

The Newsletter of the Victim Support Project

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A protest stand in Al-Hijaz Square, Damascus, on December 27, 2024.

Collaborative Efforts of Victims 'Groups in Achieving Justice after the fall of the Assad Regime

Introduction:

The issue of forcibly disappeared persons in Syria remains one of the most urgent and pressing humanitarian crises, requiring multilateral cooperation both locally and internationally. After the fall of the fugitive President Bashar al-Assad's regime on December 8, 2024, and the release of detainees from prisons of the former Syrian government, the issue took a different and more complex turn.

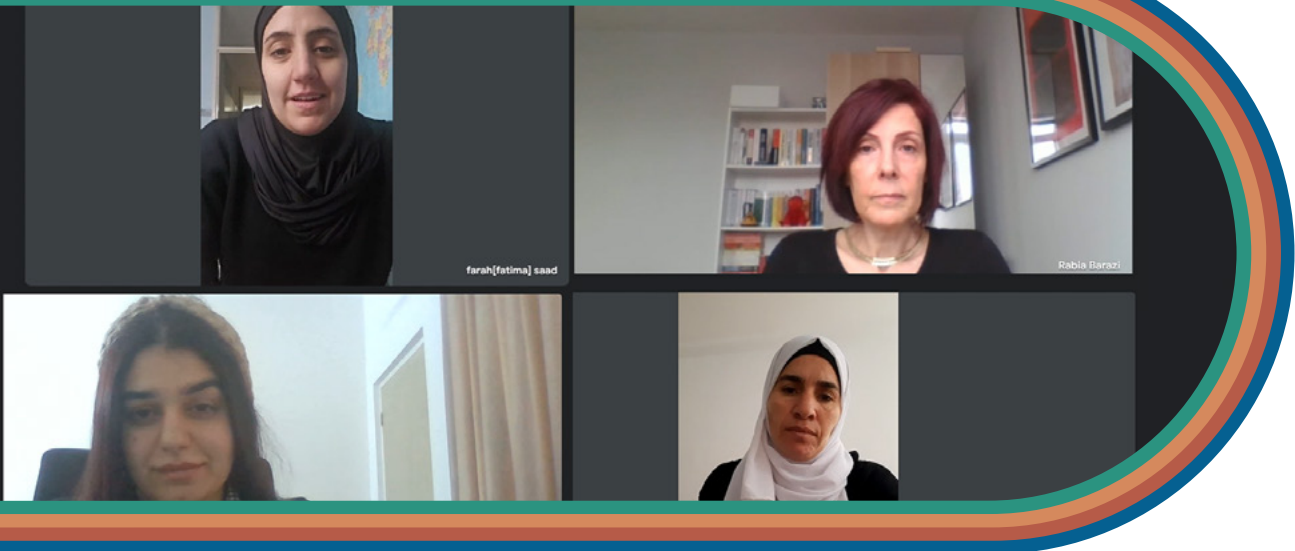
Despite access to previously classified records and detention centers that were once off-limits to both international and local entities, the security vacuum led to scattered responsibilities and the loss of many records and documents related to this issue. Furthermore, the neglect of securing potential mass grave sites and the delayed arrival of international specialized teams to critical locations further exacerbated the suffering of Syrian families searching for answers about their missing loved ones.

Amid these challenges, victims' groups and Syrian human rights organizations continue their efforts to uncover the truth and achieve justice by documenting violations, providing evidence to legal and human rights entities, and mobilizing international support to hold those responsible for enforced disappearances accountable. These groups also work to protect the rights of victims and their families, applying pressure on transitional authorities to ensure the implementation of effective and impartial justice measures in Syria's future. Furthermore, they advocate for the disclosure of detention sites, the identification of mass grave locations, and the prosecution of those responsible in accordance with international standards.

