

“Take Him to the Ghoul”: 16 People Executed in a Single Day in Fahel Village, Homs Countryside



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سوريون
من أجل
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Syrians
For Truth
& Justice





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Warning: The report contains violent images in the appendix.



1. Introduction

As part of its efforts to document ongoing human rights violations even after the fall of the Assad regime, Syrians for Truth and Justice (STJ) has verified the summary executions of at least 16 individuals in the predominantly Alawite [village of Fahel](#), located northwest of Homs Governorate. These executions occurred during a “[combing](#)” campaign – essentially a raid and search – on 23 January 2025. Villagers believe the killings were motivated by “retaliation with clear sectarian intentions”.

The “combing” operation was part of a broader security campaign launched by the Syrian transitional government’s security forces in western rural Homs on 21 January 2025. The [campaign](#) aimed to track down remnants of the previous regime and smugglers in the area. It is also important to recall that Hay’at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), along with other opposition factions led by Ahmed al-Sharaa, overthrew the al-Assad regime and took control of Damascus following [Operation Deterrence of Aggression](#) in December. HTS was later [dissolved](#) on 28 January 2025.

Among the 16 people who were summarily executed, [14 were members](#) of the former Syrian Army, including at least four retired officers. Additionally, at least two of those executed had undergone status settlements at [reconciliation centres](#) established by the transitional government in Homs. According to witnesses, the other two victims were civilians who were taken off a bus heading to their village and executed after their Alawite affiliation was revealed during questioning.

Notably, witnesses interviewed by STJ for this report requested confidentiality due to fears of retaliation from security forces; thus, STJ used pseudonyms in their accounts.

The killing of the 14 Syrian Army soldiers was part of a larger incident involving 56 individuals, most of whom were civilians. These individuals were taken from their homes by the campaign’s initiators and brought to a square in an area locally known as al-Kazia. Of those taken, 35 were released immediately after ransoms were paid, while seven others were arrested and transferred to Homs Central Prison. These seven individuals were released five days later following [protests](#) organized by local villagers. Witnesses reported that the campaign involved heavy gunfire, looting of homes, and violent, humiliating treatment of residents during the searches.

Two witnesses confirmed allegations that violations in Fahel were committed by General Security forces and HTS-linked militias, which led the security campaign. However, Hamza Qablan, the director of public relations in Homs, attributed these violations to “criminal groups” that [allegedly](#) entered the village after the security forces had completed their operations and left, arresting individuals on specific lists. Qablan also mentioned that authorities arrested a group suspected of involvement in the killings, but provided no further information about this group.

This statement contradicts the testimony of Salim al-Sayyid, a resident of Fahel, who stated that Qablan’s claim regarding individuals entering after the security forces departed is “baseless” since the massacres occurred during the campaign when security forces were present.¹ The incident in Fahel was [described](#) as was against a military group of regime remnants who refused to surrender their weapons and were neutralized by the Military Operations Administration. However, the Al-Jumhuriya website [reported](#) that officials from General

¹ During an online interview conducted by an STJ researcher on 22 February 2025.

Security asserted that “[t]hose killed were unarmed and were arrested and executed outside the framework of the law.”

Additionally, two sources informed the website that the director of the Houla region told residents the deceased had not died as a result of clashes but had been executed. He emphasized that the factions already present in the Houla region were not responsible for the incident and that the group accountable for the violation was not affiliated with the HTS, noting that 15 members of this group had been arrested and would be referred to the judiciary.

Fahel was not the only village to experience violations during the extensive security campaign; the neighboring village of Marimeen, whose residents are Murshidi and Alawite, also suffered, witnessing the killing of two people on 23 January 2025. This incident occurred during a search operation marked by sectarian insults, hate speech, and the destruction of images of religious figures from the Murshidi sect. Witnesses from Marimeen reported that the raid was [conducted](#) by individuals wearing General Security uniforms, accompanied by members of factions other than HTS, as stated in accounts shared with the Snack Syrian website. However, this account contradicts the official narrative, which claimed that the violations were [perpetrated](#) by a “criminal group” impersonating security personnel after the actual security forces withdrew from the village.

