



Testimonies

The hell of the fourth division Detention centers

Human Right Violations documentation Center in Syria

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VDC

مركز توثيق الانتهاكات في سوريا



Violations Documentation Center in Syria



Since the beginning of the uprising , and As thousands of Syrians became detainees due to the massive arrest campaign, The regime had shortage on detention center in prisons and security branches, knowing that even school were at some point utilized as ones.

Among the replacement places the regime has turned to were the premises of the Army's fourth division

Lead by Brigadier general Maher El-Assad, Those premises are spreaded across (armored Brigade 40 , Brigade 138 Infantry , Regiment 154 , armored brigade 42 in sabora , Brigade 41 in Yafour , Regiment 555 Paratrooper) all of which are located in Damascus suburb

Often detainees are directly held in the fourth division premises after being arrested, or they can be transferred later from the air force intelligence branches, after they are done investigating them, Moa'damia and Somarie premises are the most widely used ones.

Paratrooper's Regiment 555 – Somariah

None of the detainees whom have been held in this center has a clear description on the place's geography, since all whom have been there were blind folded, the main gate is located 1 KM away from Al-Somariah bus station

Yet all who were admitted to this center have come to a mutual consensus that dormitories are cramped and under grounded.

Most of them were transferred to the fourth division center in Al-somariah after the investigation stage is finished (mostly in the nearby air force intelligence branch) , and they were not subjected to any further investigation sessions while being in these centers.

Detainees who are usually sent there are ones whom the regime has no intention of releasing nor transferring to court any time soon, though they are done investigating them.

In addition these premises are considered to be torture centers in which detainees can be subjected to all kinds of ill-treatment and beating through the duration of their presence there, which often ranges from four to nine months.



First Testimony

Name : Kamal

Age : 25 Years

Province : Damascus Suburb

Profession & Educational background: A university Graduate

Charges: Taking part in demonstrations & other revolutionary activities.

Kamal Says : after completing a whole month in the air force intelligence branch , and after they were done investigating us, it was decided that we were to be transferred to a different place.

It was in February 2012 , I couldn't say how much time did the trip from the air force intelligence branch at Mezzah's Military airport to the new place took us, as I was blind folded

And upon our arrival, we were taken hand cuffed with long chains that would binds me with other detainees so to make movement impossible, we started to walk slowly and it took us almost 15 minutes, as we walked further we could hear the screams of other detainees who were clearly suffering torture, voices kept getting louder as we walked further

Through this time guards have wasted no time, they were hitting us all the way through, using batons and electrifying sticks all over our bodies, heads, necks and even areas of chastity

Till we reached what was known to us later as the gate for the collective dungeon which we went down through, using a stair

Where they have fully stripped us naked to do the routine inspection, though we were just transferred from a different branch, but I guess they used it as a mean to humiliate us, and right after we were stripped, they started hitting us and then we were admitted to the collective dungeon

Of course that was the reception party that was routinely given to new comers, and after that I came to know that we are at a fourth division premises.

There , we were reunited with Some of the detainees whom were with us through our detention at the air force intelligence base, and once I saw traces of the brutal beating and torture all over their bodies , I couldn't help it but to burst in to tears.



Another friend that I met there had his back colored in red and grey cause they kept hitting him on this very same spot every time, consequently swelling and lesions were all over his back, as he became extremely ill and had a high temperature.

There were only two Collective big cells and all other cells were relatively smaller, They used to put new detainees in the smaller ones as a preparation before transferring them to the big ones , and I remember they used the letter “ C “ to mark the big ones.

They used to put 25 detainees in each (C) Cell with no bathroom, and only 2 meals were served daily , detainees had to follow specific rules when food is served, they had to stand facing walls with their hands behind their bags, blind folded, and prison wardens would hit them with batons and electrifying sticks, and after each meal we had to go to bathroom, and that must usually be accompanied with hitting and beating as well.

They used to make prisoners crawl their way to bathroom in pairs and to share the same one, they had to get it done in less than 30 second, and then to run back to their cell stepping on the next pair crawling their way to the bathroom .

After serving the first short period in the small cells, prisoners are transferred to one of the two big collective cells, mine was named (A), it had a shower, A bathroom with no and a plastic sink .

There was a respiration hole in the ceiling of the cell, and we believed that the hole was very close to the investigator office, as we could hear him clearly above us.

The second big collective cell was about two rooms opened to each other, with a very low ceiling (About 2.5 meter), with no respiration holes , and at times when electric power is off, and the air turbine stops working , breathing becomes impossible, and due to the poor ventilation lots of detainees became very sick.

