

## **1. Presentation of Families for Freedom and Truth and Justice Charter**

This statement is delivered on behalf of Families for Freedom and the Truth and Justice Charter Group. The Truth and Justice Charter group is led by five leading associations of survivors of torture and arbitrary detention, and families of detainees and disappeared in Syria. The Truth and Justice Charter was released in February 2021 to advance victim-led and victim-centred truth and justice measures on the question of detainees and disappeared in Syria.

## **2. National consultations for the drafting of the national report**

The Syrian government did not hold national consultations ahead of this UPR and did not reach out to Syrian non-governmental organizations and victims' associations in the drafting and development of its national report. Since 2011, we have never received any invitation by the Syrian government to address the question of detainees and disappeared in Syria.

## **3. Plan of the statement**

This statement will address the ongoing violations of arbitrary detention, enforced disappearance and torture in the detention centres of the Syrian government, focusing on the right of families to know the truth about the fate and whereabouts of their loved ones disappeared by the Syrian government.

## **4. Statement**

Since 2011, almost 150,000 individuals have been detained in Syria, with no family being left untouched by this tragedy. Tens of thousands of individuals continue to be arbitrarily detained to this day and are subjected to a range of human rights violations in detention centers, including torture, sexual violence and extrajudicial executions. Despite several states making recommendations at the previous Universal Periodic Review (UPR) to cease these violations, the Syrian government has not taken any step to release detainees or end violations in detention centers - but has instead continued to arbitrarily detain individuals.

Families of detainees are therefore left to live in limbo, with no information about their loved ones and where they may be. In the previous UPR, Brazil recommended that the Syrian government publish a list of all detainees in places under its control. Similarly, Austria recommended for the Syrian government to inform families of the whereabouts of persons in detention facilities and to regularly publish a list of detainees who have died in detention. The Syrian government responded that such a recommendation was being implemented and that the information about detainees and their places of detention was reported by the authorities concerned. However, as families of disappeared ourselves, we want to highlight that this is not happening and that we continue to be left in the dark up to this day about our loved ones.

In May 2018, the Syrian government provided civil registry offices with notifications regarding thousands of individuals who are deceased. These notices pertained to individuals detained by State authorities between 2011 and 2014, whose death occurred in detention facilities run by Syrian intelligence or military agencies. The Syrian

government has neither released any information on the location of the remains of deceased detainees nor returned any personal belongings to the families.

By releasing these notifications, the Syrian government is clearly acknowledging that it possesses information about the fates and whereabouts of people who have disappeared. Government forces keep meticulous registers of detainees. The availability of registries shows that the government is able to provide the truth to families about their loved ones, but the ongoing intentional withholding of such information is in effect prolonging the suffering of hundreds of thousands of families.

In the upcoming UPR, we urge UN member states to prioritize the families' right to the truth .

We call on Syria to:

- a. Call for unconditional access to a third party organization, such as the ICRC, to all formal, informal and secret detention facilities.
- b. Return the remains of deceased individuals in detention to enable their families to pay their respects and provide a dignified burial in line with their traditions.

Hundreds of thousands Syrians wake up each morning, worrying about the fate and whereabouts of missing loved ones. It is our right to know the truth.