

Syria

For over four decades, public freedoms in Syria were severely repressed and the country witnessed widespread violations to human rights under the regimes of Hafez and Bashar al-Assad. This repression in Syria went unrivaled in the Arab world, except perhaps by the regimes of Saddam Hussein in Iraq and Moammar al-Qaddafi in Libya. Expectations that Syria would experience a lessening of this repression and see a measure of political liberation when Bashar al-Assad assumed the presidency after the death of his father Hafez were quickly proven wrong. Bashar maintained the core of the police state by extending the state of emergency that had been in effect since 1963, thus allowing the security authorities sweeping exceptional powers, which they used to carry out arbitrary arrests and to destroy homes. Bashar also granted increased immunity to the security and intelligence establishments and to the army in order to protect them from being held accountable for the violations and crimes they committed. Although the pro-democracy and pro-reform movement grew significantly during the years of Bashar's rule, Bashar al-Assad confronted this movement with further repression, including through the increased use of state security and military courts which issued

highly repressive judgments against the political and rights activists involved in the movement, whether independently or through their affiliations to political parties. The constitutional and legal framework of the country further reinforced the domination of the Baath Party, known as the “historical leader.” At the same time, other political parties – despite being legally licensed – were utterly marginalized. Bashar’s era, like that of his father, was marked by a dismal record in terms of human rights, particularly due to the systematic practice of torture, enforced disappearance, the blatant denial of the right to freedom of association, including overt hostility to human rights defenders and organizations, and systematic and institutional discrimination against the Kurdish minority.

During 2011, the regime dealt brutally with the peaceful uprising which had begun calling for change in March. In this context, the security apparatus, the armed forces, and militias sponsored by the regime committed crimes amounting to war crimes and crimes against humanity under international humanitarian law. Throughout 2012, the state of human rights in the country deteriorated immensely, as state repression against peaceful protest underwent a qualitative change to become an internal armed conflict between the security forces, the army, and regime-backed militias known as “shabiha” on one side and what became known as the “Free Syrian Army” (FSA) on the other, which was joined by officers and soldiers who refused to carry out the orders of the regime and defected. The FSA also included some opposition groups which had gradually resorted to armed resistance to combat the brutal repression exercised against them by the state and to seek revenge for the increasing number of victims and destruction of property.

In its attempt to destroy the armed resistance movement, the regime escalated its repressive tactics to include the use of heavy artillery by the army to shell residential areas as well as the destruction, plundering, and arson of property, arbitrary killings, and summary executions. Such acts of repression were not limited to the towns and villages considered strongholds of the armed opposition or the FSA, nor were the places which maintained the peaceful nature of the uprising spared. A number of hospitals were hit by heavy shelling, and some were used as detention centers and places of summary execution. Arbitrary arrest and systematic torture were practiced

against doctors, emergency caregivers, and those involved in delivering humanitarian aid.

It is difficult to arrive at exact numbers of civilian casualties of the violent repression exercised against the popular protests and against the population in general, just as it is nearly impossible to determine the number of those affected by the armed clashes between pro-regime forces and anti-regime armed groups. Reports of the United Nations¹ state that the number of deaths between the beginning of the uprising in March 2011 and the end of 2012 has probably surpassed 60,000, while the Syrian Network for Human Rights has estimated the number of civilian casualties during 2012 alone to be more than 36,000.² This number is closely corroborated by the estimates of the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, which documented the deaths of nearly 40,000 people during 2012, 90% of whom were civilians.³ International reports point to the displacement of nearly a million people and some 350,000 have attained refugee status in neighboring countries;⁴ more than 170,000 displaced people from Syria have been documented by the UN High Commission for Refugees in Lebanon.⁵

Arbitrary arrest is widespread and torture is frequently practiced, often resulting in death. A large number of detainees have become disappeared, not only because of the refusal of the authorities to reveal information about their whereabouts but also because the authorities do not even acknowledge that some of them are being held in custody

¹United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, "Data Analysis Suggests over 60,000 People Killed in Syria Conflict: Pillay," Jan. 2, 2013, <<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=12912&LangID=E>>; For more information, see: The Benetech Human Rights Program, "Preliminary Statistical Analysis of Documentation of Killings in the Syrian Arab Republic," Jan. 2, 2013, <<http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/SY/PreliminaryStatAnalysisKillingsInSyria.pdf>>.

² Syrian Network for Human Rights, "Bayan haseelat 'am 2012 mowathaqa b-il-ism wa at-tarekh wa as-sowar wa al-fedeo: maqatal 36332 mowaten sury bi-ma'del 101 mowaten kol yom bi-ma'del 4 mowatenen kol sa'a," Jan. 2, 2013, <<http://www.syrianhr.org/reports/syrian-network-for-human-rights-report-02-01-2013.pdf>>.

³ Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, "Alf qateel wa 170 alt nazih fe2012 m.," Jan. 1, 2013, <http://www.syriahr.com/index.php?option=com_news&nid=2014&Itemid=2&task=displaynews#.UaokNNi-iCV>.

⁴ Amnesty International, "Europe: Act Now to Help Refugees Fleeing Syria," Oct. 24, 2013, <<https://www.amnesty.org/en/news/europe-act-now-help-refugees-fleeing-syria-2012-10-24>>.

