



أزقذوا البقية
Save The Rest

Save The Rest

before it's too late

Introduction

Many of those interested in the Syrian situation find it very difficult to understand the description used by many Syrians about their country under the Assad rule when they say that death is not the worst that could happen to them in Syria. For it has been instilled in the collective consciousness of a whole people that the horrors and torments experienced by detainees in the Assad regime's prisons make death appear to be a merciful friend.

Bashar Al-Assad, following his father's example and that of all tyrants, built a police state that solidifies his reign by all means of repression and infringement on the rights and liberties of his own people so as he tightens his grip and continues to rule as president of the country his father took control of in a military coup in 1970. When the Syrian Revolution against the Assad regime started in 2011, the security and intelligence apparatuses dedicated to the protection of the ruling regime showed their teeth and the practices used against detainees forgotten for decades in the dungeons of Assad regime's prisons suddenly surfaced.

For there, in the dark, the world as we know it disappears, for another world to emerge; one where there is no trace of mercy or humanity, not even any law or deterrent, nothing but the whims of the torturer, their might and the forms of torture dictated by their sick imagination and inflicted upon whoever comes under their mercy. Should their souls flee their bodies, the torturer would prey on others constantly supplied by the Assad regime to satisfy his thirst for oppression and mutilation. So, the plight of detainees continues as a crime in the dark away from media or human rights documentation. Despite the atrocities revealed by the bloodless bodies of victims of silent massacres documented by the criminal himself and leaked by the end of 2013, the actual magnitude of the crime would most likely not reveal itself until the dust of the battles settles.

In the meanwhile, the carnage continues to grind the bones of our children and eat at the hearts of their parents leaving a lasting scar on the face of humanity unless the world takes action to Save The Rest.

**#SaveTheRest
2017**



Magnitude of the Disaster

It is hard to determine for sure the number of detainees and forcibly disappeared persons in the prisons and detention centres of the Assad regime. This is attributable to many reasons; most importantly, the deliberate complete black out and continued denial by the regime of the presence of a systematic policy of arbitrary arrests and enforced disappearance and the regime's denial of access for all international and human rights institutions and NGOs to the territories of the Syrian Arab Republic and let alone detention facilities and prisons. This applies as well to the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (COI) established by the UN Human Rights Council on 22 August 2011 and prevented since from accessing Syrian territories.

On the other hand, the difficulty of documentation does not only lie with blocking human rights and international organizations, but is also due to the regime's adopted policy of arbitrary detention and forced disappearance on a large scale and over many years, let alone the multiplicity of security, military and paramilitary bodies loyal to the regime involved in such crimes in Syria. Moreover, many families are reluctant to share the details of the detention of their children with human rights organizations in fear of potential reprisal measures which could be inflicted on the detainee or their family members.

There is no doubt, however, that the number of detainees in the Assad regime's prisons and detention centres and the number of those killed under torture and disappeared amounts to a terrifying figure reflected by some numbers which have been verified under the aforementioned black out. The Syrian Network for Human rights estimates in its 2017 Report on enforced disappearance the number of detainees at 76656. The number of those killed in custody amounts to horrifying numbers at best. Suffices to say that the photos leaked by the defected military photographer known as Caesar document around 11 thousand martyrs killed in only five security centres between May 2011 and August 2013. Amnesty International's report further talks of an estimated 13 thousand martyrs executed in Saydnaya military prison alone between 2011 and 2015. One former detainee told STR of much larger numbers in Saydnaya prison alone according to what he overheard from one of the wardens during his detention there.

Evidently, those numbers are only the tip of the ice berg. The actual numbers are estimated by the hundreds of thousands which made the COI accuse the Assad regime of practicing "extermination" against detainees, which amounts to a crime against humanity.

