



Voices from the Dark:

Torture and Sexual Violence Against Women in Assad's Detention Centres

Lawyers and Doctors for Human Rights (LDHR) is a Syrian NGO working to secure justice for the victims of International Crimes in Syria. Our doctors and lawyers use science and forensic evaluations to help victims of torture and sexual violence obtain justice and accountability. We foster survivor support networks and provide referrals for holistic care to aid victim recovery.

By Lawyers and Doctors
for Human Rights
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Acknowledgements

LDHR would like to acknowledge and thank the eight brave women whose stories are the focus of this report. These women documented their cases and agreed to share their stories in LDHR Reports to give a voice to those still detained. We would also like to thank our Humans Rights Committee for its assistance analysing and drafting this Report, and our international partner, Synergy for Justice, for its contribution.

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Summary

These are the stories of eight women who have survived Assad's detention centres. Each of the women agreed to be medically evaluated by a specially trained LDHR doctor. They were extremely brave to share their stories and to reveal their physical and psychological scars.

None of these women are connected. They were not arrested or detained at the same time or in the same place. Rather their experiences range across many of the Syrian government's most notorious detention centres. This report brings together their collective experience and explores the commonalities between the women's treatment in detention and how they are trying to survive now that they have been released. Their stories contain horrific details of rape, sexual violence and brutal torture. They disclose unbearable suffering and agony, to the point where one of the women would have given up her children to make it stop. Three of the women attempted suicide during their detention.

Whilst the physical abuse and terror used against the women differs, the long lasting psychological damage resonates between their cases. Without exception, these women are still haunted by the terror of detention. They have become withdrawn, fearful and anxious. The relationships with their families and children have suffered. Their communities regard them with shame.

These stories must be heard. Tens of thousands of Syrians have been detained and subjected to the human destruction of these detention centres.ⁱ Thousands of women are believed to be still held in detention.ⁱⁱ Children are also being detained and exposed to the same horrors.ⁱⁱⁱ The arbitrary arrest and detention of government opponents must be stopped. Immediately. As must the torture and extreme cruel and inhuman treatment which is being inflicted upon detainees. There must be immediate independent monitoring and medical access into each and every detention centre in Syria, and the release and care for detainees must be given utmost priority. The profound, long-term damage exacted upon those who survive has to be addressed. The remains of those who did not survive must be found and returned to their loved ones.

Recommendations

Lawyers and Doctors for Human Rights (LDHR) calls for the following:

For the Syrian government:

- to immediately publish all information it holds regarding the whereabouts and status of all detainees in Syria, including the fate of all those who have died in detention since March 2011.

For all parties, but the Syrian government in particular:

- to immediately and unconditionally release all political detainees, recognising that each additional day spent in detention means the infliction of more torture, sexual violence and subhuman conditions, and constitutes an imminent threat to life. The release of women and children should be prioritised.

- to immediately provide unrestricted access for independent monitors and doctors to any location where any person is being deprived of their liberty, to prevent further deaths and abuse, and to provide life-saving medical care for detainees;

- to take immediate steps to comply with the UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners, and to stop all abuse during detention;

- to stop all forms of sexual violence and harassment against detainees, and to investigate and punish all those found responsible, including those with command responsibility for the detention personnel.

For the international community:

- to take all possible steps to ensure the release of all political detainees in Syria as an utmost priority and not to treat the issue of detainees as an agenda point for resolution through negotiations;

- to keep this issue at the top of the agenda until all of the tens of thousands of detainees are safely released or their remains recovered;

- to respond to its moral and humanitarian responsibility to act to stop and prevent further international crimes in Syria by taking all possible steps to end impunity, provide a comprehensive judicial adjudication mechanism to address these crimes and send a clear message that there will be accountability for such crimes;

- to conduct a comprehensive investigation and prosecution of those most responsible for the arbitrary arrest and unlawful detentions, enforced disappearance, torture, cruel and inhuman treatment, and sexual violence which have been an integral feature of the Syrian government detention system;

- to support the localised development, expansion and sustenance of Syrian support, both immediate and long-term, for the survivors of torture and sexual violence in detention;

- to support the development of immediate and longer term reform to the security and detention system in Syria to ensure abuse cannot occur in Syria's detention system again.



Recommendations

For the new United Nations International, Impartial, Independent Mechanism, and other organisations working towards justice:

- to prioritise the collection of evidence and building of prosecution cases regarding the crimes committed in Syrian detention centres, ensuring all necessary measures for the fair and efficient trial of perpetrators.
- To prioritise collating a full list of those missing in detention, together with all necessary data which can be used to trace and identify them.

For Syrian civil society, to work together to:

- Advocate for the release of all political detainees held in Syria;
- To combine and collate all data held on those believed still to be in detention into a comprehensive register which can be used to locate them;
- To collaborate to ensure comprehensive networks for survivor and family support and care, including medical, psycho-social, protective, rehabilitative and legal services.
- To consider the gendered impact of detention, torture and sexual violence and to consider ways to ensure men, women, boys and girls all have access to the support they need.
- To educate local communities to reduce stigma and encourage support for survivors through awareness-raising discussions and forums, particularly addressing sexual violence and the important roles of women in building a new future for Syria.
- To work together to develop a detention reform proposal which addresses immediate needs including treatment and support for detainees, as well as developing a system which adheres to human rights standards and is subjected to monitoring, inspection and independent oversight.



Methodology

LDHR's trained doctors conduct Medical Expert Evaluations which adhere to the Istanbul Protocol, the United Nations Professional Training Series No.8/1 Manual on the Effective Investigation and Documentation of Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. This methodology applies international standards and procedures on how to recognise and document the signs and symptoms of torture so the documentation may serve as valid evidence in court. Each Medical Expert Evaluation includes a clinical interview, a physical examination and a psychological assessment. The Expert records all physical and psychological findings from the evaluation. Physical injuries are photographed. Diagnostic tests or consultations may be requested, if this would assist the medical expert to more fully document, record and assess the medical findings. The Expert then gives her expert opinion as to the degree of consistency between the narrated events and the medical findings.

LDHR relies on its Medical Expert Reports, as the application of science as evidence of torture and sexual violence. For the eight women whose stories are highlighted in this report, all had a Medical Expert Evaluation which determined that the findings in their case (be it physical or psychological injury) were consistent with torture and/or sexual violence. In order to provide context to understand these events, LDHR has also relied upon the careful work of well-respected international documenters and investigators such as the United Nations Commission of Inquiry, Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International. These organisations set high standards for the use and reliance on information, in keeping with LDHR's own approach.

LDHR has concealed the identity of the women, giving them pseudonyms rather than using their real names. This has been done to protect them, especially in light of struggles and dangers that they can face in their own communities following detention. At the start of each Medical Evaluation, LDHR doctors carefully discuss how the survivor wishes her report to be used. LDHR have only included the reports of women who consented to use in LDHR Human Rights Reports to raise awareness, to seek action against the crimes in detention and to give a voice to both survivors and those currently lost within the darkness and depravity of the detention system in Syria.

There are many cultural, societal barriers to discussing detention and what happens there, particularly for women. Unfortunately, instead of care and support, women who have been detained face stigma and shame in their communities. The stories of these women are just a small glimpse into a much bigger, untold problem. LDHR are extremely grateful to these women for their contribution to breaking these taboos, and to ensuring other women can receive treatment, care and support more easily. LDHR runs a confidential network for survivor support.



This report focuses on the government's detention system, due to the scale and prevalence of the torture and ill-treatment hidden behind its walls. LDHR acknowledges that other parties to the conflict also stand accused of unlawfully detaining and torturing opponents, and its recommendations apply across the board to any unlawful detention of political prisoners, being held without cause or the protection of law.

The findings are analysed against the elements required for international crimes in customary international law, as well as international human rights instruments ratified by Syria. While Syria signed the Rome Statute in 2000, it has not ratified it. Nor does it seem likely, after six years of paralysis, that the United Nations Security Council will refer the crimes in Syria to the International Criminal Court's jurisdiction. Any wholesale justice process for the crimes in Syria is likely to found upon customary international law applicable at the time of the events. LDHR notes that the definition of crimes in the ICC Statute does not always reflect customary international law.