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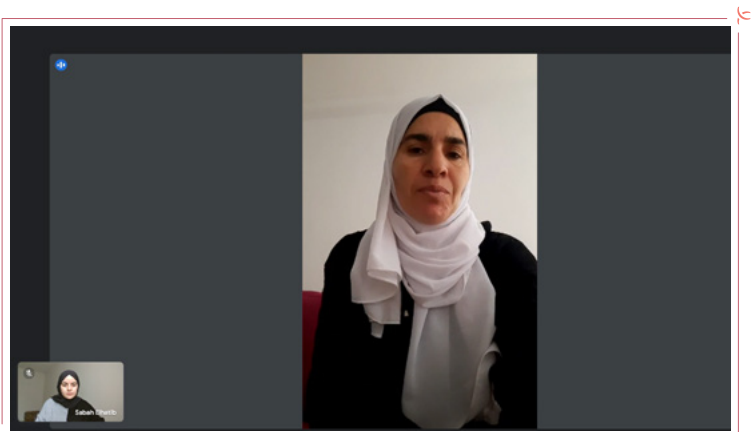
Victims 'Groups Aspirations for the Future of the Missing Persons Conflict in Syria and Their Work After the Fall of the Regime



After the recent developments following the fall of the Assad regime ,the Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression conducted interviews with some of victims 'groups to explore their visions and future aspirations regarding the issue of missing persons.

A Good Seed:

In this context ,an interview was conducted with Ms .Latifa from the "A Good Seed "Association ,who spoke about the association's directions and objectives during this critical phase .Ms .Latifa emphasized that the association prioritizes accountability and is committed to advocating for the cause of the missing and holding those responsible for violations accountable.

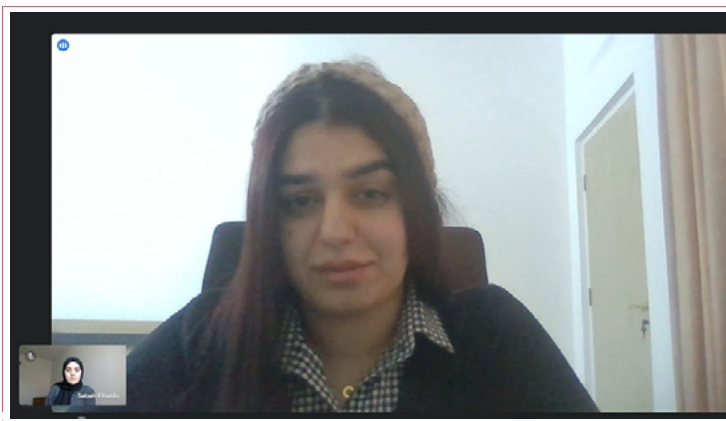


Following the fall of the Assad regime ,the association has adopted a multi-phase approach ,beginning with opening an office inside Syria and continuing to support children of detainees and missing persons by providing them with psychological and social support. Additionally ,it documents the stories and experiences of victims ,reflected in the books published by the association ,which include writings by these children.

Ms .Latifa also explained that the association prioritizes uncovering the fate of the missing and protecting mass grave sites .It coordinates efforts with other associations focused on truth and justice ,as well as the Independent Institution for Missing Persons in Syria ,which is set to begin operations soon .She further emphasized the importance of collaborating with various entities to achieve justice and reveal the truth about the missing.

Synergy:

During our interview with Ms. Barin Sharaf ,Communications and Advocacy Officer at the” Synergy” Association for Victims ,she emphasized that the association’s primary goal is to address the issue of missing persons in Syria in a manner that serves truth and justice .She stressed that” Synergy “is committed to continuously uncovering the fate of all missing and forcibly disappeared individuals while ensuring justice

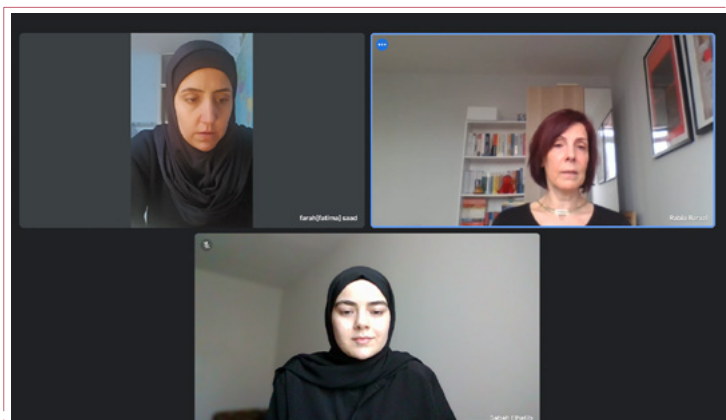


through holding those responsible for these crimes accountable—regardless of the parties involved. She added that the association’s efforts are ongoing ,led by the families and victims themselves ,to ensure that these crimes are not repeated in the future of Syria .She emphasized the importance of collective action and coordination with relevant authorities to ensure justice and redress for victims.

