



Views from the heart of hell

The Testimony of the Syrian Red Crescent Activist who survived the Syrian Regime Detention Centers

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First: introduction

From the arresting at the checkpoint through passing several security branches and prisons until the release. As part of documenting violations taking place inside the Syrian regime detention centers, SNHR met Mrs. Sa'ha the Syrian Red Crescent activist who survived torture and arrest.

We got her approval to publish her testimony:

Personal information of the detainee:

Name: Sa'ha Barodi

Governorate: Hama

Date and Place of birth: Hama- 1970.

Occupation: a volunteer for the Red Crescent and the committee of social care in Hama.

Social status: married and has two children.

The date of arrest: 2 April 2014

The date of release: 28 June 2014

Second: testimony's details

First: at the security checkpoint:

On Wednesday 2 April, I decided to travel to Lebanon with my husband, I went to Garages area that is located in Tripoli neighborhood in Hama city. I was stopped by a checkpoint affiliated to the military security in that area and an officer asked for my ID, when I gave him the ID, he told me that I am wanted for a brief matter and it will end in a minute of interrogation (a question and an answer). I got out of the car and entered the checkpoint with them. When I got inside the checkpoint they beat me and cursed me. They had my clothes and purse thoroughly inspected,





and cursed me with bad words. They fettered my hands behind my back. After half an hour of threats and curses, they put me in a bus affiliated to Al Shabiha and took me to the Military Security Branch in Hama.

Second: in the Military Security Branch:

As I arrived to the Military Security Branch they cursed me with bad words. They inspected me another time with my hands behind my back. After the inspection, they took me to the solitary confinement that is in the lower storey. It contains a toilet of 1.5 meter, I stayed there until the next day.

On the next day 3 April the investigator brought me for interrogation, they fettered my hands and blindfolded me. When I entered the investigation room the investigator started the interrogation which was simultaneously with beating and kicking me with his shoe. He asked me, in particular, about my volunteering activity in the Red Crescent and the social care. I didn't have anything against law but they tried to get information about my help to the armed opposition through the Red Crescent, and supporting the armed opposition elements' families. My negative answers didn't satisfy him, so he beat me again. The blindfold was removed and he ordered them to bring two detainees and made me saw how they were being tortured by whipping them, putting them in a wheel, beating them and hanging them. He asked me to reveal the names of armed opposition elements and that I contacted them, but I didn't mention anything. He asked me whether I see the killed as dead or martyrs.

The interrogation lasted for four hours which was repeated for 18 days. Every day, the interrogation was with the same investigator and the same questions, the same charges, beating and insulting.

The interrogation lasted for four to five hours, he would leave me for some time and go torture other detainees in front of me. The interrogation started at the morning about 8:00 am, and at night about 2:00 pm. I stayed in the military security for 18 days.





Third: in the Military Police detention center:

After they transferred me to a detention center inside the building of the military police that is located in the neighborhood southern of Al Mal'ab. I was with 16 male detainees, the male detainees were kept in the military police building, but they took me to the Criminal Security Branch.

Fourth: Criminal Security Branch:

They took me to Criminal Security Branch to transfer me to Homs, it was Thursday, as Friday and Saturday are holiday, and I stayed in Criminal Security Branch until Sunday.

At Sunday morning, a security patrol of military police came and took me to the military police. There, there was a bus and there were 16 detainees inside. When I asked the elements "where are you going to take us?", they cursed me. Then I got in the bus and they took us to Military Police Command in Homs accompanied by Al Shabiha.

Fifth: Military Police Command in Homs:

Along the road toward Military Police Command, they cursed us. In that day we didn't eat or drink anything until we arrived to Homs to Military Police Command, there they gave me a loaf of bread and one cucumber only. They put me in a cell and I slept in an iron bed because the blankets were full of lice and urine smell. I stayed there until 8:00 am of the next day, as I was transferred to Al Baloneh prison with the same youths.

Sixth: Al Baloneh prison:

In Al Baloneh prison, I stayed for a day and a night in a solitary confinement without interrogation to the next day. They took me blindfolded and tight handcuffed to Homs Central Prison.

Seventh: Homs Central Prison:

When I entered Homs Central Prison, there were about 230 female detainees. After I asked about their situations I knew that most of them weren't subjected to judiciary except for one time since they were detained, there were cases that were completely neglected. There were some detainees who were arrested for more than nine months and haven't stood trial and didn't accused with any charge.





