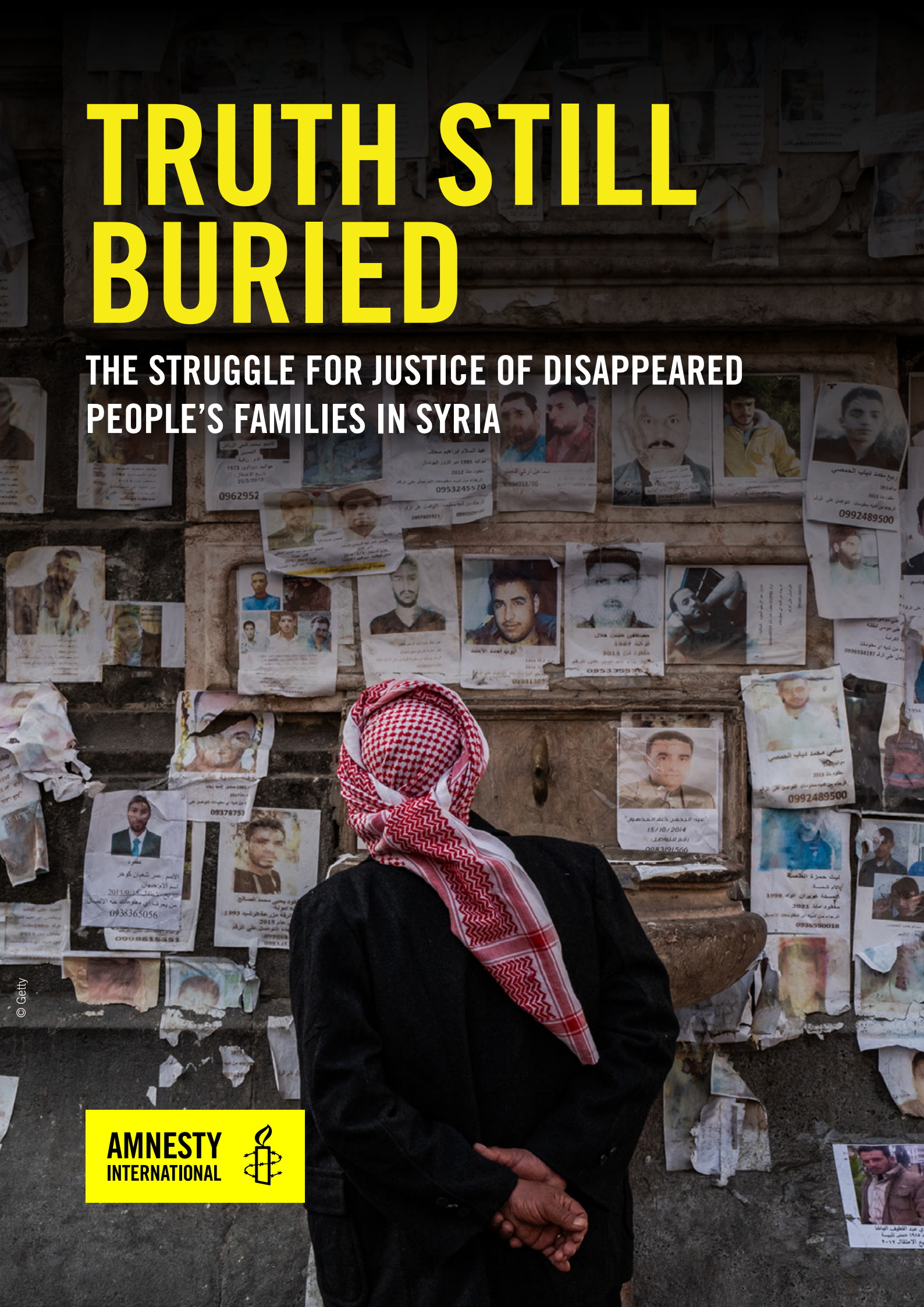


# TRUTH STILL BURIED

THE STRUGGLE FOR JUSTICE OF DISAPPEARED  
PEOPLE'S FAMILIES IN SYRIA



AMNESTY  
INTERNATIONAL



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# INTRODUCTION

Following the fall of the government of President Bashar al-Assad in Syria on 8 December 2024, amid immense joy, many families of disappeared people were also thrust into a new form of agony. For years Assad's government had waged a chilling campaign of mass arbitrary detention and enforced disappearances to crush dissent and intimidate opponents. When detention centres and prisons were opened, images of people forcibly disappeared inside Syria's notorious prison system who were finally freed and able to return home flooded mobile phones. But, for the majority of families, the loved ones they had waited years for did not emerge.

What followed was a period of chaos. Evidence that could have been vital to discover the fate and whereabouts of victims of enforced was destroyed. Families began to search prisons, detention centres and morgues themselves, examining corpses, and visiting mass grave sites in the hopes of finding answers.

Nine months later, families of those forcibly disappeared by the former government, as well as those disappeared by armed groups, are continuing their long struggle to uncover the fate and whereabouts of their loved ones. They want to know what happened to them, to recover the remains of those that died, and to see those responsible held to account.

Between May and June 2025, Amnesty International interviewed 21 family members of the disappeared, survivors of detention, and representatives of victims' associations. The organization visited Syria in May 2025, meeting with government ministers, representatives of non-governmental organizations and UN agencies, and attending vigils and gatherings in Yarmouk, Eastern Ghouta, and central Damascus where families gathered to make their voices heard and their demands known.







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“

*The families of the detainees are saying that today, little by little, the cause of the missing is disappearing from the public space. We need to keep raising this issue. It must stay present in the public and in the streets. The families are still asking “Where are our children?”*

”

**Wasel Hamideh, activist <sup>1</sup>**

The Syrian government bears primary responsibility for uncovering the truth, delivering justice, and providing reparations for the tens of thousands of people disappeared in Syria.

Even though the government faces myriad economic challenges, and the security situation in the country continues to deteriorate amid growing sectarian violence, the search for the disappeared must begin without delay. Families have faced enormous torment since their loved ones were taken. That torment is prolonged each day the government fails to provide them with answers or to demonstrate a genuine commitment to accountability. Any path to justice must be inclusive, transparent, and firmly grounded in the rights and needs of victims.

This briefing aims to amplify the calls of families and survivors for truth and accountability, particularly given the serious concerns that persist about the government’s willingness to prioritize and achieve these objectives. Clarifying the fate and whereabouts of every missing person, regardless of who was responsible, is essential to achieving truth, justice, and reparation for victims and their families. The Amnesty International movement will stand with the families of Syria’s disappeared, including those forcibly disappeared by the former Assad government or other de facto authorities, and those disappeared by armed opposition groups, until the Syrian government guarantees their rights.

<sup>1</sup> Interview by voice call with Wasel Hamideh, 13 May 2025.

# BACKGROUND

On 8 December 2024, the government of Bashar al-Assad was ousted, ending more than 54 years of authoritarian rule over Syria by his family.

In March 2011, Syrian people took to the streets in a mass uprising demanding reform and freedom from oppression. The government responded with crushing force, shooting protesters and forcibly disappearing scores. The violence descended into a devastating armed conflict. Hundreds of thousands of people were killed and millions displaced.

