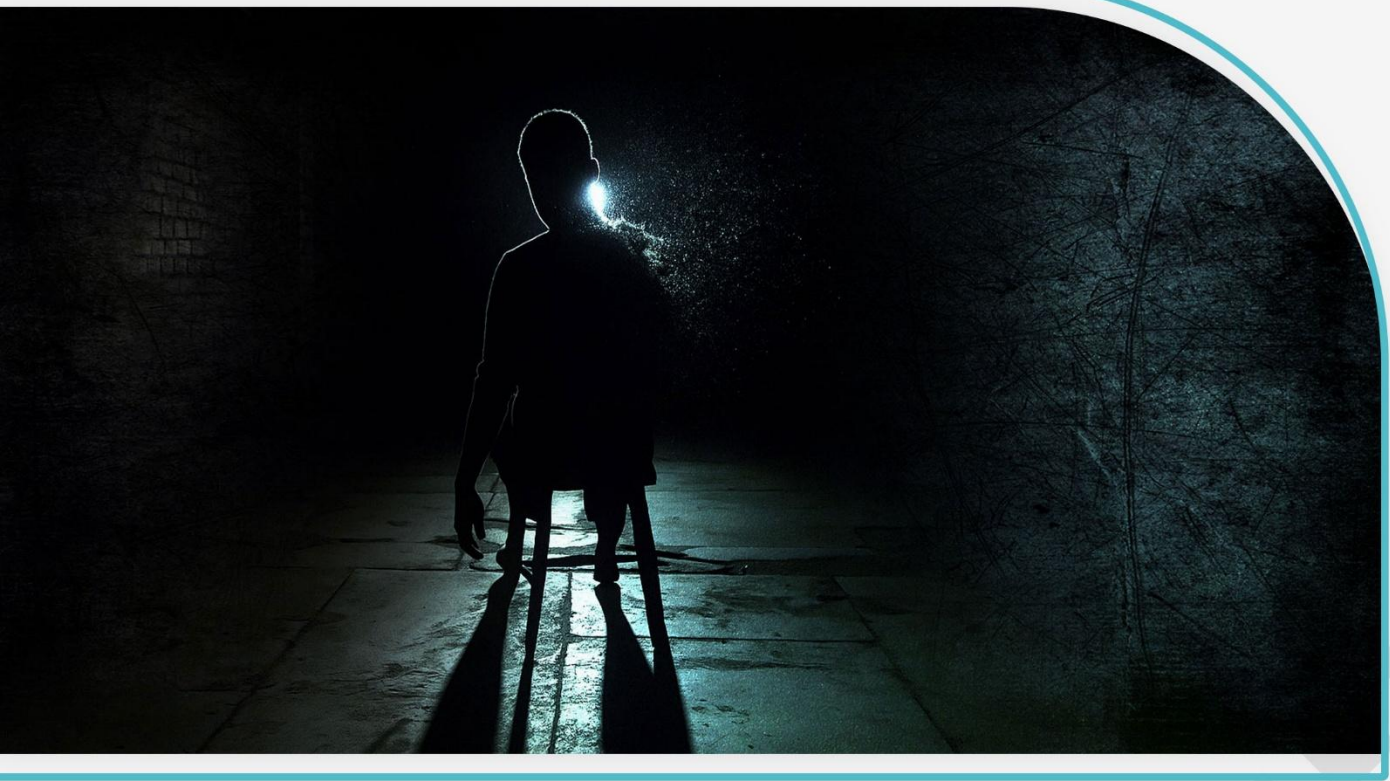


## “Living Between Hope and Fear”: Testimonies Documenting the Persistence of Enforced Disappearance in Post-Assad Syria



On the International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances, Syrians for Truth and Justice Urges Ratification of the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance and Accession to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

August 2025



سوريون  
من أجل  
الحقيقة  
والعدالة  
Syrians  
For Truth  
& Justice





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## 1. Executive Summary

This report documents patterns of enforced disappearance that have occurred after the fall of the Syrian regime in December 2024, indicating that the practice did not end with the Assad era but has persisted into the transitional period, albeit in different forms and at lower rates. Based on witness accounts and testimonies from relatives of the disappeared, these violations were primarily carried out by the security agencies of the new government, particularly the General Security Directorate (Internal Security).

