



Press Statement

Escaping Hell

More than **400** Detainees at Risk of Death in a Secret Detention in Syria

Violation Documentation Center in Syria - September 2013

[VDC](#) said in a report issued today entitled "Escaping Hell" that the Syrian regime forces, along with members of the Forth Military Brigade have been carrying out many extrajudicial killings against the detainees in the Air Force Intelligence Branch in Harasta. The report also pointed out that there are more than 400 detainees at risk of death penalty, respectively; all of them were detained by the above mentioned branch as they are being killed in cold blood after there are being exploited in digging trenches and barricades to protect the soldiers in the vicinity of the branch.

"Escaping hell", the thirty-page report is based on the testimonies of five former detainees in the same branch, who managed to escape on 02.07.2013 while carrying out excavation work "hard labor". Detailed interviews have been conducted with all the witnesses, firstly, on the tragic conditions the detainees are living in the branch, and secondly, on the extrajudicial killings that have been witnessed in the branch recently. The witnesses are: *Ahmad Saber Hamada* (27 years old), *Lo'ay Kamal Bakour* (25 years old), *Fawaz Ibraheem Badran* (23 years old), *Hassan Nasrallah* (25 years old), and *Mouafak Jandali* (25 years old)

The Lawyer *Razan Zaytouna*, who has visited the witnesses accompanied by **VDC** Field Monitoring Team, says:" There are more than four hundred detainees are different in age and period of the arrest, are waiting death by firing squad without a sense of guilt or responsibility , and all of them who have been held for more than a year".



Figures and statistics show that hundreds of thousands of Syrian citizens have been subjected to arbitrary arrest by members the Syrian regime's intelligence. Moreover, many of [the reports and testimonies](#) of former detainees show that they have all been subjected to severe physical and psychological torture resulting in hundreds of cases to death. VDC managed to [document the death of more than three thousand prisoners](#) in the cells of the Syrian Intelligence since the revolution began in March 2011

The witnesses mentioned the names of the five victims who have been killed in the branch recently. They are: *Abdulmoueen Shalit, Abu Kasem Naddaf, Wael Saraqbi, Mohammed Khatib* and *Ghassan Ballur*. The witnesses –in their testimonies- confirmed stressed the brutal acts such as beating and torturing that have been carried out against the detainees, especially during interrogation, which in some cases lasted for months .they also mentioned the deteriorated health condition in the Branch that caused serious skin diseases to all the detainees, who have been also suffering a malnutrition till they got the "Starvation disease"

The witness Ahmad Hamadeh says describing the torture during interrogation:

In the interrogation room there was 'Bisat Al Reeh' (a way of torturing prisoners by laying them down, tying their feet and whipping them severely and continuously) and 'Dulab' (the car tire). When they put me in the 'Dulab', they beat me like 50 times with a hard green stick. In one occasion, they put me in the 'Dulab' for 16 hours and beat me 400 times and they electrified me in the genitals. The interrogator always electrified our bodies with a charged electric stick; till our burned skin smelled. In another occasion, I was hanged in the bathroom for five day in a row; it's a very dirty place where the insects walk on our bodies and we can do nothing about it.

The health conditions of the detainees are all tragic. They get no health care at all. On the contrary, the "Devil's Doctors" -as described in the report- contributed to the beatings and torturing, similar to other agents in that security branch. The detainee *Hassan Nasrallah* says describing the first moments following the severe torture he was exposed when he was being examined by the two doctors in the Branch:

I thought that the doctors would help me. One of the doctors asked me" who did this (torture and beating) to you?" I told him "the shabeeha outside" so he beat me by a huge stick. The second doctor wiped the blood on my back and gave me a pill that might be a pain killer."



An Image showing traces of torture on the body of the former detainee *Hassan Nasralla*

Due to the lack of health care, many diseases have spread among the detainees, especially the chronic skin diseases. The detainees have named one of those diseases as "fish scales". The detainee Ahmad says about this says strange disease that even detained doctors could not diagnose:

The 'Fish Scales' forces the detainee to constantly rub inflicted parts till they bleed. When the blood dries, it leaves a carbuncle full of pus, blood, and germs with 1 or 2cm thickness to the degree that the detainee can't move. With time passing, these carbuncles dried up and get very hard and start 'eating' the skin to take the shape of fish scales.

While asking and interviewing the five detainees, they all reported that field executions are committed in the branch when a number of detainees are taken to a nearby place to dig trenches and barricades for the regime's forces to protect them from the attacks of the revolutionary fighting battalions, and when the detainee is fatigue and can no longer work, a lieutenant colonel named "Ma'en", known as " the father of death" comes and carries out the execution.

In the same context, Fawaz Badran says:



When they brought Mouhamad Khair Naddaf and Abdulmueen Al Shalit from Doma, Abdulmueen was in a very difficult condition; his body was bluish out of disease and torture. He was about to die. At the barrier, he lived only for six hours, during these hours he was exposed to most horrible torture methods. I believe that no one was ever exposed to such torture like burning his body by inflamed nylon and writing the name of the tyrant Bashar Al Assad on his chest with gunpowder and "fire it up", in addition to pouring hot water on his body. They asked him to blaspheme and insult God, but he refused and passed away after that...

After that, the five detainees managed to escape the excavation location in the dark in a dream-like journey after they had broken their chain, and arrived to the Eastern Gouta surviving the death by fire shots.

Razan Zaytouna, the General Coordinator in VDC is calling on the transfer of the Syrian file to the International Criminal Court describing the crimes committed by the forces of the Syrian regime as "extremely brutal and horrific". She is also appealing to the international organization to intervene immediately to save the lives of all the detainees in the Air Force Intelligence Branch and other secret prisons and detention centers in Syria .

*To view the full report, together with the detailed testimonies, please visit the following link:

<http://www.vdc-sy.info/index.php/en/reports/categories/special-reports>

Video report of the five detainees testimony

<http://youtu.be/8FIrcKl5CaY>

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