



PRESS RELEASE

Systematic torture in Syria

Syrian military police defector “Caesar” passes key evidence to German Federal Prosecutor

Berlin, 22 September 2017 – Thousands of photos of corpses in Syrian government detention facilities, in high definition, many containing metadata – key evidence for the ongoing investigations into human rights abuses under Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. On 21 September 2017, the group around the former Syrian military police employee “Caesar” for the first time took legal action by filing together with the European Center for Constitutional and Human Rights ([ECCHR](#)) a criminal complaint with the German Federal Prosecutor in Karlsruhe against senior officials from the Syrian intelligence service and military police concerning crimes against humanity and war crimes. A representative of the “Caesar-File Support Group” also provided the Federal Prosecutor with image files. The files represent unique proof of the machinery of torture and killing under Assad’s government.

“The photos show the extent and the systematic nature of torture under Assad. The metadata is especially useful. Until now no international investigators or third-country national prosecutors or courts have seen this information,” explains ECCHR General Secretary Wolfgang Kaleck. “The German Federal Prosecutor is the first authority which can use this data to bring about international arrest warrants against those most culpable within the Syrian regime.” As one of the few countries where the principle of universal jurisdiction applies, Germany is playing a key role in the fight against impunity in Syria.

German authorities are already investigating and have heard evidence from torture survivors who, together with ECCHR, filed a [criminal complaint](#) with the Federal Prosecutor in March 2017 against senior officials in the Syrian Military Intelligence Service.

The photos filed this week were taken in Syria between May 2011 and August 2013. They were subsequently obtained by the “Caesar-File Support Group” and smuggled out of the country. The images show the bodies of people who were tortured and died in Syrian government detention facilities. The metadata and the accompanying criminal complaint from ECCHR and the “Caesar-File Support Group” provide information on the locations and institutions involved as well as the torture methods used and the causes of death. The complaint is directed against the heads of the Syria’s National Security Bureau, the Military Intelligence Service, the Air Force Intelligence Service, the General Intelligence Directorate and the Military Police.

In Syria there is complete impunity for human rights violations committed by the intelligence services and the military police. There is currently [no way to bring the cases](#) before the International Criminal Court. It therefore falls to national jurisdictions in third-party states such as Germany to investigate and prosecute these crimes.

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