

198 Individuals Died due to Torture in Syria in August 2018

Including 194 at the hands of
Syrian Regime Forces

SNHR

SYRIAN NETWORK FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

الشبكة السورية لحقوق الإنسان

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The Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR), founded in June 2011, is a non-governmental, independent group that is considered a primary source for the OHCHR on all death toll-related analyses in Syria.



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I. Introduction and Methodology

The international law completely prohibits torture and other forms of cruel, inhumane, or degrading treatment. This being a customary rule, states can't dismiss or undermine this rule in favor of other rights or values, even in times of emergency. Violating the prohibition of torture is an international crime according to the international criminal law as people who issued orders for torture, or failed to prevent its occurrence, are regarded criminally responsible for such practices. Nonetheless, torture is being practiced in Syria in a systematic manner to extremely brutal and sadistic degrees. Also, torture is practiced on sectarian and ethnic basis in many cases – especially inside the detention centers of Syrian regime forces who has been, and still is, the primary and main perpetrator of the crimes of torture. Syrian regime forces have been practicing arbitrary, random, concentrated arrests as a policy since the early days of the popular uprising for freedom in March 2011. We started recording deaths due to torture on a daily basis in parallel with arrests and enforced-disappearances. Syrian regime forces have practiced extremely brutal acts of torture for the purpose of retaliation, murder, and as a way to get rid of the ever-increasing detained opposition figures, and to submit and erode the popular uprising by terrorizing, degrading, and fragmentizing it. We have outlined the most notable methods of torture in an [extensive study](#) that was released in 2014.



Other parties have committed the crime of torture, even if to a lesser extent than the Syrian regime. However, we have recorded a notable increase, since 2015, in rates of deaths due to torture at the hands of other parties – particularly at the hands of ISIS, who managed to build multiple detention centers, and an apparatus specifically dedicated to arrest and torture in its areas of control, as well as Kurdish Self-Management forces, who practiced torture methods that were similar to the Syrian regime’s especially against detainees who are accused of being affiliates of factions from the armed opposition and their relatives while some of the acts of torture they committed were based on ethnic grounds. Even though forces from the armed opposition never practiced torture to an extent where it can be described as consistent acts of a large scope against civilians, we have monitored a rise in the rates of such practices as well as in deaths due to torture at detention centers for factions from armed opposition since November 2016.

All of those parties have failed to distinguish, in their crimes of killing by torture, between a child, a woman, or an elder, where we documented hundreds of cases where such individuals were killed in order to submit the people and intimidate them. Some of those parties tend to inform a victim’s family without delivering the dead body while Syrian regime forced victims’ families to sign papers that certify that the victim died due to health reasons that are not related to torture without even seeing the dead body.

Fadel Abdul Ghany, chairman of SNHR, says:

“The norm of ‘Responsibility to Protect’ must be implemented in light of the government’s failure to protect its people, and the fruitlessness of the diplomatic and peaceful efforts so far. Crimes against humanity and war crimes are being perpetrated every day in Syria and mainly at the hands of the organs of the state itself.”

August was the third month in a row in which new dead forcibly-disappeared persons, which were detained by the Syrian regime, came into light, as some families are still learning of the death of their beloved ones through Syrian regime’s civil registration offices when visiting those offices for some kind of civil paperwork, or through lists publicized by those offices that contained the names of forcibly-disappeared persons who died due to torture without specifying the cause and place of death. According to SNHR’s most recent [report](#), 836 cases have been documented, including nine children and one woman.



Methodology

The report outlines deaths due to torture at the hands of the main five parties (Syrian regime forces, extremist Islamic groups, Kurdish Self-Management forces, armed opposition factions, and group we couldn't identify) that we were able to document in August. Also, the report sheds light on the most notable of these cases.

This report draws upon the ongoing monitoring of news and developments by SNHR team, and on an extensive network of relations with various sources that have been built over the course of our work. When we receive information, or hear some news about a violation via the internet or media outlets, we work on following-up on this news and try to verify and collect evidences and data. As with other human rights groups, SNHR was not able to visit Syrian regime forces' detention centers due to the ban imposed on our members which was also the case for the detention centers that are affiliated to the rest of the parties to the conflict.

