



## Press Statement

### Hundreds of Detainees buried in Mass Graves in Damascus Suburbs after Torturing to death in Branch 215–Raid Brigade.

[Violation Documentation Center](http://www.vdc-sy.org) in Syria said in an **extensive investigation report**\* issued today about the reality of the extrajudicial killings and systematic torture that are taking place in the Raid Brigade in Damascus that hundreds of Syrian citizens who have been arbitrarily detained may have died as a result of severe systematic torture carried out by the Military Intelligence in Damascus. the report also mentioned that dozens have died due to skin diseases and other diseases prevalent in the place of detention as a result of medical negligence, intentional lack of medicines, lack of nutrition in addition to very bad conditions in the detention centers.

The report, **38** pages, said that hundreds of detainees who have died in that Branch have been buried in two relatively adjacent areas "Njha, Damascus Suburbs," where the regime forces dug two parallel trenches parallel in the Martyrs Cemetery \ Njha, as the center used satellites images showing the potential places that are usually and "very likely" used as mass graves.

**VDC** has conducted many interviews with eyewitnesses and former detainees that have been released recently. It has also conducted several interviews with dissident officers of the same branch, one of which provided the center with detailed information about the structure of the intelligence body and the specialization of every branch of it. The team that prepared the report has contacted many field activists, especially residents of the nearby areas of "Njha, Damascus Suburbs", Bahdaliyah and Sayeda Zeinab. In their testimonies, they all assured that they spotted several suspicious transactions in the two cemeteries; " the Martyrs Cemetery" in Njha and "Bahdaliyah Cemetery" near Husseiniya area, specifically the burial that took place between the



last days of September and early October 2012 where two large refrigerator lorries were seen carrying dozens of bodies that were buried in a mass grave in a Bahdaliyah Cemetery.

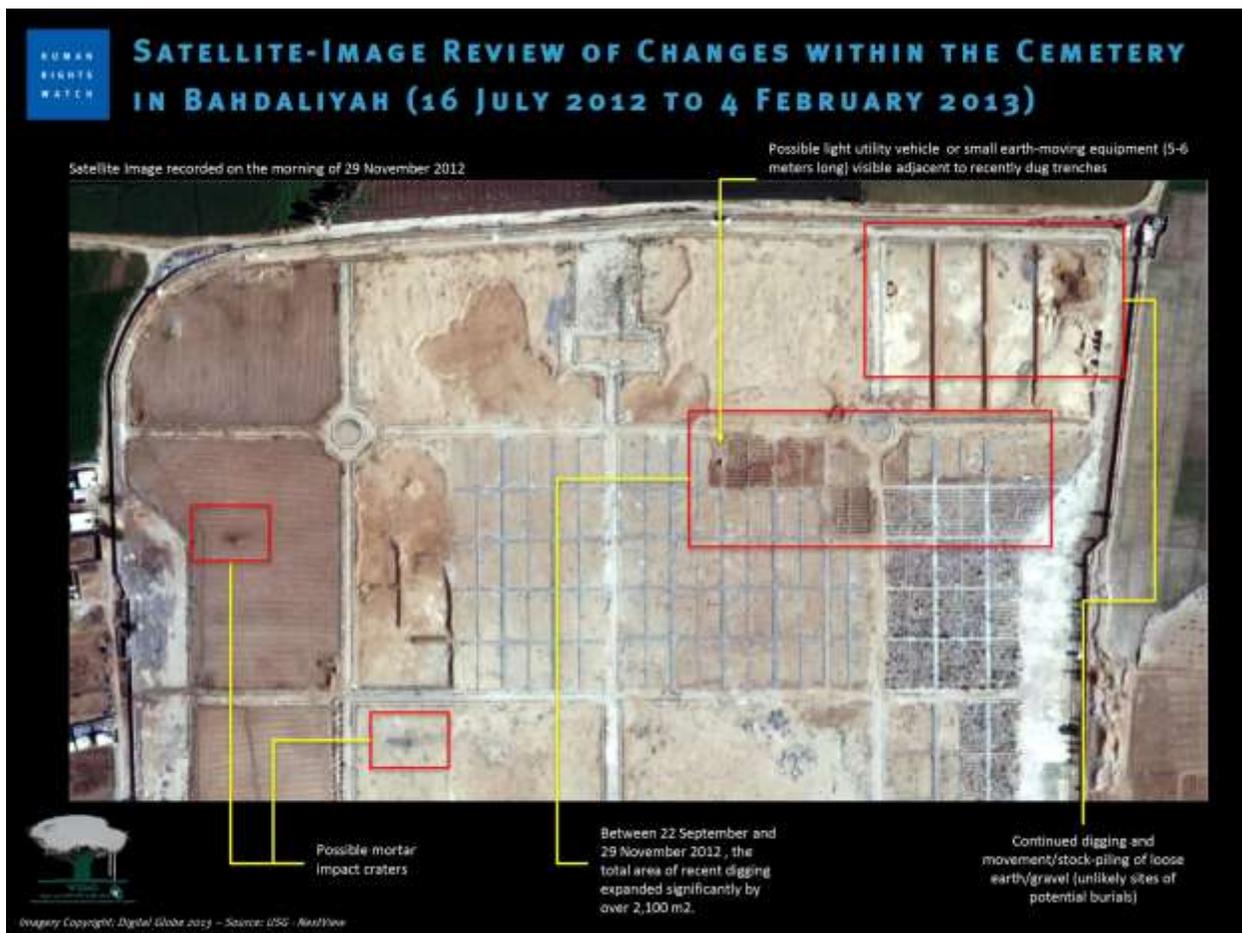
As each victim was "given a number", one of the eyewitnesses stressed to VDC that he, in person, saw a number of bodies at the Office of the officer in charge of the detention in the above mentioned Branch, one of which had the number (3234).