Through the analysis of eleven testimonies collected by Syrians for Truth and Justice (STJ) for the purposes of this report, supplemented by additional sources, the research team identified several recurring patterns of enforced disappearance over recent months, including:

1. **During home raids and search operations:** For example, military and security forces stormed houses in Jableh, Homs, and Damascus, arresting entire family members without judicial warrants or clear charges, after which their relatives lost all contact with them.
2. **At security checkpoints:** In other cases, checkpoints in rural Latakia, Homs, and Tartous turned into traps for enforced disappearance, where civilians were stopped in broad daylight, and security bodies either denied their detention or provided contradictory accounts of their fate.
3. **By security centers and newly established agencies:** Some cases began with official summonses “for interrogation,” but then turned into complete disappearances, such as the case of a civil servant in Homs, where the same authority that had summoned him later denied knowledge of his whereabouts.
4. **In public spaces:** The practice was not confined to closed facilities but also extended to public arrests in open streets, followed by enforced disappearance, such as in Tishreen Square in Latakia, reflecting the perpetrators’ confidence in the absence of accountability.

These testimonies reveal a dangerous gap between the legal framework and actual practices on the ground. The Constitutional Declaration issued during the transitional period (Article 18) and Legislative Decree No. 19 establishing a National Commission on Missing Persons have yet to translate into effective protection against enforced disappearance. According to testimonies, the authorities have neither initiated investigations into all documented cases nor disclosed the fate of the victims, nor have they treated families’ appeals with seriousness—further entrenching a climate of impunity.

STJ emphasizes that government responsibility extends beyond violations directly committed by its forces to include those carried out by armed groups affiliated with, or operating with the knowledge of, the state. The state bears the obligation to protect all citizens, to investigate every incident, and to ensure accountability for perpetrators.

In addition to local testimonies, the report reviews recent international and UN reports that highlight the growing scope of the phenomenon. UN expert bodies have documented the abduction of hundreds of individuals—including women from the Druze and Alawite communities—by armed groups closely linked to the transitional Syrian authorities, noting the

continuing lack of effective state response. Accordingly, the report stresses that addressing the issue of enforced disappearance constitutes a decisive test of the transitional government's commitment to international human rights standards.

STJ therefore calls for the activation of the National Commission on Missing Persons with its full mandate, including cases of disappearance occurring after the fall of the regime, and for full cooperation with the UN-established Independent Institution on Missing Persons in Syria (IIMP), created in 2023.

## 2. Methodology

This report is based on direct testimonies collected by STJ over the past several months, as well as on the organization's accumulated expertise in documenting this crime. STJ has previously published several reports on similar cases, including one on enforced disappearance affecting members of the Alawite community in the Damascus countryside, titled [\*“Syria: Documentation of Enforced Disappearances and Arbitrary Arrests in the al-Qadam Neighborhood of Damascus.”\*](#) These publications demonstrate that the phenomenon has recurred across different parts of the country.

For the purposes of this report, STJ conducted eleven in-depth interviews online, using secure communication platforms. Prior to participation, all interviewees provided informed consent after being briefed on the voluntary nature of the interviews and the intended use of the information, including its publication in this report. Many chose to conceal their identities or any identifying details due to fear of possible retaliation against themselves or their families. Accordingly, pseudonyms were used for several of the individuals quoted in this report. The names of some victims were also withheld for the same reason, although their data is duly recorded in STJ's secure database in accordance with established procedures.

This report does not purport to capture all cases of enforced disappearance that have taken place in Syria since December 2024. The number of documented cases far exceeds those presented here. Instead, the report highlights selected examples to shed light on specific incidents—particularly those committed or facilitated by the General Security Directorate and forces affiliated with the transitional government.