“Enforced disappearance” occurs when a person has been apprehended by state authorities or their agents, or people acting with their authorization or acquiescence, followed by a refusal to acknowledge such deprivation of liberty or concealment of the person’s fate or whereabouts, placing them outside the protection of the law.<sup>2</sup> The term “enforced disappearance” is thus used to refer to acts attributable to state actors, including the Syrian government, or to de facto authorities exercising government-like functions, such as the Autonomous Authorities of the North and East Syria Region. The term “disappearance” is used more broadly to encompass acts akin to enforced disappearance when committed by non-state armed groups without the authorization, support or acquiescence of state authorities.

<sup>2</sup> International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (CPED), Art. 2.









Since 2011, more than 100,000 people in Syria are estimated to have gone missing.<sup>3</sup> The vast majority were forcibly disappeared by the Assad government and taken into a labyrinth of prisons and detention centres across Syria. Thousands of others were disappeared by armed opposition groups, including Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), the Syrian National Army (SNA), the Islamic State (IS), and the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), the armed wing of the Autonomous Authorities of the North and East Syria Region.

Under the Assad government, Amnesty International documented acts of torture, enforced disappearance and extermination carried out as part of a widespread and systematic attack against the civilian population, amounting to crimes against humanity.<sup>4</sup> The Assad government forcibly disappeared people who opposed its rule, including activists, protesters, journalists, doctors, students and humanitarian workers.<sup>7</sup> Others were in the wrong time or the wrong place, taken randomly, or had informants or other individuals report them to authorities accusing them of dissent or suspicious activity. In a 2017 report on Saydnaya Military Prison, Amnesty International found that the Assad government had extrajudicially executed thousands of people in its custody.<sup>5</sup>

In November 2024, HTS, SNA and allied armed opposition groups launched a military offensive which first led to the capture of Aleppo governorate, then other governorates and eventually Damascus, resulting in President Bashar al-Assad and his family fleeing the country.

On 29 January 2025, the Syria Military Operation Command appointed former head of HTS, Ahmed al-Sharaa, to serve as interim head of state. On 13 March 2025, President al-Sharaa endorsed a Constitutional Declaration, which provides a framework for a five-year transitional period.<sup>5</sup> On 29 March 2025, a new government was formed, with President al-Sharaa at its head. On 17 May 2025, President al-Sharaa issued Decree No. 19 establishing the National Commission for the Missing (NCM)<sup>6</sup> and Decree No. 20 establishing the National Commission for Transitional Justice (NCTJ).

<sup>3</sup> UN News, "Syria: UN commission hails recent action to address past violations", 27 June 2025, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2025/06/1165066>

<sup>4</sup> Amnesty International, *Harrowing accounts of torture, inhuman conditions and mass deaths in Syria's prisons*, 18 August 2016, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2016/08/harrowing-accounts-of-torture-inhuman-conditions-and-mass-deaths-in-syrias-prisons/>

<sup>5</sup> The Syrian Observer, "Syrian President Ahmad al Sharaa Signs Constitutional Declaration, Setting Roadmap for Five Year Transitional Period," 14 March 2025, <https://syrianobserver.com/syrian-actors/syrian-president-ahmad-al-sharaa-signs-constitutional-declaration-setting-roadmap-for-five-year-transitional-period.html>

<sup>6</sup> SANA, "مرسوم رئاسي بتشكيل الهيئة الوطنية للمفقودين" ["Presidential decree forming the National Authority for the Missing"], 17 May 2025, <https://www.sana.sy/?p=2219862>



# DISAPPEARANCES IN SYRIA

## 1980s

- Enforced disappearances used as a tactic of oppression in Syria

## 2011

- Syrian uprising begins, and the government begins mass forced disappearances
- UN Human Rights Council establishes the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (COI) to investigate violations of international law since March 2011

## 2013 – 2014

- Armed non-state actors including the armed group IS and HTS carry out disappearances and unlawful killings

## 2014

- Caesar photos showing widespread torture, inhumane conditions and deaths released

## 2016

- UN establishes the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism (IIIM) to assist in the investigation and prosecution of persons responsible for the most serious international crimes

## 2017

- Amnesty International concludes crimes against humanity committed at Saydnaya Military Prison in 'Human Slaughterhouse' report

## 2018

- Government issues death certificates to families of many victims of enforced disappearance

## 2021

- Mass graves in Najha and other locations believed to hold remains of disappeared people revealed



**2023**

- UN establishes the Independent Institution on Missing Persons in Syria (IIMP)

**2024**

- Bashar al-Assad falls and those remaining in his notorious detention centers are freed

**2025**

- National Commission for Missing (NCM) established





# CAUGHT BETWEEN HOPE AND HEART- BREAK

## A NIGHT WHERE NO ONE SLEPT

On the night of 7 December 2024, many families of those forcibly disappeared, like Syrians across the country, did not sleep. The crime of enforced disappearance was deeply connected to the Assad family that had ruled Syria for 54 years. As opposition groups advanced and took territory, they released those held in the Assad government's detention facilities.

The opening of the prisons - including the notorious Saydnaya Military Prison outside Damascus - came to symbolize not only the collapse of the government's apparatus of repression but also the end of the Assad family's rule.





الأمم المتحدة



“

*There was news that the opposition was closing in on Saydnaya Prison, and we were waiting for the liberation of the prison. I had a feeling my brother was there.*

**Wasel Hamideh, whose brother disappeared in September 2013.<sup>7</sup>**

”

As news of detainees being freed flooded people's phones, many families with missing relatives waited with bated breath to see if their loved ones would be among the survivors that made it out.

“The night Damascus was liberated, no one slept,” he continued. “We were on edge — we were glued to social media, following every rumour that the opposition was nearing Saydnaya. I believed my brother was there. I had no proof, but it was the only place left that I had no information about. When they said Saydnaya was liberated, I thought: ‘Today my brother will return. He’ll come back. All of them will.’”

<sup>7</sup> Interview by voice call with Wasel al-Hamideh, 13 May 2025.





## BROKEN TEETH, TUBERCULOSIS AND LITTLE SUPPORT

Thousands of detainees emerged from Saydnaya Military Prison and other Assad government-run prisons and detention centres across the country. There was no immediate humanitarian response for the released detainees, many of whom had endured years of horrific detention conditions and torture. Diseases such as cholera and tuberculosis were widespread in Syria's prison system, and many of the released detainees suffered from physical and mental illnesses. Many had broken teeth, survivors said.

"Some had lost their memories and didn't even know where they were," said Ahmad Helmi, Director of the Ta'afi Initiative, an association of survivors of torture.<sup>8</sup> "They didn't know how to find their families, or even how to get home. Many had no transport, and many had no idea whether their families were still in Syria." Some were taken to mosques to sleep, hoping relatives would eventually come looking for them.

Freed detainees told Amnesty International that reparations and accountability were crucial for their healing and felt a strong sense of neglect after their release. Many could not afford medical care.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Interview by video call with Ahmad Helmi, 22 May 2025.

