

The Media Digest of the Victim Support Project

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A vigil by the families of detainees and forcibly disappeared persons in Damascus ,calling for the truth about the fate of their loved ones and for justice25/05/2025 .

Collaborative efforts of victims 'groups in the transition phase of Syria

Introduction:

After years of denial and deliberate neglect ,the issue of the missing has entered a new stage with the beginning of the transition phase in Syria following the fall of the Assad regime .This issue has become one of the urgent priorities on the agenda of the provisional government ,which has begun taking initial steps to acknowledge the rights of victims and their families by announcing the establishment of national bodies dedicated to the matter and involving some victims 'groups in formulating policies related to uncovering the truth and achieving justice.

In this phase ,victims 'groups are working to document violations and ensure that the voices of victims are represented in both national and international forums .They are also pushing for the integration of transitional justice principles—chief among them the right to truth and accountability—into the national transitional justice programs .Furthermore ,they call for guaranteeing reparations for victims and their families through moral and material compensation ,as well as psychological and social support ,contributing to the restoration of dignity and the prevention of future violations.

Despite these positive developments ,the road to uncovering the truth and achieving comprehensive justice remains long .Many mass graves have yet to be discovered ,security agency archives remain largely unopened ,and families continue to suffer from a lack of information about their missing loved ones .In light of this ,the role of victims 'groups remains pivotal—not only in advocating for rights but also in reconstruction—through active participation in shaping the future of a new Syria.

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Local and International Updates on the Issue of Forcibly Disappeared Persons in Syria:



Photos of missing persons believed to be detainees from Sednaya Prison (Reuters)

The National Commission for the Missing

On May 17, 2025, the Syrian President of the Transition Phase, Ahmad Al-Shara, issued a [decree](#) establishing the National Commission for the Missing, a body with legal personality and financial and administrative independence. The Commission is mandated to operate across Syrian territory and is tasked with uncovering the fate of missing and forcibly disappeared persons, documenting their cases, creating a comprehensive national database, and providing legal and humanitarian support to their families.



Meeting of the President of the National Commission for the Missing in Syria with some members of the Advisory Team - 19/06/2025. Facebook

Legal expert Mohammad Reda Jalkhi was appointed as President of the Commission and was assigned the responsibility of forming the working team and drafting the internal bylaws within thirty days from the issuance of the decree. However, as of the current date, the internal bylaws have not yet been announced.

The initiative was welcomed by international entities, including the International [Committee](#) of the Red Cross, which considered it a positive step toward truth and justice for victims' families. The European Union also expressed its willingness to cooperate with the Commission if formally requested. Nevertheless, the absence of detailed legal provisions in the decree has raised questions about the clarity of the Commission's mandate and its alignment with international standards, posing an early test of its credibility and effectiveness.

On the same day ,Decree No 20 .was issued ,establishing the National Commission for Transitional Justice ,an independent body responsible for investigating violations committed by the“ defunct Syrian regime ”,holding perpetrators accountable in coordination with relevant bodies ,ensuring redress for victims ,and promoting guarantees of non-repetition and national reconciliation .Abdul Baset Abdul Latif was appointed as its president.

Victims ‘[groups](#) –Caesar Families ,MASSAR ,Taafi ,Families for Freedom ,Release Me ,Families Of Truth and Justice ,and Synergy Association–welcomed the formation of both commissions ,viewing it as an official acknowledgment of the tragedy of the missing .They called for the inclusion of survivors and victims ‘families in all stages of the work of the Missing Commission and urged for effective coordination with the Independent Institution on Missing Persons in Syria .The Independent [Institution](#) welcomed the establishment of the Commission and the appointment of Dr .Mohammad Reda Jalkhi as its head ,expressing its eagerness for a nationally-led partnership supported by the international community .It affirmed its commitment to cooperate with the new Commission and jointly work toward uncovering the fate of all missing persons without exception ,while providing necessary support to their families.

On June ,2025 ,26 the National Commission for the Missing announced the formation of its Advisory Council .In a post on its [Facebook](#) page ,the Commission shared a brief introduction to the council members ,describing them as a group of experts and representatives of victims ‘groups ,combining technical expertise with lived experience in the field of the missing.

