

# The Media Digest of the Victim Support Project

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Demonstration in front of ICJ, The Hague, The Netherlands  
10 October 2023

## General overview:

### Introduction:

The legal and political movement emerging from the pain and suffering of the families of forcibly disappeared, missing, and detained individuals in Syria represents a prominent form of resilience and resistance against the injustice and oppression practiced by the Syrian authorities and other de facto powers in various areas of control. The issue of detainees and forcibly disappeared persons is one of the most sensitive and humanitarian crises in Syria, with thousands of families suffering from the disappearance of their loved ones in prisons run by parties to the Syrian conflict, where they endure torture, mistreatment, and a lack of fair trials.

The movement of associations founded by the families and relatives of the missing and forcibly disappeared reflects a strong will to seek truth and justice. These families organize peaceful protests and events to demand the immediate release of their loved ones and to uncover the fate of the missing. Participants in this peaceful movement utilize various media platforms, including social media, public demonstrations, and activities aimed at rallying public opinion, to spread their message and draw attention to the suffering of detainees, forcibly disappeared persons, and their families.

The families' peaceful struggle receives support from human rights organizations, as the persistent efforts of the families and associations of the victims reflect the determination of Syrians to reach truth and justice. The issues of detention, enforced disappearance, and loss remain central in the struggle to achieve human rights and fundamental freedoms.

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# Overview of Victims' Associations

## Families for Freedom:

“Families for Freedom” is a movement that unites the families of detainees and forcibly disappeared individuals who have lost their sons and daughters in various ways at the hands of different parties in the Syrian conflict.

The movement was launched in Geneva in February 2017 by five women from the families of detainees and forcibly disappeared persons in Syria.



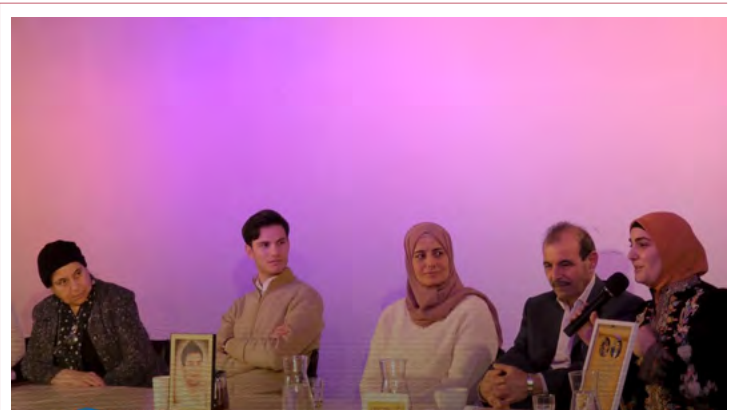
To date, the movement works to raise public awareness among all families who have a relative that has been arrested, detained, or forcibly disappeared, regardless of race, religion, sect, political belief, or ideology. The goal is to pressure all parties involved in the Syrian conflict, whether local or international, to comply with the demands of the families of detainees and forcibly disappeared individuals.

Since 2017, “Families for Freedom” has led more than 100 promotional campaigns at both the local and international levels, with the participation of 250 families of the missing in Syria and hundreds of Syrian activists in Syria, Lebanon, Turkey, Germany, the United States, France, Belgium, and the United Kingdom.

## Caesars Families Association:

The Caesar Families Association was formed by the families of victims who perished under torture and were identified through the photographs smuggled out by [Caesar](#), the Syrian photographer who shared images documenting acts of torture in Syrian prisons.

