

Syria: Instances of Looting Public Institutions in Damascus and Suburbs Following the Regime's Fall



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Syrians for Truth and Justice (STJ) documents in this brief report the looting, theft, and vandalism acts that occurred at several government institutions, involving military personnel and civilians. The institutions targeted included the [Central Bank of Syria](#), the [fifth branch of the Commercial Bank](#) in Damascus, the [General Corporation for Potable Water and Sanitation](#) in Damascus, the [General Commission for Scientific Agricultural Research](#) in Damascus, the [power plant in al-Qutayfah](#) and the [Deir al-Hajar station](#) for agricultural research in rural Damascus.

As the fall of the Syrian government approached, incidents of theft and looting began in several governorates, particularly in Damascus and its surrounding areas. This surge in criminal activity peaked on the night of 7 December 2024, after government employees left their institutions, and there was a near certainty that the Assad regime was on the verge of collapse. Following the official announcement of the regime's downfall on 8 December 2024, and Bashar al-Assad's flight, thefts became even more widespread.

The types of stolen goods varied, including cash, assets, and important documentation, with some institutions experiencing the intentional destruction of documents and identification papers. At the Central Bank of Syria, a significant amount of money was stolen, although the total value remains undetermined. [Reports](#) indicated that thieves faced difficulty accessing the funds stored in the main safes, and sources have yet to confirm the total amount stolen.

It is important to note that the looting incidents were not limited to Damascus and its countryside; many other governorates in Syria experienced similar events on different scales. However, the identity of those responsible and the underlying motives behind these looting operations remain unclear.

The report is based on interviews conducted by STJ researchers with six former employees who witnessed incidents of theft, looting, and the destruction of files. The interviews were held in person, and all the witnesses were informed about how their statements would be used, including in this report. They were assured that their anonymity would be preserved, as they had requested.

Notably, STJ decided to publish information about the institutions mentioned in the report after obtaining adequate evidence, including direct testimonies, photographs, and videos that convincingly demonstrate acts of sabotage and theft.

1. Stealing Money from the Central Bank of Syria

In the early morning hours of 8 December 2024, the Central Bank of Syria was robbed by armed groups described as "unknown" during the chaos that followed the collapse of the Syrian regime. The thieves managed to break the locks and disable the alarms, indicating they had a solid understanding of the size and security methods protecting the Central Bank's funds.

Majed, a bank employee, provided STJ with a testimony in early January 2025 stating,

"The armed robbers exploited the lack of security and the suspension of the former Syrian army, attacking the bank at 7:00 a.m. They broke the locks and disabled the alarms, after nearly three hours, allowing them to steal money from the small safes and load it into cars parked inside the bank."

According to Majed, the robberies occurred throughout the day, starting in the morning and continuing until 4 p.m. This coincided with the spread of news about the thefts in the capital, Damascus. Members of Operation Deterrence of Aggression (the Military Operations Administration) were able to reach the bank, secure the remaining funds, and bring the situation under control. Majed explained,

"The members intervened – it was evident from their accents that they were from the city of Douma in Eastern Ghouta, which is distinct from other areas – and arrested some of the thieves who had stolen money and gold bars from the small safes, thanks to the cooperation of the residents. However, they were unable to apprehend all the thieves of furniture, which included chairs, office tables, and computers. Some of the stolen money was recovered after the arrests, but not all of the furniture was returned."

The Governor of the Central Bank of Syria, Mohammed Issam Hazima, confirmed in later [statements](#) that the bank had been subject to looting, but some of the stolen funds were recovered following the intervention of armed opposition forces. He indicated that the robbery was planned and assured that the bank is currently stable and under military control.

Sources from the Syrian capital, Damascus, [revealed](#) that most of the funds that officials from the former Syrian government had attempted to steal have been returned. The money and stolen items were transported in closed vehicles before bank guards noticed the theft and reported it to the Military Operations Administration, which subsequently recovered the stolen items. The sources did not provide specific figures regarding the value of the stolen items.

In a related context, on 10 December 2024, Basil al-Hamawi, head of the Damascus Chamber of Commerce, reported to [Reuters](#) that authorities confirmed some money had indeed been stolen from the Central Bank, but the main vaults had not been accessed. He assured that there had been no attack on the Central Bank and that the funds in the institution had been handed over to the new authorities.

