

**BRANCH 215**

Agency: Military Intelligence  
 Documented Torture Methods:  
 beating; beating with object;  
 shaming

**BRANCH 248**

Agency: Military Intelligence  
 Documented Torture Methods:  
 beating; beating with object;  
 electrocution; shaming

**BRANCH 227**

Agency: Military Intelligence  
 Documented Torture Methods:  
 beating; slaps; shaming;  
 exposure to cold; stress  
 positions

**AL-KHATTIB BRANCH**

Agency: General Intelligence  
 Documented Torture Methods:  
 beating; beating with object;  
 stress positions; flogging;  
 electrocution; threats

**BAS TOUMA BRANCH**

Agency: Air Force Intelligence  
 Documented Torture Methods:  
 beating; beating with object;  
 electrocution; shaming; balance;  
 shaming; burning with cigarettes

**DAMASCUS****MEZZEH AIRPORT BRANCH**

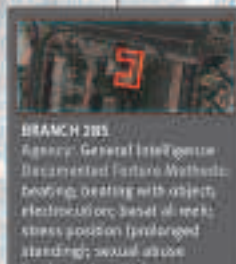
Agency: Air Force Intelligence  
 Documented Torture Methods:  
 beating; beating with object;  
 shaming; electrocution; threat to  
 detainees; shaming; flogging  
 with hot water and acid

**MEZZEH BRANCH**

Agency: Political Security  
 Documented Torture Methods:  
 beating; shaming; electrocution;  
 threats to family; burning with  
 cigarettes

**BRANCH 291**

Agency: Military Intelligence  
 Documented Torture Methods:  
 beating; beating with object;  
 shaming; electrocution; threats  
 against detainees; exposure to  
 cold; threats against family  
 members; sexual abuse

**BRANCH 285**

Agency: General Intelligence  
 Documented Torture Methods:  
 beating; beating with object;  
 electrocution; shaming; stress  
 position (prolonged  
 standing); sexual abuse  
 (prolonged nudity)

**BRANCH 235 (TALESTINE)**

Agency: Military Intelligence  
 Documented Torture Methods:  
 beating; beating with object;  
 shaming; electrocution; shaming;  
 threats

HUMAN  
 RIGHTS  
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# Torture Archipelago

Arbitrary Arrests, Torture and Enforced Disappearances  
 in Syria's Underground Prisons since March 2011



# **Torture Archipelago**

**Arbitrary Arrests, Torture, and Enforced Disappearances in  
Syria's Underground Prisons since March 2011**

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Printed in the United States of America

ISBN: 1-56432-906-2

Cover design by Rafael Jimenez

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JULY 2012

ISBN: 1-56432-906-2

# **Torture Archipelago**

## **Arbitrary Arrests, Torture, and Enforced Disappearances in Syria's Underground Prisons since March 2011**

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## SUMMARY

The guards hung me by my wrists from the ceiling for eight days. After a few days of hanging, being denied sleep, it felt like my brain stopped working. I was imagining things. My feet got swollen on the third day. I felt pain that I have never felt in my entire life. It was excruciating. I screamed that I needed to go to a hospital, but the guards just laughed at me.

—Elias describing how he was tortured in Branch 285 of the Department of General Intelligence in Damascus

Since the beginning of anti-government protests in March 2011, Syrian authorities have subjected tens of thousands of people to arbitrary arrests, unlawful detentions, enforced disappearances, ill-treatment, and torture using an extensive network of detention facilities, an archipelago of torture centers, scattered throughout Syria.

Based on more than 200 interviews with former detainees, including women and children, and defectors from the Syrian military and intelligence agencies, this report focuses on 27 of these detention facilities. For each facility, most of them with cells and torture chambers and one or several underground floors, we provide the exact location, identify the agencies responsible for operating them, document the type of ill-treatment and torture used, and name, to the extent possible, the individuals running them. The facilities included in this report are those for which multiple witnesses have indicated the same location and provided detailed descriptions about the use of torture. The actual number of such facilities is likely much higher.

In charge of Syria's network of detention facilities are the country's four main intelligence agencies, commonly referred to collectively as the mukhabarat:

- the Department of Military Intelligence (Shu`bat al-Mukhabarat al-`Askariyya);
- the Political Security Directorate (Idarat al-Amn al-Siyasi);
- the General Intelligence Directorate (Idarat al-Mukhabarat al-`Amma); and
- the Air Force Intelligence Directorate (Idarat al-Mukhabarat al-Jawiyya).

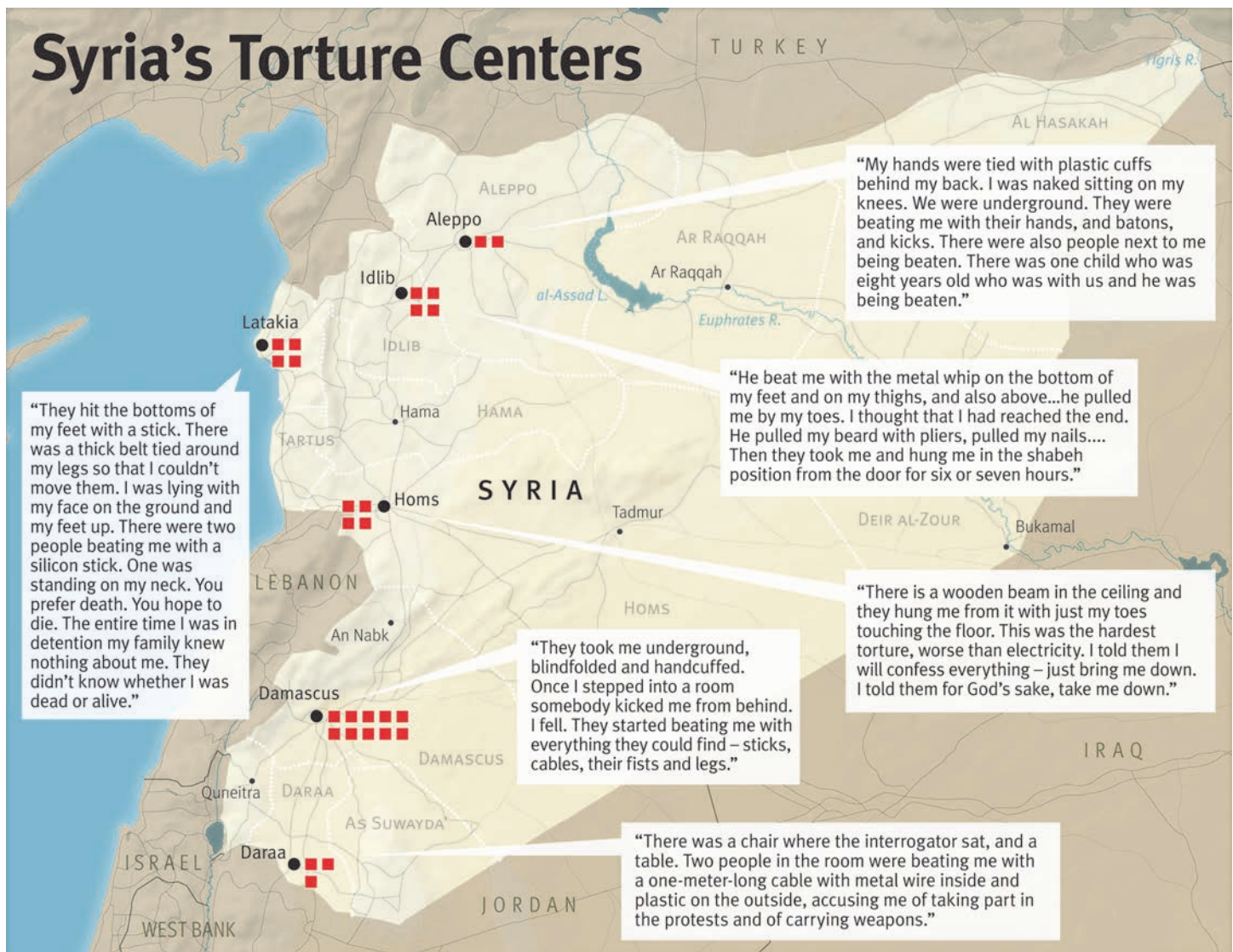
Each of these four agencies maintains central branches in Damascus as well as regional, city, and local branches across the country. In virtually all of these branches there are detention facilities of varying size.

Syria's intelligence agencies have historically operated independently from each other with no clear boundaries to their areas of jurisdiction. Relying on the country's overbroad emergency law, the mukhabarat has a long history of detaining people without arrest warrants and denying detainees other due process safeguards. Lifting the emergency law in April 2011 changed little in practice. Legislation limiting the time that a person can be lawfully held in detention without judicial review to 60 days for certain crimes, simultaneously introduced in April 2011, does not meet the requirement in international law that judicial review should take place "promptly." Furthermore, several former detainees interviewed by Human Rights Watch said that they had been held without judicial review even longer than the 60 days permitted by Syrian law.

To manage the thousands of people detained in the context of anti-government demonstrations, the authorities also established numerous temporary unofficial holding centres in places such as stadiums, military bases, schools, and hospitals where the authorities rounded up and held people during massive detention campaigns before transporting them to branches of the intelligence agencies.

