

Syria: Alarming Evidence that Torture Persists and the Machinery of Violence Is Being Rebuilt after Assad (June 2025–June 2026)



STJ Urges the Transitional Authorities to Adopt Urgent and Effective Measures to Prevent Torture, Close Unofficial Detention Facilities, Independently Investigate Violations, Hold Those Responsible to Account, and Provide Reparation to Victims and Their Families without Discrimination

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1. Executive Summary

More than a year and a half after the fall of the Assad regime and the opening of prisons and detention facilities long associated with torture and enforced disappearance, ill-treatment in Syria has not ceased.

Exclusive testimonies collected by Syrians for Truth and Justice (STJ) reveal that severe beatings, electric shocks, humiliation, threats, deprivation of basic necessities, and deaths in custody continue to be common practices at the hands of multiple security and military actors. These abuses have occurred in official and undisclosed detention facilities, at checkpoints, and during transfers and interrogations.

This expanded investigative report draws on **19 testimonies** from survivors of detention and torture, relatives of people who died or went missing in custody, and eyewitnesses. It also reviews official statements, human rights and media reports, and open-source material concerning **14 cases** in which individuals were subjected to torture or died in custody between June 2025 and June 2026. The report does not seek to provide an exhaustive account of all cases during this period. Rather, it analyses recurring practices and the institutional and security environments that allowed them to persist.

The testimonies obtained by STJ show that torture was not confined to interrogation rooms; in several cases, it began at the moment of arrest. Individuals were beaten at checkpoints and in the streets before being informed of the reasons for their detention or charged with any specific offence. Some were transferred, blindfolded and handcuffed, among several facilities without their arrest being clearly recorded or their families being told where they were held.

Several incidents bore strong indicia of torture, given the severity of the pain and suffering inflicted, the deliberate humiliation involved, and the use of such treatment to extract information or confessions, or for purposes of punishment, intimidation, coercion, or discrimination. Survivors described being punched and kicked and beaten with cables, sticks, plastic pipes, and rifle butts; subjected to electric shocks until they lost consciousness; threatened with death or execution; subjected to mock executions; partially stripped; and forced into degrading positions.

The report also documents forms of sexual violence and sexual torture, including threats to rape family members, sexual touching and sexual assault, and insults of a sexual nature.

In some incidents, wives and children were used to pressure and subdue detainees, while family members were themselves deprived of their liberty, held in inappropriate conditions, and denied food and healthcare.

The testimonies further show that sectarian, ethnic, or political identity; previous employment or military service; a person's area of origin; and the contents of mobile phones were used as grounds for suspicion and punishment without an adequate nexus to any individual criminal conduct. Beatings and interrogations were accompanied by sectarian, ethnic, and political insults, indicating that discrimination was not merely incidental but, in several cases, formed part of the purpose for which the torture was inflicted.

The harm was not limited to direct violence. Witnesses described being held in severely overcrowded cells lacking ventilation and hygiene and being denied adequate food, water, bathing facilities, and medical care. In some cases, these conditions caused or contributed to serious illnesses whose effects persisted after release. Some survivors were released with injuries and psychological trauma; others lost money, phones, and other property, while their families bore the costs of searching for them and securing treatment, as well as the toll of uncertainty over their fate.

The material reviewed by STJ includes deaths in detention facilities operated by different actors. In some cases, families were told that the death resulted from a medical condition; in others, families reported seeing injuries or marks on the bodies that they believed indicated violence. In the absence of independent medical reports or published investigative findings, it is not possible to determine conclusively the medical cause of death in each case. Nevertheless, a death occurring in the custody of a detaining authority, coupled with credible allegations of torture, triggers an obligation to conduct a prompt, independent, and transparent investigation.

The incidents documented in this report do not point to a single detention apparatus or one centralized chain of command directing all violations. Rather, they reveal multiple, overlapping detention structures comprising security and police services, military formations, armed factions, and local forces, as well as temporary or undisclosed facilities. Yet similar methods recurred across these actors: beatings upon arrest, torture during interrogation, discriminatory insults, incommunicado detention, denial of access to a lawyer and judicial oversight, and denial that certain individuals were in custody or withholding information from their families.

The multiplicity of actors and facilities, together with unannounced transfers, created accountability gaps and made it more difficult for families and lawyers to trace detainees and identify where abuses occurred. It also allowed each actor to disclaim responsibility for injuries or acts occurring before it received a detainee or after the detainee's transfer, in the absence of unified records, formal handover documentation, and independent medical examinations documenting the person's condition at every stage.

STJ concludes that the persistence of torture was linked to the absence or weakness of fundamental safeguards governing detention, foremost among them immediate registration, family notification, access to a lawyer, prompt appearance before a judicial authority, independent medical examination, and confinement only in officially recognized and monitored facilities. Torture often occurred while the detaining authority exercised exclusive control over the individual and all information concerning them, without effective judicial or external oversight.

In some cases, the relevant authorities announced investigations or formed committees to examine the circumstances of deaths or ill-treatment. Announcing an investigation, however, is not in itself evidence that accountability has been achieved. There is no public system for tracking the number of complaints, investigations, judicial referrals, judgments, or measures adopted to prevent recurrence. Nor is sufficient information available about the independence of investigations, the participation of families, or whether inquiries extend to persons in positions of command.

Given the recurrence of these practices, the involvement of multiple personnel, and their commission in several facilities, the problem cannot properly be reduced to isolated individual misconduct. Effective accountability must extend beyond the direct perpetrators of torture to those who ordered arrests, supervised detention facilities, knew or should have known of the abuses, and failed to prevent or investigate them or to ensure that victims received treatment.

The report concludes that the change in political authority has not yet been accompanied by the effective dismantling of the structures and practices that enable torture. A transition based on the rule of law cannot be built while undisclosed detention continues, mediation, exchanges, and security assurances substitute for judicial process, or accountability is applied selectively to the crimes of the former regime without ensuring that violations committed by present-day actors are also investigated.

STJ maintains that torture will not end through its condemnation in law or the announcement of investigations only after incidents become public. Ending torture requires subjecting all detaining

authorities to uniform rules and rigorous independent oversight; ensuring detainees' access to their families, lawyers, courts, and doctors from the outset; holding both direct perpetrators and persons in positions of command accountable; and securing truth, justice, and reparation for survivors and for the families of those who died in prison or disappeared after arrest.

2. Methodology

This report covers the period from June 2025 to June 2026 and is based on 19 testimonies collected by STJ from survivors of torture and detention, relatives of detainees and persons who died in custody, and eyewitnesses. Participants gave their informed consent after the voluntary nature of their participation and the intended use of the information—including publication in this report—were explained to them, and they were informed that they could withdraw their consent at any time. The report uses pseudonyms to protect sources and witnesses and withholds information that could identify or endanger them or their families.

STJ also reviewed human rights reports, media investigations, official statements, videos, and posts available through open sources. Additional information concerning 14 cases was used to establish context, identify further indicators, and compare the practices described in the testimonies with other reported incidents. No single social media post was relied upon unless corroborated by other sources or direct testimony.

3. Introduction: The Fall of the Regime Did Not End Torture

The opening of prisons and security service facilities operated by Bashar al-Assad's regime in December 2024 was a watershed moment in the Syrian public consciousness. Detainees emerged from facilities that had for decades been associated with torture, disappearance, and death, while families searched cells and abandoned records for traces of people who had disappeared years earlier. Dismantling this system should have been one of the clearest tests of any new political era.

Yet removing an authority that had used torture on a vast scale did not automatically end the practice or dismantle the conditions that enable it. In June 2025, STJ published an initial report documenting testimony that beatings, humiliation, and torture continued in the streets and detention facilities after the fall of the regime; it called on the transitional authorities to launch urgent and transparent investigations.¹

One year later, the testimonies examined in this expanded investigation indicate that those incidents were not merely abuses confined to the first months of the transitional period.

These accounts are consistent with the findings of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic. In its March 2026 report, the Commission documented torture and ill-treatment in 18 official detention facilities and 12 temporary facilities across several Syrian governorates, as well as incidents at checkpoints. The methods recorded included beatings with cables, rods, pipes, and rifle butts, electric shocks, suspension, the *dulab* “tyre” method, *falaka* (beating on the soles of the feet), mock executions, and sexual violence. The Commission also documented incommunicado detention, enforced disappearance, and deaths in custody.²

An investigation published by Reuters in December 2025 found that Syrian prisons were filling up again after having been emptied when the regime fell. It identified at least **829** people detained on

¹ Syrians for Truth and Justice, [Torture Persists: Testimonies and Indicators Reveal Alarming Incidents in Post-Assad Syria](#), 26 June 2025.

² Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, [document A/HRC/61/62](#), 12 March 2026.

security grounds and reported the renewed use of several Assad-era detention facilities, detention without clear charges or access to lawyers, torture, extortion, and poor conditions.³ These figures are not exhaustive, but they provide a further indication that the problem extends beyond separate individual incidents.

Nor are the violations limited to facilities controlled by the transitional government. Human rights reports and testimonies collected by STJ have documented torture, ill-treatment, and deaths in custody in areas controlled by the Autonomous Administration, as well as violations committed by factions, local formations, and armed forces in Afrin,⁴ Suwayda, and elsewhere.

This reality calls for rejecting two reductive approaches. The first is to treat every incident as an isolated individual act that does not reflect a broader problem. The second is to presume the existence of a single centralized system equivalent in structure and direction to the torture apparatus entrenched by the Assad regime. The available material reveals a more complex reality: actors and facilities vary, but victims described similar methods and encountered the same absence of safeguards.

State responsibility for torture arises not only where an explicit order is issued by the highest authority, but also where torture is committed by officials or personnel exercising public authority, or where the authorities know of recurring practices and fail to prevent or effectively investigate them. Armed groups and de facto authorities are likewise bound by the prohibition of torture and cruel treatment. This prohibition is absolute and admits no exception on grounds of war, security disturbances, or the gravity of the allegations against a detainee.

The report therefore asks not only who beat or electrocuted a detainee, but also: Who ordered the arrest? Where was it registered? Who supervised the transfer? Who could have stopped the torture but failed to do so? And why were families left unable to locate their relatives or obtain reliable reports concerning their deaths?

4. Arrest and Interrogation as Sites of Punishment and Humiliation

On the evening of 14 July 2025, "Saleh" and "Abdulrahman," two young men from al-Hasakah, were travelling back from Damascus to al-Hasakah. Each was driving one of two cars purchased by a car dealer from the area, along the route passing through Homs, Salamiyah, and Ithriyah towards Raqqa.

At the Ithriyah checkpoint, armed personnel stopped the car driven by Abdulrahman. One of them asked for his identification and questioned him about his city and military service. Abdulrahman denied having performed the Autonomous Administration's compulsory Self-Defence Duty and attempted to conceal his phone because it contained old photographs taken during his compulsory service. The officer found the phone and immediately began beating him.

Saleh had already crossed the checkpoint in the other car, but returned when he noticed that his companion had been detained. When he arrived, he saw the personnel covering Abdulrahman's head with his jacket and beating him. Saleh was soon subjected to the same treatment. Both men were taken to a room at the checkpoint, where they were questioned about their previous service and any connection to the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF).

The two men's accounts are consistent on the essential details: the time and location of the arrest; the two cars they were driving; the discovery on the phone of photographs connected to compulsory military service; the surname of one officer; the nature of the questions; the beatings

³ Reuters, [Syrians emptied Assad's prisons. They're filling up again, and abuse is rife](#), 22 December 2025.

⁴ Syrians for Truth and Justice, [Behind Closed Doors: Afrin's People Between Detention and Denial](#), 6 May 2026.

at the checkpoint; and their subsequent transfer in one of the cars to another detention facility. Other detainees told them that this facility was near the town of al-Sa'an, administratively part of Salamiyah in Hama Governorate, and was operated by the Suleiman Shah faction, also known as al-Amshat.

According to both witnesses, at that stage the beatings were not intended to obtain any specific information. They began as soon as the photographs were found, before anyone had sought to establish the nature of the men's service or whether they had taken part in hostilities. The men said that their captors accused them of affiliation with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) while beating them, and threatened that government forces would reach north-eastern Syria and eliminate the SDF. Saleh said:

"They accused us of belonging to the Kurdistan Workers' Party. They did not believe our denials and claimed that we should have left the area and fled. We tried to explain that we were citizens with families and relatives and could not simply leave our homes. But they beat us without mercy, as though we were their enemies. Their words were full of hatred and spite, and they directed extremely abusive insults at us."

The two men said that, at the second checkpoint, they were handed over to a man who spoke Arabic with a heavy accent and drove the car to a nearby facility. They also described another person with a similar accent who appeared to hold a command position. Both were beaten immediately upon arrival, before they were asked a single question. Personnel punched and kicked them, beat them with cables, and subjected them to electric shocks, before placing them in a small cell **"measuring no more than two metres by two metres, with five other detainees inside."**

During the night, each man was taken for interrogation three times. They were blindfolded, their hands were bound behind their backs, and, while walking, they were forced to grip the clothing of the person in front of them with their teeth. In the interrogation room, their trousers were pulled down to their lower legs—a measure they described as intended to humiliate them and restrict their movement. Both said they lost consciousness under torture and that personnel splashed water on their faces to revive them before resuming the interrogation.

They also described being deprived of food and water: during a prolonged period of detention, a single dish of yoghurt was provided for seven detainees.

Neither man was brought before a judge, informed of any specific legal charge, or allowed to contact a lawyer or his family. Their families learned where they were only after an acquaintance began showing their photographs and asking about them at checkpoints.

After four days, the men were transferred to another facility in Hama city whose name or precise location they could not identify. Their treatment changed there: they were given food and allowed to bathe. They were later released following the intervention of intermediaries and warned not to return to SDF-controlled areas. They said that money, luggage, and equipment kept in the car had disappeared during their detention.

The use of phone contents as a basis for suspicion and punishment was not limited to government-affiliated actors. In a case involving the SDF, "Karim," a relative of detainee [Munther al-Ezzo](#) from Qamishli, said that SDF personnel arrested him on 20 January 2026 after finding on his phone a photograph of Transitional President Ahmed al-Sharaa that he had posted as a WhatsApp status. According to the testimony, Munther was beaten at the checkpoint and transferred among several detention facilities. His family then lost all contact with him until his body, bearing signs of torture, was returned on 22 April 2026.

These cases demonstrate how searches of mobile phones at checkpoints have become a means of uncovering people's views, relationships, or earlier periods of their lives, and treating them as evidence of loyalty or hostility, without any necessary connection to a criminal act or a specific threat.

The testimonies did not describe interrogation as a process intended to gather information or determine whether a specific offence had been committed. In the documented cases, detainees entered the interrogation room after already being beaten and were repeatedly returned there to face the same questions, while the torture continued whenever they denied the allegations or could not provide the answers their interrogators sought.

In the cases of Saleh and Abdulrahman, who were detained at the Ithriyah checkpoint, their answers did not lead to a discussion of the acts alleged against them or to their being confronted with evidence. Instead, further torture followed. Abdulrahman said that he gave a false account in the hope that the pain would stop:

"I told them that my old injuries were from fighting, even though they resulted from a traffic accident, just to make them stop this torment. I no longer had the strength to resist. I was physically and psychologically exhausted and wanted only for the pain to end."

This account illustrates one direct consequence of torture during interrogation: it does not necessarily elicit the truth, but may drive detainees to repeat what they believe their interrogators want to hear. Statements extracted in this way therefore have no probative value and cannot be regarded as voluntary or reliable confessions.

The separation of interrogation from genuine information-gathering also recurred in the testimonies of detainees from Suwayda. "Majed," a firewood vendor in Suwayda, said that on 14 July 2025 an armed group stopped the vehicle in which he was travelling with women, children, and young men at the al-Majdal junction in Suwayda Governorate. Some members identified themselves as General Security personnel, while others were armed members of tribal groups.

According to the witness, the personnel immediately began beating the young men. They then took them to the General Security headquarters in Izra, Daraa Governorate, then to the city's Political Security branch, and finally to the General Security branch in Daraa city. At all three facilities, they were repeatedly beaten with wooden sticks, rubber hoses, and plastic pipes, without being told why they had been detained. Majed recounted:

"They began beating us from the moment they pulled us out of the car. Several officers grabbed me, then one came running and punched me hard in the head and face, breaking my teeth. They then struck my back and body with rifle butts and other implements until I fell to the ground."

Majed said that in Daraa an official entered the detention area and told the detainees:

"Get ready. We buried one of you today."