2. Looting the Fifth Branch of the Commercial Bank in Damascus

On 8 December 2024, gunmen, whose identities remain unknown to STJ, carried out a robbery at the fifth branch of the Commercial Bank in Damascus. During the heist, they stole financial documents, computers, and pieces of furniture, in addition to incidents reported at the Central Bank.

The night before the fall of the Syrian government, employees at the fifth branch of the Commercial Bank of Syria in Damascus, including Amer, began to sense that the Deterrence of Aggression forces were approaching the city. As a precaution, they decided to evacuate the bank before the forces arrived. Amer explained,

"The day just before the Deterrence of Aggression forces took control of Damascus, we received information that they were advancing and would likely reach the city within hours. This news came from relatives of workers at the Commercial Bank. They reported that members of the fallen Syrian regime's army were laying down their weapons and abandoning their vehicles, and only a small number of soldiers remained to resist the Deterrence of Aggression forces. Additionally, we learned that members of the Fourth Division and the Republican Guard were heading towards the Syrian coast."



After the news spread among employees, those from Latakia and Tartous returned to their hometowns, according to Amer. Regarding the armed attack on the bank, he stated,

“Unidentified armed men assaulted the bank, stealing several financial documents and computers that contained bank-specific programs, such as loan and salary platforms. Fortunately, the thieves were unable to take much money, as it had been transferred to the public treasury the day before the attack.”

Amer also noted that the stolen items included some furniture and employee papers, and the premises were vandalized and left in disarray around 10:00 a.m. on Sunday, 20 December 2024. Amer concluded,

“The rebels arrived at the bank, secured the area, and promised to return the stolen items while ensuring the bank’s safety from future thefts. However, I am unsure if the stolen items were ever returned. It is believed that the security forces were fighters from the Army of Islam/Jaysh al-Islam, who are from the city of Douma, based on the slogans displayed on their vehicles.”

3. Looting the Power Plant in Al-Qutayfah, Damascus Countryside

On 7 December 2024, coinciding with looting and theft in the capital of Damascus, a group believed to be former members of the National Defense militia residing in the al-Qutayfah housing complex seized control of the al-Qutayfah power plant. They stole equipment, electricity bills, and other corporate assets, as reported by STJ researchers.

Khair, an employee at the plant, detailed to STJ about the incident, saying,

“About 25 armed men wielding Kalashnikov rifles infiltrated the headquarters after cutting off the electricity. They stormed the building and forcibly seized equipment and money. An employee named Mahmoud happened to enter the building during the incident. Unaware of what was happening, he tried to reason with the armed men about the dangers their actions posed to society, but they detained him and violently assaulted him.”

Khair added,

“The incident resulted in the theft of 25 laptops connected to the internet that belonged to employees in the records room, as well as 12 chairs. Additionally, five rooms were burned entirely. After the armed men left, Mahmoud was rescued and taken to a doctor, where it was discovered that he had suffered severe fractures and bruises. I am aware of these details and the extent of the damage because I was one of the employees assigned by the new government to assess the situation. I also provided my testimony days after the incident.”





4. Looting the General Corporation for Potable Water and Sanitation

In contrast to the relative order observed in the cities of Aleppo, Hama, and Homs, the Syrian capital, Damascus, was engulfed in widespread chaos. This turmoil ensued when government personnel abandoned their posts at security checkpoints, leaving their weapons on the streets. Government institutions and departments [faced](#) theft and vandalism, including the Palace of Justice and the Immigration and Passport Department. Furthermore, several electrical appliance stores, along with various small factories and workshops, were looted.

In the midst of widespread chaos and looting, the General Corporation for Potable Water and Sanitation in the capital, Damascus, was robbed, according to Mahmoud, an employee who has worked for the Syrian Water Company for 15 years and witnessed the incident firsthand. He recounted that he heard a loud explosion followed by screams in the streets and then saw a group of armed men storming the company building. Mahmoud recounted,

“When I arrived, I found that the thieves had broken down the doors and begun looting the premises. They stole important documents, essential materials, and technological equipment. A total of 44 laptops, 25 pumps, and 50 water pipes were taken and loaded into vehicles. I decided to intervene, joining some other employees. We tried to protect the property by closing the doors and keeping the thieves away from the important documents.”

