



PRESS RELEASE

German Prosecutor interviews torture survivors from Syria

Torture under Assad: Paving the way for first Syrian cases under universal jurisdiction laws

Berlin, 12 May 2017 – Criminal complaint in March, witness hearings in May: the German Federal Prosecutor has responded promptly to the first criminal complaint filed in Germany on torture in Syria. This week the complainants – nine Syrian torture survivors now living in Germany – gave witness evidence in Berlin. These nine women and men, including lawyers Anwar al-Bunni ([Syrian Center for Legal Researches & Studies](#)) and Mazen Darwish ([Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Speech](#)) witnessed or were themselves subjected to torture in Syrian military intelligence run prisons. The European Center for Constitutional and Human Rights ([ECCHR](#)) worked with them to file a [criminal complaint](#) in Karlsruhe on 2 March 2017 under the principle of universal jurisdiction against senior officials in Bashar al Assad’s government.

“As a lawyer, I know that legal proceedings can take a long time. But in the Syria case, there is a need to act fast. With every day of inaction, more innocent people are dying,” said Munem Hilaneh, one of the complainants, after the interviews. Al-Bunni added: “This is a strong message to the criminals that they will not go unpunished, and it is a hope message to the victims that justice will not forget them or ignore their rights.”

Under the principle of universal jurisdiction, German authorities can prosecute serious human rights violations regardless of where they were committed or the nationality of the victims and perpetrators. The complainants’ cases are representative of the torture system under Assad’s government. The goal is to ensure that the Federal Prosecutor investigates these cases and seeks international arrest warrants against those responsible. “Germany can and must play its role in bringing about legal action into the chain of command behind systematic torture in Syria,” said ECCHR General Secretary Wolfgang Kaleck.

Since 2012, ECCHR has been examining crimes committed by different parties to the conflict in Syria. With the French organization Sherpa, ECCHR filed a [criminal complaint against cement company Lafarge](#) and its subsidiary Lafarge Cement Syria (LCS) in November 2016 in Paris. The allegation: through its dealings with the “Islamic State” (ISIS) in Syria, LCS aided and abetted war crimes and crimes against humanity. Lafarge has since admitted making errors in its Syrian operations and in late April the company’s CEO announced his resignation.

More on the criminal complaint (videos, claimants’ portraits, summary of complaint, Q&A on legal background and Special Newsletter) can be found at [ECCHR/Syria/Torture](#)

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