According to the witness, several personnel carrying a large hose and batons then entered and began beating the detainees. The reference to a detainee's death was not used to warn against violence or initiate an investigation, but to terrorize the others and suggest that the same fate might await them.

Another detainee from Suwayda, "Raed" (33), said that personnel and guards **"from the tribes who carried Ministry of Defence identification cards"** forced him during transfers between locations to

kneel blindfolded at the roadside. They then ordered him to recite the two declarations of faith and told him that they would kill him:

"They would say, 'We are going to finish you off now.' This happened many times."

The threat was unrelated to an investigative procedure or judicial decision. It amounted to repeated mock execution designed to keep the detainee in a state of constant fear. Raed continued:

"I do not know what fear does to a person, but eventually we stopped feeling afraid."

Although Raed said that the threats and mock executions affected him more severely than the beatings, he described the physical torture in Izra as extraordinarily violent and said it caused a lasting injury:

"General Security personnel used four-core cables, batons, and other implements. The beating was so severe that I lost consciousness twice, and they woke me up only to beat me again. Sometimes we did not know what we were being whipped with or who was beating us. To this day, I have a health problem in my shoulder and right hand as a result."

These testimonies demonstrate that the interrogation room was not the only site of torture and that violence was not always used to obtain information. It was also inflicted to punish detainees for their perceived identities, compel submission, terrorize them during transfers, and make them feel that their lives depended on the immediate decisions of their captors rather than on any law or court to which they could appeal.

5. Identity and Perceived Affiliation as Grounds for Suspicion and Punishment

The testimonies show that a number of detainees were treated not on the basis of specific individual conduct, but according to their identities, areas of origin, previous service, or photographs found on their phones. In these cases, collective labels displaced individualized investigation: "SDF member," "follower of al-Hijri," "Druze," "Assad supporter," or "regime remnant."

In the testimonies of detainees from Suwayda, repeated questions focused on perceived sectarian and political affiliation. "Samih" (46) said he was asked several times whether he belonged to an armed faction or was a follower of Sheikh Hikmat al-Hijri, one of the Druze community's spiritual leaders and an opponent of the transitional government. This was despite Samih's insistence that he was a civilian concrete worker with no political or military affiliation:

"I always answered that I was a civilian, that I did not belong to any political or military group, and that my life consisted of going from home to work and back again."

His answers did not protect him from beatings and death threats. He said he was arrested in Suwayda city and transferred to a Military Police facility, where he was beaten with metal objects, cables, and rifle butts. A knife was held to his throat and he was ordered to recite the *shahada*. Samih said:

"The marks of torture remained visible all over my body, which was covered in bruises and wounds. For 74 days I could move only by crawling on all fours, and I could not sit normally."

He was subsequently transferred among several detention facilities, which he described as follows:

"Throughout all the interrogations I underwent, I never felt that the regime in Syria had changed. All the prisons, branches, detention facilities, and jailers still use the same methods as under the former regime."

The testimonies also described insults directed at the Druze community during arrest, transfer, and interrogation. "Fadel" (22), a university student, said that the beatings inflicted after his arrest reopened earlier wounds that had not yet healed and that he and other detainees were repeatedly insulted personally and on account of their sectarian identity.

The testimony of "Samir" (20), from Latakia, illustrates how the misreading of a name, coupled with preconceived sectarian categorization, can become a basis for detention and violence. On the morning of 29 April 2026, Samir was travelling from the village of al-Bahluliyah to Latakia city when his bus stopped at a security checkpoint at the city entrance. Personnel asked his name and, because of a slight difference between otherwise similar surnames, assumed he was connected to Sheikh Ghazal Ghazal, an Alawite cleric opposed to the transitional government. One officer ordered him off the bus while insulting him and accusing him of protesting against the State:

"He insulted my mother and said, 'You pig, I will make you protest against the State now.'"

The officer seized Samir by the elbow, dragged him off the bus, and ordered the driver to leave. Samir said that the officer punched and kicked him in the face and body until he lost consciousness.

After he regained consciousness, a person known as "the Sheikh" interrogated him. Samir tried to explain that his family name was unconnected to Sheikh Ghazal's, but the interrogator refused to believe him. Samir said:

"I tried every possible way to convince him, but he kept insisting that I was a lying Nusayri pig. The Sheikh and the armed personnel subjected me to the most obscene and viciously racist insults."

In another case, "Suleiman" (41), an Alawite, was threatened and tortured in detention. His detention began before the period principally covered by this report and continued into that period until his release on the morning of 17 February 2026.

Suleiman said that he was initially held in Aleppo Central Prison, where a person known as "the Sheikh" approached him. The man wore Afghan-style clothing and, in the witness's view, was a foreign fighter who spoke halting Modern Standard Arabic. Suleiman added:

"The Sheikh told me and two other Alawites detained with me: 'There will be no mercy or compassion for you. We have no choice but to detain you, interrogate you, and then kill you, in the hope that killing you will intercede for us on the Day of Judgment.'"

Suleiman explained that he was later transferred to a prison in the Sarmada area of Idlib Governorate, where armed men received him by whipping him and beating him with wooden batons until he lost consciousness. During interrogation, the interrogator explicitly linked his detention to his sectarian identity, saying:

"I will not ask which sect you belong to, because we arrest only Alawite pigs."

Suleiman added that the interrogation lasted approximately eight hours and covered details of his life, family, and military service. He was then ordered to recite the two declarations of faith and **"proclaim his conversion to Islam,"** even though he was already Muslim. He was also held with around 50 people in a cell measuring no more than ten square metres. They were forced to pray, read the Qur'an, and follow a food regimen akin to forced fasting.

These testimonies show that, in a number of cases, perceived affiliation substituted for individualized suspicion, and that sectarian, ethnic, and political rhetoric accompanied the violence and helped justify it in the eyes of the perpetrators.

6. From One Authority to Another: Detainee Transfers and Accountability Gaps

One of the patterns most frequently reported in the testimonies was the transfer of detainees among several actors and facilities within a short period, without their knowing the name of the place in which they were held or the legal basis for their transfer. Detention might begin at the hands of a local or tribal group, after which the individual would be handed over to an armed faction, the Military Police, or a security service before ultimately being transferred to a central prison.

Handing a detainee to another authority does not extinguish the first authority's responsibility for violations it committed. Nor does it relieve the receiving authority of its duty to register the detainee, examine their health, assess any visible injuries, and prevent further torture. The testimonies nevertheless indicate that handovers took place without clear procedures allowing responsibility to be traced at each stage.

In the case of "Jwan" (26), a tailor from Aleppo's Ashrafiyah neighbourhood, the detention began at the hands of personnel whom he identified as members of the al-Baggara tribe, one of Syria's largest Arab tribes, whose members are concentrated principally in the governorates of Deir ez-Zor, Aleppo, and Raqqah. He was beaten and his phone and money were stolen before he was handed over to other factions, then to the Military Police, and finally to a prison in Raqqah.

Jwan summarized the course of his detention as follows:

"The Military Police received us from fighters of the Arab al-Baggara tribe. During the three hours we remained in their custody, the insults and beatings never stopped... I noticed that some personnel wore green or red bands on their arms, while others wore black headbands bearing the words, 'There is no god but Allah.'"

Jwan continued:

"Later, the Military Police and General Security took us to the Military Security branch—the Northern Region Command—where I was beaten with green plastic pipes and a four-core cable, subjected to electric shocks, and verbally abused. The torture continued inside the prison and during interrogation. I was never examined by a doctor. I was questioned on suspicion of belonging to a military or armed group, but I admitted only the truth: that I was a civilian."

The testimonies of victims from Suwayda reveal longer and more complex routes. "Fadel" (22), a university student, said that after his arrest he was transferred among several locations in Suwayda, then to the village of al-Mazraa on the road to al-Walgha, then to Military Police custody in Izra and afterwards to General Security, before ultimately being transferred to Adra Prison. Fadel said:

"During that period, I was repeatedly beaten and both I and my sect were insulted... In Izra, I was tortured for several days... At Adra Prison, we were barred from contacting our families or a lawyer, and we were treated badly."

Fadel's uncle, who was arrested with him, remained missing as far as the family was concerned. When Fadel appeared before a judge in Adra, he saw his uncle's name in documents which, as far as he could read, indicated that his uncle was being held in Damascus Central Prison. The judge asked that he be brought before the court, but an employee returned and said that this was impossible **"for security reasons."**

In the case of Raed (33), his detention began on the evening of 16 July 2025 at the hands of an armed group from the Mawali tribe, an Arab tribe inhabiting north-western and central Syria, particularly Idlib and Hama, which intended to use him in a prisoner exchange.

