

# Documenting the Death of 976 Individuals due to Torture in Syria in 2018

Including 12 in December

# SNHR

SYRIAN NETWORK FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

الشبكة السورية لحقوق الإنسان

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The Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR), founded in June 2011, is a non-governmental, independent group that is considered a primary source for the OHCHR on all death toll-related analyses in Syria.

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## I. Introduction and Methodology

International law completely prohibits torture and other forms of cruel, inhumane, or degrading treatment. This being a customary rule, states can't dismiss or undermine this rule in favor of other rights or values, even in times of emergency. Violating the laws prohibiting torture is an international crime according to international criminal law, with people who issued orders for torture, or failed to prevent its occurrence defined as being criminals with legal responsibility for these practices. Nonetheless, torture continues to be practiced in Syria in a systematic manner to a chillingly brutal and sadistic degree. In many cases, torture is inflicted on the basis of the victim's sectarian or ethnic status – especially inside the detention centers of the Syrian regime, which has been and remains the primary and main perpetrator of torture crimes. Syrian regime forces have carried out arbitrary, random large-scale arrests as a policy since the early days of the popular uprising for freedom in March 2011. Since its establishment, the SNHR has recorded deaths due to torture on a daily basis, in parallel with arrests and enforced-disappearances. Syrian regime forces have practiced extremely brutal acts of torture for the purposes of retaliation, murder, and simply as a way to dispose of the ever-increasing detained opposition figures, as well as to enforce submission and erode support for the popular uprising by terrorizing, debasing and fragmenting any opposition to the regime. We have outlined the most notable methods of torture in an [extensive study](#) that was released in 2014.



Other parties have also committed crimes involving torture, although to a lesser extent than the Syrian regime. However, we have recorded a notable increase since 2015 in rates of deaths due to torture at the hands of other parties – particularly at the hands of ISIS, who managed to build multiple detention centers, and an apparatus specifically dedicated to arrest and torture in areas under its control. Kurdish Self-Management forces have also utilized torture methods similar to the Syrian regime’s, especially against detainees accused of being affiliated with factions of the armed opposition and their relatives, as well as torturing a number of people on the basis of their ethnicity. Although forces of the armed opposition have never practiced torture to the extent where it could be described as consistent large-scale policy against civilians, we have documented a rise in the levels of such practices, as well as in the numbers of deaths due to torture at detention centers for factions of the armed opposition since November 2016.

All of those parties have failed to distinguish, in their crimes of killing by torture, between men, women, children or elderly people; we have documented hundreds of cases in which such individuals were killed in order to intimidate the local population and force them into submission. Some of those parties have routinely informed victims’ families that their loved ones have died without allowing the bereaved family members to see or remove their loved ones’ bodies for burial. Often Syrian regime officials will force victims’ families to sign documents certifying that their loved ones died of illness or health reasons unrelated to torture without even allowing them to see the bodies.

**Fadel Abdul Ghany, chairman of SNHR, says:**

“The norm of ‘Responsibility to Protect’ must be implemented in light of the government’s failure to protect its people, and the fruitlessness of the diplomatic and peace-making efforts so far. Crimes against humanity and war crimes are being perpetrated every day in Syria, mainly at the hands of the organs of the state itself.”

**Methodology**

This report outlines the deaths due to torture at the hands of the main five parties (Syrian regime forces, extremist Islamist groups, Kurdish Self-Management forces, armed opposition factions, and groups we couldn’t identify) that we were able to document in December, as well as shedding light on the most notable of these cases.



This report draws upon the ongoing monitoring of news and the latest developments in Syria by the SNHR team, and through an extensive network of contacts with various sources that have been built over the course of our work. When we receive information, or hear reports of violations via the internet or media outlets, we work on following-up on this news and try to verify the information and collect evidence and data. As with other human rights groups, SNHR is unable visit Syrian regime forces' detention centers due to the ban imposed on our members which is also the case for the detention centers that are affiliated with the other parties to the conflict.