German court sentences Syrian doctor to life in jail for crimes against humanity

On June 16, 2025, the 5th Senate for Criminal Matters (State Security Senate [Staatsschutzsenat]) of the Higher Regional [Court](#) (OLG) Frankfurt/Main found 40-year-old Syrian national Alaa M. guilty of several counts of crimes against humanity, war crimes against persons and murder. Alaa M. was sentenced to lifelong imprisonment as a cumulative sentence. In addition, the Senate established the particular gravity of the guilt and ordered the defendant to be placed in preventive



(AFP) Presse-France Agence . 2025 ,16 June ,Germany ,Frankfurt in court in Mousa Alaa

detention after imprisonment. Judge Christoph Koller, delivering the verdict, stated that the doctor “killed two individuals and inflicted serious injuries on nine others,” emphasizing that these acts occurred in 2011 and 2012 as part of “the brutal crackdown by Assad’s dictatorial and oppressive regime” on anti-government protests.

The convicted doctor arrived in Germany in 2015, where he practiced orthopedic surgery until his arrest in 2020, after being identified by Syrian refugees who testified that he had worked in military hospitals in Damascus and Homs. His trial began in January 2022 at the Higher Regional Court in Frankfurt and spanned 188 sessions, during which the court heard testimony from nearly 50 witnesses, including survivors and legal experts. Prosecutors charged him with more than 12 counts of torture committed while working in a military prison and hospitals in Homs and Damascus in 2011 and 2012.

Achievements Section:



Caesar Files for Justice / Facebook

Joint events and statements by Victims' Groups

Statement by Victims' groups on the Establishment of a National Commission for Missing Persons in Syria

On May 17, 2025, the victims' groups—Caesar Families, MASSAR, Taafi, Families for Freedom, Release Me, Families of Truth and Justice, and Synergy Association—issued a joint statement regarding the Syrian Interim Government's decision to establish a National Commission for Missing Persons in Syria. The groups welcomed this step and called for it to be pursued seriously and responsibly to ensure justice and uncover the fate of all missing persons without exception.

The groups emphasized that addressing the issue of missing persons in Syria cannot be separated from the effective participation of victims' groups and their families. They stressed that any envisioned commission must respond to their demands for truth and justice and that its establishment should align with a comprehensive vision for transitional justice. The statement also underscored the importance of full coordination with the existing Independent Institution on Missing Persons in Syria, recognizing it as a key actor that must not be ignored or undermined. Instead, its expertise and resources should be leveraged to build upon past achievements and enhance national efforts to uncover the truth and determine the fate of the missing.

Furthermore, the statement stressed the need to involve victims' groups and survivors in all phases of consultation related to the commission's formation, decision-making, and the design and implementation of its mandate.

Statement on Decree No. 20 Establishing the National Commission for Transitional Justice

The victims' groups—Caesar Families, MASSAR, Taafi, Families for Freedom, Release Me, Families of Truth and Justice, and Synergy Association—welcomed, in a statement, the issuance of Decree No. 20 on May 17, 2025, which establishes the National Commission for Transitional Justice. They considered it a step toward opening a national path to justice and redress. However, they also expressed deep concern about the content of the decree and the limited powers granted to the commission.

The statement, published on May 23, 2025, pointed out that restricting the commission's mandate to violations committed by only one party to the conflict undermines the principle of equality enshrined in the Constitutional Declaration and contradicts international human rights law. This, they warned, risks turning the commission into a tool for discriminating among victims rather than ensuring justice for all without exception.

The groups emphasized the importance of acknowledging all violations committed over the past decades by all parties and holding perpetrators accountable in accordance with the principle of non-impunity. They called for the decree to be followed by a dedicated law issued by a future legislative authority, clearly defining the commission's powers and ensuring its independence through inclusive consultative mechanisms involving victims, survivors, and civil society.

They urged the adoption of a comprehensive, inclusive, and non-discriminatory transitional justice approach that encompasses truth-seeking, accountability, reparations, and guarantees of non-repetition—along with transparency and cooperation with relevant international bodies.

