

The Newsletter of the Victim Support Project

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Photo: The Syria Campaign / Zakaria Abdelkafi

Introduction:

Syrian organizations and associations established by the families of detainees remain at the forefront of the struggle for truth and justice in cases of enforced disappearances throughout the country. These victims' groups represent a glimmer of hope for many in achieving justice for victims, working to highlight the suffering of affected families and exert pressure on authorities to provide clear information about the fate of detainees and missing persons. They also advocate for holding those responsible for violations accountable.

These groups include [Families for Freedom](#) Movement, [Caesar Families Association](#), [Massar Families Association](#) or the Coalition of Families of Persons kidnapped by ISIS, [Taafi](#) Initiative, [Synergy](#) Associations, [Families Of Truth & Justice](#), [Release Me](#) Organization, and [A Good Seed](#) Initiative.

Activists within these groups document cases of detention and enforced disappearance, offering legal and psychological support to families of the missing and raising awareness of these issues at both local and international levels. Through their efforts, these human rights associations aim to lay a common foundation for achieving peace and stability in Syria, rooted in the principle of justice as a cornerstone for rebuilding trust among community members and fostering reconciliation.

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Achievements section:

Between April 1 and September 30, 2024, the victims' groups actively engaged in joint statements and advocacy activities on both regional and international levels, effectively mobilizing public opinion:



Joint Activities and Statements by Victims' Groups

A joint activities by Victims' Groups Welcoming the Paris Criminal Court's Ruling in the Dabbagh Case

On May 24, 2024, the Criminal Court of Paris sentenced three senior Syrian officials to life imprisonment in absentia for complicity in crimes against humanity and war crimes committed against French-Syrians Mazen Dabbagh and his son, Patrick Dabbagh. Representatives from Families for Freedom, Caesar Families Association, Release Me Organization, and Taafi Initiative attended the court sessions.



In conjunction with the Paris Criminal Court's decision, the [victims' groups](#) of the Charter of Truth and Justice alongside with [SCM](#), organized solidarity vigils in May 2024 to support justice and solidarity with victims of torture and enforced disappearance, in the city of Paris and several Syrian [cities](#). The victims' groups also issued a joint [statement](#) welcoming the Paris Criminal Court's decision to sentence three senior Syrian security officials to life imprisonment for the enforced disappearance and murder of Mazen and Patrick Dabbagh.

The statement described the conviction of Major General Ali Mamlouk, Major General Jamil Hassan, and Brigadier General Abdel Salam Mahmoud as a significant step toward justice. It affirmed the commitment to fighting impunity until all perpetrators of violations in Syria are held accountable, ensuring justice and appropriate reparations for victims and their families.

International Day in Support of Victims of Torture

On June 26, 2024, marking the International Day in Support of Victims of Torture, survivors and families of victims and the disappeared, represented under the Truth and Justice Charter, issued a joint [statement](#) condemned the Syrian government's non-compliance with the provisional measures ordered by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) regarding Syria's violations of the Convention Against Torture. It highlighted the ongoing use of torture in Syrian government detention centers and the deliberate destruction and concealment of evidence, actions that represent a continued breach of international obligations under the Convention Against Torture.

International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances

On August 30, marking the International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances, families of victims gathered alongside survivors from the Truth and Justice Charter groups, including [Families Of Truth & Justice](#), [Synergy](#), [Caesar Families Association](#), [Families for Freedom](#), and Release Me Organization. Joined by the Campaign for Syria, they assembled outside the United Nations headquarters in Geneva, carrying photos of their loved ones



in a powerful event demanding the release of detainees and information on forcibly disappeared persons in Syria. During the event, families wrote heartfelt messages to their missing loved ones on the sculpture King of Holes, created by Syrian artist Khaled Dawwa. The artwork symbolizes the tyrant responsible for the enforced disappearance of hundreds of thousands of Syrians, creating a poignant visual reminder of the scale of the tragedy.