Save the Rest

Before it's too late

Enforced-disappearance and Death victims in the Syrian regime's prisons

From March 2011 to August 2017:
Victims of enforced-disappearance are mainly from Damascus countryside, followed by Damascus and Daraa



The first half of 2017:



In 2016 :



Since March-2011 Today :



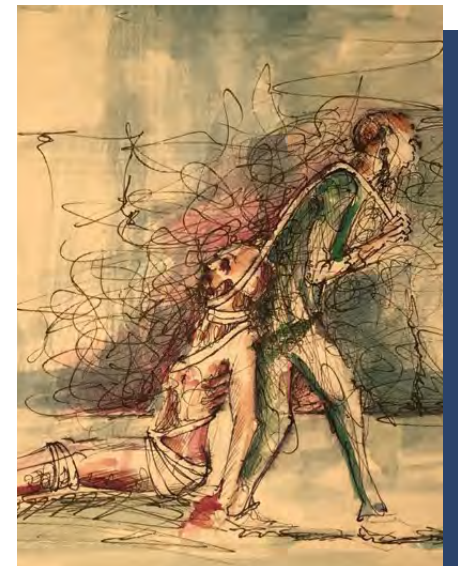
Detention Facilities

The police state and the iron security fist constitute some of the pivotal pillars of the present authoritarian regime under Assad in Syria. Formal detention facilities under state authority include civilian prisons, military prisons, and detention centres under security and intelligence bodies, let alone secret prisons. With the presence of paramilitary militias loyal to the regime and foreign militias and forces supporting it, arbitrary detention became rampant especially since the outbreak of the Syrian Revolution in 2011. Often, detainees are held in custody in informal and undeclared detention centres in military installations, militia locations and others.



The regime has seven central prisons including Adra, Suweida, Homs, Hama, Tartous, Lattakia and Aleppo; in addition to the notorious Sadnaya military prison and Palmyra desert prison which was destroyed by ISIS after it took control of the city in 2015.

Detention centres, on the other hand, are affiliated to air force intelligence, military security, state security, political security in addition to detention centres affiliated to the army. Under the present conflict, militias and foreign forces loyal to the regime have taken to the same policies used by the regime practicing abduction, detention, and forced disappearance in informal and undeclared detention centres in areas under their control.



In 2012, Human Rights Watch issued a detailed report about detention facilities and prisons affiliated to the regime titled "Torture Archipelago" in reference to the systematic brutal practices committed by the Assad regime in that hellish system.



Violations against Detainees

As rule of law is non-existent in Assad's police state, nothing governs arrests in any stage let alone subjecting it to monitoring and accountability. Thus, detainees are stripped of all rights, even their humanity as soon as their name finds its way to the list of persons wanted by the state. As of the moment of arrest, which is so random and illegal it could as well be called abduction, to the concealment of the fate of the detainee and their whereabouts, the brutal practices and torture during detention, the inhuman conditions of prisons and detention centres and absence of health care, and the phony trials and unjust, and often secret, verdicts, detainees fall prey to "the entrenched systematic nature of violations" exercised by the regime against its citizens, and others in many cases, to fortify its reign.

1- Arbitrary Detention

Any person may be arrested arbitrarily in break-ins or raids or at the checkpoints by military or security personnel not necessarily in uniform and who do not show any search or arrest warrant. Therefore, neither the detainee nor their families would know the body that made the arrest nor the charges for which they have been arrested, which very often are fabricated and based on unfounded reports. Crimes for which Syrians are arrested may involve anything from taking part in a peaceful demonstration to rescuing a wounded person or offering relief to the displaced. The COI has concluded that the practice of arbitrary detention constitutes a "pattern" practiced by the regime's security personnel.



2- Enforced Disappearance

The International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance defines this situation as "the arrest, detention, abduction or any other form of deprivation of liberty by agents of the State or by persons or groups of persons acting

with the authorization, support or acquiescence of the State, followed by a refusal to acknowledge the deprivation of liberty or by concealment of the fate or whereabouts of the disappeared person, which place such a person outside the protection of the law'. The scope of victims of this violation extends to include the detainee as well as their families who experience the emotional distress linked to not knowing the fate or whereabouts of their loved ones. Furthermore, this violation is one that continues as long as the regime persists in denying having the detainee in its custody.

Hence, since the very first moment of detention, the detainee and their families set out on a tormenting journey which could last for long. The detainee is taken, mostly blindfolded, to a destination which they would not know. Even if they learn of their destination later, their families would be in the dark and be torn by fear and anxiety and set out on a quest in search for any news or information about the whereabouts and status of their child, whether they are dead or alive. Detainees often spend the first stage of their detention in one of the notorious security centres. Detainees spend anything between a few days to months and even years in this stage in which they move between a number of security centres and may be killed under torture with no one knowing of their fate. According to Amnesty International, the regime's enforced disappearance policy targets three categories: peaceful opponents of the government, individuals considered disloyal to the government and family members of individuals wanted by the government. The Assad regime is well known for its long history of practicing enforced disappearance not only against its own citizens but also against Iraqis, Palestinians let alone Lebanese forcibly disappeared during its era of control in Lebanon.

