

# 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

## Hawwa

(a nickname of a survivor of detention)

### **From the Corners of the Memory Rooms**

---

**The worst thing a person can experience is to lose his/her freedom and live amid the darkness of closed rooms, the darkness of prison, the darkness of the jailer, the cruelty of hunger and the pain of torture, and to write his/her diaries on the walls of a prison.**

My torment journey began with the arrest of my husband in 2011 at the start of the Latakia uprising, when he was sentenced to 20 years of prison in favour of the field court. During that period, which was jeopardized by the systematic bombing on my governorate, I was fully responsible for my children.

After a violent day of bombing by the Syrian Regime, my father and I were arrested in the evening from our house, and we were dragged 'like sheep'. I was taken in front of the eyes of my children and my mother, who tried to sacrifice herself to replace me, and started asking them to take her instead of me, and to leave me with my children.

I was dragged out in the dark as there was no power in the area and my kids were calling me from the balcony, I was scared...where would I go? Or what were they going to do to me? Especially since I could not verify the identity of the people who came to arrest us, as we did not know if they were members of the security branches, or from the Shabiha (Regime Loyalists) who wore military uniforms to terrorize people in order to steal and loot.

But I was forced to walk with them under the weapon threat. I was afraid of worsening the situation in front of my children.

They took me to the Air Force Intelligence Branch, and there, the torment journey of interrogation and torture started. I was not safe from any kind of torture, whether suspension, feet whipping, wheel / electricity shocks / removing the veil / insults).

All of that was a systematic attempt by them to extract confessions from me, or to deliberately insult me because of my position and my demand to throw the Regime down.

Perhaps the most frequent thought of the detainee after the torture journey ends is the condition of the beloved ones... How were my family and children without me? The pain of my mother was more severe for me than the pain of torture, because I remembered how she felt when my brother was arrested, and whether she received news that I had been martyred or tortured. Sometimes I had gone crazy when they told me that they had arrested my mother and children to force me to confess. Despite all the torture, I did not utter a word or admit anything. I sometimes even forgot that my father was with me in the branch, as they were telling me that he had died. However, after 3 days, I received news from him through (forced labour) one of the detainees who distributed food and reassured me about my father.

Throughout my detention, I thought so much about how society would look at me! How would I go back to belong to a society controlled by the Regime? Just because of the arrest, you will be seen as a terrorist and a traitor to your country, as, according to the moral evaluation the society conducts of the detainees and former prisoners, political detention is the most stigmatizing and disgraceful detention for women.

I was transferred from the Air Force Branch in Aleppo to the Air Force Branch in Damascus, which was like a small prison in which female wardens frisked us, where they put me in a room full of insects and cockroaches, which I could not bear, so I was begging them to take

me back to Aleppo. I asked them to torture and beat me, but to get me out of that room, and then we were transferred to Adra Prison, and I discovered when I saw myself in the mirror for the first time that my hair turned white and started to gray because of what I had been through.



After my release, my family met me with open arms and pride. Even my mother told me “I am proud that you are my daughter”. Also, my friends and colleagues in my work helped me inside and outside the prison.

On the other hand, for others, I was a pervert who did not deserve to be greeted or to be considered a friend or relative anymore. Some of them did not talk to me, or they blocked my calls, or did not respond to me. Sometimes I excused them, as some of them acted like that out of fear, but I say in my heart, is it my fault that the Regime is brutal?? Some people refuse to believe that the Regime uses these brutal methods, arguing that the Regime does not commit

such heinous things that I talked about, even though I walked out from prison in a way that clearly showed I had been beaten on my feet. And some said that the government is like a mother that needs to discipline her children if they do not behave well!!

In addition to all of the above, comes the most important question in the eyes of some people in this society, which occupies their sick minds: "Did they rape you?", a question that neither my husband nor my mother asked. As if it happened, I would be ashamed of it. Many thought that "her husband cherished her and kept her under his custodianship because he is still detained." They were not ashamed to ask a question like that, (rape) is what really matters to them, and not what I experienced of dignity and freedom deprivation, from searching for bits of food to the simple things that were taken from me such as potable water or using the toilet.

I felt I was unwanted in the Regime's areas, in addition to my constant fear of being arrested again, and my children's fear of me being arrested again, especially after one of the Regime's checkpoints asked for my ID for inspection, though we passed in peace back then, but my son turned pale, and he asked me to hurry up and go home, and he said to me, "Mama, I was afraid that they may take you again." So I decided not to stay in Syria, my children were hurt as much as me, and this was a sufficient reason to emigrate, then I decided to go to Turkey, because I did not find a real shelter in my country, for I was the traitor who betrayed her country after they stripped me of my civil rights, and I was prevented from travelling, obtaining a passport, and seizing my money under the

pretext of terrorism, in addition to losing my job after arrest.

I traveled to Turkey after a three-month arduous journey with my children. We slept in houses we did not know, and in the streets, while we were trying to cross to a safe land. However, I arrived in there to find myself in a bigger prison. People have forgotten about the revolution, detainees, and detention centres, and they are busy with life and securing food, as well as adapting to a racist society, especially with the presence of many Syrian Regime supporters in Turkey, who see us as the people who destroyed their country and emigrated, and that we belong to the "Fifth" World, and do not know anything about science or civilization.

I decided to rise again and try to build a nest for me and my children. I tried to find a job similar to my work in Syria, so I learned Turkish and I stood by my children to overcome the language barrier in their education. I tried to find a supportive environment for detainees, thus I searched for organizations that aim to support detainees inside and outside Syria, to receive some help after losing our family, our homeland, and everything.

Unfortunately, some associations used our names and stories, turning the Syrian cause into a commodity. They traded and earned 'dollars' because of us in exchange for documenting our cases, or from behind the stories we tell because we believe that they care about us. A few organizations, however, tried to help us to restore our rights, prosecute the criminals, hold accountable all those who oversaw our torture, and release the detainees; men, women, and children.

Until now, I did not get rid of the feeling of fear or the cruelty of arrest, until now I am afraid of the police, until now I am afraid of showing my identity card or approaching a checkpoint!

I want this nightmare to end, I want to find someone who feels like me, I want to meet my family and live safely without fear, I want to raise my children without worrying about the simplest things of life and living.

I want them to go back to Syria without al-Assad, I want them to witness the birth of the revolution we went through.

I'm proud I was a part of this revolution and participated in its pain, and I hope to be a witness to its freedom, and to be present at the retribution of every oppressor and their prosecution in international courts. I want everyone who caused bombardment, displacement, homelessness, torture of any Syrian male or female citizen, and deprivation of any of their rights to be prosecuted, starting from the security branch's cook to the most senior commander.

**I am certain that justice will be established and that the time for us to harvest its fruit is approaching, and we will return and build Syria and restore its past and be one hand in building the country.**

**Long live Syria, Down with Bashar al-Assad, and freedom for the detainees!**