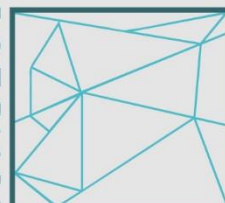


A joint statement from Syrian civil society organisations to expedite the trial of Rifaat al-Assad



May, 2024

سوريون
من أجل
الحقيقة
والعدالة
Syrians
For Truth
& Justice



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On 11 March 2024, the Swiss Attorney General submitted an indictment to the Federal Criminal Court (FCC) against Rifaat Al-Assad, uncle of Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad for committing war crimes and crimes against humanity. The accused is charged with ordering homicides, acts of torture, cruel treatment and illegal detentions in the Syrian city of Hama, within the context of the armed conflict the city witnessed in February 1982, in his capacity as commander of the defense brigades and the former Vice-President of his brother, the former President Hafiz Al-Assad.

The signatory civil society and non-governmental organisations, and victim associations commend this judicial measure as a significant advancement towards delivering justice to the victims of crimes and violations in Syria. They affirm their commitment to pursuing justice and express gratitude for the testimonies and information provided to support this endeavour.

Nonetheless, the signatory parties assert the following demands:

Firstly: The necessity of holding trial sessions without delay.

We stress the urgency of promptly commencing trial sessions. Given the advanced age of the accused, Rifaat al-Assad who is now 86 years old, and the importance of delivering justice to plaintiff parties and Syrian society at large, expedited legal proceedings are imperative.

Our concern is mainly due to the risk of a premature end of judicial processes due to the ageing defendant's potential death—an occurrence witnessed in a previous case based on universal jurisdiction involving Algerian Major General Khaled Nezzar in 2023. Nezzar passed away before the set dates of his trial in Switzerland for war crimes and crimes against humanity. Therefore, expediting Rifaat al-Assad's trial is imperative. We urge the court to consider adopting the previously scheduled trial dates for Khaled Nezzar (June 17 to July 19, 2024) for Rifaat al-Assad's trial instead.

Proposing to hold Rifaat al-Assad's trial in June 2024 is both justified and feasible. This timeline offers hope to plaintiffs and victims of the Syrian government, providing an opportunity to obtain long-awaited legal answers concerning atrocities such as the Hama massacre of which the details have been hidden for decades.

Secondly: Implementing the arrest warrant through Interpol.

Despite a French court issuing a ruling against him in 2021, sentencing him to four years in prison and confiscating his ill-gotten gains, Rifaat Al-Assad managed to evade justice. He exploited slow legal procedures and leveraged his wealth and connections, enabling his return to Syria. This raises suspicions and perpetuates a state of impunity.

Based on the aforementioned circumstances, we demand that the arrest warrant for Rifaat al-Assad be forwarded to Interpol and the Syrian government so that handing him over to justice is binding.

Thirdly: The necessity of providing a full translation of the hearing sessions.

It is crucial to ensure full translation of the court proceedings. The trial of Rifaat al-Assad holds significance not only for the victims but also for Syrian society as a whole, both within Syria and in the diaspora. This importance is underscored by its connection to the Hama massacre, a tragic event symbolising years of oppression and violence endured by Syrian men and women.

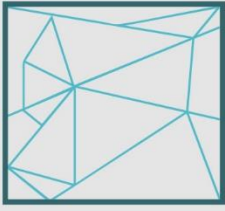
Hence, we demand comprehensive translation of all trial sessions from French to Arabic. This translation should be accessible to the public, civil society organisations, victims' associations,

and the press. Past experiences have demonstrated that the availability of translation services enhances the perception of justice and the court's respect for victim groups and their representatives.

The signatory organisations are confident that providing such translation services during Rifaat al-Assad's trial will fulfil the expectations of Syrian victims and non-French-speaking stakeholders. Moreover, it will bolster confidence in the application of universal jurisdiction for crimes committed in Syria.

Signatories:

1. Adel Centre For Human Rights
2. Caesar Families Association
3. Do Not Suffocate Truth
4. FAMILY OF TRUTH AND JUSTICE
5. Fraternity Foundation for Human Rights -FFHR
6. Human RightsGuardians
7. Jana Watan
8. LACU
9. Lamsat Ward
10. Lawyers and Doctors for Human Rights LDHR
11. Mari Research and Development
12. Political Feminist Platform
13. Pro-justice
14. Sane menottes
15. Syrian Archive
16. Syrian Center for Legal Studies and Research
17. Syrian Forum
18. Syrian Memory Institution
19. Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR)
20. Syrians for Truth and Justice
21. The Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression (SCM)
22. The Syrian Legal Development programme
23. Union of revolutionary bureaus
24. Urnammu for Justice and Human Rights



ABOUT STJ

Syrians for Truth and Justice (STJ) started as an idea in a co-founder's mind while attending the U.S. Middle-East Partnership Initiative's (MEPI) Leaders for Democracy Fellowship program (LDF) in 2015. The idea became a reality and flourished into an independent, non-profit, impartial, non-governmental human rights organization.

STJ's beginnings were more than humble; initially, it only reported stories of Syrians who experienced arbitrary arrest, enforced disappearance, or torture. Planted in fertile soil, the seed of this project grew into an established human rights organization licensed in the Middle East and the European Union. STJ today undertakes to detect and uncover violations of all types committed in all Syrian parts by the various parties to the conflict.

Convinced that Syria's diversity is a wealth, our researchers and volunteers serve with unfailing dedication to monitor, expose, and document human rights violations that continue unabated in Syria since 2011, regardless of the affiliation of the victims or perpetrators.