

# The Newsletter of the Victim Support Project

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A Protest for the families of the missing in Marjeh Square in Damascus. 01/25/2025

## Collaborative Efforts of Victims' Groups in Achieving Justice after the fall of the Assad Regime

### Introduction:

The fall of the Assad regime in Syria brought significant changes in the issue of the missing. Prisons and detention centers formerly operated by the regime were emptied, and several mass graves were discovered. This also created opportunities for international organizations and victims' groups, to enter Syria and engage directly with the families and loved ones of the missing.

Despite these developments, thousands of Syrian families continue to suffer from ongoing crimes of enforced disappearance, torture, and ill-treatment at the hands of various de facto authorities across Syria. Meanwhile, dozens of mass graves still require efforts to uncover, in order to achieve justice for all victims and their families.

Amid these transformations, civil society organizations and victims' groups are striving to rebuild the social fabric and support transitional justice efforts. In recent months, victims' groups have intensified their efforts on the issue of the missing, including documentation of violations, and implementing advocacy campaigns at both the local and international levels to pressure all relevant actors to reveal the fate of the missing and to demand the establishment of a national body responsible for addressing this file inside Syria.

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Between January 1, 2025 and March 31, 2025, victims' groups participated in a number of joint events and advocacy activities at the regional and international levels, which had an impact on mobilizing public opinion:

## Joint events by Victims' Groups



### First World Congress on Enforced Disappearances in Geneva

In cooperation with the [Syrian Center](#) for Media and Freedom of Expression, the victims' groups; Release Me, Synergy, Taafi, Families for Freedom and Caesar Families participated in the first World Congress on Enforced Disappearances, held in Geneva on January 15-16, 2025. The event shed light on the ongoing practice of enforced disappearance worldwide and its devastating impact on victims, their families, and communities.

On the sidelines of the congress, Izzadin Saleh, Executive Director of "Synergy" association, held two separate [meetings](#) on January 15-16, 2025 with the team of the Independent Institution on Missing Persons in Syria (IIMP) and representatives from victims' groups and Syrian civil society organizations. The discussions focused on IIMP's work priorities and both current and future plans, including operations inside Syria.

The final day of the congress concluded with [protests](#) held by victims' families, calling for the disclosure of the fate of their loved ones and the realization of justice.



## Syrian Dialogue: On Justice, Truth, and Reparation

On January 24-25, 2025, a group of civil society organizations and victims' and survivors' groups—including Taafi, Release Me, Synergy, Caesar Families, [Families of Truth and Justice](#), Families for Freedom, and Massar, alongside the Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression—convened a Syrian [Dialogue](#) Conference on Justice, Truth, and Reparation in Damascus. The conference was attended by Judge Khitam Haddad, Deputy Minister of Justice for Legal Affairs and Studies.



The goal of the meeting was to launch a Syrian-led dialogue that paves the way for a comprehensive transitional justice process placing victims' rights and the dignity of Syrians at the heart of political transition and reconstruction efforts. The participating organizations and associations drafted a set of recommendations to be submitted to the Ministry of Justice in the new government, urging for accelerated efforts toward implementing transitional justice and providing the necessary support to secure victims' rights and those of their families.

### Exchange of Views on Truth, Justice, and Accountability in Syria

On January 28, 2025, The Subcommittee on Human Rights of the European Parliament's Committee on Foreign Affairs, invited both the Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression—represented by its director, Mazen Darwish—and Caesar Families Association—represented by founding member Yasmin Almshaan—to participate in a panel [session](#) titled "Exchange of Views on Truth, Justice, and Accountability in Syria."

At the start of the session, Ms. Almshaan spoke about the right of families to have their voices at the center of any conversation regarding truth and justice in Syria. Almshaan highlighted the need to support victims' groups and civil society organizations by providing resources and funding to strengthen their work.

In his remarks, Mazen Darwish pointed to the enormous challenges following the fall of the dictator, particularly the challenge of securing justice for victims and preventing impunity through a national transitional justice process that fosters joint efforts and guarantees non-repetition—ultimately paving the way toward sustainable peace.