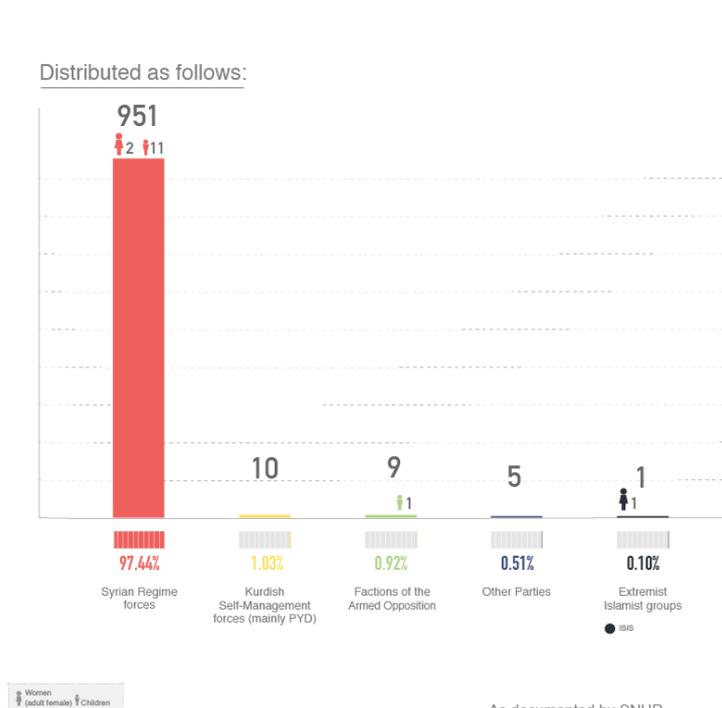
We obtain information on victims who died due to torture in the Syrian regime's prisons by speaking with either former detainees or victims' families and friends. Most of these bereaved family members get information about their detained relatives through bribing senior regime officials. Conclusively confirming deaths remains subject to ongoing documentation and verification as cases of this nature remain open in light of the serious difficulties we encounter in the process of documentation. The cases included in this report only represent a fraction of the actual total number of violations that are being perpetrated.

Please see SNHR's methodology for [documenting victims](#)

## II. Executive Summary

### A. Death toll due to torture in 2018

SNHR documented 976 cases of death due to torture at the hands of the parties to the conflict in Syria in both official and unofficial detention centers in 2018, including 12 children and three women (adult females). The total death toll distributed by the perpetrator party as follows:



**976**  
individuals  
died due to torture  
at the hands of  
the main parties to  
the conflict in Syria in  
**2018**

