



Survivors of Assad’s torture regime demand justice – criminal complaint in Sweden

Plaintiffs’ testimonies (extracts)

On 19 February 2019, together with nine plaintiffs from Syria, Syrian Center for Legal Studies and Research (SCLSR), Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression (SCM), Caesar Files Group, the Civil Rights Defenders (CRD) and the European Center for Constitutional and Human Rights (ECCHR) submitted a criminal complaint against 25 known and further unknown high-level officials of the Syrian security apparatus. The complaint, based on witness testimonies, extensive research and a strong legal analysis, aims for the initiation of an investigation by the Swedish prosecutorial authorities into the individual criminal responsibility of the suspects as well as the issuance of international arrests warrants against them. Such important steps would further increase public awareness about the systematic, on-going human rights violations in Syria and enhance pressure on the international community to establish effective judicial avenues for prosecuting such crimes.

The complaint revolves around the testimonies the nine plaintiffs who have survived and witnessed torture in the above-mentioned detention facilities between February 2011 and June 2015.

Plaintiff 2 (P2)

P2 is a Syrian human rights defender and journalist. In 2012, he worked for the Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression (SCM) in the “Violations Documentation Center.” In February 2012, he was arrested in the SCM office together with his colleagues and brought to the Investigative branch of the Air Force Intelligence in Damascus, where he witnessed other detainees, including minors, being tortured on several occasions.

One month later, *P2* was transferred to the Regiment 555 of the 4th division, where shared an underground collective cell with up to 90 persons. There, he was repeatedly tortured, including by being beaten almost on a daily basis, also with cables and solid sticks as well as being exposed to electric shocks until he lost consciousness. Due to the inhuman detention

conditions, P2 lost 30kg in detention. In November 2012, he was transferred to Adra Civil Prison. Following his release in February 2013, he fled to Lebanon and Turkey before coming to Sweden in 2014. By now, he has the Swedish citizenship.

During detention, P2 and his fellow cell mates decided to document the names and contacts of those detained in their cell, using a piece of fabric, a chicken bone as a pen and their own blood and rust from the cells' iron bars as ink. The final list, which contained names and hometowns of detainees, included 82 entries. The piece of fabric was put into the collar and cuffs of a shirt which the first detainee to be released was supposed to wear. P2 happened to be the first one, he wore the shirt until his final release and smuggled it out successfully. Then he started to search for the families of the detainees to inform them about their whereabouts.

Plaintiff (P5)

P5 was arrested twice. The first time, he was arrested in May 2011, because someone had put his name on a list of wanted persons. Following this arrest, he was detained in the State Security branches 251 and 285, where he was exposed to severe beatings including *falaqa*. He was released after two months.

In December 2012, he was arrested for the second time, supposedly for being politically active and engaged in humanitarian work. He was brought again to branch 251, where he had to endure several torture sessions. Among other things, he was beaten until unconsciousness, exposed to electric shocks and *shabeh*.

While in detention, P5 saw a doctor only once. When he told the doctor that he had problems with his stomach, the doctor kicked him hard in the stomach. He still has a hole in his knee, because he was tormented with a drilling machine. After more than one year, he was released. He arrived in Sweden in April 2015.

Plaintiff 7 (P7)

P7 was accused of participation in demonstrations, having instigated students in his university to take part in demonstrations and of having spoken critically about the government. He was arrested in September 2012 and detained in the Military Intelligence branch 215. There, P7 was first held in a cell of about 3x4 meters in size with a number of people varying between 25 and 50, and later in a cell of about 4x5 meters holding up to 104 people. This gave the detainees no space to lie or sit down. He was allowed to use the toilet twice a day for only a few seconds. The bad hygienic conditions in the cell caused diseases and led to the inflammation of wounds. P7 was exposed to different kinds of torture, for example, severe beatings, electric shocks and *shabeh*.

He was released after 45 days. In mid-2012, he fled to Europe and arrived in Sweden in October 2014.

Plaintiff 8 (P8)

P 8 was arrested at the age of 19 in November 2012 because she had organized shelter and collected money for internally displaced people. She was first brought to the Military Intelligence branch 215, where she was subjected to degrading detention conditions characterized by limited access to sanitary facilities, lack of daylight, insufficient air circulation and inedible food. During interrogation and torture sessions, she was, for example, beaten, insulted, sexually harassed and threatened with further violence.

After around 26 days, she was transferred to the Military Intelligence branch in Homs where she was detained for another five weeks. There, she was, among other things, subjected to sexual violence.

P8 left Syria in 2013 and has been living in Sweden since December 2014.

Plaintiff 9 (P9)

P9 was arrested in March 2012 when gathering together with other people for a funeral. The student helped wounded people when the funeral was attacked by the military and was then, together with other participants of the funeral. He was first brought to the Military Intelligence branch in Raqqa, where he was beaten, verbally humiliated and severely hit with a cable.

Afterwards, P9 was transferred to the Criminal Security branch in Raqqa, which was used as a detention facility of the local Joint Investigation Committee. 30 to 40 people had to stay in the cell of 4x4 meters. There was little oxygen left to breath and the detainees had to take turns in sleeping. Beyond that, he was exposed to physical torture like *falaqa*.

Three weeks later, he was transferred to the central prison in Raqqa where he had to stay for another two weeks until he was released. He arrived in Sweden in January 2015.