



Statement by Bridges of Truth Member Organizations The Path to Accountability Through European Courts

The start of 2022 was marked by two important victories in the fight for justice and redress for victims of human rights violations in Syria. The first was the sentencing of Anwar Raslan, a former colonel in the Syrian intelligence service, to life in prison by the Higher Regional Court in Koblenz, Germany. The second was the opening of the trial of Alaa M., a former doctor in Syrian military hospitals who is accused of crimes against humanity, including premeditated murder and torture, before the Higher Regional Court in Frankfurt.

The nine civil society organizations comprising the Bridges of Truth project, a collaboration focused on issues related to the disappeared, the missing, and their families in Syria, welcome the steps taken by prosecutors and courts in Germany and other European countries to hold Syrian and non-Syrian war criminals accountable. The nine organizations also commend the efforts of the many Syrian human rights organizations seeking justice for victims of war crimes and crimes against humanity in Syria.

The justice deficit is enormous and grows each day as state and non-state actors in Syria continue to commit atrocities unhindered. The Syrian government alone already bears responsibility for countless violations, including forcibly disappearing, detaining, torturing, and killing more than 150,000 Syrians, in addition to thousands more undocumented victims. Yet, the landmark trial and verdict in Koblenz of the first senior Assad government official for crimes against humanity, involving over 4,000 torture victims, 27 murders, and cases of rape and sexual assault, offers hope that some justice can be and will be achieved for Syria's many victims.

The nine organizations applaud the courage of survivors and witnesses who testified and provided crucial evidence during the Koblenz trial, at potential risk to themselves. Their contributions were essential for exposing the true nature and scale of the atrocities perpetrated in Syria, which reinforced the resolve of the Koblenz Court to issue its sentence and helped

show that the crimes committed by the Syrian government were part of a widespread and systematic policy. Accordingly, we urge everyone who possesses information, evidence, or testimonies to consider submitting them, if it is safe to do so, to international mechanisms and courts and contribute to the ongoing documentation efforts.

We believe that the sentence issued by the Higher Regional Court in Koblenz and the opening of the trial of Alaa M. in Frankfurt are important steps toward achieving justice for the victims and their families. They send a clear message to perpetrators of human rights violations that the prosecutors and courts can and will act, impunity can come to an end, and justice will eventually be served.

We all have a shared responsibility to help deliver justice and uncover the fate of the disappeared, missing, and wrongfully detained. We urge local, national, and international bodies to intensify their efforts and coordinate more closely in order to fulfill their commitments and establish the legal framework and mechanisms to achieve justice and redress for all affected persons and their families and end human rights violations, such as torture and all forms of violence, in Syria.

Signatories:

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Lawyers and Doctors for Human Rights

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The Day After

Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression