford their food at these ever-increasing prices. Hence, I went to the Health Directorate to ask if I can get my husband's salary arrears; the employee there said that would be possible if I presented a death certificate. Now, here's the problem; the mayor refused to register my husband's death, for it was unnatural, and said that I had to go to the Syriah Court and follow the due procedures, but everyone around me said that would be in vain."**

***Recommendation:***

*Ensure the application of the circular in all Syrian regions, without exception, and remove any pretexts by any party for not carrying out their obligations. This circular must be mandatory.*

Mona A., 29, from the town of Busra al-Harir, in eastern rural Daraa, is another woman still denied a death certificate for her husband who was killed in 2016 while fighting for the armed opposition against the Syrian Army. Thus, Mona couldn't register her second marriage, which took place in early 2018 nor obtain a birth certificate for her newborn child. She explained:

<sup>14</sup> The death transaction procedures are: 1. Writing a report at the police station; 2. Obtaining a death certificate from the mayor 3. Register the death at the Civil Registry.

**“The mayor told me that I can’t register my second marriage nor my newborn child at the authorized state institutions, since I’m still registered to my deceased husband, whom the authorities refuse to register his death in accordance with security instructions. Some people told me to file an application for “khula” against my former husband, and so I can confirm my second marriage and paternity; and my child wouldn’t be stateless, at least, but I haven’t consulted a lawyer on this yet.”**

*STJ legal expert explained that the wife in such a case can’t sue for “Mukhala'la”, as it requires the consent and attendance of both parties (or individuals standing to act on their behalf). One of the “Mukhala'la” terms provides for the wife to waive all her rights, as she would become divorced and thus has no right to inherit. However, given the death of the second party (the husband), we advise her to bring an action for proving the death of her husband, and accordingly she would become her widow and could access her right to inherit from him.*

*The legal expert added that in such cases the wife can also file an application for separation- despite the absence of the husband- but it is a long-term transaction and eventually the wife would be registered as divorced, not a widow, since her deceased husband remains alive in the official records.*

Fadi Z., 33, from the province of Daraa, is the eldest son in his family, which lost the father by a barrel bomb landed on their neighborhood in the town of Dael in 2016. Fadi was denied a death certificate for his father, though he signed a settlement agreement with the government, he said:

**“Everyone here knows that my father was a good man and had never carried a weapon or even taken a side. But nevertheless, I still can’t register his death, after a year from signing the settlement agreement, to follow the ensuing proceedings, including the “deed of determination of inheritance”, which I need to deal with the money and property left by him, like, for instance, to sell his car- registered in his name-; indeed, I need that money to pay off my family’s debts. In an attempt to register the death, I went to a doctor in our neighborhood and managed to persuade him to give me a death certificate for my father and then I registered it at the police station. After that, I headed to the Civil Registry, where an employee said to me: don’t bother, you’ll not obtain the death declaration before the Syriah Court investigate you and ensure you have a clean security record. I don’t understand what this complexity is all about; our neighbor died of a heart attack and the mayor immediately issued him a death certificate.”**

### 3. Bribery to issue death certificates blaming armed opposition groups:

While some families denied death certificates for their relatives who died of unnatural causes- in accordance to alleged security instructions- others managed to obtain ones for deaths occurred in the same circumstances, by paying bribes to the police officers, to write a false death report, which claims the death caused by “armed terrorist groups”.

Khalid Kh. from the village of al-Najyeh in eastern rural Daraa, is a relative to a guy, who succeed in obtaining a death certificate for his brother-married with four children-, who was killed in an ambush while fighting for Al-Nusra Front/*Jabhat al-Nusra*, in which he was a prominent leader.

The witness revealed that the brother of Khalid decided to marry the latter’s widow, so he settled with the government after it retook Daraa in 2018, and accordingly he was allowed to remain in his village. Following that he managed to register his marriage and obtain a family book after paying more than 200 dollars to an expediter in the city of Izraa, who in turn bribed the personnel at the police station to change the cause of death to a landmine planted by “armed terrorist groups”.

Similar incidents occurred in eastern rural Daraa, specifically in the town of Al Musayfrah, where two opposition deaths were registered. STJ met mothers of the guys killed; the first in confrontations with the Syrian Army in 2015 and the second in bombardment by the latter on Al Musayfrah in 2013. One of those ladies elaborated:

**“I had no idea that the cause of death would decide whether that death would be registered or not, before I was told by everyone to not say the real cause of my son’s death to the police officers.**

**So, I told the police that my son died in a motorbike accident, but they asked me to present so many proofs, including his driving license and the ownership papers for the bike, they also asked to inspect it, so I admitted I had lied. Contrary to what I expected, they showed great sympathy and one of them said: “you can claim in your statement that your son was killed by mortar shells fired by the terrorists on the town, but this cause requires two witnesses to be confirmed”. Indeed, I brought two witnesses and a false coroner report claims that my son died of his wounds, and the policemen registered the death accordingly; I paid around 100 dollars to complete those procedures. After that, I got a copy of the police report and submitted it to the Police Command and then to the Civil Registry and ultimately got a death declaration.”**

The witness added that the other lady had followed the same procedures and managed to obtain a death declaration for her son, noting that it was not easy to find two witnesses who accept to give false testimony, since that may expose them to liability in the event that the circumstances of death were investigated.