⁵ Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

by the state. Arrests, enforced disappearance and even killings have affected a large number of human rights defenders. Killings and physical attacks have similarly targeted a number of those working in humanitarian aid and medical care, as well as journalists, reporters, and artists.

Ironically, it was in the context of these acts of severe repression that a referendum on a new constitution for the country was held in February 2012, despite a large boycott of the referendum. The new constitution, however, did nothing to change the power structures in the country, with the exception of removing the Baath Party's status as "leader of the state" to become one among several parties. Observers did not consider this to be a significant change, given that the role and effectiveness of the party had already been giving way to that of the massive power structures which had been built around the presidency, the extensive networks of interests established to support it, and the security establishment which had become entrenched in all areas of the state.⁶ In early May, parliamentary elections were held, ostensibly to allow the Syrian people to determine the affairs of their country through free and fair elections.

Three anti-terrorism laws were passed which included broad language when defining "terrorist crimes." These laws in effect give legitimacy to arbitrary arrests of opposition members and allow for the imposition of severe penalties, up to and including the death penalty. Such broad definitions also allow for the punishment of writers and journalists based on accusations that they are guilty of spreading terrorist propaganda or inciting to terrorist acts. These penalties can include hard labor for "distributing publications which could comprise terrorist propaganda." Such penalties can also be imposed on individuals accused of supporting terrorists simply for delivering humanitarian aid. These laws call for the dismissal of any government employee from his/her position if found guilty of such acts by a court and that the employee not be paid severance pay.⁷

⁶ International Crisis Group, "Syria's Mutating Conflict," Aug. 1, 2012, <<http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/middle-east-north-africa/egypt-syria-lebanon/syria/128-syrias-mutating-conflict.aspx>>.

⁷ Syrian Arab News Agency, "Al-assad yusdir thalathet qawaneen li-mokafahet al-irhab wa tasreeh al-a'amel b-ad-dawla fe hal irtikabih 'amalan irhabayyan wa mu'aqabet man yeqom

The situation in Syria has become increasingly blurred as some of those affiliated with the FSA and other armed opposition groups have also committed grave violations such as extrajudicial killings, summary executions, and torture against captives from pro-regime forces or militias.

Massacres Perpetrated to Suppress the Uprising

Attempts to suppress the uprising and armed resistance led to the perpetration of grave violations amounting to war crimes and crimes against humanity. These crimes were frequently committed in cities and towns considered strongholds of the opposition. Many of these crimes aimed to terrorize the population and to seek revenge against those supportive of the opposition through collective punishment.

The city of Idlib and the surrounding towns experienced widespread killings at the hands of the Syrian armed forces during the period between March 10 and April 16. In some cases, men were taken from their houses with their hands tied and lined up with their faces to a wall before the armed forces opened fire on them. 16 people were reportedly shot and killed in Sarmin, one of the villages near Idlib, immediately upon being arrested. In the village of Taftanaz, over 20 people from one family were killed in the same manner. Similar acts of killing took place in Mound Zawiya and Mount Wastani south of Idlib, after which the armed forces burned the victims' bodies. The shelling of the Mount Zawiya area led to the partial or total destruction of over 1500 homes and the burning of mosques and field hospitals in Idlib.⁸

On May 25, the town of Houla, near the city of Homs, witnessed the massacre of some 108 people, among them 49 children and 34 women. A number of these victims died due to the use of heavy artillery and tanks to shell the town, yet most were executed by armed

b-al-khatf b-al-ashghal a-shaqa," July 2, 2012,
<<http://www.sana.sy/ara/2/2012/07/03/428811.htm>>.

⁸ Amnesty International, "Deadly Reprisals: Deliberate Killings and Other Abuses by Syria's Armed Forces," June 2012,

<<http://amnesty.org/en/library/asset/MDE24/041/2012/en/30416985-883b-4e67-b386-0df14a79f694/mde240412012en.pdf>>.

men thought to belong to militias supported by the regime.⁹ After the Houla massacre, the army moved northward and invaded the city of Hamah, shelling various areas of the city with heavy artillery, which injured over 90 people and led to 33 deaths, among them 7 children and 5 women. When residents attempted to flee the shelling, they were targeted by snipers from the security apparatus, leading to a large number of injuries, including of women and children; some of the injuries were critical.¹⁰

On June 13, armed pro-regime militias supported by security forces used ambulances belonging to the Red Crescent to invade the city of Haffah in Latakyya governorate, in clear violation of international humanitarian law. Haffah had long been besieged and targeted with violent shelling by all kinds of heavy artillery. The militias abducted the injured and a number of the bodies of those who had been killed and took them to an unknown location. The number of those who died increased due to attacks on those who had been injured; this took place in the context of a broader pattern of systematic attacks against the injured and medical teams treating them in field hospitals.¹¹ A number of hospitals were directly bombed, resulting in the deaths of a number of civilians and injured persons who were inside. For example, in early April the army bombed the National Hospital in Homs, destroying the hospital and killing at least 11 citizens.¹² In August, the main hospital able to treat emergency cases in the area controlled by the opposition in Aleppo was also bombed, resulting in the deaths of a number of civilians and significant damage to the hospital.¹³ It was reported that the governmental hospital in Homs was turned into a

⁹ Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies, "Andema yuthbah at-tifl fe hodn omeh: 36 monathama wa shakhseyya haquqeyya yudenon majazar an-natham as-sury," May 30, 2012, <<http://www.cihrs.org/?p=2303>>; Human Rights Watch, "Syria: UN Inquiry Should Investigate Houla Killings," May 28, 2012, <<http://www.hrw.org/news/2012/05/27/syria-un-inquiry-should-investigate-houla-killings>>; Amnesty International, "Deadly Reprisals: Deliberate Killings and Other Abuses by Syria's Armed Forces."