All of the witnesses interviewed by Human Rights Watch described conditions of detention—extreme overcrowding, inadequate food, and routine denial of necessary medical assistance—that would by themselves amount to ill-treatment and, in some cases, torture. But almost all the former detainees interviewed by Human Rights Watch also said they had been subjected to torture or witnessed the torture of others during their detention. Interrogators, guards, and officers used a broad range of torture methods, including prolonged beatings, often with objects such as batons and wires, holding the detainees in painful stress positions for prolonged periods of time, often with the use of specially devised equipment, the use of electricity, burning with car battery acid, sexual assault and humiliation, the pulling of fingernails, and mock execution. Altogether Human Rights Watch documented more than 20 different methods of torture used in Syria's archipelago of torture centers.





This map shows 27 detention centers that were identified by multiple witnesses interviewed by Human Rights Watch. Human Rights Watch has interviewed more than 200 people who experienced or witnessed torture, including defectors from intelligence agencies who participated in abuses. © 2012 Human Rights Watch© 2012 Human Rights Watch

Most of the detainees interviewed said they had been subjected to several forms of torture, often inflicted with escalating levels of pain. At times detainees were forced to remain naked or in their underwear while they were tortured. Several former detainees interviewed for this report told Human Rights Watch that they had witnessed people dying from torture in detention. Human Rights Watch also received information about deaths in custody from families or friends of the victims.

A former intelligence officer described to Human Rights Watch the various methods used at the Air Force Intelligence base at the Mezzeh airport in Damascus:



The mildest form of torture is hitting people with batons on their arms and legs and not giving them anything to eat or drink. Then they would hang the detainees from the ceiling by their hands, sometimes for hours or days. I saw it while I was talking to the interrogators. They used electric stun-guns and an electroshock machine, an electric current transformer. It is a small machine with two wires with clips that they attach to nipples and a knob that regulates the current. In addition, they put people in coffins and threatened to kill them and close the coffin. People were wearing underwear. They pour hot water on people and then whip them. I've also seen drills there, but I've never seen them being used. I've also seen them using martial art moves, like breaking ribs with a knee kick. They put pins under your feet and hit you so that you step on them. I also heard them threatening to cut off the detainees' penises.

A 31-year-old detainee who was detained in Idlib governorate in June described to Human Rights Watch how intelligence agents tortured him in the Idlib Central Prison:

They forced me to undress. Then they started squeezing my fingers with pliers. They put staples in my fingers, chest, and ears. I was only allowed to take them out if I spoke. The nails in the ears were the most painful. They used two wires hooked up to a car battery to give me electric shocks. They used electric stun-guns on my genitals twice. I thought I would never see my family again. They tortured me like this three times over three days.

While most of the torture victims interviewed by Human Rights Watch were young men aged between 18 and 35, interviewed victims also included children, women, and elderly individuals. Defecting members of the intelligence agencies told Human Rights Watch that they either witnessed or participated in the torture and ill-treatment of detainees, corroborating accounts by former detainees.

Human Rights Watch has documented the use of torture and ill-treatment in the following detention facilities:

Agency	Name of Branch	City	Head of Branch
Military Intelligence	Branch 215	Damascus	Brig. Gen. Sha'afiq
Military Intelligence	Branch 227	Damascus	Maj. Gen. Rustom Ghazali
Military Intelligence	Branch 291	Damascus	Brig. Gen. Burhan Qadour (Replaced Brig. Gen. Yousef Abdou in May 2012)
Military Intelligence	Branch 235 ("Palestine")	Damascus	Brig. Gen. Muhammad Khallouf
Military Intelligence	Branch 248	Damascus	Not identified
Military Intelligence	Branch 245	Daraa	Col. Loai al-Ali
Military Intelligence	Aleppo Branch	Aleppo	Not identified
Military Intelligence	Branch 271	Idlib	Brig. Gen. Nawfel al-Hussein
Military Intelligence	Homs Branch	Homs	Muhammad Zamreni
Military Intelligence	Latakia Branch	Latakia	Not identified
Air Force Intelligence	Mezzeh Airport Branch	Damascus	Brig. Gen. Abdul Salam Fajr Mahmoud (director of investigative branch)
Air Force Intelligence	Bab Touma Branch	Damascus	Not identified
Air Force Intelligence	Homs Branch	Homs	Brig. Gen. Jawdat al-Ahmed
Air Force Intelligence	Daraa branch	Daraa	Col. Qusay Mihoub
Air Force Intelligence	Latakia Branch	Latakia	Col. Suhail Al-Abdullah
Political Security	Mezzeh Branch	Damascus	Not identified
Political Security	Idlib Branch	Idlib	Not identified
Political Security	Homs Branch	Homs	Not identified
Political Security	Latakia Branch	Latakia	Not identified
Political Security	Daraa Branch	Daraa	Not identified
General Intelligence	Latakia Branch	Latakia	Brig. Gen. Khudr Khudr
General Intelligence	Branch 285	Damascus	Brig. Gen. Ibrahim Ma'ala (Replaced Brig. Gen. Hussam Fendi in late 2011)
General Intelligence	Al-Khattib Branch	Damascus	Not identified
General Intelligence	Aleppo Branch	Aleppo	Not identified
General Intelligence	Branch 318	Homs	Brig. Gen. Firas Al-Hamed
General Intelligence	Idlib Branch	Idlib	Not identified
Joint	Central Prison - Idlib	Idlib	Not identified

In the vast majority of detention cases documented by Human Rights Watch, family members could obtain no information about the fate or whereabouts of the detainees and detainees were not allowed any contact with the outside world. Many of the detentions can therefore be qualified as enforced disappearances.

Human Rights Watch calls on the UN Security Council to ensure accountability for these crimes by referring the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court. Human Rights Watch also calls on the United Nations Security Council to ensure that the Syrian government grants recognized international detention monitors access to all detention facilities, including those mentioned in this report.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### To the UN Security Council

- Demand that Syria grant recognized international detention monitors access to all detention facilities, official and unofficial, without prior notification, including those mentioned in this report;
- Ensure that the UN supervisory mission (UNSMIS) deployed to Syria includes a properly staffed and equipped human rights component with staff with expertise in detention monitoring that is able to identify the use of arbitrary detention, visit detention centers, and to safely and independently interview victims of human rights abuses while protecting them from retaliation. The mission should include among its personnel people trained to identify gender-based violence and other gender-specific human rights violations and personnel trained to work with children;
- Demand that Syria enforce its commitment under point 4 of the Annan plan by releasing all arbitrarily detained persons, “including especially vulnerable categories of persons, and persons involved in peaceful political activities,” and provide without delay “a list of all places in which such persons are being detained”;
- Refer the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court (ICC);
- Adopt targeted sanctions on officials credibly implicated in abuses;
- Require states to suspend all military sales and assistance, including technical training and services, to the Syrian government, given the real risk that the weapons and technology will be used in the commission of serious human rights violations;
- Demand that Syria cooperate fully with the UN Human Rights Council Commission of Inquiry and with the UNSMIS;
- Demand access for humanitarian missions, foreign journalists, and independent human rights organizations.

### To All Countries

- Acting individually, or jointly through regional mechanisms where appropriate, adopt targeted sanctions against Syrian officials credibly implicated in the ongoing serious violations of international human rights law;

- Under the principle of universal jurisdiction and in accordance with national laws, investigate and prosecute members of the Syrian senior military and civilian leadership suspected of committing international crimes;
- Call for the UN Security Council to refer the situation in Syria to the ICC, as the forum most capable of effectively investigating and prosecuting those bearing the greatest responsibility for abuses in Syria.

### **To the Arab League**

- Acting individually and jointly, maintain and strengthen targeted sanctions against Syrian officials credibly implicated in the ongoing grave, widespread, and systematic violations of international human rights law in Syria since mid-March 2011;
- Support a strong UNSMIS human rights component (as described in the recommendations above);
- Call for the UN Security Council to refer the situation in Syria to the ICC.

### **To Russia and China**

- Support UN Security Council action on Syria (as described in the recommendations above), including referring the situation to the ICC;
- Suspend all military sales and assistance to the Syrian government, given the real risk that weapons and technology will be used in the commission of serious human rights violations;
- Condemn in the strongest terms the Syrian authorities' systematic violations of human rights;

### **To the Syrian Government**

- Release all arbitrarily detained persons, "including especially vulnerable categories of persons, and persons involved in peaceful political activities," and provide without delay "a list of all places in which such persons are being detained" in accordance with point 4 of the Annan plan.
- Immediately halt the practice of enforced disappearance, arbitrary arrest and detention, and the use of torture;

- Conduct prompt, thorough, and objective investigations into allegations of arbitrary detention, use of torture, enforced disappearances, and deaths in custody, including the ones described in this report, and bring the perpetrators to justice;
- Suspend members of the security forces against whom there are credible allegations of human rights abuses, pending investigations;
- Annul Legislative Decree No. 14, of January 15, 1969, and Legislative Decree 69, which provide immunity to members of the security forces by requiring a decree from the General Command of the Army and Armed Forces to prosecute any member of the internal security forces, Political Security, and customs police;
- Publish lists of all detainees;
- Provide immediate and unhindered access for recognized international detention monitors to all detention facilities, official and unofficial, without prior notification, including those mentioned in this report;
- Provide all UNSMIS staff with the necessary permissions, including visas to Syria or use of UN air assets, to carry out their mandate;
- Provide immediate and unhindered access and cooperation to independent observers, journalists, and human rights monitors, including the UN special rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions; the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights; the UN Human Rights Council Commission of Inquiry on Syria; and the special rapporteur on Syria.