Based on the information in the report, STJ recommends that the Syrian transitional government grant families of victims access to the findings of its investigations. This includes conducting fair, public, and transparent trials for those responsible for the violations that occurred in Fahel on 23 January 2025. Additionally, the transitional government should reorganize its “combing/search” operations to ensure their legality and prevent the recurrence of violations, particularly extrajudicial killings of civilians, retired military personnel who have surrendered their weapons, those who have reached settlement agreements, and individuals wanted on warrants. This can be achieved by implementing robust oversight mechanisms to monitor the actions of law enforcement agencies, including the General Security.

It is important to recall that the Taldou village, located in the Houla region near Fahel, experienced a horrific [massacre](#) in May 2012, during which 108 people, including 49 children, lost their lives. This tragic event was [carried out](#) by former Syrian government forces, including irregular armed groups known as “shabiha.” The then government claimed that “terrorist groups” were responsible for the massacre.

Map showing the villages of Fahel, Houla, Shin, Alshineah, Alkabo, Alshariqliah, and Marimeen.



2. Details of the Security Campaign

Omar Mohammad, a resident of Fahel village, reported that at 9:30 a.m. on 23 January 2025, convoys entered the village from the east. These convoys [included](#) members of the General Security, identifiable by their black uniforms, as well as individuals he referred to as “the factions” and the HTS, who wore camouflage military clothing and gear commonly seen on social media. Omar mentioned that all the members conducting the security campaign were masked with no identifiable affiliations. This campaign followed similar operations in the nearby village of [Alshineah](#), as well as in [al-Kabo](#) and the neighboring village of [Alshariqliah](#), all of which are Alawite villages, and in the village of [Marimeen](#).² Omar also noted that on the day of the security operation, a military checkpoint was established at the village entrance, manned by armed individuals from the neighboring village of [al-Houla](#).

Omar reported that the convoy entered the village under heavy gunfire and split into two groups, maintaining coordination throughout the operation. One group proceeded to the municipal council at the village entrance and requested that the mayor accompany them to the last house. The mayor drove ahead of the second group, which conducted house-to-house searches .

Residents stayed in their homes during the searches, too intimidated to leave due to the threat of armed violence. This included the firing of medium and small-sized shells, the use of Dushka machine guns and anti-aircraft weapons known as the 23, as well as bombs being dropped on empty agricultural areas. Fahd Suleiman, another civilian from the village, corroborated this account, stating that security forces imposed a curfew during the operation, which ended at 5 p.m. He added, “Anyone appearing at the windows was shot with the intent to kill.”³

² During an online interview conducted by an STJ researcher on 8 February 2025.

³ During an online interview conducted by an STJ researcher on 16 February 2025.



Images 2 – 3 – Gunshot residue on civilian homes following the security campaign in Fahel on 23 January 2025. Source: Witness Omar Mohammad.

Omar reported that the searches were accompanied by violent actions, including beatings and insults directed at the residents. He described an incident in which authorities entered a civilian's home, assaulted the individual, causing fractures, and verbally insulted his wife, accusing her husband of dishonoring the family. The victim was identified as J. Mohammad.

Fahd detailed on the incident, confirming that J. Mohammad is a civilian who owns a block factory. He mentioned that Mohammad was tortured, while his wife faced financial blackmail and sexual assault. After these events, he was arrested and taken, along with others, to the al-Kazia area. Fahd recounted,

“They tortured him violently with knives and threatened his wife. One of the officers asked her to give him all the money they owned. She gave him the money, the father's and son's cell phones, and her own. As she was bringing the money from the bedroom, he threw her on the bed and said, ‘If I am not a *shabih*, I do not get a dance, huh?’”

Fahd reported that a second civilian, Abu Ali Yasser, a bicycle mechanic, had his home raided. He was beaten and humiliated before being taken to the al-Kazia area. Additionally, Fahd mentioned that several homes in the village were looted, including one belonging to a civilian living in Damascus and another owned by a fighter pilot named Ahed Qassem. Omar spoke about the pilot saying,

“He was a pilot officer who carried out hostile operations with the air force against civilians. He fled following the fall of the regime and was neither at home nor in the village at the time. No one was upset about the looting of Ahed’s home, as he was a pilot officer responsible for killing civilians.”



Image 4- Traces of violence on a Fahel local, allegedly tortured during the combing operation of 23 January 2025. Source: Nidal Hamada's [Facebook account](#).