Amnesty International and COI concluded that the regime practices enforced disappearance in the framework of a systematic and large scale attack on civilian population which makes it amount to a crime against humanity.

3- Psychological and Physical Violations

Human Rights Watch has described the practice of torture and maltreatment in Syria as a "state policy". It hence constitutes a "crime against humanity". Detainees are subject to many forms of torture and humiliation at the hands of their torturers. It starts with the arrest per se and the 'reception party' at the security centre, the complete nakedness, humiliation and beating. It does not end with being hung from one's hands (Shabeh), electrocution, sexual abuse, burning, starvation and other forms of systematic torture for which security centres in Syria are notorious.

Human rights and international reports tackling the issue of detainees abound with stories and testimonies reflecting the horrific practices inflicted upon them. A letter leaked by STR from a detainee in Syria says:



Rama.. 5 years of absences.. 5 years of hope

Rama (25 years) was arrested for the first time for one day on 4 November 2011 while she was participating in a peaceful sit-in. Forty-five days later while she was participating in a peaceful demonstration, members of Crime and Security Branch tried to arrest her but she managed to escape.

Rama, a kindhearted and nice young woman who likes to help others, never hesitated in participating in pro-democracy demonstrations that took place in Damascus. This made Assad regime chase her up till Palestine Security Branch issued an arrest warrant against her in May 2012 on charges of getting involved in relief work, so her house was raided twice.

Rama hid away from her house for a while but when she tried to go back home on Saturday morning, 27 August 2012, she was ambushed by 4 Shabiha members -3 of them were in Syrian Army uniform- and put in dark tinted vehicle. Her father was later called and asked to pay 2 million Syrian Pounds as a ransom for her release. Despite that he paid the money, Rama wasn't released. Her family knew later that she was detained in the Military Branch (215).

Today after 5 years of Rama's absence, her father still has hope and waits for her, just as families of more than 200,000 disappeared persons in the Syrian regime's prisons.



Ruba and Her two Children..

Four Years of Disappearance

Ahmad (11 years), his sister Maram (9 years) and their mother Ruba (30 years) have been missing since 2013 and no one knows anything about them. On 3 July 2013, while Ahmad and Maram with their mother were on their way from Homs city to Jeiroud to see their father and spend Ramadan with him, they passed by Assad checkpoint and after that couldn't be reached on the phone.

Abu Ahmad was staying in Jeiroud city, not held by the regime, and he could not go to Homs to see his family, because Assad forces would arrest him. While Ruba, his wife and the children were living in a camp for IDPs in Homs. Ruba wanted to see her husband and to give her children a chance to spend Ramadan with their father, so she took a taxi and headed to Jeiroud. On the way, Abu Ahmad was talking to them on the phone till they reached an Assad checkpoint and had to hang up. After a while the taxi driver called Abu Ahmad and told him that his family had arrived safe and sound and he could talk to his wife. When they gave the phone to Ruba, she refused to say anything in a try to protect her husband. Abu Ahmad became certain that Assad forces arrested his family.

Ruba's husband tried hard to know whereabouts of his family but in vain. In October 2013, Abu Ahmad learnt from the head of one of the tribes that Ruba, Ahmad and Maram were detained in an investigation branch affiliated to Military Intelligence, one of the most terrifying branches along with Palestine Branch.

Ruba and her children became voiceless but Ruba's mother wanted to speak for them, so she lodged a complaint to Military Police in Al-Qaboun on 22 July 2014. As usual she was asked to come and check every month. Despite all her visits, she had no answer and knew nothing about her daughter or her grandchildren.

On 18 October 2017, Karama Foundation and Ornamo Organization for Justice and Human Rights issued an urgent appeal to the United Nations Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances (WGEID) about Ruba Bakkar and her children. The two organizations requested the UN team to intervene and demand the Syrian authorities to reveal the fate of the three victims, and release them immediately. Till today, there is no response!



Islam Dabbas.. Six Years of Disappearance...

"It doesn't matter if they arrest me as long as they accept my flower" these were Islam, from Darayya, last words to his friends while walking with his flowers toward Assad forces when they detained him on Friday, 22 July 2011 during a peaceful demonstration "Friday of National Unity".