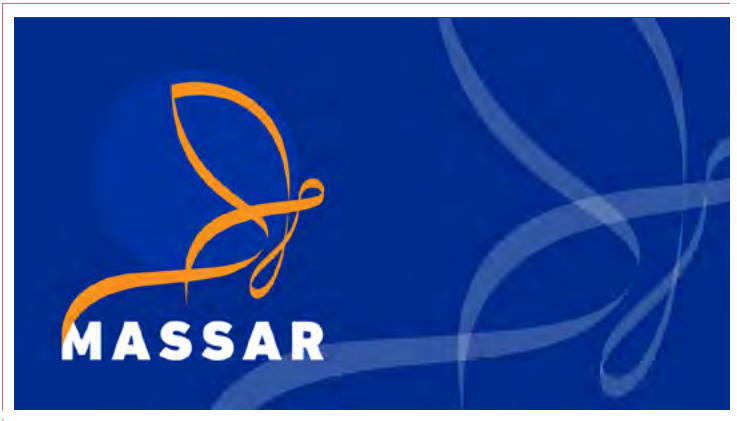
The association is committed to demanding the prosecution of those responsible for violating the law in Syria and considers all victims of the “Syrian Arab



Republic” who appeared in the Caesar photos to be the sons and daughters of the “Caesar Families.” The documentation department of the association works intensively to assist Syrian families in identifying their loved ones within the Caesar photos and provides them with legal support. The association pledges to continue advocating for the rights of the victims until all prisoners of conscience are released and to contribute to building civil peace in Syria. It is also committed to advancing truth and justice in the case of Syrian detainees. The association was founded in February 2018 by 11 families and has since expanded to include around 85 families, with the number of affiliated families continuing to grow.

## Massar:

Massar Families was established in April 2019, initially under the name “The Coalition of Families of Persons Kidnapped by the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS).” It was formed by the relatives of individuals who were kidnapped by ISIS during its control of areas in Syria between 2013 and 2019. Since its inception, Massar has been working on three main pillars: Documenting the cases of the kidnapped and the names of the perpetrators, networking with the families of the kidnapped to organize and create effective action around their cause, and advocating for the cause of the kidnapped, linking it to the broader issue of the missing in Syria.



## Taafi Initiative :

“Taafi” was founded in 2017 by survivors of arbitrary detention in Syria. Its mission is to provide support and protection to individuals who have survived detention, empowering them to resume their struggle for justice, accountability, and victims’ rights. Taafi encourages advocacy efforts to end arbitrary detention and torture, while ensuring freedom of expression and human rights.



## Synergy:

It is a community initiative aimed at achieving justice for the victims of the conflict in Syria by empowering them to represent themselves, claim their rights, and actively participate in accountability and justice efforts.

The association was established on March 11, 2021, by a group of Syrian victims and follows a community organizing approach to unite victims, develop their capacities, and engage them in building plans and





policies, as well as implementing activities aimed at uncovering the truth, ensuring accountability, and achieving justice.

Synergy is part of the Charter for Truth and Justice and is a member of the Human Rights Reference Group of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, as well as the International Network of Victims and Survivors of Serious Human Rights Violations (INOVAS).

Synergy works on documenting all human rights violations in northern and northeastern Syria, preserving evidence, documents, and testimonies to contribute to truth-seeking, accountability, and achieving justice. Additionally, it works to strengthen the capacities of victims and advocate for their causes in order to build a society that demands its rights.

## **Families of Truth and Justice:**

It is a Syrian collective that was officially launched in 2021 in the city of Antakya in southern Turkey.

The organization was founded by the families of the missing and forcibly disappeared in Syria, and it was officially registered with the Turkish Directorate of Associations in October 2022. It also opened an official office in Antakya.



Among its goals are: Advocating for the rights of detainees and forcibly disappeared persons in Syria, including demanding their release, revealing their fate, and contributing to raising local and international awareness of their cause.

This is in addition to empowering their families to claim their rights and providing legal, psychological, and economic support to the families of victims, documenting cases of enforced disappearance, torture, and sexual violence, supporting efforts to develop mechanisms for transitional justice and accountability in Syria, providing psychological and legal support to the refugee and displaced communities, particularly women and children and promoting gender equality and fostering a culture of equal citizenship.