The focus on this aspect stems from the gravity of continued involvement by official bodies in a crime explicitly prohibited under the Constitutional Declaration. While some of the documented cases also point to the involvement of other actors or non-state armed groups, the ultimate responsibility lies with the government. Under international law, the state is obligated to protect citizens from enforced disappearance, to investigate all allegations, to hold perpetrators accountable, and to prevent the entrenchment of impunity.

## 3. Introduction

After more than thirteen years of armed conflict, many Syrians continue to live under the weight of the crime of enforced disappearance, which the former regime systematically employed as a tool of political control and societal intimidation in the absence of the rule of law and amid widespread impunity. Despite the fall of the regime in December 2024, this crime has not

ceased; it has persisted into the transitional phase in various forms, albeit at a lower frequency. Since that time, numerous testimonies and appeals have emerged through media outlets and social media platforms regarding new cases of disappearance across different parts of the country, many of them perpetrated by security agencies or armed groups affiliated with the transitional government, with apparent sectarian motives behind several incidents.

The recurrence of such practices raises serious concerns that they may evolve into a pattern reproducing some of the gravest violations witnessed in Syria over past decades.

In this context, Syrians for Truth and Justice issues this report on the occasion of the [International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances](#) (30 August 2025) to shed light on the persistence of this crime during the transitional period, to demand the disclosure of the fate of all the disappeared, and to ensure accountability for those responsible—affirming that no political transition can be complete without truth and justice.

#### 4. Enforced Disappearances from Homes: When Houses Become the Stage for a Crime

House raids leading to enforced disappearances represent one of the gravest practices currently taking place in Syria, as they violate the sanctity of what should be the safest space for individuals and families. Following the fall of the former regime, STJ documented numerous cases in which military forces or armed groups stormed houses, took individuals without judicial warrants or legal orders, and later denied any knowledge of their detention. These practices recall some of the most entrenched patterns of violations under the previous era and reveal the continued danger faced by civilians even within their own homes.

On 8 March 2025, the al-Rumaila neighborhood in Jableh became the site of extensive military raids carried out by forces affiliated with the Ministry of Defense during the coastal massacres. “Ismail,” a 45-year-old teacher from Jableh, described the arrest of six members of his family, including a child:

**“The military forces affiliated with the authorities in Damascus entered Jableh, Latakia, Baniyas, and other areas. My family and I were at home in al-Rumaila. They entered the neighborhood and combed it in search of armed men. They were from the Ministry of Defense, wearing full military uniforms with yellow bands.”**

Believing themselves not to be at risk, the family did not leave their home:

**“We stayed at home... we did not flee because we had done nothing wrong. Suddenly, they knocked on the door, asked who was inside, then stormed the house. They arrested my elderly father, aged 68, my three brothers, including a minor in the eleventh grade, as well as my uncle and cousin.”**

The arrests were accompanied by insults and sectarian slurs directed against the Alawite family. Ismail explained:

**“They took them all by force, shouting and hurling sectarian insults at us.”**

From that moment, the fate of six men from one family has remained unknown. The relatives tried to reach officials and contacted intermediaries, but all demanded large sums of money in exchange for information. Ismail recounted:

**“We tried to contact officials but couldn’t. We sought out intermediaries (wasta), but all of them demanded money. We knew they had been arrested, but we had no idea where they were. The government denies holding them.”**

He added that some members of the forces used the detainees’ phones to harass female relatives through messages. Despite this, no official acknowledgment of their detention or place of custody has ever been issued. Ismail heard rumors that his family members were held in Idlib Central Prison, but he was unable to verify this information through official sources as of the writing of this report. This incident illustrates how official raids can directly turn into enforced disappearances, carried out by state forces and leaving families with no legal recourse to uncover the fate of their loved ones.