The security campaign in Fahel led to the arrest of 56 individuals, including both members and retired officers of the former Syrian regime’s army. They were taken to the al-Kazia area. Fourteen of these individuals were executed on-site, while seven were transferred to Homs Central Prison and released five days later, on 28 January 2025. Thirty-five others were released immediately, with some of them paying money or offering other forms of financial compensation for their freedom. According to Omar, all of the detainees were “beaten with various sharp objects by the agents responsible for their capture.” He further explained,

“The situation for civilians differed from that of military personnel, most of whom were executed. Civilians were released in exchange for money or gold jewelry. In one instance, 14 large 20-liter cans of olive oil were confiscated from a household. When money was not available for the release of those detained at the al-Kazia, agents would seize household furniture and appliances, such as television sets or microwaves.

The seven individuals [taken](#) to Homs Central Prison; Ali Naim Salloum, Farid Issa Saleh, Raheel Suleiman Fandi, Ghadir Abdul Rahman Musa, Ahmed Louay Ibrahim, Shadi Ahmed Saleh, and Ribal Nouris Salloum, confirmed upon their release that they had endured “severe degrees of torture,” according to Fahd. STJ was able to identify the location in the image (coordinates: [34.847892, 36.412634](#)), which appeared repeatedly in [videos](#) of demonstrations in the village of Fahel on 14 February 2025.

3. Field Execution of 16 People

According to Omar and Fahd, [14 detainees](#) from the village were field executed, among them four retired officers who are; Abdul Karim Khalil Mohammad (60 years old, retired 10 years ago), Hassan Mohammad Musa (Brigadier General, 58 years old), Muhib Abdul Rahman Badour (Brigadier General, 55 years old), Jamil Ahmed Barbar (Brigadier General, 50 years old, retired two years ago). The list of detainees also included the following officers; Mohammad Rami Kamil Issa (Lieutenant Colonel, 30 years old), Samih Sharif Mar'i (Brigadier General, 62 years old), Ali Tawfiq Dahi (Brigadier General in Communications, 59 years old), Suleiman Ibrahim Hamid (Brigadier General, 53 years old), Youssef Ayman Nasser (Captain, 25 years old), Mohammad Ayman Nasser (First Lieutenant, 27 years old), Wissam Shawkat Mohammad (Captain in Technical Affairs, 38 years old, nephew of Abdul Karim), Mahmoud Faisal Suleiman (Captain, 25 years old), Ghiyath Rahil Musa (Brigadier General), and Issa Farid Darwish (Assistant). Omar explained,

“All the officers and non-commissioned officers who were killed included individuals in both administrative and organizational roles at the barracks, as well as those working in military training offices at military colleges. They settled their legal status in reconciliation centres set up in the village by the Operations Administration and General Security after the regime fell. They hold settlement cards that are issued at such centers.”

Among those killed were brothers Youssef and Ayman Nasser. They were executed despite settling their status and assurances from security forces that they would not be harmed, to their families. On this Omar recounted,

“When the [security] officers entered the home where the brothers lived together, one of them told the family, ‘You will not be harmed if nothing is proven against you.’ The first thing they did was collect the cell phones of Youssef, Ayman, and their relatives, taking five phones in total. The two officers, [Youssef Nasser and his brother Mohammad Nasser] had previously completed the settlement process after the regime’s fall and possessed their settlement cards at that time. The [security officers] began searching the house, and after finishing, one of them asked the brothers to accompany him to identify their previously confiscated cell phones. At this moment, their mother started screaming, pleading with the officers not to take her sons. One of the officers then reassured her, saying, ‘In half an hour, we will bring them back. This is just a simple investigation.’”

Omar reported that 13 individuals were executed at the village intersection, including one civilian. He mentioned phrases commonly used among the soldiers, such as “take him to the ghoul” and “let him go,” which he interpreted as equivalent to a kill order. Additionally, he stated that Mahmoud Suleiman, a military college instructor, was brutally executed outside the village. Omar narrated,

“Security forces took him to the village of Alshariqliah, where they fed him grass and asked him to bark. He was killed there on the farm, and his body was mutilated. A number of those killed had a metal rod inserted into their necks, and they were shot in

the same spot where the rod was inserted. This is what we saw when we received the bodies.”