Syria has ratified the following international human rights instruments:

- The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (R. 1969)
- The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (R.1969)
- The International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (R. 1969)
- The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (R.1993) together with the Optional Protocols on Armed Conflict and the Sale of Children
- The Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) (R. 2003 with a reservation)
- The Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment (R. 2004)
- The International Convention on the Rights of Migrant Workers (R. 2005)
- The Convention on Disability Rights (R. 2009) together with the Optional Protocol
- The Arab Charter on Human Rights (State Party, in force since 2008)

LDHR has chosen not to name or identify any individual perpetrators in this report in order to ensure due process, fair trial standards and full criminal accountability in the future. Where consent is provided by survivors, LDHR passes any names, identification and descriptions of possible perpetrators to investigative entities which either have a mandate to build criminal files against perpetrators of crimes in Syria or which provide lists of such perpetrator to the United National Security Council or other such bodies which use such lists for sanction and future accountability.



The Women

Almost all of the women were between the ages of 30-45 years old when they were detained, except one who was 52 years old. All eight of the women are mothers with between two and five children each. There is no connection between any of the women. They were not arrested or detained together.

They were not held in the same location at the same time. They come from many different areas of Syria, including Idlib, Aleppo, Homs, Rif Damashq and Rif Hama. Their time in detention ranges between eight days and 11 months, between 2011 and 2016. Many of the women were moved between different detention facilities. The detention locations include some of Syria's most notorious branches:

- 4th Division Military checkpoint, Damascus
- Lebanon-Syria Border Crossing
- Adra Prison, south of Damascus
- Military Intelligence Branch 215 (Raids Branch), Damascus
- Military Intelligence Branch 235 (Palestine Branch), Damascus
- General Intelligence Al Khateeb Branch (Branch 251), Damascus
- Al Mezzeh Military Airport Branch, Damascus
- Political Security Branch, Latakia
- Republican Guard, Aleppo
- Political Security Branch, Aleppo
- State Security Branch, Aleppo

While these women are not known to each other and their detentions are not connected, their stories of detention and its lasting impact on them bear striking similarities. A short summary of each of the women's cases is appended to the back of this report.



The Crimes against These Women amount to Crimes against Humanity

The detention of each of these women, and the conditions and violence to which they were subjected, form part of a systematic and widespread pattern of arbitrary detention, enforced disappearances, pervasive torture, sexual violence and life-threatening conditions inside Syrian government detention centres.^{iv} Their stories correlate with hundreds of other documented descriptions of the same detention centres, whether by men or women.^v

I. Arbitrary or Unlawful Arrest and Detention

Elements

a. Deprivation of Liberty (from point of arrest, and at any stage),

b. Without due process of law based on international standards, and includes any elements of injustice, discrimination, inappropriateness or lack of predictability.

ICCPR Article 9 requires (a) being informed of the reasons for arrest promptly at the time of arrest, (b) being brought promptly before a judge (usually within 48 hours, 24 hours where risk of torture), (c) presumption of release pending trial, (d) opportunity to challenge the legality of arrest or conditions of detention (habeas corpus), and (e) a fair trial within a reasonable time.

ICCPR Article 10 requires that "All persons deprived of their liberty shall be treated with humanity and with respect for the inherent dignity of the human person."

Mass arrests associated with peaceful protests, prolonged detention without charge or trial, and detention of relatives to put pressure on another suspect have all been found to amount to arbitrary detention. Secret or incommunicado detentions are arbitrary per se. Other conditions of detention may render a detention unlawful, and may also amount to torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment.

[End notes for textbox] vi- vii- viii- ix

In all cases, the women were arbitrarily arrested and unlawfully detained, amounting to illegal detention as a crime against humanity.

Three of the women were arrested at home, one at work and four at a checkpoint or border crossing. «Hayah» reported being punched in the face and on her arms at the point of arrest, while «Ayda» was severely beaten immediately on arrival at the detention centre. «Munira» was threatened with violence once she arrived at the detention facility. Four others spoke of being insulted and cursed (Zahira, Amina, Rima and Manar), either at the point of arrest or upon arrival at the detention centre.

Almost all the women were arrested when they were caring for their children, without any provision made for the continuing care of those children. «Rima» was arrested at the Lebanese-Syrian border with her five children, who then had to proceed on their own by bus to relatives inside Syria. Two of the women were arrested along with their husbands, and their children were left behind, alone, in the house. «Amina»'s children were thrown out of the house while she was detained. «Munira» "counted on God" for the safety of her children. «Hayah» had to leave her 12 year old son and 80 year old mother in the house to fend for themselves. «Ayda» and «Janan» were arrested at checkpoints with their children. Their children were left there.

At the point of arrest, the most that any of the women were told is that they were wanted by a particular branch or wanted for assisting terrorists. «Amina» and «Manar» were held because of the suspected acts of their male relatives.

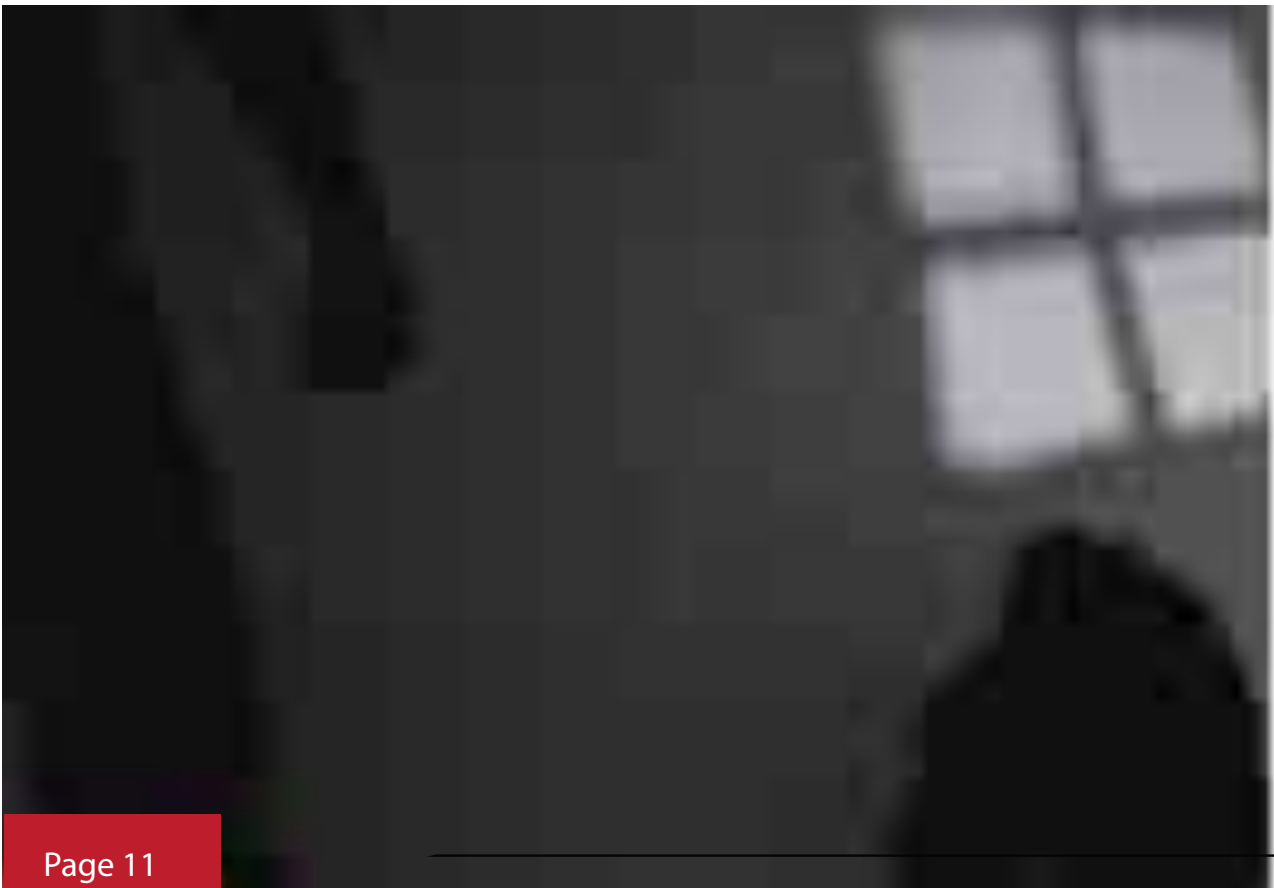


The Crimes against These Women amount to Crimes against Humanity

In 2014, «Amina»'s house was raided by 20 armed men in Syrian military uniforms and one man in a suit. Ten armed men came into the house and asked her, along with her husband, to come with them. No reasons were given. No warrant for arrest shown. Four days after detention she was accused of dealing with "terrorists" (the opposition). Nine days after detention she was told she had been arrested because of her brother-in-law and her husband talking to his relative who was a member of the armed opposition. She was told to confess against them. She was held for approximately three months. She never appeared before a judge during that time, and no charges or accusations were made against her. She was pregnant at the time.