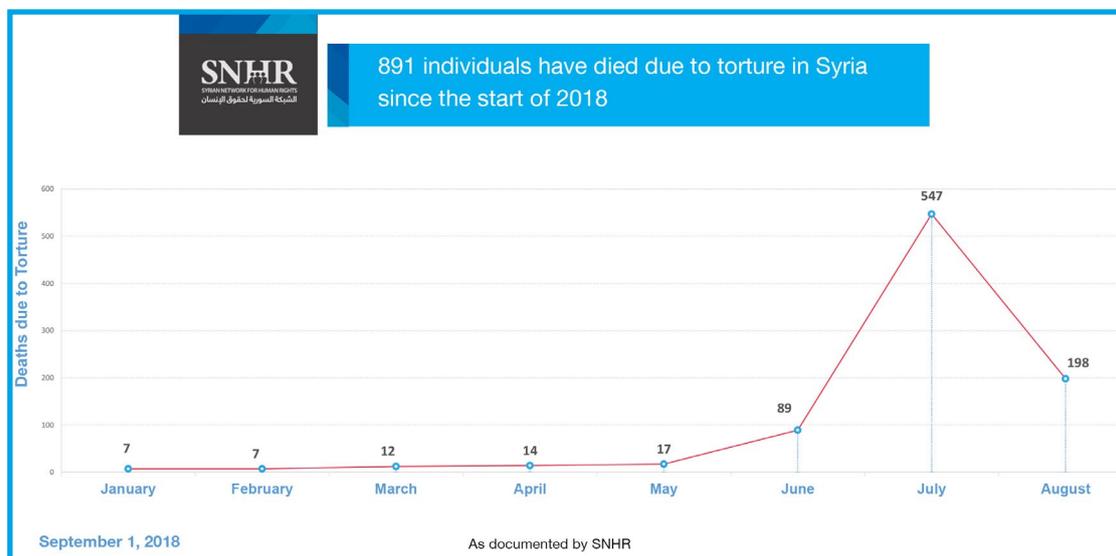
We obtain information on victims who died due to torture at Syrian regime's prisons by speaking to either former detainees, or victims' families and friends. Most of them get information about their detained relatives by bribing officials in charge. Conclusively confirming deaths remains subject to ongoing documentation and verification as cases of this nature remain open. In light of the serious difficulties we encounter in the process of documentation, what has been included in this report only represents the bare minimum of the actual violations that are being perpetrated.

Please see SNHR methodology for [documenting victims](#)

II. Executive Summary

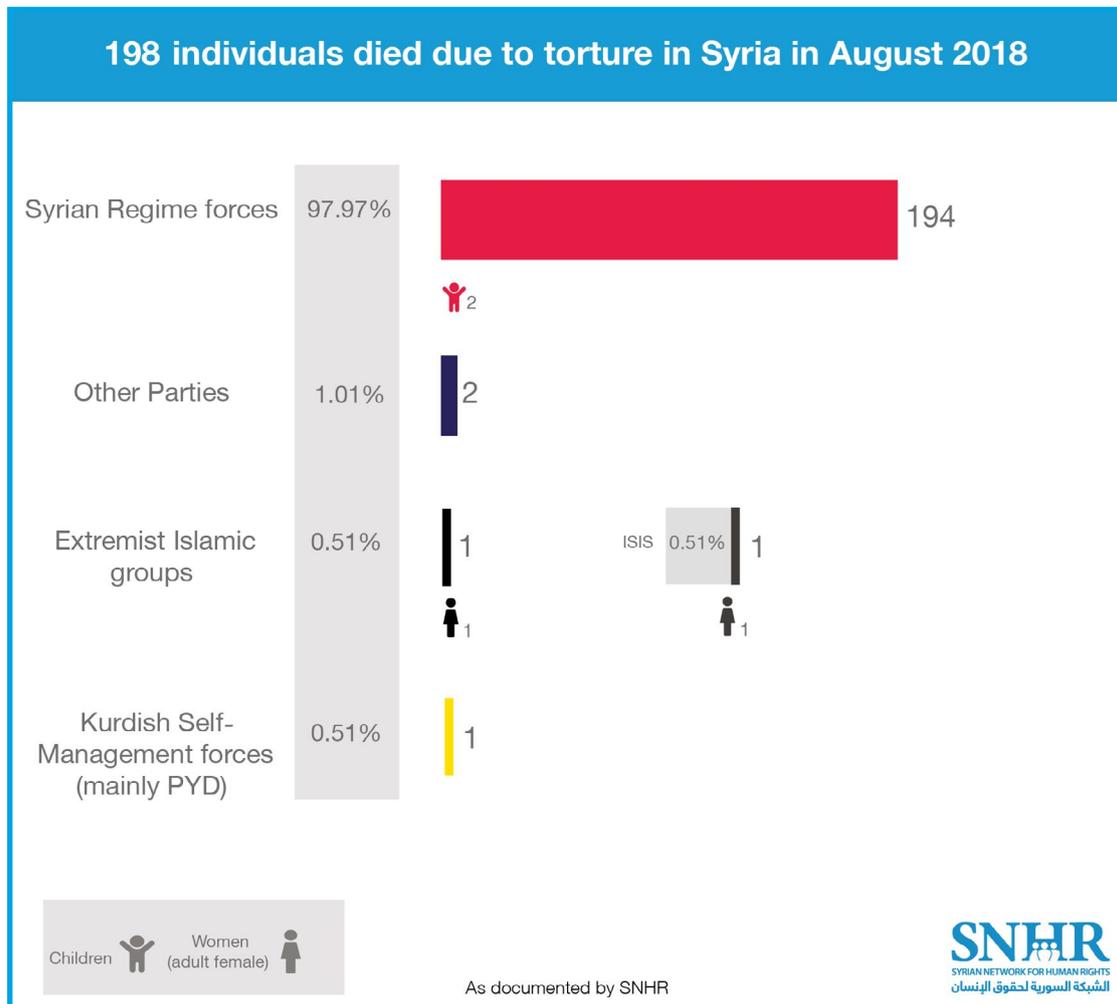
A. Deaths due to torture since the start of 2018

