

## What about Syrian Detainees?!

July 30, 2018

The issue of Syrian detainees remains neglected in all political actions on Syria that have been taking place for years. Despite the political and legal activity of states and human rights organizations, as well as serious human rights abuses against detainees which contravene international conventions and human rights instruments, the political use of the issue of detainees continues. This is done with the participation of some regional and international parties, as well as with almost utter silence on the part of the United Nations and the international community.

Recently, the Syrian government has begun issuing death notices for political detainees at an unprecedented rate. Syrian institutions in most Syrian provinces are contacting the families of detainees who died in Syrian prisons. In some towns the government has posted names of the deceased so their relatives can get their death certificates. The civil registry offices issue notices that are essentially executive summaries listing few details about the deceased. Other death notices are issued by military hospitals, which release formal certificates and medical reports. These routinely list the cause of death as heart attack or stroke. However, some of the death notices offer no details about the deaths, except a date. Many families still want to know how their loved ones died and where their bodies are.

**“F.R” said that on July 15, 2018, the civil registry notified them that two of their relatives had died. The deceased men were arrested on June 22, 2012, by the Syrian Air Force Intelligence branch in Hassakeh province. Theirs deaths were registered on July 1, 2013, with the cause of death as stroke, for both of them.**

The same is true in many Syrian areas, such as Darraya, Muadamiyat al-Sham, Kafarzita, and Daraa. The notification is done through the civil registry; through one of the intelligence branches located in the area; or through the President of the Community Council (Mukhtar). The date of death is often recorded at an earlier date.

These recent procedures conducted by Syrian institutions coincides with the release of 1,500 detainees in Syrian prisons in an agreement to transfer the entire population of the villages of al-Fu'ah and Kafriya from Idlib countryside to the areas controlled by the Syrian government.

Center for Civil Society and Democracy (CCSD) expresses its concern about these procedures regarding detainees and forcibly disappeared persons, which coincided with the Syrian government restoring control over the entire Syrian territory by military force, the forced transfer of dissidents and opponents to Idlib province, as well as the policy of pressuring Syrian refugees in Lebanon to return to Syria. CCSD considers these procedures and actions as a threat to the course of justice and democratic transition in Syria, and flagrantly violates human rights and international humanitarian law.

As such, CCSD stresses on the recommendations which were previously made by 54 Syrian organizations on the International Day in Support of Victims of Torture, namely:

1. **Reveal all places of detention and facilitate full access** for all international humanitarian actors, in particular the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), to all secret and public detention centers and prisons on a regular basis and whenever they request.
2. **Take all necessary measures to stop the brutal practice of torture**, including rape and other forms of sexual violence, as well as to conduct the necessary investigations and hold those involved in such practices accountable in accordance with international standards.
3. **Disclose the fate of detainees** who are believed to have been killed under torture, and to handover their remains to their families in a humane manner that respects the sanctity of their bodies and the feelings and the religious rituals of their relatives. Any such actions will not, however, change the fact that the Syrian government bears legal responsibility for the practices that led to detainees' deaths and is therefore responsible for their right to justice and compensation.
4. **The United Nations Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture** must take the necessary steps to provide psychological, moral and financial support to victims of torture in Syria and their families and provide them with the necessary care.
5. **No State nor party to the conflict may use the issue of torture in political bargaining or negotiation.** The United Nations should maintain the role of guarantor and neutral international mediator for negotiations in Syria, and remain a key player in any process addressing the issue of detainees to ensure neutrality and credibility.
6. The Syrian Government and parties to the conflict bear full responsibility for **the preservation of victims'** remains who have died under torture or in locations which hold evidence that could contribute to the identification of victims' fate and the identification of perpetrators.