



## **Syria – Researched and compiled by the Refugee Documentation Centre of Ireland on 26 March 2013**

### **Information regarding the government targeting of family members of persons who have been arrested and tortured or who have been killed due to their opposition to the government.**

A report published by the Damascus Center for Human Rights Studies, in a section titled “Enforced disappearances, arbitrary arrests and detentions”, states:

“Over the past decades and in particular in the 1980's and 1990's, security bodies carried out waves of arrests, detaining hundreds of suspects and their relatives for long periods of time. Cases of enforced disappearances could last a few months, or several years. According to the information received, on occasion, some suspects were even unlawfully executed.” (Damascus Center for Human Rights Studies (2010) *Alternative Report to the Syrian Government's Initial Report on Measures taken to Fulfil its Commitments under the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment*, p.22)

In a section titled “Unexplained deaths under torture and deterrence of families to look for truth” this report states:

“The number of people who have died in Syria under torture is unknown, first and foremost due to the difficulty of accessing such information, but also because the security apparatus threatens the detainee's family, telling them they will meet the same fate if they speak of the torture.” (ibid, p.24)

A Human Rights Watch report on the arrest of the wives of detained suspected Islamists states:

“On July 31, State Security, one of Syria's numerous security agencies, seized Yusra al-Husayn at her house and took her into detention. She is the wife of Jihad Diab, a detainee at the US military base at Guantanamo Bay. Four days later, State Security detained Raw`a al-Kilani from her house. Raw`a is married to Ziad al-Kilani, who was detained by Syrian Air Force Intelligence in April 2004 and is currently facing trial before the Supreme State Security Court (SSSC), a special court that is exempt from standard rules of criminal procedure and evidence, on charges of membership in an association ‘created to change the economic or social structure of the state’ through terrorist acts. Ziad is currently detained in Sednaya prison. Around the time Raw`a was arrested, State Security also detained Bayan, the wife of Ahmad Saleh `Ali, from her house. Security services arrested Ahmad in June 2005.” (Human Rights Watch (17 August 2008) *Syria: Wives of Islamist Suspects Detained, Whereabouts Unknown*)

In an article published by the Institute for War & Peace Reporting an exiled opposition activist states:

“The Assad regime has a long history of targeting the families of opposition activists as a way of pressuring them to stop their activities, and this tactic has become even more crucial since the start of the uprising.” (Institute for War & Peace Reporting (9 September 2011) *Syria Activist Fears Family Targeted*)

The author of this article also states:

“There are a number of instances of family members being arrested and tortured in order to blackmail opposition activists, especially in places like Hama, where we believe children as young as a year old have been held hostage by security forces.” (ibid)

The 2013 Human Rights Watch report on Syria, in a section titled “Arbitrary Arrests, Enforced Disappearances, Torture, and Deaths in Custody”, states:

“In some instances activists reported that security forces detained their family members, including children, to pressure them to turn themselves in.” (Human Rights Watch (31 January 2013) *World Report 2013 – Syria*)

The 2012 US Department of State country report on Syria, in a section titled “Arbitrary Arrest”, states:

“In effect until April 19, the Emergency Law authorized the government to conduct preventive arrests and overrode constitutional and penal code provisions against arbitrary arrest and detention, including the need to obtain warrants. After the Emergency Law was technically lifted, security forces continued their previous practices and, in fact, arrested more individuals arbitrarily. There were also several reports that the security services would arrest relatives of a wanted person to pressure that individual to surrender. Warrants and court orders were rarely issued or presented before an arrest. Most detentions were made secretly at the order of one of the security branches. Arbitrary and false arrests were common, and detainees had no legal redress. Often the authorities cited no reasons for arresting civilians.” (US Department of State (24 May 2012) *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2011 – Syria*, p.8)

In a section titled “Arbitrary Interference with Privacy, Family, Home, or Correspondence” this report states:

“The government actively targeted and arbitrarily arrested the family members of government critics and human rights groups. On August 30, air force intelligence agents seized Yassin Ziadeh, the brother of exiled activist Radwan Ziadeh. Activists reported that the government targeted Yassin due to his brother’s criticisms of the regime. At year’s end Yassin continued to be held incommunicado at an unknown location and had not been charged. Composer Malek Jandali’s parents were killed in their home in Homs in retaliation for Jendali’s activities in the United States. There were unconfirmed reports that security personnel forced prisoners to watch relatives being tortured to extract confessions.” (ibid, pp.11-12)

An Amnesty International briefing document, in a section titled “From Shooting Peaceful Demonstrators to Air Bombardments and Ballistic Missiles Strikes Against Civilians”, states:

“As the conflict spread, Syrian armed forces and pro-government militias carried out destructive incursions in town and villages, where they extrajudicially executed captured opposition fighters, their relatives and other civilian residents, and burned and vandalized residents’ homes and businesses.” (Amnesty International (14 March 2013) *Syria: Government Bombs Rain on Civilians*, p.2)

A UN Human Rights Council report, in a section titled “Enforced disappearance” (paragraph 80), states:

“There were multiple reports of enforced disappearance committed by Government forces and affiliated militia. No information was provided to families who enquired about their relatives’ whereabouts. Relatives of some detainees who approached officials were themselves arrested, justifying a fear in others who might undertake similar enquiries.” (UN Human Rights Council (5 February 2013) *Report of the independent international commission of inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic*, p.14)

An Amnesty International urgent action alert on the arrest of a mother and her children states:

“Mahmoud Hamada, aged 10 and Osama Hamada, aged 8, were arrested from their home in Aqraba, in the suburbs of Damascus on 15 May 2012, along with their mother Malika al-Khateeb who is six months pregnant. Five other family members present in the house at the time were also arrested: they are the children’s grandfather Mahmoud Rida Hamada; grandmother Samiya al-Jad; uncle Mohamed Hamada; aunt Noor al-Habyan; and cousin Adam Hamada, aged 3. Following the arrests, several of the town’s elders went to ask for their release at the Air Force Intelligence branch in al-Mezzeh neighbourhood of Damascus, but were told the family would only be released if Malika al-Khateeb’s husband, Said Mahmoud Hamada, hands himself in to the authorities. Said Mahmoud Hamada is reportedly accused by the Syrian authorities of ‘belonging to a terrorist group’, and is currently in hiding.” (Amnesty International (1 June 2012) *Mother And Children Held Incommunicado*)

An urgent appeal from the World Organisation Against Torture on the arrest of a human rights activist states:

“The Observatory has been informed by reliable sources about the arbitrary arrest and incommunicado detention of Mr. Mazen Naji, a college student also known as Abu Hamza al-Shami, a member of the Syrian Network for Human Rights and an activist in the Syrian peace movement who has been monitoring human rights violations occurring within the country, as well as four of his relatives.” (World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT) (18 February 2013) *Syrian Arab Republic: Incommunicado detention of Mr. Mazen Naji*)

This appeal also states:

“The agents also put pressure on Mr. Naji's family members, trying to get them to make contact with other activists. Mr. Naji's father and sister Ms. Islam Naji were also arrested for questioning and have not since returned home. On January 21, 2013, Ms. Naji's husband and his father went to the security branch to find out what had happened to their relatives and have also not returned since then.” (ibid)

This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research and Information Unit within time constraints. This response is not and does not purport to be conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Please read in full all documents referred to.

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