On the same day, two civilians from the village were [executed](#); Duraid Nazih Ahmad, an employee at the Electricity Establishment, and Alaa Ghosn Ibrahim, an engineer at the Commercial Bank of Syria. According to Omar,

“These two individuals were on their way to the village on an internal bus. The bus was filled with women, and they were the only two men on board. Before taking the two civilians to their village, Fahel, the bus driver, went to drop off their female colleague in Marimeen village. After leaving her off and continuing toward Fahel to drop off the men, the bus was intercepted by a car carrying armed men near the Marimeen intersection. The [armed men] asked the two men about their sect, since they were the only males on the bus. They inquired, ‘Are you Alawites?’ The men replied, ‘Yes.’ The armed men then removed them from the bus and took them to the agricultural fields adjacent to the Marimeen village intersection, [where the car containing the armed men had been parked]. They killed them immediately.”

Fahd confirmed the details of the incident, citing the bus driver who was transporting the victims. The driver reported that he was threatened by individuals demanding the victims get off the bus, with one stating, “Do not turn around or you will be killed like them.” Several social media accounts shared news of the bodies being [found](#) at the Marimeen village intersection, along with photos of the deceased.



Image 6 - An image [circulated](#) on the X platform claims to show the bodies of two victims, Duraid Nazih Ahmad and Alaa Ghosn Ibrahim.

Regarding the other 14 deceased, Omar stated,

“When the residents of the village of Fahel came to collect their [loved ones’] bodies on 23 January 2025, the HTS members prevented them from doing so at gunpoint. These members also obstructed ambulances from reaching the site to retrieve the bodies. The bodies remained at the village intersection until the following day, 24 January 2025. On that day, HTS members finally allowed the villagers, some of whom were relatives of the deceased, to collect the bodies. The [villagers] arrived with two medium-sized Kia 4000 trucks to transport the remains to the city of Homs. Upon arrival in Homs, these two trucks, which were loaded with the bodies, were escorted by HTS members already present in Homs (who were not involved in the initial operation). The bodies were distributed to four hospitals in Homs: the Forensic Medicine Department, al-Walid Hospital, a hospital in al-Dahiya, and the National Hospital in Homs.”

STJ obtained a collection of photos depicting the victims’ bodies from witnesses interviewed for this report, which are included in the appendix below.

4. Fahel after the Campaign

In another part of his testimony, Salim Sayed, a resident of Fahel, stated that the villagers held a collective mourning ceremony in a square near the Fahel municipality for over a week. He noted that the purpose of this mourning ceremony was to protest the massacre that occurred in their village.

According to Salim, the measures taken by the authorities have not stabilized the situation in Fahel, including the establishment of a security checkpoint in a building that once housed the Ba’ath Party branch. This checkpoint was established following Qabalan’s visit to the village on 28 January 2025. Salim explained,

“The individual directly responsible for supervising this security checkpoint is a man named Abu Khaled, who is regarded as the director of the security zone in the Houla area. He is followed in command by a former defector captain named Mahmoud Abu Amer. During the first two days after its establishment, this security checkpoint maintained what could be described as good neighborly conduct. However, after those initial two days, the number of personnel at the checkpoint gradually increased. They began arriving in vehicles, blocking roads in the village, and playing songs that contained sectarian innuendos and insults. Despite this, the villagers welcomed them cordially, so that the village would remain safe and the Fahel massacre would not be repeated.”

Tensions returned to the village on 14 February 2024, when members of a security checkpoint attempted to arrest a civilian farmer for wearing a military-style jacket. Salim recounted the events of that day, saying,

“Nawar was stopped by a vehicle belonging to the security checkpoint. They asked for his name and whether he was a soldier. Nawar assured them he was not a soldier and that he only had that uniform because someone had donated it to him. As the voices

grew louder, they demanded that he take off the jacket, but he refused. They pointed their weapons at him and insisted that he come with them, but he stood his ground, saying, ‘Kill me here, but I will not go with you.’”

The forces retreated to the checkpoint after residents [gathered](#) to protest Nawar’s arrest. They later returned home after village elders intervened to calm the situation, according to Salim. He reported that a curfew was [announced](#) the day after the incident through the village mosque, lasting from 12 noon to midnight. However, the residents, who heard heavy gunfire, did not comply and rushed into the streets, according to Salim, who added,

“We feared a repeat of the security escalation that occurred during the inspection on 23 January 2025. When we took to the streets, we saw young men from the village confronting the armed elements, estimated to be between six and ten, who were firing heavily. They attempted to push the villagers away. The young men managed to push the gunmen back toward the security checkpoint [at the former Ba’ath Party building.]”

