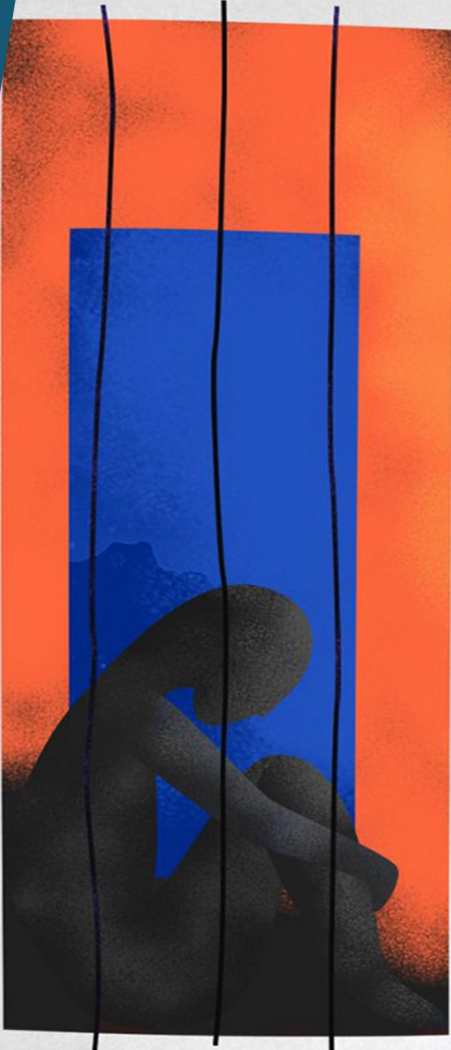




22 June 2020



# Statement on the Submission of a Criminal Complaint on Sexual and Gender-Based Violence in Germany

We are 42 Syrian and international feminist and human rights organisations and 38 individuals and we welcome the filing of the first criminal complaint in Germany pertaining to sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) in Syrian government-run detention facilities. Alongside seven Syrian survivors, the European Center for Constitutional and Human Rights (ECCHR) filed the complaint to the German Federal Prosecutor jointly with the Syrian Women's Network (SWN) and Urnammu on 17 June. We would like to express our support to all survivors of SGBV and our full solidarity with the Syrian women and men who took this legal step.

As Syrian feminist organisations working in Syria can attest, SGBV is a common occurrence, yet incidents are often under-reported, individualized, and hidden. Moreover, according to the Human Rights Council's report, "I Lost My Dignity", SGBV against women, girls, men, and boys has been a persistent issue in Syria since the civil uprising in 2011. The Syrian state authorities and allied militias have perpetrated rape and sexual abuse of women and girls and men during ground operations, house raids, and at checkpoints, and in official and unofficial detention facilities.

Given the documented systematic occurrence of SGBV during the ongoing conflict in Syria, this legal action is a critical step in achieving justice for victims of SGBV, and we urge the German judicial authorities, already utilising the principle of Universal Jurisdiction, to broaden their investigation and prosecute such crimes as crimes against humanity.

However, a comprehensive investigation into SGBV crimes will require staff with sufficient gender expertise and experience to support survivors of SGBV. Without the right questions and expertise, survivors are not able to report their experiences in a safe and supportive way. Without this, investigations will miss the structural and endemic abuses being committed systematically across Syria. Investigations currently risk portraying sexual and gender-based crimes as isolated acts against individuals rather than as part of widespread attacks against a civilian population, and thus as crimes against humanity.

Survivors of SGBV, and particularly female survivors, are discriminated against in multiple ways, within social, economic, and political spheres to public and private life. They often face a lifetime of trauma, social discrimination (stigma), and gender-based violence (such as 'honour' crimes). Some experience violence and abuse as a result of their actual or perceived attack. As a result of this discrimination, many female survivors of SGBV choose to keep their stories to themselves and do not participate in the pursuit of justice, out of fear of a societal backlash. Moreover, due to insufficient specialised support and protection services for individuals pursuing justice avenues, many SGBV survivors refrain from taking legal action out of fear of reliving or exacerbating trauma.