Ms .Sharaf also explained that after the fall of the regime ,the association will continue its work by strengthening efforts to uncover the truth and documenting cases to ensure that the rights of victims and their families are preserved” .Synergy “also seeks to participate in accountability and justice processes to prevent impunity and ensure that such crimes are never repeated in the future.

Families for Freedom:

Ms .Farah Al-Saad ,a member of Families for Freedom ,spoke about the association’s vision for the next phase ,noting that the focus will be on forming an investigation committee inside Syria ,independent of external parties ,with the aim of accelerating efforts to uncover the fate of the missing .Al-Saad emphasized that the association has moved beyond collecting testimonies and has become more capable of identifying the missing ,facilitating follow-up and advocacy for their rights.



Ms .Rabia Barazi emphasized the importance of ensuring the participation of the victims ’families in all steps taken in this case ,given its role in achieving justice and redress .She emphasized that this participation is not limited to documentation or moral support ,but also through providing material, health ,or educational assistance ,as associations working with the victims ’families contribute effectively to providing these types of support.

On the other hand ,Ms .Barazi emphasized the necessity of cooperation between civil society organizations and international entities specializing in the search for missing persons .Regarding the role of the future government ,she highlighted the need to establish a national body responsible for overseeing the missing persons file—one that is internationally recognized and capable of operating according to clear standards in this field.

Concluding her remarks ,Ms .Farah Al-Saad stressed the importance of bringing in forensic experts from abroad ,as trust in local medical institutions is nearly nonexistent due to the potential involvement of some doctors in covering up crimes committed against detainees .She asserted that uncovering the fate of the missing is not just a humanitarian demand but a legitimate right that everyone must work toward to achieve justice and end the suffering of thousands of Syrian families still waiting for news of their loved ones.

Between October 1 and December ,2024 ,31 the victims 'groups actively engaged in joint statements and advocacy activities on both regional and international levels ,effectively mobilizing public opinion.

Joint Statements by Victims 'Groups



Statement Issued by Syrian Women Relatives of the Forcibly Disappeared ,Regarding Recent Developments

On December ,2024 ,11 a group of Syrian women whose family members have been forcibly disappeared issued a [statement](#) ,relayed by victims 'groups networks ,addressing the recent developments following the fall of the Assad regime .The statement urged relevant international organizations ,including the International Committee of the Red Cross ,the Syrian Arab Red Crescent ,the ruling authorities on the ground ,and the current interim government ,to take immediate action to uncover the fate of the missing and prioritize this issue during the current transitional phase.

The Truth and Justice Charter Networks in Syria Reject the Call for a" National Day of Mourning" on December2024 ,27

In a joint [statement](#) ,multiple victims 'groups—including Massar ,Families Of Truth & Justice ,Families for Freedom ,Release Me ,Taafi ,Synergy ,and the Caesar Families Association—rejected a call made by Syrian activists to declare Friday ,December ,2024 ,27a national day of mourning and public grieving .The networks deemed this call inappropriate and untimely ,as thousands of Syrian families are still grappling with the shock of their detained and missing loved ones following the opening of Saydnaya Prison .The statement, published on December ,2024 ,25 emphasized that selecting a national mourning day should be part of a comprehensive and agreed-upon transitional justice program ,symbolizing the immense sacrifices Syrians have made throughout the revolution .And concluded by affirming that genuine mourning for the disappeared can only be achieved when their remains are recovered and given proper burial.

Legal Paper :Human Rights Response After the fall of the Syrian Regime

On December ,2024 ,24 a group of Syrian civil society organizations including victims 'groups issued a legal [paper](#) titled" Human Rights Response After the Fall of the Syrian Regime ".The paper provides a comprehensive framework for addressing human rights issues during Syria's transitional phase.

