

“They Took Him Before Our Eyes, Then Denied He Was There”: Documenting Cases of Enforced Disappearance during the Transitional Period



STJ Calls For The Immediate Cessation And Criminalisation Of Enforced Disappearance, Independent Investigations Into The Cases Documented In This Report, And Ratification Of The International Convention For The Protection Of All Persons From Enforced Disappearance

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1. Executive Summary

This expanded report documents the continuation of enforced disappearances in Syria, alongside incidents of detention in which detainees’ whereabouts remained concealed for varying periods, between January 2025 and August 2026.

The pattern revealed by the cases documented in this report differs from the centralised structure and scale that characterised disappearance under both Hafez and Bashar al-Assad. The change in authority, however, did not bring the violation to a complete end: it persisted in multiple contexts, while its effects continued to shape the lives of victims and their families.

Published to mark the International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances on 30 August 2026, the incidents documented in this report constitute an early warning that calls for addressing the gaps that allow the crime to occur before these cases develop into a widespread practice affecting more victims.

The incidents documented in this report vary. It presents examples in which relatives or witnesses reported that members of the General Security, which is subordinate to the Ministry of Interior, or of the Ministry of Defence deprived victims of their liberty. Their identification was based either on the standard official uniforms they wore or on their own statements that they belonged to these bodies. The official authorities subsequently denied holding the victims or refused to disclose their fate or whereabouts. In other cases, the concealment ended when the detainee’s location was disclosed or the family was permitted to visit. Although such a development brings the continuing disappearance to an end, it does not erase the preceding period where the elements of the violation were present, nor any arbitrary detention or ill-treatment that may have accompanied it.

STJ also received reports concerning children who were said to have disappeared and whose families had lost contact with them. It followed up on these reports through investigations, interviews with their families, and a review of the information collected. This follow-up indicated that some reports concerned children who had been recruited or incorporated into armed formations affiliated with de facto authorities before contact was lost during transfers between areas of control or following hostilities. Other cases concerned children who may have been detained and subsequently subjected to enforced disappearance. Families received conflicting accounts that the children had been killed, injured, or remained alive in detention, without obtaining reliable confirmation of their fate.

These incidents are not automatically classified as enforced disappearances unless the requisite legal elements are established. They nevertheless raise distinct violations relating to the recruitment and use of children, deprivation of liberty, and the failure to search for them or disclose their fate.

Across these cases, families bore the burden of searching, together with the resulting fear and psychological and financial exhaustion. Some were also subjected to extortion, without receiving reliable official information.

The report further finds that the continuation of this violation is attributable not only to the absence of a distinct offence of enforced disappearance, but also to the lack of a unified register of detainees, weak judicial oversight and urgent response to reports, and the multiplicity of detaining authorities without a clear chain of responsibility. Institutional steps, foremost among them the establishment of the National Commission for Missing Persons, have not yet been translated into practical safeguards that prevent new cases and ensure the search for all victims without discrimination.

The report calls on the Syrian transitional authorities to end secret and unregistered detention; establish a unified national register of all persons deprived of their liberty; immediately notify families of the place of detention and the reasons for it; and ensure access to a lawyer and doctor and prompt appearance before a judicial authority. It also recommends independent investigations into the documented cases, the adoption of legislation criminalising enforced disappearance in accordance with international standards, and the repeal of provisions allowing prolonged detention without judicial oversight.

Finally, the report calls for ensuring that the work of the National Commission for Missing Persons covers cases that occurred after the transition of power. It stresses the importance of ratifying the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance and cooperating fully with international and United Nations institutions, including the Independent Institution on Missing Persons in the Syrian Arab Republic (IIMP), and allowing it to operate throughout Syrian territory.

2. Introduction

Following the fall of Bashar al-Assad’s government in December 2024, the transitional period brought promises of breaking with a long legacy of arbitrary detention and enforced disappearance. Families’ right to know the truth, however, is not realised merely by changing institutions or their names. It requires accurate records, immediate notification, judicial oversight, independent investigations, enabling detainees to communicate with their families and lawyers, and holding accountable anyone who deprives a person of liberty and then places that person outside the protection of the law. A previous report issued by Syrians for Truth and Justice (STJ) in August 2025 showed that disappearance was no longer merely a legacy file inherited from the

former government, but continued in new incidents following the transition of power, while emphasising that these occurred in smaller numbers.¹

As part of its continued work on enforced disappearance and human rights violations after the fall of Assad, STJ pursued two interconnected tracks during the period covered by this report: monitoring and duly documenting new or continuing cases and sharing information with the relevant bodies; and advocating for families’ right to the truth concerning persons disappeared in earlier years. In April 2026, STJ submitted a contribution to the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances, warning against selective memory and justice, differential treatment of victims, and treating disappearance as a crime belonging solely to the past. In March 2026, it submitted 22 individual complaints to international mechanisms concerning cases that had occurred since the fall of the former government.²

This report does not seek to compile everything that occurred in Syria during the period it covers. Rather, it analyses the cases the organisation was able to document, distinguishes among the possible legal characterisations, and identifies the gaps that allow disappearance and impunity to persist.

The cases documented by the organisation demonstrate that enforced disappearance did not end with the transition of power. This does not mean that it has continued with the scale or centralised structure that characterised it under the former government. The continuation of the practice does not depend on its reaching thousands of cases: every incident that meets the elements of enforced disappearance constitutes a separate violation requiring a search, investigation, and accountability. STJ had previously documented the continuation of disappearance after the fall of Bashar al-Assad’s government, including cases attributed to security services or armed groups allied with the new authorities.³ The cases documented here are read alongside international reports that have documented the continuation of enforced disappearance in Syria, most notably those of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry, Amnesty International, and Human Rights Watch, in order to place them within a broader national context.⁴

Syrians for Truth and Justice, [“Living Between Hope and Fear”: Testimonies Documenting the Persistence of Enforced Disappearance in Post-Assad Syria](#), 29 August 2025.

Syrians for Truth and Justice, [Syrians for Truth and Justice Submits a Contribution to the UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances](#), 16 April 2026; and [STJ Submits Twenty-Two Individual Complaints to the UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances](#), 16 March 2026.

Syrians for Truth and Justice, [Syrians for Truth and Justice Submits a Contribution to the UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances](#), cited above; and [STJ Submits Twenty-Two Individual Complaints to the UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances](#), cited above.

Amnesty International, [Syria: Ending Impunity, Protecting Rights: Amnesty International’s Submission to the 54th Session of the UPR Working Group, January–February 2027](#), MDE 24/0924/2026, 9 July 2026; and Human Rights Watch, [Submission to the Universal Periodic Review of Syrian Arab Republic](#), 16 July 2026.

