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## Submission by Syrians for Truth and Justice to the Special Rapporteur on Torture

Legislative and Institutional Developments in Syria Regarding  
the Prevention and Prohibition of Torture  
(1 July 2024 – 30 June 2025)

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May 2025

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## **Submission by Syrians for Truth and Justice to the Special Rapporteur on Torture**

Legislative and Institutional Developments in Syria Regarding the  
Prevention and Prohibition of Torture (1 July 2024 – 30 June 2025)

This submission was presented by Syrians for Truth and Justice to the Special Rapporteur on torture in 2025, and we are providing it in full, including the recommendations, for review and dissemination.

Syrians for Truth and Justice (STJ)<sup>1</sup> submits this contribution in response to the call<sup>2</sup> issued by the Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.<sup>3</sup> This submission aims to highlight the legislative and institutional developments in Syria regarding the prevention and prohibition of torture, and to assess the extent to which the Syrian authorities have fulfilled their legal obligations before and after 8 December 2024, a date adopted here as a turning point in the context of Syrian governance.

This input focuses on paragraphs (b) and (c) of the call entitled Global Trends and Developments on Torture.

## 1. General Context

Despite Syria's ratification of several international instruments prohibiting torture<sup>4</sup> – most notably the 1984 Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, the 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the 1949 Geneva Conventions– human rights violations, particularly torture, have continued systematically in official and secret detention facilities operated by Syrian security agencies throughout the rule of the former regime (the Assad regime). These acts of torture, humiliation, and ill-treatment did not cease following the fall of the regime.

In the post-regime period, dozens of video clips from Syria<sup>5</sup> circulated widely on social media, and media reports<sup>6</sup> documented acts of mistreatment, beating, torture, and degradation of human dignity, including against members of the Alawite, Druze, and Christian minorities in Syria.

Torture in Syria had long constituted a state policy implemented by security agencies and military institutions primarily targeting opponents of the former regime. Tens of thousands of cases were documented by international and local organizations, including the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic,<sup>7</sup> without any meaningful accountability or preventive measures in place.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://stj-sy.org/en/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/en/calls-for-input/2025/call-inputs-global-trends-and-developments-torture>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/sr-torture>

<sup>4</sup> <https://indicators.ohchr.org/>

<sup>5</sup> Daraj Media, published 5 May 2025. <https://www.facebook.com/darajmedia/videos/617684041300752>

<sup>6</sup> Daraj Media, "Syria: The Perpetuation of Humiliation and the Violation of Dignity", published 5 May 2025. <https://daraj.media/en/syria-the-perpetuation-of-humiliation-and-the-violation-of-dignity/>

<sup>7</sup> UN News, "Syria: Rights probe reveals systematic torture and detention of Assad regime," 27 January 2025. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2025/01/1159466>

## 2. Paragraph (b): Preventing torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment

### A. Before 8 December 2024

One of the most prominent steps taken by the former Syrian government was the issuance of Law No. 16 of 2022 on the Prohibition of Torture.<sup>8</sup> The law provided an expanded definition of torture and stipulated that no confession or information obtained through torture shall be admissible, except as evidence against the perpetrator. However, the law has not been effectively implemented.<sup>9</sup> STJ and other independent bodies have not recorded any cases in which perpetrators were held accountable under this law.

It is believed that the law was issued as a formal and legal response to the joint case filed by Canada and the Netherlands against Syria before the International Court of Justice.<sup>10</sup>

### B. After 8 December 2024

The transitional government has not adopted any new legislative or administrative measures to combat torture, nor has it taken practical steps to prevent beatings during arrest operations, or security campaigns.