"During the first few days, we were held in a house belonging to the tribe. We were bound, beaten, and insulted without interruption. They forced us to imitate animal sounds and trampled us underfoot. Some children even joined in beating and humiliating us in front of the adults."

Eleven days later, Raed was handed over to General Security in Hama. He was then transferred to a branch in Damascus whose location he could not identify, followed by Izra, Daraa, and finally Adra Prison.

This chain of handovers creates gaps through which accountability can be lost. The final authority may claim that a detainee's injuries were inflicted before arrival, while independent medical records documenting the detainee's condition at handover are generally absent. Families may also remain unable to identify which authority holds their relatives, because each actor treats the detainee's presence in its custody as a temporary stage that does not require notification.

The danger arises not only from the length of the transfer route, but also from the nature of some of the locations used. Raed described being held in a private home; Fadel referred to a car showroom used to assemble detainees; and Saleh and Abdulrahman described a facility near al-Sa'an in the Salamiyah area whose name and official affiliation they could not identify.

Such temporary and undisclosed facilities heighten the risk of torture because they operate outside ordinary oversight and because lawyers, families, and independent bodies cannot determine whether detainees are held there. After release, it is also difficult to identify the authority that managed the premises or the individuals who issued orders inside.

7. Conditions of Detention: Harm Beyond the Interrogation Room

The prohibition of torture and ill-treatment is not limited to preventing beatings and electric shocks. Conditions of detention may themselves amount to cruel or inhuman treatment when detainees are crammed into overcrowded and insanitary premises and denied water, air, and medical care, particularly where the authorities know of these conditions and fail to remedy them.

The harm inside detention facilities was not limited to overcrowding and the denial of basic necessities. "Firas," a former fighter with the People's Protection Units (YPG), said that in Aleppo's Political Security Prison he was subjected to electric shocks and beaten with cables and plastic pipes. He added that guards inflicted violence inside the dormitory with no connection to any interrogation:

"They would come in the evening to amuse themselves with us. They would walk among the prisoners, choose one of us, place him in the middle of the room, and start beating him."

Jwan (26), from Aleppo, gave a harrowing description of the room in which he was held inside Aleppo's Military Security Prison:

"They put us in a room measuring six metres by four, and there were 85 detainees. The toilet was exposed and blocked, sewage overflowed from it, there was no ventilation, and the room was extremely damp."

He said that unsanitary conditions continued to varying degrees at Political Security and Raqqa Prison and caused him to contract tuberculosis. Before his release, he was hospitalized for one week and was then released as part of an exchange after approximately three months in detention.

At the time of his interview, Jwan was still receiving treatment for tuberculosis in al-Hasakah and living apart from his family to avoid infecting them. His case demonstrates that the effects of detention do not necessarily end when the prison door opens. He emerged with an illness requiring prolonged treatment and separation from his family, in addition to having lost his home and property to theft.

In the cases of Saleh and Abdulrahman, the witnesses said that seven detainees were confined in a cell **"measuring no more than two metres by two metres."** For a prolonged period, their food consisted of a single dish of yoghurt, while the limited quantities of water were insufficient for all those held there. This deprivation was not separate from the torture; it occurred alongside beatings, electric shocks, and humiliation.

Fadel also said that earlier wounds on his body began bleeding again as a result of the beatings and that he was not taken to a hospital until approximately 35 days after his detention began.

The testimonies also show that conditions were not uniform across all facilities or at every stage of detention. Some witnesses reported that their treatment improved after they were transferred elsewhere, or following intervention by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and increased external attention to their cases.

Fadel described an improvement in treatment after external actors began monitoring the case of Druze detainees at Adra Prison, after which they were allowed to make calls and receive food and clothing. Samih likewise said that an ICRC visit to Adra Prison helped detainees inform their families where they were being held.

The convergence of these accounts underscores the importance of external oversight and independent access to detainees. It also raises a fundamental question: why did detainees require external intervention before they could contact their families or receive better treatment, when these safeguards should form part of the ordinary detention regime from the outset?

This confirms that preventing torture requires more than issuing instructions to personnel. It requires a system permitting regular, independent access to every place of detention; the registration of every detainee; medical examination upon admission, transfer, and release; and guarantees that no one is held at a facility outside judicial and administrative oversight.

8. Deaths in Custody: Official Accounts Are No Substitute for Independent Investigation

A person's death in a detention facility does not, by itself, establish that the person died as a result of torture. Nevertheless, when a person dies while under the complete control of a detaining authority, that authority is under a heightened obligation to explain what occurred, preserve evidence, and conduct an investigation capable of establishing the cause of death and responsibility for it, rather than merely informing the family of a brief account that cannot be independently verified.

These obligations assume even greater importance when a death is preceded by an arrest for undisclosed reasons, incommunicado detention without access to family or counsel, or allegations that injuries were visible on the body. In such cases, an investigation is the essential safeguard against the authority that controlled the victim becoming the sole source of information about the death.

8.1. A "Medical Emergency" without a Detailed Medical Report

In March 2026, [Ahmed Ibrahim al-Ayada al-Dayeh](#) was arrested in the market of al-Tabni, in rural Deir ez-Zor, according to "Salim," a relative of the victim. Ahmed had previously served in the Syrian army under the former regime. Following the change in power, he regularized his status and provided the relevant centres with his personal details and place of residence.

Salim said that Ahmed did not engage in military activity after returning home and was arrested without being shown a warrant or his family being told why. Twenty days later, on 22 April, the family was informed that he had died in detention.

According to Salim, the family received only a cursory explanation:

"The relevant authority said that the death resulted from a medical emergency, without providing a detailed medical report or allowing an independent body to verify the cause of death."

The phrase "medical emergency" does not, in itself, adequately explain what occurred. It does not identify the nature of the condition, when symptoms first appeared, or what care was provided; whether Ahmed received a medical examination upon admission to the detention facility or before his death; or whether injuries or detention conditions contributed to his deterioration.

Nor does the existence of a natural medical cause automatically absolve the detaining authority of responsibility. A death may result from an untreated illness, a delay in transferring a detainee to hospital, denial of medication, or detention conditions that aggravated a pre-existing condition. An investigation must therefore examine not only the immediate anatomical cause of death, but also the chain of decisions and omissions preceding it.

This includes reviewing admission and transfer records, the identities of those responsible for the detainee, the times at which medical care was requested, medication and examination records, statements by fellow detainees, and any available surveillance footage. The body must also be examined by a forensic doctor independent of the detaining authority and acting under the supervision of an independent judiciary. The family should receive a copy of the medical report and the investigation findings, subject only to limitations strictly necessary to protect the integrity of judicial proceedings.

8.2. A Body Returned Months after All News of the Victim Ceased

The death of [Munther al-Ezzo](#), from Qamishli, raises additional concerns because of the prolonged period during which his family had no news of him. According to "Karim," a person close to the victim, Munther was arrested on 20 January 2026 at a checkpoint in Qamishli. He was transferred between al-Sina'a Prison and Jerkin Prison in rural Qamishli and then to the National Security Prison near Mount Kawkab in al-Hasakah Governorate—information the family reportedly obtained from a former detainee. His relatives were unable to contact him or obtain official information about his situation until they received his body on 22 April 2026.

The source said:

"Throughout his detention, all news of him ceased and fears for his fate mounted. Then came the shock on 22 April, when the Military Relations Office in Qamishli, which is affiliated with the Autonomous Administration, returned his body to his family after it had been brought from the military hospital in the town of Himo."

The source said that people who examined the body while preparing it for burial observed injuries to the back, chest, and thighs and marks resembling those caused by electric shocks, including swollen veins and signs of internal bleeding.

Specific allegations of injuries on the body of a person who died after being held incommunicado provide reasonable grounds for an independent criminal and medical investigation, rather than a merely administrative inquiry by the body implicated in the detention.

In particular, the investigation should identify the authority that held Munther at every stage; the date of each transfer; when he was last seen alive; who interrogated him or supervised his cell; the actual place of death; when he was transferred to the military hospital; and the measures taken before his death was announced.

The documented cases are not limited to government detention facilities. In a similar case, [Alaa al-Amin](#) died while in the custody of a security body affiliated with the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria.