It has been 6 years since Assad forces, whose job was attacking civil activists during peaceful demonstrations, used their rifles to beat Islam Al-Dabbas smile and their boots to step on his flowers. He was trying to give Assad forces a message of peace and love when his fellow demonstrators heard him saying to those who were beating him "you are my brothers... you are my brothers". His good words fell on deaf ears. He was beaten while his hands were cuffed till his body started to bleed. Then security forces started shooting live ammunition at people who tried to help Islam.

Since then, Islam was voiceless yet his family tried to know his whereabouts and what happened to him, but in vain. His father who had been detained for 20 days before Islam detention and who was sent to Adra Central Prison, asked every new detainee about Islam and if it happened that he was seen at any security branch, but there was no answer.

Islam, who was a third year student at the collage of Architecture when detained, is still missing. His friends graduated and moved forward in life, but Islam is still absent from life, family and study!

Qamar Awad, a Detainee or Hostage!

Qamar Awad (55 years), whose 2 sons refused to join Assad army, was arrested by Syrian Air Force Intelligence on 2 October 2012 as she was on her way to visit some relatives in Qudsaya city, Damascus Suburbs.

Being a woman of 55 years didn't protect her from getting transferred to Air Force Intelligence centre in Mazzeh Military Airport, one of the worst detention centres where detainees are subject to torture.

Despite the fact that one of her sons evading the military service was killed by bombardment on Qaboon in 2014, Assad regime refused to disclose her fate or whereabouts.

Arresting Qamar Awad, holding her as a hostage or her enforced disappearance is an example of what Assad regime is doing to innocent people in Syria to compel families to hand their sons in. It is worth mentioning that AlKaram Foundation for Human Rights filed a complaint to the UN's Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearance of Qamar, but no result so far.



It's like a fairy tale in this place, only the background music is the muted cries and deafening shrieks. Everyday new people fall into their hands and are beaten with batons and cables on their back, electrocuted all over their bodies.. I had to get used to that daily background noise in my new world beyond the sun.

In addition, violations go beyond the body to reach deep into the psyche and leave a scar that can never be removed. As a matter of fact, many former detainees agree that the psychological deterioration under torture, humiliation and the unknown fate may lead to the death of a detainee.

Detainees are subjected to continuous humiliation and sexual violation be it through direct assault or through what detainees are coercively made to do as well as verbal sexual abuse and extremely offensive language used against them and their families around the clock, all of which affect the psychological state of detainees. Many detainees talk of a common condition which they call "disconnection" where a detainee is believed to lose their conscious ability to control their mind and bodies so that they approach insanity as described in a leaked letter:

Sa'ad was the first "disconnected" detainee I met. A "disconnected" detainee is one whose brain stops giving voluntary orders to his body disconnecting him from the surroundings. He doesn't eat or talk, only acts instinctively. There are many "disconnected" people around, but how much they last varies though never surviving more than a month.

The COI has pointed out "outrages upon personal dignity" as one of the regime's practices that may amount to a war crime.

4- Detention Conditions

The torturers' practices against detainees are not the only means through which they are killed, their bodies and minds perish, or even approach madness. The detention centres and the inhuman conditions in which detainees find themselves are, too, designed to not only degrade their bodies but also break their will and destroy their self-esteem so that they or those who hear or learn of what their life is like would not dare even consider deviating from the path of the 'good citizen': the silent, obedient,



coerced and powerless citizen. Such conditions include dirty surroundings, lack of oxygen, over crowdedness, lack of hygiene, absence of health care and food. The COI has considered those conditions one of the reasons for deaths in custody in Syria, particularly in detention centres affiliated to security centres which generally lack ventilation which could lead in some cases to suffocation if ventilators stop working. They also lack sunlight and some of them lack lighting altogether. Furthermore, detainees are subject to severe malnutrition and the exacting starvation and thirst policy which the regime deliberately practices against detainees so much so that it often becomes life-threatening or a matter of slow death whereby the detainee becomes a skinny ghost with no immunity.

At the beginning, I was fat in comparison with my cellmates. In only two months I was like them. All we get here are 3 loaves of bread, few olives, a handful of rice and a half boiled potato a day. Hunger is a painful companion.

In addition, over crowdedness is disastrous in most detention centres, so much so that detainees cannot find enough room to sit, let alone sleep or rest. Detention centres lack sanitary facilities and the minimum hygiene standards and requirements. Detainees in detention centres receive no health care whatsoever and rarely are any medications provided such as those for chronic illnesses, antibiotics...etc. Quarantine is not applied for contagious diseases such as tuberculosis which makes it likely to spread and threaten detainees lives.