## Release me:

It is a collective of Syrian survivors, a civil feminist non-profit organization established in 2017 as a shelter for women who were released from detention through exchanges and those forced to reside in northwestern Syria. This is in addition to some women who arrived in the area after separating from their husbands or away from their families due to the stigma associated with survivors of detention (some of them accompanied by their children).



The first center was opened in Kafranbel, Syria, with the goal of supporting and empowering survivors to live in new communities after psychological healing from the experience, enabling them to make decisions regarding their life paths.

The work continued for about two years, and with the cessation of prisoner exchange operations, Harrirni (Release Me) shifted its focus to working with survivors of physical, psychological, and sexual violence, alongside survivors of detention. A center was established in Kafr Takharim, but with ongoing military operations and after the center was bombed, the decision was made to relocate to the city of Afrin.

With the opening of the Association's main office in Afrin in 2019, Release Me continued its efforts as a feminist organization working to empower survivors of violence, including survivors of detention and families of the missing, led by women whose traditional breadwinners were forcibly disappeared.

Additionally, it promotes feminist work and its development to achieve greater access for women to decision-making positions at various levels, while also working on civil peace programs and social integration led by women.

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



On January 22, 2024, The Hague District Court issued a conviction in the case of the Dutch Public Prosecution against Mustafa A., a member of the Jerusalem Brigade, for committing crimes against humanity, war crimes, and participating in the activities of the Jerusalem Brigade militia. Specifically, it pertained to the violent detention and torture of a civilian in January 2013 at the Neirab camp in Aleppo.

The court sentenced the defendant to 12 years in prison for committing crimes against humanity and war crimes in the form of deprivation of liberty (as a direct perpetrator), and torture during detention (as an accomplice), as well as for his participation (as a leader) in a “criminal organization” aimed at committing crimes against humanity and war crimes.

This ruling represents a significant step toward achieving justice for victims and survivors of international crimes in Syria, and underscores the importance of holding individuals accused of such crimes accountable.

In this context, Mazen Darwish, director of the Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression, stated: “Achieving accountability through the prosecution of individuals responsible for serious crimes is a crucial step toward building sustainable peace in Syria. By strengthening channels of cooperation between Syrian human rights organizations and local authorities, we can contribute to the safety and security of Syrians and host communities around the world.”

This case marks the first time that a member of a pro-Syrian government militia has faced trial in the Netherlands, and it is considered groundbreaking in terms of victim participation and its establishment as a legal precedent. The case began based on a complaint filed by the Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression in June 2020, where the center’s team investigated the defendant’s file and provided information and evidence to the Dutch authorities through its database.

On Thursday, November 16, 2023, the International Court of Justice ruled that Syria must stop its torture program, which has led to the deaths of tens of thousands since 2011.

The court stated that Syria must “take all measures within its power to prevent acts of torture and other forms of cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment.”

The court also ruled that Syria must “prevent the destruction of any evidence and ensure its preservation” in relation to torture.

The court’s decision was disappointing for the families of detainees and victims who were hoping for a ruling that would ensure the implementation of all measures necessary to uncover the fate of the detainees and victims.

[Ahmed Helmi](#), a survivor of enforced disappearance and the founder of the Taafi Initiative, said:

“The court’s decision to implement provisional measures is clear evidence of the horrendous crimes of torture committed by the Syrian state, which remain systematic and widespread. I am frustrated by the weak language of the ruling, and I expect that more measures will be adopted to help ensure the Syrian regime halts its use of torture.”

On the other hand, Kholoud Helmi from Families for Freedom commented: “The lives of the detainees and the years they lost deserved a more serious approach from the court in its decisions. A regime that has committed, and continues to commit, violations against detainees and their families would not have waited for someone to tell it to preserve the evidence that incriminates it. We need serious and firm actions and decisions that ensure fair trials for Assad and his regime and return even a small part of the justice detainees, the missing, and their families have been waiting for.”