In another testimony, STJ documented the raid of a home in the Basatin al-Waer neighborhood of Homs on 18 May 2025, carried out by an armed group, during which three brothers were arrested. “Zena,” a 27-year-old lawyer and relative of the missing men, recounted:

**“They came in a silver Santa Fe car and a van, one with Idlib plates and the other with Aleppo plates. They wore official security uniforms and carried ID cards indicating they were from the security services. They gathered the women and children in one room along with the disabled brother of the three missing men, then took the three brothers for interrogation. They tried to take the brother in the wheelchair but left him behind because he could not stand.”**

According to the source, the raid was accompanied by looting of gold jewelry, cash, a safe containing millions of Syrian pounds, and mobile phones. Zena continued:

**“We reported the incident to the General Security in the area. They told us these men did not belong to any official body and that the IDs were forged. Nevertheless, no action was taken to verify this or to investigate further.”**

The family later received a text message from an unknown number demanding ransom, but repeated attempts to call back went unanswered, and efforts to trace the number failed. To this day, the fate of the three brothers remains unknown. Zena explained:

**“We filed complaints with several departments. We searched for them in all police stations and hospitals, but we were unable to find out anything about their fate.”**

The authorities’ claim that the IDs were forged does not absolve them of responsibility to investigate and to ensure the protection of civilians. The lack of follow-up entrenches a climate of impunity and leaves families without protection.



Elsewhere, following the takeover of Ashrafiyat Sahnaya in rural Damascus by the General Security forces, “Hasan,” the father of one of the victims, provided testimony to STJ about his son’s disappearance after being arrested by men in General Security uniforms, only to later discover that he had died under torture:

**“On 30 April, more than ten General Security officers raided our home. They took my son, saying it was a routine procedure and that he would return within hours before nightfall. We never heard from him again, and no one informed us where he was being held or what had happened to him.”**

Several days later, on 9 May, Hasan discovered that his son’s body was at a hospital in Damascus, where he had been transferred after being interrogated in a General Security detention facility. Hasan told STJ that he clearly saw bruises and fractures across his son’s body as a result of beatings and torture.

His account demonstrates that the crime of enforced disappearance had occurred: his son was deprived of liberty by an official body, and his whereabouts and fate were concealed from his family throughout his detention and until his death. This case illustrates how enforced disappearance often coincides with other grave violations such as extrajudicial killing and torture, compounding the suffering of families left without truth or justice.

## **5. Enforced Disappearances at Checkpoints: Security Barriers as Gateways to Disappearance**

Enforced disappearances in Syria have not been limited to home raids but have also extended to security checkpoints scattered across roads—points ostensibly established to regulate traffic and protect civilians. In many cases, these checkpoints became sites of disappearance, where individuals were stopped and subsequently vanished, while security agencies remained silent or offered contradictory accounts that compounded the suffering of families. Disappearances at checkpoints starkly illustrate the fragility of the right to freedom of movement and personal security, turning daily life into an experience fraught with fear and uncertainty.

On the morning of 7 March 2025, members of a checkpoint operated by the “Hamzat” faction stopped a civilian man from the village of Barabshbo in Latakia after summoning him to meet the checkpoint commander. Upon his arrival, his eyes were blindfolded, and he was taken to an undisclosed location. His father, “Hussein,” told STJ:

**“We filed several official complaints with the relevant authorities and registered his name on the lists of the missing, but to this day we have received no response and no information clarifying his fate. We do not know whether he is alive or dead. All we want now is to know the truth.”**

On the same day, “Hani” lost his son at another checkpoint run by the same faction in the village of Zoubar. The father recounted:

**“He went out to buy bread for the house... After a few hours we learned that he had been stopped at the checkpoint and never returned. As a father, I live every**

**day in a painful state of waiting. I do not know whether he is still alive or has died. I live between hope and fear, and not a day passes without imagining him standing before me. My only wish is to know the truth, whatever it may be, because this uncertainty weighs heavily on my heart and eats away at my life.”**

Both families turned to the General Security Directorate and filed formal complaints confirming that fighters from the Turkey-backed “Hamzat/Hamza Division” had arrested their sons, yet they received no official response or clarification. Although the arrests took place in broad daylight, the young men’s fates remain unknown while the authorities remain silent.