Salim noted that a confrontation broke out between the residents and the security forces, some of whom wore Public Security badges while others had Special Forces badges. The forces opened fire during the altercation, which was followed by the arrest of a well-known village civilian, Ramez Suleiman, who was released later that same day.

5. Appendix



The body of victim Abdul Karim Khalil Mohammad.



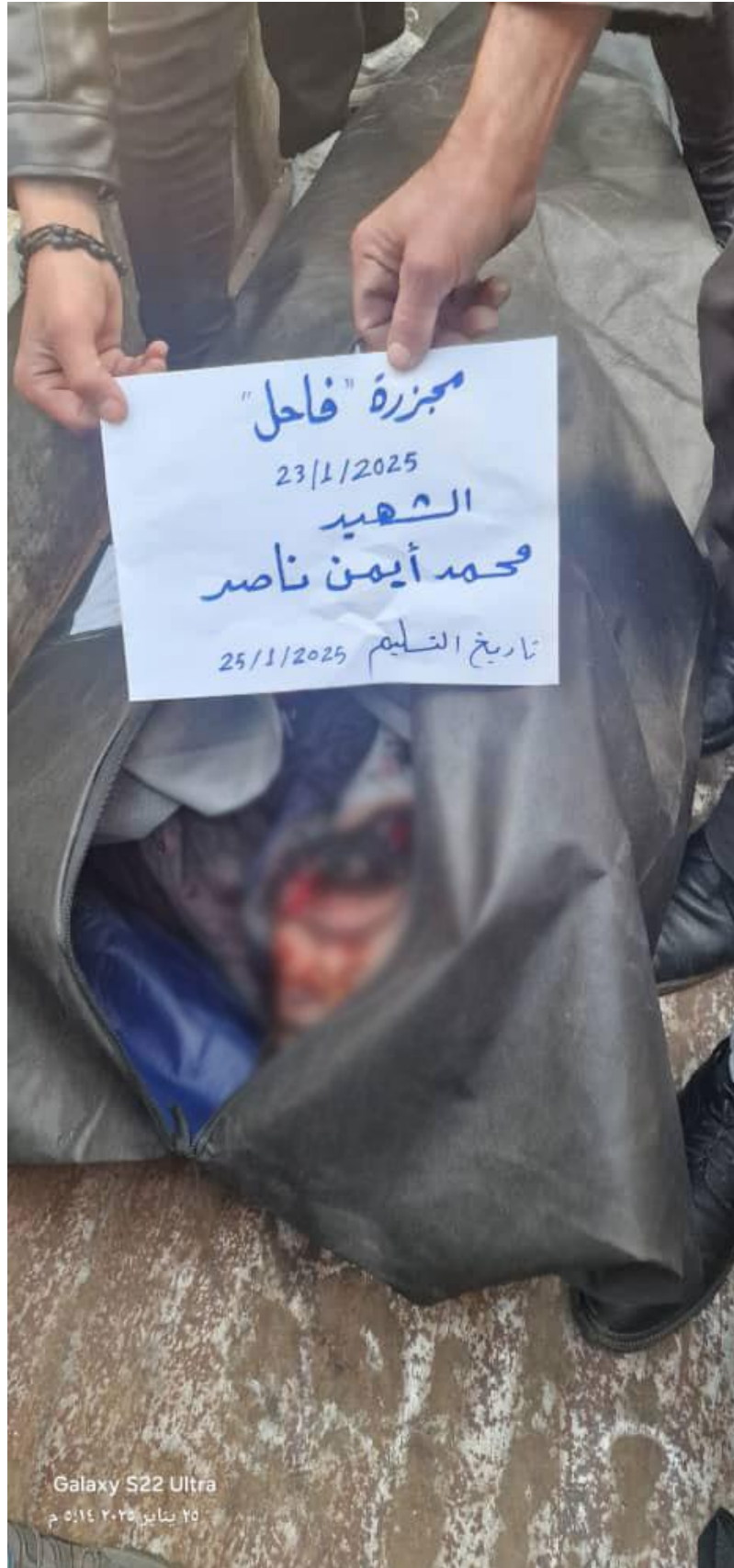
The body of victim Samih Sharif Mar'i.