In this context, the witness says:

**When a detainee is released, he is asked to go to officer's office to sign some papers. Usually this happens at 11 pm. On 11 Jun 2013, I was one of those who were meant to have a new life; they summoned my name and asked me to go to the officer's office. Near the office, there were many detainees waiting to sign some papers. There were, also, nine dead bodies, one of which has the number '3234' on its forehead. I remembered, immediately, what one of the 'Shawishia' told me about the number of death cases.**

**Bassam Ahmad, VDC member who conducted the report says:**

One of the major challenges faced by the working team is that the regime was burying the bodies next to already-existing Cemeteries, like the Martyrs Cemetery in Njha and Bahdaliyah Cemetery, which made the first days of investigation very difficult, but after that the team collected dozens of testimonies, verified and analyzed them in order to come up with the exact coordinates of the burial places. Then, Human Rights Watch provided the center with satellites images of specified intervals that confirmed the suspicious drilling and excavation acts, which correspond so much to the possibility of being mass graves. For example, a number of testimonies confirmed the entry of two refrigerator lorries loaded with corpses to Bahdaliyah Cemetery in the end of September and the beginning of October, and after carefully determining the coordinates, a newly captured satellite image of the area showed the extreme expansion of the drilling area for more than 2100 m<sup>2</sup>.



The report describes the horrors witnessed in Branch 215 and the conditions that claim the lives of dozens of the detainees such as; the systematic torture and the widespread diseases without any kind of treatment.

VDC has previously issued a special report entitled "[Horrors in The Region Branch, Branch 227](#)", in which it referred to dozens of the cases that had been recognized by the regime itself, for the regime forces delivers the personal belongings of the deceased detainees to their families with a stamped, sealed paper from the Military Police in Qaboun, Damascus that confirms, undoubtedly, that those detainees- who had been arbitrarily arrested- were extrajudicially killed in the cellars of Branch **227**, known as the Region Branch, which is also a subsidiary of the Military Intelligence Division, only meters away from Branch **215**.



**One legal consultant said to VDC describing the actions mentioned in the report:**

The actions described in this report are happening in an armed conflict of no international characteristic, as recognized by all the reports of the International Independent Investigation Commission formed by the UN Human Rights Council. Those actions are serious violations of Article 2 included in the four Geneva Conventions **12 August 1949**, on the people who take no active part in hostilities because of the detention. They also include widely used violence to life and person, particularly the murder of all kinds, mutilation, cruel treatment and torture, which makes these actions a war crime.

The death of detainees resulting from severe torture and deliberate deprivation of medical help until they die is a murder committed within a systematic framework against a civilian population; it is an attempted attack. It reflects a state of organized violence, and frequent non-accidental crimes based on a common policy among all security branches of the regime, which includes an organized rally of resources, so as to transfer the deceased in detention centers and bury them in mass graves following the orders of high political and military ranks in order to achieve the goal of suppressing any political movement in the rebellious Syrian cities. Accordingly, these acts may amount to the level of a crime against humanity, which requires enabling all international investigation bodies to speed up the detection of these mass graves in an endeavor to prevent the regime from hiding the traces of the crime.

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\*Under the supervision of **Razan Zeitounh**; the General Coordinator of Violation Documentation Center in Syria

**For Any comments or question, please  
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