Transitional Justice Symposium and the Families' Vision

The Independent Institution on Missing Persons in Syria - @IIMPSyria On May 20, 2025, the Caesar Families Association, in cooperation with the Charter for Truth and Justice associations, organized an online [symposium](#) titled "Transitional Justice and the Families' Vision." The event brought together a distinguished group of legal and humanitarian experts to spotlight the demands and vision of families in the transitional justice process.



The symposium featured contributions from Karla Quintana, Head of the Independent Institution on Missing Persons in Syria; Mayassa Sheikh Ahmed, human rights activist and defender, Robert Petit, Head of the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism (IIIM), and Joumana Seif, Senior Legal Advisor at the European Center for Constitutional and Human Rights. The session was moderated by Ahmad Helmi, Director of the "Taafi" Initiative. The event also saw active participation from Maryam Al-Hallaq, founder of the Caesar Families Association, and Yasmin Al-Masha'an, the association's current president.

Proposal for the Establishment of an Independent National Commission on Missing Persons

On June 16, 2025, a coalition of victims' groups and Syrian civil society organizations—including the Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression and associations such as Taafi, Caesar Families, Families for Freedom, MASSAR, Synergy, Families of Truth and Justice, and Release Me—held an emergency meeting to develop a vision for the establishment of an independent national commission on missing persons.

The outcome of the meeting was a position paper outlining proposals to ensure genuine partnership with victims and to strengthen the commission's effectiveness and independence. The paper presented a set of principles and procedures aimed at ensuring the commission's autonomy and alignment with the rights and demands of families in their pursuit of truth and justice.

Key recommendations included ensuring that victims make up no less than 50% of the commission's membership, while reflecting geographic, political, and ethnic diversity, as well as ensuring fair

representation of women and rejecting any form of political or governmental subordination. The paper also proposed a comprehensive legal framework that criminalizes enforced disappearance, amends national legislation, and grants the commission broad powers including: determining the fate of missing persons, managing an independent database, providing legal and psychological support, and cooperating with international organizations.

Additionally, the paper emphasized the importance of involving civil society and victims' groups in monitoring the commission's work through independent community oversight councils formed across various governorates, with the authority to review and publicly challenge decisions.

According to the participants, this proposal represents a critical step toward establishing a transparent, independent body grounded in victims' rights, playing a central role in advancing transitional justice in Syria.



Advocacy activities

On April 1, 2025, the "Release Me" organization and the "Syrian Revolution Detainees Association," coordinated vigils with participation from the "Taafi Association" and families of victims of enforced disappearance. The solidarity vigils were held under the slogan "A Candle for the Disappeared." These vigils were attended by family members of the victims as well as activists from across Syria and the city of Berlin. They were organized in honor of those forcibly disappeared and to demand the disclosure of their fate and the realization of justice.



The vigils took place in more than 22 locations, where participants lit candles and held banners expressing their unwavering commitment to truth and justice. They affirmed that absence does not mean forgetting and that justice is a right that does not expire with time. The solidarity vigils spanned multiple locations including: Damascus, Salamiya, Aleppo, Daraa/Sanamayn, Daraa/Tafas, Mhardeh, Hama, Shayzar, Homs/Saha, Homs/Baba Amr, Afrin, Al-Kiswah, Hujaira, Qamishli, Armanaz, Azaz, Eastern Ghouta, Idlib, Al-Tall, Salqin, Quneitra/Naba' Al-Sakhr, in addition to the city of Berlin

Guidelines for Victim Participation in Justice Processes

On April 3, 2025, the International Network of Victims and Survivors of Serious Human Rights Violations ([INOVAS](#))—including the Synergy Association, Taafi Initiative, Caesar Families Association, and the Families of Truth and Justice Association—took the initiative to develop and [publish](#) a set of guiding principles for the participation of victims in justice processes.

These principles emphasize the importance of involving victims at all stages of justice processes, while respecting their choices and boundaries, and enabling them to express themselves authentically and honestly. They also stress the need for an inclusive approach that considers the diversity and differences among victims—especially in terms of gender and social context—and for ensuring accessible, transparent communication channels for all, while protecting victims from any harm or risks resulting from their participation.