On 8 March 2026, after months of searching and denials by the relevant authorities that Alaa was in their custody, his family learned of his death. When the family arrived at the National Hospital in al-Hasakah to receive his body, they were told to search for him inside the morgue refrigerators. When they found him, they reported that Alaa was "**handcuffed**" and that his body bore injuries, including bleeding from the head, a broken nose, and blows to various parts of his body. The family also received a preliminary medical report attributing the death to a heart attack and recording the date of death as 16 January 2026—almost two months before the family was notified. This raises serious questions about the delay in notification and the continued denial of his detention during that period.

The Internal Security Forces (Asayish) [acknowledged](#) that Alaa had died in custody and announced on 10 March 2026 that it had formed an investigative committee and would publish the findings. As of the date of this report, however, no update or findings had been made public.

8.3. Returning a Victim's Body Is Not Sufficient to Close the Case

The testimonies and open-source material reviewed by STJ included other cases in which persons were reported to have died while in the custody of bodies affiliated with the transitional government or other local forces. Responses varied: some authorities denied torture; some announced investigative committees or the arrest of certain personnel; and others provided insufficient information about subsequent measures.

Announcing an investigation does not mean that the legal obligation has been discharged. The standard is not whether a body called an "investigative committee" exists, but whether it can actually access evidence, operate independently of the authority suspected of responsibility, and identify both the direct perpetrators and those who issued orders or knew of the violations and failed to prevent them.

Under international standards, investigations into deaths in custody must be prompt, effective, thorough, independent, impartial, and sufficiently transparent to ensure accountability. Families should be meaningfully involved, kept informed of the investigation's progress, allowed to submit

evidence in their possession, and able to challenge medical findings where there are serious grounds for doing so.⁵

Responsibility should not be confined to the person who directly caused the death. It must extend to those who ordered torture, allowed a known practice to continue, concealed the detainee's whereabouts, failed to provide treatment, or tampered with records or evidence. Administrative and criminal responsibility may also arise from gross negligence, even where it is not established that torture directly caused the death.

Accordingly, a family's inability to prove the cause of death does not shift onto it the burden of uncovering what happened inside a facility to which it had no access. The authority that detained the individual and controlled their movements, food, and treatment holds the records and evidence. It must provide a complete and verifiable account rather than require the family to accept an undocumented conclusion.

8.4. Other Cases Identified through Open Sources

In addition to cases based on direct testimony, STJ reviewed media reports and open-source material concerning deaths and assaults occurring in custody or at the hands of security officials and personnel during the period covered by the report.⁶

In the [case of Yusuf al-Labbad](#), who died at the Internal Security's al-Hamidiyah Prison in Damascus, the Syrian authorities [announced an investigation](#) following his death in July 2025, after his family accused security personnel of torturing him. On 19 August 2025, Damascus Attorney General Hossam Khattab published a summary of the [findings of a three-member medical committee](#). The committee stated that the death resulted from cerebral hypoxia caused by a seizure and that the visible injuries were not the cause of death.

On 10 August 2025, [Abdulrahman Jaajoul](#) died while in custody at al-Kallaseh Police Station in Aleppo city, after being arrested on suspicion of stealing a motorcycle. According to a relative, the family saw signs of beatings on his body, and the forensic medical report stated that the cause of death was a severe blow to his genitalia.

In Homs, the family of [Muhannad al-Saleh](#) received his body on 25 August 2025, [approximately six months after his arrest](#) in the village of Ain al-Dananir in rural Homs. According to published information, a seven-person force raided his home, beat and insulted him while arresting him in front of his family, and transferred him to al-Balouneh Prison in Homs.

[Milad Aziz al-Farkh](#), from the town of Kafra in Wadi al-Nasara, also died in al-Balouneh Prison on 9 September 2025, approximately two weeks after his arrest. Published accounts differed as to the reason for his arrest, while [his family told Reuters](#) that his body bore injuries indicating that he had been struck on the back of the head. Local residents demanded a transparent investigation.

In the [case of Atallah Saleh al-Fayyad](#), who was reportedly killed in September 2025 in Damascus's Masaken Barzeh neighbourhood as a result of torture by members of the patrol that arrested him, the [Ministry of Interior stated](#) that the patrol members involved had been detained and an

⁵ The [Minnesota Protocol on the Investigation of Potentially Unlawful Death \(2016\)](#) requires investigations to be prompt, effective, thorough, independent, impartial, and transparent, and requires the preservation of evidence, forensic examinations, and family participation. Article 12 of the Convention against Torture also requires a prompt and impartial investigation wherever there is reasonable ground to believe that torture has been committed.

⁶ STJ was unable independently to verify every detail of these incidents or review the original medical reports. It therefore presents them as incidents requiring investigation.

investigation opened. The available material, however, does not provide sufficient information about the investigation's outcome, any judicial referral, or any judgment.

In Azaz city, local sources reported in October 2025 that businessman [Fadi al-Naes died](#) after being held inside a security headquarters in the city. They linked his detention to a personal dispute and an attempt to force him to relinquish his property. [Some open sources](#) indicated that a forensic physician's report recorded the cause of death as a heart attack.

In north-eastern Syria, [local media sources reported](#) that [Muhammad Jasim al-Hamidi](#) died several hours after his arrest in August 2025 at the Abu Rasin checkpoint in the rural area of Tell Tamer, north of al-Hasakah, following an altercation with SDF personnel. His family was reportedly informed of his death within hours of his arrest. In another incident, the family of [Saleh Mahmoud al-Tammar](#) received his body in October 2025 after he died in an SDF detention facility in Raqqa; the family was told that the incident resulted from a case of mistaken identity. Reports also circulated of the death of [Muhammad Hassan al-Jumaa several hours after his arrest](#) by SDF personnel following a raid on his home in eastern rural Raqqa. No independent investigative findings or published medical reports were available in relation to these cases.

In Suwayda, [Sheikh Raed al-Matni](#) was humiliated and had his beard and moustache shaved while in detention. His body was later found alongside that of [Sheikh Maher Falhout](#) outside the National Hospital in early December 2025. [Media sources](#) reported that the two men had previously been arrested by members of the [National Guard Forces](#), a Druze military formation comprising several local factions merged under the leadership of Sheikh Hikmat al-Hijri. Based in Suwayda Governorate in southern Syria, the formation was announced on 23 August 2025 following the Suwayda massacres.

One death did not occur in a detention facility, but in a public institution at the hands of its officials. Yahya Hussein Nana'a died in April 2026 following an altercation and assault inside the Aleppo Transport Directorate. [According to the victim's son](#), several government employees severely beat his father, who fell to the ground during the assault. No ambulance was immediately called and he subsequently died. [Official bodies acknowledged](#) that an altercation with employees had taken place, that those involved had been detained, and that the case had been referred to the judiciary; they attributed the death to a heart attack.

Published incidents were not limited to deaths in prison. In March 2026, a [video recording](#) circulated showing an older man and a young man with injuries after their detention at Ain Tarma Police Station in rural Damascus. The [Ministry of Interior acknowledged](#) that two personnel had assaulted them and announced that both had been arrested and that legal and disciplinary investigations had been opened.

These cases reveal three recurring problems: deaths or serious injuries in the custody of bodies exercising public authority; discrepancies between official and family accounts concerning their causes; and the difficulty of obtaining independent medical and judicial findings.

9. When Families Do Not Know Where to Search: Incommunicado Detention and the Absence of an Official Process

Several testimonies show that part of detainees' suffering arose from their entry into a detention process that their families could not trace from beginning to end: personnel who did not identify themselves, facilities that denied the person's presence, transfers of which no one was notified, and repeated promises of release that were never fulfilled.

Detaining a person and then refusing to acknowledge the detention or concealing the person's fate or whereabouts, thereby placing them outside the protection of the law, may satisfy the elements of enforced disappearance even where it lasts only a short time. Where not all elements can be established, or the status of the responsible actor cannot be determined, undisclosed or unacknowledged detention remains a serious violation that sharply increases the risk of torture.

9.1. Arrest and the Search for Detainees: Between Denial and Extortion

On the morning of 20 May 2026, a security force raided the village of al-Hanadi in Latakia Governorate, according to "Zuhair," the father of "Hussein," a former conscript who had regularized his status. Zuhair said that personnel stormed the house and demanded the identity documents of family members. When Hussein (27) produced his "settlement" card, one officer said:

"Welcome, remnant of the defunct regime... Drag this pig away."