## METHODOLOGY

Human Rights Watch has documented the systematic use of torture by the Syrian authorities since anti-government demonstrations broke out in March 2011.<sup>1</sup> This report is based on more than 200 interviews with former detainees and defectors from the Syrian military and intelligence agencies. The interviews were conducted in Syria and in neighboring countries that host refugees from Syria—Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq, and Turkey—between April 2011 and May 2012.

Interviews were conducted in Arabic or in English using an interpreter. Because of the very real possibility of reprisals we have withheld the names of the victims and witnesses we interviewed, using instead pseudonyms to identify the sources of information.

To establish the location of the detention facilities, we asked victims, witnesses, and defectors to indicate the building where they were held, visited, or served using satellite imagery. Some detainees were not able to identify the facility in which they were held because they were blindfolded. Others, however, were able to do so, either because they were detained close to where they lived and knew the area well, or because they were told by guards and fellow detainees where they were being held, or because they were not blindfolded when they were brought to the facility or released. In a few cases, detainees were asked to come back to the same detention facility for further interrogation upon release.

We also asked former detainees and defectors to describe the facilities in detail and to draw the layout of the floors where they were detained and interrogated. This helped us to corroborate information from different witnesses.

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<sup>1</sup> See “Syria: Sexual Assault in Detention,” Human Rights Watch news release, June 15, 2012, <http://www.hrw.org/news/2012/06/15/syria-sexual-assault-detention>; Human Rights Watch, *“They Burned My Heart”: War Crimes in Northern Idlib during Peace Plan Negotiations*, May 2012, <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2012/05/02/they-burned-my-heart-o>; “Syria, Stop Torture of Children,” Human Rights Watch news release, February 3, 2012, <http://www.hrw.org/news/2012/02/03/syria-stop-torture-children>; Human Rights Watch, *“We Live as in War”: Crackdown on Protesters in the Governorate of Homs*, Syria, November 2011, <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2011/11/11/we-live-war-o>; Human Rights Watch, *“We’ve Never Seen Such Horror”: Crimes against Humanity by Syrian Security Forces*, June 2011, <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2011/06/01/we-ve-never-seen-such-horror-o>; “Syria: Rampant Torture of Protesters,” Human Rights Watch news release, April 15, 2011, <http://www.hrw.org/news/2011/04/15/syria-rampant-torture-protesters>.

We also asked former detainees and defectors to name those in charge of these detention facilities. In some cases, it was possible to corroborate information through independent interviews with two or more witnesses or public sources. However, given the secrecy surrounding the Syrian intelligence services (mukhabarat), names of commanders and others in authority and command responsibility might be further clarified as more information comes to light.

The detention facilities included in this report are those for which several sources described having witnessed or experienced the use of torture and ill-treatment. We have only provided the location of facilities that were identified by two or more people.

# I. ARREST, DETENTION, AND TORTURE IN SYRIA

## Arbitrary Arrests and Unlawful Detention

Given the limited access for independent observers and the near-complete secrecy surrounding detentions and detention facilities in Syria, it is virtually impossible to establish how many people have been detained since demonstrations broke out in March 2011. As of June 22, 2012, the Violations Documentation Center (VDC), a Syrian monitoring group working in coordination with the Local Coordination Committees (LCC), a network of Syrian activists, had documented over 25,000 detentions.<sup>2</sup> The actual number is likely much higher.

Most of the detentions documented by Human Rights Watch were carried out by the intelligence services (mukhabarat), often assisted by the military, during and immediately following anti-government protests; in the course of large-scale house-to-house “sweep” operations; and at checkpoints on roads. Riot police (Hafz al-Nizam), the army, and, in some cases, pro-government militias also detained people, but often these detainees were eventually transferred to the mukhabarat.

Security forces also raided the homes of “wanted” individuals and, in some cases, when these persons were not at home, detained their relatives instead. The raids were often accompanied by looting and destruction of property, and by beatings and other ill-treatment of the detainees. As documented in previous Human Rights Watch publications, these actions were usually ordered, authorized, or condoned by the commanding officers.<sup>3</sup>

According to witnesses interviewed by Human Rights Watch, the security forces conducting the arrests did not introduce themselves, did not provide any legal justification for the arrest, and did not inform the detainees as to where they were being taken. Following the arrests, the detainees were usually brought to local detention facilities—police stations, local branches of one of the intelligence agencies, or ad-hoc facilities such as stadiums, schools, facilities belonging to the youth branch of the Baath party (locally referred to as Tala’e`), or hospitals. Following initial interrogation and collection of personal data, the

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<sup>2</sup> See Center for Documentation of Violations in Syria, Statistics for the Number of Detainees, <http://vdc-sy.org/index.php/en/> (accessed June 25, 2012).

<sup>3</sup> Human Rights Watch, *“By All Means Necessary!”: Individual and Command Responsibility for Crimes against Humanity in Syria*, December 2011, <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2011/12/15/all-means-necessary-o>.

security forces typically transferred the detainees to larger detention facilities located in regional centers such as Damascus, Homs, Idlib, Latakia, Daraa, and Hama.

Most of the detainees interviewed by Human Rights Watch spent anywhere from a few days to several months in detention. In most cases, detainees were held in more than one detention facility. It was not uncommon for detainees to be transferred to four or five detention facilities run by different intelligence agencies during their detention, being subjected to torture, the deliberate infliction of severe pain, in several of them.

In a typical example, security forces detained thirty-one-year old Khalil during a protest in a town in the Idlib governorate on June 29, 2011. They first took him to the local police station where police officers interrogated him three times during the night following his arrest, kicking and beating him. The next day security forces transferred Khalil to the central prison in Idlib, where he initially spent 16 days on the third floor, being subjected to severe torture by Political Security officers who had taken over the floor. Political Security officers then transferred him to a Military Intelligence facility located in the basement of the prison, where the torture continued. After 13 days in Military Intelligence custody in Idlib, Khalil was transferred to Damascus where he was held in Military Intelligence Branch 215 for five days, in Branch 291 for six days, and then in Branch 248 before he was eventually released, about two months after his detention.<sup>4</sup>

Some detainees were released without any formal procedure, when the interrogators eventually told them that they were free to go; others were taken to court and seen by a judge and either charged and released on bail, or simply released. More than half of the former detainees interviewed by Human Rights Watch were released without seeing a judge or having any formal charges brought against them. Human Rights Watch does not know how many people were sentenced to prison terms after their detention.

The vast majority of detention cases documented by Human Rights Watch can be qualified as enforced disappearances. In international law this is when state agents or other persons acting with the support of the state detain someone and then refuse to

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<sup>4</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Khalil, January 8, 2012.

acknowledge the detention, or conceal his or her fate or whereabouts.<sup>5</sup> In most of the cases documented by Human Rights Watch, the detainees' families had no information about their fate or whereabouts for weeks or, in some cases, months following the arrest, despite their inquiries with various intelligence agencies. The authorities did not allow detainees to have any contact with the outside world and left their families wondering whether their detained relatives were alive or dead.

Widespread or systematic enforced disappearances, carried out as part of a state policy, can constitute a crime against humanity.<sup>6</sup>

## Conditions in Detention

All of the witnesses interviewed by Human Rights Watch described conditions in these detention facilities that by themselves amount to ill-treatment and, in some cases, torture.

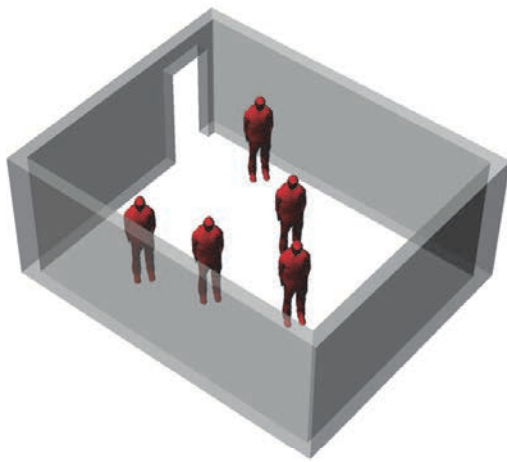
In all of the facilities that witnesses described to Human Rights Watch, the detainees were held in overcrowded cells. Former detainees usually distinguished between what they called common cells and individual cells. The size of the common cells varied, measuring up to 70 square meters. For example, two former detainees told Human Rights Watch that a common cell measuring about 20 square meters in Military Intelligence Branch 291 in Damascus held 60-75 people.

Former detainees explained to Human Rights Watch that what they called individual cells were often small rooms measuring one to two square meters, many with a hole in the middle of the ground for a toilet. While in some cases former detainees reported being held alone in such cells most of the detainees said that these individual cells usually held several people. Both in the common and individual cells, the overcrowding was such that in many cases the detainees could only stand inside their cells, or had to take turns sleeping.