# Achievements section:

## Advocacy Activities:



The Families Of Truth and Justice Organization participated through its representatives in all meetings of the founding committee for the institution responsible for determining the fate of the missing in Syria, which was voted on for establishment in late June 2023. Additionally, a bilateral meeting was held between members of the founding committee and members of the Families Of Truth and Justice Organization in the city of Gaziantep, Turkey, on November 28, 2023, where viewpoints were exchanged, and opinions related to the new institution and the demands of the victims' families were considered, prior to the issuance of the [institution's charter and the determination of its headquarters](#). The organization also provided recommendations regarding the presidency of the institution and the qualifications for the president, emphasizing that the individual should have diplomatic experience, knowledge of international law and international human rights law, a particular sensitivity to the issue of the missing, a central role for survivors, victims, and their families, and an understanding of the historical and cultural context of missing persons in this part of the world. Additionally, proficiency in the Arabic language could be considered a valuable, though non-essential, skill, provided the outlined qualifications are met. The president should not be from neighboring countries of Syria, nor from any of the states involved in the Syrian conflict, and must have relevant experience in this field.

It is worth noting that members of the founding team visited the city of Reyhanlı on March 6, 2024, to meet with members of the General Assembly and discuss developments following the previous meeting and the issuance of the Terms of Reference.

Additionally, Families Of Truth and Justice held regular virtual meetings with the UN Special Envoy to Syria, Geir Pedersen, to discuss some recent developments in Syria, such as the issuance of the [general amnesty](#) under Legislative Decree No. 36, the [abolition](#) of [military field courts](#), and all regional and international updates that specifically impact the Syrian situation.



As for The Caesar Families Association, represented by Mrs. Mariam Hallak, they [participated](#) in a [discussion with](#) human rights activists titled “The Gathering of Syrians in Exile - Renewing Hope.” This meeting was held under the auspices of the Syria Coordination Group at Amnesty International Germany in Berlin on December 2, 2023.

During the meeting, Mrs. Mariam shared the story of her son Ayham’s arrest after he participated in protests. She said: “He was studying for a master’s degree at the Faculty of Medicine at Damascus University before shifting his focus to documenting the martyrs of the revolution at a human rights center at the time. He was arrested, along with his colleagues, in 2011 but was released.”



She added that Ayham was arrested again at his university and subjected to torture in the Faculty of Medicine, which had been turned into a security branch inside the university. She noted that members of the Student Union were responsible for torturing Ayham and his colleagues, leading to his death after five days of detention.

According to one of his fellow detainees, they repeatedly struck Ayham on the head until he lost consciousness. An ambulance was called, and Ayham suffered from a brain hemorrhage, dying as a result in the hospital.

For a year and a half, Mrs. Mariam clung to the hope of seeing her son again, as she was misled and manipulated into believing he was still alive, until she finally received his death certificate.

She mentioned meeting over 50 women who had also lost family members due to torture, each with their own heartbreaking story. After fleeing to Lebanon, she began her journey of advocacy for her late son, Ayham, and for all the young Syrian men and women who were victims.

## **Detainees’ Week Activities in the City of Al-Bab, Northern Syria:**

The Caesar Families Association held an event on January 19, 2024, in partnership with the “Beit Al-Kul” forum as part of Detainees’ Week activities in the city of Al-Bab, northern Syria.

During this event, the documentary film (The Silent Witness to Assad’s Crimes) was screened. Additionally, one of the founding members of the Caesar Families Association gave a speech introducing the association and its activities with the families of martyrs and those forcibly disappeared.

The Caesar Families Association also organized a demonstration in the city of Azaz on March 8, 2024, to mark International Women’s Day. The goal of the demonstration was to introduce the Caesar Families Association and highlight the Syrian women’s ability to fight for their right to uncover the fate of the missing and hold the perpetrators accountable.

The demonstration was organized in collaboration with a group of survivors of detention.