Family members tried to explain that Hussein's service had been compulsory and clung to him to prevent the personnel from taking him away. The personnel struck his father and brother with rifles and kicked them, then took Hussein. According to the testimony, no arrest warrant was shown and the family was not told where he would be taken.

A detainee who was later released told the family that he had been held with Hussein and that both had been beaten, subjected to electric shocks, and whipped with sticks and wires, and denied food and water in a cold, damp place. In the days that followed, the family contacted security and local authorities in search of him but received no clear official information about his whereabouts or legal status. At the same time, they began receiving calls from Turkish and Iraqi numbers. The callers claimed to know where Hussein was, and some demanded USD 50,000 in exchange for his release or for information.

These calls demonstrate how secrecy and the absence of official channels create a market for exploitation. When a family does not know where its relative is held, anyone can claim to have information and demand payment on the strength of claims that cannot be verified.

Zuhair said:

"I want nothing except for my son to return safe and well."

Prompt intervention is critical in such cases because the first hours and days are when the risk of torture is highest. The longer a person remains in custody outside any accessible register, the greater the opportunity for personnel to interrogate, transfer, or abuse them without oversight.

It should also be noted that the "settlement" card—whether in Hussein's case or in other cases documented in the report—did not protect its holder from arrest. On the contrary, it became a means of identifying him and treating him as a suspect. This undermines the stated purpose of the settlement process and makes those who disclosed their details to the authorities more vulnerable to targeting rather than affording them a clear legal status.

9.2. Ninety-Three Days without a Judge

In another case, "Moayad" and his son were arrested at their home in Salhab, Hama Governorate, on 7 January 2026. Moayad said that an armed force of more than ten personnel stormed the house. One pointed a handgun at his head and struck him with the pistol grip before taking him and his son away.

They were first taken to the security centre in al-Suqaylabiyah and then to Political Security in Hama. According to his testimony, Moayad was detained for 93 days and interrogated during this period, but was never brought before a judge or served with a judicial decision authorizing the continued deprivation of his liberty.

Moayad said:

"The interrogations focused principally on Sheikh Ghazal Ghazal, my relationship with him, and why I had participated in the strike attributed to him. Each time, I insisted that I had no connection to this person or those events."

Moayad was not allowed to see his son until approximately 63 days had passed. The father was then released alone, while the son remained in custody:

"To this day, my son Ali remains detained and has not been released. I do not know his status or why his detention continues."

Separating the father and son and withholding information about them for a prolonged period illustrate the absence of one of the fundamental safeguards against torture: prompt judicial oversight. Appearance before a judge is not a formality that can be postponed until after a security investigation has concluded. It is a means of reviewing the legality of the arrest, hearing allegations of ill-treatment, and ordering a medical examination or release where no legal basis exists.

International standards require a person detained on a criminal charge to be brought before a judge without delay. The Human Rights Committee has stated that any delay exceeding 48 hours must remain exceptional and be justified.⁷ Investigative necessity or the nature of the allegation cannot justify holding a person for three months under the control of the very service that arrested them, without genuine judicial review.

Ali's continued detention without his father being informed of the charge or judicial status affects not only the son's rights, but also subjects the family to continuing uncertainty. It is not sufficient for his name to be internally recorded by the service if basic information is withheld from his family and lawyer and he has no means of challenging his detention.

9.3. "Two Hours and He'll Be Back"

On 2 January 2025, an armed group entered the home of the brother of "Raghad," a witness from Homs, searched it, and arrested him without showing a warrant or identifying themselves.⁸ When his wife asked where they were taking him, the personnel replied:

"Two hours and he'll be back."

He did not return after two hours, and the family did not know where he was. His mother began visiting security branches and asking about him but obtained no information. The family later learned—when they met him during a prison visit—that he had spent approximately 45 days in Military Security and had been tortured during the first ten days, before being transferred to Homs Central Prison.

⁷ In [General Comment No. 35](#), the Human Rights Committee affirms that prompt appearance before a judge is a fundamental safeguard against arbitrary detention and ill-treatment and that any delay exceeding 48 hours must remain exceptional and be justified.

⁸ This case began before the principal period covered by the report. Its continuation during the reporting period, the detainee's subsequent transfer to Hessiya Prison, and the cessation of family visits following the transfer nevertheless make it relevant to the analysis of prolonged detention and legal uncertainty.

Raghad said that her brother was repeatedly told he would be released at the end of the month, but these promises were not fulfilled. During one interrogation session, he was required to sign documents whose contents he did not know while blindfolded.

Signing a document a person cannot read cannot be regarded as a free expression of their will. Any statement shown to have been obtained through torture must be excluded from all proceedings, except when used against a person accused of torture as evidence that the statement was made. This exclusion protects not only the accused's rights but the integrity of justice itself. A confession born of pain tells an interrogator what they want to hear, not necessarily what happened, and may lead to the conviction of innocent people while concealing those truly responsible.

The family's last prison visit took place in April 2026. He was then transferred elsewhere without his family being officially informed; acquaintances told them that he was in Hessiya Prison.

10. Sexual Torture and the Use of Family Members to Exert Pressure

Sexual violence encompasses rape and threats of rape, sexual touching, forced nudity, sexual insults, and the use of a victim's body or the bodies of family members to humiliate and intimidate the victim.

The United Nations Special Rapporteur on torture has affirmed that rape and other forms of sexual violence may constitute torture, and that the purposes of intimidation, punishment, humiliation, or discrimination are often present in such acts.⁹

The testimony of "Ahmed," an Iranian Kurdish journalist and engineer, is one of the most detailed accounts in this report concerning the use of, and threats of, sexual violence. On 8 June 2025, Ahmed was attempting to return with his wife and two young daughters to the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. He said, however, that smugglers took them to the Azaz area and handed them over at the Bab al-Salam border crossing.

One daughter was two years old; the other was only ten months old.

10.1. Threatening to Assault His Wife to Obtain Documents

Ahmed said that personnel at the crossing separated him from his wife and daughters and began beating him with weapons, sticks, fists, and feet while asking about their passports. After a period of beatings, the personnel threatened that unless he disclosed where the documents were hidden, they would strip his wife and sexually assault her in front of him. He said:

"I was so terrified that I told them where we had hidden the documents, inside a bag among the children's clothes."

This incident demonstrates the use of a sexual threat to compel a victim to surrender documents and information. The threat achieved its purpose immediately because Ahmed believed that the personnel were capable of carrying it out and that his wife was in their custody.

The threat need not actually be carried out for the conduct to constitute psychological torture. A serious and immediate threat of rape, made in a custodial environment by persons who control both the victim and the person threatened with assault, will often inflict severe mental suffering amounting in itself to torture.

⁹ Human Rights Council, Report of the Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, Juan E. Méndez, [A/HRC/31/57](#), 5 January 2016.

10.2. Sexual Assaults in the Detention Vehicle and Cell

Ahmed said he was then transferred from the Bab al-Salam crossing, blindfolded and handcuffed, to a building which he later learned belonged to General Security in Azaz. During the journey, one of the two personnel seated beside him subjected him to sexualized insults, touched him sexually from behind, and used degrading language.

Upon arrival, Ahmed was placed alone in a small room. He had been beaten so severely that he could no longer stand and continued shouting that he wanted to see his wife and daughters. He said that one officer entered and beat him, then urinated on his face when he refused to remain silent:

"When he grew tired of beating me, he urinated on my face and said, 'Drink. This is fresh water.'"

Near dawn, another officer entered and sexually assaulted him. The officer seized him by the hair, raised his head, rubbed his genitals across Ahmed's face, mouth, and ears, and then threatened him:

"If you do not stay quiet, I will rape you."

Ahmed described trying to conceal his crying:

"I remained silent and cried quietly. I bit a piece of foam on the floor so no one would hear me crying."

If established and attributed to personnel exercising custodial authority, these acts go far beyond misconduct or verbal abuse. They were intentional sexual acts inflicted on a defenceless and restrained person to subdue, silence, punish, and humiliate him. These purposes are among those recognized in the legal definition of torture.¹⁰

The absence of visible physical injury does not diminish the gravity of the conduct. Sexual torture targets a person's sense of dignity and control over their body, and its psychological and social effects are often deeper and more enduring than visible physical injuries. Requiring a victim to produce physical evidence of every sexual act also disregards the nature of such violations, which usually occur behind closed doors and without independent witnesses.