3. Methodology

STJ documented dozens of cases from the beginning of 2025 through the preparation of this report in August 2026. This report presents examples demonstrating that the practice continues, in order to underscore the need to end it immediately, investigate it, and hold those responsible to account before it expands and becomes entrenched again.

For this report, the organisation’s researchers conducted **30** interviews with witnesses and members of victims’ families. The interview sample included immediate relatives; eyewitnesses to arrests or abductions; persons who had been with or in contact with the victim shortly before contact was lost; and relatives recounting information provided by released detainees who had seen the victim or heard information about them. The documented cases do not constitute a national count; they reflect the cases to which the organisation was able to gain access and document during the preparation of this report.

The report also reviewed open-source material, including family appeals, public campaigns, and media and human rights reporting, in order to identify additional incidents and follow developments in certain cases. These incidents were kept separate from those documented through interviews and were not included in their number. Information concerning them is attributed to the published sources.

The researchers obtained the informed consent of the interviewees. The report uses pseudonyms when presenting interview-based cases to protect the safety and privacy of victims, their relatives, and witnesses. Where cases had been the subject of family appeals or public campaigns, the report uses the names made public after considering the risks associated with republishing them. The organisation also withheld details whose publication it considered might place individuals at additional risk or facilitate their identification.

4. Enforced Disappearance Persists despite the Transitional Government’s Apparent Attention to the Issue

The transitional authorities took institutional steps to acknowledge the issue of forcibly disappeared persons, most notably Presidential Decree No. 19 of 2025 establishing the National Commission for Missing Persons and Presidential Decree No. 20 concerning transitional justice.⁵ Institutional recognition, however, is insufficient unless it clearly encompasses cases that occurred after the transitional government assumed power and is accompanied by effective access to all places of detention and records, genuine

[Presidency of the Republic: Presidential Decree Forming the National Commission for Missing Persons](#), Presidential Decree No. 19 of 2025, 17 May 2025; and [Presidency of the Republic: Presidential Decree No. \(20\) Forming the National Commission for Transitional Justice](#), 17 May 2025.

financial and administrative independence for the Commission, and family participation in setting priorities.⁶

At the same time, several human rights organisations documented continued incommunicado deprivation of liberty, failure to notify families, denial of detention, and conflicting responses. In its 2026 submission to the Universal Periodic Review, Amnesty International noted that Syrian law still lacks a distinct and comprehensive offence of enforced disappearance and called for an end to incommunicado detention and for the fate of missing persons to be disclosed. It stated: “In 2025, authorities repeatedly arrested people, including members of the Alawite community and other minority groups and low-ranking former government officers, without arrest warrants. Some of those detained were denied contact with their families, not informed of the charges against them, denied legal counsel, or not brought before a judge.” Amnesty International also called for bringing to justice those responsible for enforced disappearances committed before and after 2024, confirming that its recommendations were not limited to addressing the legacy of the former government.⁷ The Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic also documented eight cases that remained ongoing as of January 2026, in which victims were last seen in the custody of government forces before those forces denied detaining them. The Commission concluded that these incidents amounted to enforced disappearance.⁸

These practices and risks were not confined to a single security context or region; they arose amid waves of violence and military operations across several parts of Syria. On the Syrian coast, widespread killings and serious violations in March 2025 were accompanied by reports of arrests, abductions, and disappearances. In As-Suwayda, the July 2025 massacres, during which government forces and tribal fighters entered the governorate and committed acts of detention, abduction, and killing, while fighters from Druze armed factions committed violations against Bedouins, left many fates unresolved throughout the period covered by this report.⁹ In northern and eastern Syria, STJ documented killings, arrests, missing persons, and disappearances in connection with the military operations of January 2026, particularly in Aleppo’s Sheikh Maqṣoud and Ashrafiyeh neighbourhoods and across areas between al-Hasakah

Special Procedures of the Human Rights Council, communication [AL SYR 4/2025](#), 14 July 2025, ⁶ describing the functions of the National Commission for Missing Persons established by Decree No. 19 of 2025 and observations concerning independence and inclusiveness.

Amnesty International, submission to the Universal Periodic Review of the Syrian Arab Republic, cited ⁷ above, pp. 2–5.

Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, report [A/HRC/61/62](#), ⁸ 12 March 2026, para. 94 and annex I, in particular paras. 155–158.

Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, [Violations against Civilians in Coastal and Western Central Syria](#), A/HRC/59/CRP.4, 11 August 2025; Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, [International Human Rights Law and International Humanitarian Law Violations Committed during the July 2025 Violence in Suwayda, Syria](#), A/HRC/61/CRP.7, 27 March 2026.

and Raqqa. The fate of many individuals remained unknown after the operations ended, despite corroborating information that they had been detained or transferred between prisons and different authorities, but without official notification confirming their whereabouts or legal status.¹⁰ Some families also received conflicting accounts concerning their relatives’ fate, prolonging uncertainty and preventing the missing persons from enjoying the protection of the law to which they were entitled.

The cases documented in STJ reports since 8 December 2024 do not permit a comparison between the scale of disappearance in the current period and the widespread and centralised system entrenched by Bashar al-Assad’s government. They do, however, reveal changes in the manner in which disappearance occurs and is concealed. In the newly documented cases, deprivation of liberty is not always associated with a known security branch or fixed place of detention. It may begin at a home, checkpoint, or vehicle bearing official markings, after which the person’s trail is lost between security and military units, armed formations allied with or integrated into State institutions, and bodies that deny responsibility or refer the family elsewhere. The unrecorded chain of transfers thus itself becomes a means of concealment: the body that took the person knows where the process began, while the family is unable to determine who received them or where it ended.

Such concealment may last for hours, days, or months and may end when the detainee’s name appears or a visit is permitted. Yet the short duration of concealment or subsequent disclosure of the detainee’s location does not mean that the elements of enforced disappearance were absent. Nor does it diminish the danger to which the victim was exposed while outside official records and judicial oversight, or extinguish the right to investigation and reparation. The continuation of the crime is therefore not measured solely by the number of persons who remain of unknown fate; it also encompasses persons who were concealed and later reappeared without any investigation into the period of concealment or accountability for those responsible. The form and visibility of the practice have changed, but the essence of the danger it creates has not. The conduct of State organs and officials is attributable to the State when they act in their official capacity. Enforced disappearance also encompasses conduct by persons or groups acting with the authorisation, support, or acquiescence of the State. Even where deprivation of liberty is carried out by persons or groups and this connection has not been established, the authorities remain obliged to take reasonable measures to prevent it, urgently search for the victim, conduct an effective investigation, and prosecute those responsible.¹¹

Syrians for Truth and Justice, [North and East Syria: Killings, Detentions, Disappearances, and Torture During the January 2026 Events](#), 8 July 2026; Syrians for Truth and Justice, [Syrians for Truth and Justice Submits a Contribution to the UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances](#), cited above.

