



Secret Detention Centers in Syria Der Shmiel camp

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Introduction

With the accumulating, ceaseless widespread, and systematic arrests and detentions is continuing at the hands of government forces (The army, security forces, or the local and Shiite militias), the number of detainees has exceeded 215,000 according to SNHR's estimation. SNHR has documented approximately 110,000 whilst the fates of tens of thousands remain unknown. You can search our lists for any name by using [the search engine](#) on our website.

As a result, the official detention centers, the four main security branches and its sub-branches has been completely overfilled with detainees. Since the beginning of 2012, government forces started using schools, stadiums, some building and villas as detention camps which is similar to the Nazi and Stalinist camps. This report will highlight the largest secret camp: Der Shmiel secret camp.

The secret detention centers are controlled by local militias (The National Defense Army and the Popular Committees) which are affiliated to the Syrian government that worked on facilitating these militias' work in exchange of insuring the cooperation of these militias in raids, clashes, and terrorizing the residents of the nearby areas. This is the case in Der Shmiel camp where the majority of the forces that control the camp are residents from the surrounding towns and villages. There are about 1,500 "Mercenaries -Shabihas-" in these camps including women according to local activists and residents in these areas.

Investigations and former prisoners' testimonies suggested that the main purpose of this kind of detention centers is brutal torture. The brutality of torture in these secret detention centers surpasses other security branches' by far. The torture in Der Shmiel has a religious





background. Additionally, it is extremely rare for anyone to get out alive from the camp. SNHR, after years of searching, managed to find only one survivor who was formerly imprisoned inside Der Shmiel secret camp.

The second goal is gaining large amounts of money as most of the detainees inside these secret detention centers were kidnapped.

The Syrian law indulges torture inside the official detention centers let alone the secret detention centers. According to decree 14 of 1968, anyone who works with the intelligence apparatus can't be prosecuted without the authorization of his administrator. Also, any military personnel can't be prosecuted without the approval of the minister of justice. After the beginning of the Syrian revolution, Law no. 55 was adopted on 21 April, 2011 (only a month after the outbreak of the popular protests) to expand the circle of impunity to include the other branches of the government forces. The Syrian government only wants to affirm the practices of torture more and more.

The international commissions wasn't able to visit any official detention centers and will never be able to visit any secret detention center.

Der Shmiel Secret Camp

Location: Der Shmiel camp is located in Hama northwestern countryside 20 km to the north of Misyaf city center. The camp has an approximate area of 180 donums (0.18 kilometers²).

Most of the detainees in the camp are from three governorates: Hama, Homs, and Idlib. According to the survivor, who spent three months in the camp, there are about 2500 detainees including 250 children and 400 women approximately.

The camp contains special facilities for torture. A number of local residents, including the survivor, told us that they saw many disfigured dead bodies dumped in the streets with signs of torture on them.

Basil, a local activist from At-Triemsa village, located near Der Shmiel camp, offered SNHR his testimony:

“On Saturday 25 May, 2013, some of the residents found eight disfigured dead bodies dumped in the street with signs of torture on them. Many believed the dead bodies were for



The map shows the approximate location of the camp





people who were being detained inside Der Shmiel camp on the account that the dead bodies were found near the camp which is the main and most notable center for torture in the area. The dead bodies were for three elders, two children, one is apparently 10-year-old and the other is slightly older. We couldn't identify or recognize the other dead bodies because they were drastically disfigured. After the dead bodies were found, some policemen came and took the dead bodies to the government hospital in Hama city. We don't what happened after that.”

Wael Mohammad Tawil, 45-year-old, was formerly imprisoned in Der Shmiel camp, he is from Hama western countryside – Al-Qbier village. Wael was an employee at the government water station in Hama, he was kidnapped by the National Defense militias on 7 December, 2012:

“I was leaving my work, I took a cap to Al-Qalaa’, located in the middle of the city. When I arrived at Al-Qalaa’ circle, a flash checkpoint (temporary and abrupt checkpoint) stopped us and asked for our identifications, they searched the car and asked me to get out before they quickly blindfolded, handcuffed and took me. They also took the taxi and told the driver: if you want it, come to Der Shmiel and take it. In the car, they kept beating and kicking me and I didn't know why, we spent about an hour and a half like that. The car stopped, I got out and kept walking for about 200 meters, I heard the sound of a large door opening and guards talking. They left me in a cell in the basement, I couldn't see anything because I was still blindfolded.”