However, the authorities have established an investigative committee regarding violations that occurred in the Syrian coastal region, including torture associated with mass killings. STJ considers this a step in the right direction.<sup>11</sup>

Nevertheless, dozens of torture and ill-treatment cases have been documented under the current transitional government, committed by individuals and military groups affiliated with it. These include acts of humiliation and torture based on sectarian, social, religious, or political identity. Examples include:

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<sup>8</sup> (SANA), "President Issues Law No. 16 of 2022 Criminalizing Torture," 30 March 2022. <https://www.sana.sy/?p=1616786>

<sup>9</sup> <https://stj-sy.org/en/request-for-a-statement-by-the-special-rapporteur-on-torture-in-relation-to-the-international-court-of-justice-order-on-the-indication-of-provisional-measures-in-the-netherlands-canada-vs-syria-case/>

<sup>10</sup> <https://scm.bz/en/the-international-court-of-justice-announces-dutch-canadian-application-against-the-syrian-government/>

<sup>11</sup> <https://stj-sy.org/en/syria-serious-concerns-regarding-integrity-independence-and-effectiveness-of-the-investigation-committee-for-coastal-events/>

- The case of activist Abdul Rahman Kaheel,<sup>12</sup> who was arbitrarily detained on 2 May 2025 by officers from the General Security and Criminal Security directorates in Homs, alongside his fiancée. He was accused of failing to provide “documents proving that the woman with him was his fiancée.” He sustained serious injuries including a ruptured eardrum and bruises to his face and hands. His fiancée was subjected to degrading verbal abuse.
- An interrogation conducted by pro-government journalist Jamil Al-Hassan, published on 24 April 2025 on Platform X, in which a detainee named “Abu Muhammad Taysir”<sup>13</sup> appeared to have visible signs of torture. He was accused of past abuse during the former regime period.
- A video from Mhardeh, Hama Governorate,<sup>14</sup> dated 30 April 2025, showed General Security forces forcibly shaving the heads of Christian youth and using sectarian slurs such as “Christian pig” under the pretext of mingling with women. According to *Al-Modon*, similar incidents were reported elsewhere,<sup>15</sup> including in Damascus, where youths were arrested or humiliated without legal grounds or judicial warrants. In another case, teenagers in Rukn al-Din (in Damascus) were publicly humiliated for allegedly “harassing girls.” Also, posters were posted at the Faculty of Medicine at Damascus University urging young men not to mix with women or shake their hands.
- A video clip, verified by STJ, shows instances of sectarian humiliation during the coastal region events, carried out by individuals strongly believed to be affiliated with the transitional authorities. The video, dated 8 March 2025, depicts detainees being forced to imitate dog sounds,<sup>16</sup> insult the Alawite sect, and repeat sectarian slurs, including the phrase “The Umayyads are our masters.” Another video published on Facebook, also verified by STJ, shows detainees being coerced into barking after being verbally assaulted based on their sectarian identity.<sup>17</sup> This flagrant violation of human dignity was accompanied by military personnel –again, strongly suspected of being affiliated with the transitional authorities– riding on the backs of the victims. The footage was filmed in the village of Al-Shir near Lataki

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<sup>12</sup> Facebook post, published 7 May 2025.

[https://www.facebook.com/story.php?story\\_fbid=10171850531895232&id=802160231](https://www.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=10171850531895232&id=802160231)

<sup>13</sup> Jamil Alhasaan (@Jamil\_Alhasaan), post on X, 24 April 2025.

[https://x.com/Jamil\\_Alhasaan/status/1915176341298626734](https://x.com/Jamil_Alhasaan/status/1915176341298626734)

<sup>14</sup> Ivan Hassib, video posted on Facebook, 30 April 2025.

<https://www.facebook.com/Ivan.Hassib/videos/665312246112058/>

<sup>15</sup> Al-Modon, “Hama: Youth Attacked for Allegedly Mingling with Girls,” 1 May 2025.