The principles aim to serve as a reference for individuals and organizations working in the field of transitional justice. They promote meaningful and effective victim participation and provide practical recommendations for governments, international organizations, and civil society to ensure that victims are fully integrated into decision-making and the implementation of justice mechanisms.

The Synergy Association issued on May 7, 2025, a [statement](#) condemning the military appointments announced by the Syrian transitional government within the formations of the "Syrian National Army." The appointments included individuals listed on international sanctions lists and accused of committing grave human rights violations that may amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity.



Among those appointed were Ahmad Ihsan Fayyad al-Hayes (Abu Hatem Shaqra), Mohammad al-Jasim (Abu Amscha), and Sayf Boulad (Abu Bakr), all of whom are responsible for crimes against humanity, including murder, torture, rape, human trafficking, the forced displacement of Kurdish populations, the confiscation of their properties, and the accumulation of illicit financial gains estimated in the tens of millions of dollars.

Synergy described these appointments as “a profound setback to the course of transitional justice in Syria, and a re-legitimization of criminality under the guise of the state and military institutions,” warning against the reconstitution of the old repressive structure with new faces. The association called for subjecting these appointments to human rights standards, the immediate removal of all those involved in crimes from positions of power and influence, and the prosecution of those responsible for violations.

On May 12, 2025, members from the Caesar Families participated in a [meeting](#) with the Head of the European Union Delegation to Syria, Michael Unmacht, with the aim of shedding light on the issue of transitional justice in Syria and discussing the vision for the upcoming phase.



The meeting included listening to the participants' perspectives on the current challenges and featured an in-depth discussion regarding the transitional justice commission that is expected to be established by the new Syrian government.

All attendees emphasized the urgent need and critical importance of establishing the commission and ensuring accountability for all perpetrators of human rights violations.

Caesar Families stressed the significance of such meetings in advancing the justice file, uncovering the truth, and ensuring that impunity does not prevail—steps deemed essential for building a new Syria founded on the principles of justice and accountability.

During the conference titled “Witnesses of Justice: The Pursuit of Accountability and Justice in Syria - What’s Next?” held in Paris on May 28, 2025, and organized by the Caesar Files for Justice organization, Mrs. Maryam Al-Hallak, founder of Caesar Families, was [honored](#) in recognition of her long-standing efforts in defending the rights of victims and the families of martyrs and the disappeared in Syria.



The tribute acknowledged her courageous voice, which carried the suffering of Syrian mothers to international platforms and served as a living memory of justice that refuses to forget. Mrs. Maryam emphasized that this recognition was not hers alone, but for every mother who never found her son’s grave and for everyone still demanding the truth. She stated: “We demand justice because accountability is a right, and because those who deprived us of our sons must not escape punishment. I say this on behalf of the families of the martyrs: do not stop, do not

remain silent, continue to demand truth and accountability."

The conference also honored Farid Al-Madhhan and Osama Othman from the Caesar Files team, in appreciation of their work in uncovering and documenting crimes, as well as Mrs. Fadwa Mahmoud, a steadfast voice for the families of the forcibly disappeared.

Separately, Families for Freedom held two meetings in Istanbul and Damascus during May 2025 to strengthen the role of families in transitional justice and accountability processes, and to follow ongoing developments concerning detainees and the forcibly disappeared.

The first meeting took place on May 18, 2025, in Istanbul, and focused on recent updates regarding the formation of the National Commission for Transitional Justice and the National Commission for the Missing. Members were introduced to the roles and responsibilities of both bodies.

Later, between May 23 and 25, 2025, the majority of the leadership team convened in Damascus in what was the first such gathering held inside Syria. The meeting included a review of internal policies, a reassessment of priorities, and the drafting of a strategic action plan for the coming year.

Members also participated in a symbolic vigil in Umayyad Square, where they expressed their commitment to justice and their rejection of any settlement that ignores victims' rights or excludes the voices of families. They affirmed their role as active participants in the ongoing struggle for truth and accountability.

On May 25, 2025, Families for Freedom organized a [protest](#) in Umayyad Square in the capital, Damascus, coinciding with the issuance of a presidential decree establishing the Transitional Justice Commission. The participating families expressed their rejection of limiting the commission's scope to violations committed by the regime only, arguing that excluding victims of other parties strips the justice process of its meaning and reinforces exclusion and discrimination.