10.3. Detention of a Wife and Two Young Daughters in Inhuman Conditions

After a night in solitary confinement, Ahmed was allowed to see his wife and daughters. He said he found them in an extremely dirty warehouse, with human faeces and urine and animal waste in one corner, sitting on pieces of cardboard.

He added:

"When we saw one another, we embraced and cried for a long time from the shock. We could not even speak normally."

His wife told him that personnel had insulted her during the transfer and placed bags over their heads, and that the two children had continued crying in fear while no one responded to them.

¹⁰ The [Istanbul Protocol: Manual on the Effective Investigation and Documentation of Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment](#) recognizes sexual threats, insults, and sexual touching as forms of sexual torture because of the humiliation and psychological and physical suffering they cause.

The family was later held in another room and received only one daily meal intended for two people, although there were four of them. At times, they received no food for two or three days. No milk or other age-appropriate necessities were provided for the infant.

Ahmed said:

"We learned to divide the food: one portion for my wife and me, and two for the girls, so that if no food came the next day, they would still have something to eat."

Both girls became ill in detention, and a wound on the older daughter's leg grew progressively worse. The detaining authority allowed her to be taken to hospital only after repeated pleas from her parents. Ahmed's wife had suffered severe anaemia and recurring low blood pressure before the detention; he said that her condition deteriorated while in custody.

After approximately one week, the family was transferred to a building in Aleppo which Ahmed said he later learned was affiliated with General Military Intelligence. The interrogations and threats continued. He said that interrogators threatened him with execution and starvation and with taking his daughters away and separating him from his wife.

Under international standards, a child may be deprived of liberty only in accordance with the law, as a measure of last resort, and for the shortest appropriate period of time; the child's best interests must be a primary consideration in all actions and decisions affecting them. Every child deprived of liberty must be treated humanely and in a manner that takes account of their age and physical, psychological, and health needs. They must be provided with sanitary conditions, sufficient and appropriate food, and adequate medical care. Holding an infant and a two-year-old child in contaminated premises, denying them suitable nutrition and care, and threatening to remove them in order to pressure their parents are therefore fundamentally incompatible with these obligations.¹¹

11. Investigations Announced, but Accountability Remains Difficult to Trace

In a number of incidents reviewed by STJ, government and security bodies announced that investigations had been opened or committees formed to determine the circumstances surrounding detainees' deaths or ill-treatment. Acknowledging the need for investigation is preferable to denial or silence, but it is not, in itself, sufficient to fulfil the obligations to investigate and ensure accountability.

There is a fundamental difference between issuing a statement that an investigation has begun and conducting an investigation genuinely capable of uncovering the truth. There is also a difference between an internal administrative review asking whether personnel breached instructions and a criminal investigation examining the possible commission of torture, killing, or enforced disappearance.

¹¹ See the [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#), in particular Article 37(b), which provides that the detention of a child shall be used only as a measure of last resort and for the shortest appropriate period of time, and Article 37(c), which requires every child deprived of liberty to be treated humanely and in a manner that takes account of the needs of persons of their age. See also United Nations General Assembly, [United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners \(the Nelson Mandela Rules\)](#), Resolution A/RES/70/175, adopted 17 December 2015, Rule 29, which requires that any decision to allow children to stay with a parent in prison be based on the child's best interests, that children accompanying a parent never be treated as prisoners, and that child-specific healthcare services be provided.

11.1. An Administrative Inquiry Is No Substitute for a Criminal Investigation

An administrative inquiry may have a role in identifying breaches of regulations and imposing measures such as suspension or dismissal. It is not sufficient, however, where there are reasonable grounds to believe torture has occurred, because torture is not merely a disciplinary infraction; it is a crime requiring a criminal investigation.

The public prosecution service must initiate an investigation *ex officio* where injuries or a death occur in custody or credible information concerning torture emerges, even if the victim or family is unable to file a formal complaint. Fear of reprisals, the victim's detention, and the inability to identify the personnel involved all mean that making an investigation contingent upon a complete complaint can become a means of obstructing accountability.

Nor should conclusive proof be required before an investigation begins. The threshold for opening one is the existence of reasonable grounds to believe that torture may have occurred, not whether the victim can produce, from the outset, medical records, witnesses, and the names of every responsible person.

An effective investigation requires investigators to be independent, in both practical and institutional terms, from the individuals and body potentially implicated. When the same security unit gathers evidence concerning its personnel's conduct, it can control the records, suspects, and witnesses.

This does not preclude a role for an internal inquiry. It does require, however, that the public prosecution service or an independent body lead the criminal investigation and that medical examinations be conducted by experts who are not administratively subordinate to the detaining authority. Suspects must not remain in positions allowing them to contact witnesses or influence evidence.

The investigative body must have the power to enter all facilities, seize records, devices, and surveillance footage, summon officials of every rank, and protect victims, witnesses, and their families from reprisals.¹²

11.2. Transparency and Publication of Investigation Findings

Transparency requires a clear public statement identifying, at a minimum: the body that conducted the investigation and the extent of its independence; the essential facts established; the cause of death, where applicable; whether torture or medical negligence occurred; the number and official positions of those referred to the judiciary; the stage reached by the proceedings; and the institutional measures adopted to prevent recurrence.

This information must be disclosed without publishing material that could endanger witnesses or prejudice the rights of accused persons or the integrity of proceedings. Families must have access to more extensive information concerning their relatives, including medical and forensic reports, even where full public disclosure would be inappropriate.

¹² [Principles on the Effective Investigation and Documentation of Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment](#), which require the investigating authority to be independent and empowered to obtain evidence and summon officials and witnesses.

11.3. Legal Responsibility

Some official responses have focused on arresting a limited number of low-ranking field personnel. Their direct responsibility may be clear, but an effective investigation must also examine the chain of command and supervision.

Necessary questions include: Who ordered the arrest? Who was responsible for the detention facility? Were beatings recurrent and widely known? Who reviewed the interrogation records? Who observed the injuries? Who denied or obstructed treatment? And did the commander take meaningful action upon receiving earlier complaints?

Command responsibility must be assessed in light of the commander's effective authority; their knowledge, or the information that should have alerted them to the violations; and their ability to prevent or suppress the conduct or refer it for investigation. Commanders also have a duty to inspect detention facilities under their control periodically and monitor the conditions in which detainees are held. Limiting a case to the direct perpetrators, without examining the environment that allowed abuses to recur, reduces accountability to a symbolic response.

Dissolving an armed formation or integrating it into State institutions does not extinguish responsibility for violations committed by its members before integration. Individual criminal responsibility remains, while the institutions that inherit detention facilities and records assume duties to preserve evidence, clarify the fate of detainees, cooperate with investigations, and prevent persons suspected of involvement in torture from being assigned custodial or security functions.

11.4. Accountability and Redress

Investigation and prosecution are essential components of redress, but a victim's rights do not end with the perpetrator's punishment. An effective response also encompasses establishing the truth, acknowledgment, restitution of property, compensation, medical and psychological treatment, rehabilitation, and measures to prevent recurrence.¹³

In cases of death, the right to an effective remedy extends to the family. Families should never have to pay to obtain a medical report, recover a body, or learn where a relative is detained.

12. Legal Analysis

12.1. A Non-Derogable Prohibition: Domestic Law and International Obligations

The prohibition of torture is absolute and non-derogable. War, security disturbances, the threat of terrorism, or superior orders may never be invoked to justify torture. Protection is equally unaffected by the nature of the allegation or the victim's previous conduct: detained fighters, former military personnel, persons suspected of serious crimes, and civilians expressing political views are all protected against torture.

Syria acceded to the [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#) in 1969 and to the [Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment](#) in

¹³ Article 14 of the [Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment](#), and the Committee against Torture's [General Comment No. 3](#) concerning the right to redress, compensation, rehabilitation, and guarantees of non-repetition.

2004. The Covenant requires States to prohibit torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment and to treat all persons deprived of liberty humanely and with respect for their inherent dignity. The Convention against Torture requires the State to adopt effective measures to prevent, investigate, and criminalize torture and provide redress to victims.

At the domestic level, Article 12 of the [2025 Constitutional Declaration](#) provides that the rights and freedoms enshrined in international human rights treaties ratified by Syria form an integral part of the Declaration.

These provisions are directly relevant to the cases documented in this report, in which arrests at checkpoints and homes began with decisions made in the field by security personnel or armed actors, without a judicial order being shown or a clear legal reason being given. The incompatibility is not limited to the torture subsequently inflicted; it also extends to the original deprivation of liberty and the manner in which it was carried out.