<https://www.almodon.com/amp/media/2025/5/1/حماة-اعتداء-على-شبان-بتهمة-الاختلاط-مع-فتيات/>

<sup>16</sup> Kabos Tel Rifat Telegram Channel, post dated 8 March 2025. <https://t.me/KabosTelRifat/22208>

<sup>17</sup> Facebook Reel, accessed 9 May 2025. <https://www.facebook.com/reel/1338518794153983>

- Moreover, a video,<sup>18</sup> published during the same period (mid-March 2025), along with additional footage –also from the village of Al-Shir near Latakia–<sup>19</sup> was verified by STJ as documenting incidents that occurred during the coastal events near the city of Latakia. The videos clearly show military personnel, strongly suspected of being affiliated with the transitional authorities, committing grave violations. These videos, circulated via Telegram channels supportive of the transitional government, depict acts of torture and humiliation targeting civilians from the Alawite sect, in addition to the use of offensive sectarian language.
- A separate video,<sup>20</sup> recorded by a masked individual –believed to be affiliated with General Security– in early May 2025, shows a Syrian citizen being forced to imitate the sound of a sheep using the phrase “say Maa” during events that involved violations against members of the Druze community in Damascus and its countryside, a blatant violation of human dignity.

Since the Constitutional Declaration<sup>21</sup> issued by the transitional government on 13 March 2025 confirmed the continued applicability of pre-existing laws unless amended or repealed, Law No. 16 of 2022 on the Prohibition of Torture theoretically remains in force. This imposes a legal obligation on the current government to implement it. However, the absence of any concrete steps toward enforcement, coupled with the ongoing widespread violations, demonstrates a clear lack of political will to genuinely prevent torture.

### **3. Paragraph (c): Investigating and prosecuting torture – justice and accountability**

Between 1 July 2024 and the date of this submission, STJ has not documented any genuine and transparent initiatives undertaken by either the former or current Syrian government– to ensure prompt, impartial, and independent investigations into torture cases, with the sole exception of the committee formed to investigate the massacres against the Alawite community in the Syrian coast.

On the contrary, dozens of individuals accused of past abuses under the former regime were arrested without being brought before judicial authorities, without access to legal counsel or family visitation, and without disclosure of their whereabouts. These

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<sup>18</sup> Kabos Tel Rifat Telegram Channel, dated 7 March 2025. <https://t.me/KabosTelRifat/22114>

<sup>19</sup> Syrdoc Telegram Channel, dated 15 March 2025. <https://t.me/Syrdoc/2219>

<sup>20</sup> Facebook Reel, accessed 9 May 2025. <https://www.facebook.com/reel/671390225784004>

<sup>21</sup> Al Jazeera, “Syria’s al-Sharaa Signs Five-Year Temporary Constitution,” 13 March 2025. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/3/13/syrias-al-sharaa-signs-five-year-temporary-constitution>

detentions were accompanied by acts of beating, torture, and property seizures, particularly in the Damascus suburbs of Harasta,<sup>22</sup> al-Moadamiyeh,<sup>23</sup> and al-Dimas<sup>24</sup>.

#### 4. Violations of Syria's Obligations Under International Law

The transitional Syrian government's failure to take concrete steps to protect individuals from torture, ill-treatment, and humiliation, along with its failure to hold perpetrators accountable, constitutes a violation of Syria's obligations under the Convention against Torture, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Geneva Conventions, and domestic Syrian law.

The government's lack of political will to prosecute those responsible for such violations is further evidenced by the appointment of individuals accused of serious abuses to senior positions, including:

- **Mohammad al-Jassem (Abu Amsha)**, accused of serious human rights violations, was appointed commander of the 25th Division under the Ministry of Defense on 2 February 2025.<sup>25</sup> The U.S. Department of the Treasury imposed sanctions on him and his militia (Suleiman Shah Brigade)<sup>26</sup> on 17 August 2023 for abuses in Afrin, including rape. The Syrian Islamic Council, through its Tripartite Committee, had also issued a decision on 16 February 2022 to dismiss him from all positions,<sup>27</sup> citing numerous violations including extortion of women, torture leading to death, and disabling injuries inflicted on fighters.
- **Seif Boulad (Abu Bakr)**, commander of the Hamza Division, was appointed head of the 76th Division in Aleppo,<sup>28</sup> despite being listed in the U.S. Treasury sanctions on 17 August 2023 for his group's involvement in documented torture