In another case on 5 April 2025, a young man from rural Tartous disappeared while trying to cross Homs on his way to Lebanon. According to his relative “Samih,” the driver dropped him off at the al-Msheirfeh checkpoint, but the last contact he made with his family was from the Arizonah checkpoint on the Homs–Tartous road. Hours later, the family received a call. Samih explained:

**“They called from his phone and hurled insults, then demanded a ransom. They clearly said the young man was in their custody. But the next day they changed their story, saying they had handed him over to the Political Security Branch in Talkalakh.”**

Despite the family’s attempts to locate him by visiting all known security branches and prisons in the area, they found no trace of him, and his fate remains unknown.

This testimony highlights an additional dimension of enforced disappearances at checkpoints—not only arbitrary arrest and official denial, but also contradictory narratives between abductors and security agencies, coupled with extortion of victims’ families. The recurring pattern is clear: a civilian is seized at a checkpoint and taken to an unknown destination, while the family is left without any legal means to determine his fate or even confirm that he is in official custody.

## **6. Security Centers: From Official Premises to Spaces of Disappearance**

Several cases demonstrate that even a formal summons to a security center can mark the beginning of an enforced disappearance. Citizens summoned for investigation or questioning at security branches often vanish, leaving their families with no means to determine their whereabouts or legal status. This practice is particularly dangerous as it occurs under the guise of “official procedures,” with the very authority that issued the summons later denying knowledge of the detainee’s existence.

On 15 January 2025, a civil employee at the Hisyah Iron Factory—who suffered from a documented physical disability—was summoned to the “Criminal Security Branch” in Homs. STJ interviewed his relative “Sara,” who had direct knowledge of the incident:

**“He was detained by General Security in Homs after being summoned to the Criminal Security branch under the pretext of questioning. From that moment, all**



**contact with him was lost. No arrest warrant had been issued, and no formal charges were brought against him.”**

She added:

**“Although several officials within the security apparatus told his family that he was being held at Homs Central Prison, staff at the prison denied his presence there. When the family inquired again, they were told they could not see him unless they hired a lawyer.”**

Meanwhile, the factory director who was detained alongside him was released. Sara explained:

**“We later heard that large sums of money had been paid to secure the director’s release because he belonged to an influential family. But the modest employee remains disappeared to this day, and no one knows whether he is alive or not.”**

In a more complex case, the authorities did not fully deny the detention but, after several weeks, issued public media statements announcing the arrest of two individuals. These announcements, however, omitted critical details such as the location and date of detention and did not allow families to contact their relatives or appoint legal counsel. Thus, the essence of enforced disappearance remained. A mere public statement does not suffice to lift the characterization of enforced disappearance unless accompanied by full transparency and legal safeguards. The problem is exacerbated when families have already visited police stations, security branches, and prisons in the governorate where the arrest took place, and none acknowledged holding the individual. In such cases, the public announcement appears to serve only as propaganda, leaving the central question unanswered: where is the detainee, and does he enjoy his legal rights? Instead of easing the suffering of families, such statements only deepen concerns about the denial of the right to a fair trial.

On 14 July 2025, “Munzer Ali Issa,” a civilian from the village of Dayr Hibash in Tartous, received a call from an acquaintance asking him to come urgently to the al-Naqib area. Munzer went to meet him but was never heard from again. “Rami,” a close relative, recounted to STJ:

**“Munzer was with his wife on a walk along the corniche when he received a call from a man named Ali, asking to meet him immediately. Munzer told his wife he would return shortly, but the call with him was cut off, and from that day on his family has had no news of his whereabouts.”**

The family searched through police stations and security branches across Tartous without success. Weeks later, reports circulated on social media claiming he had been arrested on suspicion of attempting to bomb a church in Khraybat, Safita. Rami explained:

**“On 6 August 2025, we were shocked to see Munzer’s photo circulating on social media alongside news that General Security had arrested him. Since his**

**disappearance, his family has been asking at every police station and branch, but to no avail.”<sup>1</sup>**

The family formally requested to visit him in Tartous Central Prison, hoping he was being held there, but were informed that his name was not listed in the prison’s records. This case highlights the problematic practices of the authorities: even after the Ministry of Interior issued a statement and social media circulated news of the arrest, the family was not formally notified, nor were they informed of his place of detention, nor allowed to contact him or appoint legal representation. Thus, his status remains that of an enforced disappearance. A media statement alone does not absolve the authorities of their core obligations: to provide families with official, accurate information and to guarantee the detainee’s fundamental rights. The denial of family contact and access to legal counsel raises serious concerns about further violations, including the denial of the right to a fair trial under international standards.