Article 18 of the Constitutional Declaration safeguards human dignity and physical integrity, prohibits enforced disappearance and physical and psychological torture, and provides that torture is not subject to a statute of limitations. It further stipulates that, except in cases of *flagrante delicto*, no person may be arrested, detained, or otherwise deprived of liberty without a judicial order.

Under Article 51 of the Constitutional Declaration, existing laws remain in force unless amended or repealed. Accordingly, [Law No. 16 of 2022 Criminalizing Torture](#) remains, in principle, part of Syrian law. The Law defines torture and prescribes enhanced penalties for perpetrators, prohibits the use of confessions extracted under torture and the issuance of orders to commit it, requires compensation for victims, and provides protection for whistle-blowers, witnesses, and their families.

The [General Penal Code, Legislative Decree No. 148 of 1949](#) also enshrines the principle that no person may be detained without a judicial warrant, and provides that prison directors or officers who accept a person into custody without a warrant or judicial order are liable to imprisonment for one to three years.¹⁴ Requiring legal authority for an arrest means that any deprivation of liberty must rest on a clear legal basis tied to verifiable individual conduct, not to collective identity or perceived affiliation.

The [Syrian Code of Criminal Procedure, Legislative Decree No. 112 of 1950](#) likewise requires the Public Prosecutor, investigating judge, or magistrate, as applicable, to attend the place where an arrest or detention has occurred and release anyone held unlawfully. If grounds for detention are found to exist, the person must be brought immediately before the competent Public Prosecutor or magistrate.¹⁵ The public prosecution service is also required to inspect and supervise prisons and detention facilities.¹⁶

The General Penal Code further criminalizes unlawful deprivation of liberty and increases the penalty to temporary hard labour for no fewer than three years where the deprivation lasts more than one month or the victim is subjected to torture.¹⁷ Arresting persons without legal grounds to obtain a ransom or exact revenge because the detainee belongs to a particular racial or ethnic group also violates [Legislative Decree No. 20 of 2013](#). Torturing detainees and subjecting them to

¹⁴ Article 358 of the General Penal Code, Legislative Decree No. 148 of 1949.

¹⁵ Article 425 of the Syrian Code of Criminal Procedure, Legislative Decree No. 112 of 1950.

¹⁶ Article 15 of the Syrian Code of Criminal Procedure, Legislative Decree No. 112 of 1950.

¹⁷ Articles 555–556 of the General Penal Code, Legislative Decree No. 148 of 1949.

inhuman or degrading treatment likewise violates the Penal Code provisions criminalizing the use of "duress" or other violence against detainees and punishing such acts with imprisonment.¹⁸

Article 49 of the Constitutional Declaration should also be noted. It exempts war crimes, crimes against humanity, genocide, and "all crimes committed by the former regime," including torture, from the principle of non-retroactivity of criminal law, and establishes a constitutional basis for a transitional justice body.

Legal provisions alone, however, are insufficient unless translated into measurable judicial and security practice. During the period covered by this report, no comprehensive public data were available showing the number of complaints filed under Law No. 16, investigations opened, judicial referrals made, or judgments issued, or the extent to which provisions on compensation and witness protection were applied to violations committed after the fall of the former regime. The Law also remains inadequate to address certain forms of cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment that may not reach the threshold of torture, although they too are prohibited under international law.

12.2. International Humanitarian Law and the Responsibility of Different Actors

In situations related to armed conflict, [Common Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions](#) prohibits the torture of civilians and fighters who have laid down their arms or are *hors de combat* owing to injury, surrender, or detention. A detainee's affiliation with the SDF, the former army, or any faction therefore does not deprive them of protection and cannot justify beating or torturing them to obtain information or punish them for their affiliation.

The State is responsible for the acts of its organs and personnel, including where an official exceeds their authority while acting in an official capacity. The actual relationship between the State and factions or formations exercising security powers must also be examined, including command, financing, the issuance of orders, and control over facilities. For their part, the SDF and the Autonomous Administration—during the period in which they exercised detention and security authority—along with local forces and armed groups, are obliged to prohibit torture and cruel treatment of all persons under their control. Upon the full integration of all factions and de facto forces under the authority of the Ministry of Defense, the Syrian transitional government will assume this obligation in the areas previously controlled by those forces.

13. Recommendations

On the basis of the facts and patterns documented in this report, Syrians for Truth and Justice calls upon the relevant actors to adopt the following measures to prevent torture and ensure investigation, accountability, redress, and non-recurrence.

13.1. To the Competent Syrian Authorities, Each within Its Mandate

- Issue binding orders to all State security, military, and police services, and to all formations affiliated with or integrated into the State, prohibiting torture and ill-treatment; close every unofficial place of detention; and ensure that all deprivations of liberty occur only in legally designated facilities subject to judicial oversight.

¹⁸ Article 391 of the General Penal Code, Legislative Decree No. 148 of 1949.



- Establish a unified central register for all detainees recording the place and date of arrest, the arresting authority, the grounds for detention, all transfers, and the detainee's health status; notify families where their relatives are held; and ensure that detainees can contact a lawyer from the outset and are brought promptly before a judge.
- Subject every detainee to an independent medical examination upon admission, transfer, and release; document allegations of torture in accordance with the Istanbul Protocol; and guarantee unannounced access to detention facilities for independent monitoring bodies.
- Open prompt, independent, and effective criminal investigations into all allegations that provide reasonable grounds to suspect torture, disappearance, or death in custody; preserve records and evidence; investigate the responsibility of direct perpetrators, commanders, and supervisors; and refrain from relying solely on administrative reviews or the isolated punishment of field personnel. Ensure that accountability proceedings are conducted before an independent and impartial judiciary and in accordance with fair-trial standards.
- Publish essential information concerning investigative findings and judicial referrals; inform victims and families of the progress of cases and provide them with relevant medical and forensic reports; and protect witnesses and complainants against reprisals.
- Ensure the exclusion of all statements, confessions, and signatures obtained through torture or coercion; enforce Law No. 16 of 2022 Criminalizing Torture; and review legislation and procedures to guarantee prevention and redress and ensure that no perpetrator evades responsibility, irrespective of official status or affiliation.
- Preserve the records and information of detention facilities previously operated by the SDF, the Autonomous Administration, or any formations that have been dissolved or integrated; clarify the fate of their detainees and investigate past violations; and do not use restructuring or the transfer of authority as a pretext for closing cases.
- Provide reparation to survivors and to the families of deceased and disappeared persons, including medical and psychological treatment, rehabilitation, compensation, restitution of property, and guarantees of non-recurrence.
- Ensure that the transitional justice process covers violations committed by all actors across all periods and is not limited to crimes of the former regime; and meaningfully involve victims, their families, and civil society in policy development and priority-setting.

13.2. To International Actors, Donor States, and Relevant United Nations Mechanisms

- Support programmes documenting torture, strengthening forensic capacity, rehabilitating and supporting survivors, and preserving evidence; and continue monitoring deaths, disappearances, and undisclosed detention by all actors.
- Refrain from surrendering or transferring any person to an authority where there are substantial grounds for believing that they would face torture or undisclosed detention.





- Call on the Special Rapporteur on torture to follow up with the Syrian authorities on the cases in this report; send communications concerning persons who remain at risk of torture or are held in undisclosed locations; and request an official visit to Syria that includes unrestricted access to places of detention and confidential interviews with detainees and survivors.
- Call on the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic to continue investigating torture, deaths in custody, and identity-based violations during the transitional period by all actors, with particular attention to command structures and the overlap between official institutions and armed formations; and to publish periodic findings on the implementation of investigations and accountability measures.
- Call on the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to preserve and analyse evidence relating to torture, disappearance, and deaths in custody, and to prepare relevant case files in support of competent investigations and prosecutions.
- Condition economic and political support for, and cooperation with, the transitional government on respect for human rights; and press the government to grant United Nations bodies and mechanisms, and international and domestic human rights organisations, access to detention facilities and prisons.





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.



ABOUT Ceasefire

The Ceasefire Centre for Civilian Rights aims to empower civilians in situations of armed conflict or prevailing insecurity to document violations of their rights; to seek justice and accountability for violations of civilian rights; and to develop the practice of civilian rights protection and raise public support for the promotion of civilian rights.

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