¹⁰ Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies, "Andema yuthbah at-tifl fe hodn omeh: 36 monathama wa shakhseyya haquqeyya yudenon majazar an-natham as-sury."

¹¹ Arabic Network for Human Rights Information, "Al-milisheyyat al-mowaleyya l-an-natham tastakhdim seyarat al-hilal al-ahmar as-sury li-khataf al-jarha wa ad-dahayya fe madenat al-haffa al-mohasara," June 13, 2012, <<http://www.anhri.net/?p=54948>>.

¹² Syrian Human Rights Committee, "As-sulta mustamirra fe qatl al-mowateneen wa i'atiqalhim," Apr. 7, 2012, <<http://shrc.org/data.aspx/d17/4687.aspx>>.

¹³ Human Rights Watch, "Syria: Fighter Planes Strike Aleppo Hospital," Aug. 15, 2012, <<http://www.hrw.org/news/2012/08/15/syria-fighter-planes-strike-aleppo-hospital>>.

center for interrogations and executions and that soldiers burned the dead bodies to prevent them from being subsequently identified.¹⁴

On July 12, over 200 people were massacred in the village of al-Tarimsah after the army carried out an intensive attack on the village using helicopters and tanks; the village was then looted by “shabiha” militias.¹⁵ According to the Syrian Human Rights Committee, another massacre was committed on August 25 in Darayya, a suburb of Damascus, in which 242 people were killed. Most of the corpses were found with bullet wounds in the city’s mosque; among them were 13 female bodies.¹⁶ A similar massacre was committed in the village of al-Ma’adameyya, also near Damascus, where 86 people were killed due to air strikes and attacks by “shabiha” armed groups on homes; helicopters subsequently bombed those who went out to bury the dead.¹⁷ On December 29, government forces and pro-regime groups of “shabiha” perpetrated another massacre in the area of Deir Ba’lba in Homs, in which over 220 civilians were killed and entire families were executed, including women, children, and the elderly.¹⁸

According to evidence documented by rights organizations, the army also used weapons prohibited under international law, particularly

¹⁴ International Crisis Group.

¹⁵ Arabic Network for Human Rights Information, “260 qateelan fe mathbaha maru’a tertakibha al-qowat as-sureyya wa al-malishiyyat al-musalaha al-munasira l-an-natham fe qareyyet al-tarimsa,” July 14, 2012, <<http://www.anhri.net/?p=56615>>; The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, “Can It Get Worse in Syria? It Just Did,” July 13, 2012, <<http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/can-it-get-worse-in-syria-it-just-did>>.

¹⁶ Syrian Human Rights Committee, “A’ajil: Majzara rahiba fe dareya wa ad-dahayya 208 madanyan,” Aug. 25, 2012, <<http://www.shrc.org/data/asp/d13/4753.aspx>>; Sky News, “Majzara fe daheyet dareya qorb damashq,” Aug. 26, 2012, <<http://goo.gl/TZG9Xm>>.

¹⁷ Syrian Human Rights Committee, “Majzara hamajeyya fe al-ma’adameyya,” Aug. 21, 2012, <<http://www.shrc.org/data/asp/d11/4741.aspx>>.

¹⁸ Syrian Human Rights Committee, “Majzara maru’a fe deir ba’lba bi-homs,” Dec. 29, 2012, <<http://www.shrc.org/data/asp/d13/4973.aspx>>; Syrian Human Rights Committee, “Qatla fe sureya nusfhom fe majzaret deir ba’lba bi-homs,” Dec. 29, 2012, <<http://www.shrc.org/data/asp/d14/4974.aspx>>.

cluster bombs,¹⁹ in addition to incendiary bombs dropped from the air on a number of residential areas.²⁰

The areas which fell under the control of the Syrian army often witnessed widespread looting to the point that army vehicles were used to carry off the plunder. The security apparatus and the armed “shabiha” groups did the same. Soldiers also frequently destroyed private property and burned homes. UN observers called this a form of collective punishment to make residents pay for their support of the opposition.²¹

Crimes Committed by Anti-Government Armed Groups

Armed groups opposed to the government also committed grave crimes in violation of the rules of war and international humanitarian law which may amount to war crimes or crimes against humanity, yet these crimes have been on a smaller scale than the crimes committed by government forces and pro-regime militias.

In a statement to the United Nations, the Syrian government accused the FSA of carrying out kidnappings, killings, and enforced disappearances of Syrian citizens, including against women and children as well as members of the army and security forces.²² Evidence points to the FSA having tortured and executed individuals who appeared to be from the “shabiha” groups in Homs. Cases of holding people for ransom with the aim of pressuring for the release of detainees held by the government were also documented.²³ Rights

¹⁹ Human Rights Watch, “Despite Denials, More Cluster Bomb Attacks,” Oct. 23, 2012, <<http://www.hrw.org/news/2012/10/23/syria-despite-denials-more-cluster-bomb-attacks>>; Human Rights Watch, “Isolate Syria’s Arms Suppliers,” June 3, 2012, <<http://www.hrw.org/news/2012/06/03/isolate-syria-s-arms-suppliers>>.

