

Statement on the Abduction of Women and Girls in Syria and the Need to Ensure Protection, Investigation, and Accountability



July 2026

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to Ensure Protection, Investigation, and Accountability**

The undersigned human rights organizations express their profound concern over the continued emergence of reports and consistent testimonies regarding the abduction and disappearance of women and girls across different regions of Syria, and the possible connection of these cases to arbitrary detention, enforced disappearance, human trafficking, forced marriage, extortion, sexual violence, and gender-based violence, as documented by United Nations bodies and Syrian and international human rights organizations since the beginning of 2025.

The nature and gravity of these allegations do not permit them to be dismissed as family matters or isolated incidents before they are subjected to independent, professional investigations. Likewise, classifying disappearances as voluntary departures, family disputes, or unfounded allegations must not be based on prior assumptions or video recordings whose circumstances of production have not been independently verified. Such determinations should instead rely on a private and secure interview with the victim, supported by evidence capable of judicial scrutiny, while taking into account the possibility that the victim may have been acting under coercion, threats, or fear of retaliation.

These incidents have had consequences extending far beyond the direct victims. They have contributed to widespread fear among women and girls, restricting their freedom of movement and access to education, employment, and public life. They have also discouraged some families from reporting disappearances due to fears of stigma, retaliation, or the belief that their complaints would not be taken seriously. These risks are compounded when those suspected are members of security agencies or individuals wielding significant influence, or when abuses occur in official or unofficial detention facilities. Such circumstances undermine public confidence in state institutions and raise serious concerns about the effectiveness of judicial oversight and the independence of investigations.

In this context, particular attention must be given to the case of university student Batoul Suleiman Alloush, whose family reported her disappearance in the city of Latakia before she later appeared in video recordings denying that she had been abducted and stating that she had left voluntarily. These recordings, however, cannot in themselves be regarded as sufficient evidence that coercion was absent. It therefore remains essential for an independent judicial authority to verify her whereabouts, ensure her safety and the voluntariness of her statements, and provide her with an opportunity to testify in private, free from the presence or influence of any person or entity that may exert pressure upon her. Reports indicating that she may have been staying with an unlicensed entity likewise warrant an official investigation into the nature of that entity, those responsible for operating it, and the legality of receiving or sheltering women and girls.

The undersigned organizations also express their deep concern regarding the recorded testimony of Walaa Mahmoud, originally from the countryside of Jableh, who stated

that she was abducted on 25 March 2026, subjected to detention, repeated assaults, and threats, and identified an individual whom she alleged held a security position in the city of Jableh. She further reported that she had been transferred to a security facility in Latakia Governorate, where she observed another woman detained in severely deteriorated physical and psychological condition and heard the sounds of other detainees being tortured.

Should these allegations be substantiated, they may constitute serious violations of Syrian law and international human rights law, including abduction, arbitrary detention, enforced disappearance, sexual violence, torture, and abuse of authority. They also raise concerns that official security powers may have been exploited to facilitate unlawful detention, abuse, and the prevention of the victim from contacting her family or accessing legal counsel. Such allegations require an immediate and independent judicial response.

Under the Constitutional Declaration and its international legal obligations, the Syrian state is required to respect and protect the rights of women and girls and to exercise due diligence in preventing, investigating, and punishing gender-based violence, whether committed by public officials, private actors, or non-state armed groups. This obligation extends beyond the mere establishment of formal complaint mechanisms. It requires the creation of independent, accessible, safe, and effective mechanisms capable of delivering tangible results, including establishing the fate of missing women, protecting victims, holding perpetrators accountable, and ensuring effective reparations.

Accordingly, the undersigned organizations call upon the Syrian authorities to:

Initiate an immediate, independent, transparent judicial investigation into the allegations contained in Walaa Mahmoud's testimony, encompassing all individuals suspected of direct involvement, ordering, facilitating, or concealing the alleged crimes; adopt measures to prevent any suspect from interfering with evidence or witnesses; and ensure protection for the victim and her family.

Suspend the official and security powers of any individual whose name is credibly implicated in the investigation until the competent proceedings are concluded, without prejudice to the presumption of innocence or the guarantees of a fair trial.

Determine the whereabouts of Batoul Suleiman Alloush and ensure that an independent judicial authority is able to interview her privately in order to verify her safety and the voluntariness of her statements, while officially informing her family of the findings, with full respect for her privacy and rights.

Investigate all unlicensed entities and locations suspected of being used to shelter or detain women, disclose all official and unofficial places of detention, and subject them to effective judicial oversight.

Establish an independent and specialized national mechanism to receive reports of the abduction and disappearance of women and girls, including a 24-hour hotline, focal points in all governorates, and investigative units staffed by trained female investigators and experts in sexual violence and digital evidence.

Guarantee protection for victims, survivors, witnesses, their families, and women human rights defenders against retaliation, intimidation, and defamation, while ensuring confidential and free access to medical, psychological, social, and legal support.

Publish regular and transparent data on the number of reported cases, measures taken, and investigation outcomes, while enabling independent oversight and the participation of specialized civil society organizations, with full protection of victims' confidentiality.

Recognizing the seriousness of the abduction of women and girls and conducting credible investigations into these incidents are fundamental prerequisites for protecting society and upholding the rule of law. The manner in which the Syrian authorities address the issue of abducted women and girls will serve as a critical test of their commitment to ensuring equality before the law, holding influential individuals accountable, preventing impunity, and restoring Syrians' trust in state institutions.

Organizations endorsing this statement:

1. Dawlaty
2. The Syria Campaign
3. Women Now for Development
4. Seen for Civil Peace
5. Badael
6. Syrian Justice and Accountability Centre (SJAC)
7. ADAD Center
8. Masar Forum
9. Mauj
10. Media for Women
11. Jana Watan
12. Syrian Women's Council
13. Musawah
14. The Syrian Women's Political Movement (SWPM)
15. Justice for Life (JFL)
16. Transformative Pathways
17. For Feminism/L'Ajil Al-Naswaya
18. Lëlûn
19. Feminist Studies in Ithaca
20. Hunna

21. Ta'afi Initiative
22. Syrians for Truth and Justice (STJ)
23. Synergy Association for Victims
24. Caesar Families Association (CFA)
25. Center for Civil Society and Democracy (CCSD)
26. Afrin Platform
27. Bayt Al-Narjes for Feminist Knowledge
28. Dar Adala
29. Yazidi Council of Syria
30. Equal Citizenship Center
31. Duroob Organization
32. MADAD for Development and Peacebuilding (MDP)
33. Kongra Star
34. Al-Noor Legal Foundation
35. Human Rights Organisation in Syria - MAF
36. Malva for Arts and Culture
37. Syrian Lemon Blossom Association
38. Nissan Organization
39. Duderi/Duderi
40. Syrian Women's Network
41. Tulip Organization
42. Syrian Legal Development Programme (SLDP)
43. Kesh Malek
44. PÊL - Civil Waves
45. khatwa
46. Huquqyat
47. Local Development and Small Projects Support (LDSPS)
48. The Digital Publisher
49. Syrian Center for Policy Research (SCPR)

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.