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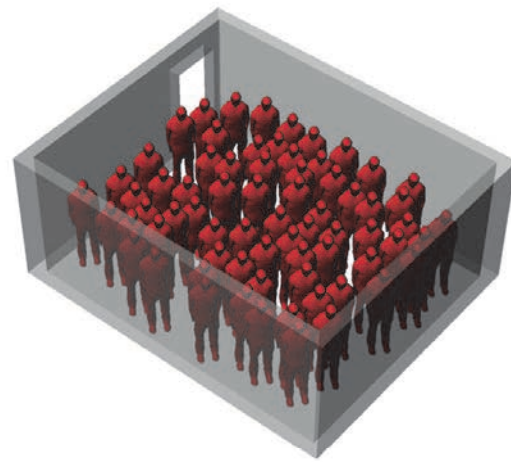
<sup>5</sup> International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (ICCPED), adopted December 20, 2006, G.A. Res. 61/177, U.N. Doc. A/RES/61/177 (2006), entered into force December 23, 2010, art. 2 [Syria has not ratified the ICCPED].

<sup>6</sup> Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, U.N. Doc. A/CONF.183/9, July 17, 1998, entered into force July 1, 2002, art. 7.



**Maximum cell occupancy under the Council of Europe's Committee for the Prevention of Torture**  
4 x 5 meters, 5 detainees

International guidelines stipulate that accommodations for prisoners should meet a minimum floor space requirement, but do not define what this requirement is. In the above model, each prisoner is provided four square meters, a standard often used by the Council of Europe's Committee for the Prevention of Torture.



**Military Intelligence Branch 291 in Damascus**  
4 x 5 meters, 70 detainees

*"I spent 40 days there in a group cell measuring about 20 square meters. There were about 70 people in the cell. It was so packed that we couldn't lie down to sleep. We had to lean on each other and take turns."*

—"Fawzi," who was detained for the second time in August 2011 and held for about 70 days, including about 40 days in Military Intelligence Branch 291. Human Rights Watch interviewed "Fawzi" in Hatay, Turkey, on January 6, 2012

Diagrams produced by SITU Studio and Forensic Architecture, an ERC-funded project.

Hatem, who was detained in late September 2011 in a branch of the General Intelligence Directorate in Kafr Souseh, Damascus, told Human Rights Watch,

In the first three days I was in a group cell. We were around 65 people in the cell which was 3.5 by 3 meters. While in that cell I stayed standing for three days. When I wanted to sleep I would lean on the wall and sleep. The bathroom was in the cell. After the first three days they moved me to a solitary cell. We were five people in that cell. It was one by two meters. In the group cell that had around 65 people. Because they couldn't sleep and had to stand all the time, people started to go crazy, to hallucinate. There was a group of five or six people in my group cell that started going crazy. One time some people were sitting, and sleeping in the cell, and there was one person hallucinating who started peeing on the people as they are sleeping. Imagine!<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Human Rights Watch phone interview with Hatem, November 18, 2011.



The majority of former detainees interviewed by Human Rights Watch said they were blindfolded and handcuffed most of the time during their detentions, and some said they were kept naked for several days.

All the former detainees interviewed by Human Rights Watch reported being deprived of proper food (a commonly described meal was a piece of stale bread, half an egg, or a tomato, provided once a day), potable water, and regular access to a toilet.

Samir, who was detained in Military Intelligence Branch 235 (known as the “Palestine Branch”) in Damascus from July to September 2011, told Human Rights Watch,

They brought me down to where the cells are and put me in a room that measured 2 by 1.5 meters. The ceiling was not high. They left me there by myself. I stayed in this cell the whole time I was detained. The cell had every kind of filth, cockroaches, fleas, the smell of dirt and mold. There was no toilet. There was just an old large Pepsi bottle filled with urine. On the floor there was a flimsy mattress with an unreal smell ... There was no light and [when I entered] no food and no water. [You would] hear the sound of torture, beatings, people being sworn at, humiliated, it was routine. They let you go to the toilet two times a day. You just took your Pepsi bottle and emptied it and there was another bottle for water, which you filled. There was no showering and no soap. For 61 days I did not shower once. After a while, you get used to it.

There were three meals a day, but their way of distributing it was very bizarre. They distributed the bread on the floor. In the metal door of the cell there was a small vent for air. They threw the bread in through this vent. The bread was either dough or burnt entirely. We would only get stale bread. They would serve the food in old empty *halaweh* [a sugar and sesame sweet] containers ... The guard that distributed the bread at lunch yelled at you to stand at the door and to put out your plate to get the food. Then he throws the liquid, the bulgar wheat—it’s all dirt—through the vent. He throws it, some lands on the floor, some on the plate, you don’t know where. This is between 12 and 2 o’clock. At 4 p.m. you go to the bathroom. They give each

person one potato for his dinner. At night there is no other food. The second time you go to the bathroom is at 6 a.m. You go to the bathroom and the prison guard, so as not to tire himself out, has the food at the door of the bathroom and gives it to you on the way out. It is four olives and a small spoon of jam or sometimes half an egg or some *halaweh*, but the worst kind of *halaweh*.<sup>8</sup>

Former detainees also said that there was virtually no medical assistance available to the detainees in many detention facilities, even to those who sustained injuries or bullet wounds during their arrest, or suffered from chronic conditions. Several witnesses told Human Rights Watch that they witnessed the deaths of fellow detainees from complications caused by lack of medications they required for diabetes or a heart condition.

Jalal, a former detainee in the Central Prison in Idlib, for example, told Human Rights Watch that one of the detainees died because of lack of medical treatment in July 2011:

One guy had diabetes. We kept telling the guards to get him medical care, but they would just take him out and beat him up. For a week he couldn't eat or stand up. We had to carry him to the bathroom. And then he went into diabetic shock. He said his prayers and then he just died. As he was saying his prayers another prisoner realized that he was dying and started kicking the door. But the guards just took the guy out who kicked the door and beat him. They dropped the dead man's body on the floor outside the cell and called the nurse who confirmed that he had died.<sup>9</sup>

## Systematic Use of Torture and Deaths in Custody

Almost all the former detainees interviewed told Human Rights Watch that they had been subjected to torture, meaning the deliberate infliction of severe pain, during their detention and witnessed the torture of others. Defectors from the intelligence agencies,

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<sup>8</sup> Human Rights Watch phone interview with Samir, December 14, 2011.

<sup>9</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Jalal, January 8, 2012. The detainee who was beaten because he kicked on the door corroborated the account in a separate interview in a different location. Human Rights Watch interview with Yazid, January 9, 2012.

who either witnessed or participated in the torture and ill-treatment of detainees, corroborated these accounts.

The most severe torture took place during interrogation sessions, often in separate interrogation or torture rooms, or in corridors and hallways in some of the smaller detention facilities. During these sessions, interrogators and officers usually wanted the detainees to confess to having participated in demonstrations, provide names of other demonstrators and organizers, admit to owning and having used weapons, and in some cases provide information about alleged funding of demonstrations from abroad.

But many former detainees interviewed also believed that a main reason for the use of torture was not just to obtain information, but to punish and intimidate the detainees.

Interrogators, guards, and officers used a wide range of torture methods, including prolonged beatings, often with objects such as batons and cables, holding the detainees in stress positions for prolonged periods of time, and use of electricity and electric shocks. At times detainees were forced to remain naked or in their underwear while they were tortured.

Human Rights Watch has documented the use of the following torture methods:<sup>10</sup>

- Prolonged and severe beating, punching, and kicking;
- Beating with objects (cables, whips, sticks, batons, pipes);
- *Falaqa* (beating the victim with sticks, batons, or whips on the soles of the feet);
- *Shabeh* (hanging the victim from the ceiling by the wrists so that the his toes barely touch the ground or he is completely suspended in the air with his entire weight on his wrists, causing extreme swelling and discomfort);
- *Balanco* (hanging the victim by the wrists tied behind the back);
- Basat al-reeh, or “flying carpet” (tying the victim down to a flat board, the head suspended in the air so that the victim cannot defend himself. One variation of this torture involves stretching the limbs while the victim lies on the board (as on a rack). In another variation described to Human Rights Watch the board is folded in half so

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<sup>10</sup> See also Amnesty International, “Syria: ‘I Wanted to Die’: Syria’s Torture Survivors Speak Out” A.I. Index MDE 24/016/2012, March 14, 2012, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE24/016/2012/en> (accessed June 25, 2012).

- that the victim's face touches his legs both causing pain and further immobilizing the victim);
- Dulab, or the "tire method" (the victim is forced to bend at the waist and stick his head, neck, legs and sometimes arms into the inside of a car tire so that the victim is totally immobilized and cannot protect him or herself from ensuing beatings);
  - Electrocution (with electric prods or wires connected to a battery);
  - Mock execution;
  - Threats against the detainee (of execution, rape);
  - Threats against family members (of detention, rape);
  - Exposure to cold/heat;
  - Sexual violence;
  - Stress positions, such as being forced to stand upright for hours or days;
  - Hanging upside down;
  - "Standing on the wall" (The victim stands with his back to the wall. His hands are tied to the wall up by his head. There is a metal pole sticking out of the wall pressing into his back and causing discomfort but he can't move because his hands are tied. His feet are on the ground);
  - Pulling out fingernails;
  - Plucking out hair/beard;
  - Use of acid to burn skin;
  - Burning; and
  - Prolonged nudity.

Some of these torture methods, such as the use of electric shocks, the dulab, and basat al-reeh, involved the use of objects, some of them apparently custom-made, which indicates that the torture was planned. Many of these torture methods had been used in Syria in the past. In 1991, Human Rights Watch documented many of these forms of torture.<sup>11</sup>

While information from former detainees indicates that particular detention facilities, or particular interrogation officers, preferred certain torture methods over others, the replication of torture methods across branches and even agencies shows that the use of torture was systematic.