Fadia Th., 51, from the town of Muzayrib in western Daraa, had also initiated procedures to obtain a death certificate for her son, who died in 2013, being hit by a shrapnel from a missile fired on their neighborhood by the Syrian Army. She detailed STJ saying:

**“When the mayor refused to issue a death certificate for my son, I consulted several lawyers about the registration matter and they all told me not to say that he had died by the Syrian Army’s fire in my testimony before the Syriah Court or the police officers, otherwise I will be investigated and consequently gain nothing. Therefore, in my statement at the police station I said that my son was killed by a stray bullet while on the way to his shop, the officer asked promptly “fired by the terrorists, right?” I replied: I don’t know. Then he looked at me and said “I’m sure aunty, it’s the terrorists, who else could it be? I answered in fear “sure sir”. However, I’ve done most of the procedures, and now I’m waiting for the police station in the town to complete the required security inquiries.”**

#### **4. Serious consequences of the death certificates denial; a legal opinion:**

The Syrian Civil Code of 2007, provides for the mandatory registration of the vital events, including deaths. Theoretically speaking, the law excluded no one. (It is important to point out here that the articles of the law explicitly referred to the natural death, and it is apparent that mayors in southern Syria, appointed by the Syrian government, had received instructions to classify deaths occurred in southern Syria as unnatural (see, for example, Article 37, chapter Vi).

*STJ considers that there are due reasons behind the refrain of the survivors from registering the death of their relatives between 2011 and 2018. On top of those reasons is the ongoing conflict in the country and its direct consequences; forced displacements, asylum, the withdrawal of service institutions of the Syrian government from areas taken by Syrian armed opposition or terrorist groups, (such as Al-Nusra Front/Jabhat al-Nusra and the Khalid ibn al-Walid Army, affiliated with the Islamic State (also known as Daesh)).*

It is, however, important to note here that in recent years the Syrian Minister of the Interior issued a circular to the Civil Registry directorates regarding those who died during what he termed the “circumstances” in the hotspot areas, including the besieged. The circular provided guidance for the registry of the dead in those areas elaborating that, the death registration transaction begins from submitting a “statement of facts” on the incident to the Attorney General office, which transfer it to the “Witnessed Crimes Department” and then the statement forwarded to the police station to write a report on the death incident

according to testimonies of two witnesses, with no condition to examine the body of the dead, since this wouldn't be available in such circumstances. After that, the family of the dead takes the police report to the mayor of the area-without having to attach it with a medical report-, who issues the death certificate, then the police report with the death certificate taken to the Civil Registry, where the death officially registered based on them. (STJ hasn't been able to know the cause of death written on the certificate in this process).

*Although it is a positive move that such a circular was issued by the Syrian Minister of the Interior, STJ still sees that it is impossible for thousands of survivors to follow the procedures provided in it due to the aforementioned reasons (the ongoing conflict and its consequences).*

At first glance, perhaps, the decision may appear to affect only the dead, but upon analysis one can easily see that his/her family is the much more affected. Failing to register the death incident, especially those of males, families face a series of psycho-social and financial difficulties, as they can't submit for a "deed of determination of inheritance", and thus can't deal with money or property left by the deceased and access their right to inheritance.

Besides, if the dead was a civil servant, his family members denied their right to get his salary arrears and pension, which would relieve their financial burdens. They also would be unable to benefit from the services and financial aid provided by orphan charities.

As for the wives of the deceased, they can't move on and marry again, as they remain registered to their already dead husbands, which forces them to apply to the judiciary and follow a lengthy complicated transaction to resolve this issue.

With not obtaining death certificates for their dead husbands, wives also can't gain guardianship by the sharia judge, and thus can't- for example- obtain passports or visas to their minor children, in case the latter's grandfather or uncles are not in the country and can't act on behalf of their father in giving the approval to that matter, according to the Syrian law.

Article 20 in Chapter III, which deals with the provisions of civil registration, provides that after the expiration of the legal time limit (more than three months and less than a year) the vital events in Syria must be registered according to an "administrative record" authorized by the entrusted civil registrar.



Paragraph 12 of Article 20 stipulates that after the passage of the year period, a “police report” must be drawn up on the death incident, except if it was confirmed by a judicial decision. (all the cases of unregistered death incidents mentioned in this report have already exceeded the one-year time limit, thus they can’t be confirmed by an “administrative record”. Well, it seems the judicial decision is the only and final solution to those cases.

## 5. Justifications provided by the Civil Registry of Daraa:

Employees in the Civil Registry justified that this decision aimed at preventing the forgery amid such circumstances where it is impossible to provide statistics on the numbers of people hidden, wanted or fugitive. An employee explained:

**“The decision can’t be considered unfair, since there are high numbers of people who had immigrated illegally from the area and others wanted for terrorism or have personal claims against them. Moreover, some families tend to register their illegally immigrated sons as dead in the Syrian Civil Registries, so that they can evade the compulsory military service, which is considered a circumvention of the law that consequently helps the wanted escape justice. For these reasons, mayors were instructed not to issue death certificates for those who died of unnatural causes.”**

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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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