Mahmoud stated that he learned about the damages mentioned from colleagues before the arrival of the Deterrence of Aggression forces. He continued,

“I helped them confront the thieves. While some of the thieves were arrested, others managed to escape with the stolen items. Vehicles loaded with stolen property left the scene, but questions remain about the identities of those who were captured. It was clear from their accents that they were from southern Syria.”

Due to the ongoing security chaos, the Military Operations Administration [announced](#) a curfew in the Syrian capital, Damascus, from 4:00 p.m. to 5:00 a.m. It also [issued](#) strict directives prohibiting access to public institutions and the firing of firearms into the air to ensure the safety of both property and citizens.

Following the entry of opposition factions into Damascus, Syrian President Ahmed al-Sharaa [urged](#) these factions to protect and preserve public property, asserting that it belongs to the Syrian people.

5. Stealing and Burning Files of the Ministry of Agriculture in Damascus

Jamal, who has worked for the Ministry of Agriculture for ten years, testified to STJ that in the week leading up to the fall of the Assad government, the Ministry implemented “preventive measures.” This included closing entrances and doors in anticipation of potential attacks. On 7





December 2024, an attack occurred on the ministry building, during which the assailants attempted to steal the institution's equipment. Jamal detailed,

"Five young men, neighbors of the Ministry – I often saw them at the bus stop opposite the Ministry – took advantage of the chaos to break into the building. They stole approximately 200 computers, which included both laptops and desktop models, as well as employee chairs. They smashed windows and tables and burned paper files related to the employees."

Jamal confirmed that the recent events seemed to be motivated by theft and looting. He added,

"The losses were significant. The Ministry lost an extensive archive due to the theft of computers and the burning of valuable documents. This represents a major challenge for Syria's future reconstruction, as we will have to start from scratch. The documents that were burned did not contain security or dangerous information, meaning the attack was intended only for sabotage."

6. Looting Deir al-Hajar Station for Agricultural Research

On the morning of 8 December 2024, the Deir al-Hajar station for agricultural research in Damascus countryside, was targeted by thieves. This incident involved not only the theft of computers and furniture but also of livestock. A group of armed Bedouins exploited the prevailing security chaos, as reported by Hassan, a ten-year employee at the station. Hassan narrated,

"After their attack, the Bedouins opened fire randomly and restrained the employees. They vandalized documents and files and stole 200 head of cattle, leaving pregnant cows that they could not remove. They also took 150 sheep and goats, but they were unable to steal the camels due to their resistance. One calf was killed at the station gate."

Hassan added,

"Within a few hours, the pens were completely emptied, and approximately 350 head of cattle were stolen. The stolen items were never recovered, despite the identities of the thieves being known. This was justified by claims that the perpetrators sold the livestock to unknown traders."

7. Appendices

Image -1 A map illustrating the locations where STJ documented instances of theft and looting in the Damascus Governorate.

