



## Assad’s senior intelligence officers accused of torture – Syrian torture survivors file criminal complaint in Norway

### Witness testimony (extracts)

Five torture survivors [filed criminal charges](#), including crimes against humanity, against 17 senior officials of Assad’s security apparatus on 11 November 2019 in Oslo, Norway. The crimes were allegedly committed in 14 detention facilities throughout Syria by officials connected to the Military Intelligence, General Intelligence and Political and Criminal Security divisions. The plaintiffs filed the complaint together with the Syrian Center for Legal Research and Studies ([SCLRS](#)), the Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression ([SCM](#)), the Caesar Files Group ([CFSG](#)), the Norwegian Helsinki Committee ([NHC](#)) and Berlin-based European Center for Constitutional and Human Rights ([ECCHR](#)). The organizations, whose legal research and analysis forms the basis of the criminal complaint, have been working closely with the plaintiffs over the last several months.

---

#### Witness 1

In April 2012, Witness 1 (W1) was detained at age 22 for a total of seven months. He was knocked unconscious and taken to the Damascus “Section 40” prison. W1 was accused of instigating violence and civil disobedience. He was subjected to various forms of torture, including electric shocks, flogging, and a torturing device called the German chair – a metal chair that stretches and puts severe stress on the neck, back and limbs, sometimes causing permanent damage.

W1 was later transferred to Syrian General Intelligence Directorate Branch 251, where he stayed for four weeks, and then to Branch 248. In both branches, he was held in solitary confinement. During interrogation sessions, he was regularly tortured – beaten on the soles of his feet, *dulab* (forced into a vehicle tire that is often then hoisted up, and beaten on the feet or elsewhere on the body with fists, sticks, whips or cables) and *shabeh* (being suspended by his wrists for hours or days).

W1 was later transferred to the Al-Qabun military court, to the Hamadi civil court in Damascus, and subsequently to Adra prison, where he was released in November 2012. W1 has lived in Norway since 2014.

---

#### **Witness 4**

Witness 4 (W4) was arrested at age 25 in July 2011. He and a friend, who had been previously detained, attended demonstrations and publicly spoke out against the Syrian government. Syrian General Intelligence agents came to W4's house and asked him to accompany them. When he arrived at the General Intelligence Branch 322 in Aleppo, he handed over his belongings, was taken to an interrogation room where he was screamed at and hit several times with a stick, and accused of participating in illegal demonstrations, insulting the reputation of the state, and being involved with a religious leader in Saudi Arabia.

After one day, W4 was transferred to Criminal Security in Aleppo, where he was forced to stay in a 5x4 meter overcrowded, underground cell. There was not enough space for all detainees to sit down or sleep. There was hardly any fresh air; and detainees were reluctant to eat the food they were given, as they all had to use the cell's one toilet.

During his six days in detention, W4 endured daily interrogation and torture sessions. He was usually handcuffed, forced to kneel, and then, for example, beaten with a stick on the soles of his feet. W4 was then brought before a judge in Aleppo. He was subsequently taken to Aleppo's central prison and released 11 days later. He was arrested a second time in November 2011, but only for several hours.

W4 left Syria in September 2013 and arrived in Norway in March 2014.

---

#### **Witness 5**

Witness 5 (W5) is 55 years old and was detained three times between November 2011 and early 2013. She owned a gym in Damascus and organized humanitarian aid with friends, especially for children suffering from the Syrian conflict. W5 was first arrested at a meeting of her humanitarian support group, together with four friends. People entered the office, put black bags over the five women's heads and took them to a detention facility.

The women stayed in an underground 3x4 meter cell, together with about 20 other women, for around 20 days. There was not enough space for everyone to sleep. There was no toilet in the cell; the women were given two bathroom breaks per day. Food was insufficient and of poor quality. Even though there was medicine available, they were denied medical treatment. Every day, W5 was brought to one of two interrogation rooms for an interrogation and torture session, including having her fingernails pulled out, flogging and *shabeh*. W5 saw one of her friends who was detained with her die from torture. Her body was thrown into W5's cell for an entire day.

W5 was transferred to four other detention facilities. After being tortured daily in the first two facilities, she was subsequently treated less violently due to her poor physical condition. Prison conditions were extremely poor. Despite being sick and injured, W5 was denied the medication she was carrying with her when she was detained. Her last detention was in

Damascus Central Prison, where she was reunited with the three living friends who were arrested with her. W5 was released on a court order in February or March 2012.

W5 was arrested for the second time in early summer 2012, when she was called to the Criminal Intelligence Branch in Damascus under the pretext of having to sign documents for her acquittal. She was released two months later. In November 2012, she was arrested for the third time. Officers entered her house claiming they wanted to search it. They then blindfolded and detained her. She was held for three months without physical abuse.

W5 left Syria in April 2013 and arrived in Norway in December 2015.