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<sup>11</sup> Human Rights Watch/Middle East, *Syria Unmasked: The Suppression of Human Rights by the Asad Regime* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), pp. 54-57.

### *Shabeh*

Detainees described being hung from the ceiling by their wrists. Some detainees described their toes barely touching the ground, while others said they were suspended in the air with their entire weight on their wrists, causing extreme swelling and discomfort. While suspended, a number of detainees told Human Rights Watch they were beaten.

“They would beat me and say ‘don’t you want to confess!’ For an hour and a half I was hanging. I didn’t confess and they brought me down. At his point it was 3.30-4:00 am. My hands were red like blood.”

— Male detained in the Kafr Souseh neighborhood of Damascus in September 2011. Human Rights Watch interviewed him by phone while he was inside Syria.



Human Rights Watch commissioned a Syrian artist to produce sketches based on statements received from former detainees and security force defectors. They depict six of the most commonly used torture methods in detention centers across Syria — shabeh, dulab, beating with object, falaqa, electrocution, and basat al-reeh. They are not representations of any specific individuals.

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### *Dulab*

Detainees described being folded at the waist and having their head, neck, and legs put into a car tire so that they were immobilized and could not protect themselves from beatings on the back, legs, and head including by batons and whips. Some detainees described having their arms inside the tire as well.

“They fold you in half, feet first, and put you inside so that you can’t move at all. Then they started beating me. They had a braided electrical cable and they hit me with it. There was no talking. It was like this for 30 minutes then they pulled me out and poured water on my legs and hands. Cold water. I was feeling death.”

— Soldier who was detained in the Military Intelligence branch in Latakia in June 2011. Human Rights Watch interviewed him in Hatay, Turkey in January 2012.



## Beating with Objects

On the way to and inside detention facilities detainees described being bound and blindfolded while being beaten by batons, cables, whips, and other objects.

“There were 20 security officers. To welcome us each started beating us with a whip while we were standing. We were ten people in a row [one right after the other]. The officer hit me in the chest and I fell on those behind me and they fell down. Each security officer hit us and they were laughing. They made us lie on our stomachs and they hit the bottoms of our feet...”

— Male detained in the Central Prison in Idlib in July 2011. Human Rights Watch interviewed him in Hatay, Turkey in January 2012.





### *Falaqa*

Detainees described being beaten on the soles of their feet with sticks and whips to the point that their skin was raw, their feet swollen and bleeding, making it impossible to walk.

“He ordered me to raise my legs and then he started hitting me on my soles with a thick wooden baton. I started screaming “I didn’t do anything, I can’t bear the pain.” He hit me 5 times and ordered me to stand up. After standing he told me to run in my place. I couldn’t lift my legs because of the pain.”

— Male detained at the Tadumr roundabout checkpoint and taken to the Political Security branch in Homs. Human Rights Watch interviewed him by Skype while he was inside Syria in April 2012.

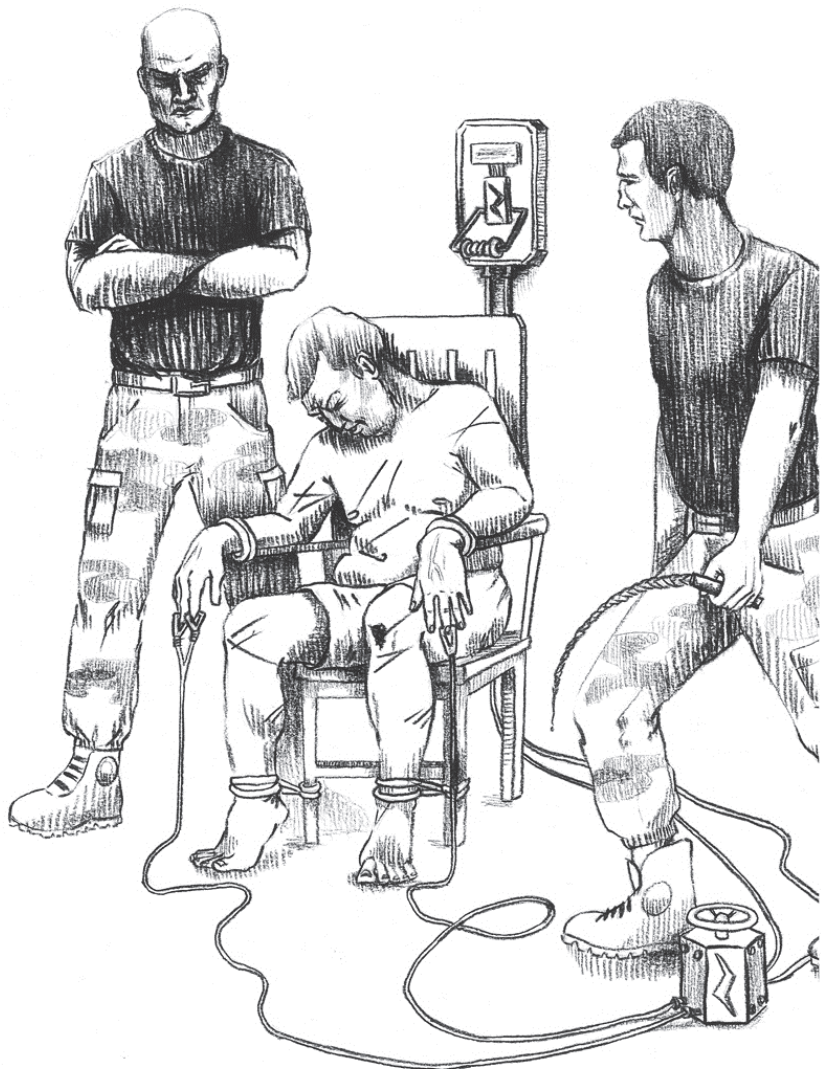
## Electrocution

Detainees described being bound, sometimes on a chair, having cattle prongs attached to their bodies, and being jolted repeatedly by electrical currents.

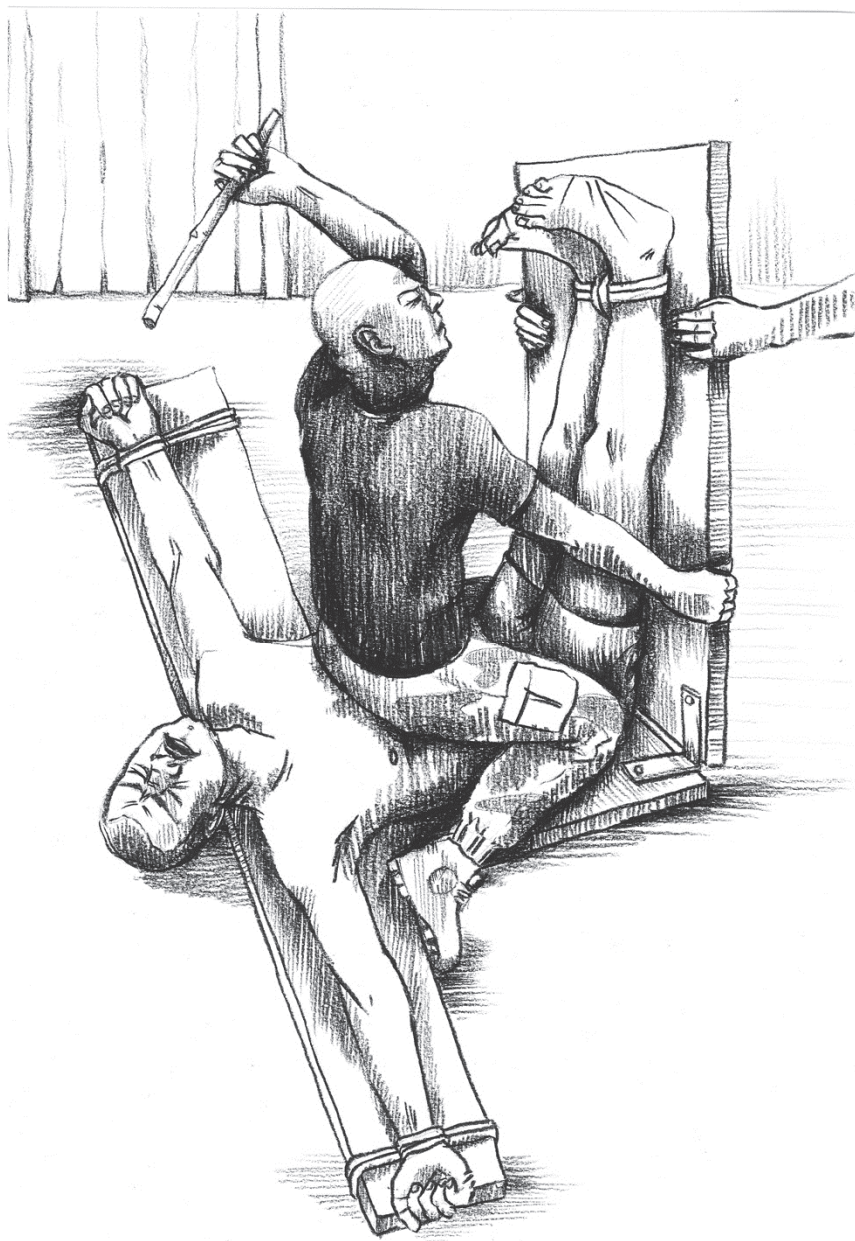
The prongs were reportedly attached to sensitive places including genitalia, inside the mouth, and also on the neck, chest, hands, and legs.