<sup>9</sup> Amnesty International, *Syria: Torture survivors of Saydnaya and other detention centres grappling with devastating needs and minimal support* 26 June 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2025/06/syria-torture-survivors-of-saydnaya-and-other-detention-centres-grappling-with-devastating-needs-and-minimal-support/>

Abu Alaa, a survivor of Saydnaya Military Prison, said: “We came out of prison and were surprised that our families had sold our houses and everything we owned to get us out of prison... the people that extorted them haven’t been held accountable.”<sup>10</sup> Abdulmoneim al-Kayed, another survivor, said: “I call for accountability for the heads of security branches so they don’t escape justice, and for every person who traded in our lives and extorted our families.”<sup>11</sup>

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Abu Alaa, a survivor of Saydnaya Military Prison, said: “We came out of prison and were surprised that our families had sold our houses and everything we owned to get us out of prison... the people that extorted them haven’t been held accountable.” Abdulmoneim al-Kayed, another survivor, said: “I call for accountability for the heads of security branches so they don’t escape justice, and for every person who traded in our lives and extorted our families.”

<sup>10</sup> Interview in person with Abu Alaa, 31 May 2025, Damascus Suburbs.

<sup>11</sup> Interview in person with Abdulmoneim al-Kayed, 31 May 2025, Damascus Suburbs.







## “WHERE ARE THE MISSING?”

Following the fall of the Assad government, when their loved ones did not emerge, many families flocked to prisons, detention centres, morgues and mass grave sites to carry out the search themselves.

An Amnesty International researcher who entered Syria on 12 December 2024 and spoke to nearly two dozen family members at the morgue at Al-Mujtahid Hospital reported that the main question the families were asking was: “Where are the missing?”

Bodies from detention sites were being sent to nearby hospitals. A hospital administrator confirmed they had received 47 bodies from various locations, including Saydnaya Military Prison. Families were permitted to enter the morgue and view the corpses to see if they could identify their loved ones.

Eventually, as hundreds of people were coming, the hospital posted photos of the corpses on a wall outside. Inside, the morgue separated the bodies. Those who had been identified were kept in one room, wrapped in body bags marked “identified.” The unidentified corpses were in another.

In the room dedicated to the unidentified bodies, Amnesty International’s researcher saw around eight bodies. They were emaciated, rib cages protruding, skin missing in patches. Some had missing eyes. Many were bruised. The condition of the bodies resembled the infamous Caesar photographs.<sup>12</sup>

A morgue worker told the families: “Their appearance has changed after 10 to 12 years in detention. Do you remember any birthmarks or scars that could help identify them?”

<sup>12</sup> The Caesar photographs are a collection of more than 50,000 images smuggled outside of Syria by a defector code-named “Caesar”, who was an official forensic photographer for the Military Police. Many of the photographs showed the bodies of detainees who died in Syria’s detention, emaciated and showing signs of torture. <https://www.hrw.org/report/2015/12/16/if-dead-could-speak/mass-deaths-and-torture-syrias-detention-facilities>



One young man asked, “There’s a corpse inside — could you check for us? Do they have a metal rod on their left leg?”

The morgue worker asked the family members to return the next day with an old photograph of their loved one, ideally showing their teeth, and to fill out forms that might help with identification.

A woman, whose 20-year-old son had been forcibly disappeared in August 2012, told Amnesty International, “It’s been five days, I haven’t left a hospital, [there isn’t] a morgue that I haven’t visited. The corpses inside, I didn’t recognize them. Even if my son was among them, I wouldn’t know. They are deformed.”

Some of the disappeared were identified. Mazen Hamide, a prominent activist who had returned to Syria from the Netherlands, was one of the bodies discovered in Saydnaya Military Prison. Doctors who examined the body said he had likely died days before the prisoners had been freed.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>13</sup> The Guardian, “We won’t stop until we find them all: joy gives way to grief as Syria buries its dead,” 12 December 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/dec/12/joy-gives-way-to-grief-as-syria-buries-its-dead>







## “FAMILIES WERE DIGGING IN THE GROUND”

Wasel Hamideh visited the Al-Mujtahid Hospital morgue to look for his brother. “Seeing the bodies was so painful,” he said. “I also saw three [recently released] men that had lost their memory. I spoke to a young man I will never forget in my life. I asked him what his name was. He answered, ‘24’ – the name he was given by prison guards in Saydnaya, and the only thing he remembers.”

Wasel Hamideh continued his search, going to other hospitals and morgues: “I went to detention centres to look for evidence, but I didn’t go to Saydnaya at first, I was too scared.” Then, his cousin sent him a screenshot from a video on Tiktok apparently showing papers from Saydnaya Military Prison that included his brother’s name and noting he had been held on the prison’s third floor.

The next morning, Wasel Hamideh went to Saydnaya Military Prison: “It was horrible.... and the prison is huge, it’s a town...It really was a human slaughterhouse, you could smell the death”.<sup>14</sup>

There were rumours that there was a secret underground prison. When he arrived, he said, “Families were digging in the ground, so many mothers were there digging, hundreds of families. It was a tense and horrible situation.”<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Interview by voice call with Wasel Hamideh, 13 May 2025.

<sup>15</sup> Interview by voice call with Wasel Hamideh, 13 May 2025.

He asked a member of the Turkish civil defence, one of the earliest first responders to show up to the prison, if there indeed was an underground prison. The civil defender said no, but that he worried announcing it would put his team at risk from distraught families. On 9 December 2025, the Syria Civil Defence, more commonly known as the White Helmets, released a statement saying that, after completing their own exhaustive search, no secret underground prisons had been found.<sup>16</sup>

Wasel Hamideh said: “Despite the statement, people were still digging. The families were sleeping outside, resting among the trees and then they kept digging. For 15 days they were looking every day.”<sup>17</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Syrian Civil Defence (The White Helmets), “Statement on the conclusion of search operations for possible remaining detainees in secret cells and basements of Sednaya Prison”, 10 December 2024, <https://whitehelmets.org/node/1691>

<sup>17</sup> Interview by voice call with Wasel Hamideh, 13 May 2025



Ali Haj Suleiman / Amnesty International





## “MORE PAINFUL THAN THE PAST 10 YEARS COMBINED”

The release of detainees from Saydnaya Military Prison and other detention facilities after the fall of the Assad government brought long-awaited hope to families of Syria’s forcibly disappeared persons. It also unleashed a new wave of trauma, exacerbated by the absence of an immediate and coordinated search, the spread of misinformation, and the widespread loss or destruction of evidence that might have helped families uncover the truth about their loved ones.

Across Damascus, in the days that followed, photos of the disappeared plastered walls, with numbers of families to contact if the person had been seen.

Despite their desperate efforts, the vast majority of families did not find their loved ones, nor any answers about their fate.

The families of those forcibly disappeared were caught between hope and heartbreak. In the chaos following 8 December, many prison records were looted or destroyed — records that could have held vital information about where disappeared persons had been detained and who might still be alive.

The mother of a victim, speaking to Amnesty International on 10 December, said “the past 48 hours have been more painful than the past 10 years combined”.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Interview by voice call with Fadwa Mahmoud, 10 December 2024.

# THE FAMILIES OF THE DISAPPEARED DEMAND ACTION

The families of disappeared persons have organized, inside and outside Syria, to demand truth and justice for their relatives soon after the uprising began in 2011. Before 8 December 2024, people continued the struggle for justice in ways they could, from sharing information on people seen imprisoned, to advocacy, to demonstrations. The families were instrumental in drawing attention to the missing in Syria, persuading states and international organizations to take the issue seriously and achieving key victories in the pursuit of accountability, including the creation of an international mechanism for the missing in Syria and encouraging the trials of suspected perpetrators in Europe under the principle of universal jurisdiction. After the Assad government fell, the struggle for truth, justice and reparations for victims of disappearances did not end, it transformed.