The paper called for preserving evidence and securing sensitive sites to ensure justice and accountability, establishing a temporary judicial body composed of independent and qualified judges and legal experts to oversee the fair and systematic release of detainees ,documenting cases of missing persons and supporting released detainees and their families to ensure their reintegration and access to justice, enhancing cooperation with international and local organizations to facilitate access for United Nations teams and humanitarian actors to affected individuals ,and ensuring the unrestricted operation of Syrian civil society organizations within the country to aid the documentation and accountability process.

Advocacy Activities



The Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression Organizes an Advocacy Tour in Collaboration with Victims 'Groups on the Sidelines of the 79 th Session of the United Nations General Assembly

As part of the Victims 'Groups Support Project ,the Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression, in collaboration with its partners from Families for Freedom and Dawlaty Foundation ,organized a three-day advocacy tour in New York City from October 9 to October .2024 ,11 The tour coincided with the 79 th session of the United Nations General Assembly.

The delegation held ten bilateral meetings with permanent missions to the United Nations .The participating delegation included activists from Families for Freedom ,accompanied by a member from the Syrian Forum .The discussions addressed several key issues ,including arbitrary detention and enforced disappearance in Syria ,their impact on victims and their families ,and pathways to achieving justice for detainees and missing persons .The meetings also explored mechanisms for holding perpetrators accountable for these violations .In addition to these concerns ,the meetings highlighted the ongoing violations against Syrian refugees ,particularly incidents of violence ,arbitrary detention ,and forced repatriation.

During November ,2024 the Executive Director of the Families Of Truth& Justice organization ,with the support of the organization Impunity Watch, [participated](#) in a week-long visit to Colombia to study the Colombian experience in uncovering the fate of the disappeared ,documentation, reparations ,and ongoing trials at the Colombian Special Jurisdiction for Peace .The delegation also explored the work of the Search Unit and the museum as well.



[The Third Victims 'Forum in Northern Syria](#)

The Synergy Association held the Third Annual Victims 'Forum in Northern Syria on November,15 ,2024 under the theme " Equity and Justice for All ".The forum addressed key issues concerning victims 'needs and priorities ,including uncovering the fate of missing and forcibly disappeared persons ,ensuring the safe and voluntary return of displaced individuals ,tackling stability



challenges ,and holding perpetrators of violations accountable .Additionally ,the forum reviewed available justice mechanisms for victims within the context of the Syrian conflict.

The event- partially funded by the EU -was held in Qamishli ,and organized by the Synergy Victims' Association in partnership with the Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression) [SCM](#) (and other associations.

On December ,2024 ,8 A Good seed Association joined its members ,along with children and relatives of detainees and forcibly disappeared persons in Syria ,in celebrating the fall of the regime .The association also participated in a civil society demonstration on the same day.

Following the collapse of Bashar al-Assad's regime in Syria ,the Caesar Families Association launched a campaign on December ,2024 ,10 titled " [Justice for Peace](#) ",demanding accountability for perpetrators of torture and enforced disappearances in Syria .With Assad fleeing to Moscow ,the campaign emphasized the need to implement justice and reject any leniency toward those involved in crimes against humanity .It urged all Syrians to work towards uncovering the truth and ensuring justice for the victims.

A press release from the Missing Persons 'Families Platform in North and East Syria (MPFP-NES)

On December ,2024 ,11 the Missing Persons 'Families Platform in North and East Syria issued a [statement](#) following the fall of the Syrian regime .The statement noted that while the regime's downfall had revived the hopes of families seeking to uncover the fate of their loved ones ,it also raised concerns about the fate of evidence and documents that could reveal the truth and bring justice.

The platform emphasized that " the issue of the missing and the enforced disappearance remains one of the most pressing humanitarian ones in Syria ,and the opening of prisons and the release of prisoners cannot be considered a final solution to this tragedy .This issue exceeds beyond the previous regime ,as all parties to the conflict have been involved in committing crimes of arbitrary detention ,enforced disappearance ,and torture that have claimed the lives of thousands .Moreover, there are dozens of mass graves that require intensive efforts to uncover and ensure justice for the victims and their families."