“I stayed in that cell for two days without food or water, my hand remained cuffed and I heard the sound of children and women screaming and men being tortured all the time. I thought I was at a security branch. After two days, the cell door opened, a Shabih (mercenary) took me to a room on the first floor directly next to the stairs. I remained standing for 10 minutes. The interrogator told the Shabih to remove the blindfold. In the room there was a table above which there was a gun, three bombs, and a lash, the interrogator was sitting behind the table and there was a military bed made of steal. After ten minutes, the interrogator got my wallet from the table drawer and started asking about my personal information, my job, my family, and then he asked me about my political views. When I told him that I only mind my work, he took the lash and started hitting me and accused me of lying: “All of you, Sunnis, are against the regime” he took me to a hall and told who were there to keep beating me until I confessed to whatever crimes I committed. The hall was about 10 × 5 meters and there were six people being tortured with the Shabh method (Ash-Shabh method is when the prisoner is tied to the roof by his hand without letting his feet touch the ground). They put me in the Dulab (another torture method) and starting beating and insulting me and I lost consciousness, they poured cold water one me and starting hitting my face and told me to confess (I had nothing to confess to). After two hours of being beaten inside the Dulab, I couldn't scream anymore, then they left me hanging from the roof (Ash-Shabh torture





method) and left me for... I don't know how long I was up there because I fainted.”

“The interrogator came to the hall, I was unconscious, he kicked me in the stomach, I woke up and found that I was the only prisoner in the hall, I don't know what they did to the other six prisoners who were there with me. The interrogator asked for my family phone number, I gave it to him, he threatened me that he would kill them if I lied. He asked me how much money I have and then told me that I have a clean record but they will not release me until my family pay money. I said to him: “just call them and they will pay you, just get me down” he had me back to the old cell in the basement, they gave me a loaf of bread and one potato. At that time, it has been three days since I ate last time. The torture didn't stop in these three days. On the next day I was taken to a room (5 × 4 meters) that had 23 detainees and kidnapped.”

Wael told us that he spent two months in that cell and no one interrogated him even once, during that time, the local militias that control the camp contacted his family and asked for a ransom of 25 million Syrian pounds or else they will kill him.

Wael told us about the camp and the detainees:

“There was only one meal a day, it was either potato or some grains with one loaf of bread for each prisoner. We were only allowed to go to the bathroom once a day. They would not let us go again no matter what even if you shitted or urinated yourself. Also, taking bath was prohibited. If you got sick, no one would care about you and you would not have any medication or a doctor or even a nurse. They didn't care about our lives in the slightest. I got to know most of the detainees, most of them weren't active in the revolution but they won't be released until their families pay the camp a lot of money, money that they absolutely didn't have. The cell that was next to us had detainees who were active in the revolution. Most of the detainees there would die under torture. Many times, we heard Shabihis and interrogators say: dump the bodies outside the camp.”

“After two months, on one day at 3:00 in the morning, a shabih took me after blindfolding and handcuffing me to a car, two shabihis sat next to me. We drove for an hour before they dumped me onto the street. Some stranger took me home in Al-Qbier. When I got out, I learned that my family sold our house and rented another, sold a land I owned, and loaned a lot of money to pay the camp the 25 million Syrian pounds. They paid him a month after I was kidnapped. I was released on Wednesday 9 December, 2013, when I was released they didn't give me back my wallet which contained my identification and other things I had when I was kidnapped.”





Conclusions and Recommendations

SNHR affirms that the Syrian government practiced and still practicing the crimes of torture and kidnapping in a systematic and widespread manner which can be classified openly as a crime against humanity according to Article 7 of the International Criminal Court Rome Statue and as a war crime according to Article 8 of the International Criminal Court Rome Statue.

This coordination between the various branches of governmental forces indicate that the violations perpetrated in Syria are a part of an institutional policy. All the individuals involved in these violations must be held accountable.

Recommendations

The Security Council seems completely helpless to take any action against the ruling regime in Syria after four years of ceaseless widespread killing. The Council is also unable to follow-up with the resolution it adopted regarding this matter. The Security Council adopted three resolutions regarding the detainees in Syria: resolution 2042, adopted on 14 May, 2012, and resolution 2043, resolution 2043, adopted on 21 May, 2012, and resolution 2139, adopted on 22 February, 2014, which “Strongly condemns the arbitrary detention and torture of civilians in Syria, notably in prisons and detention facilities, as well as the kidnappings, abductions and forced disappearances, and demands the immediate end of these practices and the release of all arbitrarily detained persons starting with women and children, as well as sick, wounded and elderly people and including UN personnel and journalists;”

Despite the conclusive evidences that were collected by the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic and what we have proved by documenting hundreds of massacres and violations, we must be helped to file a lawsuit directly to the International Criminal Court prosecutor and contribute to establish a special court that would specialize in the crimes that were perpetrated in Syria regardless of the perpetrator parties.

The torture and detainees issue must by an absolute indisputable priority in any political or negotiation process. The Syrian government must release all the political and non-criminal detainees.