SNHR has documented 891 cases of death due to torture at the hands of the parties to the conflict inside the official and non-official detention centers between the start of 2018 and September of the same year. Death toll is distributed by month as follows:



B. Deaths due to torture in August 2018

SNHR has documented no less than 198 cases of death due to torture inside the official and non-official detention centers in August, as follows:



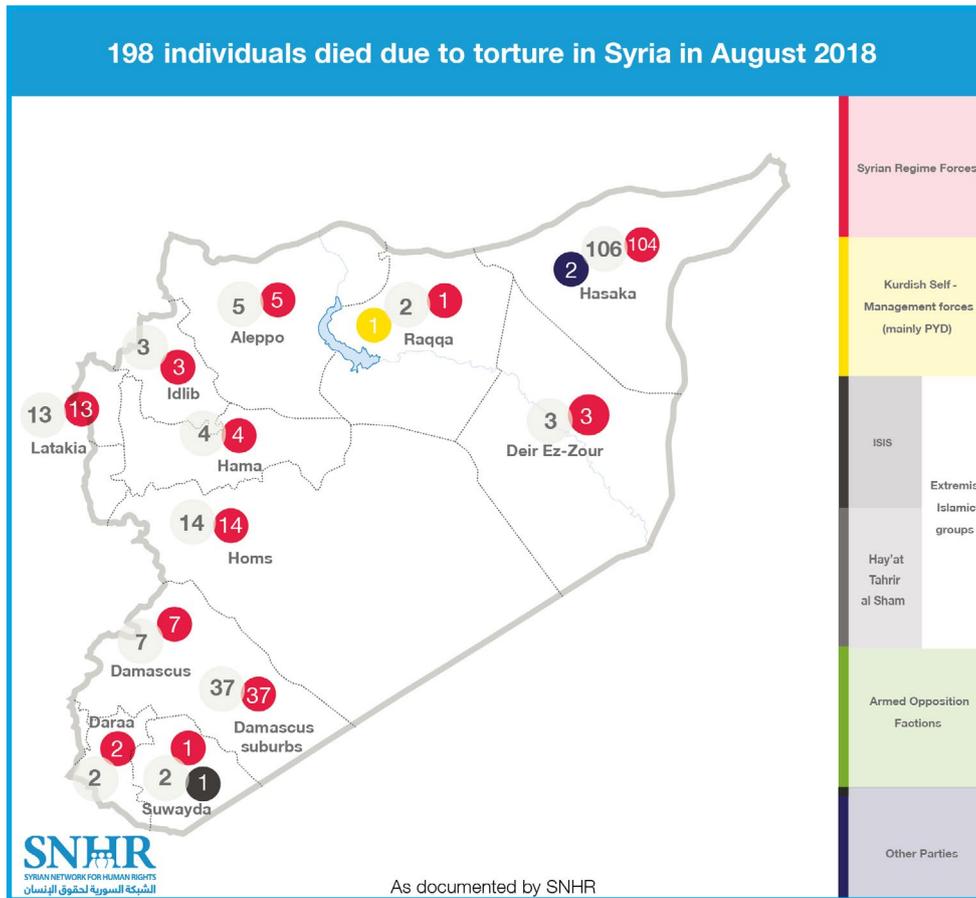
1. Syrian regime forces (army, security, and local militias): 194, including two children
2. Extremist Islamic groups: 1 woman
 - ISIS (self-proclaimed the Islamic State): 1 woman
3. Self-Management forces (primarily consisting of the Democratic Union Party – a branch for the Kurdistan Workers' Party): 1
4. Other parties: 2