As part of the “Supporting Victims’ Associations” project funded by the European Union, and during the [55th session of the Human Rights Council](#) on March 18, 2024, the Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression, along with representatives from victims’ associations, including the Taafi Initiative, Massar Families, and Herarni Organization, held several meetings with representatives of permanent state missions and workers from international and UN organizations.



These meetings called for support for victims and survivors and for efforts to uncover the fate of the missing persons in a two-day advocacy tour that took place on March 18 and 19, 2024.

This mission included several meetings, starting with a meeting with the International Commission of Inquiry on Syria (COI), where the delegation praised the commission’s work in conducting investigations that serve justice for the victims. The delegation emphasized the need for continued follow-up on the Syrian authorities’ failure to implement the provisional measures imposed by the International Court of Justice in the case of Syria’s violations of the Convention Against Torture. It was reported that the violation of these measures, including the continuation of torture, arbitrary detentions, and enforced disappearances, will be included in the commission’s upcoming report.

A meeting was then held with the members of the founding team of the UN institution concerned with determining the fate of the missing in Syria. The discussion focused on the challenges facing the institution’s early work, the timeline for its launch, and the role of the victims and their families, along with their expectations for support to ensure justice and accountability in the institution’s agenda.

The following day, the delegation attended the Interactive [Dialogue Session with](#) the International Commission of Inquiry on Syria (COI) at the United Nations headquarters. A representative from the Taafi Initiative delivered an oral intervention, calling on all member states to support the institution tasked with determining the fate of the missing in Syria so it can carry out its duties and access all detention centers in Syria. The representative emphasized that ending impunity is the definitive solution to achieving a settlement in Syria.

There was also a meeting with the team from the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, where the forced or disguised return of refugees, particularly from neighboring countries to Syria, was discussed. The delegation highlighted the real threat to their safety, given the continued arbitrary detentions and enforced disappearances by the Syrian authorities. In another context related to the institution tasked with determining the fate of the missing in Syria, the conversation centered on the importance of continued advocacy with countries that supported the establishment of the institution to ensure they remain committed to overcoming the challenges hindering its progress. The advocacy tour concluded with a meeting with the European Union’s permanent mission to the United Nations. The delegation reaffirmed the necessity of supporting the victims, implementing accountability mechanisms, and pursuing justice in Syria, while also working to end the culture of impunity that is widespread in Syrian territories, to prevent it from becoming a reality on both the regional and international levels.

## Taafi Initiative Organizes an Awareness Session on the Institution for the Missing

On March 10, 2024, the Taafi Initiative organized an awareness-raising session on the institution tasked with determining the fate of the missing in Syria. The session was held via Zoom and attended by survivors of arbitrary detention, with Mr. Khalil Haj Saleh presenting. The session focused on the establishment of the institution, which is based on joint efforts by victims' associations concerning the issues of enforced disappearance and arbitrary detention. The future role of the institution in searching for the missing in Syria and collaborating with victims' associations was thoroughly explained. Additionally, the institution's responsibilities will include documentation, issuing certificates of absence for missing persons outside of Syria, and providing non-material support such as awareness campaigns and psychosocial support. Survivors will play a significant role within the institution by occupying seats on its advisory council, which will be composed of three categories: civil society organizations, victims' associations, and international experts. The institution is set to begin operations in Switzerland starting in April 2024. During the session, survivors raised questions regarding the possibility of including searches for the missing in detention centers run by the Syrian regime.

### Public Advocacy Activities:



In front of the UAE Embassy in the United Kingdom, **Families for Freedom** gathered to demand an end to normalization with the Syrian regime, responsible for violations and war crimes, including the arrest and disappearance of thousands in prisons.

Families for Freedom urged the members attending the climate change conference in the UAE, should they meet with the Syrian Prime Minister Bashar al-Assad or one of his representatives, to raise the issue of their loved ones who have been missing since 2011, and to question the conditions of the prisons and detention centers, which are akin to human slaughterhouses.