Darwish also called for the design of recovery and reconstruction programs based on principles that guarantee victims' rights. He warned of the consequences of failure in Syria and its impact on the Syrian interior and the wider region.

The session concluded with both participants responding to journalists' questions regarding the issue of missing persons and the future of transitional justice in Syria.

On February 5, 2025, [victims' groups](#) and families of detainees held a meeting with Syrian President Ahmad Al-Sharaa, attended by Foreign Minister Asaad Al-Shaibani, to address mechanisms for handling the issue of the missing persons in Syria. During the meeting, participants called for the disclosure of the fate of the missing and for the truth to be revealed about what occurred in detention centers and places of arrest. They emphasized that "holding those responsible for





violations accountable is a non-negotiable right and a fundamental condition for achieving justice, and that transitional justice must go beyond criminal accountability to include institutional reform and memorialization.”

President Al-Shar’a reiterated the government’s commitment to prioritizing the issue of the missing, pledging to establish a specialized entity for missing persons and to prevent the recurrence of past violations. He affirmed the importance of ongoing engagement with families of the missing and victims’ groups, and stressed that those forcibly disappeared should not be considered deceased without concrete evidence.

On February 6, 2025, the Independent Institution on Missing Persons in Syria, held a meeting in Damascus with several victims’ and survivors’ groups, including “[Release Me](#)”, “[Caesar Families](#)”, and “[Taafi](#)”. During the meeting, the Institution listened to testimonies from families about their struggles to find their loved ones and their fears concerning the future of the issue. Karla Quintana -Head of the Independent Institution- emphasized the Institution’s role in supporting international



cooperation and working alongside both the government and local groups, underscoring that Syria’s future must be shaped first and foremost by the Syrian people. She stated that the Institution will propose “a project to the authorities for discussion with both officials and families, to help in the collective efforts to know the fate and whereabouts of the missing and to help open a path to truth.”

## Advocacy Activities



A group of survivors in the [Taafi Initiative](#), alongside families of the forcibly disappeared, organized a protest in Damascus on January 16, 2025. During the protest, they issued an urgent call demanding an end to the violations committed in prisons, security branches, and detention centers across Syria following the fall of the regime. Participants emphasized the importance of protecting these sites and preventing tampering with documents and records.



In a similar context, Caesar Families held a [protest](#) on January 24, 2025, in support of victims of torture in Assad regime detention centers. The participants called for holding the perpetrators accountable and achieving justice, while also stressing the need to protect mass graves. The Caesar Families also launched an [advocacy](#) campaign on February 2, 2025, titled "Where Are the Detainees' Children?", calling on the new Syrian government authorities to reveal the fate of the detainees' children.



On February 7, 2025, and upon the invitation of EuroMed Rights, represented by Mr. Anas Dello, participated in a reflective [session](#) on Syria to assess the geopolitical context of the Syrian transitional phase and explore possibilities for joint action. The session was held in Istanbul with the participation of Syrian civil society actors and resulted in recommendations being sent to the European Union.



Separately, Synergy association, represented by its Executive Director Mr. Izzadin Saleh, participated in an [event](#) organized by Madaniya Initiative in Paris titled “Justice and Accountability in Syria’s Political Transition” on February 12, 2025. The event discussed the outcomes of the Truth, Justice, and Reparation Conference, organized by a number of Syrian civil society organizations and victims’ groups in Damascus on January 24 and 25, 2025.

The event also presented key challenges and opportunities related to achieving transitional justice and ensuring accountability in Syria’s political future.



### **Syrian Civil Society meeting with the Syrian and French Foreign Ministers in Paris**

A delegation of Syrian civil society organizations and victims’ groups—including [Synergy](#), Families for Freedom, and the director of the [Syrian Center](#) for Media and Freedom of Expression—met with the [French](#) Foreign Minister and the Syrian Foreign Minister on the sidelines of the ministerial meeting on Syria on February 13, 2025, in Paris.

The meeting sought to ensure that the voices of survivors and victims are reflected in international positions and decision-making processes.