Deaths due to torture have been going on since 2011. This is a very strong indicator of the systematic violence and excessive forces used with detainees.

Hasaka governorate recorded the highest number of deaths due to torture in August with 106 individuals.



Death toll is distributed across governorates as follows:



Most notable deaths due to torture in August are:

One doctor, one athlete, one teacher, two university students, one media worker, two children, one woman, and 13 cases of kinship

III. Most Notable Deaths due to Torture in August

Doctors

Abdul Ghafour Khiasi, anesthetist, a co-founder of al Zarzour Hospital in Aleppo city, from Kafr Nouran village, western suburbs of Aleppo governorate. On Wednesday, November 28, 2012, he was arrested by Syrian regime forces along with his brother Yousef on Damascus International Highway. On Tuesday, August 7, 2018, we received information that they were registered as dead in civil records. We suspect that they died due to torture.

Yousef, has a degree in Sharia and the former preacher “khatib” of al Ferdous neighborhood mosque and a Sharia teacher, born in 1963.



Abdul Ghafour Khiasi



Athletes

Mahmoud al Ali, was a footballer for al Jazira Football Club, from Ghwairan neighborhood, Hasaka city. On Wednesday, October 8, 2014, he was arrested by Syrian regime forces in Damascus city. On Wednesday, August 1, 2018, we received information that he was registered as dead in civil records. We suspect that he died due to torture.



Teachers

Mazen Dabbagh and his son Abdul Qader Patrick, they both hold a French nationality, from Damascus city. They were arrested by Syrian regime forces on Sunday, November 3, 2013, from Damascus city. On Wednesday, August 15, 2018, we received information that they are registered as dead in civil records. We suspect that they died due to torture.

Mazen, worked as senior educational consultant at Lycée Charlee de Gaulle School¹ in Damascus. His death date, according to civil records, is Tuesday, November 25, 2017, while Abdul Qader Patrick died on Sunday, December 21, 2014, according to civil records.



University students

Mohammad al Ahmar, an economics student, from Darayya city, western Damascus suburbs governorate, born in 1991. On Wednesday, May 9, 2012, he was arrested by Syrian regime forces from Darayya city. On Friday, August 17, 2018, we received information that his death certificate states that he died in 2013. We suspect that he died due to torture.



¹ The school is supervised by the France through its embassy in Damascus city



Children

Mahmoud Asaad al Haj, child, from al Zbari village, eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate, was 16-year-old when he was arrested. In March 2018, he was arrested by Syrian regime forces from al Zbari village. He was taken to one of their detention centers in Deir Ez-Zour city. He was released in July 2018. On Saturday, August 25, 2018, Mahmoud died due to the torture he was subjected to during his imprisonment.

Women

Zahiyya Fawwaz al Jba'ie, from al Shbeki village, eastern suburbs of Suwayda governorate, 60-year-old. On Wednesday, July 25, 2018, she was abducted by ISIS gunmen from al Shbeki village. On Tuesday, August 9, 2018, we received information that she died due to negligent health care at a detention center.



Cases of kinship

Saed Mohammad Naser al Rajab and his brother Mohammad Yassin, from Ghwairan neighborhood, eastern Hasaka city. They were arrested by Syrian regime forces in 2013. On Wednesday, August 1, 2018, we received information that they were registered as dead in civil records. We suspect that they died due to torture inside a Syrian regime detention center.