Families for Freedom also called on participating countries to reject being in the presence of a regime that has used chemical weapons against its own people, besieged villages and cities, and cut off water and electricity to suffocate them. They urged for a moral stance in support of humanity and a rejection of normalization.

In Sweida, during the **Detainee Week** event, families of detainees, in collaboration with a number of activists, raised the longest artwork in al-Karama Square in the city of Sweida, Syria, on January 20, 2024. The artwork, extending 300 meters, displays images of forcibly disappeared detainees in the regime's prisons and of martyrs who died under torture in those prisons

**Families Of Truth and Justice** attended a session with the International Commission on Missing Persons (ICMP) to discuss a paper titled "Towards a Convention on Crimes Against Humanity and Its Relevance to the Syrian Context" on March 6, 2024.

On January 30, 2024, Families Of Truth and Justice met with the Swiss Ministry of Foreign Affairs and discussed several topics related to the new mechanism and advocating for its funding at the United Nations.

## Contributions to Statements or Position Papers:

On November 17, 2023, **The Synergy Alliance** and its partners in the **Truth and Justice Charter** issued a statement regarding the International Court of Justice's ruling against Syria to prevent acts of torture. The Charter group welcomed the court's decision on the request for provisional measures and acknowledged the potential role it could play as a preventive tool aimed at protecting individuals from torture in Syrian prisons and detention centers. However, they pointed out that, as survivors and families of the missing in Syria, the mandated measures are insufficient to alleviate the severity of the violations committed. They called on all United Nations member states to fully assume their responsibilities to ensure the Syrian government complies with the mandated measures and to guarantee their swift implementation.

Additionally, Synergy participated in the drafting and publication of a statement signed by 158 Syrian organizations at the end of December 2023. The statement called on the United Nations Security Council to protect civilians and their livelihoods and to stop targeting vital infrastructure in northeastern Syria, which is essential for the survival of the population

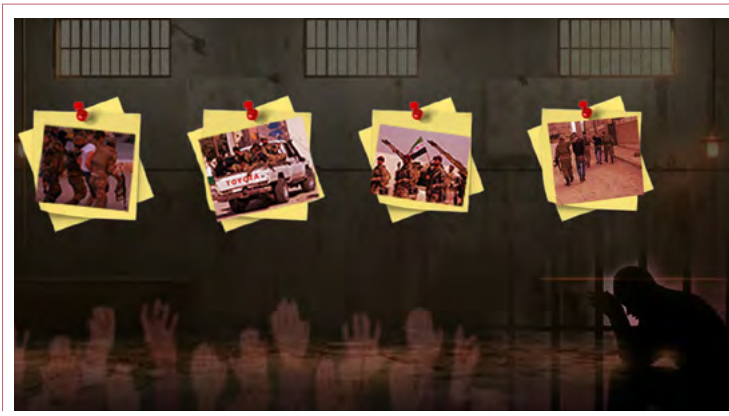
On December 18, 2023, **Families Of Truth and Justice** signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the **International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism (IIIM)**. The purpose of this MoU is to cooperate with the Mechanism by providing available and accessible information and evidence regarding war crimes and crimes against humanity committed in Syria since March 2011. This cooperation aims to assist in the investigation and prosecution of individuals responsible for the most serious crimes, in accordance with international law.

Additionally, the Mechanism was provided with a form documented by Families Of Truth and Justice, upon their request, concerning one of the **Caesar** victims. This form will be submitted to the International Court of Justice in the case filed against the Syrian regime.