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<sup>22</sup> <https://stj-sy.org/en/stj-submits-report-to-damascus-governorate-on-cases-of-home-seizures-and-arbitrary-evictions-of-homeowners-in-harasta/>

<sup>23</sup> <https://stj-sy.org/en/stj-submits-report-on-cases-of-home-seizures-and-arbitrary-evictions-of-homeowners-in-muadamiyat-al-sham-in-damascus-countryside/>

<sup>24</sup> <https://stj-sy.org/en/stj-submits-report-on-cases-of-home-seizures-and-arbitrary-evictions-of-homeowners-in-al-dimas-in-damascus-countryside/>

<sup>25</sup> <https://english.enabbaladi.net/archives/2025/02/syrian-defense-ministry-appoints-abu-amsha-as-hama-brigade-commander/>

<sup>26</sup> <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/jy1699>

<sup>27</sup> Syria TV, 17 February 2022. <https://www.syria.tv/ما-الخطوة-التالية-بعد-قرار-اللجنة-بعزل-أبو-عمشة>

<sup>28</sup> Syria TV, "Seif al-Din Boulad Appointed Commander of the 76th Division in the Syrian Army in Aleppo," 3 February 2025. <https://www.syria.tv/تعيين-سيف-الدين-بولاد-قائداً-للفرقة-76-بالجيش-السوري-في-حلب>

practices.<sup>29</sup>

- **Ahmad Ihsan Fayad al-Hayes (Abu Hatim Shaqra)**, commander of Ahrar al-Sharqiya, was appointed by the transitional government to lead the 86th Division in Deir ez-Zor, Raqqa, and Hasakah.<sup>30</sup> He and his group had been sanctioned by the U.S. for abuses against civilians, including torture.<sup>31</sup> Human Rights Watch documented the death of a Kurdish civilian, Rezan Khalil, under torture in one of the group's detention centers in Afrin, based on testimonies from faction members, military police, and medical personnel.<sup>32</sup>

The appointment of such individuals, despite being sanctioned by international bodies and widely implicated in well-documented abuses, demonstrates the transitional government's lack of commitment to accountability or to a clear break from the abusive practices of the former regime, particularly torture and ill-treatment.

## 5. Recommendations

Based on the above, Syrians for Truth and Justice recommends that the transitional Syrian government take the following urgent and concrete measures, to fulfill Syria's international obligations and halt serious violations, chief among them torture and ill-treatment:

1. **Immediately end all practices of torture and degrading treatment** in detention centers or during security operations, and ensure that all military and security bodies are subject to judicial oversight.
2. **Unconditionally comply with the provisions of the Convention against Torture (1984)** and activate **Law No. 16 of 2022** by issuing clear implementing regulations and ensuring its application in all relevant cases, while subjecting all security bodies to independent judicial review.
3. **Cease the appointment of individuals implicated in serious violations**, including torture, to official or leadership positions, and ensure they are held accountable before an impartial and independent judiciary.
4. **Classify torture as a crime against humanity and a war crime** under domestic legislation, either by amending the current Penal Code or issuing a new law aligned with Syria's international obligations.

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<sup>29</sup> <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/jy1699>

<sup>30</sup> Asharq Al-Awsat, "Pro-Turkey Commander Appointed to Lead Forces in SDF Areas," 6 May 2025. <https://aawsat.com/شؤون-إقليمية/5139997-تعيين-عسكري-موال-لتركيا-فائداً-بمناطق-قسد>

<sup>31</sup> <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/jy0292>

<sup>32</sup> <https://www.hrw.org/report/2024/02/29/everything-power-weapon/abuses-and-impunity-turkish-occupied-northern-syria>

5. **Invite the Special Rapporteur on Torture to visit Syria**, in coordination with national and international human rights organizations, to assess the situation and provide recommendations.
6. **Allow full and permanent access to international mechanisms**, including the Independent International Commission of Inquiry, the Independent Institution on Missing Persons in Syria, and relevant Special Rapporteurs, to visit detention centers and review the conditions of detainees.



## 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.