On December ,2024 ,14 the victims 'groups ;Taafi ,Release Me ,Families for Freedom ,in collaboration with victim advocacy groups and families of survivors under the Truth and Justice Charter ,released an awareness [paper](#) emphasizing the urgent need to protect mass graves in Syria .The paper highlighted the risks associated with tampering with gravesites ,which could lead to the destruction of crucial evidence and hinder the pursuit of justice .It also included a reporting form for individuals with information about newly discovered mass graves ,allowing them to submit details to the relevant authorities.

On the same day ,Taafi Initiative ,along with survivor networks and victims `groups under the Truth and Justice Charter ,issued an [urgent appeal](#) to the interim government ,relevant authorities ,and families of the missing ,demanding the protection of mass graves in Syria .The statement called on the interim government and responsible entities to authorize specialized teams to secure and protect these sites ,prevent any tampering ,and collaborate with the Independent Institution on Missing Persons in Syria ,which is responsible for identifying grave locations ,analyzing evidence ,and professionally engaging with the families of the missing.

Complaint to the United Nations Regarding Arbitrary Detention and Torture in Northern Syria

In late December ,2024 the Synergy Association submitted a formal [complaint](#) to the UN Human Rights Council's Special Procedures ,addressing the arbitrary detention ,torture ,and enforced disappearances in Northern Syria .The complaint urged the United Nations to prioritize this issue due to the severity of violations and the lack of legal protections for hundreds of thousands of civilians at risk.

It is worth noting that Synergy had previously submitted a similar [complaint](#) in September 2023 regarding the same patterns of violations and alleged perpetrators ;however ,no action had been taken at that time.

On December ,2024 ,21 Yasmin Al-Mashaan ,President of the Caesar Families Association ,attended a consultative [session](#) at the invitation of Germany's Minister of State ,Reem Radovan ,to discuss the future of Syria following the fall of Bashar al-Assad's regime and the status of Syrian refugees in Germany. The session also explored ways in which Germany could support efforts to achieve peace in Syria.



German Chancellor Olaf Scholz participated in the meeting ,extending his congratulations to the attendees on Syria's liberation and the end of the dictatorial rule .He also commended the role of Syrians in Germany ,emphasizing that they have become an integral part of German society .Scholz expressed his hope for a peaceful and stable future for Syria.

On December ,2024 ,27 the Truth and Justice Charter networks ,families of the missing ,and civil society activists organized protests in [Damascus](#) ,[Afrin](#) ,and [Suwayda](#) ,as well as other provinces .The demonstrations called for revealing the fate of the missing ,preserving evidence ,protecting mass graves ,holding those responsible for these crimes accountable ,and rejecting impunity .Protesters also demanded the retrieval of victims' remains for proper burial and recognition ,ensuring families receive their right to know the fate of their loved ones.



At the same time ,the Release Me organization distributed a medical care [guide](#) for recently released detainees ,aiming to raise public awareness about the community's role in providing adequate support and healthcare to survivors.

During December ,2024 the Families for Freedom Association held a meeting with the International Committee of the Red Cross) ICRC (to discuss its recent policies concerning detainees .During the meeting ,ICRC faced criticism ,particularly regarding its handling of the prisoner release process and its lack of preparedness for post-regime collapse scenarios ,including the sudden opening of detention facilities.

During the same period ,Families for Freedom also held a meeting with the Attorney General in Damascus to discuss the status of detainees and missing persons .The meeting included a review of available evidence ,which consisted of documents from detention centers and judicial records, with detainees categorized by case type .Discussions also addressed the creation of a centralized database for missing persons and mass graves ,alongside efforts to collect DNA samples from families of the missing to match with available evidence .The meeting proposed the formation of a high-level committee on missing persons and detainees to consolidate efforts and establish a centralized search and documentation system.



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



Training Sessions for Survivors of Detention and Enforced Disappearance

On November ,2024 ,19 the Taafi Initiative held the fourth and final awareness session as part of its Missing Persons Project ,focusing on the role of survivors and families of the forcibly disappeared in Syria's justice process .The session covered various topics ,including the evolution of the concept of justice ,the struggle for truth ,and the psychological motivations behind these efforts .Taafi conducted three sessions with a group of former detainees who had been subjected to arbitrary detention ,culminating in a policy paper with recommendations for prison reform in Syria.