“I didn’t confess. The interrogator said ‘bring me the electricity.’...The guard brought two electric prongs. He put one in my mouth, on my tooth. Then he started turning it on and off quickly. He did this 7/8 times. I felt like, that’s it. I am not going to leave this branch.”

— Soldier who was held at the Air Force Intelligence branch in Latakia in June 2011. Human Rights Watch interviewed him in Hatay, Turkey in January 2012.







### ***Basat al-reeh***

A number of detainees described being tortured on the “basat al-reeh”. Some indicated that this involved being tied down to a flat board so that they were helpless to defend themselves with their heads suspended in the air. They said their hands and feet were tied together and that they were bound across the chest and legs. Other detainees said that their limbs were also stretched, or pulled, and others indicated that the board folded in half so that their faces touched their legs, both causing pain and further immobilizing them.

“They folded me so my head hit my toes. Hands up above my head, with my elbows bent. They were hitting me with a silicon cable and something like braided electrical cable. I passed out. First he closed it. I felt all of my muscles pulled. He closed it and was beating me, and then I passed out.”

— Male detained in March or April 2011 and held in a shabiha run detention facility in Latakia. Human Rights Watch interviewed him in Hatay, Turkey in January 2012.

All the detainees Human Rights Watch interviewed said the interrogators verbally and physically humiliated them, and threatened both them and their relatives with further abuse or, in some cases, execution.

Ten of the detainees interviewed by Human Rights Watch said they had been subjected to sexual abuse and three said they had witnessed sexual abuse of others. The sexual abuse included rape, penetration with objects, sexual groping, prolonged forced nudity, and electroshock and beatings to genitalia.<sup>12</sup> Thirty-one-year-old Halim, who was detained in Daraa governorate on August 8, 2011 and later transferred to Branch 291 where he spent about 20 days, told Human Rights Watch:

They took five of us out to the corridor. Four were waiting while the fifth was being interrogated. We were standing up, blindfolded, and handcuffed. They beat me. An officer placed a gun to my head, he gave me electric shocks with a stun-gun, and he made me sit on a stick in the ground [sexually abusing me]. There were no real questions— just accusations. But I denied everything.<sup>13</sup>

In most cases documented by Human Rights Watch, detainees were subjected to a combination of these torture methods, often with increasing levels of pain. Amine, a former career soldier who was detained on April 9, 2011, showed Human Rights Watch burn marks on his wrists and explained that they were caused by torture by electricity during his 40-day detention in Military Intelligence Branch 291 in Damascus:

The first day they took me out for interrogation one of the officers punched me in the face and broke one of my teeth. Another said to somebody who just entered the room that he should “beat the shit out of me.” They lifted my legs and beat me with sticks on the soles [of my feet]. As a result, they broke two of my toes on the left foot. They also kicked me with their boots. I don’t know how long it lasted. Maybe it lasted for 12 hours. They took shifts. Every time I called for help or shouted “stop” they laughed.

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<sup>12</sup> “Syria: Sexual Assault in Detention,” Human Rights Watch news release, June 15, 2012, <http://www.hrw.org/news/2012/06/15/syria-sexual-assault-detention>.

<sup>13</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Halim, November 3, 2011.

Then they said “connect him to electricity.” They put me in a chair and placed one cable in my hand and clipped another to my right wrist. I just didn’t have anything to tell them.

I lost consciousness so I don’t know how long it lasted. I woke up when they threw water on me. Then they took me back to the cell. I was naked and received no food and no water. But I couldn’t even lie down because there was not enough space and there was water on the floor.

A couple of hours later they brought me back for interrogation. This time they connected me to electricity before even talking to me. This time, the cables were connected to my lower legs. A doctor later told me that I have lost 60% of the sensitivity in my right leg.

They threatened to arrest my wife, daughter, and my oldest son. They were using my wife’s name. I took their threats very seriously. I fainted again from the electric shocks and they must have dragged me back because when I woke up I was back in my cell.

A couple of hours later they took me out for interrogation again. This time they started using electric shocks to my private parts and they threatened to give me an “acid bath.”<sup>14</sup>

Amer, a 23-year-old man from a town in the Idlib governorate, described to Human Rights Watch how he was tortured during his 42-day detention in the Political Security Branch in Latakia:

They undressed me, tied my hands behind my back, and hit me on my private parts. They clipped my hands to a metal pipe and lifted me so that my feet hardly touched the floor. They kept me like that for two days. When they released me I couldn’t stand, my feet were completely swollen.

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<sup>14</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Afif, November 2, 2011.



I then spent five days in a single cell with six other people. After that 15 officers took me to a separate room. They were cursing my mother and sister and threatened to rape me. They put me on a *basat al-reeh* – I was lying on my back, tied to a board, and they lifted my head and legs. All this time I was undressed. They wrapped wires around my penis and turned on the electricity. I could just hear it buzzing. They did this maybe five times for about 10 seconds. I passed out.

When I regained consciousness they were pushing my legs and hands into a tire. My entire body was blue from beatings.<sup>15</sup>

Several former detainees told Human Rights Watch that they had witnessed people dying from torture in detention. Five defected security force officers also told Human Rights Watch that they had witnessed detainees being executed and beaten to death while in custody.<sup>16</sup>

Human Rights Watch has documented deaths in custody in the following detention facilities:

- Air Force Intelligence Branch in Mezzeh airport, Damascus;<sup>17</sup>
- Idlib Branch of the Department of Military Intelligence;<sup>18</sup>
- Homs Branch of the Department of Military Intelligence;<sup>19</sup>
- Central Prison Idlib;<sup>20</sup>
- Temporary holding facility in Daraa stadium.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Amer, January 10, 2012.

<sup>16</sup> Human Rights Watch Interview with Walid, April 13, 2012; Ghassan, April 15, 2012; Ghassan G., October 29, 2011; Mohamed M., October 27, 2011;

<sup>17</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Habib, October 26, 2011; Human Rights Watch interview with Yazan, October 26, 2011; Human Rights Watch interview with Ramzi, November 1, 2011; Human Rights Watch interview with Zakhya, October 29, 2011; Human Rights Watch interview with Mahdi, November 3, 2011.

<sup>18</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Zahi, January 7, 2012.

<sup>19</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Fathi, July 30, 2011.

<sup>20</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Zahi, January 7, 2012; Human Rights Watch interview with Jalal, January 8, 2012.

<sup>21</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Fares, May 23, 2011; Human Rights Watch interview with Ayman, May 23, 2011.

As of June 18, 2012, the Violations Documentation Center, a Syrian monitoring group collecting the names of those killed and detained in connection with the anti-government uprising, had recorded the names of 575 people who died in custody since March 2011.<sup>22</sup>

Walid, a member of the riot police (Hafz al-Nizam), Brigade 121, Battalion 225 told Human Rights Watch:

In December a protester was killed at our base in Tel Al-Harra, in Daraa governorate. We had arrested him earlier at a protest and brought him back to the base. He was handcuffed and we told him to praise Bashar [al-Assad]. He refused so others in my unit beat him. After they beat him he was still combative and responded “your leader is nothing and your mothers are whores.” One colonel got angry and ordered that they use more violence against the detainee. Seven officers beat him with batons for more than an hour that evening until he died. Later, the colonel said, “put this dog outside” so they placed his body in an empty house. I saw the body before it was taken away, his face was bloody – I knew it was the same person that they had brought in, but his face was now totally different because of the disfiguration. Beatings are common when we detain people but not deaths. However, no one looks the same after we have arrested them and transferred them to [General Intelligence].<sup>23</sup>

Ghassan, a defected sergeant from Brigade 18, Battalion 627 told Human Rights Watch that on January 11 or 12 he saw 12 corpses of men who had been brought in alive earlier that night to his base in Zabadani. He said,

All of them were wearing civilian clothing and two of them were wearing pajamas. None of them had beards. I saw their faces as I walked by them and their faces were disfigured from blunt force trauma. Near the bodies, I

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<sup>22</sup> According to the Violations Documentation Center, 428 of the 575 died from torture, 76 were executed without being tortured, and 71 were executed after having been tortured. People who were executed in the field, and executions and torture in the absence of evidence of state involvement are excluded. For each death, the VDC collects the name, age, time of death, and place of death, see Center for Documentation of Violations in Syria, Statistics for the Number of Martyrs, <http://vdc-sy.org/index.php/en/> (accessed June 25, 2012).

<sup>23</sup> Human Rights Watch Interview with Walid, April 13, 2012.

saw shovels that had blood and what looked like brain particles. A soldier in the 4<sup>th</sup> Division who participated in their killing told me that they were ordered to kill them because they were all foreign terrorists. But when I went into the Colonel's office, I saw the dead men's identification cards in plain view on his desk. All the men were Syrians, from Sarghaya. The soldier told me that he and other soldiers had killed the men. He didn't say how but that they were all alive when they brought them in.<sup>24</sup>

Human Rights Watch also received information about deaths in custody from the families or friends of the victims. Family members of the victims told Human Rights Watch they had no information about their relatives' fate or whereabouts after security forces detained them until the day they received a call, usually from a local public hospital, asking them to pick up the body of their relative. In some cases, the bodies were found dumped in the street. In all cases where families described finding their relatives' bodies to Human Rights Watch, they said the bodies bore marks consistent with infliction of torture, including bruises, cuts, and burns.