Six of the women were never brought before a court during or in association with their detention. «Manar» was brought into a room with a desk where her personal data was given – she believes this was "military court". It was 26 days into her detention at Military Intelligence Branch 235, the Palestine Branch. «Ayda» endured more than three months of rape, sexual violence and brutal torture and one month in harrowing solitary confinement before she was brought before "the Criminal Security court, where she fingerprinted her 'statements', they photographed her, and then she signed an undertaking to travel out of Syria permanently, and to be exiled."

None of the women had the assistance of a lawyer at any stage of their detention.



The Crimes against These Women amount to Crimes against Humanity

II. Torture

Elements

- a. Intentional infliction of severe pain or suffering, physical or mental (nor arising only from, inherent in or incidental to lawful sanctions),
 - b. For such purposes as obtaining information or a confession, punishment, intimidation, coercion or any discriminatory reason, [Note: This is not an ICC requirement; it is part of the CAT definition]
 - c. By or with acquiescence of state agent/public official. [This is not a customary international law element – but it is contained in the Convention Against Torture].
- Sexual violence, including rape, can also amount to torture. It is detailed in the following section.

[End notes for textbox] x- xi

(a) All the Women had Severe Pain and Suffering Intentionally Inflicted Upon Them

Seven out of the eight women had extreme physical pain inflicted upon them, repeatedly. Some were beaten and punched all over their bodies, slapped, thrown to the ground and kicked, lashed with thick, braided wire, cables or hoses. «Ayda» had her leg stabbed with full force using a letter opener, had burning cigarettes ground into her hands and breasts, and was knocked unconsciousness by a sharp blow to her head. She also had wires attached to her ears and had electricity jolted through her body twice. «Rima» was put into a forced position like a chair. «Munira» was hung upside down. «Zahira» was beaten with a green water hose as she was tied first to a board, and then while bent backwards over a metal chair.

«Janan» was forced to lay on her back with her feet raised. Her feet and legs were beaten savagely with a broken-ended wooden stick and a braided cable. She was forced to count the lashes, restarting if she counted wrong. And all the time, her interrogator insulted her, shouted at her and threaten sexual violence. She counted over 100 lashes in 2 hours. When «Janan» was returned to the cell, she couldn't stand. The pain was unbearable. Her feet and legs were swollen, turning bluish red or even black in some areas. Her skin was torn and bloodied. This happened on seven different occasions. During one of these sessions, she fainted and urinated on herself. By the last session, she was begging for it to stop. She told them she would say whatever they wanted. She said would have given up her husband and children, she was so desperate.



The Crimes against These Women amount to Crimes against Humanity

«Ayda» was forced on to the “Flying Carpet” – a wooden board to which the body is bound before it is bent backwards to the point of head and legs touching. It felt like they had broken her back because of the pain. And in this position, they began to beat her face and legs with cables. Her interrogators repeated this process the next morning. The same woman was suspended from her hands, bound with plastic wire, from the ceiling. Her feet dangled 10cm above the ground. Around her were other women also hanging from the ceiling, and men who had been stripped naked and hung facing the women. «Ayda» remained in this position for an hour, before they let her down, only to repeat this agony three more times, each for another hour.

In addition to the physical violence, there were threats made which terrified the women, and they were kept in a constant state of extreme anxiety and fear. From the moment they arrived, violence was threatened, witnessed or inflicted; the psychological suffering constant

Immediately on arrival, «Munira» witnessed naked men, blindfolded in the corridor being beaten with thick wires, insulted and electrocuted. She explained, “You die in a second on arrival.” In Branch 235 –The Palestine Branch, «Manar» saw the green pipes used to beat detainees. There was blood in the corridors. She could hear the sounds of men being beaten, screaming and crying for six hours every day. She saw women whose skin had been torn apart from beatings. On the way to interrogation one day, she saw a line of men, “like skeletons, with torn clothes and long beards”, being beaten as they walked. «Amina» saw dead bodies and blood on the walls. She heard the voices of men being tortured and screaming. She cannot forget how they looked while hanged on the walls, and she “will never forget how the jailers were dragging the dead bodies in a degrading manner.” «Zahira» was taken to see a man hanging from his hands above a pool of his own blood. She was told by her interrogator, “I cannot stop them from hurting you”. «Janan» could hear the voices of men and women begging while being torture. She explained that this was worse than being beaten herself. She was once forced to watch the severe torture of a young man. She was so distressed by this, she beat her head against the door to try to get them to stop.

Two of the women were threatened with electrocution. This included Amina, who was pregnant and had a known heart condition. «Rima» was tied in a yard next to a dog which she believed would attack her. «Janan» was threatened with the Flying Carpet and being placed inside a tire to be beaten. She was also told that they would bring her son and torture him in front of her. «Ayda» was taken to have her finger nails pulled out. She cried and begged them not to, because she could take no more. «Manar» was told that she would be taken downstairs and left as a dead body with a name on it.

During their detention, at least five of the women lost consciousness – through violence, malnutrition or fear.



The Crimes against These Women amount to Crimes against Humanity

(b) The Purpose was always to extract information or confessions, whether against them or a relative, or as punishment.

The infliction of physical violence and psychological terror all centred around interrogations during which they were questioned for information, or were forced to confess against themselves or others. All the women were forced to sign or fingerprint a statement. Hayah was beaten because they thought she had stopped eating deliberately as part of a hunger strike.

(c) All of this done with state involvement.

All of these women were held by state agents in Syrian government-run detention centres. Several of the women were tortured and raped under pictures of Hafez and Bashar Al-Asad.

III. Sexual Violence

Elements

a. An act of the sexual nature,

b. Committed by force, or by threat of force or coercion, such as that caused by fear of violence, duress, detention, psychological oppression or abuse of power, against such person or another person, or by taking advantage of a coercive environment, or the invasion was committed against a person incapable of giving genuine consent.

Forms of sexual violence include rape (a physical invasion of a sexual nature, sexual penetration), sexual slavery, forced marriage, enforced prostitution, forced pregnancy, enforced sterilisation and other forms of sexual violence of a comparable gravity including (but not limited to) sexual/genital mutilation, beating or electrocution, threats of sexual violence, and forced nudity.

“Sexual violence is not limited to a physical invasion of the human body and may include acts that do not involve penetration or physical contact. Sexual violence covers both physical and psychological attacks directed at a person’s sexual characteristics.” Prosecutor v. Akayesu, ICTR-96-4-T, Trial Judgment, 2 September 1998, § 688:

[End notes for textbox] xii- xiii- xiv

Only one of the women did not mention some form of sexual violence being inflicted or threatened upon her during detention.

(A) Force, Threat of Force, Fear, Duress, Psychological Oppression, Abuse of Power and Detention were all coercive factors used to commit acts of a sexual nature.

In addition to being in detention and under the control of their captors, all described a violent, terrifying environment in which they were at the mercy of the whims and brutality of their jailers. Most of the women were blindfolded and/or their hands tied before and during interrogations. Some spoke of multiple men being present during interrogation sessions. Hayah mentioned extortion, promises of family visits and calls, or threats of prolonged detention or violence. All of the women spoke of great fear, which haunted them long after their release.