On the same day, Massar Families Association organized a collective activity where families of those abducted by ISIS remembered their loved ones in a symbolic way by preparing their favorite dishes. Women gathered to prepare these nostalgic meals in northern rural Aleppo, Raqqa, Deir ez-Zor countryside in Syria, and Şanlıurfa in Turkey.

Advocacy Activities



On April 17 and 18, 2024, Synergy Association organized two discussion sessions in Raqqa and Kobani/Ain al-Arab with the families of the forcibly disappeared and missing persons. The sessions aimed to provide updates on the issue of the missing, particularly regarding the work of the [Independent Institution on Missing Persons in Syria \(IIMP\)](#). The discussions also focused on the needs and priorities of families, emphasizing the importance of their active participation in efforts to search for the truth and achieve justice.

On its part, Release Me, as a member of the Truth and Justice Charter network, in collaboration with [Impunity Watch](#), organized and conducted a [side event](#) on the margins of the Eighth Brussels Conference on April 29, 2024, titled «Seeking Answers: Syrian Families' Engagement with the Independent [Institution on Missing Persons in Syria \(IIMP\)](#).» The side event highlighted the pivotal role of families and survivors in advocacy



efforts to address the issue of missing persons in Syria. It also explored ways for the international community to support the Independent Institution in its search operations and in assisting affected families.

In a related context, and marking the first anniversary of the decision to establish the Independent Institution on Missing Persons in Syria, survivors from the Taafi Initiative, alongside families of victims and missing persons under the umbrella of the Truth and Justice Charter network, issued a [statement](#) on June 29, 2024. They called for expediting the implementation of the decision to establish the institution, determining the fate and whereabouts of the missing.



On July 7, 2024, Release Me, representing the Truth and Justice Charter, participated in a [side event](#) held during the Human Rights Council session at the United Nations headquarters in Geneva. The event focused on women's rights to housing and property ownership in Syria. Discussions emphasized the severe challenges faced by Syrian women regarding housing and property rights, particularly those linked to detention and property violations. The discussions also underscored the critical role of the Independent [Institution](#) on Missing Persons in Syria (IIMP) and the importance of international support in addressing these pressing issues.



Separately, on July 11, 2024, Massar Families Association convened a meeting that brought together families of individuals abducted by ISIS with the launch team of the Independent [Institution](#) on Missing Persons in Syria. The team provided an overview of efforts leading to the decision to establish the institution on June 29, 2023. They elaborated on the two main pillars of the institution's work—search operations and support for families—as well as the structural role of victims in its operations. The team also outlined their plans for completing the institution's administrative framework in the coming months.

On July 20, 2024, the Families for Freedom movement held a [protest](#) in Berlin against the forced deportation of Syrian refugees from Turkey and Lebanon to Syria. Protesters highlighted the grave risks deported refugees face, including arbitrary detention, torture, mistreatment, enforced disappearance, and abduction.

In August 2024, the Families for Freedom team held several diplomatic meetings in Geneva. Women representatives from the movement attended meetings with the permanent missions of the United Kingdom, Italy, the United States, and Colombia. The team also met with the UN Working Group against Enforced and Involuntary Disappearances and the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, in addition to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), Independent Institution on Missing Persons in Syria (IIMP), and the United Nations Special Envoy for Syria.



On September 12, 2024, Caesar Families Association released a [report](#) titled «Not Our Choice, but We Are Bound by Hope». The report shed light on the psychological and social impact of enforced disappearance and the legal challenges faced by affected women.

Caesar Families Association organized two seminars to launch the report, one in the city of [Al-Bab](#) on September 6, 2024, and another in Azaz on September 13, 2024.