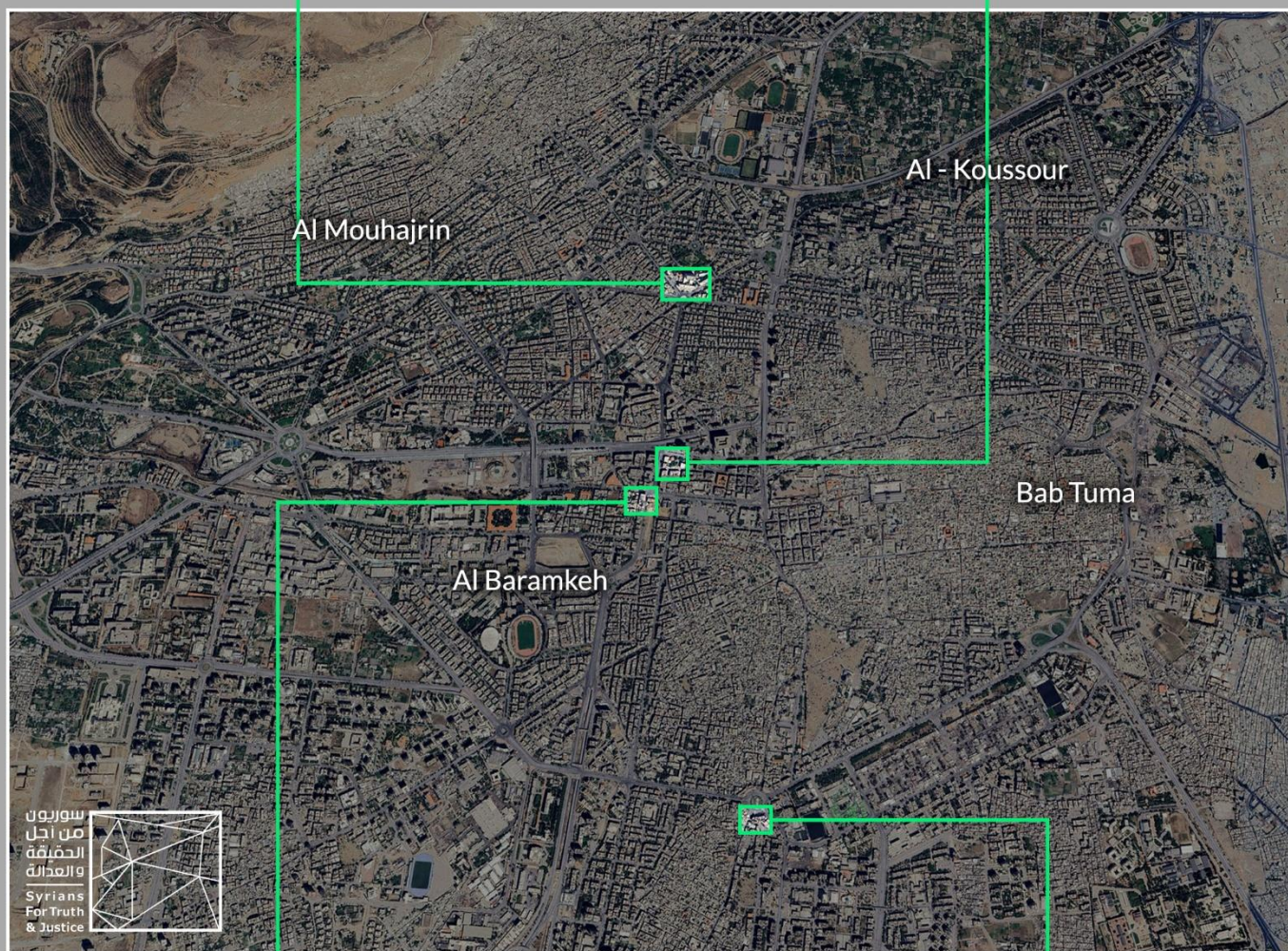




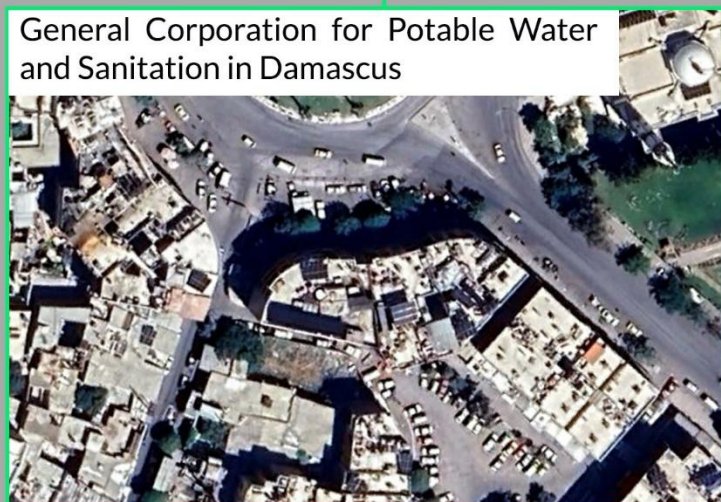
Central Bank of Syria



Fifth branch of the Commercial Bank in Damascus



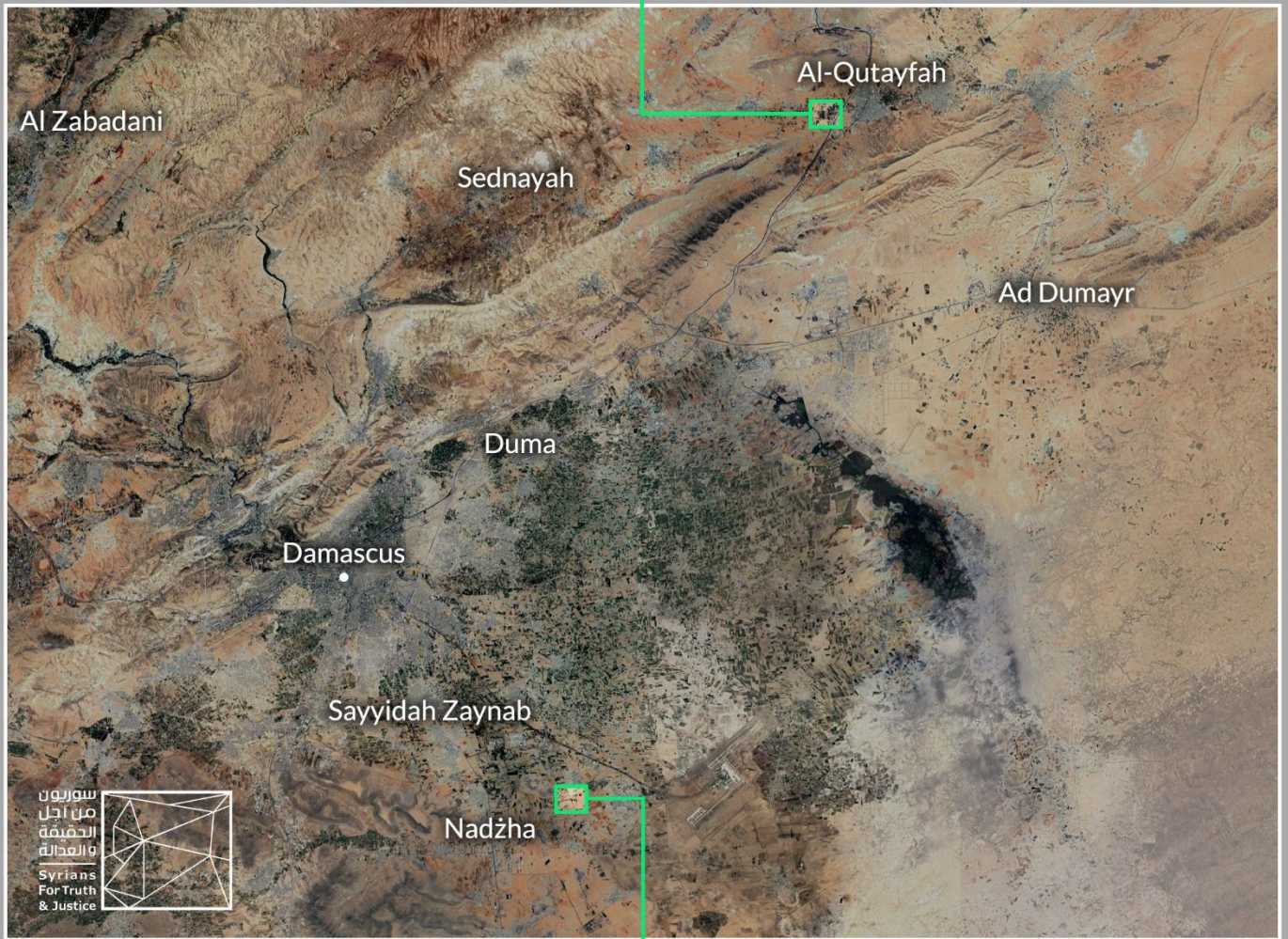
Scientific Agricultural Research in Damascus



General Corporation for Potable Water and Sanitation in Damascus



Power plant in al-Qutayfah



Deir al-Hajar station for agricultural research in rural Damascus





Image 2- A map illustrating the locations where STJ documented instances of theft and looting in the Damascus Countryside Governorate.



Image 3- A side of the theft and vandalism acts at the Central Bank of Syria. Credit: STJ.





Image 3- A side of the theft and vandalism acts at the Central Bank of Syria. Credit: STJ.





Image 3- A side of the theft and vandalism acts at the Central Bank of Syria. Credit: STJ.





Image 4- A side of the theft and vandalism acts at the fifth branch of the Commercial Bank in Damascus. Credit: STJ.





Image 5- A side of the vandalism acts at the power plant in al-Qutayfah. Credit: STJ.





Image 6- A side of the theft and vandalism acts at the General Corporation for Potable Water and Sanitation. Credit: STJ.



Image 7- A side of the theft and vandalism acts at the General Corporation for Potable Water and Sanitation. Credit: STJ.