The Crimes against These Women amount to Crimes against Humanity

(B) Acts of a Sexual Nature

Three women reported full naked body searches upon arrival at the detention centre (Zahira, Rima and Hayah). «Amina», who was pregnant at the time, was exposed in a partially naked strip search in front of the Head of Branch, during which she also had her breasts grabbed. «Janan» was threatened with being stripped naked in front of all the guards while being tortured. Forced nudity, sexual insults and harassment also followed the women down corridors, into bathrooms and in their cells, upon the demand, threat or extortion of guards (Hayah), or as part of violent sexual assaults and rape (Ayda, Zahira).

As described above, «Ayda» had cigarettes burned into her breasts. Two others were threatened with rape. «Munira» was terrified when her interrogator ordered his subordinates to “Take her downstairs and let the men ride her.” «Rima» was also threatened with rape, and that her daughter would be brought and raped in front of her. Within hours of detention, «Zahira» had been molested during a strip search and then tied to a bed before being vaginally and orally gang-raped by five men.

Over 15 days at al Mezzeh Military Airport, she was raped and sexually assaulted on at least three other occasions. During one brutal interrogation, she was stripped naked and penetrated “in every body cavity”, including her anus. Her attacker filmed what he did and threatened to show it to people in her community. On her release, she endured curettage (“to clean her uterus” which suggests she may have been pregnant), and four months of surgeries and treatment to repair the damage which had caused faecal-urinary incontinence.

«Ayda» had her hands tied and was subjected to a brutal rape under a picture of Bashar Al-Assad in the Office of the Head of the Republican Guards in Aleppo. Her clothes were torn from her. She was raped vaginally causing severe pain and bleeding. When he was finished, the man spat on her, called her a terrorist and left her naked on the floor to be found by soldiers. She spent seven days in hospital being treated for the physical damage.

«Ayda» was also forced, with the 20 other women in her cell, to watch a group of young male detainees be stripped naked, tortured and have bottles forced into their anuses. A woman in Ayda’s cell recognised one of the victims as her son, and had a heart attack.

The sexual violence which these women had to endure correlates with the reports of sexual violence against men and women in Assad prisons across Syria.^{xv}



The Crimes against These Women amount to Crimes against Humanity

It also accords with the prevalence and patterns noted by LDHR across its documented cases. In 121 reviewed LDHR expert reports (both male and female survivors):

- at least 12 survivors disclosed anal, oral or vaginal rape;
- at least 21 survivors disclosed genital mutilation, beating, burning or electrocution;
- at least 17 were forced to witness rape and other sexual violence inflicted on others;
- at least 23 were threatened with rape or that their family members would be; and
- at least 103 were subjected to other forms of sexual assault including forced nudity.

IV. Additional Cruel, Inhuman and Degrading Treatment

Elements

Article 16 of the Convention against Torture prohibits 'other acts of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment which do not amount to torture under Article 1'. Neither the intentional infliction or the purpose elements of torture are required. There is a close connection between cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment and the conditions in which detainees are held. Reference is made to the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners.

Examples from case law include:

- Extremely poor conditions of detention including, for example, overcrowding, lack of sanitation, lack of access to medical treatment, inadequate ventilation, excess light or darkness, etc.
- Forced breach of religious or cultural prohibitions or taboos such as dietary codes.
- Sensory manipulation methods, such as hooding (sensory deprivation) and constant noise (sensory bombardment). Prolonged solitary confinement, particularly if combined with incommunicado detention.
- Painful means of restraint as punishment - for example chains, irons, shackles.
- Threats against the victim or family.

Degrading treatment means "fear, anxiety, and inferiority induced for the purpose of humiliating and degrading the victim and breaking his physical and moral resistance".

[End notes for textbox] xvi

(a) Inhuman Living Conditions

The women describe squalid, subhuman conditions of detention. What they narrate stands in stark and shocking contrast to the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners ("UNSMR").

For the women not facing solitary confinement, they were held in small cells crammed with other detainees. For example, in Branch 215, there were 45 women packed into one cell. In the Political Security Branch in Latakia, 18 women huddled in a 2m x 2m cell. Ayda shared a cell with 20 other women. It was so overcrowded that none of the women could sit or lie down. The UNSMR require one person per cell overnight, with clean separate bedding for each.^{xvii}



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Almost all of the women recounted a lack of light and air. Most cells had no windows, and little or no ventilation. There was neither heat in the winter, nor fresh air in the summer. «Munira» was held four floors underground. For «Manar», the lights in her cell were left on 24 hours a day. The UNSMR require adequate air, space, heating, lighting and ventilation for the health of the prisoners. It also requires sufficient natural light to be able to read.^{xviii}

In these overcrowded dank places, disease and insects thrived. Three of the women described the prevalence and spread of lice among the detainees (Amina, Manar and Ayda). Two spoke of scabies, and two others of insects or cockroaches infesting the cell. «Janan» was confined with three others in a 1m x 2m cell.

It was so dark all the time, they could not tell day from night. The cell was dank, mouldy and smelled of blood. There were only dirty blankets filled with lice and lice eggs. The cell was also crawling with small insects which stung them, leaving painful, itchy lesions. The women clawed at their skin because of the itch.



«Amina» had typhoid when she was released – usually contracted from contaminated food or water infected by faeces or urine carrying the disease. She was pregnant. «Zahira» was diagnosed with pneumonia, hepatitis and anaemia. UNSMR requires detention living areas to be kept scrupulously clean at all times, with clean water and toiletries provided for detainees to keep healthy and clean. Detainees should be allowed to bathe as often as necessary for hygiene and health.^{xix}



The Crimes against These Women amount to Crimes against Humanity

Toilets

In two places, the toilets were holes in the corner of the cell. This included the 2m x 2m cell with 18 women crammed inside (mentioned above). In the other places, access to a toilet was severely restricted to specific times of the day: every six hours, three times a day or even less. All women spoke of being given very little time in the toilet, and some being insulted, kicked or sexually harassed in the bathrooms. Ayda said that women ended up urinating on themselves while in the cells.

«Janan» recalled that they were allowed only 30 seconds in the toilet three times a day. After 30 seconds, they would be pulled out and beaten. One jailer would beat her with a stick while she was inside the toilet. The 15 year old girl in «Janan»'s cell got sick and had severe diarrhoea. Despite crying and begging to be allowed to the toilet, she was left to defecate on herself in the cell. UNSMR provides for access to a toilet whenever necessary, and in conditions which are clean and decent.^{xx}

For all women, there was a lack of privacy, particularly around the use of the bathrooms. A few also talked of cameras filming constantly in the corridors, cells and interrogation rooms (Rima, Manar and Ayda).

Food and Water

All of the women lost weight during detention, some as much as 10 to 14 kilograms. «Amina» said that upon release, she and her husband did not recognise each other because of the weight loss they both suffered during their simultaneous detention. She was pregnant at the time. Most described little and bad food. UNSMR mandates nutritionally adequate and regular food and water whenever needed.^{xxi}

Medical care

Four of the women received some form of medical attention during their detention. «Amina» was allowed to keep taking aspirin during detention which she needed for a pre-existing heart condition. «Manar» was given a sedative injection to manage her fear, anxiety and crying when she was first put in the cell. «Ayda» spent seven days in hospital following her violent rape, but was taken back to detention against the doctor's advice.

«Janan» spent three days with her hands and legs tied to a hospital bed after she suffered vaginal bleeding, urinary infections and blood in her urine (from beatings, lack of fluid and not being allowed to the toilet). The others did not receive any medical attention or visits. UNSMR require a comprehensive system of medical examination, protection and care. All were so woe-fully absent in these detention centres that the prison doctors stand as complicit in the torture and cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment that these women suffered.^{xxii}



The Crimes against These Women amount to Crimes against Humanity

(b) Additional Cruel Treatment Meted Out

In addition to the appalling physical conditions of detention, other cruel and inhuman rules and restrictions were also applied.