In another case documented by STJ, a police station itself became the site of disappearance. On 16 January 2025, the Rastan police station, instead of protecting citizens, became the locus of enforced disappearance. “Faten,” a 49-year-old woman from Homs, described the case of her son, Alaa, who was arrested without a judicial warrant or clear charges:

**“My son Alaa was arrested by officers at the Rastan police station without a warrant or any formal charges, following an old dispute between our family and one of our neighbors in Ghawr al-Assi.”**

According to her testimony, Alaa had accompanied his aunt to the station to give a statement in a family dispute. As they were leaving, a member of the rival family intervened and filed a false report accusing Alaa of being affiliated with the Assad regime:

**“They accused him of being a regime loyalist without any material evidence or criminal record.”**

Since that day, his family has had no information about his fate. Faten explained:

**“We visited several prisons, including those in Homs and Hama, as well as the Rastan police station, but received no official information about his whereabouts or legal status.”**

Later rumors suggested he had been transferred to Idlib Central Prison, though the family could not confirm. They had previously been told he was in Homs Central Prison, but that also proved untrue—compounding the family’s anxiety and uncertainty.

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<sup>1</sup> The witness confirmed that the disappearance took place on 14 July 2025, while the church’s [statement](#) reported that the arrest of the two accused young men occurred on 13 July 2025. The Ministry of Interior’s [statement](#), issued on 6 August 2025, merely announced the arrest without specifying its date.

## 7. Disappearances in the Heart of the City: From Public Spaces to the Unknown

On 7 March 2025, during the massacres in the coastal region, a main street in Latakia became the site of a public disappearance. “Samir,” from Latakia, recounted the case of his relative “Jihad” (44 years old), a police officer who had completed his service and undergone a reconciliation process after the fall of the regime, only to disappear after being accused of using his mobile phone to film:

**“Jihad was speaking on the phone near Tishreen Square when fighters suddenly arrested him, accusing him of filming.”**

From the moment of his arrest, all trace of him was lost despite the family’s relentless search:

**“We asked about him at every security branch and station in Latakia, but they all told us they did not have him.”**

Three days later, a member of the General Security handed Jihad’s phone back to his brother without any explanation, deepening the family’s suspicions. Although the family approached police and prison officials, they received no official information about his fate.

The fact that this incident took place in a public space, amid widespread massacres in the coastal region, highlights the brazenness of the practice and the alarming message it conveys: arbitrary arrest and enforced disappearance can occur at any moment and in any place, without accountability or legal recourse.

In another testimony, STJ documented the disappearance of “Aiham” (36 years old, from Salamiyah) on 8 December 2025—the very day the regime fell. His relative “Amin” recounted:

**“Aiham was performing his military service in Homs. Our last contact with him was on the day the regime collapsed. After that, we never heard from him again.”**

Since his disappearance, the family has spared no effort to uncover his fate. Amin explained:

**“General Security informed us that he was being held in Adra Prison, but when we went there, we found no trace of him, and his detention was never officially confirmed.”**

More than eight months have passed without the family receiving any clarification or official confirmation of Aiham’s whereabouts. It is worth emphasizing that—even if Aiham was serving in the ranks of the former regime—this does not justify his enforced disappearance or the denial of his fundamental rights. Families retain the right to know the truth about the fate of their loved ones, and victims themselves have the right to a fair trial under international standards. Resorting to disappearance and vengeance instead of fair accountability only perpetuates the cycle of violence, whereas adherence to legal responsibility remains the path toward genuine and sustainable peace.