International Law Commission, [Articles on Responsibility of States for Internationally Wrongful Acts](#),¹¹ 2001, Arts. 4 and 8; [International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced](#)

5. What the Cases Documented by STJ Reveal

5.1. Arrest without a Warrant and Concealment of Detainees

Some documented cases begin with an unambiguous event: a home raid, an arrest at a checkpoint, or a person being taken from a public place by individuals who identify themselves as security personnel or who wear uniforms and travel in vehicles bearing official insignia. The clarity ends at the moment of apprehension. No arrest warrant is produced; the family receives no notification of the place of detention; and no case number or name of a judicial authority is provided. When relatives seek information, they are sent between agencies that deny responsibility or refer them elsewhere.

“Mariam” said that men dressed in black and using a vehicle bearing General Security markings took her elderly grandfather, aged 80, from his home in Latakia in April 2026. The family was subsequently told that the case had been transferred to Political Security, but was unable to reach him or verify his whereabouts:

“They told us it would be no more than a brief interrogation and that he would return. Then they asked us to send his clothes, identity card, and medication. When we went to the village police station, we were told that he had been transferred to Political Security. After that, no one would acknowledge holding him. A lawyer tried to make enquiries, but all we received were vague and contradictory statements. He is an elderly man who needs his medication, and every day that passes without information makes us more afraid.”

In an interview with “Tariq”, a retired employee from Tartous, he said that contact was lost with his son, a street vendor, on a coastal road in May 2026. Witnesses told the family that a security force had stopped him and confiscated his vehicle. According to Tariq, the missing man’s brother went to al-Hamidiyah Police Station in Tartous Governorate several hours after contact was lost. Officers at the station rebuked and expelled him, using a derogatory expression against Alawites, then loaded their rifles and pointed them at him when he persisted in asking questions. When he approached the Tartous Police Command, one of its officers telephoned the station, which denied both arresting his brother and expelling and threatening the person reporting his disappearance. The family was instructed to wait 12 hours after he went missing before filing a report.

Tariq added:

“The next morning, we went to the police station and reported my son missing. I asked them to contact the telecommunications company, review the surveillance cameras, and circulate his vehicle registration number to the traffic police so that we might find some lead. But the officer drawing up the report shouted in my

[Disappearance](#), Arts. 2, 3, and 12; Human Rights Committee, [General Comment No. 35 on Article 9 \(Liberty and Security of Person\)](#), CCPR/C/GC/35, 16 December 2014, para. 7.

face: ‘Why don’t you take over the investigation and spare us the trouble of looking for your criminal son?’ He then threw me out of the office. They later told us to remain calm and not raise the case on social media, claiming that doing so might affect the investigation. Since then, we have learned nothing about him or his vehicle. We went to the police station almost every day, but they eventually stopped allowing us inside. We now live in constant anxiety and fear. His wife is in a poor psychological state, and his children keep asking about him. The excuses we give them are no longer convincing; all they want is to hear his voice.”

In addition to the family’s ill-treatment in this account, requiring 12 hours to pass before registering the report squandered the most critical period for locating the person and preserving perishable evidence. International principles require the search to begin as soon as the authorities become aware, by any means, of a possible disappearance, and on their own initiative even in the absence of a formal complaint.

In this case, the report should have been registered immediately; surveillance recordings and telecommunications data preserved; the vehicle’s details circulated; and checkpoint and detention-centre records urgently checked in parallel with the opening of an investigation.¹²

In another testimony, “Dilshad”, aged 30, recounted that a General Security force entered his relative’s home in Raqqa in February 2026, assaulted him in front of his family, and took him away on the grounds of an alleged connection to the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). Since then, the family has received no official information about his whereabouts and has not been permitted to visit him. Dilshad said:

“They suddenly entered the house and beat him severely in front of his children and parents. They said that he had links to the Syrian Democratic Forces, then took him away. Since that day, we have approached all the relevant bodies, but have received no answer confirming where he is or allowing us to see him. His fate remains unknown.”

On the coast, “Iyad” described the May 2026 raid on the Tartous home of his elderly father, aged 71, a former officer who had been discharged in 2012. According to his account, the raiding force said that a person with security influence wanted to benefit from the man’s previous security experience. They took him by force, after which all contact ceased. The family later received conflicting accounts that he had been transferred to Idlib, while other bodies denied holding him. Intermediaries appeared demanding large sums of money in exchange for information or his release. Iyad said:

“They took him from his home in the morning and told us he would return after they asked him about matters he knew from his previous work. The lawyer searched police stations and security branches. We were first told that he had

[Guiding Principles for the Search for Disappeared Persons](#), 28 August 2019.¹²

been transferred to Idlib, and then that he was not there. After that, people appeared demanding sums that the family could not afford. We are not asking for his release outside the law. If there is a charge, let it be announced; let him be brought before the judiciary and his lawyer be allowed to see him. We want a single piece of evidence that he is alive.”

STJ's documented testimonies also include other disappearances involving persons with former military backgrounds, some of whom came from areas or communities collectively associated with the former government. Information concerning an individual may justify opening a criminal investigation or prosecuting that person in accordance with the law, but it cannot justify arrest without a judicial warrant, concealment of the place of detention, denial of access to a lawyer, or failure to bring the person before a judicial authority. Genuine accountability rests on individual responsibility, reviewable evidence, and a fair trial. Concealment replaces justice with punishment outside the law and reproduces the very tool that the transitional period is meant to end. A change in the identity of the person targeted does not alter the nature of the violation.

The case of Raed Khaled Nassar provides a further example of the continuation of enforced disappearance. According to his family's account published on social media, Nassar went to the Immigration and Passports Department in Quneitra on 29 July 2026 to obtain a passport, after which contact with him was lost. The family said that the department's director acknowledged that Nassar had been arrested because of “prior security flags” dating from the Assad government, but did not disclose which body had taken custody of him or where he was detained. The security bodies approached by the family denied holding him. At the time its appeal was published, the family had received no official answer identifying his location or the legal basis for depriving him of liberty.¹³ The incident raises the additional problem of the continued effect of old security flags imposed by the Assad regime during the conflict and their use as a gateway to an unacknowledged arrest that breaks the chain of information concerning the detainee.