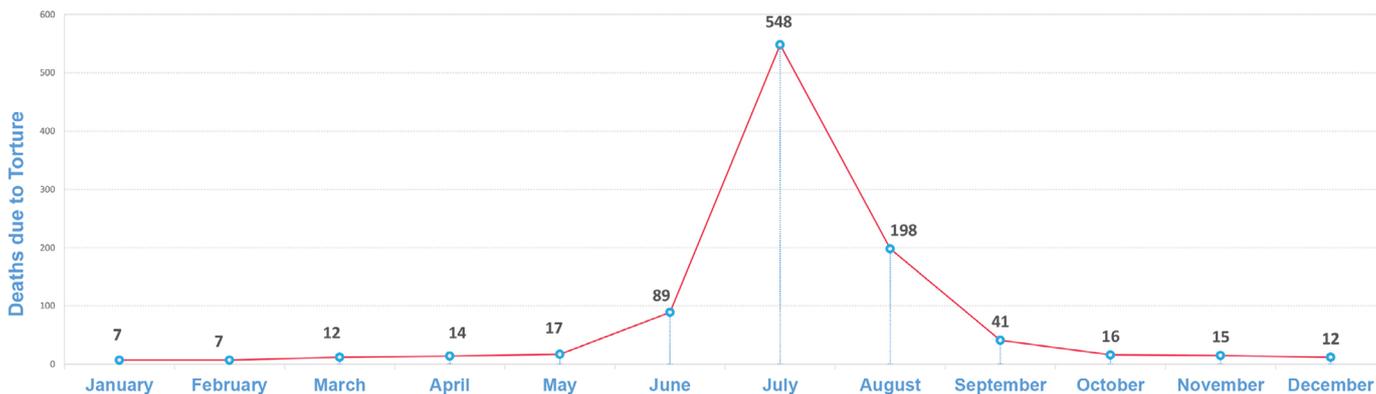


- A. Syrian regime forces (army, security, local militias, and Shiite foreign militias): 951 civilians, including 11 children, and two women.
- B. Extremist Islamist groups: one woman
  - ISIS (self-proclaimed the Islamic State): one woman
- C. Factions of the armed opposition: nine civilians, including one child.
- D. Self-Management forces (consisting primarily of the Democratic Union Party – a branch for the Kurdistan Workers’ Party): 10 civilians.
- E. Other parties: five civilians.