²⁰ Human Rights Watch, “Syria: Incendiary Weapons Used in Populated Areas,” Dec. 12, 2012, <<http://www.hrw.org/news/2012/12/12/syria-incendiary-weapons-used-populated-areas>>.

²¹ International Crisis Group.

²² Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, Submitted to the 19th Session of the UN Human Rights Council under Item 4, Feb. 22, 2012, <<http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G12/106/13/PDF/G1210613.pdf?OpenElement>>.

²³ Al-Karama for Human Rights, Report Submitted to the Committee Against Torture in the Context of the Special Review of the Syrian Arab Republic, Apr. 20, 2012, <www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cat/docs/ngos/Alkarama_Syria_CAT48.doc>.

reports in March cited that extremist groups within the FSA – such as the Nour and Farouq and Suleiman al-Farsi brigades – also committed grave violations. Acts of disappearance, detention, and torture targeted members of the security forces, government supporters, and people thought to be members of pro-regime “shabiha” militias. Torture was carried out against detainees during the initial periods of their detention in centers controlled by the opposition. Some 12 cases were recorded of summary executions of both members of the security forces and civilians.²⁴

UN reports documented numerous cases in which anti-government forces killed members of government forces or “shabiha” militias upon capture; the FSA also carried out numerous killings. In June, some prisoners of war were executed in al-Qusayr in the governorate of Homs after they were condemned by a judicial investigative commission formed by the FSA. Two Alawite soldiers were also executed in Talbesa in the Homs governorate. Twenty members of “shabiha” groups were also killed by anti-governorate combatants in Aleppo. Members of the FSA justified such acts, saying, “Either they (pro-government forces) wipe us out, or we wipe them out.”²⁵ Reports also pointed to anti-government armed groups violating the rights of

²⁴ Human Rights Watch, “Syria: Armed Opposition Groups Committing Abuses,” Mar. 20, 2012, <<http://www.hrw.org/news/2012/03/20/syria-armed-opposition-groups-committing-abuses>>; Human Rights Watch, “Syria: End Opposition Use of Torture, Executions,” Sep. 17, 2012, <<http://www.hrw.org/news/2012/09/17/syria-end-opposition-use-torture-executions>>; The Telegraph, “Rebels Accused of Massacre of 20 Syrian Soldiers in Their Worst Atrocity So Far,” Sep. 10, 2012, <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/syria/9534242/Rebels-accused-of-massacre-of-20-Syrian-soldiers-in-their-worst-atrocity-so-far.html>>.

²⁵ Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, Submitted to the 21st Session of the UN Human Rights Council under Item 4, Aug. 16, 2012, <http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/RegularSession/Session21/A-HRC-21-50_en.pdf>.

children, including by using them as child soldiers,²⁶ to transport weapons and supplies, or as lookouts.²⁷

In November, an unidentified armed group committed a mass killing of detainees being held in the governorate of Idlib. Video clips revealed that nearly 10 men, thought to belong to the security forces, were captured, beaten and kicked, and shot and killed by members of the armed group. Reports suggested that the total number of those killed in this massacre was not less than 18 people.²⁸

The FSA and some other armed opposition groups have kidnapped civilians based on their being from towns supportive of the Syrian regime, considering them a legitimate target.²⁹ 11 Lebanese Shiites traveling on a pilgrimage through the governorate of Aleppo were abducted on May 22; 9 remained held by one of the opposition groups at the end of the year. A number of Iranian civilians were also kidnapped. A Ukrainian journalist named Anhar Kochneva was also captured by an opposition group, which accused her of cooperating with and supporting the Syrian army and regime. Her abductors threatened to execute her in December,³⁰ and her fate remained unknown until the end of the year.

2012 witnessed a number of explosions, both by suicide bombers and car bombs, which also led to the deaths of dozens of civilians. Reports were not able to determine the identity of those responsible for the

²⁶ Annual Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and reports of the Office of the High Commissioner and the Secretary-General submitted to the 21st Session of the UN Human Rights Council under Agenda Items 2 and 4, "Situation of Human Rights in the Syrian Arab Republic: Implementation of the Human Rights Council Resolution 19/22," Sep. 25, 2012, <<http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G12/172/59/PDF/G1217259.pdf?OpenElement>>.

²⁷ Human Rights Watch, "Syria: Opposition Using Children in Conflict," Nov. 29, 2012, <<http://www.hrw.org/news/2012/11/29/syria-opposition-using-children-conflict>>.

²⁸ Amnesty International, "Syria: Armed Group Carries Out Summary Killing of Security Forces in Idlib," Nov. 1, 2012, <<http://www.amnesty.org/en/for-media/press-releases/syria-armed-group-carries-out-summary-killing-security-forces-idlib-2012-11>>.

²⁹ Russia Today Arabic, "Al-maleh: Kol mowatin rusy hadaf mashrua' li-thawra as-sureyya l'an ruseya tuhareb a-sha'b as-sury," Dec. 18, 2012, <http://arabic.rt.com/news_all_news/news/602840/>.