In the town of Nahta in eastern rural Daraa, residents organised a protest demanding disclosure of the fate of Muhammad Khaled al-Mafalani. Local sources reported that members of Internal Security had arrested him in the town approximately four months earlier, after which all information ceased, without any announcement of his place of detention, presentation before a court, or statement of the charges against him.¹⁴ The

Ultra Syria, [Raed Nassar's Family Demands Disclosure of His Fate after His Arrest in Quneitra](#), 16¹³ August 2026; Alaraby TV–Syria, [Raed Khaled Nassar's Family Report to the Ministry of Interior](#), Facebook post, 16 August 2026.
Daraa in a Minute, [Facebook post](#), 18 August 2026; Radio Horan, Cradle of the Revolution, [Facebook post](#), 17 August 2026.

authorities must therefore immediately disclose the detainee’s whereabouts and legal status and investigate the circumstances of his arrest.

5.2. Persons Disappeared in 2025: Fates Still Unresolved

In addition to the cases documented in STJ’s previous reports published in 2025,¹⁵ this section addresses cases that began during the events in As-Suwayda in July 2025 and remained ongoing as of the date of this report: the victims’ fates remained unknown, and their families had received no reliable official answer disclosing their whereabouts or what had happened to them.

Local sources indicate that the number of unresolved fates in As-Suwayda exceeds one hundred forcibly disappeared persons. On 30 August 2026, the Suwayda Press platform published a list that it said had been prepared by the residents’ negotiating committee dealing with the missing persons file. It included the names of 101 persons from the governorate whose fate remained unknown. According to the source, the overwhelming majority of the cases date from the events of July 2025, while others occurred later.¹⁶

The testimony of “Widad”, whom STJ interviewed, is particularly significant because she directly witnessed her husband’s detention. On 16 July 2025, a patrol stopped them at an intersection in As-Suwayda city. She described some of its members as wearing General Security uniforms and insignia, while others wore military uniforms belonging to the Ministry of Defence. The men ordered her husband out of the vehicle, took his telephone, and placed him in an armoured vehicle. Since that day, the family has received neither official acknowledgement of his detention nor reliable information about his fate. Widad said:

“I am certain that General Security personnel took him, because they made him get out of our car in front of me and his children and put him in their armoured vehicle. I heard one of them tell another, ‘Take him to Abu Musab.’ We later learned that this referred to a person whom we were told belonged to one of the Ministry of Defence divisions and was responsible for the area’s file. They also took our car and told the two children and me to walk home.”

The witness continued:

“Since that day, we have received no news of him. We approached many bodies, but they do not acknowledge that they are holding him. His name once appeared on a list said to be from Adra Prison; we were then told that he had been transferred to Tartous Prison, and after that that these lists were inaccurate. We

See, for example, Syrians for Truth and Justice, [“Living Between Hope and Fear”: Testimonies Documenting the Persistence of Enforced Disappearance in Post-Assad Syria](#), 29 August 2025; Syrians for Truth and Justice, [Syria: Documentation of Enforced Disappearances and Arbitrary Arrests in the al-Qadam Neighborhood of Damascus](#), 23 June 2025. Suwayda Press, [Facebook post](#), 30 August 2026.¹⁶

no longer know what information to believe. To this day, I am still waiting for reliable official information telling me where he is and what happened to him.”

“Samah”, from As-Suwayda, described a context in which raids and threats were followed by a search for missing persons among unidentified bodies. She said that armed men took her husband at gunpoint on 16 July 2025 and ordered him to extinguish a fire in a neighbouring house. He left and did not return. The family searched hospitals, forensic medicine centres, and circulated photographs, but the absence of a unified official process left it suspended between the possibility that he was detained and the possibility that he was dead. Samah said:

“They entered the neighbourhood more than once, searched homes, took whatever they could carry, and threatened people. They took my husband out at gunpoint and ordered him to put out a fire that had broken out in a nearby house, and then he disappeared. We searched among the bodies and at the forensic medicine centre, and asked everyone who had been released from detention. I filed an official report of his disappearance, and we identified one member of the groups that took him, but to no avail. Each time, we fear finding him among the dead, while at the same time clinging to any report that he is alive. No one gives us a satisfactory answer.”

In another incident, “Wasim” said that on 15 July 2025 his father saw individuals who identified themselves as being from General Security and the Ministry of Defence take his son—Wasim’s brother—at a checkpoint near al-Thaala Roundabout in the city. One of them replied, “We are the State,” and promised that his son would return if he was not wanted. The father died months later without receiving an answer. Wasim said:

“My father was standing there when they took his son. He asked them where they were taking him, and one of them replied that they were the State and that he would return if there was nothing against him. We knocked on every door, went to the forensic medicine department at the National Hospital, and searched photographs and records. Then my father died of grief without knowing where his son was.”

5.3. Revealing Some Persons’ Fates Confirms the Concealment; It Does Not Erase It

Some families were more fortunate than others, managing after days or months to learn where their relative was detained or to visit them. Yet the appearance of a detainee’s name in an official register or permission to visit does not erase the period during which the person was concealed, nor does it retroactively render the detention lawful. From the moment of arrest, the deprivation of liberty should have been recorded; the family informed of the place and grounds of detention; and the detainee allowed to communicate with a lawyer and challenge the lawfulness of the detention. The information available in the cases documented in this report does not indicate that any

investigation was conducted into the preceding concealment or that those responsible were held accountable—as though the months that families spent searching and living in fear had never occurred.

The testimony of “Hayyan”, from the city of Salamiyah, illustrates this course of events. On 25 April 2026, a group that identified itself as belonging to General Security and Customs raided his brother’s shop in Salamiyah, confiscated its contents, and took him away without producing an arrest warrant. According to Hayyan, his brother had recently returned to Syria “to live and work in his own country”. He also suffers from chronic health problems requiring regular medical follow-up, which heightened his family’s fears while there was no news of him. The family was initially unable to learn his whereabouts despite retaining a lawyer to search for him. Approximately three months later, it learned that he had been transferred from Homs Customs to Damascus. His wife and daughter were then able to visit him for a few minutes in Adra Prison. The family thereby learned where he was detained, but his detention continued without the family receiving sufficient clarity about the legal measures taken in his case or when his case would be resolved.

Hayyan said:

“The visit was extremely brief—no more than five minutes; only five minutes after all that waiting, fear, and anxiety. When they saw him, he was in a poor psychological state and appeared extremely exhausted. They noticed that he had lost a great deal of weight. During those few minutes, they tried to raise his morale, but the effect of his fear that the detention would continue, and of not knowing when he would return to his family, was clear. All we ask is that he be treated in accordance with the law, receive a fair trial, and that the measures taken against him be clear and lawful, with due regard for his health and humanitarian circumstances.”