After the frantic search undertaken by the families of victims of enforced disappearance, and the painful realization that their family members would not emerge from the Assad government's prison system, some families began donning black and acknowledging that their loved ones were most likely no longer alive.

The painful realization by families that many of their loved ones had likely perished did not weaken the urgency with which they, and others whose loved ones remained missing, demanded their right to the truth about what happened to them, including a search for the disappeared persons that might allow them to find the remains of their loved ones and give them a dignified burial. They called for the suspected perpetrators of disappearances, torture and killings to be held accountable. Families of the disappeared for meaningful participation in shaping the future of Syria, in particular the transitional justice efforts announced by the new government.

In May 2025, Fadwa Mahmoud, a movement leader, whose husband and son have been missing since 2012 said: "The struggle is just beginning. Of course, 14 years of suffering may weaken some of us. But it can also give birth to strength".<sup>19</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Interview by voice call with Fadwa Mahmoud, 19 May 2025.









## “THE DEMANDS WE RAISE”

Dozens of family and survivor associations have emerged since the Syrian uprising began in 2011. Families for Freedom, a women-led movement of Syrian families demanding freedom and justice for disappeared persons, was formed in 2017. Its founders said they drew inspiration from other movements, including the Mothers of Plaza Del Mayo in Argentina and the Committee for the Disappeared in Lebanon. Among the group’s public campaigning actions was the Freedom Bus, which was covered in the photos of persons disappeared by all parties to the conflict in Syria and drove around Europe. Syrian women with disappeared loved ones hosted rallies in public squares, the bus beside them, urging European governments to do more to help free their loved ones.



Ali Haj Suleiman / Amnesty International



Several of the family associations came together to form the Syria Truth and Justice Charter (Charter group) in February 2021. The Charter group initially included Families for Freedom, survivor associations including Ta'afi Initiative, and the Association of Detainees and Missing Persons in Saydnaya Prison, the Coalition of Families of Persons Kidnapped by ISIS (Massar), and the Caesar Families Association, and later expanded to include others. The Charter group was key in campaigning for the formation of an international institution to search for the disappeared. In June 2023, the UN General Assembly created the Independent Institution for Missing Persons in the Syrian Arab Republic (IIMP), which is dedicated to clarifying the fate and whereabouts of all missing persons in Syria and to supporting victims, including survivors and families of the missing.<sup>21</sup> Family associations, and many civil society organizations, believe the IIMP will play a key role in searching for the missing.



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*The struggle is just beginning.*

**Fadwa Mahmoud, movement leader**

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<sup>20</sup> Impunity Watch, “Truth and Justice Charter Syria”, 10 February 2021, <https://www.impunitywatch.org/grassroots-voices/truth-and-justice-charter-syria/>

<sup>21</sup> Independent Institution on Missing Persons in the Syrian Arab Republic (IIMP), “What is IIMP”, <https://iimp.un.org/en/what-is-iim>



Ali Haj Suleiman / Amnesty International

Following the fall of the Assad government, an initiative called the Truth Tents emerged in Syria. For the first time in more than a decade, families of the disappeared could gather in public in parts of Syria under the government's control, honour their loved ones, and demand justice.

Amnesty International visited the Truth Tents in Yarmouk Camp on 30 May 2025 and Deir al-Assafir in Eastern Ghouta on 31 May 2025. Truth Tents were also erected in Jaramana, in Damascus countryside, and Salamiya, in Hama Governorate.

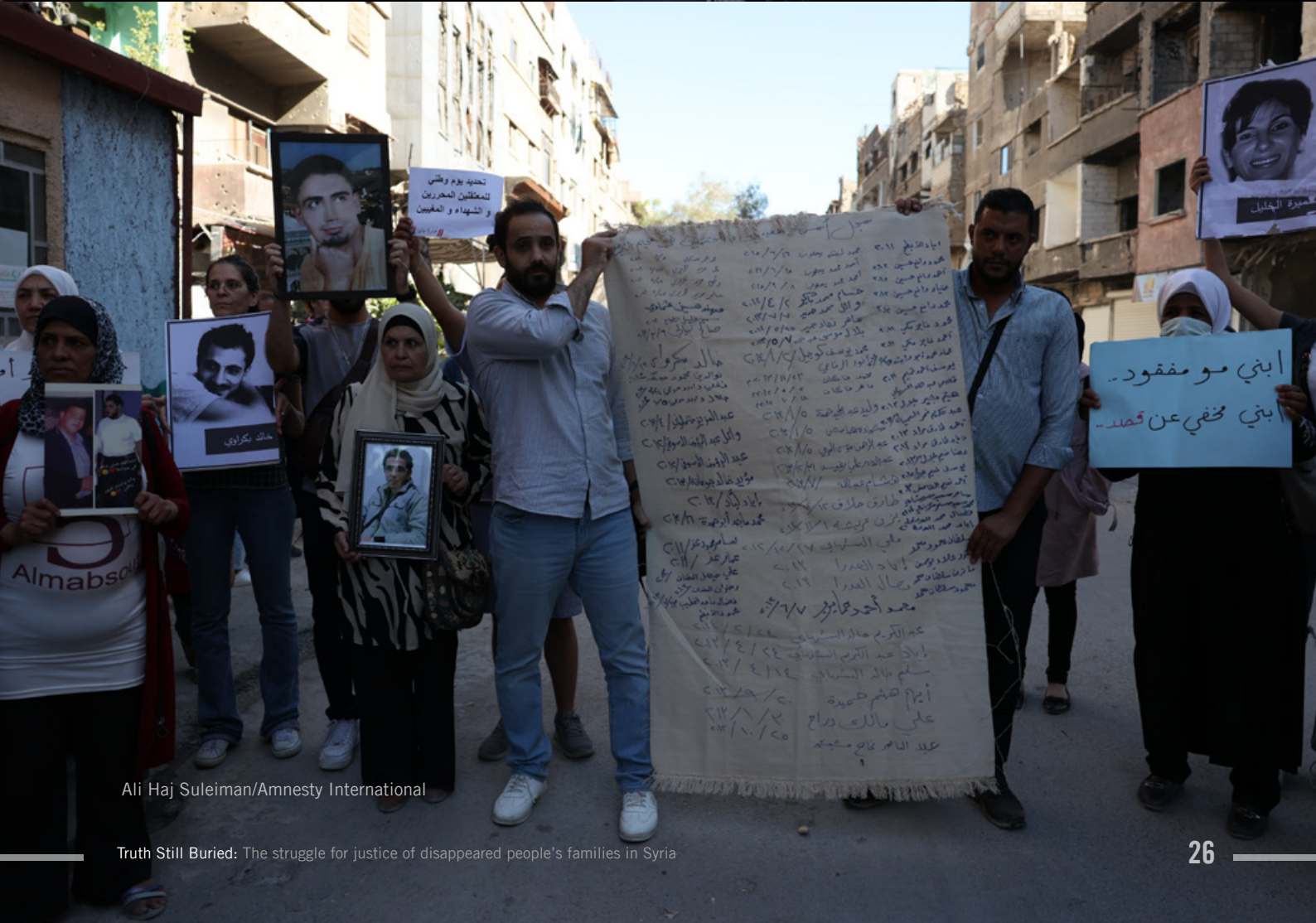
In Deir al-Assafir, hundreds of families gathered, among them children whose parents had been missing most of their lives. Women gave speeches explaining their demands to the government and stressed that they would remain steadfast and continue the struggle until their demands were met, however long it would take. Clutching framed photos of their loved ones and in some cases handwritten lists containing the names of family members that were missing, families said their strength and determination would be fuelled by the solidarity they had with each other.