I dream of getting some antibiotic that would heal the festers and herpes eating at my body... to rid me of this humiliation and the ugliness of my skin that has become like scales. At least those who would carry me away when I die would not be disgusted or my skin rots and the smell lingers with you all night.

In some cases, sick detainees are referred to military hospitals which also abuse them mostly leading to their death or murder. Ironically, some of the photos leaked by the defected photographer known as Caesar were taken in the backyard of Mazzeah Military Hospital which is not too far from Bashar al-Assad's residence.

Although detainees are not generally tortured in prisons, the general conditions of their detention there fall short of human standards at best,

especially in terms of lack of health care as is the case, for example, in Adra prison where the medical staff in the men department consists of one officer only who is the head of the medical department and there are no specialized doctors in the women department.

Moreover, detainees' families face enormous difficulties getting to see their loved ones. Often, they fall prey to the network of brokers and lawyers who have established a black market in which they trade information, visits or anything related to the detainee with huge sums of money which overburden the families.



4- Trials

Detainees who survive the security centres are transferred to civilian or military prisons waiting to stand before a court based on confessions which would have been fabricated or taken under torture. Most detainees of the Syrian Revolution are referred to extraordinary courts which do not in the least observe due process including the court of terrorism and military field court.

Waiting for the trial, detainees suffer the impact of torture and the terrible conditions in detention centres while available health care in prisons they are transferred to is minimal. In some cases, detainees are transferred to the hospitals where they mostly start a new journey of torture, sometimes at the hand of the medical staff themselves; a journey that often leads to death.

In civil prisons themselves, detainees suffer maltreatment and over crowdedness and are sometimes subject again to beating and torture. Moreover, many cases of renewed disappearance from civilian prisons have been reported. Detainees are taken afresh to an unknown destination after being held in a civil prison.

The trial, its proceedings, families visits, and all the simplest rights of detainees all become costly commodities in a black market for rights, lawyers and verdicts that are unfounded in the first place.



Caesar Photos

At the beginning of 2014, on the eve of the negotiations between the National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces and the Assad regime in what have come to be known Geneva II negotiations, one of the clearest and biggest pieces of evidence of what is happening in the dungeons of the Assad regime's detention centres surfaced. The opposition's Syrian National Movement published the testimony of a defected military photographer who has come to be known as 'Caesar' who talked of a group of photos which he had leaked over many months while he was working for the regime. Fifty five photos show around 11 thousand detainees who were killed between May 2011 and August 2013. Caesar's testimony and the photos he leaked were supported by a detailed report by an independent inquiry team comprising legal professionals and forensic experts. They concluded that these photos constitute "clear evidence, capable of being believed by a tribunal of fact in a court of law, of systematic torture and killing of detained persons by the agents of the Syrian government." They further established that this evidence may assist prove the implication of the regime in war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Human Rights Watch reopened the issue and published a report in 2015 reiterating the above conclusions reached by the expert team. It stressed that responsibility for such deaths lies with all military and civil command in the regime be it for giving direct commands or failure to prevent or investigate these deaths.

Despite the huge media coverage and initial interest in the issue as well as the angry statements by many world leaders, the absence of a political will to hold the Assad regime to account obscured this file which is almost the biggest tangible evidence to emerge to the public as the crime continues.

Life cycle of Assad detainees

A Detainee



Any person, regardless of their age, gender or social status. Most of the time, it is arbitrary detention. Many people were detained while queuing to buy some bread or when security forces raided their areas.



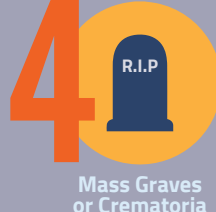
Detention



Enforced Disappearance



Mock Courts



Mass Graves or Crematoria

Released

Referred to Anti-Terrorism Court (ATC)

Referred to Military Field Court



Detention

1. for peaceful demonstration
2. for human rights, media, or civil activity
3. for providing medical or food aid to people in areas not held by the regime
4. for communicating with relatives residing in areas not held by the regime
5. for using foreign currencies
6. for having a family member wanted by the regime
7. for a security report on you



Mock Courts



Anti-Terrorism Court

This stage lasts for one year or more. A detainee is sent to a civil prison: "Adra Central Prison", where they can see their families for the first time after detention. But a detainee agony does not end until they meet the investigating judge for 0 minutes, to be either released (rarely) or sent to prison. At the end of this stage, a detainee might be released, or sent to Criminal Court, and waits for a period that can last for 9 years. Then the detainee is either sentenced to life imprisonment, or to death.