³⁰ Human Rights Watch, "Syria: Strong Coalition Message against Targeting Civilians," Dec. 22, 2012, <<http://www.hrw.org/news/2012/12/21/syria-strong-coalition-message-against-targeting-civilians>>; Amnesty International, "Syria: Release of Journalist Must Be First Test of Opposition Coalition," Dec. 14, 2012, <<http://www.amnesty.org/en/news/syria-journalists-release-first-test-opposition-coalition-2012-12-13>>.

explosions. The worst of these bombings took place on May 10 inside one of the branches of the military security in Damascus, leading to 55 deaths. Another bombing on April 30 near a government compound in Idlib killed 20. A bombing on July 18 in the headquarters of the Syrian National Security killed the minister of defense and a number of officials from the security establishment.³¹

Arbitrary Arrest Campaigns and Systematic Torture

Between March 2011 and October 2012, over 32,000 people in Syria were arbitrarily arrested without charge or trial, including a large number of those who had taken part in the peaceful protests or announced their support for them as well as many human rights defenders, journalists, doctors, and providers of humanitarian aid.³² Individuals and entire families were arrested to pressure their relatives to turn themselves in to the authorities or to provide information which would assist in their capture or incriminate them.³³ The pattern of holding people hostage spread to include families of individuals from the security forces who had defected to join the ranks of the opposition.³⁴

Arrest campaigns also spread to include religious leaders. For instance, Sheikh Ahmed Mu'ath al-Khatib, a former imam at the Umayyad Mosque, was arrested several times. Upon his release after having been detained in late May, he fled the country and was later chosen to head the National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces.³⁵

³¹ Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, Submitted to the 21st Session of the UN Human Rights Council.

³² Human Rights Watch, "Syria: Free Peaceful Activists, Journalists, Aid Workers in Amnesty," Oct. 25, 2012, <<http://www.hrw.org/news/2012/10/25/syria-free-peaceful-activists-journalists-aid-workers-amnesty>>.

³³ Amnesty International, "Syrian Government Targeting Dissenter's Followers," June 25, 2012, <<http://www.amnesty.org/en/news/syrian-government-targeting-dissenter-s-followers-2012-06-25>>.

³⁴ Amnesty International, "Syria: Free All Prisoners of Conscience after Amnesty," Oct. 25, 2012, <<http://www.amnesty.org/en/news/syria-free-all-prisoners-conscience-after-amnesty-2012-10-25>>.

³⁵ Syrian Human Rights Committee, "Al-i'atiqal at-ta'sufy mustamir... wa kofi anan samet," May 8, 2012, <<http://www.shrc.org/data/asp/d10/4700.aspx>>; France 24, "Al-i'tilaf al-

Even though the Syrian president has issued amnesties six times since the beginning of the uprising, most recently at the time of the Muslim holiday Aid al-Adha when prison sentences against those responsible for various crimes were annulled or reduced, thousands of peaceful activists, journalists, rights defenders, and providers of humanitarian aid remain under arrest; many have not been charged despite the long periods they have spent in detention.³⁶ The Syrian authorities have arbitrarily arrested thousands of individuals based on legislative decree 55 of 2011 and the anti-terrorism law issued in 2012, both of which allow the state to arrest individuals and to hold them for up to 60 days without judicial review. Indeed, many individuals have been held in detention long past this 60-day period.³⁷ A large number of detainees have joined the ranks of those who have been forcibly disappeared due to their being held in isolation from the outside world and the refusal of the authorities to provide information regarding their whereabouts. Among them are Mazen Darwish, director of the Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression, and a number of employees of the Center, as no information has been provided about their status or whereabouts since the office of the Center was raided by members of the air force intelligence and 16 people were arrested, including seven women.³⁸

Reports confirm that detainees are regularly subjected to brutal torture. According to testimonies of detainees who have been released, torture methods include sexual assaults and rape, electric shocks to the genitals and other parts of the body, beatings with clubs and cables, burning, and stripping detainees of their clothes.³⁹ Torture has been practiced against children, who have been forced to sit in painful positions, bound and hung by their limbs –including from their genitals– from the ceiling, and had heavy slabs of concrete placed on their heads.⁴⁰

watany li-qowa a-thawra wa al-mu'arada yentakhib ad-da'eyya ahmed mu'ath al-khatib ra'esan lih," Nov. 11, 2012, <f24.my/Q0Rfmr>.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Human Rights Watch, "Syria: Free Peaceful Activists, Journalists, Aid Workers in Amnesty."

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Amnesty International, "Syria: Free All Prisoners of Conscience after Amnesty."

⁴⁰ Al-Karama for Human Rights.