Wasel Hamideh, who searched for his disappeared brother after Assad's fall and one of the organizers of the Truth Tents, said, "The demands we raise are the known ones from the families of the disappeared: truth, justice, accountability, reparations, and guarantees of non-repetition."





Ali Haj Suleiman/Amnesty International



Ali Haj Suleiman/Amnesty International

# THE DEMANDS OF THE FAMILIES OF THE DISAPPEARED

IN INTERVIEWS CARRIED OUT BY AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL, THE FOLLOWING DEMANDS WERE CONSISTENTLY REPEATED BY FAMILIES OF THE DISAPPEARED AND SURVIVORS OF DETENTION:

## 1. TRUTH

Families want to know what happened to their loved ones. If they are alive, they want to know where they are and to be reunited. If they were killed, they want to know the circumstances of their death and retrieve their remains in order to give them a dignified burial.

## 2. JUSTICE

Families want those that committed disappearances to be brought to justice. Many emphasized that perpetrators on all sides should be held accountable.

## 3. REPARATIONS

Families called for support, whether financial or in terms of education and healthcare programmes. They explained the material impact of disappearances. They also called for moral reparations, or what is referred to as satisfaction<sup>22</sup> – an acknowledgement of what happened to them and an honouring of the victims.

## GUARANTEES OF NON-RECURRENCE

Families and survivors want measures to be taken to ensure that disappearances, be they perpetrated by the new government or any other actor, never happen in Syria again.

<sup>22</sup> UN Basic Principles and Guidelines on the Right to a Remedy and Reparation for Victims of Gross Violations of International Human Rights Law and Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law (Basic Principles).



# TRUTH STILL BURIED

The Syrian government has the obligation to investigate all acts of disappearances and search for disappeared persons in accordance with human rights standards.<sup>23</sup> Enforced disappearance is a human rights violation and a crime of a continuing character as long as the fate or whereabouts of the person has not been determined.<sup>24</sup> Enforced disappearances may amount to war crimes when committed in armed conflict and to crimes against humanity when committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack against the civilian population.

The government must not delay the search for victims of disappearances any further. The anguish and the searing grief without closure experienced by the families of disappeared persons is perpetuated every day that the Syrian government delays investigations into their fate.

<sup>23</sup> Amnesty International, *Searching Without Fear: International Standards for protecting women searchers in the Americas* (Index: AMR 01/8458/2024), 29 August 2024, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/amr01/8458/2024/en/>

<sup>24</sup> Amnesty International, *Searching Without Fear* (previously cited), p. 12.









## STARTING THE SEARCH FOR THE DISAPPEARED

Syrian authorities, in coordination with the recently established National Commission for the Missing, must immediately begin the search of victims of disappearances in full compliance with international standards, including UN Guiding Principles for the Search of Missing Persons.<sup>25</sup>

The search for disappeared persons is a complex, resource-intensive and lengthy undertaking. It requires multiple steps, multiple actors, and significant commitment. The search includes:

- Collecting, preserving, and analysing records and other documents from former detention facilities and other relevant facilities, and retrieving digital evidence from phones, computers, and surveillance systems.
- Finding and exhuming mass graves and identifying remains, which requires forensic expertise.
- Collecting testimonies from survivors, former officials, and others who hold key knowledge and who must be offered guarantees for their safety in exchange for this information.
- Creating and centralizing a database of the missing.<sup>26</sup>

The UN Guiding Principles emphasize the importance of coordination in the search process: “The search should be centralized under, or coordinated by, a competent body that ensures effective coordination with all the other entities whose cooperation is needed for the search to be effective, exhaustive and prompt.”<sup>27</sup> Governmental bodies, including but not limited to the Ministries of Interior and Justice, as well as the recently established NCM, will have a critical role to play in the search. International institutions such as the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (COI) - which has conducted in-depth investigations of human rights abuses including

<sup>25</sup> UN Guiding Principles for the Search for Disappeared Persons (Guiding Principles).

<sup>26</sup> Guiding Principles.

<sup>27</sup> Guiding Principles, Principle 12.

enforced disappearances, the Impartial and Independent Mechanism (IIIM) – which collects and preserves evidence of serious crimes committed in Syria for prosecutions – the IIIMP, and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) – which works to trace missing persons in armed conflict – could also provide critical expertise. All involved actors should coordinate to ensure an effective, exhaustive and prompt search, and the Syrian government should cooperate and provide access to relevant international institutions.

## PRESERVING EVIDENCE AND PROTECTING MASS GRAVES

The preservation and analysis of evidence will be crucial to the search for victims of disappearances, and to the investigation and prosecution of suspected perpetrators. Yet, many mass graves and detention sites have been compromised. Urgent steps are needed to prevent further loss of evidence.

In the immediate aftermath of the fall of the Assad government, Amnesty International visited former detention centres and intelligence branches in the Damascus area. At all detention facilities visited, it appeared documents had been left unprotected, with many apparently destroyed, looted or moved. There were almost no documents remaining at Saydnaya Military Prison by 14 December 2025. Later, activists told Amnesty International that some people had removed documents for safekeeping, fearing the destruction happening at the time.

Dozens of mass graves have been discovered in Syria. In 2017, Amnesty International documented how the bodies of people killed in Saydnaya Military Prison were transported to Tishreen Hospital, a military hospital, and then to mass graves located on military land near Damascus.<sup>28</sup> After the fall of the Assad government, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and the Association of Detainees and Missing Persons of Sednaya Prison visited the sites of four mass graves on the outskirts of Damascus. It appeared some bodies had been freshly buried. In three of the sites, researchers observed families of disappeared persons trying to dig up their remains.

In May 2025, the Minister of Interior told Amnesty International that “directives were sent” for the protection of mass graves but crowd control and security limitations had prevented consistent implementation.<sup>29</sup> “The Minister said they couldn’t stop families from accessing the graves but that now they were trying their best to safeguard them. However, families and activists told Amnesty International they had seen no visible presence of government authorities or security forces at multiple grave sites.”<sup>30</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Amnesty International, *Human Slaughterhouse: Mass Hangings and Extermination at Saydnaya Prison, Syria* (Index: MDE 24/5415/2017), 7 February 2017, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde24/5415/2017/en/>, p.28.

<sup>29</sup> Meeting with Syrian Minister of Interior, 27 May 2025, Damascus.

<sup>30</sup> Interviews in person with Syrian activists (names withheld), 26 May 2025, Damascus.





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“

*I came today to demand the remains of my son and my husband who are disappeared... . My son's name was on a list. He was killed one month after he was disappeared. We have a right to get their remains, to create a grave for them to be able to visit.*

**Lawahiz al-Rantissi, Yarmouk Truth Tent**

”



Ali Haj Suleiman / Amnesty International

In May 2025, the Minister of Interior also told Amnesty International that Some evidence was destroyed by the former government before they fled and that the evidence is not in one place. They said they are working on the papers that were at Saydnaya and that there are plans to digitize the evidence and create an archive and there is a team working on this. Both the Ministers of Interior and Justice told Amnesty International that their ministries held relevant evidence, were working to preserve and organize them, and were committed to cooperating with government-led transitional justice processes.<sup>31</sup> Both ministers said that the NCTJ would lead efforts to consolidate evidence and develop an archive system.<sup>32</sup>

In order to provide reassurance to families, the process around evidence preservation should be clarified and made as transparent as possible without undue delay. One survivor of torture told Amnesty International: “Much evidence was burned. I am not sure who burned it, but for sure there was neglect

<sup>31</sup> Meeting with Syrian Minister of Interior, 27 May 2025, Damascus.