This case does not represent a successful resolution of a disappearance; rather, it is a case in which the person’s fate was revealed after months of concealment without accountability. While this family was able to reach its relative, other families remained unable, as of the date of this report, to learn whether their relatives were alive, where they were detained, or which body was holding them. The absence of investigation and accountability means that the mechanisms that enabled persons to be concealed in the first place remain in place and capable of repetition, even when some disappearances end through subsequent acknowledgement of detention.

In another example, journalists and activists held a protest in August 2026 outside the Internal Security Command in Aleppo, demanding disclosure of the fate of media professional Murad Mahalli. Participants said that he had been detained in prisons under the Ministry of Interior for 247 days without being referred to the judiciary.¹⁷

Syrian Press Agency, [Facebook post](#), 29 August 2026.¹⁷

Knowing the general authority to which a detention is attributed is not sufficient to guarantee the detainee’s protection: the authorities remain obliged to identify the precise place of detention, inform the family, state the legal basis for the detention, and ensure access to a lawyer and judicial oversight. This case therefore provides another example of incommunicado detention and the unlawful concealment of a detainee’s location.

Appeals by the families of several Palestinian detainees from Khan al-Shih camp in rural Damascus reveal a similar progression in detainees’ situations. According to the Action Group for Palestinians of Syria, security forces arrested several camp residents in 2025 and 2026. News of some ceased for varying periods before their families were able to visit them, while the location and legal status of others remained unknown. The mother of Muhammad Mutasim Hamed, detained since 8 November 2025, said that as of August 2026 she had been unable to learn either his whereabouts or his legal status despite approaching the Ministry of Interior. The appeals also concerned a 16-year-old detainee whose family said that it did not know his fate.¹⁸ Not all these cases can properly be classified as continuing enforced disappearances, since the whereabouts of some detainees became known and their families were able to visit them. This does not, however, erase the preceding periods of concealment, while cases in which neither a detainee’s location nor legal status has been disclosed remain enforced disappearances requiring official disclosure and investigation.

5.4. Recruitment and Disappearance of Children during Hostilities

The testimonies documented by STJ include cases of children whose whereabouts became unknown and who disappeared. It was subsequently established that the disappearances occurred after their recruitment or incorporation into armed formations, or after they went missing during hostilities in areas under the control of de facto authorities.

Some of these cases began after the fall of the former regime, and the children’s fate remained unknown as of the date of this report. These cases engage particular obligations to prevent the recruitment and use of children in hostilities; immediately search for children who have disappeared or gone missing; restore family links; investigate whether they have been detained, injured, or killed; and provide their families with reliable information.¹⁹

“Razan” recounted that her daughter was 14 when she disappeared in April 2025. The family subsequently received information that she had joined the Revolutionary Youth

Action Group for Palestinians of Syria, [Families of Detainees in Khan al-Shih Camp Demand That the Fate of Their Sons Be Revealed and That the Detainees’ Files Be Reviewed](#), 19 August 2026; Palestinian Refugees Portal, [Continuing Demands to Disclose the Fate of Khan al-Shih Camp Detainees and Refer Them to the Judiciary](#), 20 August 2026. [Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict](#).¹⁹

(Ciwanên Şoreşger), which was licensed by the Autonomous Administration authorities,²⁰ after the group initially denied that she was with them and did not allow her mother to see or communicate with her. Approximately one month later, a female leader acknowledged that she had supervised the child’s training for seven days. The family later learned that she had spent months in al-Hasakah before being transferred to the Sheikh Maqsoud neighbourhood of Aleppo. After the fighting in Sheikh Maqsoud in January 2026, all reliable information about her ceased. Her mother received conflicting accounts: that she had been injured and transferred to Raqqa; that she had been captured and transferred to Aleppo; or that she had been transferred to Qandil. Other accounts linked her fate to persons killed during the fighting. After recognising her photograph, one released detainee said that she had been among a group that was surrounded, captured, and transferred to Aleppo. Nevertheless, as of the date of the interview, the family had received no reliable confirmation of her whereabouts or whether she was alive, and the mother had been unable to communicate with her since the day she disappeared. Razan said:

“I went to centres and hospitals, took part in sit-ins, and asked everyone who returned from Aleppo, but no one gave me an answer. She was a young child—why did they not let me see her? Even if she joined them willingly, she is a minor and cannot be held responsible for such a decision. I want nothing from them except reliable information: tell me whether my daughter is alive or dead, and where she is. They took my only daughter from me, and I do not know where to turn or what to do.”

In a similar account, “Hassan” and “Lina” said that their daughter was 12 when she disappeared in 2025, and that the family later learned that she had been incorporated into the Revolutionary Youth and given a nom de guerre. After the fighting in Aleppo, the parents were told that she had been killed, but they received neither a body nor evidence of her death. By contrast, persons who had been released said that they had seen her alive and injured in Aleppo Prison, while one reported that she had been injured and had recovered. The family was unable to verify this information or communicate with her directly. The child’s fate thus remained suspended between an unsubstantiated announcement of her death and disparate testimonies that she remained alive in detention, without either the body that incorporated her into its ranks or the authorities controlling her purported place of detention providing her parents with a reliable official answer.

The fact that these cases occurred at the hands of the Revolutionary Youth does not absolve the current authorities of their responsibilities towards the missing children. With the transfer of control to State institutions, those authorities became obliged to

For further information on the Revolutionary Youth, see Syrians for Truth and Justice, [Northeastern Syria: The RY Use of Child Soldiers Continues Unabated](#), 7 July 2023; Jusoor for Studies, [SDF and the Revolutionary Youth Organization The Nature of the Relationship and Its Effects](#), 30 December 2021.

search for them immediately and determine whether they were captured, detained, transferred, or killed during hostilities. This obligation requires taking all feasible measures to examine detention, hospital, and death records; trace both real names and noms de guerre; obtain available information from bodies that formerly exercised control; and verify accounts concerning capture, injury, or death. Families must be informed of reliable findings; the recruitment and use of children must be investigated; and children found alive must be returned to their families and rehabilitated, while, if their deaths are established, their fate must be determined and their remains returned to their relatives.

The current authorities' responsibility assumes additional importance because the information received by the two families does not rule out the possibility that the two girls were killed during the hostilities of January 2026, including operations conducted by government forces, or that they were captured or transferred to a State-controlled place of detention after the confrontations.²¹

In another case from As-Suwayda, “Maya” said that her 16-year-old brother went missing during the events of July 2025. A released child told the family that he had spoken with her brother from an adjacent cell in Adra Prison. She was, however, unable to verify the information or obtain official information concerning the place or grounds of his detention, and was still trying to reach him at the time this report was prepared.

The three cases illustrate how a child's trace may be lost between a recruiting body, the battlefield, and places of detention, requiring every body in possession of relevant information or records to disclose them and cooperate in determining the child's fate.