The authorities provided families with no information on the circumstances surrounding the deaths of their relatives and, to Human Rights Watch's knowledge, have launched no investigations. In many cases, families of those killed in custody had to sign documents indicating that "armed gangs" had killed their relatives and had to promise not to hold a public funeral as a condition of receiving the body.

The ban against torture is one of the most fundamental prohibitions in international human rights law. No exceptional circumstances can justify torture. Syria is a party to key international treaties that ban torture under all circumstances, even during recognized states of emergency, and require investigation and prosecution of those responsible for torture.<sup>25</sup> When committed as part of a widespread and systematic attack against the

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<sup>24</sup> Human Rights Watch Interview with Ghassan, April 15, 2012.

<sup>25</sup> International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), adopted December 16, 1966, G.A. Res. 2200A (XXI), 21 U.N. GAOR Supp. (No. 16) at 52, U.N. Doc. A/6316 (1966), 999 U.N.T.S. 171, entered into force March 23, 1976, acceded to by Syria on April 21, 1969, arts. 4, 7. Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (Convention against Torture), G.A. res. 39/46, U.N. Doc. A/39/51 (1984), entered into force June 26, 1987, acceded to by Syria on August 19, 2004.

civilian population, torture constitutes a crime against humanity under customary international law and the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.<sup>26</sup>

Individuals who carried out or ordered the commission of crimes against humanity bear individual criminal responsibility for these crimes under international law, including the Rome Statute.<sup>27</sup>

Military commanders and intelligence officials could also bear responsibility for violations committed by individuals under their direct or ultimate command in accordance with the doctrine of command responsibility when they knew or should have known about the crimes and failed to prevent them or to submit the matter for prosecution.<sup>28</sup> This would apply, without exception, not only to the officials overseeing detention facilities, but also to the heads of intelligence agencies, members of government, and a head of state, none of whom are exempt from responsibility.<sup>29</sup>

## Detention and Torture of Children, Women and Elderly

While the majority of the former detainees interviewed by Human Rights Watch were young men in their 20s and 30s, security forces also detained and tortured particularly vulnerable people such children, women, and the elderly.

As with the total number of detainees, it is virtually impossible to establish how many children, women, and elderly persons the security forces have detained, but local activists have recorded the detention of 635 children and 319 women as of June 22, 2012.<sup>30</sup> Through interviews with children and other detainees who witnessed the torture of children during

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<sup>26</sup> Rome Statute. Syria has signed, although not ratified, the Rome Statute and so is obliged to refrain from acts that would 'defeat the object and purpose of [the] treaty'. See Article 18 of the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties, 1969, United Nations, *Treaty Series*, vol. 1155, p. 331, acceded to by Syria in 1970. Syria signed the Rome Statute on November 29, 2000.

<sup>27</sup> Rome Statute, art. 25(3), which stipulates, in part:

"In accordance with this Statute, a person shall be criminally responsible and liable for punishment for a crime within the jurisdiction of the Court if that person:

(a) Commits such a crime, whether as an individual, jointly with another or through another person, regardless of whether that other person is criminally responsible;

(b) Orders, solicits or induces the commission of such a crime which in fact occurs or is attempted."

<sup>28</sup> Rome Statute, art. 28.

<sup>29</sup> Rome Statute, art. 27.

<sup>30</sup> Center for Documentation of Violations in Syria, Statistics for the Number of Detainees, <http://vdc-sy.org/index.php/en/> (accessed June 25, 2012).

their detention Human Rights Watch has documented the detention and torture of children in 12 cases.<sup>31</sup>

For example, Hossam, age 13, told Human Rights Watch that security forces detained him and a relative, also 13, in May 2011 and tortured him for three days at a military security branch about 45 minutes by car from Tal Kalakh:

Every so often they would open our cell door and yell at us and beat us. They said, “You pigs, you want freedom?” They interrogated me by myself. They asked, “Who is your god?” And I said, “Allah.” Then they electrocuted me on my stomach, with a prod. I fell unconscious. When they interrogated me the second time, they beat me and electrocuted me again. The third time they had some pliers, and they pulled out my toenail. They said, “Remember this saying, always keep it in mind: We take both kids and adults, and we kill them both.” I started to cry, and they returned me to the cell.<sup>32</sup>

It was the detention and torture of children from the southern town of Daraa in March 2011 that triggered the first anti-government protests in Syria, and in the following months several other cases, including the torture and death of 13-year-old Hamza Ali al-Khateeb, caused an outcry in Syria and internationally.<sup>33</sup>

In cases documented by Human Rights Watch, the detained children were usually between 13 and 17 years old, although some witnesses and defectors reported seeing boys as young as eight in detention. They were mostly held in the same cells and in the same conditions as adults, sometimes in solitary confinement, and subjected to many of the torture methods described above.

While the vast majority of former detainees interviewed were men, Human Rights Watch also interviewed women who had been detained. Sabah, a female adult detainee who was

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<sup>31</sup> “Syria, Stop Torture of Children,” Human Rights Watch news release, February 3, 2012, <http://www.hrw.org/news/2012/02/03/syria-stop-torture-children>; Human Rights Watch.

<sup>32</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Hossam, January 28, 2012.

<sup>33</sup> Liam Stack, “Video of Tortured Boy’s Corpse Deepens Anger in Syria,” *New York Times*, May 30, 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/31/world/middleeast/31syria.html> (accessed June 25, 2012).

held in the Military Intelligence Branch in Jisr Shughour in the Idlib governorate in November 2011, described to Human Rights Watch how she was beaten and groped by a guard while in detention. She said:

The director asked me why I was going to demonstrations ... I didn't lie. He asked what I said in demonstrations and I told him ... Then he slapped me. I will not forget it. He told the boys to come take me ... they took me to a closed room. There were boxes in it. It was like a storage room. There were also broken chairs and other things. They took my abaya off. I was wearing jeans and a tee-shirt underneath, and a guard tied my hands behind my back. I said, "A dog like you doesn't have a right to do anything [to touch me] ..." He grabbed my breasts. [Eventually] he let my arms untie. I said, "Beat me, shoot me, but don't put your hand on me." ... He came to grab my breasts again and I pushed him ... When I pushed him he fell on the boxes. Then he grabbed me by the chest and threw me against the wall. I fell and he started beating me with a stick. On the knee and on the ankle. My ankle was also broken [along with my hand] ...<sup>34</sup>

Another female detainee, Nour, described to Human Rights Watch how she was sexually abused when she was detained in Military Intelligence Branch 235 in Damascus in late 2011/early 2012 for two to three months:

There were three other women in the cell when I arrived ... Throughout our time in that cell, the four of us there were permanently in one of four positions: They tied our handcuffed hands above our heads onto a chain coming out of the ceiling and chained our feet together with our feet flat on the floor. They tied us face up to a metal bed which just had two planks of wood on it – we were in an X position so our wrists and ankles were attached to the four corners of the bed frame. They put our entire hunched body into the hole of a big tire with our back bent forward. They tied us to a metal chair with no bottom or back to which they sometimes attached electrodes to electrocute us.

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<sup>34</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Sabah, January 10, 2012.

With every new shift of the guards, they would switch our positions. We slept in those positions. They electrocuted us quite often ... Each time my body and particularly my jaw and teeth would clench up for a long time – it was extremely painful ...

They did other things to us too ... [They] raped us while we were on the bed ... [one of them] used to force the soldiers who were reluctant, saying things like “I have a sister,” to rape us. In my case they raped me about four or five times ... Twice, more than one man raped me one after the other. I cannot remember how many it was each time.<sup>35</sup>

There were also elderly people among those detained. Seventy-three-year-old Abu Ghassan told Human Rights Watch that in the early morning one day in March 2012, the army came to the mosque in his town in the Idlib governorate. Abu Ghassan said that while he was praying with his 71-year-old brother about 50 soldiers arrived to the mosque with tanks and other military vehicles and, after checking his documents, said that he was wanted by the authorities. Abu Ghassan said:

They put me in the car, handcuffed, and kept me there all day, until seven in the evening. I told them, “I am an old man, let me go to the bathroom,” but they just beat me on the face. Then they brought me to State Security in Idlib, and put me in a 30-square-meter cell with about 100 other detainees. I had to sleep squatting on the floor. There was just one toilet for all of us. They interrogated me four times, each time asking why some of my family members joined the FSA. I didn’t deny it, but said there was nothing I could do to control what my relatives do. They slapped me on the face a lot.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Nour, June 23, 2012.

<sup>36</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Abu Ghassan, April 26, 2012.

## II. SYRIA'S DETENTION FACILITIES

Syria's network of underground detention facilities are run by the country's four main intelligence agencies, commonly referred to as the mukhabarat:

- the Department of Military Intelligence (Shu`bat al-Mukhabarat al-`Askariyya);
- the Air Force Intelligence Directorate (Idarat al-Mukhabarat al-Jawiiyya).
- the Political Security Directorate (Idarat al-Amn al-Siyasi); and
- the General Intelligence Directorate (Idarat al-Mukhabarat al-`Amma).

Each of these four agencies maintains central branches in Damascus as well as regional, city, and local branches across the country, in virtually all of which there are underground detention facilities of varying size.