Ahmad Turki Hajj al Kawer and his two brothers Yasser and Fawwaz, from Ghwairan neighborhood, eastern Hasaka city. They were arrested by Syrian regime forces in 2014. On Thursday, August 2, 2018, we received information that they were registered as dead in civil records. We suspect that they died due to torture inside a Syrian regime detention center.

Ali Alayyan and his brothers Saif al Din, Mohammad Khair, and Izz al Din, Palestinian-Syrians, from Damascus city. On Monday, August 13, 2018, we received information that they were registered as dead in civil records. We suspect that they died due to torture inside a Syrian regime detention center.

[Ali](#), born in 1987. On Wednesday, January 29, 2014, he was arrested by Syrian regime forces at a checkpoint in Jaramana city, Damascus suburbs governorate.

[Saif al Din](#), born in 1970. On Wednesday, April 17, 2013, he was arrested by Syrian regime forces at a checkpoint.



[Mohammad Khair](#), born in 1972. On Wednesday, January 29, 2014, he was arrested by Syrian regime forces at a checkpoint in Jaramana city.

[Izz al Din](#), born in 1995. On Wednesday, January 29, 2014, he was arrested by Syrian regime forces at a checkpoint in Jaramana city.

IV. Conclusions and Recommendations

The Syrian regime has practiced torture through multiple institutions in a systematic, widespread and institutional manner which constitutes an explicit breach of the international human rights law and qualifies as crimes against humanity. In many cases, these breaches have reached levels of intensified violations of the right to life. Also, these crimes, which have been perpetrated after the start of the non-international armed conflict in a systematic and widespread manner, constitute a blatant breach of the international human rights law and constitute war crimes. It has been proven that the Syrian regime is fully aware of these acts, and fully knows that the inhuman detention conditions will definitely lead to death, but failed to take action in this regard. Furthermore, the Syrian regime never launched any investigation, or held those who were involved accountable, but rather legalized their crimes and attempted to conceal and hide criminal evidences.

The perfunctory trials that ISIS conducted for the detainees end with sentences of death by torture, field-execution, or death by brutal, innovative ways. None of these trials respect the rules of the international human rights law or the international humanitarian law which constitutes a war crime.

In this regard, Kurdish Self-Management forces didn't respect the rules of the international human rights law or the international humanitarian law. The acts of torture these forces practice on their foes, in the context of the armed non-international conflict, constitute a war crime.

The acts of torture carried out by factions from the armed opposition are an explicit violation of the international human rights law when committed against residents in their areas of control, and of the international humanitarian law when committed against one of their foes in the armed non-international conflict, and constitute a war crime.

Recommendations

Security Council and United Nations

- Renew the calls for the Syrian regime to commit to ending acts of torture, immediately demand that all torture victims' fates are revealed, and rescue the remainder of detainees as soon as possible.



- Apply pressure on the Syrian government to implement Security Council resolutions 2042, 2139, and 2254. In case the Syrian government didn't comply, which has been the case since the popular uprising started in Syria, action should be taken under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations in order to save detainees inside detention centers from dying.
- Russia should stop hindering the referral of the case in Syria to the International Criminal Court.
- All of the United Nations relief organs should search for the families who lost their provider or one of their members to torture, ensure the uninterrupted delivery of aids to people who are truly in need, and commence rehabilitation efforts.
- Immediately punish all individuals involved in the machine of torture.

International community

- States party to the Convention against Torture should take all necessary measure to establish their jurisdiction over the perpetrators of torture crimes, and make every possible effort to achieve so.
- Impose new serious sanctions against the Syrian regime in order to deter it from killing Syrian citizens under torture.
- Provide more finance, support, and grants for the local organizations that work on rehabilitating and taking care of the torture victims and their families.
- Support individual activists and local organizations who are documenting violations without exploiting influence or enforcing political directions.

Commission of Inquiry (COI)

Launch investigations on the cases included in this report and past reports. SNHR is willing to cooperate and provide more evidences and data.

International, Impartial, and Independent Mechanism (IIIM)

Address the cases mentioned in this report and past reports. SNHR is willing to cooperate and provide more evidences and data.

Syrian regime

- Launch an immediate investigation on all cases of death inside detention centers, and cease practicing systematic acts of torture which constitute crimes against humanity, as the regime's apparatuses practice these acts on a daily basis.