6. Families Searching Alone: The Human Impact of Disappearance

The absence of information concerning the fate of a disappeared or missing person destabilises the family, reshapes its daily life, and profoundly alters its structure and stability. An absent father leaves behind unresolved financial obligations, children searching for answers, and entirely paralysed administrative and legal affairs. As the family clings to hope, every call from an unknown number becomes either a sign of long-awaited news or the opening of an extortion attempt. The loss of children also leaves parents with a sense that life has lost its meaning and purpose, drawing the entire family into a vortex of uncertainty.

The testimonies describe similar search trajectories: asking at a police station; approaching General Security or security branches; contacting a lawyer who cannot access a unified register or reliable information; checking hospitals and forensic

Special Procedures of the Human Rights Council, communication [AL SYR 1/2026](#), 27 April 2026. ²¹ The communication addressed allegations of disappearance and violations during the confrontations of January 2026 and requested that the Government explain the search and investigative measures taken.

medicine departments; viewing photographs of bodies; questioning released detainees; facing extortion or paying intermediaries' fees; and then returning to the starting point.

The testimonies also reveal an intergenerational dimension. In one family, children saw their father taken away. In another, a father died before learning his son's fate. In a third, the children themselves were the ones whose whereabouts became unknown. The suffering extends beyond grief to a sense of powerlessness before an institution that possesses the records and the power but provides no answer. “Zeina”, from As-Suwayda, told STJ:

“My father and maternal uncle were killed, and my brother disappeared, all during the same days. Witnesses said that security forces and Bedouin armed men were together, and when we called my brother's telephone, a person with a Bedouin accent answered. Later, released detainees from Hama Central Prison told us that they had heard his name. Every piece of information opens a door to hope and then leaves us with another question. More than a year has passed and our hearts are burning. We want the truth.”

The testimony of “Reem”, aged 30, shows how the absence of any reliable official channel leaves a family vulnerable to exploitation. After her husband disappeared, she continued calling his telephone for days without an answer, then turned to persons claiming to have contacts within General Security. Some demanded money in exchange for information or for enabling her to communicate with him, but refused to provide any evidence substantiating their claims. Reem and her daughter remained suspended between second-hand reports that could not be verified and the fear that her husband, himself isolated, knew nothing of his family's fate. Reem said:

“After he disappeared, we could not move or function normally because of the intensity of our fear and anxiety. We tried to search for him in hospitals and other places, but found no information... One person claimed that he had seen him in Adra Prison when he was detained there. He told us that the guards used to tell detainees that their families had been killed. I feel that my husband is also anxious because he knows nothing about us or our situation... Our young daughter still asks about him, and we do not know what to tell her. These months have exhausted us. All we ask is to know the truth, hear his voice, or be reassured that he is safe.”

The right to know the truth is not a consolation offered by the authorities to a family, but an autonomous right linked to protection from torture and cruel treatment, as well as to the rights to life, liberty, and recognition as a person before the law. It encompasses knowledge of the circumstances of the disappearance, the progress and results of the investigation, the person's fate, and the location of their remains if their death is established. It also requires the protection of relatives and witnesses from retaliation or extortion because of their search for the truth. Keeping families

suspended between the possibility of life and death, and leaving them to search alone in prisons and hospitals and through intermediaries, is not merely a failure to provide information: it extends the violation into their daily lives and makes them direct victims. Redress cannot begin until the whole truth is revealed and those responsible are held accountable.²²

7. Legal Analysis and the Responsibility of the Authorities

7.1. When Does an Incident Constitute Enforced Disappearance?

Article 2 of the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance defines the crime through three interrelated elements: deprivation of a person's liberty; commission of the act by agents of the State or by persons or groups acting with its authorisation, support, or acquiescence; and a subsequent refusal to acknowledge the deprivation of liberty or concealment of the person's fate or whereabouts, thereby placing them outside the protection of the law.²³ Although Syria has not yet acceded to the Convention, this definition provides a precise international standard. Syria nevertheless remains bound by the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and by the rights violated by disappearance, including the rights to life, liberty, security, recognition as a person before the law, and an effective remedy.²⁴

Concealment need not continue for years. The elements of the violation may be fulfilled as soon as the responsible body refuses to acknowledge the detention or disclose the location, even if the person's fate is subsequently revealed. Conversely, loss of contact alone is not sufficient to establish enforced disappearance. It is necessary to identify a deprivation of liberty, the perpetrator's connection to the State, and the element of denial or concealment. The report therefore distinguishes between continuing cases, temporary concealment followed by acknowledgement or a visit, and cases in which the perpetrating body remained unknown.

Enforced disappearance is a continuing violation for as long as the person's fate or whereabouts have not been reliably disclosed and the person remains outside the protection of the law. An unofficial list, a rumour about a prison, or an intermediary's statement does not end it. The element of concealment ends when a competent authority acknowledges the detention, provides verifiable information, and makes legal

[International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance](#), Arts. 12(4),²² 24(1), and 24(2); Human Rights Committee, *Quinteros v. Uruguay*, Communication No. 107/1981, CCPR/C/19/D/107/1981, para. 14, in which the Committee found that the anguish and stress caused by continued uncertainty concerning the disappeared person's fate made the relative a victim of a violation of Article 7 of the Covenant.

[International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance](#), Art. 2,²³
[International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#), in particular Arts. 2, 6, 7, 9, and 16.²⁴

safeguards available. Other accompanying violations may nevertheless continue, including arbitrary detention, torture, or denial of a fair trial.²⁵

7.2. Responsibility for Enforced Disappearance

When a person is taken from their home or from an official checkpoint by security or military personnel and does not subsequently appear in a verifiable register, the State bears direct responsibility for identifying the body involved, the order issued, and the transfer route. The State as a whole is responsible for maintaining a unified registration system and preventing transfers of detainees between formations without a written administrative or judicial record.

From the moment of arrest, every register must record the person’s identity; the time, place, and grounds of the deprivation of liberty; the body that ordered and carried it out; the place of detention and every subsequent transfer; the person’s health; the time of appearance before a judicial authority; and the time of release or death. A specified portion of this information must be made immediately available to the family and lawyer. International standards prohibit secret places of detention and require records to be maintained, updated, and subjected to oversight.²⁶ Article 3 of the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance also requires investigation of acts of deprivation of liberty resembling enforced disappearance that are committed by persons or groups without the authorisation, support, or acquiescence of the State, and that those responsible be brought to justice. This duty gives effect to a broader principle of human rights law: the State must exercise due diligence to prevent foreseeable abuses, respond promptly to a report, search for the victim, protect relatives and witnesses, investigate, and prosecute.²⁷ The Human Rights Committee has likewise affirmed that States must protect individuals from abduction or detention by individual criminals or irregular groups, including armed or terrorist groups operating within their territory.²⁸ The State’s obligation is therefore not merely negative—a duty to refrain from enforced disappearance—but also positive: to protect persons within its territory from arbitrary detention or enforced disappearance.