<sup>32</sup> Meeting with Syrian Minister of Interior, 27 May 2025, Damascus; Meeting with Syrian Minister of Justice, 29 May 2025, Damascus.



when it came to protecting the evidence. Where is the evidence? How is it being stored? There needs to be transparency and communication.”<sup>33</sup> The survivor called on the government, including its recently established NCTJ, to explain the steps they would take to preserve evidence, how they would work with the various ministries, and their progress to date.

## ESTABLISHMENT OF A NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR THE MISSING

In an important step, on 17 May 2025, a presidential decree established the National Commission for the Missing (NCM) “in the interest of uncovering the fate of thousands of missing persons in Syria and delivering justice to their families”.<sup>34</sup> According to the decree, the NCM is “responsible for investigating and uncovering the fate of missing and forcibly disappeared persons, documenting cases, creating a unified national database, and providing legal and humanitarian support to their families.”<sup>35</sup>

In conversations with Amnesty International, several families and civil society actors stressed that the creation of this body was a direct result of years of advocacy led by families of the disappeared. Families that spoke with Amnesty International said they saw the NCM as central to coordinating the search for the missing in Syria and structuring the national response to disappearances.

On 26 June 2025, the NCM announced the formation of its advisory board, including representatives of families of disappeared persons, victims of torture and former detainees. In a public statement, advisory board member Zeina Shahla told Enab Baladi, a Syrian news outlet, that the commission will be responsible for searching all missing Syrians and non-Syrians within Syria, as well as Syrians missing abroad.<sup>36</sup>

On 5 July, the NCM began consultations to draft its plan of work and working rules and procedures.<sup>37</sup> The Head of the Commission, Mohammed al-Halkhi, told the families: “This is a huge and complex task, and it can only be accomplished with patience, mutual trust, and the support of all: families, government, civil society, and international partners. We need time, resources, and tireless teamwork to achieve tangible results.”<sup>38</sup>

While the creation of the NCM is a positive first step, nearly nine months after the fall of the Assad government, the Syrian government must do far more, far more urgently, to be able to claim the search effort for disappeared persons has begun in earnest. For example, in order to ensure the NCM can fulfil its promises to the families of the disappeared across Syria, the independence of the Commission must be enshrined in law. Principle 7 of the UN Guiding Principles for the Search for Disappeared Persons states that: “Under no circumstances may the entities responsible for the search be hierarchically subordinated to any institution, agency or person that may be involved in cases of enforced disappearance”.<sup>39</sup> This principle is especially relevant in the Syrian context, where opposition armed groups, including HTS, have perpetrated disappearances.

<sup>33</sup> Interview in person with Syrian activist (namewithheld), 26 May 2025, Damascus.

<sup>34</sup> Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA), “مرسوم رئاسي بتشكيل الهيئة الوطنية للمفقودين” [“Presidential Decree Forming the National Authority for Missing Persons”], 17 May 2025, <https://www.sana.sy/?p=2219862>

<sup>35</sup> Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA), “مرسوم رئاسي بتشكيل الهيئة الوطنية للمفقودين” [“Presidential Decree Forming the National Authority for Missing Persons”], 17 May 2025, <https://www.sana.sy/?p=2219862>

<sup>36</sup> Enab Baladi, “الهيئة الوطنية للمفقودين” تبدأ أعمالها مع ذوي الضحايا, 26 June 2025, <https://www.enabbaladi.net/764099/الهيئة-الوطنية-للمفقودين-تبدأ-أعمالها-مع-ذوي-الضحايا>

<sup>37</sup> National Commission for the Missing, Facebook Post: انطلاق المشاورات الوطنية لصياغة تفويض الهيئة الوطنية للمفقودين [“Launch of national consultations to formulate the mandate of the National Commission for the Missing”], 5 July 2025, [https://www.facebook.com/SyrMissing/posts/pfbid02WJnmcGFtMvjvHdsux5tJzP8FwgZ6TxNnPSB97nzEb7GUfMsYW4bqRdLMF8robsWI?locale=ar\\_AR](https://www.facebook.com/SyrMissing/posts/pfbid02WJnmcGFtMvjvHdsux5tJzP8FwgZ6TxNnPSB97nzEb7GUfMsYW4bqRdLMF8robsWI?locale=ar_AR)

<sup>38</sup> National Commission for the Missing, Facebook Post, 5 July 2025, [https://www.facebook.com/SyrMissing/posts/pfbid02WJnmcGFtMvjvHdsux5tJzP8FwgZ6TxNnPSB97nzEb7GUfMsYW4bqRdLMF8robsWI?locale=ar\\_AR](https://www.facebook.com/SyrMissing/posts/pfbid02WJnmcGFtMvjvHdsux5tJzP8FwgZ6TxNnPSB97nzEb7GUfMsYW4bqRdLMF8robsWI?locale=ar_AR), انطلاق المشاورات الوطنية لصياغة تفويض الهيئة الوطنية للمفقودين [“Launch of national consultations to formulate the mandate of the National Commission for the Missing”].

<sup>39</sup> Guiding Principles, Principle 7.

The NCM must also be adequately resourced, granted full cooperation from all branches of the government, as well as by other actors involved in or with information on disappearances , and supported by international actors.

According to the UN Guiding Principles, states must initiate prompt and effective searches as part of a comprehensive public policy on disappearances, particularly in contexts where enforced disappearances are perpetrated on a large-scale or systemically.<sup>40</sup> The NCM is well-placed to recommend such a policy. For the Syrian government to meet its international obligations, such a policy would need to be developed in accordance with international human rights standards, be enshrined into law, and effectively implemented.

The same day that the Syrian government established the NCM, it established the NCTJ, which is meant to lead the work on truth-telling, accountability, reparations and non-recurrence, and national reconciliation.<sup>41</sup> However, the presidential decree establishing the NCTJ said it would “uncover the truth about the grave violations caused by the former regime [emphasis added].”

The NCTJ decree’s exclusive focus on abuses by the former government raises broader concerns about the government’s commitment to ensuring access to justice for all victims. In a statement delivered on 23 May 2025, survivor and family associations said: “Limiting the Commission’s mandate to investigating only crimes committed by one party constitutes a violation of the principle of equality enshrined in Article 10 of the Constitutional Declaration of the Syrian Arab Republic, issued on 13 March 2025. Such a restriction risks turning the Commission into a tool that discriminates among victims, rather than an instrument for delivering inclusive justice that ensures redress for all victims without exception or discrimination.”<sup>42</sup>



Ali Haj Suleiman / Amnesty International

<sup>40</sup> Guiding Principles, Preamble.