- All death sentences should be suspended, considering that they were based on confessions extracted under brutal torture.
- Immediately secure access for the Commission of Inquiry, the Committee of the Red Cross, and all objective human rights groups to detention centers.
- Take immediate action in order to end all forms of torture, improve the conditions inside detention centers, and commit to protect tens of thousands of detainees from being tortured and degraded.
- Release arbitrarily arrested detainees and particularly children and women, and reveal the fates of thousands of forcibly-disappeared persons.
- The Syrian regime is responsible for deaths due to torture, and has to immediately start compensating all of the victims' families.

Extremist Islamic groups

Ensure the implementation of the international human rights law in their prisons and areas of control, and cease all forms of torture inside detention centers.

Armed opposition factions

- Respect the rules of the international human rights law, and end all unlawful trials, as well as all acts of torture inside detention centers.
- Immediately secure access for the International Committee of the Red Cross and objective human rights groups to all detention centers, and cease holding detainees in secret detention centers.
- Hold all individuals involved in committing torture accountable, and discharge them immediately.

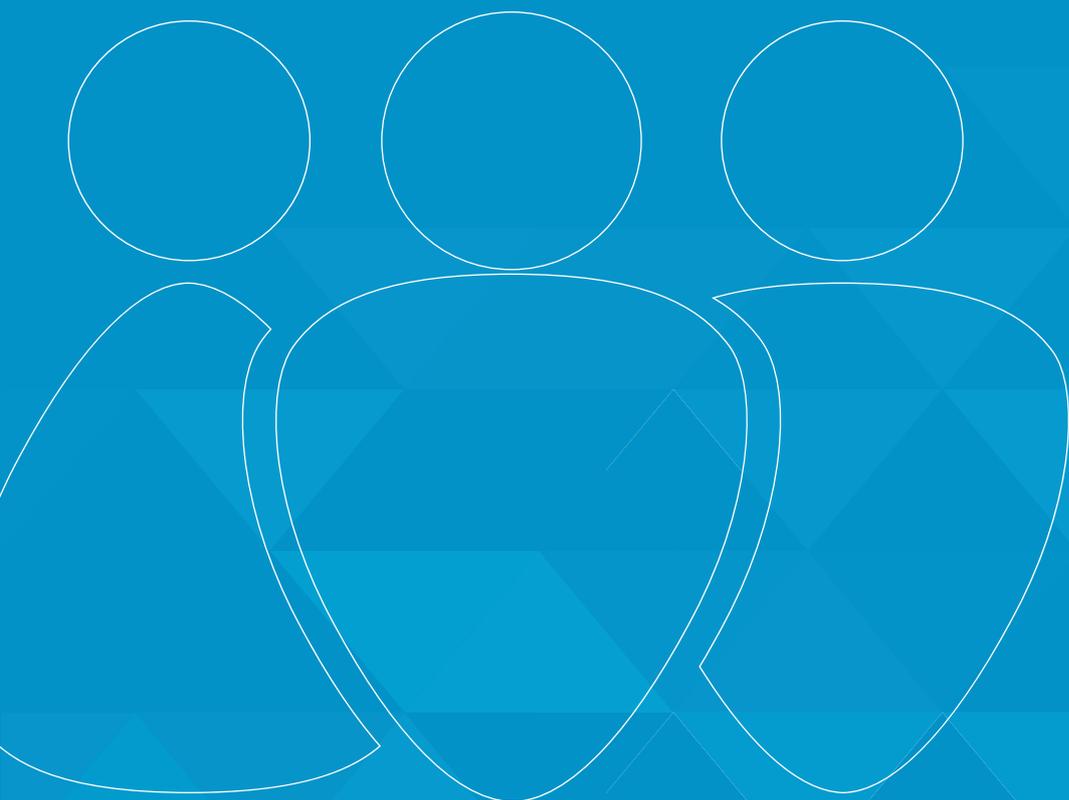
Kurdish Self-Management

- Respect the standards of the international human rights law and cease the use of torture against political or military opponents, and launch investigations to expose those who were involved in these crimes and hold them accountable.
- Reveal all detainees and publicize lists of their names, make the locations and sites of the secret detention centers public, and allow families and human rights groups to visit them.

Acknowledgment and Condolences

Our most sincere thanks to all families, eyewitness, and activists who contributed effectively to this report. Our most heartfelt condolences to the victims' families and friends.





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