The families demanded the disclosure of the fate of their loved ones and accountability for all those involved in arbitrary detention, enforced disappearance, and torture—without exception. They emphasized that justice must not be partial or selective.



On June 9, 2025, Release Me, in coordination with the Syrian Revolution Detainees Association, organized solidarity [vigils](#) in 23 locations across Syria under the slogan "No Justice Without Knowing the Fate." The purpose of these vigils was to deliver a unified message to both the Commission on the Missing and the National Commission for Transitional Justice, calling for transparency, inclusivity, and the active participation of families in the mechanisms of their work.



During the event, participants launched the "Rights Box" as a symbol of hope and continued struggle. Families placed messages inside the box addressed to the Commission on the Missing and the Transitional Justice Commission, expressing their right to know the fate of their loved ones and to hold accountable all those responsible for crimes of disappearance and detention.

Participants affirmed that enforced disappearance would not silence them, but rather strengthen their determination to pursue truth and justice. They also called for urgent action to secure the release of Syrian detainees held in Lebanese prisons.

At the conclusion of the vigil, Release Me and the families of victims who took part reaffirmed their full commitment to continuing the peaceful struggle for justice and their firm rejection of any marginalization of families' voices in the transitional justice process.

On June 11, 2025, the cities of [Idlib](#) and [Azaz](#) witnessed simultaneous vigils organized by Families for Freedom in Al-Sabaa Bahrat Square and Future Square, with the participation of victims' groups and several families

Participants raised slogans rejecting impunity, affirming that true peace cannot be achieved while perpetrators remain unaccountable, and that the dignity of victims is not negotiable. They expressed their rejection of reintegrating perpetrators into state institutions and called for the inclusion of families' voices in all transitional justice processes.



At the invitation of Families for Freedom and Caesar Families, a large public [vigil](#) was held in Umayyad Square on June 12, 2025, with the participation of families of victims, detainees, and the forcibly disappeared, under the slogan "For Our Dignity and Our Right - No Peace with Impunity."

The statement issued during the vigil affirmed that the dignity of victims is non-negotiable, and that justice is not a burden but an uncompromisable right. Participants rejected attempts to portray perpetrators as partners in civil peace and demanded genuine justice that does not recycle those responsible for atrocities into state institutions.



The vigil concluded with families reaffirming that their voices will not be silenced and their continued commitment to the struggle for comprehensive and fair justice for all victims without exception

Between June and July 2025, Release Me and A Good Seed obtained official licenses to operate inside Syria as independent, non-governmental, non-profit organizations. Both groups began establishing formal offices within the country to launch and sustain their activities in support of the cause of the missing in Syria.

Trainings and Projects to Support the Cause of the Missing - Support Families and Victims

Release Me concluded the implementation of its project "Independent Survivors," which ran from October 2024 to May 2025 and aimed to promote economic empowerment for women survivors and adolescent girls from families of the forcibly disappeared.



The project consisted of two main tracks. The first focused on the economic empowerment of women, while the second centered on empowering adolescent girls. This track included ten educational sessions combining rights-based and creative approaches, designed to support girls socially by helping them overcome negative stereotypes and beliefs and transform these into positive models that boost their self-confidence.

The program selected 16 adolescent girls between the ages of 12 and 17. The selection process focused on creating a safe and supportive space that fosters self-confidence and learning. The participants were divided into two groups, each receiving a ten-day training supervised by a specialized trainer. As part of this activity, an interactive educational discussion day titled "Our Rights" was held for both groups, where concepts related to children's rights were introduced using storytelling and engaging teaching methods.

The activity saw strong and positive engagement from the girls, who showed significant interest in the workshops and enthusiasm for learning and participation.

Meanwhile, Families of Truth & Justice continued its efforts to support the families of the missing and forcibly disappeared through documentation, advocacy, and legal support. Between April and June 2025, the association documented 228 new cases of enforced disappearance in its database as part of its violations monitoring program.