It was notable that there were children, who were two to four year old, detained with their mothers. The lice and scabies spread among them. The bed were completely full so I could not find a place to sit, until one detainee (from Hama city- Al Arba'ain neighborhood, called Fatima Tawashi, 55-year-old, a detainee in this prison for a year and a half, and her son is a martyr) allowed me to sit on her bed.

There were a lot of women and young girls, but I cannot remember their names. There were detainees from Al Hoson castle, Banyas, Al Rastan, Homs and Hama. The charges were working in makeshift hospitals, sexual Jihad or cooking for armed opposition. I cannot remember their names because of the great number and their last names sounded strange to me.

I stayed in Homs Prison for three days, then I was transferred with 61 male detainees to Damascus to Palestine Branch in a big lorry affiliated to the prison.

Eighth: Palestine Branch:

In the lorry that transferred us to Damascus, I wasn't blindfolded. As I arrived to Palestine Branch I read a big sign with bold font. It had been written "whoever enters is lost, whoever leaves is reborn". It was at the door of the branch.

In Palestine Branch, they received me with curses and they said that I am terrorist. They had beaten me on my head and back, took me in a brutal way and fettered my hands and feet.

They took me to the office and gave me my belongings and took my fingerprint. They accused me of supporting terrorist, wanting to flee from the country, treating with Bander (referring to the prince Bander Bin Sultan), traveling to Bander to publish the news of country because I am a terrorist.

Then, they took me to higher storey, to the second one. When I was walking I smelled a bad smell and I think it came from the detainees and the injured. The corridors were dark, I heard the sounds of the detainees as they were suffering. I saw youths being hit by the green water hose during the interrogation. The blood was on the grounds and walls. At every moment, the security element asked me to put my head down to avoid seeing what was happening. He was called Abu Al Jamajim, He put me in the bathroom and asked one detainee to inspect me. Of course, I could identify her, she was called Media, from Deir Ez-Zour, 40-year-old, she was detained eight months ago with charge of inciting deflection. Later, she got out with me.





Then, they took me to a 3x4m room, when the door opened I was shocked by the view. There were 34 women in that small room.

We slept on the ground on our sides, all of us were broken down psychologically, some of them suffered from diabetes, heart disease and kidney diseases. Despite that, no one receives medical care.

The bathroom system:

It was allowed to enter the bathroom at 9:00 am and 5:00pm for two times and for ten minutes only. We took shower in the bathroom (there were three toilet and two laundry) we washed our clothes and wore it without drying. We drunk water with camphor taste. When we asked about the reason of taste changing of water they told us that they put a substance which causes hair falling and impotence.

The food system:

At the morning, the element distributed three loaves of bread. Every detainees had three loaves of bread and 14 olive pills.

At 5:00 pm, they brought one boiled potato for each four women. Every four to five days, they gave everyone one cucumber or tomato.

There was a market we can buy Halawa, cigarettes, jam, shampoo or soap. In every week one detainee can buy one time in turn, so the turn reached us every three months they took prices from our money in secretariats. The truth was that most of detainees didn't have money as it was stolen or reserving by security elements when it was in secretariats.

After nine days in the branch, the lice spread and some detainees suffered from scabies.

The investigators:

The investigators drunk alcohol inside the branch, and the smell of wine was spread from them. The investigator interrogated me in Palestine Branch two times for two hours (similar to Hama interrogation). On the ninth day in the branch my fingerprint were taken on a file.

At night, we heard the sounds of interrogation with the youths, and the sounds of hitting and torturing. Their heads were being hit against the wall many times.





The most notable incidents in Palestine Branch:

On one day, one detainee was suffering from diarrhea, we begged the warden to allow us taking her to bathroom. He allowed us to go with her. We were four detainees with the patient detainee. It was 2:00 pm. When we got out with her we saw several corpses in corridors with torture signs. There were corpses wrapped with blankets, I saw hair on the wall, it seemed that it was resulting from hitting the heads on the walls.

There was a room with decadent corpses. They put the detainees inside it and took him as he suffered from lung diseases and with yellow or white face and that to press on him to confess the charge that he was accused of. This room was located under two storey of our room.

There was a detainee with me, and I saw the worms got out from the pit that were spread and purulent on her body.

When the interrogation was ended, there were a group of youth called Sab'at 777, they were old detainees and they wore the underwear only. Their job was to take the collapsed youths to their cells or to take the corpses to corpse's room then clean the traces of blood to hide it. They also distributed food to the cells. We had heard the investigators when they called them with "Sab'at".

I can remember some of detainees in Palestine Branch:

Thana' Al Qasim-Hama- 48-year-old, a detainee for six months. It wasn't interrogated with her.

Maha Al Shami(Um Riyad)- Hama- 42-year-old, a paralyzed and has a device in her foot to help her walking.

