



Press release

SNHR Participates in a Panel Discussion Entitled “Preventing Torture and Supporting Its Victims: Reality and Challenges” at the Invitation of Al Jazeera Public Liberties and Human Rights Centre

On Saturday, June 26, 2021, Al Jazeera Public Liberties and Human Rights Centre, in cooperation with Al Jazeera Mubasher, held a panel discussion entitled “Preventing Torture and Supporting Its Victims: Reality and Challenges”, on the occasion of the International Day in Support of Victims of Torture, with the event broadcast on Al Jazeera Mubasher channel. The panel discussion hosted Mr. Fadel Abdul Ghany, Director of the Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR), Mr. Abdelwahab al Hani, a human rights expert and former member of the Committee against Torture, Mr. Mansour al Dhaifi, a former Yemeni detainee, and Mr. Ahmad Mufid, a human rights defender.

The panel discussed the reality and challenges of respecting and implementing the total prohibition of torture under international human rights legislative instruments and customary international law, with the systematic and widespread practice of torture constituting a crime against humanity. The panel also highlighted the efforts of the relevant treaty bodies, national human rights committees, and human rights organizations, and the impact of these efforts on improving practical action, supporting victims and their families, and providing redress and reparation for them. In addition, the panel touched upon the role of the media in raising awareness of anti-torture standards, exposing abuses and violations committed by regimes, and enabling victims to make their voices heard and enhance their human dignity.

In his address during the event, Mr. Fadel Abdul Ghany said that torture was one of the first violations practiced in Syria against activists in the popular uprising after March 2011, along with their arbitrary arrest, with torture in Syria being organically linked with arrest, noting that there is hardly any detainee (the number of those arrested at some point is estimated at more than 1.2 million people) who hasn't been subjected to some form of torture, when arrested, with arrests being carried out without a judicial warrant, while most of the detainees are classified as forcibly disappeared. As he stated: **"Enforced disappearance of the detainee includes a severe form of physical and psychological torture, for the detainee and also for his or her family, and this torture may, or may not, lead to the detainee's death"**.

Mr. Abdul Ghany added that summary execution is another form of torture commonly practiced in Syrian regime detention centers. Through use of these practices, he noted, the Syrian regime has targeted and continues to target participants in the popular uprising, including political demonstrators, in order to strike a blow at and ultimately crush the uprising, and to deter the largest possible number of members of Syrian society from engaging in or continuing with the uprising, saying, **"Syrian regime forces have systematically and in a widespread manner practiced torture, which constitutes crimes against humanity, as well as war crimes because it is practiced in the context of an armed conflict, and it is a state policy according to the reports of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Syria (COI)"**.

Mr. Abdul Ghany further explained that it is not possible for any detainee to know the or amount of torture which he or she may be subjected to by the Syrian regime based on the invariably false accusations against him/her, describing the regime's torture regimen as extensive and limitless, increasing the psychological suffering and trauma for detainees because they do not know when or if their torture will end, and the extent of the torture they might be subjected to, which may lead to their death.

Mr. Abdul Ghany pointed out that the SNHR has documented on its database the deaths of at least 14,338 individuals at the hands of Syrian regime forces, including 173 children and 74 women, also referring to the exceptional status of forcibly disappeared persons in Syria's case, with the SNHR database containing data on nearly 131,000 detainees, including 101,000 forcibly disappeared persons, **"We do not know the fate of these persons, whether they were killed under torture, with the Syrian regime being responsible for 85% of the total recorded number of the forcibly disappeared."**

Mr. Abdul Ghany also referred to the international procedures and standards adopted by the Syrian Network for Human Rights concerning the issue of torture, and talked about the SNHR's continuous periodic correspondence with the United Nations special rapporteurs on extrajudicial killings and torture. He added, **"We have had sustained cooperation for about ten years with the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Syria, during which we provided the COI with statistics and data on survivors of detention who were subjected to torture, as well as contact data with the families of victims killed under torture, and this was reflected in the COI's reports."** Mr. Abdul Ghany said that the door of criminal accountability is closed in the face of the Syrian case due to the Russian veto at the Security Council in regard to referring the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court, pointing out that some trials are taking place in Europe under the jurisdiction of universal jurisdiction.

Mr. Abdul Ghany touched upon the importance of the Netherlands' initiative in September 2020 in which the Dutch government informed Syria of its decision to hold the regime responsible for gross human rights violations and torture, in particular under the Convention Against Torture, adding, **"The importance of this step lies in the fact that the Syrian regime can be sued before the International Court of Justice under the Convention against Torture, because Syria is a party to it."** He further noted that on March 4, 2021, Canada announced its intention to take similar steps, adding, **"We have contacted the Netherland's Government and the Canadian Government and expressed our willingness to provide the data we possess in this regard."**

In the same context, Mr. Abdul Ghany said, **"We published the names and data of individuals involved in torture by the Syrian regime, which is a means of accountability through exposure and shaming, and we have contributed to listing some of them on the sanctions lists in many countries of the world."**

Mr. Abdul Ghany concluded his speech by stating that the current international mechanisms are inadequate and do not work with brutal regimes such as the Syrian regime, and called for the essential establishment of other mechanisms to enforce and oblige the implementation of basic human rights principles, referring to the common Article 1 of the Geneva Conventions, which obligates States to undertake to respect and to ensure respect for the Geneva Conventions; despite this, he noted, the international community has been unable to secure the release of even one single detainee or reveal the fate of one single disappeared person for ten years.

At the conclusion of his address, Mr. Abdul Ghany stated, **"Impunity is what enabled the Syrian regime to continue to commit crimes against humanity,"** adding that all of these factors had led to widespread frustration that afflicted the whole of Syrian society, including amongst the surviving victims themselves. He emphasized the importance and centrality of the role of victims in the documentation processes, stressing, **"We must continue with the documentation process, no matter how limited its effectiveness. We must continue the resistance and struggle until we achieve a transition towards a democratic state that respects human rights."**

The full panel discussion can be viewed via [the following link](#).