In order to combat these barriers and enhance legal access to justice for survivors of SGBV, we address European member states, international justice mechanisms, and the Syria community at large with the following demands:

1. Legal accountability for all international crimes that took place during the Syrian conflict, including sexual and gender-based Crimes, and regardless of the perpetrators' political affiliations.
2. Gender-sensitive analysis for all international crimes committed in Syria from the beginning of investigations. This entails increasing female practitioners with gender expertise at every step of the litigation process in order to help survivors speak up for justice: More female police officers, criminal investigators, lawyers, judges, etc.
3. Increased support and specialist services for SGBV survivors to ensure they are able to seek justice and hold the perpetrators of abuse to account.
4. Awareness-raising and community-mobilising initiatives to tackle social discrimination (stigma) which causes greater suffering for SGBV survivors and prevents them from seeking justice.

As feminist and human rights organisations, we believe that transformative justice\* for SGBV survivors will not only mean their perpetrators are held to account. Their fight for their rights extends beyond the courtroom to every home and street in Syria and beyond. Until survivors are given the care, respect, and support they need, international crimes will continue to go unpunished and basic humanity will fall short. For it is only through a transformative justice and accountability process that a lasting peace in Syria can be achieved.

### Organisations:

1. Amals Healing and Advocacy Center
2. Badael
3. Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies
4. Center for Intersectional Justice
5. Civil Rights Defenders
6. Dawlaty
7. EuroMed Rights
8. Families For Freedom
9. Freedom Jasmine
10. Garden Court Chambers
11. Guernica 37
12. Global Fund for Women
13. Humans of Syria
14. Impunity Watch
15. Jana Watan
16. Madre
17. Mazaya Women's Center
18. Mwatana for Human Rights
19. Open Society Justice Initiative
20. Release Me

21. Saneat Al-Taghyeer
22. Souryana Al Amal
23. Strategic Advocacy for Human Rights
24. Syrian Female Journalists Network
25. Syrian League for Citizenship
26. Syrian Women's International Initiative
27. Syrian Women's Network
28. Syrians for Truth and Justice
29. Urgent Action Fund for Women's Human Rights
30. The Syria Campaign
31. Urnammu
32. Women's Centre for Legal Aid and Counseling
33. Women's International League for Peace and Freedom
34. Women Now for Development
35. Women Survivors
36. Zomoroda Women's Center
37. Zenobia Association for Syrian Women
38. Musawa
39. The Syrian Women Detainees
40. Rousl Group
41. Ogarit of Droit
42. Leben Frieden

### Individuals:

1. Ahmad Malas- Actor
2. Alissar Hasan- Journalist
3. Amani Al-Ali
4. Bayan Rehan- Human Rights Defender
5. Diala Brisly- Artist
6. Dima Nachawi- Artist
7. Jihad (Jay) Abdo- Actor
8. Fadia Afashe- Artist
9. Khawla Dunia- Writer
10. Edward Watts- Film Director
11. Hamza Al-Khateab- Physician
12. Joey Ayoub — Human Rights Activist and Writer
13. Joumana Seif- Human Rights Lawyer
14. Laila Al Shami- Writer and Activist
15. Laila Awad- Actress
16. Lama Kannout- Writer and Researcher
17. M-Sami AlKayial -Writer and Journalist
18. Mariana Karkoutly- Human Rights Defender
19. Maya El Ammar- Freelance Feminist Journalist

20. Milad Amin- Filmmaker
21. Najlaa Khamri- Actress
22. Naser Danan- Physician
23. Racha Rizk- Musician
24. Rasha Abbas- Journalist
25. Soumaia Talo Alolabi- Freelance Journalist
26. Wafa Mustafa- Campaigner
27. Waad Al-Khateab- Film Director
28. Leila Al-Shami- writer & activist
29. Sarah Khayat — Artist
30. Eyad Aljarod — Director
31. Mosab Al Nomire — Writer and Journalist
32. Rachael Chadwick — Action For Sama
33. Saeed Al Batal — Director
34. Heaven Jackaly — Writer and Journalist
35. Bu Naser Taffar — Writer and Musician
36. Wael Kays -Writer and Journalist
37. Wael Kadlo — Filmmaker
38. Malath Alzoubi -Journalist

\*Identifies harm, allows for healing, demands accountability and transforms behavior

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سوريون  
من أجل  
الحقيقة  
والعدالة  

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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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