

Summary of Report: *No End in Sight: Torture and ill-treatment in the Syrian Arab Republic 2020-2023*

10 July 2023

The UN Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Syria has released a new report entitled ***No End in Sight: Torture and ill-treatment in the Syrian Arab Republic 2020-2023***. It covers the continuing widespread and systematic patterns of torture and ill-treatment, including enforced disappearances, in detention facilities in Syria between 1 January 2020 and 30 April 2023, and is being released as a conference room paper to the ongoing fifty-third session of the Human Rights Council in Geneva.

The report is based on **254 interviews** conducted by the Commission between 2020 and April 2023, including over 200 who experienced and/or directly witnessed torture or ill-treatment in relation to detention in facilities run by Government authorities or non-State armed groups. A further 42 were secondary interviews with e.g. medical practitioners, others working with survivors of torture and ill-treatment and family members of detainees. The Commission also reviewed corroborating video and photographs, medical and other relevant documentation.

Nearly all former detainees held in **Government facilities** and interviewed for the report were held incommunicado for prolonged periods of time, without access to their family, friends and lawyers. During their detention, they described being subjected to varied acts of torture and ill-treatment, usually to force them to “confess”, as punishment or as intimidation. These included suspension by one or two limbs for prolonged periods (shabeh) or being folded into car tyres (dulab). Severe beatings all over the body including the genitals, often with green hosepipes, sticks, cables or other tools, usually accompanied both shabeh and dulab and also took place independently. Other mentioned methods included electric shocks, burning of body parts and sexual violence. In addition, most detainees described being held in inhumane conditions which amount to ill-treatment, and may in some cases amount to torture: severely overcrowded cells, lack of food, drinking water and sanitary facilities, widespread illness and diseases, and denial of medical care. Many witnessed deaths in detention.

With respect to torture by Government authorities, the report focuses on the **four main intelligence directorates** in whose detention facilities torture and ill-treatment are most often reported – namely the Military Intelligence, Air Force Intelligence, Political Security and General Intelligence Directorates – and additionally the **Criminal Security department of the Police and the military prisons**. Each of the four Government intelligence directorates has headquarters in Damascus composed of several central branches and administers branches throughout the country, together holding thousands of detainees in their custody. This report highlights violations in particular detention facilities including Military Intelligence branches 235 (also known as Palestine branch), 261 at Homs, 271 at Khan Sheykhun, Idlib; Air Force Intelligence branches at Harasta, Aleppo and Mezzeh and Kuweires airports; Political Security branches at Al Fahya, Damascus and Homs; General Intelligence branches at Aleppo and Khan Sheykhun, Idlib; Criminal Security branch at Homs; military prisons in Sednaya and Balooni.

Torture and ill-treatment also remain serious issues of concern in parts of Syria under control of **non-State armed groups**, particularly against those perceived to be opposing the group in control. The forms of torture, and the patterns of arbitrary detention and enforced disappearances also mirror those by the Government of Syria, even though the scale is significantly smaller.

The report documents torture and ill-treatment by three non-State armed groups that control territory and hold detainees and prisoners i.e. **Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), the Syrian National Army (SNA), and the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF)**. With respect to HTS, facilities where violations have been documented since 2020 include Sarmada and Harem detention centres; branches 107, and 77; as well as branch 33 in Idlib and a detention facility reportedly attached to a courthouse in Sarmada. SNA facilities where such violations have been documented since 2020 include prisons and makeshift facilities operated by individual SNA factions (including Suleiman Shah, Hamza, Sultan Murad, Ahrar al-Sham, Ahrar al-Sharqiyah, Faylaq al-Sham and Muhammad al-Fatih) as well as facilities operated by the SNA military and civilian police. Lastly, SDF facilities where such violations have been documented since 2020 include a dozen facilities holding alleged former Da'esh fighters, including the Al Sina'a prison in Hasakah city; other prisons and makeshift facilities operated by the SDF or the Kurdish internal security forces (Asayish) as well as the Hawl and Rawj camps.