All new comers would arrive terribly exhausted after being extremely beaten and tortured, and usually a few days passes before they start talking to others, there was no constant pace for bringing new detainees, at the beginning they used to bring 25 almost every week, but through the last few months of me being there, they only brought a few, but in return they weren't releasing anybody, and they rarely made any exceptions.

We used to heal each other's wounds , playing doctors , and as I had an injury in my leg that kept deteriorating with time, I had to be carried to bathroom, my fellow detainees were trying to operate on me, they used to take out the pus out of my festering wounds on daily basis, but things only got worse.



A pathogen used to come by at the collective dungeon door to give medicine to sick detainees.

Breakfast consisted of a one loaf of bread , 3 or 4 beads of olive, a small amount of jam and a hard boiled egg that had a slash violet color. Lunch consisted of two loafs of bread, a glass of rice or bulgur, one small cold boiled potato, a single grain of fruit (apple or orange), we used to eat oranges without peeling them, and we used to consider old dried bread as a type crackers.

In addition to overcrowding and the rampant diseases which was widely spreaded, massive hitting and beating campaigns were taking place irregularly, through the first six months of the period that I spent there, beating and hitting campaigns were very intensive and horrific

At the beginning hitting and beating was taking place on daily basis, then in a decreased pace, and then went up again, Wardens pick randomly some detainees, take them out of the cell and start to beat them for no apparent reason with batons and electrifying sticks, and it may happens that the same detainee is chosen more than once consequentially through these campaigns

And in case detainees' chatter got loud or they started a quarrel, 15 wardens are sent to the cell , and they start hitting and beating all the detainees insanely.

The concept of collective punishment was completely not understood from our side, as when new comers arrive, they get brutally beaten upon their arrivals, one day after, at the time of inspection and every time wardens enter the cell, and after each meal they used to call on their names to beat them, and they keep receiving this type of treatment, till other new comers arrive, only then wardens label them as “ Formers “ .

One of the unparalleled punishments that takes place on weekly basis at time when cleaning the cell, was when asking us to group ourselves in a chosen corner in a rectangle shape, and wardens would enter the cell and start to beat us with batons and electrifying sticks , and after they are done with the first row, they ask them to climb on the shoulders of detainees in the second row in front of them , so they can have access to that row, and after they are done cleaning the first half of the cell, detainees have to move as fast as they can in a 3 meters space, or else they will suffer brutal beating , accordingly this would lead to senior detainees trampling on each other to escape the beating.



The second Testimony

Name : Bassam El-Ahmad

Age : 31 year

Province: Hasake – Qamshlo

A Human Right Activist and a School Teacher

Charge: Human Right activism

After 33 days of detentions, we were to be transferred to a new detention center, which we discovered later that it was the fourth division, that only happened after me and other friends sharing the same cell have carried out a hunger strike back in March 2012 at the time when we were held at the air force intelligence detention center .

We arrived there 11 o'clock in the morning blindfolded, and after going through what seemed to be like a gate in a mountain, as the headquarter of the fourth division in Al-Somaria looks carved in the mountain, we walked down in a north direction, coming down a 3 steps stair, and then we walked further till we arrived at another one, that got us to an underground dungeon, labeled (A).

Upon arrival we came to know through former detainees that we were at the headquarter of the fourth division.

Beating started the moment we arrived, as few men in military costumes (that I could hardly allude , though I was blindfolded) started beating us “ New comers “ with batons , electrifying sticks and cables , they also used their hands and legs kicking us all over our bodies, not to mention of course that all of that was accompanied by torrent of insults and cursing.

Fourth division's torture is distinguished for being not only physical, but it includes psychological and harassment as well, no body questioned me through the Whole period that I spent there, it was only detention accompanied by harassments and insults through everything that we do : eating , weekly cell's clean up, doctor's visit (who has absolutely no clue about medicine) , and even through my visit to the barber (and that only happened after being there for 5 consecutive months)

The most painful scenes that I had to witness were torturing old men, whom mostly were from Homs, Hama and daraya

When dinner is served, detainees are asked to blindfold themselves and to gather in one place kneeling on the ground, as wardens would start beating and electrifying detainees at the front row, and then they would order them to climb over each other so



they could have access to other rows behind, consequently floors of human bodies are formed on top of each others

Unpleasant odors and the widely spreaded skin diseases such as scabies were the most distinctive features of the fourth division's detention centers, where total area for a single cell would not be more than (4 x 5) m, but yet it has to accommodate 80 person, the collective cell as was widely named has one bathroom , and since we were given orders to economize on using water, unpleasant odors were filling the cell at all times.

In addition to all of that, insects such as lice and triatoma were widely spreaded on detainees' cloth, hear and their long beards, Each 8 detainees were only designated one blanket infested with insects and disease for their own use.

Most of the detainees that I met were charged with either taking part in demonstration or being members of armed groups.