All of the women spoke of being blindfolded at different times during their detention. Six also had their hands tied or handcuffed. «Munira»'s name was called at midnight on her fourth day in detention. She was handcuffed, blindfolded and her legs bound together. Guards dragged her to the interrogation room. The use of excessive restraints, without any indication of justification or need, is cruel and unnecessary.^{xxiii}

When «Janan» asked for some of her hair to be cut off to relieve the intolerable itch from lice and scabies, a female jailer cut off all her hair right to the root. She begged her to stop and leave some hair so it would not scare her children when she was released. Her hair grew back white.

In addition, several of the women spoke of being forced to act against their religion. «Amina» said that the women 'who were accused of something' were not allowed to pray. «Hayah» and «Munira» had their hijabs removed.

(c) Solitary Confinement

Three of the women, «Zahira», «Hayah» and «Ayda» endured solitary confinement.

«Ayda» was placed in a solitary confinement cell for over a month as punishment for arguing with an informant in her cell. The cell was dark, without any ventilation. She was unable to see anything around her. There was a constant drip of water from the toilet. It was freezing, so she felt around in the dark to see if there was a blanket. She put her hand upon a blanket, but realised quickly it was lying over a dead body. She screamed and cried. No one answered. «Ayda» remained in the dark with the dead body for six more days before the guards removed it. During this time, she also found a small razor which had been left in the cell (she was told later this was deliberate). She used it to try to kill herself. She remained in solitary confinement for one month.

The United Nations Special Rapporteur on Torture has found that prolonged solitary confinement of over 15 days or solitary confinement used as punishment amounts to torture.^{xxiv} There is no doubt, that in «Ayda»'s case, her solitary confinement was deliberately intended to cause devastating psychological damage.



The Lasting Impact on These Women

Evidence of the impact of crimes is usually not an element to be proven in court. The exceptions are crimes which include “severe pain and suffering” or “of comparable gravity”, or courts with jurisdictional gravity thresholds. However, to understand many crimes, particularly those employed to terrorise or suppress civilians, it is vital to consider and evidence impact, not just on individual victims but also on their families, communities and groups. In this case, mass detention and the crimes committed against detainees can clearly be seen as part of a government policy to terrorise and break any citizens, communities and groups which dare to oppose them and seek change.

In addition, LDHR’s Expert Medical Evaluations assess medical findings, be they physical or psychological, as evidence for a court of what has happened to these survivors.

(a) Immediate physical injuries, chronic damage and scars remaining

Much of the blood, acute pain and bruises have disappeared by now. Most of these women have been out of detention for some time. During detention or upon their release, they reported immediate physical injuries and impact. «Zahira» stayed in hospital for four months on her release, for curettage and reparative surgeries for damage done during her multiple rapes. She also needed treatment for pneumonia, anaemia and hepatitis. «Ayda» spent seven days in hospital following her violent rape, being treated for urinary and vaginal bleeding. «Janan» had vaginal bleeding, blood in the urine and urinary tract infections.

She also had tears across her legs and feet, severe swelling in her feet, which had turned red, blue and black. «Munira» had pain and swelling in her feet. «Rima» had her shoulder dislocated, and was bruised. Half of the women reported migranes or bad headaches (Zahira, Janan, Rima and Manar). «Amina», «Manar», «Janan» and «Ayda» had lice, scabies or insect bites. Hayah was suffering from constipation and acute abdominal pains. Many suffered acute weight loss, «Amina» and «Hayah» between 10 to 14 kilograms.

LDHR’s medical experts also found physical scars remaining on these women – their terrible stories indelibly written into their skin. «Ayda» bears linear, parallel scars across her back, highly consistent with repeated lashes with a cable. Her leg is dented with a 15cm oval scar, highly consistent with a letter opener being driven into it. She has a small circular 15mm scar on her left breast, hyper-pigmented with uneven edges, consistent with a cigarette burn. She has small linear scars on each hand, consistent with fingernails gouging into her hands as she struggled against her attacker. «Ayda» also has a thin linear scar on the internal face of her left wrist, consistent with her attempted suicide while in solitary confinement.



The Lasting Impact on These Women

For the others, they still suffer shoulder pain, weakness in left hand (Hayah), muscle weakness down the left side of their body, pain in their neck (slipped disc) (Munira), pain across their back (Manar), heightened degenerative knee pain (Hayah) and scars on their legs (Rima and Janan) consistent with kicks from military boots or beating with cables.

(b) Profound and Lasting Psychological and Social Consequences

Whatever the physical marks left, the most significant and longest lasting impact on these women has been psychologically and socially.

The atmosphere and conditions of detention - the violence and fear which pervaded every moment and place – struck terror into these women. All, without exception, spoke of debilitating, overwhelming fear throughout detention. «Manar» was given a sedative within hours of being detained because she was trembling and crying so much. «Janan» described episodes where she would suddenly start screaming and crying uncontrollably, banging on the door and then hitting her head against the door. Sometimes until she lost consciousness. Two of the women spoke of attempts to commit suicide while they were detained (Rima and Ayda).

That terror has stayed with them, and continues to this day. All of these women remain extremely fearful and anxious. This fear has manifested different ways:

«Amina»'s irritable bowel syndrome, «Hayah»'s stomach ulcers and arterial hypertension, Manar's colon problems, and her chest and back pain brought on when she thinks of detention, and «Rima»'s loss of hair and multiple nervous breakdowns.

All of the women report strong reactions to reminders of detention. Some suffer shortness of breath, trembling hands and sweating. «Zahira» experiences palpitations, accelerated breathing and cries for hours.

«Rima» has needed sedatives to manage the physiological reactions. Ayda has difficulty breathing and anxiety at the sound of locking doors. «Munira» reacts to closing doors, reminding her of the threat made, "take her and let the men ride her". «Manar» startles at a door opening. For «Janan», the sight of boiled potatoes (the food in detention) makes her sob deeply. Four of the women remain extremely fearful of re-arrest. The women also fear of many different things, like police, strangers, men and loud noises. «Amina» and «Zahira» still startle easily, and «Rima» remains hypervigilant.



The Lasting Impact on These Women

All of the women have intrusive thoughts and flashbacks, when thoughts of detention invade their consciousness and play-back images or videos in their mind. For «Amina», it is “the screams of men and the sounds of torture instruments” that will not leave her. Nor the forced physical search and sexual violence upon arrival at the detention centre. Black jackets trigger images of «Ayda»’s rape. The sound of water drops takes her straight back into solitary confinement. «Janan» says the voice and face of her interrogator, his torture tools and the cell walls follow her everywhere, and chase her in her dreams. Memories are also triggered for her by colours (the grey colour of blankets, the green cell walls), and sounds (of electric generators). Almost all the women have difficulty sleeping. Six still have recurrent nightmares of detention. Janan is scared to sleep alone. She often wakes up screaming, having dreamed of detention.

Without exception, all of the women have become withdrawn. Isolating themselves at home, away from the community, and from friends and relatives. «Janan» says she changed from “a strong person who loved life to weak isolated one with no desire to see or deal with anyone.” Half of the women say they blame their husbands for failing to protect them, giving up on them or for not leaving Syria earlier. They recognise the damage to their marriage and their relationship with their family and children. «Amina» and «Manar» talked about their difficulties now looking after their children.

The women have also been stung by a negative attitude in the community towards them. «Amina» and «Janan» say that people look at them in shame. «Ayda» also found that people look at her in accusatory way. She felt like she had been rejected by her community, and that ‘the closest people gave up on her. Husband left and married someone else.’

Some of the women blame themselves or feel shame or contempt for themselves because of what had happened in detention. Many reported a lack of energy and hopelessness. «Rima» experiences profound sadness, leaving her crying all the time, sleeping a lot and with a constant feeling of desperation and incapacity.



Conclusions

The stories of these eight brave women are hard to hear. They were subjected to brutal inhuman torture and sexual violence which has left them isolated and broken. In some ways, they were treated no differently from men – the notorious methods of beating, whipping, electrocution, falanga, shabeh, dulab, the Flying Carpet, the Chair were used on these women, just as they have been against men. The appalling conditions of detention applied equally to women, without any regard to their differing health and personal needs, even for «Amina» who was pregnant. Yet, some of these women were only detained because their male relatives were suspected of helping the opposition. Against a background of forced nudity on arrival and the spectre of sexual harassment and insults in their cells, in bathrooms and in corridors, the women's bodies were not their own. Officers and guards alike tore off clothes, grabbed at breasts, burned cigarettes into breasts, threatened rape, threatened to rape daughters, forced the women to watch the torture and rape of naked men, and for «Ayda» and «Zahira», raped them and left them needing hospital care for the physical damage done to their bodies.