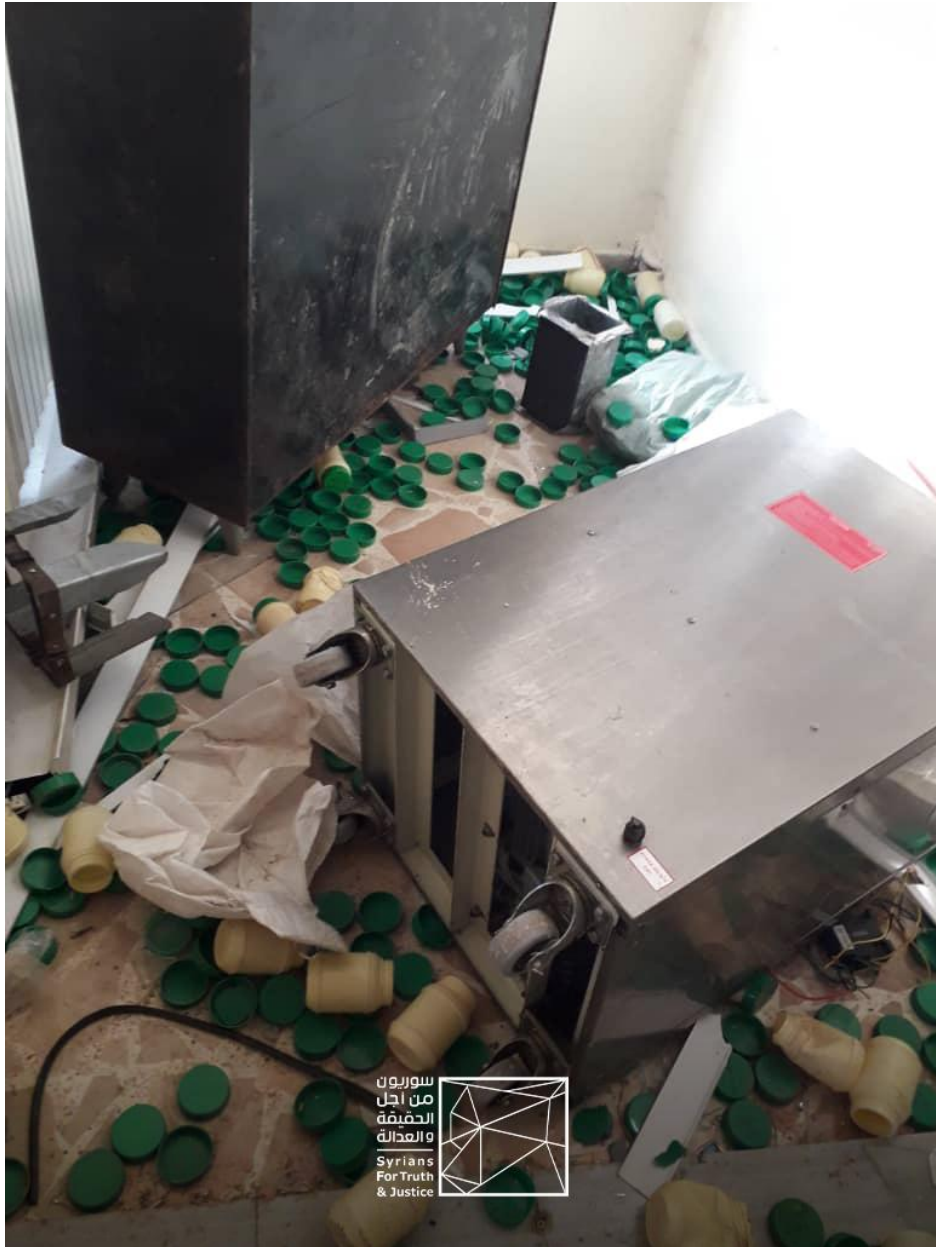


Image 8- A side of the theft and vandalism acts at the General Corporation for Potable Water and Sanitation. Credit: STJ.





Image 9- A side of the theft and vandalism acts at the General Commission for Scientific Agricultural Research. Credit: STJ.





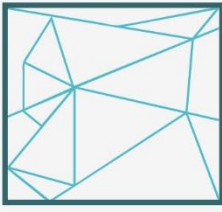
Image 9- A side of the theft and vandalism acts at the General Commission for Scientific Agricultural Research. Credit: STJ.





Image 11- A side of the theft incidents at the Deir al-Hajar station for agricultural research.
Credit: STJ.





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.

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