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## **Syria: Disturbing reports of summary killings by government and opposition forces**

Reports that government forces and armed opposition groups have been deliberately and unlawfully killing captured opponents in Syria bolster the need for all sides to commit to abiding by international humanitarian law, Amnesty International said today.

Earlier this week, the bodies of 19 unarmed men and one child were found in several locations in the Damascus neighbourhood of al-Mezzeh, after – according to local activists – having been killed by government forces who suspected them of aiding rebels in the area. Activists said that some of the bodies had their hands tied behind their backs and some bore marks indicating they had been tortured before being killed.

Although Amnesty International cannot directly confirm these reports, they mirror a pattern documented by the organization elsewhere in the country.

“Amnesty International has been documenting unlawful killings carried out by state forces and government militias in Syria for months. Our [field research in northern Syria](#) found scores of mainly men and boys – most of whom who had not been engaged in hostilities – being summarily killed by government forces, and *shabiha* militia members, after prolonged shelling of city districts, towns and villages suspected of harbouring opposition fighters and supporters,” said Ann Harrison, Deputy Middle East and North Africa Programme Director at Amnesty International.

“We have also been investigating reports that members of armed opposition groups have been responsible for the killings of captured members of the security forces and other unlawful killings. The leadership of all sides must make it clear that they will not tolerate such abuses by anyone under their command.”

The reports of the al-Mezzeh deaths followed statements attributed to Iraq’s Deputy Interior Minister who told the AFP news agency that Iraqi soldiers on Thursday 19 July had witnessed members of the Free Syria Army kill 22 captured members of the Syrian armed forces after taking control of a border post between the two countries.

If confirmed, these killings would constitute serious violations of international humanitarian law and war crimes.

There have been hundreds of cases, including those documented by Amnesty International itself, of members of the Syrian government’s security forces and pro-government militia deliberately killing captured fighters, suspected opponents, and others.

More recently, Amnesty International has received an increasing number of reports of similar, as well as other, abuses committed by members of the armed opposition groups.

Among other information, the organization has seen video clips purportedly depicting individuals being summarily killed by members of Syrian armed opposition groups.

In a video clip uploaded on 5 July 2012, a man identified as Ahmed Fadhel Ahmed, an Air Force Intelligence official (*musa'id awwal*), is seen sitting before a hole in a field, identified in a subtitle as in the Aleppo area. He is then shot dead with several bullets to the upper body and head.

Another video clip appears to show the killing of a man named as Abu Wa'el Rashid, who is thrown out of a second- or third-floor window. The narrator – who says that the footage was shot in Nabek, in Damascus governorate, on 15 June 2012 – says “this is the fate of all traitors, of those who collaborate with security and *shabiha*”.

The description of the clip says the killing was carried out by the al-Nur Battalion, which Amnesty International believes to be a Salafist armed group which is not part of the Free Syria Army.

Information received by Amnesty International, including oral testimony, video clips and media reports indicates that dozens of individuals suspected of working for or aiding the Syrian government's security forces and pro-government militia may have been killed by armed groups after being captured.

Article 3 Common to the four Geneva Conventions, which applies to all parties to non-international armed conflicts such as the one currently taking place in Syria, prohibits “murder of all kinds” and “the passing of sentences and the carrying out of executions without previous judgement pronounced by a regularly constituted court”.

“In armed conflict, all parties, including armed opposition groups, are legally bound by the rules of international humanitarian law (IHL). Serious violations of IHL are war crimes, and those responsible can expect to be brought to account in the future,” said Ann Harrison.

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