Upon release, the psychological damage from the violence and terror is compounded by communities and families which reject these women. Their nightmare continues.

Appendix: The Women's Stories

The following are short summaries of each of the women's cases. The full medical reports are available to serve as expert evidence in any criminal trial which will ensure international fair trial standards.

“Zahira”: Five months in detention, which started with 15 days of relentless brutal sexual violence including gang rape for which she needed four months of reparative surgeries and treatment

«Zahira» was 45 years old when she was arrested in 2013 from her work place in the suburbs of Damascus. She was detained in multiple locations for approximately six months, including Al Mezzeh Military Airport (15 days), the Palestine Branch (Branch 235)(three months 22 days), a centre in Rukheddeen neighbourhood (one month), another in Kafr Sousa district (one month) and Adra Prison.

During 15 days at Al Mezzeh Military Airport, «Zahira» was subjected to multiple rapes, threats of rape and sexual violence. Immediately upon arrival, she was stripped searched, before being taken to another location where she was tied to a bed and gang-raped orally and vaginally by five men. She was later threatened to be raped in front of her husband, who was also detained at Al Mezzeh airport. During one interrogation session, having been beaten and asked to confess, she was then stripped naked and sexually penetrated in “every body cavity”. Her interrogator filmed this and threatened to show the people in her community.

In addition to the brutal sexual violence, she was also electrocuted on her leg and through her head, beaten with a green plastic water hose (“Al-Akdar Al-Ibrahimi”), shackled by the abdomen to male detainees including her husband and beaten, and hit in the face. She was tied to a board and her feet beaten, again with the green hose. She was also tied to an iron chair, turned upside down and her back bent. Again all throughout, she was beaten, insulted and told to confess. Between interrogations, «Zahira» was held in a 1m x 1m solitary confinement cell, without fresh air or light. She was even sexually assaulted as she was taken from Al Mezzeh airport, a soldier grabbed her breasts.

In the Palestine Branch, she was kept in a cell which was about 3m x 4m, with around 48 other women. The women had to sleep in shifts, and on their sides. They were allowed to the toilet once every 12 hours, and to the showers/washroom once every 40 days. Throughout her time there, «Zahira» had a fever and headaches. She was finally released from Adra as her health had declined so severely that she lost consciousness and they thought she had died. She had hepatitis, pneumonia and anemia. She had a blood transfusion and curettage to “clean out her uterus”. She stayed in hospital for four months for multiple surgeries to correct faecal-urinary incontinence resulting from the multiple rapes.



“Amina”: detained for three months whilst pregnant, she saw the dead bodies of men get dragged around by jailers and men hanging from the walls, screaming

«Amina» is a 30-year-old woman, married and with four children. She was arrested because the government suspected her husband of delivering medicine to opposition forces. She was pregnant

at the time. She was arrested in her home and escorted to 'Branch 215' (Raids Branch) in Damascus. Her children were left alone in the house, and during her detention, they were evicted.

Upon entering the branch, the Head of the Branch searched her, forcing partial nudity and touching her breasts. She was detained with 45 women in a small cell which with no light. She slept on the floor with a blanket. They all suffered from scabies and lice. She lost so much weight over her three months in detention that her husband could hardly recognize her when she was released. She was interrogated four times, and threatened with electrocution, knowing that she was pregnant and had a heart condition. She was told the reason for her arrest was for her to confess and inform against her husband and brother-in-law. She was insulted and accused of adultery. They forced her to fingerprint a document that she had not read.

During her detention, she saw men hanging from the walls and heard their screams of pain. She also saw blood in the corridors and witnessed guards dragging dead bodies around with no respect for the dead.

Upon release, «Amina» had typhoid fever. The detention has had a significant impact on her psychologically. She stays home alone, isolating herself from others. She has nightmares and cannot sleep. Memories from detention invade her thoughts – the screams of men, the sounds of torture instruments and the forced physical search during which she was sexually assaulted. «Amina» feels fear and shame. She has developed irritable bowel syndrome, and startles easily at noise. She is scared of strangers, and believes that the society looks at her differently - with a glance of shame because of her arrest. She secretly blames her husband for not leaving Syria earlier. She knows it has affected their relationship. «Amina» also struggles to take care of her children, due to concentration issues and her psychological state.



“Rima”: Detained for three months, she was beaten and kicked and threatened with rape and the rape of her daughter

«Rima» is in her forties. At the start of the conflict, she used to help the injured and work on documenting detainees' files. She was arrested at one of the military checkpoints of the Fourth Division of the Syrian Army in Damascus while travelling home one day. She was locked in a room there for 10 hours before being taken, blindfolded, to a centre belonging to the Fourth Division. On arrival, she was sworn at and insulted. They confiscated all her personal belongings. «Rima» had all her clothes taken off during a strip search. She was held for three months in an overcrowded cell with a small hole in the corner as a toilet. There was no window, and only a few holes in the ceiling for air.

A few days later, «Rima» was taken for interrogation. Her hands were tied behind her back and she was blindfolded. She was beaten all over her body, and kicked with military boots. She was threatened with rape and that they would bring her daughter and rape her in front of «Rima». She was forced into sitting positions, and whipped on her shoulder and hands with a thick cable. The force used caused her shoulder to dislocate. She was also left in a square, threatened with attack by a dog. The interrogations lasted 2 weeks. She was accused of financing terrorist activities, but never appeared before a court and was released on 'Presidential pardon' after three months.

«Rima» has been left with scars on her legs from the military boots. Again the psychological impact has been severe. She has suffered hair loss, loss of appetite, anxiety and tension. She gets short of breath, finds her hands trembling and that she is sweating. She has needed sedatives to calm the fear and nerves. She suffers nightmares and flashbacks, intruding on her waking and sleeping hours. «Rima» is now withdrawn and sleeps a lot. She describes a deep constant sadness and she cries a lot of the time. She has feelings of desperation, and has had several nervous breakdowns. She mentioned attempting suicide whilst in detention. She blames herself for what has happened, but she also blames her husband. She shows clear signs of depression and PTSD.



«Manar»: A mother of five, detained at the border and terrorized by the torture of others at the Palestine Branch

«Manar» was 39 year-old when she was arrested by the Border Guards on the border crossing between Lebanon and Syria. Her five children were left to travel on their own while she was detained. She neither knew the reason for her arrest nor was she told her rights. On the second day, she was driven to the 'Palestine Branch' (Branch 235) in Damascus. During the whole journey, she was verbally abused with obscene and cruel insults, and ridiculed. The insults continued upon her arrival at the Branch.

«Manar» was detained in a small 3m x 3m cell with 12 other women. There was no ventilation or window. The conditions were so unclean that there was a lice infestation, making them all scratch and itch. The lights were kept on all the time. There was also a camera inside the room, which robbed them of any privacy. She was so afraid and worried for her children that she could not control her crying and trembling. A doctor came and gave her a sedative. She was constantly in an extreme state of fear. She "felt as if her life was over." At three set times a day, they could use the toilet, but they were given only two minutes before the door would be open, whether they had finished or not. «Manar» was pulled out for the bathroom, kicked and sworn at. The food was bad and too little for them: badly cooked bulgar or rice, sometimes potato.

«Manar» would hear the sound of men screaming and crying for help as they were tortured. This recurred every day from 17:00 until 23:00. She could see blood in the corridor and the green pipes they used to beat detainees. «Manar» saw women whose skin was torn apart from beatings. On her way to interrogation, she saw a column of male detainees in the yard. She said they were like skeletons in worn-out clothes with long beards. They were being beaten as they walked. She was cursed, sworn at and called names that she would not mention or repeat. She was told if she did not tell the interrogator everything she would be "taken downstairs and would leave as a dead body with a name tag on it". She was interrogated three times, each time blindfolded, and each time insulted and threatened. They wanted her to confess and inform against her brothers.