## Arbitrary Detention and Torture as a Systematic Policy in Areas Controlled by the Syrian National Army:

The **Synergy Alliance** has documented the continued practice of arbitrary detention by factions of the **Syrian National Army (SNA)**, which is supported and funded by Turkey, in the areas of Afrin, Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê, and Tal Abyad/Kobanê. These factions have committed war crimes, including torture and cruel treatment, leaving catastrophic effects on the victims and their families. Based on documentation from Synergy, during 2023, at least 431



people, including 22 women and 27 children, were arrested in the areas of Afrin, Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê, and Tal Abyad/Kobanê in northern Syria by Turkish forces and factions of the SNA. While only 93 individuals were released from detention, 338 remain in custody. In light of these findings, Synergy published a thematic report titled **“Northern Syria: Arbitrary Detention and Torture as a Systematic Policy in Areas Controlled by the Syrian National Army.”**

In the context of academic research, the **Taafi Initiative** released an extensive study in three languages (English, Arabic, Kurdish) titled **“A Study on the Violation of Housing, Land, and Property Rights of Survivors of Detention in Syria and Its Impact on Social Relations”**. The study was based on surveys and an investigation that included the experiences of survivors in this context. The research was published on the Taafi website on December 18, 2023.

## Projects Supporting the Missing Persons Cause – Support for Families and Victims:

On November 27, 2023, the **Caesar Families Association** began holding consultation sessions for a group of 45 women from families of the forcibly disappeared, who are facing legal challenges in their daily lives due to the absence of a family member. The aim of this five-month project is to raise legal awareness and empower families of the forcibly disappeared, particularly women, to facilitate access to legal advice and justice, thereby protecting them from threats, harassment, exploitation, and lack of knowledge about their legal rights.

Additionally, the project seeks to enhance these women's capacity to tell their stories in order to address the gendered dimensions of the Syrian situation and the impact of enforced disappearance and human rights violations on families and communities.

A number of women, including survivors of detention, attended a **story-writing training** coordinated by the organization **Release Me** during the last quarter of 2023. The outcome was a book titled **"When the Earth Trembles"**, which documents the stories and experiences of a group of women during the February 6, 2023 earthquake. The book focuses on their strength and ability to act.

In her story **"The Narcissus"**, **Wafaa Najib** writes in the book:

"I walked toward my room, searching for a glimmer of light, and I began to remember the first time the earth trembled beneath me, nine years ago during my detention, as if everything is happening now: the voices of the detainees, the smell of death, the pain. Everything that people are living through now—the fear and anxiety—is what I, and many other detainees, experienced."

In its efforts to understand the needs and priorities of victims, including internally displaced persons (IDPs) and forcibly displaced individuals, and to provide a space for discussion among them, the **Synergy Victims Association** organized three focused discussion sessions in September 2023. These sessions involved 25 participants from victims, survivors, and their families in northern and northeastern Syria. The association also conducted a survey targeting 200 individuals, including victims, survivors, human rights defenders, and civil society activists.



The discussion sessions and the analysis of the survey results led to the identification of the different needs and priorities of the victims, which helped in shaping and developing the agenda for the **Second Annual Victims' Forum in Northern Syria**. This forum aims to provide a platform and space for victims, survivors, and their families in northern and northeastern Syria to represent themselves, advocate for their rights, and coordinate with one another to achieve their goals. A report titled **"Victims' Needs and Priorities in Northern Syria and Paths to Justice"** was prepared in both Arabic and English. The report highlights the major issues faced by victims and IDPs in northeastern Syria, featuring their testimonies and quotes from their participation in the second annual forum hosted by Synergy in northeastern Syria. It also includes their recommendations and solutions from their perspectives.

Additionally, an **infographic video** (in both Arabic and English) on the state of human rights in northern Syria was designed and presented during the forum.

In addition to an **overview video** summarizing the key highlights from the forum, which is available in both Arabic and English.

Families Of Truth and Justice documented 94 cases of enforced disappearance and two cases of survivors of detention and torture, who were released during November and December 2023. This documentation was conducted using forms developed by the organization as part of its activities to support its database, allowing for the addition of new cases and sharing them later with international human rights mechanisms.

The organization provided 31 legal consultations between November 2023 and March 2024, through its legal advisor, lawyer Ahmad Hassoun, for the families of the missing residing in Turkey via the designated hotline.

