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New evidence of Syria brutality emerges as woman's mutilated body is found

Fresh evidence of the extreme brutality being meted out to Syrian protesters and their families has been revealed today by Amnesty International.

The mutilated body of 18-year-old Zainab al-Hosni of Homs, the first woman known to have died in custody during Syria's recent unrest, was discovered by her family in horrific circumstances on 13 September.

The family was visiting a morgue to identify the body of Zainab's activist brother Mohammad, who was also arrested and apparently tortured and killed in detention. Zainab had been decapitated, her arms cut off, and skin removed.

"If it is confirmed that Zainab was in custody when she died, this would be one of the most disturbing cases of a death in detention we have seen so far," said Philip Luther, Amnesty International's Deputy Director for the Middle East and North Africa.

"We have documented other cases of protesters whose bodies were returned to their families in a mutilated state during recent months, but this is particularly shocking."

The killings of Zainab and Mohammad bring Amnesty International's records of reported deaths in custody to 103 cases since mass protests in Syria began in March this year.

Amnesty International has recorded 15 new death in custody cases since its report [*Deadly detention: Deaths in custody amid popular protest in Syria*](#), published on 31 August. The bodies have borne signs of beating, shooting and stabbing.

Zainab al-Hosni was abducted by plain-clothes individuals believed to be members of the security forces on 27 July, apparently to pressure her activist brother Mohammad Deeb al-Hosni to turn himself in.

Mohammad Deeb al-Hosni, 27, had been organizing protests in Homs since demonstrations began. After Zainab's arrest in July, he was apparently told on the phone by her captors that she would only be released if he stopped his anti-regime activities.

He was eventually arrested on 10 September and held at the Political Security branch in Homs.

Their mother was summoned by security forces to pick up Mohammad's dead body from a military hospital only three days later, on 13 September. The body showed signs of torture including bruising on the back and cigarette burns on the body. He had been shot in the right arm, right leg, and three times in the chest.

By chance, their mother discovered Zainab's mutilated body at the same military hospital. However, the family were not permitted to take Zainab's body home until 17 September.

Their mother was said to have been made to sign a document saying that Zainab and Mohammad had been kidnapped and killed by an armed gang.

"There are no signs of torture and murder abating in Syria," said Philip Luther.

"The mounting toll of reports of people dying behind bars provides yet more evidence of crimes against humanity and should spur the UN Security Council into referring the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court."

Amnesty International has compiled the names of more than 2,200 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.