Twenty six days after she was arrested, «Manar» was brought, handcuffed, to the military court. In a room with a desk, her personal details were handed over. She was not seen by a judge. She was taken to a police station, and then to Adra prison, where she signed a document she had not read and was released.



In common with the other women, «Manar»'s detention has had a lasting psychological impact on her. In addition to the lice and acute weight loss, «Manar» remains severely anxious and afraid. When she remembers her detention, she gets back pain which that extends to her chest. She has gastric and colonic cramps. She is terrified of noise. When aircraft fly overhead, she screams hysterically and hits herself. She startles at opening doors. Initially, she had severe headaches, constant intrusive thoughts and was unable to sleep. She does not interact with people, keeping to herself instead. She describes having no energy and a sense of hopelessness. She feels guilty about what happened to her. It has affected her relationship with her husband, and she struggles to cope being around her children. She shows signs of PTSD and depression.

“Hayah”: held in solitary confinement for 22 days, she was sexually assaulted in her cell, her hijab forcibly removed and she was brutally beaten during interrogations

«Hayah» is 52 years old. She was at home, in Rif Damashq, with her 12 year old son and her 80 year old mother. The Military and Security forces surrounded the house. «Hayah» was punched in the face and arms, and insulted in front of her son. She was arrested without any judicial warrant and without being read her rights. She was blindfolded and handcuffed, and ended up in State Security Al-Khatib Branch (Branch 251) in Damascus. On arrival, she was stripped fully naked during a body search.

She was placed in a small cell, around 1.5m x 1m x 3m, on her own. There was only a small vent in the door. She was given little food. She was unable to eat even that. She was beaten because they thought she was on hunger strike. There were only specific times during the day when she was allowed to use the toilet, but she was insulted at the same time. «Hayah» was unable to defecate during her 22 days in detention. She left with severe constipation and abdominal pains.



After only two hours after her arrival, «Hayah» was taken to interrogation. She was asked to kneel and then was hit, kicked and punched all over her body. She was cursed and they forcibly removed her hijab. This sequence was repeated again the next day. On her third day of interrogation, they confronted her with documents of those who had confessed against her while beating and punching her. They forced her to sign a confession.

«Hayah» was also harassed in her cell. Guards would force her to undress and expose her breasts. While her breasts were exposed, the guards grabbed them through the bars. When «Hayah» asked to call her mother and son, the guards demanded that she expose her breasts again in exchange.

«Hayah» lost 10 kilograms in detention. She suffers from shoulder pain now, weakness in her left hand, and has developed degenerative knee pain that was not there before her detention and beatings. The psychological impact on «Hayah» has been severe. She is extremely anxious, trembling all over her body, feeling intense fear and sweating. She has stomach ulcers and arterial hypertension, all since leaving detention. She is afflicted by nightmares, insomnia, fear of arrest and intrusive thoughts like videos of her detention replaying in her head. She startles and begins to tremble at loud noises. She is withdrawn, and has decreased appetite and energy. She feels guilty about what happened, and has a deep shame and self-contempt for the sexual violence she suffered. She has been prescribed anti-depressants by her doctor.

«Munira»: Detained for eight days, she was beaten, threatened with rape and forced to watch naked men be electrocuted and beaten.

«Munira» is 35 years old. In 2013, she was arrested at home in Rif Hama by Political Security and taken with her husband to the Political Security branch in Tartous. Her children were left alone in the house when they were taken. «Munira» had to "count on God" for their safety. Immediately upon arrival at the Branch, she witnessed naked, blindfolded men in the corridor being beaten with thick wires and electrocuted. The guards were also shouting at them and insulting them. "You die in a second upon entry". She was separated from her husband, and searched. They took off her robe and hijab. She was insulted and threatened with violence. She was then blindfolded and led four floors underground.

She was held in a cell which was approximately 2m x 2m with 18 women crammed inside. There was no light or air. The toilet was in the corner of the same cell. On the fourth day, her name was called for interrogation. They handcuffed her, blindfolded her and bound her feet together. She was dragged to the interrogation room. She was accused of trying to smuggle her friend's son away to avoid conscription. She was slapped and thrown to the floor. Her interrogator beat her all over her body, especially on the left side of her shoulders and neck with a braided thick wire. She was insulted. They hung her upside down. They threatened to electrocute her. She fainted from the beating and lack of food. Her interrogator ordered his subordinates to "take her and let the men ride her". On the fifth day, she was interrogated and beaten again. On the 8th day, she signed a confession and was released.

«Munira» lost 14 kilograms in detention. Upon release, she had pain and severe swelling in her left foot, and sinusitis. She still suffers from neck pain and pain in her left foot. She also has muscle weakness and lack of muscle tone on the left hand side of her body. Initially «Munira» cried a lot and could not sleep. She is afraid of closed doors, as it reminds her of the threat of sexual violence made against her. She remains scared of police, even though she now lives in Turkey. She thinks they will arrest her and take her back to that detention. «Munira» has become withdrawn and quiet. She cannot find joy in anything, and only gets comfort from reading the Quran. She was prescribed anti-depressants, sleeping pills and nerve relaxants by her doctor. She saw a psychiatrist for three months. She still feels an unjustified hatred towards her husband.



«Ayda»: Shortly after her arrest, she was brutally raped, then endured three months of inhuman torture, including one month interred in a pitch black solitary confinement cell with a dead body, where she tried to commit suicide

«Ayda» was 34 years old when she was arrested at a Republican Guard check-point in Aleppo. She was taken to a Republic Guard building where her face and eyes were severely beaten when she arrived. In the office of the Head of Branch, under a picture of Assad, she had her hands tied and was raped vaginally. Her attacker left her naked on the floor, spat on her and called her a 'terrorist'. She was taken to Aleppo University Hospital where she remained for seven days to treat the uterine and vaginal bleeding. After 7 days, against medical advice, she was taken to the Political Security Branch in Aleppo.

«Ayda» was held in a cell which was so overcrowded that the women could not sit or lay down. It was infested with cockroaches and insects. All the women were plagued by lice. They were only allowed to use the toilet once every six hours. Many of the women urinated on themselves. The guards would bring a group of young male detainees, strip them naked in front of the women and torture them. The men would be insulted and cursed. The guards forced bottles up their anuses. A woman in the cell recognized her son as one of the victims, and had a heart attack.

«Ayda» was subjected to repeated and brutal interrogations. She was hit on the head with a sharp object, and they poured water on her to wake her up again. They hung her from the ceiling from her hands which were bound by plastic wire. Her feet dangled 10cm from the floor. There were other women also suspended, as well as naked men – hanging facing the women. «Ayda» was hung like this for an hour, then released, but hung back up again. This sequence was repeated 4 times. She was also put onto the 'flying carpet' twice, electrocuted through her ears, and cigarettes were stubbed out on her hands and breasts. She was stabbed in the leg with a letter opener and the interrogator threatened to pull her nails out.



For one month of her detention, she was held in a dark, dank solitary confinement cell. When she reached out to see if there was a blanket, she found a dead body in the cell with her. She started screaming and crying for it to be removed, but the body was left there for six more days. She also found a razor blade which had been left deliberately. She used it to try to commit suicide.

«Ayda»'s body bears scars from her torture and rape. Her back has parallel scars highly consistent with whipping. She has a cigarette burn on her left breast. She also has scars on her hands from her attackers' nails and an indented scar on her leg from the letter opener. On the inside of her left wrist, there is a thin line where she cut herself with the razor whilst in solitary confinement.

«Ayda» has to face the consequences of her detention every day. Her husband and family rejected her. In her community they look at her in an accusatory and negative way. She experiences severe fear, particular in response to men and black suits. Water drops remind her of solitary confinement, and she has breathing difficulties and anxiety upon hearing a door lock. She has nightmares of her rape and wakes up terrified. She has decreased sleep, energy, appetite and concentration. She blames her husband and uncles for "giving up on her while she was in detention".



«Janan»: 11 months detained, she was subjected to repeated falanga and confined to a dark insect-infested cell for 5 months.