During the meeting, Mr. Izzadin Saleh,

Executive Director of Synergy, spoke about the justice for victims, the achievement of accountability, and the construction of a state based on rights and equal citizenship. He emphasized that achieving this requires guaranteeing the participation of victims at the heart of the transitional justice process.

For its part, Families for Freedom intensified its advocacy efforts between January and March 2025, both within Syria and internationally, to defend the rights of detainees and the forcibly disappeared in Syria. This period witnessed a series of meetings and advocacy activities.

Internationally, Families for Freedom participated in the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child session held in Geneva on March 12, 2025.



Regarding strategic developments, Families for Freedom strengthened its collaboration with the International Center for Transitional Justice to advocate for victims' rights. It also launched partnerships with the ICMP and the Independent Institution for Data and Information Consolidation. Moreover, the association held internal workshops to define its organizational priorities, including completing the procedures to register officially as an entity within Syria.

On March 28, 2025, [Taafi](#) Initiative director Ahmad Helmi participated in the first-ever side event hosted by the Permanent Syrian Mission to the United Nations in Geneva on justice and accountability. The event was organized by the Syrian Forum and the Global Legal Accountability Organization. It addressed issues related to accountability and the coordination between existing international mechanisms—such as fact-finding missions and national judiciaries—to ensure comprehensive justice.



# Training and Projects to Support the Cause of the Missing - Assistance for Families and Victims



Between October 2024 and March 2025, Release Me organization, in cooperation with the Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression, implemented the “Independent Survivors” project. The organization aimed to improve the living standards and support the economic independence of women survivors of detention and women-led families of the missing in the areas of Afrin, Salqin, Armanaz, and Idlib city within Syria.

The project targeted women who had survived detention and female breadwinners from families of the missing, in addition to young women from families of the forcibly disappeared. It sought to enhance their economic and social security, while also building safe spaces for learning, self-expression, and capacity development. The training showed a noticeable improvement among the participants in areas such as bookkeeping and marketing strategy planning. Many expressed serious interest in expanding their projects and improving production quality.





As part of its efforts to support families of the missing in Syria, Families of Truth & Justice [provided](#) legal services to 141 individuals between January and March 2025. Two awareness [sessions](#) were held with 20 relatives of the missing, focusing on extortion and fraud commonly faced by families seeking information about their loved ones.

On the documentation front, the association's team succeeded in documenting 225 new cases of enforced disappearance in Afrin, Idlib, and Turkey. These cases were added to the association's official database as part of ongoing efforts to uncover the truth and achieve justice.



Between January 1 and March 31, 2025, A Good Seed carried out a series of psychosocial support activities for the children of detainees and forcibly disappeared persons in Syria. Among these was the Positive Memory Activity, which ran from early January to March 16, 2025. The activity targeted 20 children, divided into two groups, with each group attending eight sessions.

A Good Seed also implemented a Scented Candle Activity between January 1 and March 21, 2025, involving 20 children of detainees over the course of 12 sessions.



Additionally, A Good Seed organized a Theater Activity between February 1 and March 31, 2025, with the participation of 20 children of detainees, over nine sessions.

With the resumption of the European Union Project to Support Victims' groups in early February 2025, Massar launched a strategic outreach plan targeting families of persons missing at the hands of ISIS. The association held two sessions via Zoom with 50 participants from Raqqa, Deir Ezzor, the al-Shaitat region, Ayn al-Arab/Kobani, Urfa, and Azaz, on March 26 and 28, 2025.

The first session addressed the varied contexts of abduction and enforced disappearance by ISIS, depending on the group's former areas of control in Syria. The second session discussed the impact of recent political changes on the issue of ISIS detainees in Syria.

Separately, on March 30, 2025, Taafi Initiative, in cooperation with Women Now, launched a specialized psychological support program for survivors of detention. The initiative seeks to alleviate the deep psychological impact of years of imprisonment and traumatic experiences.

The program includes both individual and group therapy sessions, led by mental health and psychosocial care professionals. It emphasizes creating a safe and nurturing environment that allows participants to freely express their emotions and experiences without fear or judgment. The sessions aim to equip survivors with practical tools to manage trauma-related effects.



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