

PRESS RELEASE

Torture in Syria: The path to justice leads through Europe

16 torture survivors from Syria file criminal complaint in Austria against senior officials in Assad government

Vienna/Berlin, 29 May 2018 – They survived torture and detention in Syria and fled to Europe, where they now hope to obtain justice. Austrian authorities should follow the example set in Germany, Sweden and France and initiate investigations into systematic torture under Syrian president Bashar al-Assad. To help achieve this goal, on 28 May 2018, 16 Syrian women and men filed a criminal complaint with the prosecutor in Vienna. The complaint against 24 senior officials in the Assad government is the first of its kind in Austria and follows [four similar complaints](#) under consideration by the Office of the Federal Public Prosecutor in Germany.

“I’m one of many women who have experienced suffering as a result of torture in Syria. It continues until this day,” says Hanada Al Refai, an activist who was held in a subterranean cell in the Harasta Branch of the Air Force Intelligence in Damascus for seven months and was severely tortured during this time. „My participation in this criminal complaint is a desire to achieve justice.” Ahmad Khalil was arrested by the Military Intelligence because he participated in peaceful protests against Assad and held in branch 215 in Damascus for three months. After being released, he identified more than 50 corpses in the “[Caesar](#)” photos. „As a survivor and a witness I see it as my duty to contribute to hold those who are responsible for the system of torture in Syria accountable.”

This group of torture survivors – which include an Austrian citizen and several people who were detained while still minors, and who have lived in Austria and Germany for some time – are filing the complaint together with the Syrian lawyer Anwar al-Bunni (Syrian Center for Legal Research and Studies, [SCLSR](#)) and Mazen Darwish (Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression, [SCM](#)) as well as the Center for the Enforcement of Human Rights International ([CEHRI](#)) in Vienna and the European Center for Constitutional and Human Rights ([ECCHR](#)) in Berlin. The lawyers worked closely with the Syrian survivors to compile the complaint.

The allegations include torture as a crime against humanity and as a war crime committed by military intelligence, air force intelligence and general intelligence. The torture and other crimes described in the complaint – including murder, extermination, serious bodily harm and deprivation of liberty – were committed between February 2011 and January 2017 in 13 detention centers in Damascus, Daraa, Hama and Aleppo.

You can find more information on the criminal complaint in Austria, including profiles of the complainants and the legal background, under [ecchr/syria/torture/austria](#).

Contact:

ECCHR: Anabel Bermejo, M.: bermejo@ecchr.eu, P.: +49 (0)172 587 00 87

CEHRI: Wolfgang Petritsch, M.: office@wolfgang-petritsch.eu, P.: +43 (0) 660 656 4345