Insaf Qadowr-Hama- Qamhneh, 40-year-old.

Dalal Al Shami, Hama, 60-year-old, it wasn't interrogated with her.

Um Alaa, Idlib, 60-year-old, her charge was working for Orient channel.

Wafa' Al Sabe', Damascus, 50-year-old.

Basima Qadyati, Damascus, 55-year-old, her charge was working in a makeshift hospital, but she released for evacuation.

Lina Owdabashi, Damascus, 22-year-old, she put hezb Al Ba'eth flag down in Al Maidan. Released with me for evacuation.

Lina Bayasi, Damascus, 18-year-old, she accused with sexual Jihad, released with me.

Reem Taftanazi, Aleppo, a detainee since ten month, she was released from Adra prison.





Samar Taftanazi, Aleppo, Reem's sister. Still a detainee until she was transferred to Sednaya prison due to her big charge. She was integrated by a brutal investigator called Da'as Da'as.

I can remember these detainees but I never saw the interrogation of the other detainees. Ninth: transferring to Adra prison:

On Saturday, after 11 days in Palestine Branch, I was transferred at morning along with Reem Taftanazi and Insaf Qadowr to military judiciary in Al Qaboun. I stayed five hours waiting the judge. Then, I was transferred to police station in Rukn Al Dein , and I stayed there for a night. On the next day I was transferred to Adra Central Prison.

In Adra Central Prison we were inspected by female police. They took the secretariats. Then we distributed on the dormitories in the terrorism section which contained six dormitories everyone is 5x4 meters. In each one there are about 39 detainees. We slept on the ground on our sides to be fitted in the room. There weren't enough blankets to us. There was daily calling of our names at 9:00 pm. the monitor cameras were everywhere.

The food system in Adra:

The breakfast was at 10:00 am, it was three loaves of bread for everyone with two pieces of cheese. The food was distributed at 5:00 pm, they brought rice, peas, "Mojara", and lentils soup with stones. The food was bad. There were markets to buy food. But most of detainees hadn't had any money, as it was stolen by security elements.

The Farce: A visit from the World Health Organization to Adra prison:

A week before the presidential election, it was Monday, but I cannot remember the date exactly. The administration of prison asked us to clean the dormitories. They told us that a delegation from the World Health Organization will visit the prison, so we cleaned all dormitories. Then, the prison's manager gathered us and told us that the day after the international committee will visit us. They warned us from speaking a word about the bad treatment in the branches or the regime. They threatened us to be killed or returned back to the security branches to torture us if we speak. On the next day the committee came and the prison's officers gathered some women and they started to cheer for Bashar. They filmed them. They didn't allow the committee to come close. We stayed at our dormitories crying.





Tenth: going to the judge:

On Thursday, I was called to judiciary. I wore a blue cloth, written on it “terrorism” they fettered my hands and feet, put me in a bus and took me to terrorism court. I appeared before the sixth judge who released me on 28 July 2014, after he was sure that there wasn’t any charge. During this period, I was tortured insulted, and humiliated and after all that they were able to make sure that I wasn’t guilty.

- At the end, do you want to add anything besides question?

I want to mention that the clothes of the detainee from the moment of arrest until her released was the same unless one of the prisoners who are going to be released donated her clothes.

I want to say that Bashar Al Assad regime planted many informant women within the prison among the detainees so I want to warn all.

Third: conclusions and recommendations:

Syria is a part in the International Covenant that concerned with civil and political rights which includes the right of detainees of criminal charges to introduce to judiciary.

The Humanitarian International Law states that it must treat individuals, who aren’t involved in direct hostilities, with humanitarian treatment. The principles of the Humanitarian International Law forbid the arbitrary ban of freedom.

The Syrian government practices the crime of enforce disappearance, arbitrary arrest and torture against most of detainees in a widespread and systematic manner in all of its detention centers across Syrian governorate.





Recommendations:

The Security Council and the United Nations:

The security council have to adopt binding resolution that oblige the Syrian authorities to release all peaceful detainees and human rights, relief, and media activists, and allow the International Independent Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic to visit all detention center to investigate the horrible allegations about human rights violations in the detention centers.

Furthermore, it must allow all detainees to contact their relatives and lawyers and doctors immediately, and establish binding guarantees to ban the repetition of the violations in the detention center.

The International Community have to keep the Syrian detainees case and the force-disappeared person case in consideration as it there are no less than 85,000 force-disappeared persons and they were banned from visiting their beloved ones who suffer from the complete lack of any legal, medical or humanitarian care.