These crimes have been committed by the State Security and Political Security establishments as well as by the Military Intelligence and Air Force Intelligence services. Torture takes place in buildings belonging to the security apparatuses and in detention centers and prisons, as well as in public squares, sports arenas, and schools, which are also used as temporary detention centers. Hospitals have also been converted into detention centers and places of execution, with injured people being caught inside and tortured or executed and their bodies thrown into the streets.⁴¹ Doctors and medical teams have been tortured and killed as well. For instance, the bodies of three doctors who were detained in Aleppo on June 17 by the Air Force Intelligence were found in a burned car a week later bearing signs of severe torture; the hands of one were tied behind his back and the leg of another broken and his fingernails pulled out.⁴²

In light of the official information blackout about the status and whereabouts of detainees and the impossibility of visiting them, it is difficult to determine the number of those who have been killed as a result of torture or who have been intentionally killed in detention. One report pointed to more than 585 cases of death due to torture as of the end of April 2012.⁴³

Human Rights Defenders Arbitrarily Arrested and Killed

Human rights defenders did not escape the acts of violence and abuse. Many of these defenders have been arbitrarily arrested, forcibly disappeared, tortured, or killed since the beginning of the uprising. On February 16, 2012, members of the Air Force Intelligence raided the office of the Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression in Damascus, arresting director Mazen Darwish and 15 others, including a visitor to the Center, Shadi Yazbik, who was released on March 12. The seven women who had been among those arrested were released 48 hours later on the condition that they would present themselves

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Amnesty International, "Syria: Detained Medics Tortured and Killed amid Aleppo Crackdown," June 26, 2012, <<http://www.amnesty.org/en/news/syria-detained-medics-killed-brutal-bid-silence-dissent-2012-06-26>>.

⁴³ Arabic Network for Human Rights, "T'adam mu'ataqal ba'd ta'thibih bi-wahsheyya," Apr. 30, 2012, <<http://www.anhri.net/?p=52545>>.

daily to one of the detention centers to complete investigations with them. Upon their arrest, Mazen Darwish and the eight other men were placed in solitary confinement in one of the detention centers run by the Air Force Intelligence, and their lawyers, families, and colleagues were unable to visit them or to communicate with them. According to reliable sources, Darwish was tortured while being interrogated. The authorities have not stated what charges have been brought against him or his detained colleagues. No information about Darwish has been provided since this time,⁴⁴ and his whereabouts remained unknown as of the writing of this report. Information on his detained colleagues Abdelrahman Hamada, Hussein Gharir, Mansour Hamid al-Omri, and Hani Zeinani was similarly withheld. Seven employees of the Center and one visitor to the office were referred to a military court on charges of possessing banned information for the purpose of publishing it. The hearing of their case was postponed after the Air Force Intelligence failed to inform the court of whether Mazen Darwish would appear at the hearing as a witness. Those charged in this case included bloggers Bassam al-Ahmed, Jowan Faris, Ayhem Ghuzoul, Yara Bidr, Razan Ghazawi, Miyadeh al-Khalil, Sanaa Zeitani, and Hanadi Zahlout.⁴⁵ Other rights activists have also disappeared since their arrest in 2011, including Beraa Bekirati, Anes al-Shaghri, and Yehia al-Sharbaji, a proponent of non-violence.⁴⁶

On June 16, Rashid Omar Mohamed, a member of the Kurdish Organization for the Defense of Human Rights and Public Freedoms in Syria (DAD), was attacked in the city of Al-Malikiyah by unknown armed assailants wearing masks who beat him severely with iron rods and left him seriously injured.⁴⁷ On June 3, armed assailants shot and

⁴⁴ Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies, "The Syrian Authorities Must Reveal the Fate of Mazen Darwish and SCM Staff," Mar. 14, 2012, <<http://www.cihrs.org/?p=1840&lang=en>>.

⁴⁵Ibid; Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies, "Call to Release Freedom of Expression Defenders Held Incommunicado in Syria," June 21, 2012, <<http://www.cihrs.org/?p=3028&lang=en>>; Reporters Without Borders, "Authorities Urged to Reveal the Fate of Mazen Darwish and SCM Staff," Mar. 14, 2012, <http://www.ifex.org/syria/2012/03/14/darwish_life_in_danger/>.

⁴⁶ Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies, "Call to Release Freedom of Expression Defenders Held Incommunicado in Syria"; Reporters Without Borders, "Authorities Urged to Reveal the Fate of Mazen Darwish and SCM Staff."

⁴⁷ Kurdish Organization for the Defense of Human Rights and Public Freedoms in Syria, "Al-nashet al-haquqy al-ma'ruf az-zamil ad-doctor rashid omar mohamed yeta'rad l-ad-darb wa al-i'atida' 'ala hayatih," June 16, 2012, <[\(218\)](http://denge-</p></div><div data-bbox=)

killed Adnan Wahbeh, a member of the Arab Organization for Human Rights in Syria and of the executive office of the National Coordinating Body of the Forces for National Democratic Change in Syria. The attack took place in his clinic in the city of Douma on the outskirts of Damascus.⁴⁸

On July 14, the security apparatus arrested activist Salim Qubani while he was in Damascus to obtain humanitarian supplies for civilians in Homs; he was taken to an unknown location.⁴⁹ On October 2, rights activist and prominent lawyer Khalil Matouq, executive director of the Syrian Center for Legal Studies and Research, was abducted as he was driving his car to his office. He was held in one of the detention centers run by the Political Intelligence in Damascus.⁵⁰ Matouq had been called for questioning by the security apparatus a number of times in the period leading up to his abduction due to his work as the legal representative of detained activists and his trips abroad to receive medical treatment, as he suffers from a respiratory condition.⁵¹

Repression of Freedom of Opinion and Expression

The freedoms of opinion and expression have been severely repressed in Syria, as the government has used systematic censorship and arbitrarily refused to grant media licenses in order to control media outlets. Journalists and bloggers who express independent or critical viewpoints have been harassed, expelled from their jobs in the

derike.com/index.php?view=article&catid=78%3A2012-05-25-19-12-25&id=214%3A2012-06-20-06-52-59&format=pdf&option=com_content&Itemid=29>.