On May 18, 2025, the [association's](#) office in Reyhanlı received a delegation from the International Commission on Missing Persons (ICMP). The team met with 15 members of the association's general assembly. The meeting involved an exchange of views on recent developments in Syria following the fall of the regime and explored ways to strengthen the association's capacity and assess the needs of the families of the missing in the current phase.

Families of Truth & Justice also launched a weekly live [broadcast](#) every Sunday, aimed at providing regular legal consultations to families of the missing and responding to public inquiries. One of the sessions focused on the National Commission for the Missing, during which the association's lawyers participated to answer legal questions.



As part of its legal support services, the association provided free consultations to 122 families of missing persons and organized awareness sessions attended by 40 participants to help prevent extortion and fraud. One of the [sessions](#) was broadcast live to maximize outreach and benefit.

On June 17, 2025, the association organized a training workshop in the city of Afrin, Syria, targeting 14 members of its general assembly. The workshop focused on the principles and importance of documentation in human rights work.

A Good Seed continued its psychosocial support activities for children of detainees and the forcibly disappeared in Syria between April 1 and June 30, 2025. As part of this effort, the organization conducted a theater-based activity consisting of 15 sessions with the participation of 20 children from victims' families. The sessions focused on developing children's



communication skills and their ability to express themselves through speech and body language, which contributed to building self-confidence and enhancing their teamwork and interaction abilities.

The organization also held a legal training workshop for adolescents on the Convention on the Rights of the Child, with 20 participants. The workshop took place over three consecutive days, from April 26 to April 28, 2025. It aimed to introduce participants to the Convention, raise awareness about its importance, and highlight its relevance to children's lives and their relationship with national laws.

A Good Seed concluded its series of activities with a closing exhibition on May 30, 2025, attended by a number of partners, active organizations and initiatives in Lebanon, as well as the families and children who participated in the program. The event welcomed around 120 attendees and featured a display of wax art created by the children, alongside a live stage performance that marked the peak of the therapeutic and expressive program.



The exhibition opened with remarks from members of the organization, followed by a theatrical performance delivered by the children with professionalism and heartfelt emotion that moved the audience. The event concluded with an open discussion between the children and attendees. Dedicated corners were set up to showcase the wax creations and to collect feedback and suggestions from the audience, who expressed deep admiration for the children's work. Attendees emphasized the importance of continuing A Good Seed's initiative in Lebanon and expanding it to Syria to support a larger number of children going through similar circumstances.

Meanwhile, Massar conducted a series of legal awareness and training sessions for families of individuals who went missing at the hands of ISIS during April, May, and June 2025.

On April 6, legal advisor Samar Al-Bardan delivered a Zoom session titled "Post-Documentation Legal Steps in Syria," which addressed available legal pathways for pursuing justice against perpetrators of abduction and enforced disappearance, both within Syria and through international legal mechanisms. The session also focused on the rapid political changes following the fall of the Assad regime. It was attended by 67 participants from families of the missing, including attendees from Raqqa, Deir ez-Zor, the Shaitat area in eastern Deir ez-Zor, Kobani, Azaz, and Şanlıurfa in Turkey.

To strengthen the critical thinking skills of these families, Ahmed Murad conducted a training session on May 28, 2025, titled "Enhancing Awareness on Verifying Information and Distinguishing Between Reliable and Unreliable Sources." The training aimed to improve families' ability to identify accurate information and protect themselves from harmful or misleading content, particularly on social media. It was attended by 50 family members of missing persons.

As part of its psychosocial support efforts for families of those kidnapped by ISIS, Massar also held a series of six psychoeducational sessions via Zoom on April 15, 22, and 29, and May 6, 13, and 14, 2025. The sessions focused on the concept of "Ambiguous Loss," and were facilitated by psychologist Shahinaz Abdul Ghafour. The final session featured two singers

who used music as a tool for emotional release and grief expression, incorporating elements of folk culture to create a space for shared emotional connection.

During the musical session, participants were divided into two groups: one included individuals from Raqqa, Shaitat, Azaz, and Şanlıurfa, while a separate session was held specifically for families of the missing from Kobani. This session was conducted entirely in Kurdish, allowing participants to express themselves freely in their native language and ensuring a culturally sensitive and emotionally safe environment.



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