**The death toll distributed by month as follows:**



976 individuals died due to torture in Syria in 2018



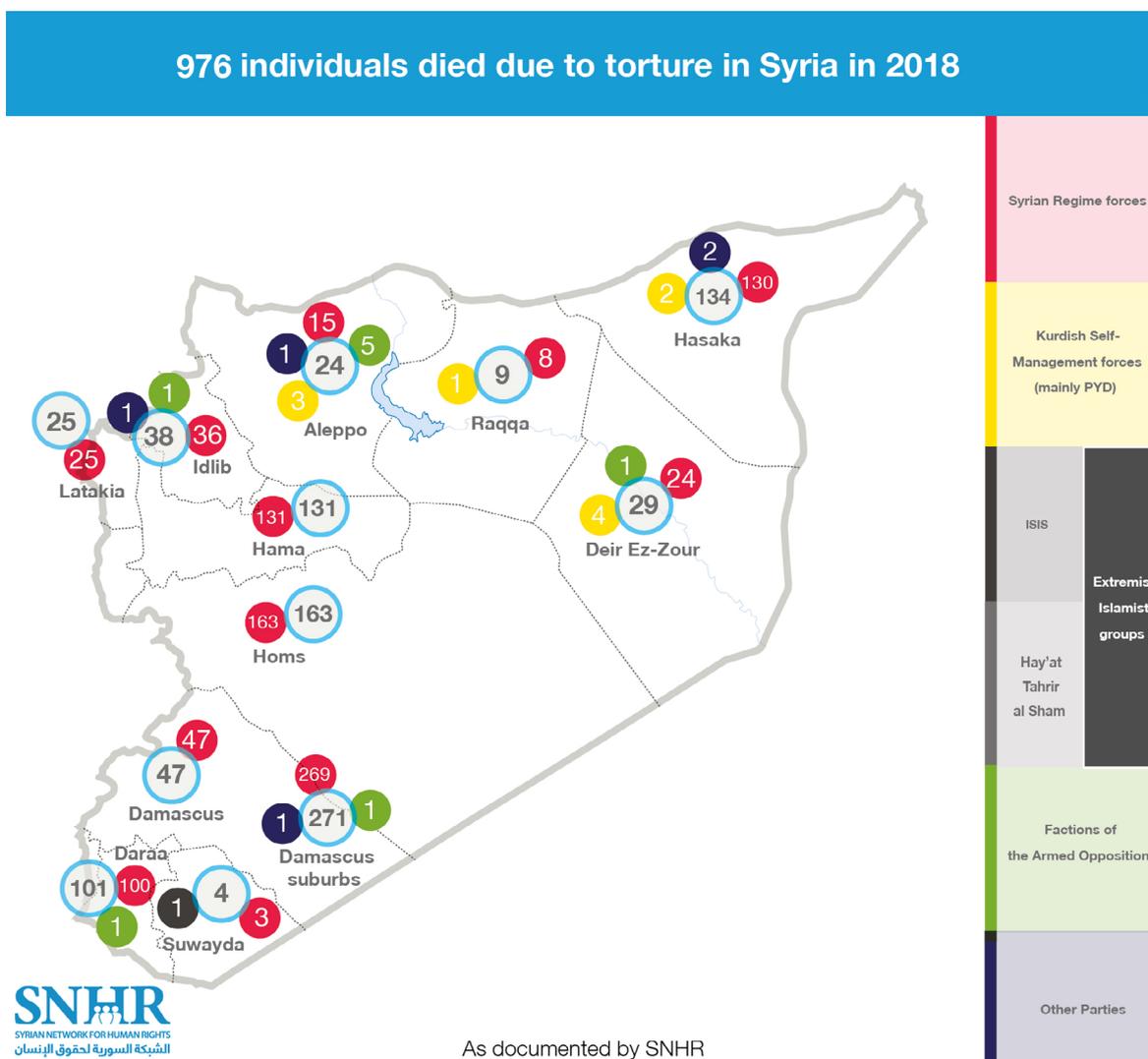
As documented by SNHR

It seems that crimes of death due to torture have been perpetrated continuously in a continuous manner since 2011, which is clear evidence of the systematic violence and brute force exercised against detainees.

The highest death toll due to torture in 2018 was recorded in Damascus Suburbs governo-rate, with 271 individuals killed under torture.



## The death toll of 2018 distributed across governorates as follows:



### The most notable cases of death due torture in 2018 are:

One doctor, one nurse, one veterinarian, 13 university students, one lawyer, one pharmacist, two engineers, three media workers, one member of teaching staff, three athletes, one musician, five children, one woman, two elderly people, and 19 cases of kinship.

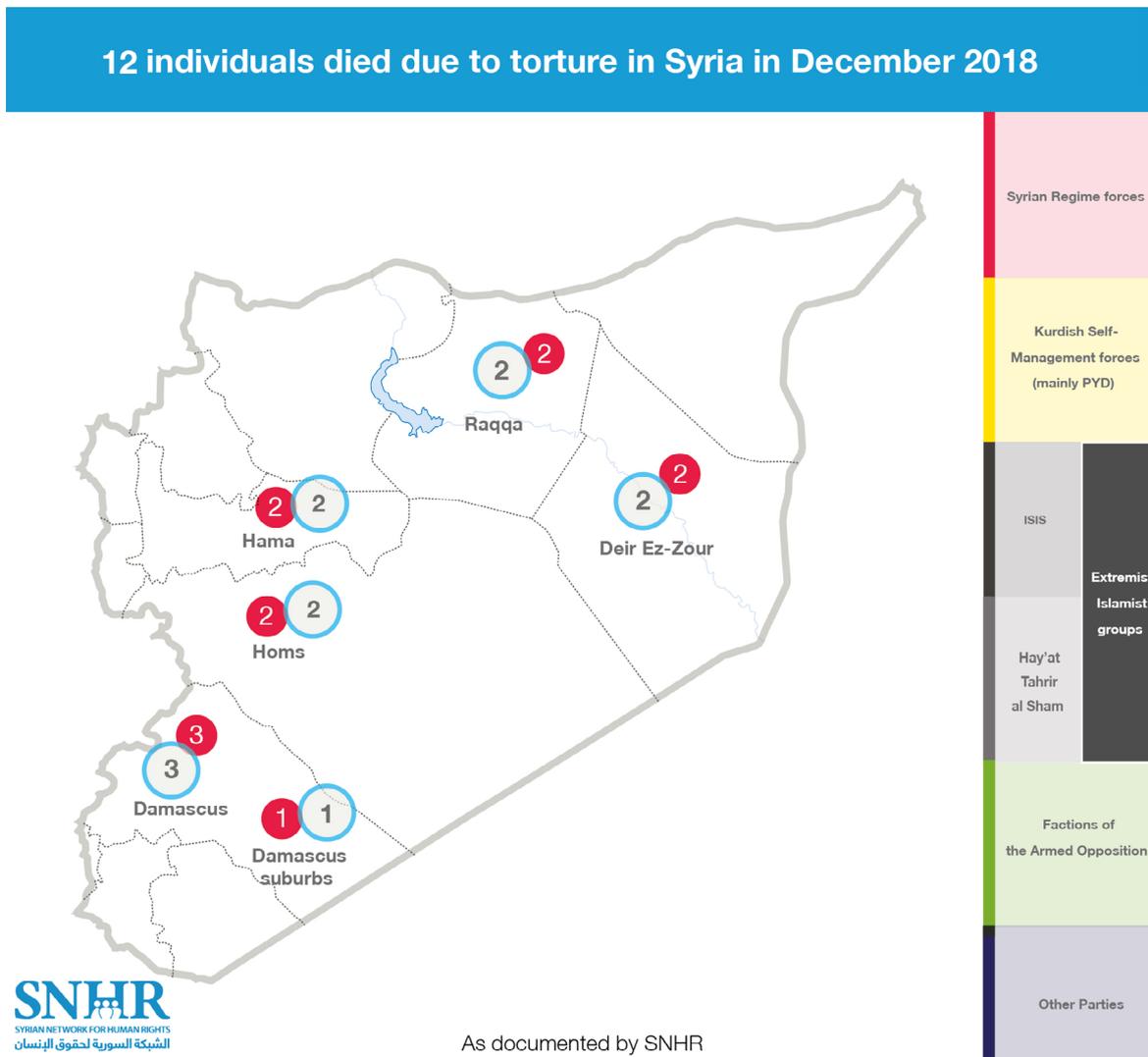
### **B. Death toll due to torture in December, 2018:**