International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, in particular Arts. 8 and 24.²⁵

International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, Arts. 17 and 18.²⁶

International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, Art. 3; and²⁷ International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Art. 2(3). See also Special Procedures communication AL SYR 4/2025, cited above.

Human Rights Committee, [General Comment No. 35 on Article 9 \(Liberty and Security of Person\)](#),²⁸ CCPR/C/GC/35, 16 December 2014, para. 7.

7.3. Shortcomings in the National Legal Framework

The 2025 Constitutional Declaration prohibits enforced disappearance and provides that, except in cases of flagrante delicto, no person may be arrested, detained, or deprived of liberty except pursuant to a judicial decision.²⁹ As of the date of this report, however, that constitutional prohibition had not been translated into a criminal provision defining enforced disappearance as a distinct offence, setting out its elements, and prescribing the applicable penalties; nor did Syrian legislation in force contain any definition of the offence of enforced disappearance. Moreover, the non-applicability of statutes of limitation under Article 18 was, according to its wording, confined to crimes of torture and did not expressly encompass enforced disappearance.

Because Article 51 of the Constitutional Declaration confirmed that laws in force would remain applicable unless repealed or amended, it is relevant to note that Articles 555 and 556 of the Syrian Penal Code criminalise the deprivation of a person’s liberty without lawful cause and impose a heavier penalty if the deprivation exceeds one month, is accompanied by physical or mental torture, or is committed against a public official during or because of the performance of their duties.³⁰ Legislative Decree No. 20 of 2013 also prescribes life imprisonment with hard labour for anyone who abducts a person for political or material gain, revenge or retaliation, sectarian motives, or ransom.³¹ Although these provisions criminalise acts that may form part of an enforced disappearance, they do not encompass all its elements. They do not expressly criminalise denial of the deprivation of liberty or concealment of a person’s fate or whereabouts, nor do they address commission by agents of the State or persons acting with its authorisation, support, or acquiescence as a defining element of the offence. They also do not regulate the continuing nature of disappearance or responsibility for ordering or concealing it. The offences of unlawful confinement and abduction therefore cannot be considered a substitute for criminalising enforced disappearance as a distinct offence.

The Personal Status Law does not address disappearance as a crime, but is limited to its civil consequences. Articles 202 to 206 define a missing person and regulate the appointment of a court-appointed representative to manage that person’s affairs, as well as the conditions for ending the status of absence or issuing a declaration of death.³² These provisions assist the family in managing certain financial and personal matters, but they create no obligation to search for the missing person, identify the body responsible for the disappearance, or hold accountable anyone who concealed the person’s fate. The law also fails to address cases in which a person reappears after

[Constitutional Declaration of the Syrian Arab Republic](#), 13 March 2025, Art. 18.²⁹
[Syrian Penal Code](#), issued by Legislative Decree No. 148 of 1949, as amended, Arts. 555 and 556.³⁰
[Legislative Decree No. 20 of 2013](#), concerning offences of abduction and the applicable penalties, 2 April 2013, Arts. 1 and 2.³¹
[Syrian Personal Status Law No. 59 of 1953, as amended](#), Arts. 202–206.³²

a final judicial declaration of death has been issued and implemented in the civil registers, with all the legal consequences that may follow. It omits procedures for restoring the person’s entry in the registers, the effects of correcting their legal status, and the resulting rearrangement of the legal positions and financial and family obligations that arose or were modified on the basis of that judicial decision.

The Code of Criminal Procedure contains safeguards that, if implemented, could limit unrecorded detention. Article 422 requires investigating judges and magistrates to inspect detainees in detention facilities and prisons once a month, and presidents of criminal courts to do so at least once every three months. Article 424 requires anyone who knows that a person is being held in a place not legally designated for detention to inform the Public Prosecutor, investigating judge, or magistrate. Article 425 requires those officials to proceed immediately to the place of detention and release anyone held unlawfully, or immediately refer the person to the competent judicial authority if there are legal grounds for detention; failure to do so is deemed complicity in the offence of unlawful confinement.³³ These safeguards, however, focus principally on the lawfulness of detention and do not establish a centralised system for recording every deprivation of liberty. Nor do they contain an express and immediate obligation to inform the family or legal representative of the detainee’s location and every transfer. The testimonies in this report show that the prescribed judicial oversight did not in practice prevent denial of detention, conflicting information, or the continued existence of actual places of detention inaccessible to victims’ families.

Legislative Decree No. 55 of 2011 compounds these gaps. It permits judicial police officers, or persons entrusted with their functions, in offences relating to State security and public safety, to request that the Public Prosecution extend the detention of suspects, provided that the total period does not exceed 60 days.³⁴ The Decree does not itself authorise concealment of a detainee, but the combination of a lengthy detention period, the absence of an express duty to inform the family, and limited effective oversight creates an environment conducive to short- or long-term disappearance. As noted above, Article 51 of the Constitutional Declaration provides that legislation in force remains applicable unless amended or repealed; no provision repealing Decree No. 55 was identified. Its provisions nevertheless raise serious questions concerning their compatibility with Article 18 of the Constitutional Declaration and the obligation under Article 9 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights to bring a detainee promptly before an independent judge.

[Syrian Code of Criminal Procedure No. 112 of 1950](#), Arts. 422, 424, and 425; Syrians for Truth and Justice, [Syria: Input to the Committee on Enforced Disappearances and the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances’ Joint Statement on the Notion of Short-Term Enforced Disappearance](#), 24 July 2023.

[Legislative Decree No. 55 of 2011](#), amending the powers of the judicial police, 21 April 2011; Human Rights Committee, General Comment No. 35, CCPR/C/GC/35, paras. 32 and 33, cited above.

7.4. The National Commission for Missing Persons and Processes for Determining Fate

In May 2025, the authorities addressed part of the institutional vacuum by issuing Presidential Decree No. 19, which established the National Commission for Missing Persons, granted it legal personality and financial and administrative independence, and tasked it with searching for missing and forcibly disappeared persons, determining their fate, documenting cases, establishing a national database, and providing legal and humanitarian support to their families.³⁵

In July 2026, the Commission launched a national discussion paper on the governing principles for a Law on the Affairs of Missing and Forcibly Disappeared Persons, as part of consultations intended to prepare comprehensive legislation.³⁶ The law had nevertheless not been enacted as of the date of this report.

