

# Syrian Road to Justice

In June 2020, coinciding with the International Day for the Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict, Syrian feminist organizations: Badael, Dawlaty, Women Now for Development, and the Syrian Female Journalists Network, as well as The Syria Campaign, launched the 'Syrian Road to Justice' campaign.

This campaign advocates for greater legal access to justice for survivors of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) perpetrated over the past ten years in the Syrian detention centers, especially for women survivors who face particular barriers to justice.

Survivors of SGBV in detention, and particularly female survivors, are discriminated against within society in multiple ways, from the social, economic and political to both public and private life. They often face a lifetime of trauma, social discrimination (stigma), and gender-based violence ('honour' crimes), making most too afraid to seek justice or speak out about their experiences, sometimes even to their families or friends. Some even experience violence and abuse as a result of their actual or perceived attack.

Survivors' fight for their rights extends beyond the courtroom to every home and street in Syria and beyond. Until survivors are given the care, respect and support they so desperately need, international crimes will continue to go unpunished and basic humanity will fall short.

The campaign works to produce content that contributes to enhancing the access of survivors of SGBV to justice and narrating their experiences and challenges that they face. The Syrian Female Journalists Network (SFJN) has therefore worked to produce this series of blogs written by survivors of gender-based violence (during detention), and/or experts in the field and others interested in the justice and accountability processes in Syria.



شبكة الصحفيات السوريات  
Syrian Female Journalists Network



Syrian Road To  
**Justice** طريق  
سوريا إلى العدالة

Bayan Rihan

## **When Abstaining from Using Force Turns into a Noble Deed**

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**“We won’t rape you; you say that we rape women in prison, right?! We won’t rape you and we would show you that we are better than your Ass Army that you call the Free Army.”**

Saying this, the interrogator initiated the first interrogation sessions with me, on the 6th floor of Branch 215 of Kafarsusa.

The interrogator started by ‘reassuring’ me that nothing would happen if I confessed and answered all the questions. With the first batch of questions, the interrogator discovered that I was lying about some information, as I was trying to win some time in the interrogation. He was sitting behind his office writing down my statements, I was sitting on a chair next to the wall, and he started uttering curses to me, I said to him “I don’t allow you”, and he responded, “I will show you how you allow me”, and he began to hit me using a stun baton ...

The first round of torture lasted for about half an hour and then he took me blindfolded out to the corridor opposite to the interrogation room, so that each member in the branch was able, when passing from there, to slap me on my face and insult me.

I heard the voices of other blindfolded women and men detainees who were being interrogated too. I realized then that I was not the only detainee in the corridor.

After an hour of standing in the corridor, the interrogator returned and took off my blindfold and brought me inside the sleeping room of the branch officers. He gave me some paper and a pen and said to me “Write all your life story here and everything you did, and if you do not write everything or if you lie, I will let all soldiers here rape you one by one.”

That was the first threat the interrogator said to me, just one hour after he told me that I would not be raped.



He left me for another hour, and I was writing in the room where the soldiers were entering and making fun of me and asking me, “Where are you from? Why did you protest with those terrorists? Do you want to throw the state down? We swear to God to do this and that to you...”. Many insults I always try to forget.

The interrogator came back and read the papers I wrote. Once he finished, he threw them to my face and said, “You will write everything since you protested with the terrorists and if this time you write nonsense and no information, I will let them rape you.” He called a soldier who was lying down on one of the beds and said to him, “Prepare yourself, you have a meal today.” And they looked at me and laughed.

My heart beats increased, my fear grew, and my fingers trembled. I tried to control my nerves not to commit any mistake and say something that could cause the detention of someone. As the first hours of detention are the most critical. While I was in the room, two young security officers entered, and they spoke with me and gave me a cup of coffee saying: “Help us to protect you. Say

everything you know, and we will protect you from the interrogator and we won’t allow him to touch you. You are a girl from a well-known family, and it is not good to stay today in the prison, so say everything and you will be released today, and no one will know what happened to you.”

The two officers went out and the interrogator returned and took me back to the interrogation room. I discovered their game and methods early, making use of all my readings of the stories of former women and men detainees in the Syrian prisons, as one investigator threatens me and the other claims to be on my side.

I returned to the room and there were two investigators taking turns in interrogating me, one of them threatened to beat and uttered curses, and the other pretended to worry about me and advised me to confess. I was arrested with two other people, my girlfriend, who was smaller than me in size. The interrogator was telling me before each interrogation session “You bear more than your friend”, and started to beat, torture, and insult me. The other one was a young man from my city and the interrogator used to bring him before me and start hitting and insulting him before me and then hitting me before him “to push him to surrender”.

Beating did not hurt me as much as insults, curses, verbal harassment, and threats. The first day ended with the interrogator calling the jailor to take me to the cell, where I found seven women detainees from different Syrian governorates and each one of them was accused of something.

On the first night, after turning the lights off at eleven o'clock (which I knew during our exit to the toilets for two minutes, where I had a look at the jailer's watch). Each female detainee of us took a spot to sleep on in an empty room except for a number of blankets the old detainees got. The jailor shouted on us to sleep... He did not want to hear any voice that might ruin his mood.

After a short time, they brought a young man detainee and put him next to the women detainees' room and started to torture, beat, and insult him as well as to insult the women of his family and to threaten him to bring them. All curses were against women and contained very bad sexual terms... I shiver when I remember them.

The interrogator tortured the young man and stunned him with electricity. A smell of burned human flesh filled the room and the detainee's screams started to fade as he lost consciousness, so jailors started pouring water on him to wake him up.

We were all crying in the cell, without saying anything. We held each other's hands, and our fears grew. That torture was repeated on a daily basis. A detainee I met there told me "Every day, they bring a man detainee to torture him in front of our cell, to break his spirit and make us more afraid".

I asked her how long she had been there, she answered "Fifty days". I asked her "What did you do when you had your period?". She told me "Once you have your period, the jailer gives you some cotton and medical gauze. You are not allowed to go to the toilet whenever you need and even if you are in pain, there is no pain killer, unless you beg the jailor to give

you one of those pills that are produced by the Defence firms, and which do not contain a good effective substance."

The next day I was sent back to interrogation. It was 8 am, and the interrogator began with more detailed questions. He hit me every time he did not like my answer. One time he said to me, "Before you, M.G. (one of the well-known activists) was here and we treated her with all respect and after she was released, she told lies, you only deserve hitting... you need to be chastened because your families did not do that."

Each time he was using different insults; once insulted me, once insulted the people of my city, once insulted covered women because I'm a head-covered woman, once insulted my family, using different sexual terms. After fifteen days of detention, they brought two young girls. The first was 15 years old, and the other was no more than 17.

They were transferred from another security branch. The prison warden brought them inside the frisking room where all detainees were frisked. He started mocking the organs of the little girl (breasts and butt) and said bad words to her. She entered the room shaking, and we tried to calm her down. Even that girl was not safe from their sexual harassment. Thirty days later, I was released by a negotiation agreement with the Free Army, leaving behind thousands of women detainees who were not included in the agreement.

Even today when I remember those details I went through in prison, I do not feel pain of the beating I faced as much as the pain of

insults and curses, and what provokes me more is the interrogator's 'noble deed' that he used in every interrogation session; "They will not rape you if you tell them everything!"

**Only at al-Assad prison abstaining from committing a murder turns into a noble deed, and the worst thing is that when you are released from detention, you will face a society, which also suffered from al-Assad's injustice, but will sue you again for a crime that was committed against you, to impose community restrictions on you and complete the unfinished business of your jailor.**

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15/4/2021**