



The Syrian Road to Justice:

Statement on the Submission of a Criminal Complaint on Sexual and Gender-Based Violence in Germany

We are 46 Syrian and international feminist and human rights organisations and bodies, and 38 individuals and we welcome the filing of the first criminal complaint in Germany pertaining to sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) in Syrian government-run detention facilities. Alongside seven Syrian survivors, the European Center for Constitutional and Human Rights (ECCHR) filed the complaint to the German Federal Prosecutor jointly with the Syrian Women's Network (SWN) and Urnammu on 17 June. We would like to express our support to all survivors of SGBV and our full solidarity with the Syrian women and men who took this legal step.

As Syrian feminist organisations working in Syria can attest, SGBV is a common occurrence, yet incidents are often under-reported, individualized, and hidden. Moreover, according to the Human Rights Council's report, "I Lost My Dignity", SGBV against women, girls, men, and boys has been a persistent issue in Syria since the civil uprising in 2011. The Syrian state authorities and allied militias have perpetrated rape and sexual abuse of women and girls and men during ground operations, house raids, and at checkpoints, and in official and unofficial detention facilities.

Given the documented systematic occurrence of SGBV during the ongoing conflict in Syria, this legal action is a critical step in achieving justice for victims of SGBV, and we urge the German judicial authorities, already utilising the principle of Universal Jurisdiction, to broaden their investigation and prosecute such crimes as crimes against humanity.

However, a comprehensive investigation into SGBV crimes will require staff with sufficient gender expertise and experience to support survivors of SGBV. Without the right questions and expertise, survivors are not able to report their experiences in a safe and supportive way. Without this, investigations will miss the structural and endemic abuses being committed systematically across Syria. Investigations currently risk portraying sexual and gender-based crimes as isolated acts against individuals rather than as part of widespread attacks against a civilian population, and thus as crimes against humanity.

Survivors of SGBV, and particularly female survivors, are discriminated against in multiple ways, within social, economic and political spheres to public and private life. They often face a lifetime of trauma, social discrimination (stigma), and gender-based violence (such as 'honour' crimes). Some experience violence and abuse as a result of their actual or perceived attack. As a result of this discrimination, many female survivors of SGBV choose to keep their stories to themselves and do not participate in the pursuit of justice, out of fear of a societal backlash. Moreover, due to insufficient specialised support and protection services for individuals pursuing justice avenues, many SGBV survivors refrain from taking legal action out of fear of reliving or exacerbating trauma.

In order to combat these barriers and enhance legal access to justice for survivors of SGBV, we address European member states, international justice mechanisms, and the Syria community at large with the following demands:

- 1. Legal accountability for all international crimes that took place during the Syrian conflict, including sexual and gender-based Crimes, and regardless of the perpetrators' political affiliations.**
- 2. Gender-sensitive analysis for all international crimes committed in Syria from the beginning of investigations. This entails increasing female practitioners with gender expertise at every step of the litigation process in order to help survivors speak up for justice: More female police officers, criminal investigators, lawyers, judges, etc.**
- 3. Increased support and specialist services for SGBV survivors to ensure they are able to seek justice and hold the perpetrators of abuse to account.**
- 4. Awareness-raising and community-mobilising initiatives to tackle social discrimination (stigma) which causes greater suffering for SGBV survivors and prevents them from seeking justice.**

As feminist and human rights organisations, we believe that transformative justice* for SGBV survivors will not only mean their perpetrators are held to account. Their fight for their rights extends beyond the courtroom to every home and street in Syria and beyond. Until survivors are given the care, respect and support they need, international crimes will continue to go unpunished and basic humanity will fall short. For it is only through a transformative justice and accountability process that a lasting peace in Syria can be achieved.

*Identifies harm, allows for healing, demands accountability and transforms behavior



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Signatories

Organisations:

1. Amals Healing and Advocacy Center
2. Badael
3. Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies
4. Center for Intersectional Justice
5. Civil Rights Defenders
6. Dawlaty
7. EuroMed Rights
8. Families For Freedom
9. Freedom Jasmine
10. Garden Court Chambers
11. Guernica 37
12. Global Fund for Women
13. Humans of Syria
14. Impunity Watch
15. Jana Watan
16. Kvinna till Kvinna
17. Madre
18. Mazaya Women's Center
19. Mwatana for Human Rights
20. Open Society Justice Initiative
21. Release Me
22. Rousl Group
23. Saneat Al-Taghyeer
24. Souryana Al Amal
25. Strategic Advocacy for Human Rights
26. Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression
27. Syrian Female Journalists Network
28. Syrian Feminist Lobby
29. Syrian League for Citizenship
30. Syrian Women's International Initiative
31. Syrian Women's Network
32. Syrian Women's Political Movement
33. Syrians for Truth and Justice
34. Urgent Action Fund for Women's Human Rights
35. The Syria Campaign
36. Urnammu
37. Women's Centre for Legal Aid and Counseling
38. Women's International League for Peace and Freedom
39. Women Now for Development
40. Women's Support Unit
41. Women Survivors
42. Zomoroda Women's Center
43. Zenobia Association for Syrian Women
44. Musawa
45. The Syrian Women Detainees
46. Ogarit of Droit



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Signatories

Individuals:

1. Ahmad Malas – Actor
2. Alissar Hasan – Journalist
3. Amani Al-Ali – Cartoonist
4. Bayan Rehan – Human Rights Defender
5. Bu Naser Taffar – Writer and Musician
6. Diala Brisly – Artist
7. Dima Nachawi – Artist
8. Eyad Aljarod – Film Director
9. Edward Watts – Film Director
10. Fadia Afashe – Artist
11. Hamza Al-Khateab – Physician
12. Heaven Jackaly – Writer and Journalist
13. Joey Ayoub – Human Rights Activist and Writer
14. Jihad (Jay) Abdo – Actor
15. Joumana Seif – Human Rights Lawyer
16. Khawla Dunia – Writer
17. Laila Al Shami – Writer and Activist
18. Laila Awad – Actress
19. Lama Kannout – Writer and Researcher
20. M-Sami Al Kayial – Writer and Journalist
21. Mosab Al Nomaire – Writer and Journalist
22. Malath Alzoubi – Journalist
23. Mariana Karkoutly – Human Rights Defender
24. Maya El Ammar – Freelance Feminist Journalist
25. Milad Amin – Filmmaker
26. Najlaa Khamri – Actress
27. Naser Danan – Physician
28. Rachael Chadwick – Member of Action For Sama
29. Racha Rizk – Musician
30. Rasha Abbas – Journalist
31. Soumaia Talo Alolabi – Freelance Journalist
32. Salam Al Hasan – Artist and musician
33. Saeed Al Batal – Film Director
34. Sarah Khayat – Artist
35. Wafa Mustafa – Syrian Campaigner
36. Waad Al Khateab – Film Director
37. Wael Kays – Writer and Journalist
38. Wael Kadlo – Filmmaker