«Janan» was stopped at a military checkpoint in Aleppo with her children. They let her children go, but Janan was detained at the Aleppo State Security Branch for 11 months. For the first six months, she was confined to a dark, tiny (approx. 1m x 2m), insect-infested cell with a 15 year old girl. They were allowed out for just three toilet breaks each day, but each for only 30 seconds before they were dragged out and beaten. From there they could hear the sounds of interrogation, of men and women begging for torture to stop.

«Janan» was subjected to repeated violent interrogation sessions. On seven separate occasions, she was forced to extend her legs in the air while her legs and feet were lashed with the broken end of a stick and with braided cables. Her interrogator made her count the strikes. She counted over one hundred on the first occasion. During one session, she lost consciousness and urinated on herself. By the last sessions, she was begging for it to stop. She said she was so desperate she would have given up her children.

«Janan» was threatened with the Flying Carpet (a wooden plank to which the detainee is attached and then bent backwards, before being beaten), "Dulab" (the tyre into which detainees are forced and again beaten) and with forced nudity in front of guards. Her interrogators also threatened to bring her son and torture him in front of her. After being beaten, «Janan» was unable to stand because of the unbearable pain. Her legs were torn and bleeding, her feet red, blue and blackened by the damage.

Because of the violence and conditions of detention, «Janan» suffered from vaginal bleeding, urinary tract infections and blood in her urine. She was taken to Aleppo Military hospital, where her hands and feet were tied to the bed for three days before being returned to her cell. Her legs show scars and an oedema, consistent with lashings with a braided cable.

The psychological damage to «Janan» has been profound. During detention, she would have episodes where she would cry and scream uncontrollably. She would bang the door and hit her head against it. She knocked herself out. Upon her release, she has become withdrawn and plagued with memories and nightmares of detention. Janan is scared to sleep alone and to be in the dark, and she manages to get only a few hours of sleep each night. She often wakes up screaming. Many things trigger memories and tears: colours (grey for the colour of the lice-filled blanket, green for the cell walls), sounds (electricity generators), and even food. She cries deeply when she sees boiled potatoes because this was all she was fed in detention. She is unable to escape these memories and thoughts. As a result of her detention, she has been separated from her family. She feels shamed by her community's perception of her as a female detainee. She worries deeply that her family and children will reject her. Her only hope is to see her children again.



- i. United Nations Commission of Inquiry on Syria (2016) *Out of Sight, Out of Mind: Deaths in Detention in the Syrian Arab Republic*, UN Doc. A/HRC/31/CRP.1, §4.
- ii. The Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) has documented over 7,571 women who are still under arrest or forcibly disappeared by the Syrian government.
- iii. United Nations Commission of Inquiry on Syria (2016) *Out of Sight, Out of Mind: Deaths in Detention in the Syrian Arab Republic*, UN Doc. A/HRC/31/CRP.1, §22.
- iv. Amnesty International concluded in 2011 that there was sufficient evidence of scale and pattern of torture and death in detention to prove that Syrian authorities were committing crimes against humanity: Amnesty International (2011) *Deadly detention: Deaths in custody amid popular protest in Syria*; Amnesty International (2012) *'I wanted to die': Syria's torture survivors speak out*; Amnesty International (2016) *'It Breaks the Human': Torture, Disease and Death in Syrian Prisons*, §3.3.
- v. See e.g. Human Rights Watch (2012) *Torture Archipelago: Arbitrary Arrests, Torture and Enforced Disappearances in Syria's Underground Prisons Since March 2011*; Human Rights Watch (2013) *Syria: Detention and Abuse of Female Activists*; EMNHR (2015) *Detention of Women in Syria: A Weapon of War and Terror*; United Nations Commission of Inquiry on Syria (2016) *Out of Sight, Out of Mind: Deaths in Detention in the Syrian Arab Republic*, UN Doc. A/HRC/31/CRP.1; Amnesty International (2016) *'It Breaks the Human': Torture, Disease and Death in Syrian Prisons*; Amnesty International (2017), *Human Slaughterhouse: Mass Hangings And Extermination At Saydnaya Prison, Syria*; M. Forestier (2017) *"You Want Freedom? This is Your Freedom": Rape as a tactic of the Assad Regime*, LSE Centre for Women, Peace and Security.
- vi. Deliberation No. 9 concerning the definition and scope of arbitrary deprivation of liberty under customary international law: Report of the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, A/HRC/22/44, 24 December 2012.
- vii. Amnesty International Fair Trial Manual, Sections 1.2, 1.3.
- viii. Amnesty International Fair Trial Manual, Section 5.1 "promptly".
- ix. HRC Comment No.20 (1992) recommending a ban against incommunicado or secret detention. See also enforced disappearance.
- x. Convention against Torture, Article 1; Prosecutor v. Kunarac, Kovac and Vokovic, ICTY, Appeals Chamber Judgement, 12 June 2002, §142.
- xi. Prosecutor v. Kunarac, Kovac and Vokovic, ICTY Appeals Chamber Judgement, 12 June 2002, §§149-151.
- xii. Using ICC definitions which are reflective of customary international law.
- xiii. While the ICC does not list 'forced marriage', it is regarded as an underlying act of crimes against humanity. See Prosecutor v. Brima, Kamara & Kanu, Case No. SCSL-2004-16-A, Appeals Chamber Judgment, §.202 (Feb. 22, 2008).



xiv. Other forms of a comparable gravity: Prosecutor v. Akayesu, ICTR-96-4-T, Trial Judgment, 2 September 1998, § 688: "Sexual violence is not limited to a physical invasion of the human body and may include acts that do not involve penetration or physical contact. Sexual violence covers both physical and psychological attacks directed at a person's sexual characteristics."

xv. See e.g. EMNHR (2015) Detention of Women in Syria: A Weapon of War and Terror, p.20; Human Rights Watch (2013) Syria: Detention and Abuse of Female Activists, pp.3, 6-8; UN Commission of Inquiry (2016) Report UN Doc.A/HRC/33/55, §§105-108; UN Commission of Inquiry (2015) Report UN Doc.A/HRC/30/48, §§49-53, 90-95.

The United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners, known as the Mandela Rules: Updated 2015: UNGA Res 70/175, 17 December 2015. See e.g. Kalashnikov v. Russia (2002) ECHR (47095/99) §97; Trepashkin v. Russia, (2007) ECHR (36898/03), §§93-95; Masslotti and Baritussio v. Uruguay, Communication No. R.6/25, CCPR (1982), UN Doc. Supp. No. 40 (A/37/40) §187; Deidrick v. Jamaica, Communication No. 619/1995, CCPR (4 June 1998), U.N. Doc. CCPR/C/62/D/619/1995; Gomez de Voituret v. Uruguay, Communication No. 109/1981 (22 July 1983), CCPR (1984), U.N. Doc. Supp. No. 40 (A/39/40) §164; Keenan v. the United Kingdom, 27229/95 [2001] ECHR 242.

xvi. UNSMR Rules 12, 21.

xvii. UNSMR Rules 13-14.

xviii. UNSMR Rule 16-18.

xix. UNSMR Rule 15.

xxi. UNSMR Rule 22.

xxii. UNSMR Rules 24 – 35. A whole system of medical care is required including prenatal, and reporting on health conditions (food, hygiene, cleanliness, sanitation, temperature, lighting, ventilation, clothing and bedding), medical exams on arrival and as necessary. Doctors cannot engage in, even passively, torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment. Doctors have a duty to document and report any indication of ill treatment.

xxiii. UNSMR Rules 47-48.

xxiv. Interim Report of the Special Rapporteur of the Human Rights Council on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment (Solitary Confinement) UN Doc. A/66/268 11 August 2011. See also Loayza-Tamayo v. Peru, Inter-American Court of Human Rights, Series C, No. 33, §58 (1997); Cantoral-Benavides v. Peru, Inter-American Court of Human Rights, Series C, No. 69, paras. 62 and 104 (2000); UN Standard Minimum Rule for Treatment of Prisoners, Rules 38, 43 (no placement in a dark cell, no solitary confinement of more than 15 days), 45(2) (no solitary confinement for women or children).