On February 1, 2024, the Caesar Families Association was accepted as a member of the International Network of Victims and Survivors of Serious Human Rights Violations (INOVAS), an international network led by victims and survivors, providing them with an official platform to raise their voices.

## **Job Opportunities:**

During 2023, Families Of Truth and Justice helped provide job opportunities for the families of the missing by employing nine of them in a project supported by the Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Defenders Support program. The project team is entirely made up of family members of the missing, from the project manager to the financial manager, documentation office manager, project coordinator, three documenters, and two trainers.

There is one female employee in Jandires, Syria, one male employee in Reyhanlı, and five employees in Antakya, three of whom are women, along with a male and female trainer in İskenderun and Reyhanlı.

## **Psychological Support Projects:**

Families Of Truth and Justice provided primary psychological support (PFA) to six women from the families of the missing through its psychological consultant, either via the hotline or individual sessions at the organization's office in Antakya, Turkey.

## **Oral Memory:**

Qaada Zinzana (Cell Gathering):

The Recovery Foundation produced podcast episodes embodying discussions from sessions inside a virtual cell, based on memory stories from survivors of detention about intense, unconventional aspects of life they lived inside the cell, and the ways they created their own reality despite the darkness of prisons.

"Qaada Zinzana" delves into the details of social and political life in prison as an attempt to recreate the self, both within and outside its walls.

The first episode was recorded in December 2023 and published on social media in February 2024. It is a discussion session between survivors of detention, sharing their experiences inside the cell, the methods they used to resist the will of the jailer, and their attempts to survive. To listen to the full episode, please visit the link [here](#).

The second episode focuses on a discussion with female survivors about the feminist privacy in the Syrian revolutionary movement and women's detention experiences. The third episode addresses a discussion with former detained psychologists about the concept of prison and its tools from a psychological perspective.

## Other Contributions:

Due to the many recurring questions about the institution responsible for determining the fate of the missing in Syria, and the importance of families having sufficient knowledge about the institution, its mandate, and the role victims and families can play in decision-making and guiding the institution's work, the Synergy Association saw the need to prepare a fact sheet that outlines the context of the issue of the missing and forcibly disappeared in Syria.



The fact sheet provides information on the new institution, its mandate, reporting mechanisms, and the importance of active participation by victims, survivors, and families of the missing.

The aim of the fact sheet is to provide families of the missing and forcibly disappeared with adequate knowledge about the institution, manage their expectations, and amplify their voices to increase the chances of progress on this issue. The fact sheet is titled "The Independent Institution for the Missing in Syria: Its Mandate, Responsibilities, and the Role of Victims' Families in Guiding its Work." Additionally, 14 promotional posters were published in both Arabic and English to highlight the key points included in the fact sheet.

Between February 10 and March 15, 2024, the organization Release Me held 17 knowledge-building sessions for the families of the missing in the regions of Salqin and Afrin/Syria and surrounding areas.

The sessions included 246 individuals, distributed as follows:

- \* 9 sessions in Salqin included 142 individuals, 10 males and 132 females.
- \* 8 sessions in Afrin included 104 individuals, 30 males and 74 females.



These sessions will continue until the end of 2024, within a project funded by the DRL, in partnership with Impunity Watch.



Between January 25 and April 27, victim families' associations attended periodic workshops on transitional justice online and in Paris, organized by the Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression and Omar Hammadi, the former political and constitutional advisor to the UN Special Envoy to Syria.

The primary goal of these activities was to build a shared vision of transitional justice in Syria among large and diverse groups of Syrian victims, survivors, and their families. The workshops addressed the issue of "narratives" of severe human rights violations from different perspectives and worked on building a common understanding of the various challenges surrounding the possibility of a national transitional process in Syria.

This activity resulted in a policy paper reflecting the analysis, views, and recommendations of a group of Syrian civil society organizations regarding the issue of transitional justice.



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