New Criminal Complaint Against Syrian Intelligence Officials

With the support of Caesar Families Association and [the European Center for Constitutional and Human Rights](#), the families of four detainees arrested by Syrian intelligence filed a legal [complaint](#) with the Federal Prosecutor in Karlsruhe, Germany, on September 23, 2024. The complaint targeted senior Syrian officials, accusing them of crimes against humanity, including murder, arbitrary detention, and torture.

Trainings and Projects Supporting the Cause of the Missing – Assistance for Families and Victims

Massar Families Association conducted a series of training sessions addressing the issue of individuals missing at the hands of ISIS starting in January 2024. During April and May, families of abductees participated in a training program on documentation and reporting mechanisms, clarifying the documentation process and its subsequent procedures. The association concluded the training package in May 2024 by introducing advocacy goals and strategies, drawing on the model presented by the Charter for Truth and Justice Links in Syria.



Meanwhile, on June 1, 2024, Families Of Truth & Justice signed a partnership agreement with the [Euro-Mediterranean](#) Foundation of Support to Human Rights Defenders as part of the project “Documenting New Cases and Supporting Families of the Missing in Antakya to Access Available Services.” The initiative aimed to add 900 new cases to its database, offer legal support [workshops](#) to those affected by the earthquakes in Turkey, and facilitate their integration into host communities.

Represented by its co-founder, attorney Anas Dallo, the movement also delivered a verbal [intervention](#) during an interactive dialogue session with the UN Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Migrants, held on the sidelines of the 56th session of the Human Rights Council. The intervention highlighted the increasing discrimination and hate speech against Syrian refugees in neighboring countries and the alarming rise in illegal deportations. It called on states to uphold their international obligations toward Syrian refugees.

The Platform of Missing Families in Northeast Syria

On June 6, 2024, Synergy Association announced the launch of the Platform for Families of the Missing in Northeast Syria, an independent initiative uniting families of missing and forcibly disappeared persons in the region. The platform aims to provide an effective space for organizing efforts, exchanging information, and fostering the participation of victims and their families in efforts to uncover the truth and achieve justice, laying the groundwork for sustainable peace in Syria.



On July 2024, Release Me concluded the first phase of its [advocacy project](#) for the [Independent Institution](#) for the Missing in Syria (IIMP). During this phase, the initiative focused on fostering communication with families, the local community, and stakeholders in northwest Syria, building a supportive community base that strengthens the Institution's legitimacy and bolsters the position of victims and survivors' associations.



A Good Seed Initiative organized a storytelling activity between January and June 2024, involving 33 children from the families of detainees. Through this activity, children enhanced their writing skills and expressed themselves by creating fictional stories, which culminated in the publication of a book titled "Letters of Pain." During the same period, the Initiative conducted therapeutic art sessions for 30 children, helping



them express their thoughts and emotions while reducing stress and psychological pressure. Using crayons, acrylic, watercolors, and chalk, the children created artworks displayed in an exhibition. The initiative compiled their stories and drawings in a book titled "[Scattered Dreams](#)."

Additionally, A Good Seed Initiative collaborated with MAPS on the "Raising Great Children Program" from November 12, 2023, to May 21, 2024, targeting 30 mothers aged 35 and above. The program consisted of 14 sessions aimed at strengthening mother-child relationships.

During June 2024, members of Families for Freedom movement completed a community organizing training, and another on transitional justice last August.

Trainings for Survivors and Families of Victims

As part of the «Searching for the Missing» project, Taafi Initiative hosted an awareness session on June 6, 2024, about extortion and exploitation targeting survivors and families of victims. Speaker Diab Serieh shed light on common fraudulent practices, often perpetrated by intermediaries linked to security branches, and explained ways to verify the authenticity of documents to protect victims' families from exploitation. In August 2024, Taafi conducted two separate trainings on transitional justice and advocacy, aiming to enhance the capacities of survivors. Each three-day training session introduced participants to key concepts of transitional justice and its role in addressing the issue of the missing and forcibly disappeared, while equipping them with the skills needed to run effective advocacy campaigns.



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