In December ,2024 Taafi organized seven additional training sessions for survivors ,focusing on the process of searching for the missing in Syria and the practical expertise required for such efforts. The sessions covered a range of topics ,including distinguishing between key terms such as" missing persons " ,forcibly disappeared " ,and" mass graves " ,procedures for identifying missing individuals, comparative analysis of international experiences in searching for the missing ,forensic investigative techniques and their application to missing persons cases.

Separately ,on December ,2024 ,3 the Families Of Truth & Justice Association signed a new agreement with the Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression) SCM (to collaborate on joint initiatives, particularly in the fields of translation and the submission of complaints to UN special mechanisms. Following the signing of the agreement ,ten complaints were submitted ,including eight to the UN Special Rapporteur on Enforced Disappearances and one to the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture.

Additionally ,Families Of Truth & Justice documented 224 new cases of enforced disappearance through five field researchers based in Turkey and Syria.

Families Of Truth & Justice [held](#) four awareness sessions for 40 relatives of detainees on fraud and extortion schemes targeting families ,primarily carried out by organized groups and individuals ,most of whom were women .These lectures were conducted in December 2024 in collaboration with the Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression. The sessions focused mainly on financial fraud and extortion, providing attendees with key tips and recommendations to avoid falling victim to such schemes .Discussions also covered recent events in Syria ,efforts to uncover the fate of missing persons ,and the available support networks.



On December ,2024 ,29 the Caesar Families Association launched” [Yaqeen](#) “,an artificial intelligence-powered application designed to help families report missing persons with accuracy and clarity .This platform enables families to easily connect with the association through its website or WhatsApp. Users can submit photos and preliminary information confidentially about missing persons from2011 to ,2013 which the association then cross-references with the” Caesar Files “using advanced facial recognition technology.

In a related effort ,the Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression activated an online [form](#) for reporting human rights violations or disappearances .This form allows Syrians to submit initial information regarding human rights abuses or cases of missing persons inside Syria or affecting Syrians abroad .A specialized staff member from the center then follows up with the submitter within seven working days and securely stores the provided information in the center’s database.

Between October ,2024 ,1 and December ,2024 ,31 A Good Seed Association launched a campaign to shelter and accommodate displaced Syrian families from southern Lebanon who were forced to flee due to the Israeli aggression .The association provided shelter to30 individuals from six Syrian families, some of whom had relatives who were detainees ,after they were denied entry to Lebanese refugee centers. Additionally ,the association organized group psychological support activities for 70 children within the shelters ,incorporating recreational activities and art therapy.



In December ,2024 A Good Seed also launched the” Positive Memory of Syria “initiative for the relatives of detainees .Two sessions have been held so far ,with the initiative set to continue in the coming period.



Between October and December, 2024 the Release Me Organization conducted a series of activities targeting female survivors of detention and women from families of victims of enforced disappearance in Syria. Participants engaged in a creative writing program, which was a significant step toward empowering them to document their experiences in a gender-sensitive manner, respecting their privacy and helping them overcome the negative effects of war. This initiative resulted in a published book titled "[We, the Brave, Tell Our Stories](#)", featuring the narratives of participating women.



The organization also facilitated a popular education [program](#) that provided participants with the opportunity to share their personal stories and experiences, discussing the various impacts of certain ideas on their decisions and actions, as well as those of others. The objective was to help them take conscious steps toward breaking free from negative social practices. The initiative included 64 participants across eight groups, with four groups based in Salkin and four in Afrin.

Separately, the Massar Association conducted a narrative training program between October and December 2024 to help families develop their personal narratives and use them to advocate for the cause of those forcibly disappeared by ISIS. The initiative involved 30 women and 10 men from families of individuals who had gone missing under ISIS control. The program led to the creation of 12 complete stories, with an additional 28 narratives still requiring further development.

During the same period, Massar continued to operate safe spaces for women in the cities of Azaz and Raqqa in Syria. Each location hosted 10 women, with a total of 16 sessions held in each city. The sessions concluded with celebratory events in which the women expressed their joy over Syria's liberation, despite the ongoing challenges faced by families of the missing.



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