The establishment of the Commission represents official recognition of the scale of the issue and the need to entrust it to a specialised national body. It does not, in itself, remedy the absence of criminalisation of enforced disappearance or guarantee the Commission’s independence and practical ability to discharge its mandate. The anticipated law should therefore grant it clear powers to obtain records and information from public institutions, security and military bodies, and integrated formations; access places of detention, mass graves, and other relevant sites; protect data, witnesses, and evidence; and communicate regularly with families and keep them informed of the progress of searches. Its mandate should encompass every case, irrespective of the identity of the victim or responsible body or the date of disappearance.

Reading Decrees Nos. 19 and 20 of 2025 together reveals a further institutional gap. Whereas the mandate of the Commission was framed in general terms encompassing missing and forcibly disappeared persons, without an express restriction based on the identity of the responsible body or the date of the incident, the mandate of the National Commission for Transitional Justice (NCTJ) was confined to violations “caused by the defunct regime”. This may produce a situation in which a new disappearance is covered by the search for the person’s fate but excluded from accountability and reparation processes because of when it occurred or the identity of the responsible body. Such separation creates unjustified inequality among victims and risks turning the determination of fate into a substitute for justice, instead of forming part of an integrated process that encompasses search, investigation, accountability, and reparation without discrimination. To close this gap, the forthcoming missing persons

[Presidency of the Republic: Presidential Decree Forming the National Commission for Missing Persons](#), Presidential Decree No. 19 of 2025, 17 May 2025.³⁵

SANA, [Missing Persons Commission Launches National Discussion Paper on the Governing Principles for a Law on the Affairs of Missing and Forcibly Disappeared Persons](#), 15 July 2026.³⁶

law should include specific rules on reparation and accountability in missing persons cases.

The facts documented in this report confirm the need for the Commission to work along two parallel tracks: a long-term track addressing cases from previous years by examining archives, graves, and available data; and an urgent track activated immediately upon receipt of a report of a new and unrecorded deprivation of liberty, before evidence is lost, the detainee is transferred, or the person is exposed to further violations. In such cases, the search for the person should proceed concurrently with the opening of a criminal investigation, preservation of evidence, notification of the judiciary, and enabling the family or its lawyer to challenge the lawfulness of the detention. In this manner, the Commission’s work complements rather than replaces the duties of law enforcement bodies and the judiciary.

8. Conclusion and Recommendations

This report does not equate the cases documented by Syrians for Truth and Justice during the transitional period with the extensive and centralised system of disappearance established by previous governments, nor does it assume that they are comparable in scale or organisation. The occurrence of new cases, even in smaller numbers, nevertheless demonstrates that the conditions enabling disappearance have yet to be dismantled. This report should therefore be read as an early warning calling for the dozens of cases at issue today to be addressed before the practice expands and its victims number in the thousands. The path between the moment of deprivation of liberty and the receipt of official information remains unregulated and open to denial, contradiction, and extortion. The most important test of the transitional period is to ensure that disappearance does not become a renewed tool in the name of security, combating crime, or revenge. Credible transitional justice that recognises victims of the past cannot be built while the present produces new missing persons. The truth is the right of every family, irrespective of the identity of the victim, the body suspected of responsibility, or the region from which the person comes. Accordingly, Syrians for Truth and Justice recommends the following:

8.1. To the Syrian Transitional Authorities

- Immediately end every form of secret or unrecorded detention and restrict deprivation of liberty to legally recognised places subject to independent judicial oversight.
- Establish a unified and up-to-date national register of every person deprived of liberty, and require all bodies and formations under the Ministries of Interior and Defence to enter data on arrest, transfer, release, and death, with penalties for concealing or falsifying information.

- Immediately and officially inform the family of the detainee’s location, the grounds for detention, and every subsequent transfer, and ensure prompt access to a lawyer and doctor and appearance before a judge.
- Open prompt and independent investigations into the cases in this report and others, including the chain of command, checkpoint, vehicle, and communications records, and testimonies of released detainees; and protect relatives and witnesses from retaliation and extortion.
- Adopt a stand-alone law on enforced disappearance that complies with international standards; criminalises ordering, contributing to, and concealing the offence; establishes command responsibility; and guarantees the victim’s and family’s rights to truth, accountability, and reparation. Repeal provisions permitting prolonged detention; implement Articles 422, 424, and 425 of the Code of Criminal Procedure; and amend them to ensure the establishment of official registers and immediate notification to victims’ families of places of detention.
- Ratify the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance and recognise the competence of the Committee on Enforced Disappearances to receive individual communications.
- Enable the National Commission for Missing Persons, established by Decree No. 19 of 2025, to operate with full independence; ensure that its powers encompass determining the fate of all missing persons, including those who went missing after the fall of Assad; and include accountability and reparation in the missing persons law.
- Grant the National Commission for Missing Persons clear statutory powers to compel all public institutions, security and military bodies, and integrated formations to provide records and information; preserve evidence; and refer information giving rise to suspected criminal conduct to the competent judicial authorities, thereby ensuring that the Commission’s humanitarian work to determine fate does not replace investigation and accountability.
- Exclude confessions obtained during incommunicado detention and investigate allegations of torture, extortion, and sectarian or degrading treatment.
- Provide families with urgent remedies, including an expedited judicial application to disclose the detainee’s location and review the lawfulness of the deprivation of liberty.

8.2. To the National Commission for Missing Persons

- Adopt a comprehensive mandate covering all missing persons, including victims of new cases following the transfer of power and cases attributed to de facto authorities, armed groups, and private actors.

- Establish a safe and unified reporting channel that provides every family with a case number, contact person, and timetable for updates, and permits reports to be submitted from inside and outside Syria.
- Prioritise cases involving imminent risk, particularly those concerning children, older persons, persons with illnesses, and persons feared to be at risk of torture or extrajudicial execution.
- Publish a transparent search methodology; distinguish confirmed information from information assessed as probable or merely circulated; protect personal data and ensure informed consent; and cooperate effectively with forensic medicine centres and DNA laboratories.
- Involve families and survivors in governance and priority-setting; ensure the representation of women and different regions and communities; and publish periodic progress reports that do not disclose individuals' identities.

8.3. To International Actors and States Supporting Syria

- Keep new cases on the political and human rights agenda, and do not treat enforced disappearance as a historical legacy that ended with the fall of the former government.
- Support the work of the Independent Institution on Missing Persons in the Syrian Arab Republic (IIMP), ensure the transitional government's cooperation with it, and press the Syrian government to permit it to operate without restriction throughout Syrian territory.
- Exert diplomatic pressure to ensure that the Syrian authorities disclose the fate of disappeared persons and fulfil their obligations under international treaties and instruments.
- Provide technical and financial support to Syrian organisations documenting enforced disappearance and enabling victims and their relatives to access justice.



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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