

# INVITATION

## Advancing the Cause of Detainees and Forcibly Disappeared Persons Is Our Collective Responsibility

Since the first days of the start of the popular uprising for democracy in Syria in 2011, the Syrian regime has used arbitrary arrests followed by enforced disappearances as weapons of war, suppression and terrorism against Syrian people calling for political change, as well as against dissidents and apolitical civilians in a systematic and widespread manner. The first years of the mass uprising saw the highest percentage of enforced disappearances because of the intensive nature of the demonstrations in areas controlled by the Syrian regime, which aimed to end these protests and liquidate as many participants as possible with the objective of reducing or ending the incidence of the popular uprising, even if this were to take years. All other parties to the conflict and the controlling forces have practiced widespread arbitrary detentions and enforced disappearances of Syrian citizens in connection with the armed conflict, with the aim of crushing and intimidating political opponents and subjugating society in areas under their control, or achieving material benefits by blackmailing the victims' families, in addition to turning the victims into hostages and bargaining chips, with these tactics used in an escalating fashion throughout the past ten years. The number of detainees or forcibly disappeared persons has now reached approximately 149,800 Syrian citizens, making Syria the worst country in the world in this century to date in terms of enforced disappearance of citizens, with approximately 102,000 Syrian citizens having been, and remaining, documented as forcibly disappeared to date, according to the Syrian Network for Human Rights' (SNHR) database; this is a terrifying and massive number, more especially compared to the population of Syria. The Syrian regime is responsible for 85% of these cases or 86,792 individuals, tens of thousands of whom have been 'disappeared' in the Syrian regime's detention centers for eight or nine years.

There is hardly a detainee who has not been subjected to one or more methods of torture, which in Syria is organically linked to arbitrary arrest, beginning from the first moment of arrest and routinely leading to the detainee's death. Enforced disappearance is considered one of the cruelest methods of torture, as the repercussions of this crime are not limited to the victims only, but also extend to their families, who suffer from loss, trauma, stress, years of waiting, and absolute helplessness, in the absence of any legal procedures they can take to assist their loved ones, due to the dominance over all state security issues of the intelligence services responsible for arrests and enforced disappearances, with family members also afflicted by constant psychological, economic and social suffering.

The Syrian regime has succeeded, with Russian/Iranian support, in achieving impunity, in addition to the fact that no Syrian official has been held accountable, despite the enforced disappearances practiced by the regime amounting to crimes against humanity, which is proven in the reports of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry (COI).

As part of a serious effort to prevent the continuation of this culture of impunity and to keep the issue of detainees and the disappeared current and alive in various political and social forms, a group of victims' families launched the Truth and Justice Charter in February 2021, which seeks to present a victim-centered, comprehensive vision, and encourages these families to actively participate and join in the continuous and long struggle to reach truth and accountability.

### The online event will focus on the following questions:

- What tools are available to raise awareness and refocus attention on the issue of detainees and forcibly disappeared persons in Syria in order to pressure the international community to end the arrest/ disappearance/ torture machine? Also, how can civil society organizations active in the issue of detainees put pressure on the international community and the United Nations in order to support the survivors of detention and the families of the missing and detainees?
- How can civil society organizations active in the issue of detainees raise awareness amongst the Syrian community about the importance of documentation and accountability processes, and what role can they play in light of the loss of hope regarding the feasibility of documentation processes?
- What types of support can be provided to survivors and victims' families?
- What are the repercussions of all parties continuing the policy of arrest/enforced disappearance/ torture for more than a decade, in light of complete impunity, what are the repercussions of this on the Syrian people and state?
- What is the role of these organizations in educating Syrian society about the forms of accountability, their mechanisms, and the realistic results to be expected in the short and long terms from the documentation and accountability processes? How can the reports and resolutions issued by the United Nations bodies on this issue be capitalized on and activated within the framework of mobilization and advocacy operations?

### Speakers:

- **Fadwa Mahmoud**  
Co-founder of the Families for Freedom movement
- **Maryam al Hallaq**  
Chairwoman of the Caesar Families Association
- **Ahmad Helmi**  
Ta'afi Initiative
- **Diab Serriya**  
Association of Detainees and the Missing in Sednaya Prison
- **Khalil al Haj Saleh**  
Massar organization (Coalition of Families of Persons Kidnapped by ISIS)
- **Fadel Abdul Ghany**  
Executive Director of the Syrian Network for Human Rights

### Moderator:

**Amina Khouliani**  
Families for Freedom, human rights activist

### Online event (via Zoom)

22 October 2021 at 16.00 - 17.30 Berlin time  
(17.00 - 18.30 Syria/Turkey time)

To participate directly on Zoom, please sign up using this [link](#).

After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the event.

The event is in Arabic - there will be direct translation to English

Organized by



For any additional information, please contact  
**Mr. Abdulla Bassam**  
(+905312502092; abdullah@sn4hr.org).