SNHR has documented at least 12 cases of death due to torture in the official and unofficial detention centers at the hands of Syrian Regime forces in December.

The highest number of deaths due to torture in December was documented in Damascus Suburbs governorate, with three individuals killed under torture.



## The death toll of December distributed across governorates as follows:



The most notable death in December was a case of kinship.

### III. Most Notable Cases of Death due to Torture in December:

#### **Cases of kinship:**

Siblings Wafi and Mahmoud Amara, from al Yarmouk Camp in southern Damascus city, were arrested in Damascus city in 2014 by Syrian Regime forces. On Friday, December 14, 2018, we received information confirming that both had died due to torture in a Syrian regime detention center.





Mahmoud Amara – Wafi Amara

#### IV. Most Notable Cases of Death due to Torture in 2018:

The following is a review of death due to torture incidents in 2018. We have retained complete accounts of these incidents on the SNHR database:

##### **Syrian Regime forces:**

[Mohammad Latif al Salman](#), born in 1995, was a student at the faculty of literature in al Furat University in Hasaka city, from Hajin city in eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour. He was arrested in 2015 following a raid on his place of residence. On Wednesday, December 17, 2018, we received information confirming that he had died due to torture in a detention center of the Syrian regime in Damascus city.

[Islam Khairo al Dabbas](#), born in 1989, was a student at the architecture faculty in Damascus University and an activist in the popular uprising, from the city of Darayya in western Damascus Suburbs governorate. He was arrested by Syrian Regime forces on Friday, July 22, 2011. On Monday, July 16, 2018, we received information confirming that he had died due to torture on Sunday, December 15, 2013, in Sydnaya Military Prison in Damascus Suburbs governorate.

Yahya Taha Shurbaji and his brother Mohammad, from the city of Darayya in western Damascus Suburbs governorate, were arrested by Syrian Regime forces on Tuesday, September 6, 2011. On Monday, July 23, 2018, we received information confirming that they had died due to torture in a detention center. We note that Yahia, born in 1979, reportedly died on Tuesday, January 15, 2013. We released [a statement](#) on his death due to torture. The information that we received stated that his brother, Mohammad, died on Friday, December 13, 2013.