<sup>41</sup> SANA, “Presidency of the Republic: Presidential Decree No. (20) establishing the National Transitional Justice Authority”, 17 May 2025, <https://www.sana.sy/en/?p=355958>

<sup>42</sup> Caesar Families Association, Facebook Post, 23 May 2025, <https://www.facebook.com/CaesarFamilies/posts/statement-on-decree-no-20-stipulating-the-establishment-of-a-national-commission/1131438779025237/> Caesar Families Association, Facebook Post, , Statement on Decree NO. 20 Stipulating the Establishment of a National Commission for Transitional Justice.



Fadwa Mahmoud told Amnesty International: “There are people disappeared by Jabhat al-Nusra, Jaish al-Islam. Do you know how many sides there are to the conflict? Don’t these people have rights, don’t they get rights? Razan, Samira, Wael, Nazem? Don’t their families have rights?” Mahmoud was referring to the four prominent human rights defenders disappeared on 9 December 2013 from an area under the de facto control of armed opposition groups, including Jaish al-Islam.<sup>44</sup>

Wasel Hamide said: “As families of the disappeared, we demand justice for all victims — those who lost loved ones to the Assad regime, or to other armed actors. Securing justice and holding perpetrators from all sides accountable is the only guarantee that our agony will not be repeated. It is the only way we can live in a country governed by the rule of law.”<sup>45</sup>

## SEARCHING FOR ALL SYRIA’S DISAPPEARED PERSONS

The search process must be inclusive of disappearances by all parties.

In addition to enforced disappearances by the Assad government, non-state armed groups in Syria have also carried out disappearances. In August 2024, the UN Commission of Inquiry found “reasonable grounds to believe that HTS members may have committed acts tantamount to enforced disappearance”, and that HTS had detained children as young as seven and engaged in torture.<sup>46</sup> It also found that SDF “continues to arbitrarily deprive individuals of their liberty, including some who are detained incommunicado and others in a manner tantamount to enforced disappearance”.<sup>47</sup> In 2024, Human Rights Watch reported on abductions by factions of the Türkiye-backed SNA.<sup>48</sup>

In May 2025, Izzadin Saleh, from Synergy Association for Victims, explained the concerns among members of the Missing Persons’ Families Platform in North and East Syria (MPFP-NES): “If we talk about the North and especially the North-East, those disappeared were disappeared by all parties, in every sense of the word. ... the majority of the missing [in that part of the country] weren’t taken by the Syrian regime but rather by Da’esh [IS]”.<sup>49</sup>

Saleh explained that, after Assad government prisons and detention facilities were opened in December 2024, “people believe that there are no more closed prisons in Syria – [but] ...not all prisons have been opened.”<sup>50</sup> He added, “There is a concern among families of those disappeared by the SNA or the SDF or HTS that only those disappeared by the regime [former Assad-government] are being talked about. We are trying hard to be present in these conversations to ensure that all the victims are being heard.”

The new government is now responsible for both prisons and detention facilities controlled by the former Assad government, as well as former detention facilities that were run by armed groups, such as SNA, which the government has said have been formally integrated into the military and security apparatus.

<sup>43</sup> Interview by voice call with Fadwa Mahmoud, 19 May 2025.

<sup>44</sup> Amnesty International and others, Syria: No word on four abducted activists (Index: MDE 24/051/2014), 9 December 2014, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde24/051/2014/en/>

<sup>45</sup> Interview in person with Wasel Hamide, 26 May 2025, Damascus.

<sup>46</sup> Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (COI), *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic*, 12 August 2024, p. 13.

<sup>47</sup> COI, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic* (previously cited), p. 19

<sup>48</sup> Human Rights Watch, “*Everything is by the Power of the Weapon*”: Abuses and Impunity in Turkish-Occupied Northern Syria, 29 February 2024, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2024/02/29/everything-power-weapon/abuses-and-impunity-turkish-occupied-northern-syria>

<sup>49</sup> Interview by video call with Izzadin Saleh, Co-Founder & Executive Director of Synergy Association for Victims, 14 May 2025.

<sup>50</sup> Interview by video call with Izzadin Saleh, Co-Founder & Executive Director of Synergy Association for Victims, 14 May 2025.

Searching for all disappeared persons in Syria will require cooperation from state authorities and armed groups that have information on those missing in Syria since 2011. An inclusive search strategy will therefore require specific investigative methods depending on the context of the disappearance, including the party suspected of carrying it out. For those that were disappeared by the Islamic State (IS), for example, members of the US-led coalition and the SDF may hold relevant information. The SDF, the United States, Iraq, and other states involved in the Global Coalition against Daesh conducted extensive interrogations with people the autonomous authorities held in detention who allegedly committed international crimes or held positions of power in the so-called caliphate of the Islamic State. The SDF, the United States, Iraq and other actors within the US-led coalition should share information that could help locate, identify or determine the fate of the missing as part of the search process.

All actors, including the government and autonomous authorities, in control of formal or informal detention facilities in Syria must immediately grant access to independent monitors and end enforced disappearances, arbitrary arrest and detention, and torture or other ill-treatment in detention facilities.





# TRUTH, JUSTICE AND REPARATION FOR THE DISAPPEARED

In addition to the search, the Syrian government has an obligation to ensure the rights to justice and reparations, including guarantees of non-recurrence, for all victims of crimes under international law and other serious human rights violations and abuses.



Ali Haj Suleiman / Amnesty International



Ali Haj Suleiman / Amnesty International

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*The fire in us will not be extinguished until we know the truth. We came to demand justice, to hold the perpetrators accountable. Justice is a society free of all torture, of all disappearance of all oppression.*

**Hiyam Burhan**

”

## JUSTICE

Former detainees and families of disappeared persons repeatedly expressed deep distress at the seeming impunity of perpetrators, fuelling mistrust that those responsible for disappearances would be held accountable. The Syrian government has an obligation to investigate and, where sufficient evidence exists, prosecute in accordance with international fair trial standards, and without recourse to the death penalty, all suspected perpetrators of disappearances.

In one case emblematic of the broader concern, on 12 June 2025, families staged a protest in response to statements made by a member of the Civil Peace Committee, a committee formed by presidential decree to ease sectarian tensions following killings of civilians mostly from the Alawite minority in Syria's coastal area in March 2025.<sup>51</sup> Statements by the Committee member appeared to indicate the

<sup>51</sup> Amnesty International, "Syria: Horrific killings of civilians on northwest coast must be investigated", 10 March 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2025/03/syria-horrific-killings-of-civilians-on-northwest-coast-must-be-investigated/>



government had agreed not to prosecute Fadi Saqr, a commander of the Assad government's National Defence Forces who is alleged to have played a key role in the infamous Tadamon massacre.

The government must build trust that it is actively and seriously pursuing accountability.

Revenge killings have already been reported. In one widely-publicized case, the mayor of Dumar, a town in the suburbs of Damascus, was killed by local residents after they accused him of reporting people to the former Assad government.<sup>53</sup> An activist with a missing loved one said: "In Homs, people are disappearing constantly and turning up dead, and this is for several reasons, most importantly, the failure to proceed with implementing the accountability aspect of the transitional justice process."<sup>54</sup>

In May 2025, the Minister of Justice told Amnesty International that the government needed to balance the need to follow the appropriate legal procedures, including updating Syria's domestic laws, thoroughly investigating allegations of crimes, and following international standards concerning criminal justice processes, with people's desire to see justice delivered quickly. He said he was awaiting direction from the NCTJ before initiating prosecutions of alleged perpetrators of crimes under international law currently in state custody.

