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For Truth  
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## **A Woman Disappeared in Southern Syria — Reports Say She was Killed for Honor**

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Syrians for Truth and Justice (STJ) has obtained reports from credible local sources on the occurrence of the “honor killing” of Abeer M., 19, who is from the village of Mathara in al-Qunaitra. Sources confirmed that the victim was killed and buried in an unknown location by her brothers in the first half of July 2021.

In 2017, when Abeer was only 16, she was forced to marry by her family. Her husband was a relative who was far older than her and lived in the town of Dael in rural Daraa.

The crime against Abeer remains shrouded in secrecy. Neither her family nor her husband breathed a word about the incident. Additionally, relevant local Syrian government authorities have neither investigated the incident nor held any of the perpetrators accountable.

According to information obtained by STJ, Abeer was killed by her brothers on 9 or 10 July 2021. Reportedly, Abeer was killed for fleeing her husband’s home in Dael for the town of Tafas, in Daraa, amid rumors that she had an affair with another man.

## An Early and Forced Marriage

A 30-year-old female relative of Abeer recounted to STJ:

“Abeer was only 16 when she was forced to marry a relative whom she did not love and who was 20 years her senior.”

Abeer’s marriage was made without her consent, as confirmed by her relative, who added:

“Abeer told her mother many times that she did not want to marry the man, who raises livestock in Dael. However, Abeer’s mother did not listen; everyone around Abeer thought that they knew what was good for her better than she did. Thus, Abeer was pressured to be married and had two children by him, one aged three years, the other two months.”

A 44-year-old man who lives next to Abeer’s marital home in Dael confirmed that Abeer and her husband frequently disagreed, leading Abeer to flee her home for her brothers’ multiple times. He added:

“It is shameful for a man to marry a woman who does not want him and is so much younger than him. Disparities between spouses result in an imbalance in their marital relationship. Abeer’s husband is a good man, but he could not bring their disputes to an end even after the birth of their children. Abeer would often flee to her brothers' home after a fight with her husband. Everyone blamed her every time she fled, and eventually she would return to her husband's home. Honestly, this was what happened.”

## How Did the Alleged Crime Occur?

In early July 2021, rumors spread throughout Dael of an affair between Abeer and a relative of her husband. Specifically, these rumors started on 9 July 2021 when the victim asked a relative of her husband to drive her to her cousin's home in the town of Tafas. Abeer wanted her cousin to help her do something about her tiresome marriage. As rumors spread, the man who was accused of having an affair with her fled.

Witnesses did not specify the exact date Abeer was killed; however, they believe the crime likely took place on the 9<sup>th</sup> or the 10<sup>th</sup> of July 2021.

A 37-year-old man from the town of Tafas told STJ:

“Abeer left her marital home with her two-month-old child and went with a relative of her husband to her cousin's home in Tafas. After that, rumors spread in Dael, Tafas, and even in al-Qunaitra about an affair between Abeer and her husband's relative, even saying that Abeer ran away with him. However, no one knows how true the rumors are — perhaps that guy only helped her flee her husband's home after a conflict between the two. Actually, no one knows what really happened. However, what is certain is that the man drove Abeer to the home of her cousin, who promised to protect her from her brothers and find a solution to her marital problems. As for the man, he fled Dael after the rumors spread.”

The source added:

“Abeer's cousin held her in his home and called her brothers, living in al-Qunaitra, and told them what happened. A few hours later, her brothers came to the cousin's home and then news of Abeer's death spread.”

STJ field researchers spoke to locals from the village where Abeer's family lives. They told STJ that Abeer's brothers broke her neck and cut her body before burying her. However, STJ cannot verify these statements since Syrian local authorities have not opened an impartial and independent investigation into the incident.

Regarding where Abeer was buried, the locals we interviewed shared two different accounts. The first account was that Abeer's brothers and cousin buried her in a farm near Tafas, taking advantage of the insecurity there. The second account claimed that the perpetrators killed Abeer in a deserted area in the village of Ashtarah in western rural Daraa, near an old fountain called Ein al-Neelah, to the east of the village of Adawan, and buried her there.

## Local Authorities Ignored News of Abeer's Murder

Our field researchers spoke with a witness in the village of Abu Mathara who confirmed that he informed local authorities of the crime against Abeer and urged them to hold the perpetrators accountable:

“They (he means head of the town’s police station, affiliated to the Syrian government authorities in Quneitra) want to bury the case. When I first informed the police about the incident, they were shocked and considered it a crime. However, they have not taken any action about it despite the passage of about a month since I came to them.”

He added:

“Several days after informing the police, I ran into the head of the police station at the funeral of an individual who had been assassinated by unknown gunmen in the town. I asked him what they were doing about Abeer’s murder. He answered quite frankly, saying: ‘Can’t you see that the country is in chaos? Our interference in Abeer’s case will only make things worse. It is better to leave the solution to the tribes; our country is going through a hard time’.”

## Pro Forma Domestic Laws Should Punish Criminals

The [Syrian Penal Code](#) does not use the term “honor killing” to describe the murder of a woman or girl by male family members. Instead, it calls such killings “crimes against morality and public morals”.

Article 548 of the Syrian Penal Code (before its amendment in 2009 and 2011) waived the punishment for a man found to have killed a female family member in a case provoked by “illegitimate sex acts”. In such cases, the killer benefited from a complete “exemption of penalty” because the excuse was considered pardonable. The article that replaced this allowed for mitigated punishment for “honor killings”; however, it also required a sentence of at least two years, and later five years.

On 17 March 2020, Syrian President Bashar al-Assad issued [Legislative Decree No. 2](#), which abolished Article 548 of the Penal Code, making it so that legally “honor killings” are handled like any other crime. Presidential Decree No. (2) ratified [a bill passed by](#) the Syrian People’s Assembly on March 12, 2020 repealing Article 548 of the Syrian Penal Code, promulgated by Legislative Decree No. 148 of 1949, and its amendments and the legal texts that replaced it relating to granting a mitigating excuse for crimes committed in the name of so-called “honor”.

Abeer’s alleged “honor killing” is not an isolated incident. STJ has [documented](#) no less than 16 “honor killings” between January 2020 and February 2021, as well as the killing of six women for inconclusive reasons, but which are believed to be related to honor.



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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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