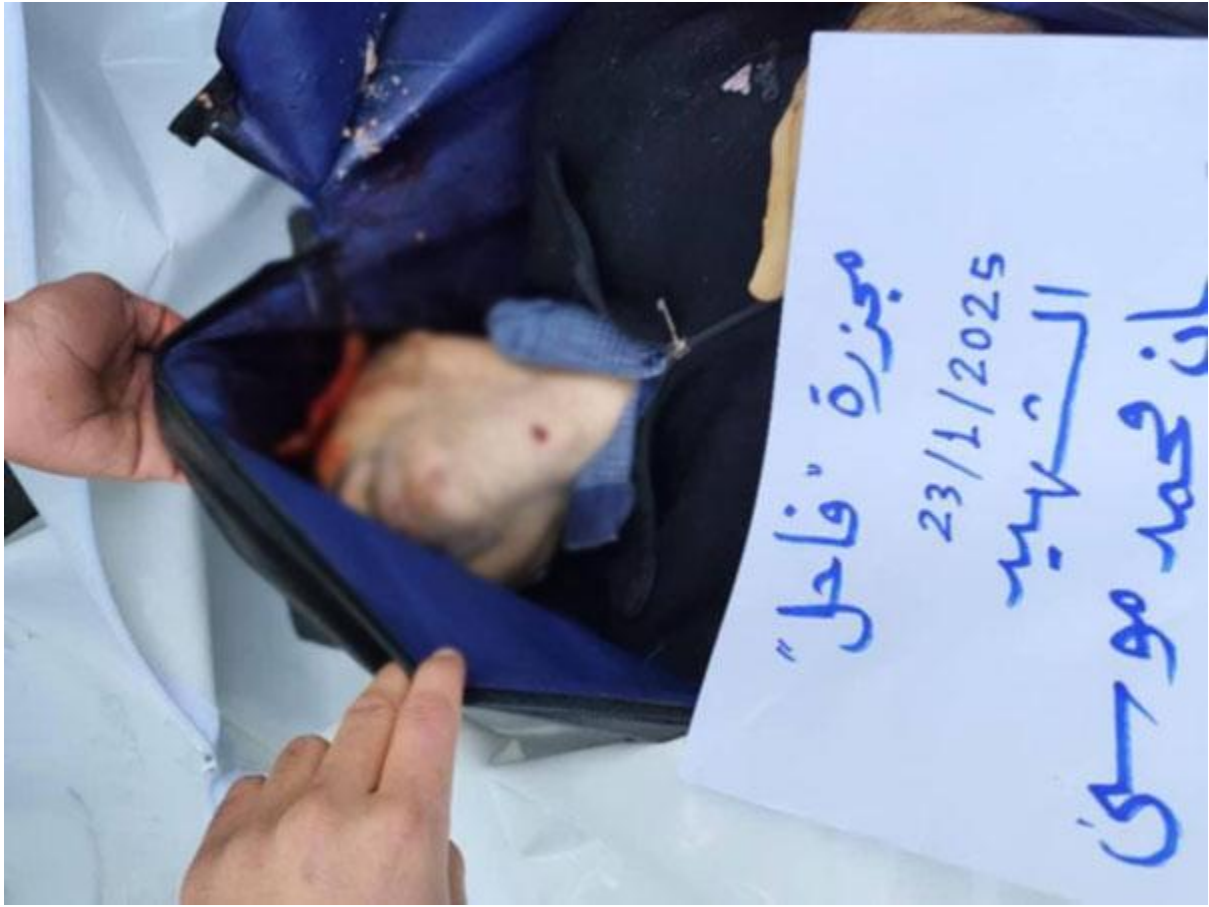
The body of victim Ali Tawfiq Dahi.



The body of victim Youssef Ayman Nasser.



The body of victim Mohammad Ayman Nasser.



The body of victim Hassan Mohammad Musa.



The body of victim Issa Farid Darwish.



The body of civilian victim Wassem Shawkat Khalil.



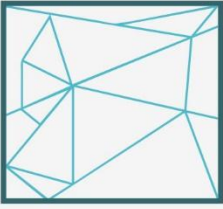
The body of the military college instructor, Mahmoud Suleiman, who was brutally executed outside Fahel village.



The body of civilian victim Duraid Nazih Ahmad.



The body of civilian victim Alaa Ghosn Ibrahim.



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.