⁴⁸ Arab Organization for Human Rights in Syria, “Amaleyat al-ightiyal al-athma total hayat az-zamil ad-doctor ‘adnan wahbeh ‘odou al-manathamah al-wataneyya li-huquq al-insan fe sureya,” June 3, 2012, <<http://goo.gl/umnKu0>>.

⁴⁹ Arabic Network for Human Rights Information, “Al-mukhabarat as-sureyya ta’ataqil an-nashet al-barez salim qubani, July 16, 2012, <<http://www.anhri.net/?p=56724>>.

⁵⁰ Human Rights Watch, “Syria: Free Peaceful Activists, Journalists, Aid Workers in Amnesty.”

⁵¹ Human Rights Watch, “Syria: Prominent Human Rights Lawyer Abducted,” Oct. 4, 2012, <<http://www.hrw.org/news/2012/10/04/syria-prominent-human-rights-lawyer-abducted>>; Amnesty International, “Urgent Action: Syrian Human Rights Lawyer Feared Arrested,” Oct. 4, 2012, <<http://www.amnesty.org/ar/library/asset/MDE24/080/2012/ar/807a1199-4003-4e42-8019-460992e913e9/mde240802012en.pdf>>.

government sector, or arbitrarily detained,⁵² and as such Syria has become one of the most dangerous places in the world for media professionals to work. Rights sources estimate that over 150 of those working either professionally or informally in the press and different forms of media have been detained since the beginning of the uprising.⁵³ At least 36 of them remained in prison at the end of 2012, and at least 60 journalists, media professionals, internet activists, and others who collaborated with newspapers and information networks were killed.⁵⁴ The Syrian government targeted others through physical assaults, arrest, torture, and killing due to their opinions which opposed the regime and supported democratic freedoms.⁵⁵

At the beginning of April, journalist Mary Askander, who was known for her criticisms of the repression in Syria which were published in a number of Arab papers, and Ali Mohamed Othman, the director of the Media Center in the region of Baba Amr in Homs, were arbitrarily arrested.⁵⁶ On April 24, the Air Force Intelligence arrested Salameh Kaileh, a Jordanian journalist of Palestinian descent, after raiding his apartment in Damascus. He was cursed, beaten, and subjected to the “falaqa” method of torture (painful beatings on the feet leaving few physical marks), after which he was taken to the military hospital in Al-Mezzeh for treatment. He was forced to sleep with two other ill people in one bed with their hands and feet bound and their faces covered, and they were forced to defecate in the bed. Keila was subjected repeatedly to severe beatings while being blindfolded and tied to the bed. In mid-May, he was expelled to Jordan.⁵⁷

On May 18, journalist Mohamed Abdelmowli al-Hariri was sentenced to death on charges of high treason and dealing with foreign bodies

⁵² Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, Submitted to the 19th Session of the UN Human Rights Council.

⁵³ Human Rights Watch, “Syria: Free Peaceful Activists, Journalists, Aid Workers in Amnesty.”

⁵⁴ Reporters Without Borders, “Targeted Killings and Forced Confessions Condemned,” Dec. 4, 2012, <http://en.rsf.org/syria-targeted-killings-and-forced-04-12-2012_43758.html>.

⁵⁵ Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, Submitted to the 19th Session of the UN Human Rights Council.

⁵⁶ Committee to Protect Journalists, “Syria Detains Journalists, Releases Others,” May 14, 2012, <<http://cpj.org/2012/05/syria-detains-journalists-releases-others.php>>.

⁵⁷ Amnesty International, “Syria: Deported Palestinian Journalist Speaks Out about Torture in Custody,” May 17, 2012, <<http://www.amnesty.org/en/news/syria-deported-palestinian-journalist-speaks-out-about-torture-custody-2012-05-17>>.

and transferred to the military prison of Seidanayyah. At the end of 2012, no information was available regarding whether the sentence had been carried out. Al-Hariri had been arrested on April 16 after a television interview with Al-Jazeera in which he spoke about the severe humanitarian and security situation in the governorate of Deraa. He was subjected to brutal torture leading to fractures in his spine, yet the security apparatus continued to interrogate him even as he was partially paralyzed, refusing to provide him with the necessary medical care.⁵⁸

On May 26, the security forces arrested novelist Khalid Khalifa as he was participating in the funeral of the youth Rabe'a al-Ghazi in central Damascus. Khalifa was detained for several hours before being released, during which time he was subjected to violent beatings which led to fractures in his hand and bruises on his head. Hossan Abbas, well-known for his criticism of the government, was similarly attacked; he had been with Khalifa at the funeral.⁵⁹ On August 11, the security apparatus arrested playwright Zaki Kordilo and his son from his home in Damascus and took them to an unknown location after confiscating their personal computers.⁶⁰ On August 24, actor and television writer Mohamed Omar Owso was arrested along with his family members from his home in Damascus; he had been an active participant in the protests in support of the revolution.⁶¹ On August 23, the authorities arrested cinema producer Arwa al-Neirbeh, the son of the well-known opposition member Mawafeq al-Neirbeh, at the international airport in Damascus as he was traveling to Cairo.⁶²

Foreign journalists were also forcibly disappeared. Two Turkish journalists, Adam Owzkoz and Hamed Kuskuf, disappeared in March, and nothing was heard from them for nearly two months while they

⁵⁸ Skeyes Media, "Skayz yudin al-hokm al-qada'y as-sory bi-i'adam an-nashet al-i'alamy mohamed al-hariri," May 19, 2012 <<http://www.skeyesmedia.org/ar/SKeyes-Statements/Lebanon/1548>>.