## 8. International Reports on the Continuation of Abduction and Enforced Disappearance after the Fall of the Regime

In addition to the testimonies documented in this report, UN bodies recorded widespread incidents of abduction and disappearance in 2025, underscoring the scale and gravity of the phenomenon.

According to a [statement](#) issued by the UN Panel of Experts on the “*wave of armed attacks on Syrian Druze communities in and around Sweida Governorate since 13 July 2025*,” at least 105 Druze women and girls were abducted by armed groups affiliated with the Syrian Interim Authorities, with 80 of them still missing. The statement also noted that 763 individuals had been reported missing as of its release on 21 August 2025.

Similarly, the [report](#) of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Syria (COI) concerning the coastal events of March 2025 characterized them as systematic and widespread acts of violence, including abduction and enforced disappearance. The Commission received credible reports of the abduction of dozens of Alawite women, a finding corroborated by other sources, including a UN Panel of Experts [report](#) dated 23 July 2025 that documented the abduction of 38 women from the Alawite community. The report also identified patterns of gender-based violations amid the absence of an effective response from the transitional government.<sup>2</sup>

These reports collectively indicate that the crime of enforced disappearance did not end with the fall of the former regime but has persisted, carried out by various actors—including security forces and armed groups affiliated with the new government.

## 9. The Legal Framework of Enforced Disappearance: The Gap Between Law and Reality

### 9.1. International Level

International law defines enforced disappearance as a composite crime involving the deprivation of a person’s liberty by agents of the State or by persons or groups of persons acting with the authorization, support or acquiescence of the State, followed by a refusal to acknowledge the deprivation of liberty or by concealment of the fate or whereabouts of the disappeared person, which place such a person outside the protection of the law. This definition is enshrined in the [International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance \(2006\)](#), which also affirms that the statute of limitations for this crime begins only at the end of the enforced disappearance, given its continuous nature. The [Human Rights Committee](#) has further emphasized that states have a duty to protect individuals from

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<sup>2</sup> Reuters also published a special [investigation](#) documenting the abduction of 33 women, while Amnesty International released a [report](#) indicating that the organization had received “credible reports of at least 36 Alawite women and girls, aged between three and 40, abducted and kidnapped across Latakia, Tartous, Homs, and Hama governorates” The report condemned what it described as the “failure of authorities to effectively investigate” and their disregard for families’ complaints.

abduction or detention not only by state agents but also by private criminals or irregular groups, including armed or terrorist organizations operating within their territory. Thus, the state’s duty is not merely negative—abstaining from perpetrating enforced disappearance—but also positive, requiring it to protect persons under its jurisdiction from arbitrary detention or enforced disappearance.

The [Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court](#) designates enforced disappearance as a crime against humanity when committed on a widespread or systematic scale. It is significant that Syria has neither signed the International Convention on Enforced Disappearance nor acceded to the Rome Statute, exacerbating the gap in legal protection and underscoring the importance of the transitional government’s obligation to ratify and join these instruments.

According to the [Human Rights Committee](#), enforced disappearance constitutes a grave threat to life, depriving the victim of legal protection and exposing them to serious and ongoing danger. It directly violates the right to life (Article 6 of [the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#)), the right to liberty and security of person (Article 9), and the right to recognition as a person before the law (Article 16).

Furthermore, victims of enforced disappearance and their families have the right to know the whereabouts of the detainee and the reasons for their detention, a principle that falls within the broader “right to truth.” A 2006 [study](#) by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights affirmed that the right to truth concerning gross human rights violations and serious breaches of humanitarian law is an inalienable and autonomous right, intrinsically linked to the state’s duty to protect and guarantee human rights, conduct effective investigations, and ensure effective remedy and reparation.

In June 2023, the UN General Assembly adopted a [resolution](#) establishing the *Independent Institution on Missing Persons in Syria (IIMP)* as an international mechanism designed to coordinate efforts to uncover the truth and guarantee families’ right to know the fate of their loved ones. This places an added responsibility on the transitional government to harmonize its legislation with international conventions, to cooperate fully with this institution and related UN mechanisms, and to grant them immediate access throughout the Syrian territory—demonstrating a genuine commitment to preventing recurrence of this crime.