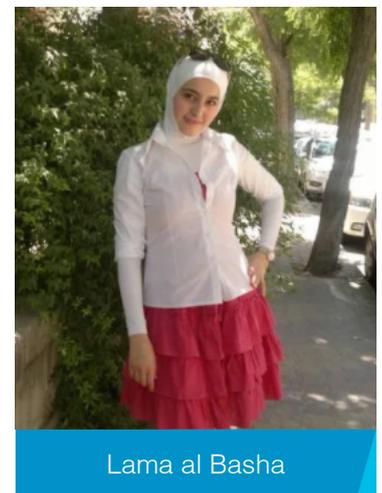




Mohammad Shurbaji – Yahya Shurbaji

Siblings [Abdul Sattar and Majd al Din](#) Abdul Fattah Kholani were from the city of Darayya in the western Ghouta in southwest Damascus Suburbs governorate. On Tuesday, July 24, 2018, we received information confirming that they died due to torture on Tuesday, January 15, 2018, in Sydnaya Military Prison in Damascus Suburbs governorate. We note that Syrian Regime forces arrested Abdul Sattar on Friday, July 22, 2011, in Darayya city, and arrested Majd al Din, a law student, on Monday, August 8, 2011.

Lama Nawwaf al Basha, born in 1992, was a student at Damascus University's Economics faculty in the Management Small-Medium Enterprises department, from al Tal city in the north of Damascus Suburbs governorate, was born in 1992. Lama was arrested by Syrian Regime forces on Sunday, November, 2014, in al Tal city. On Tuesday, July 31, 2018, we received information confirming that she had died due to torture in a detention center.



Lama al Basha

[Sameh Srour](#), a player with al Jaish basketball club and a member of the national basketball team, from M'araba town in the east of Daraa governorate, was born in 1989. Syrian Regime forces arrested him on Monday, April 23, 2012, at Damascus International airport as he returned from Aleppo city. On Tuesday, July 31, 2018, we received information confirming that he died in February, 2014 in a detention center.



[Mohammad Noor al Shamali](#), a media activist, from Aleppo city., was arrested by Syrian Regime forces on Saturday, December 1, 2012 in the area around Aleppo University. On Wednesday, August 1, 2018, we received information confirming that his name had been registered in the civil registry department as deceased. We consider it most probable that he died in a detention center.

Mazen Dabbagh and his son Abdul Qader Patrick, from Damascus city, had French citizenship. Syrian Regime forces arrested them on Sunday, November 3, 2013, in Damascus city. We were informed on Wednesday, August 15, 2018, that they had been registered in the civil registry department as deceased. We consider it most probable that they had died in a detention center.

Mazen worked as the Senior Educational Adviser at the Lycée Charles de Gaulle<sup>1</sup> in Damascus. According to the civil registry, he died on Tuesday, November 25, 2017, while his son, Abdul Qader Patrick, died on Sunday, December 21, 2014, also according to the civil registry.



Abdul Qader  
Patrick Dabbagh



Mazen Dabbagh

### Extremist Islamist Groups:

#### - ISIS:

Zahiya Fawaz al Jba'i, from Shbeki village in al Suwayda governorate's eastern suburbs, was aged 60 when she was kidnapped from Shbeki village on Wednesday, July 25, 2018. On Thursday, August 9, 2018, we received information confirming that she had died due to the neglect of health care in a detention center.



Zahiya al Jba'i

<sup>1</sup> the Lycée Charles de Gaulle is a school supervised by the French Republic through its embassy in Damascus



### **Faction of the Armed Opposition:**

The child [Abdullah Nabil al Nasr Askar](#), from Jasem city in Daraa governorate's northern suburbs, was born in 2002. Factions of the Armed Opposition arrested him on Wednesday, April 25, 2018, from Jasim city, where he was taken to the city's police station; his dead body was handed over to his family on the same day showing signs of torture.