Enforced Disappear



1- Reception

it is about getting beaten and kicked by security members on arrival.



2- Investigation

waiting for investigation differs from one branch to another, and it may take months. During investigation, a detainee is getting tortured badly to death sometimes. If they survive, they are forced to sign their statements without reading them. In addition to severe torture, a detainee could die of malnutrition, cold, illness or madness.



3-Deposit

After investigation, a detainee is transferred to "Military Police branch"

where they might get



Military Field Court

A detainee is sent from a security branch to the Military Police Branch directly and then to Sednaya Military Prison, which is "hell on earth". In this case, the detainee does not have a chance to be sent to a civilian prison and their families know nothing about them. In Sednaya Prison, a detainee waits to be sent to a field court where the session lasts for five minutes with no lawyers present. Then waits in a cell without knowing what the judge had decided. It could be execution sentence.



Mass Graves or Crematoria

After the execution, a detainee is photographed with a number on a paper and sent to a mass grave. It may take years for a detainee family to find out about their death.



Necessity of Accountability

The issue of detainees in Syria is very thorny and directly linked to the police state and the culture of impunity instilled by the Assad regime for decades. While many international and human rights reports talk about war crimes and crimes against humanity committed by the regime against detainees and despite continued calls to hold the regime and its figures accountable for such crimes, the international community has failed to take any tangible steps towards that end. Although the Independent International Commission of Inquiry for Syria, the longest-lived in UN history, continues to carry out its mandate, and despite the recent introduction of a supportive mechanism known as the International Impartial Independent Mechanism Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011 in addition to the so-called Caesar law passed by the US Congress; all these steps have not yielded any tangible results in terms of holding the Assad regime accountable.

This continued international failure in serving justice in Syria does not only constitute a major injustice for hundreds of thousands of victims, but, more critically, it has been giving the regime messages of reassurance which make it persist in its crimes with impunity. This has reflected directly on the treatment of detainees according to some testimonies. One detainee told STR that there would sometimes be a slowdown in violations at the time of negotiations or international meetings on Syria in anticipation of what may emerge from such meetings. However, torturers have become more relaxed recently, so much so that one told detainees "At least we feed you. Even your 'folks' do not give a damn about you" having felt the absence of international will to take action towards accountability and rescuing detainees.

Justice and the rule of law, primarily based on holding those responsible for violations to account, has always been one of the most important demands of the great Syrian Revolution which started in 2011. Every day that passes by without serving justice in Syria, the Syrian society loses more of its members devoured by the monstrous killing machine in detention centres and prisons. It is no exaggeration to say that failure to hold the Assad regime and its figures accountable for those crimes, which can no longer be denied, does not only constitute a disappointment to the Syrian people and their revolution but also sends a message to all oppressive regimes around the world that the international order based on human rights and the UN Charter is incapable of or lacks the necessary will to translate those values into reality and practice.

#SaveTheRest Demands

- Immediate and unconditional release of all detainees and political prisoners
- Immediate cessation of enforced disappearance and arbitrary detention and all forms of torture, maltreatment, liquidation, execution and extrajudicial killings.
- Implementing Security Council resolutions on detainees in Syria and the recommendations of the Commission of Inquiry and activating the International Impartial and Independent Mechanism for assisting in investigation and prosecution of those responsible for the most serious crimes in Syria.
- Investigating all crimes and violations committed in Syrian prisons and detention centres and holding perpetrators and all those responsible to account.
- Abolishing all extraordinary courts such as the military field court and the court of terrorism, revoking all verdicts issued by such courts and repealing the counter-terrorism law.
- Disclosing records of deaths in custody to an international impartial committee to inform families of the fate of their missing persons, detainees or forcibly disappeared persons and disclosing sites of burial.
- Subjecting prisons and detention centres to international monitoring so that international inspectors can visit the facilities without prior notice.
- Any political solution or final agreement must include provisions to ensure dismantling security forces and the pillars of the police state established by the Assads in Syria, respecting the rule of law and combating impunity.

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savetherest.campaign@gmail.com