## 9.2. National Level

The [Constitutional Declaration](#) adopted after the fall of the former regime represented a step forward by explicitly prohibiting enforced disappearance and torture under Article 18 and by declaring such acts not subject to a statute of limitations.

Beyond this, however, Syrian legislation contains no specific provision addressing enforced disappearance. The only partial references are Articles 555–556 of the [Syrian Penal Code](#), which criminalize unlawful deprivation of liberty and provide harsher penalties where detention exceeds one month, involves physical or psychological torture, or targets a public official. Likewise, [Legislative Decree No. 20 of 2013](#) criminalizes the abduction of persons for political, material, sectarian, retaliatory, or ransom purposes, prescribing life imprisonment with hard labor—yet it fails to recognize enforced disappearance as a distinct crime.

[The Syrian Personal Status Law](#) addresses only the definition of a “missing person” and the conditions under which a legal proxy may be appointed or a declaration of death issued, without treating enforced disappearance as a crime in itself. Moreover, no official mechanisms or designated government bodies exist to search for the disappeared or to provide information to families. There is also no explicit legal provision prohibiting the denial of detention or the refusal to disclose the whereabouts or fate of a detainee.

Further compounding the problem, Article 425 of the [Syrian Code of Criminal Procedure](#) obliges prosecutors or investigating judges to visit places of detention, release persons held unlawfully, or, where grounds for detention exist, to refer them immediately to competent judicial authorities. Article 422 likewise obliges judges to conduct regular inspections of detention facilities. Yet these provisions remain largely unenforced.

[Legislative Decree No. 55 of 2011](#), which authorizes law enforcement officers to detain suspects for up to sixty days, has effectively legitimized enforced disappearance rather than curbing it. According to Article 51 of the Constitutional Declaration, this decree remains in force, as no subsequent law has explicitly repealed or suspended it. In the absence of clear criminal provisions defining enforced disappearance as a standalone crime, violations persist without accountability.

In May 2025, the transitional authorities issued [Legislative Decree No. 19](#) establishing the *National Commission on Missing Persons*. While this represents an official acknowledgment of the scale of the crime and the need to address it, its effectiveness depends on the commission’s independence, its authority to access security archives, the meaningful participation of victims and their families in its work, and the breadth of its mandate—whether it will include all cases across conflict parties and those occurring after the fall of the former regime.

## 10. Recommendations

The cases documented in this report demonstrate that the crime of enforced disappearance continues in Syria despite existing legal provisions prohibiting it. In order to address this phenomenon and safeguard the rights of victims and their families, Syrians for Truth and Justice recommends the following:

### 10.1. To the Syrian Transitional/Interim Government:

- Conduct independent and immediate investigations into all cases of enforced disappearance documented since December 2024, including investigations of officers and officials directly involved in unlawful detentions, and hold them accountable.
- Ensure the full independence of the National Commission on Missing Persons (Decree 19/2025), guaranteeing that its mandate covers all missing persons, including those who disappeared after the fall of Assad, and grant it access to security archives and both official and unofficial detention sites.
- Ratify the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance and accede to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.





- Enshrine enforced disappearance as a distinct crime in the Penal Code, repeal provisions allowing for prolonged detention without judicial oversight, and enforce Articles 422–425 of the Code of Criminal Procedure.
- Guarantee the fundamental rights of detainees in accordance with international standards, including immediate contact with their families, access to legal counsel, and prompt presentation before a court within a reasonable time.

#### **10.2. To the International Community and UN Mechanisms:**

- Support the work of the international Independent Institution on Missing Persons in Syria (IIMP), ensure full cooperation by the transitional government, and exert pressure on Syrian authorities to permit the institution to operate without restrictions across all Syrian territory.
  - Apply diplomatic pressure to ensure Syrian authorities disclose the fate of the disappeared and fulfill their obligations under international treaties.
  - Provide technical and financial assistance to Syrian organizations documenting enforced disappearance and strengthen the capacity of victims and their families to access justice.
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## 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.