### **Self-Management forces:**

[Saleh Ahmad al Yasin](#), a pharmacist from al Mouhasan city in Deir Ez-Zour governorate's eastern suburbs, was aged 55 when he was arrested by Self-Management forces in April, 2018 at his place of work in Jazaret al Bouhmaid in Deir Ez-Zour governorate's western suburbs. On Thursday, June 7, 2018, his family was handed his dead body. He died due to torture he had been subjected to, and the neglect of health care in the detention center.

## **V. Conclusions and Recommendations**

The Syrian regime has perpetrated torture through multiple institutions in a systematic, widespread and institutional manner which constitutes an explicit violation of international human rights law, with these instances qualifying collectively as crimes against humanity. In many cases, these violations have reached levels of intensified violations of the right to life. Also, these crimes, which have been perpetrated since the start of the non-international armed conflict in a systematic and widespread manner, constitute a blatant breach of international human rights law and constitute war crimes. It has been proven that the Syrian regime is fully aware of these acts, and fully cognizant of the fact that the inhuman detention conditions will definitely lead to death, but has failed to take action in this regard. Furthermore, the Syrian regime has never launched any investigation, or held those involved in perpetrating torture on its behalf accountable, but has rather legitimized their crimes and attempted to conceal and hide criminal evidence.

The perfunctory trials that ISIS conducted for the detainees end with sentences of death by torture, field-execution, or death in brutal, innovative ways. None of these trials respect any of the rules of international human rights law or international humanitarian law, and these practices constitute war crimes.

In regard to torture, Kurdish Self-Management forces have also failed to respect the rules of international human rights law and international humanitarian law. The acts of torture which these forces perpetrate against their adversaries in the context of the armed non-international conflict, constitute war crimes.



The acts of torture carried out by factions of the armed opposition are an explicit violation of the international human rights law when committed against residents in areas under their control, and of international humanitarian law when committed against any of their adversaries in the armed non-international conflict, and constitute war crimes.

## **Recommendations**

### **Security Council and United Nations**

- Renew calls for the Syrian regime to commit to ending acts of torture, immediately, demand that all torture victims' fates are revealed, and rescue the remaining detainees as soon as possible.
- Apply pressure on the Syrian government to implement Security Council resolutions 2042, 2139, and 2254. Should the Syrian government fail to comply, as has been the case since the popular uprising started in Syria, action should be taken under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations in order to save detainees inside detention centers from death.
- Russia should stop hindering the referral of the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court.
- All of the United Nations relief bodies should search for the families who have lost providers or other members to torture, ensure the uninterrupted delivery of aid to people who are truly in need, and commence rehabilitation efforts.
- Immediately punish all individuals involved in perpetrating or being accomplices to torture.

### **International community**

- States party to the Convention against Torture should take all necessary measure to establish their jurisdiction over the perpetrators of torture crimes, and make every possible effort to achieve this.
- Impose serious new sanctions against the Syrian regime in order to deter it from killing Syrian citizens under torture.
- Provide more finance, support, and grants to local organizations that work on rehabilitating and caring for torture victims and their families.
- Support individual activists and local organizations who are documenting violations without exploiting influence or enforcing political directions.

### **Commission of Inquiry (COI)**

Launch investigations into the cases included in this report and previous reports. SNHR is willing to cooperate and provide more evidence and data.



## **International, Impartial, and Independent Mechanism (IIIM)**

Address the cases mentioned in this report and previous reports. SNHR is willing to cooperate and provide more evidence and data.

### **Syrian regime**

- Launch an immediate investigation into all cases of death inside detention centers, and cease practicing systematic acts of torture which constitute crimes against humanity, as the regime's apparatuses practice these acts on a daily basis.
- All death sentences should be suspended, given that these were issued based on confessions extracted under brutal torture.
- Immediately secure access for the Commission of Inquiry, the Committee of the Red Cross, and all objective human rights groups to detention centers.
- Take immediate action in order to end all forms of torture, improve the conditions inside detention centers, and commit to protecting tens of thousands of detainees from being tortured and degraded.
- Release arbitrarily arrested detainees, particularly children and women, and reveal the fates of thousands of forcibly disappeared persons.
- The Syrian regime is responsible for deaths due to torture, and must immediately start compensating all of the victims' families.

