



joint statement

A Message to the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Ministers of Foreign Affairs in the European Union on the Detainees and Missing Persons Issue in Syria

Her Excellency Federica Mogherini
High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy
Your Excellencies Foreign Ministers of the European Union

Your Excellencies,

Across Syria, tens of thousands of innocent civilians are currently being subjected to torture, starvation and sexual violence inside Assad regime prisons. As former detainees and long-time Syrian human rights defenders, we have experienced such atrocities firsthand and have worked hard to ensure that all forms of arbitrary detention and abuse inside Syrian prisons end. Unfortunately, despite the efforts of the UN Special Envoy for Syria, we have seen far too little progress on Syria's detainee file. We therefore appeal to the European Union and its Member States to move with urgency to secure the release of arbitrarily held detainees and ensure access by independent monitors to all Syrian detention centres, including Assad's secret prisons.

Since March 2011 over 17,000 people have died inside Syrian regime's prisons and approximately 65,000 have gone missing. There are many more cases of forced disappearances, not documented in these figures, believed to be in secret regime prisons and detention facilities. The murder, torture, and starvation of Syrian detainees—including women and children—have been meticulously documented, including in over 55,000 photos smuggled out of Syrian prisons by a former military policeman known as 'Caesar'. According to Amnesty International, the torture inside Assad's prisons is "widespread" and "systematic" and has been perpetrated as a matter of "state policy". The former Chief Prosecutor of the special court of Sierra Leone, Desmond Lorenz de Silva, has likened the horrors ongoing inside Assad's prisons to "industrial-scale killing" and the UN's Independent Commission





of Inquiry has called them “crimes against humanity of extermination”.

The evidence of atrocities inside Assad’s jails is overwhelming and indisputable. Yet it has not translated into progress on the detainees file. Despite the UN Special Envoy for Syria’s decision to appoint a Senior Advisor to handle the issue of detainees and abductees, independent monitors still have only limited access to Syrian detention centres, the whereabouts of tens of thousands of abductees remain unknown, and the torture and starvation of detainees continues unabated, as seen most recently in As-Suwayda prison, where the use of excessive force by prison officers resulted in two deaths and dozens of injuries.

The lack of progress on the detainees file has cost Syrian lives. It has jeopardized the Geneva process—imperiling efforts to reach a political solution to the Syrian crisis. And it has set a dangerous precedent for terror and atrocities inside the prisons of extremist groups like ISIS. Six years into the Syrian conflict, it is vital that progress be made on the detainees file. Europe – as a champion of human rights and the pursuit of justice and accountability – can ensure that such progress is made. We therefore urge you to take the following steps:

- (i) Secure full, unconditional and immediate access for international monitors such as the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and a specialist task force to all Syrian detention facilities, including secret or undisclosed regime prisons and detention facilities, by initiating a UN Security Council resolution demanding such access, without prior notification. We know from our own experiences inside Assad’s jails that ICRC access can improve conditions and save lives – yet far too many facilities remain outside of the ICRC’s reach.
- (ii) A moratorium on execution orders, especially those issued by Military Field Courts and Courts handling terrorism cases.
- (iii) Ensure accountability for those responsible for torturing and killing Syrian civilians by prosecuting cases under domestic or universal jurisdiction. Several European states have already initiated such cases—others should follow. In light of the Security Council’s refusal to refer the situation to the International Criminal Court,





it is also imperative that steps be taken to establish a special war crimes tribunal for Syria.

(iv) Strengthen sanctions against personnel at all levels of the Syrian regime who are responsible for or complicit in the most brazen atrocities inside Assad's jails. As a first step, EU Member States should proactively work alongside the independent Commission of Inquiry to operationalise its list of suspected war criminals and set out consequences for the systematic violations of international humanitarian law by all parties to the conflict in Syria.

Your Excellencies, the world cannot feign ignorance to the state-sponsored carnage ongoing inside Syrian prisons. The world knows what is happening inside Assad's jails and it can stop it—but to do so, we need Europe's help. Europe has long been a bastion of freedom and justice—the very values which first motivated our people to come to the streets in 2011, and for which our people continue to be detained, tortured, and killed. We look to you to uphold European values now, and to demonstrate the leadership needed to bring justice to the Syrian people and pave the way for a sustainable and lasting peace for Syria.

Signatories:

Organizations and institutions

1. Aleppo's Lawyers to Build the Rule of Law
2. Al-Kawakibi Organization For Human Rights
3. Arab Organization for Human Rights
4. Arab Organisation for Penal Reform in Syria
5. Basamat for Development
6. Baytna Syria
7. Center for the Study of the Democratic Republic
8. Council of Free Syrian Judges
9. The Day After
10. Detainees' Voice Organization
11. Fraternity Foundation for Human Rights
12. Free Association Bar of Daraa
13. Free Syrian Lawyers Association
14. Human Rights Office - Eastern Ghouta
15. Hama Media Center
16. Human Rights Organization in Syria - MAF
17. Justice for Detainees in Syria
18. Lawyers aggregation the free syrian
19. Liberal Idlib Bar Association
20. Liberal Hama Bar Association
21. Life institute
22. Local Coordination Committees of





Syria 23. Ma'an Organisation for Supporting Women's Issues 24. Masar Centre for Studies 25. Motivation 26. National Group for Transitional Justice in Syria 27. NUON Organization for Peace Building 28. Orient Center for Documentation and Human Rights 29. Save The Rest Campaign 30. Syria Inside 31. Syrian Kurdish Journalists Union 32. Syrian Activists Monitoring Organization 33. Syrian Center For Legal Studies and Research 34. Syrian Center for Media and freedom of Expression 35. Syrian Center for Press Freedom 36. Syrian Center for Studies and Human Rights 37. Syrian Christians for Peace. SCP 38. Syrian Commission for Detainees 39. Syrian Feminist Lobby 40. Syrian Human Rights League 41. Syrian Judicial Council 42. Syrian Jurists Network in Netherlands and Diaspora 43. Syrian Legal Development Programme 44. Syrian Network for Human Rights 45. Syrian Organization for Documenting and Publishing 46. Syrian Organization for Victims of War 47. Syrian Women's Network 48. Tastakel: The Syrian Centre for Dialogue 49. The Hague Center for the Prosecution of Criminals Against Humanity in Syria 50. The National Salvation Group in Syria 51. The Syrian Commission for the Release of Detainees 52. The Syrian Journalists Association 53. The Syrian National Organisation 54. The Working Group for Syrian Detainees 55. URNAMMU for Justice and Human Rights

In addition to a group of political and humanitarian personalities and formed detainees in the Regime prisons and a group of civilian activists