⁵⁹ Skeyes Media, "Qawat al-amn as-soreyya ta'taqil ar-rouwa'y khalid khalifa fe damashq wa ta'tadi b-ad-darb 'ala al-bahith wa an-naqid hossan abbas," May 28, 2012, <<http://www.skeyesmedia.org/ar/News/Syria/1608>>.

⁶⁰ Skeyes Media, "I'ataqal al-fanan al-masrihy as-soury zaki kordilo min manzileh fe damashq," Aug. 13, 2012, <<http://www.skeyesmedia.org/ar/News/Syria/1976>>.

⁶¹ Skeyes Media, "As-sulutat as-soureyya ta'taqil al-mumethil mohamed omar awso," Aug. 25, 2012, <<http://www.skeyesmedia.org/ar/News/Syria/2035>>.

⁶² Skeyes Media, "Amn matar damashq ya'taqil al-muntij as-senema'ey arwa al-nerbeh," Aug. 24, 2012, <<http://www.skeyesmedia.org/ar/News/Syria/2025>>.

were in detention. They were released in May through an Iranian intermediary based on a request from Turkey.⁶³

On September 21, security forces raided the home of journalist and photographer Abdelkarim al-Oqda, who had filmed hundreds of videos of the acts of repression taking place daily in Syria. He and three of his friends were killed during the raid, and the house was burned; some sources suggested that the fire was lit intentionally.⁶⁴

On August 22, Musaab Mohamed Said al-Awdallah, a journalist with the state-owned newspaper *Tashrin*, was killed after the army raided his house. He had had links to the opposition and had criticized the repression practiced by the government in articles he published under a false name.⁶⁵ Two other Iraqi journalists were killed while covering the events of July 18; reports suggested that one of them, Falah Taha, was killed during clashes in Damascus, and that the other, Ali Jabouri al-Kaabi, was killed in the neighborhood of Jarmaneh in Damascus by a group of unknown armed assailants.⁶⁶

On May 27 and 28, five journalists were killed while filming unrest in Homs – the largest number of journalists killed in a single incident.⁶⁷ On August 20, Japanese journalist Mika Pamamoto was killed in a bombing of Aleppo. Three other local journalists were reportedly killed in August as well.⁶⁸

The most prominent of the fatal attacks on media institutions took place in June, when the armed opposition raided the Syrian Arab News Agency, a governmental television channel whose programs blame what they refer to as “terrorists” for the violence in the country.

⁶³ Committee to Protect Journalists, “Syria Detains Journalists, Releases Others.”

⁶⁴ Committee to Protect Journalists, “Syrian Journalist Killed in City of Hama,” Sep. 21, 2012, <<http://cpj.org/2012/09/citizen-journalist-killed-in-syria.php>>.

⁶⁵ Skeyes Media, “Ighteyal as-sahafi musa’b mohamed sa’id al-’awdallah fe damashq,” Aug. 22, 2012, <<http://www.skeyesmedia.org/ar/News/Syria/2014>>.

⁶⁶ Committee to Protect Journalists, “Two Iraqi Journalists Killed in Syria,” July 18, 2012, <<http://cpj.org/2012/07/two-iraqi-journalists-killed-in-syria.php>>.

⁶⁷ Committee to Protect Journalists, “Five Citizen Journalists Killed over Two Days in Syria,” June 8, 2012, <<http://cpj.org/2012/06/five-citizen-journalists-killed-over-two-days-in-s.php>>.

⁶⁸ Committee to Protect Journalists, “Japanese Reporter Killed, Two Missing in Syria,” Aug. 20, 2012, <<http://cpj.org/2012/08/japanese-reporter-killed-two-missing-in-syria.php>>.

The armed attack led to the deaths of three journalists and four other employees at the Agency.⁶⁹

Artists were also attacked, including on August 25, when the well-known caricaturist Ali Farzat was attacked for the second time since the beginning of the revolution by unknown assailants who abducted him as he was returning from his office to his home. Farzat was severely beaten and thrown from the car along the road to the Damascus airport, which led to bruising all over his body.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Amnesty International, "Syria: Attack on TV Station Condemned as UN Report Finds Violence Worsening," June 27, 2012, <<http://www.amnesty.org/en/news/syria-attack-tv-station-condemned-un-report-finds-violence-worsening-2012-06-27>>.

⁷⁰ Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, "Ikhtitaf rassam al-caricatur as-soury 'ali farzat wa al-i'atada' 'aleh," Aug. 25, 2012, <<http://www.syriahr.com/25-8-2011-syrian%20observatory3.htm>>.