### **Extremist Islamist groups**

Ensure the implementation of international human rights law in their prisons and areas under their control, and cease all forms of torture inside detention centers.

### **Armed opposition factions**

- Respect the rules of international human rights law, and end all unlawful trials, as well as all acts of torture inside detention centers.
- Immediately secure access for the International Committee of the Red Cross and objective human rights groups to all detention centers, and cease holding detainees in secret detention centers.
- Hold all individuals involved in committing torture accountable, and discharge them immediately.



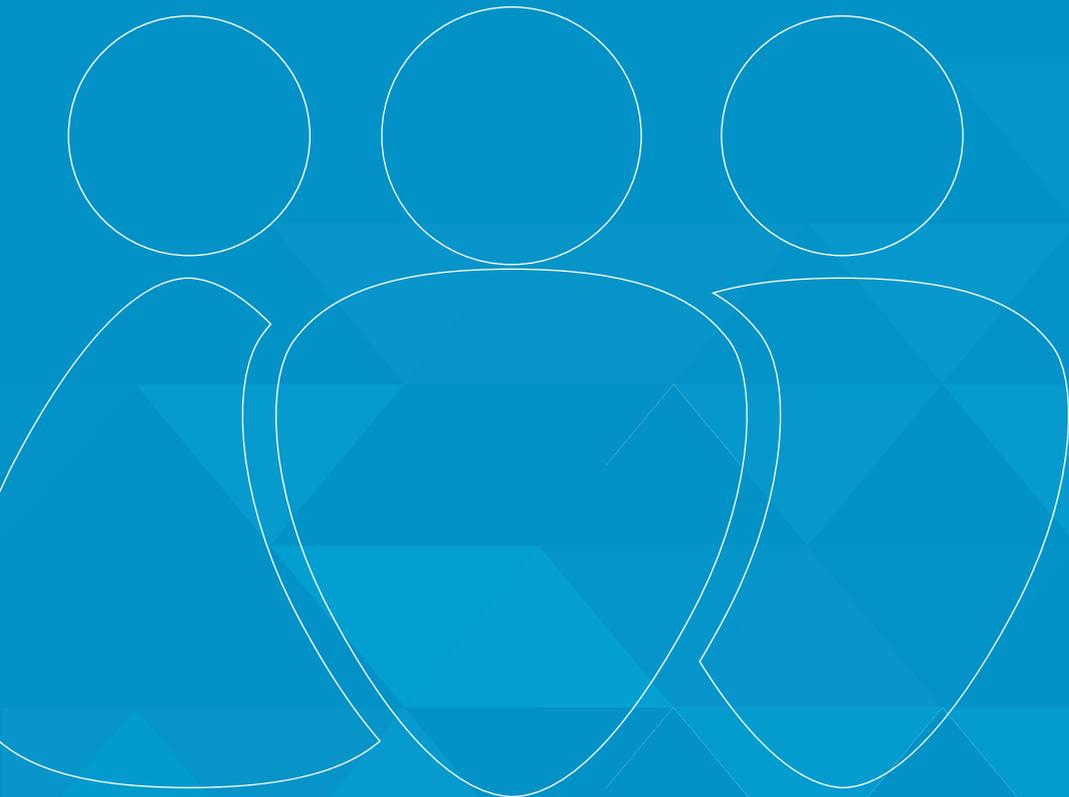
## **Kurdish Self-Management**

- Respect the standards of international human rights law and cease the use of torture against political or military opponents, as well as launching investigations to expose those who were involved in these crimes and hold them accountable.
- Reveal all detainees and publicize lists of their names, make the locations and sites of the secret detention centers public, and allow families and human rights groups to visit them.

## **Acknowledgment and Condolences**

Our most sincere thanks to all families, eyewitness, and activists who contributed effectively to this report. Our most heartfelt condolences to the victims' families and friends.





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