



Yasser Sabbouh... The Father Who Never Returned from “Questioning”



Yasser Sabbouh... The Father Who Never Returned from "Questioning"

"We struggled just to secure a decent burial for him, after his body lay on the ground for an entire day."

Yasser Sabbouh was a man who loved reading and writing. He had a passion for nature and filled every room with positive energy and a constant smile. But above all, he was a caring father to three daughters, showering them with love and affection. His daughter, Leen, says of him,

"My father, Yasser Sabbouh, who passed away at the age of fifty-eight, was more than just a father; he was a small world of knowledge and kindness. He spent many years studying and traveling. After high school, he went to Russia to study Library Science, then earned a Master's in Educational Sciences, followed by a PhD in Physical Health from the British National Academy. He taught at universities in Libya and high-level institutes, and also served as the director of the Cultural Center in Lattakia.

He was deeply well-read and cultured. I never heard a harsh word from him, even when I was wrong. We found depth in the smallest details: I would choose his clothes, we would laugh, and we lived within the warmth of the purest, most sincere relationship.

Despite our modest financial situation, he put our education above everything else. He followed my studies with such care. I remember the last time he walked into my room while I was studying; he said, 'Bravo... keep studying so you can travel and succeed.' From then on, whenever he saw me at my desk, he would knock on my door just to bring me something to eat or drink. Even now, I can still hear the sound of his knock.

Everything changed on the evening of Thursday 7 March 2025. Shooting broke out right beneath our building, near our home. We huddled together in the hallway, trembling with fear, and did not sleep all night. We moved aimlessly through the house, watching and waiting, sometimes arguing from the sheer tension. I was seventeen, not understanding what was happening, and never imagining that danger could reach us inside our own homes.

At dawn, the shooting quieted a bit, so I went to sleep, thinking the morning would bring calm. But my father did not sleep. He stayed awake, worried about us. He had heard screams from a nearby building where a young girl had been hit by a bullet.

I woke up Friday morning, and the tension still lingered in the air. We watched gunmen in the street from behind the windows. At eleven o'clock, I saw them enter the building and take a young man from our neighbors. I told my father, and he gave me a look I will never forget, a look of helplessness and deep worry that said everything.

Then, they started knocking on doors. They knocked on our neighbors' door first. My father opened our door before they even reached it, confident he had done nothing wrong. They immediately told him, 'The girls stay in the room... you, come with us for questioning.' I ran after them and asked, 'Where are you taking my father?' One of them replied: 'Just questioning downstairs. If he is clean, he will come back.'

My father said, 'I have not done anything,' and he went down with them quietly, without even saying goodbye. He believed, as we did, that he would be back in minutes.

I stood on the balcony and saw him below, which made me feel a little safer. But a few moments later... he disappeared.

In the evening, they returned to the house. I asked them, 'Why did not my father come back?' They said, 'By tomorrow... just a few procedures.' We believed them and waited for morning.

The next morning, my uncle called my mother and said, 'I am so sorry for your loss.' I did not believe it. I did not cry. I kept holding onto their words: 'He will be back tomorrow.'

The next day, we went downstairs and saw my father lying on the ground. Later, we learned there had been no investigation at all. They had detained him with others, trying to force them into humiliating acts, shouting and insulting them. My father refused to give in. He told them, 'We are brothers... we should hold the guilty accountable. We have done nothing wrong.' Because of those words, they took him aside... and he never returned.

We struggled just to secure a decent burial for him, after his body lay on the ground for an entire day.

To this day... it all still feels like a nightmare.

Just two days before the incident, we were laughing together. He told me, 'You look beautiful... just like your father and mother.' The day before that, he proudly said in front of guests, 'My daughters have grown into young women.' He was so proud of us. Despite everything he had been through, losing his mother at the age of five and growing up in poverty and hardship, he remained determined to succeed. He traveled at a young age, built himself from nothing, and became a truly one-of-a-kind person.

Whatever I say about him is not enough. He was not just a father; he was a life in himself."

[This story is based on the testimony of Leen Sabbouh, Yasser Sabbouh's daughter.]

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.