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Syria's surge of deaths in detention revealed

[*Deadly detention: Deaths in custody amid popular protest in Syria*](#) documents reported deaths in custody between April and mid-August in the wake of sweeping arrests.

The 88 deaths represented a significant escalation in the number of deaths following arrest in Syria. In recent years Amnesty International has typically recorded around five deaths in custody per year in Syria.

“These deaths behind bars are reaching massive proportions, and appear to be an extension of the same brutal disdain for life that we are seeing daily on the streets of Syria,” said Neil Sammonds, Amnesty International’s researcher on Syria.

“The accounts of torture we have received are horrific. We believe the Syrian government to be systematically persecuting its own people on a vast scale.”

The victims recorded in the report were all swept up in arrests after Syrians took to the streets en masse from March this year. All male, the victims include 10 children, some as young as 13.

All the victims are believed to have been detained because they were involved, or suspected of being involved, in the pro-reform protests.

In at least 52 of these cases there is evidence that torture or other ill-treatment caused or contributed to the deaths.

Amnesty International has seen video clips of 45 of the cases – taken by relatives, activists or other individuals – and has asked independent forensic pathologists to review a number of these.

Injuries on many of the victims’ corpses indicate that they may have suffered horrendous beatings and other abuses. Signs indicating torture include burns, blunt force injuries, whipping marks and slashes.

Most of the cases in the report occurred in Homs and Dera’a governorates, which have seen major protests. Deaths in detention have also been reported in five other governorates, namely Damascus and Rif Damashq, Idlib, Hama and Aleppo.

Thirteen-year-old Hamza Ali al-Khateeb disappeared on 29 April during protests against the siege of Dera’a, and was later found dead with apparent blunt force injuries and a severed penis.

One video clip seen by Amnesty International shows the body of Tariq Ziad Abd al-Qadr from Homs, which was returned to his family on 16 June. His injuries included pulled-out hair, marks to the neck and penis possibly caused by electric shocks, an apparent cigarette burn, whipping marks, stab wounds and burns.

The body of Dr Sakher Hallak, who ran an eating disorders clinic in Aleppo, was discovered by the side

of a road a few days after his arrest on 25 May. Sources told Amnesty International that his injuries included broken ribs, arms and fingers, gouged eyes and mutilated genitals.

Amnesty International is not aware of any independent investigation having been carried out into the causes of death in any of the cases in the report.

Amnesty International has called on the UN Security Council to refer the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court, to impose an arms embargo on Syria and to implement an asset freeze against President Bashar al-Assad and his senior associates.

“Taken in the context of the widespread and systematic violations taking place in Syria, we believe that these deaths in custody may include crimes against humanity,” said Neil Sammonds.

“The response from the Security Council has been utterly inadequate so far, but it is not too late for them to take firm and legally binding action.”

Amnesty International has compiled the names of more than 1,800 people reported to have died since pro-reform protests began. Thousands of others have been arrested, with many held incommunicado at unknown locations at risk of torture or death.

Notes for editors:

Spokespeople

- Amnesty International spokespeople are available to speak about this report in English, Arabic, French and Spanish. Please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566 or [email the Press Office](#)
- The brother of Dr Sakher Hallak, Mr Hazem Hallak, based in the USA, is available for interview in English or Arabic about his experience. Amnesty International can provide contact details on request.

B-roll footage

- [Click here to download interviews](#) with Amnesty International's Syria researcher Neil Sammonds, as well as video footage used to develop this report

Map

- Amnesty has created an interactive [Eyes on Syria](#) map – showing the location of the deaths in custody in this report.