While criminal justice processes can indeed take significant time, the authorities have an obligation to promptly, independently and impartially investigate all acts of torture and disappearances that have been committed under their jurisdiction. Any person that alleges they have been subjected to torture has "the right to have their case promptly and impartially examined."

Authorities should ensure that investigative processes and outcomes are transparent. According to the Minnesota Protocol on the Investigation of Potentially Unlawful Death, governments should ensure transparency in all investigative processes, particularly in cases where torture or disappearance has led to the death of the victim. This includes openness to scrutiny by the public and by the families of victims. Transparency enables victims to participate meaningfully in the investigative process.

<sup>52</sup> On 14 April 2023, the European Union sanctioned him based on the allegation that "Fadi Saqr was part of the chain of command in the massacre of at least 41 civilians in the town of Tadamon on 13 April 2013." <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32023R0844>. Fadi Saqr, in a statement to the New York Times, denied his involvement in the Tadamon Massacre. In a press conference on 10 June 2025, Hassan Soufan, a member of the Civil Peace Committee, said "We understand the pain and anger felt by the families of the martyrs, but we are forced to make decisions that ensure relative stability at this stage." <https://x.com/MegaphoneNewsEN/status/1933581708877566304>

<sup>53</sup> New York Times, "Many Syrians Want Justice for Regime Crimes. Others Want Revenge", 15 January 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/01/15/world/middleeast/syria-justice-revenge-assad-crimes.html>

<sup>54</sup> Interview by voice call with activist, name withheld for security purposes, 19 May 2025.

<sup>55</sup> Meeting with Syrian Minister of Justice, 29 May 2025, Damascus.

<sup>56</sup> Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT), Art. 13/

<sup>57</sup> Minnesota Protocol on the Investigation of Potentially Unlawful Death, Para. 2.



“

*My son, Mohammad Ahmad Zein Hmeid, was disappeared on 15 October 2014 from Qaboun. We want to find the disappeared, to learn where they are. And those who took our sons away, who hurt us like this, who ripped the souls from our bodies, they must be held accountable.*

**Mariam Ali Juneid, Families for Freedom protest in Marjeh Square**

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## REPARATION

Reparations, including restitution, compensation, rehabilitation, satisfaction measures and guarantees of non-repetition,<sup>58</sup> are crucial. The families of the disappeared face urgent and complex needs and reparations must begin without delay. Victims and their relatives described deep psychological trauma and financial hardship that resulted from the disappearances.

One activist with a disappeared loved one emphasized that reparations must not be limited to monetary compensation but should also include forms of satisfaction (to acknowledge what happened), such as symbolic recognition of the suffering endured by the victims and their families. He also emphasized the urgent needs families face: “Families should be given priority for food, education, and housing. People don’t see their sacrifices as being honoured.” He pointed to the urgent needs of widows and displaced families, many of whom live in tents or informal settlements with no access to basic services. “This is not a small number of people,” he said. “These people should be a priority. They are the most vulnerable.”

<sup>58</sup> UN Basic Principles and Guidelines on the Right to a Remedy and Reparation for Victims of Gross Violations of International Human Rights Law and Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law, UN General Assembly Resolution 60/147, 16 December 2005, para. 18 ff.



The Syrian government has an obligation to provide reparations for victims of torture and other serious human rights abuses in line with Article 14 of the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT).<sup>59</sup> This obligation is further reinforced by the UN Basic Principles and Guidelines on the Right to a Remedy and Reparation<sup>60</sup>, which outline the right of victims to restitution, compensation, rehabilitation, satisfaction, and guarantees of non-repetition. Amnesty International has also called on donor governments to urgently fund survivor-led groups, family associations, and programmes dedicated to supporting torture survivors.

In a May meeting, the Minister of Interior told Amnesty International that the most notorious prisons, including Saydnaya Military Prison and the Palestine Branch, would never be used as prisons again.

## “NEVER... EVER AGAIN”

Families of the disappeared repeatedly emphasized guarantees of non-recurrence being key to how they perceived justice and reparations. Hiyam Burhan, whose husband was forcibly disappeared, told Amnesty International: “What does justice mean to me? Justice is a society free of all torture, of all disappearance of all oppression.”

Wasel Hamide said: “There should never be a government ever again that can disappear you behind the sun.”<sup>61</sup>

Key to ensuring that human rights violations and abuses do not repeat is pursuing genuine and comprehensive accountability. Any truth, justice, and reparation efforts must address the rights of all victims, including those subjected to abuses by the former government and armed opposition groups.<sup>62</sup>

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*There should never be a government ever again that can disappear you behind the sun.*

**Wasel Hamideh**

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<sup>61</sup> Interview in person with Hiyam Burhan, 25 May 2025, Damascus.

<sup>62</sup> Interview in person with Wasel Hamide, 26 May 2025, Damascus.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

## TO THE GOVERNMENT OF SYRIA

- Initiate a comprehensive national search for all persons forcibly disappeared by the former government, disappeared by armed groups, and any other missing persons, in full alignment with international standards, including the UN Guiding Principles for the Search for Disappeared Persons.
- Ensure the prevention and end of all disappearances, arbitrary detention, torture or other ill-treatment in detention in line with international law.
- Grant independent monitors immediate and unfettered access to all prisons and detention facilities, and take urgent steps to reveal the fate and whereabouts of individuals currently disappeared.
- Cooperate with, and ensure unhindered access for, the IIMP, the IIIM, COI, the Office of the High Commission for Human Rights and the ICRC.
- Enshrine the independence of the NCM in law, in line with Principle 7 of the UN Guiding Principles for the Search for Disappeared Persons, ensure it is fully resourced to carry out its mandate effectively, including guaranteeing the meaningful participation of families in all aspects of its work, and ensure it is not subordinated to any actors implicated in disappearances.
- Guarantee the safety and participation of victims and their families in all processes relating to truth, justice, and reparations.
- Centralize and preserve all available evidence, including in relation to mass grave sites, detention records, forensic data and evidence collected through witness interviews, and ensure transparency in how this evidence is safeguarded, analysed, and accessed.
- Fully cooperate with and facilitate prompt access for the NCM and other relevant actors — including Syrian civil society, international organizations, and UN mechanisms — to official and unofficial archives which are relevant in securing truth and justice for disappeared persons.
- Ensure the prompt, thorough, independent, impartial and transparent investigation of all crimes under international law, including disappearances and torture, and, where sufficient evidence exists, prosecutions of suspected perpetrators, regardless of their affiliation, in full compliance with the right to a fair trial and without recourse to the death penalty.
- Ensure prompt, full and adequate reparations for all victims of crimes under international law and other serious human rights violations and abuses.
- Ratify the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, without making any reservations and recognizing the competence of the UN Committee on Enforced Disappearances to receive and consider communications both from victims, or on their behalf, and from other states parties to the Convention.



# TO DONOR GOVERNMENTS

- Urgently fund survivor-led groups, family associations, and programmes dedicated to supporting victims of enforced disappearance and torture.
- Provide immediate technical and financial support to enable the full functioning of the NCM.
- Support inclusive truth, justice and reparation efforts by ensuring that assistance is not limited to serious human rights violations committed by the former Syrian government but also addresses human rights abuses by armed opposition groups, including HTS, SDF, SNA, the Islamic State armed group and others.
- Support the role of international mechanisms and organizations, including the IIMP, the IIIM, OHCHR and the ICRC.