In addition to the large number of detention centers in intelligence branches, the Syrian authorities also established numerous temporary unofficial detention centers in stadiums, schools, hospitals, and on military bases. These temporary detention facilities often served as large collection points where the security forces gathered hundreds of detainees before they screened them and transported them to other detention facilities.

In some cases, intelligence agencies also used some of these newly established detention centres for longer-term detentions, possibly because their own underground detention facilities were full. For example, intelligence agencies assumed control of at least one floor and the basement of the Central Prison in Idlib, subjecting detainees to prolonged detention, interrogations, and torture in that facility.

The following chapters provide information about detention facilities run by these four agencies, including, when available, the names of those in charge, the location, general comments, methods of torture documented by Human Rights Watch, and statements by eyewitnesses and victims.



## DEPARTMENT OF MILITARY INTELLIGENCE

Director: Maj. Gen. Abdul Fatah Kudsiyeh<sup>37</sup>

### Branch 291 – Damascus<sup>38</sup>

#### OFFICERS IN CHARGE OF FACILITY:

- Brig. Gen. Burhan Qadour (head of branch since May 2012)<sup>39</sup>
- Brig. Gen. Yousef Abdou (head of branch until May 2012)<sup>40</sup>
- Brig. Gen. Salah Hamad (deputy head of branch)<sup>41</sup>

#### LOCATION:

Coordinates: 36.274799, 33.50462<sup>42</sup>

Damascus city. May 6 Street, commonly referred to

as the “Street of Branches,” on the northeastern corner of the intersection with April 17 Street.

#### DOCUMENTED METHODS OF TORTURE AND ILL-TREATMENT:

Beating; beating with objects; *shabeh*; electrocution; threats against detainee; exposure to cold; threats against family members; sexual abuse.

#### GENERAL COMMENTS:

Detainees interviewed by Human Rights Watch said that they were kept on the second or third underground floor. At the bottom of a set of stairs there was a large entry room. Most of the torture took place in this room or in interrogation rooms on the same floor, which were accessed through a door from the entry room. Interrogations also took place on the ground floor. From the entry room on the underground floor, double doors lead to a corridor with several common cells on each side and about 16 individual cells along two shorter corridors off the main corridor.

The detainees said that the cells were extremely over-crowded. Three of the detainees said that the group cells, which measured approximately 20 square meters, held 60-75 people. Two detainees said that the individual cells, measuring about one square meter, held five or six people. (By using his hand, one detainee estimated that the individual cell measured 1.5 by 0.70 meters.)

This map shows the locations of detention centers that were identified by multiple witnesses. Using satellite imagery, Human Rights Watch asked the victims and defectors to point out the buildings where torture took place. Former detainees and defectors corroborated the findings by describing the facilities in detail and drawing layouts of the floors where they were detained and interrogated. It also sets out the names of the known commanders. The report sets out where there is evidence of direct, indirect or command responsibility of the commanders, but Human Rights Watch does not have evidence of this applying in each case.

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<sup>37</sup> The Council of the European Union imposed travel restrictions and an asset freeze on Abdul Fatah Kudsiyeh (also spelled Abd Al-Fatah Qudsiyah) on May 9, 2011, for being “involved in the repression against the civilian population” in Syria. “Council I No. 442/2011 of 9 May 2011 concerning restrictive measures in view of the situation in Syria,” Official Journal L 121/1, May 10, 2011, <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2011:121:0001:0010:EN:PDF> (accessed June 25, 2012).

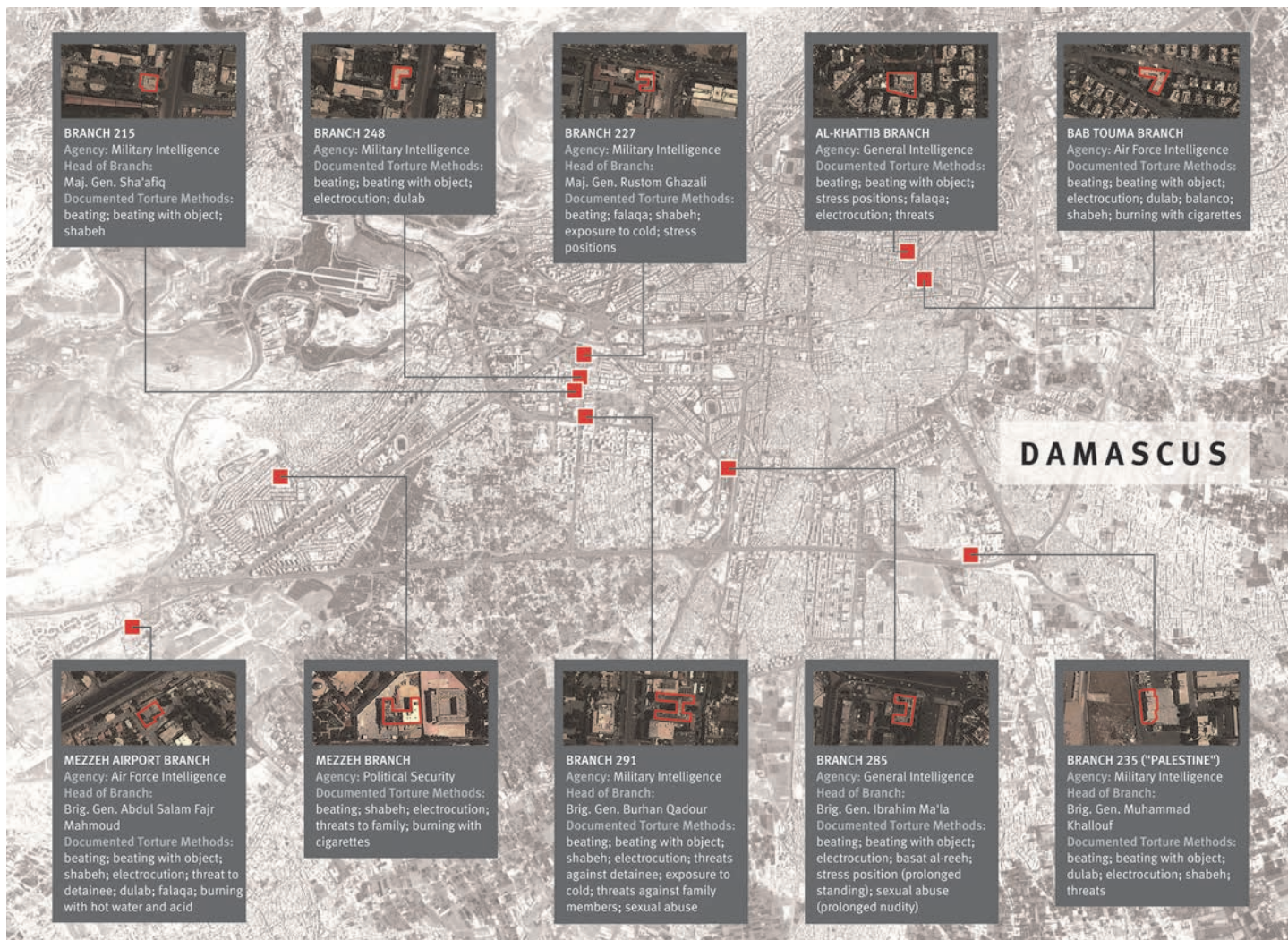
<sup>38</sup> Human Rights Watch interviewed nine people who suffered or witnessed torture in this facility.

<sup>39</sup> Human Rights Watch telephone interview with Sayid, June 20, 2012.

<sup>40</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Amine, November 2, 2011; Human Rights Watch telephone interview with Sayid, June 20, 2012.

<sup>41</sup> According to Amine, Brig. Gen. Salah Hamad personally participated in his torture. Amine, a former career military officer, had previously served with Hamad and immediately recognized his voice. According to Amine, Hamad admitted that it was he when Amine asked. Human Rights Watch interview with Amine, November 2, 2011.

<sup>42</sup> All coordinates are given in the format Latitude, Longitude using the decimal system.



## STATEMENTS BY VICTIMS AND EYEWITNESSES:

They took five of us out to the corridor. Four were waiting while the fifth was being interrogated. We were standing up, blindfolded, and handcuffed. They beat me. An officer placed a gun to my head, he gave me electric shocks with a stun-gun, and he made me sit on a stick in the ground [sexually abusing me]. There were no real questions—just accusations. But I denied everything.

The officer then called a soldier and told him to suspend me in the *shabeh* position. I didn't know at that time what it was. They took me out to the corridor. There was a tall double-

door leading to the corridor with the cells. There was a ring installed on top of the door that doesn't usually open. They handcuffed me behind my back and then handcuffed me to the ring so that only my toes could reach the ground, causing pressure on the wrists and shoulders. Anybody passing by hit me. They kept me like this for 48 hours. I couldn't move for three days after this and I needed help to go to the bathroom.

—*Thirty-one-year-old Halim, who was detained in Daraa governorate on August 8, 2011, and later transferred Branch 291 where he spent about 20 days.*<sup>43</sup>

<sup>43</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Halim, November 3, 2011.

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They made me bend over and took a piece of ice and pushed it into my anus six times. Then they tied me and hung me upside down for six hours. The ice-torture was difficult. I was ready to confess that I had owned a tank. We were six people in a small cell that used to be a toilet. They were running the air-conditioner so it was very cold. I started throwing up and suffered from diarrhea.

*—Thirty-one-year-old Khalil, who was detained in the Idlib governorate on June 29, 2011, and spent about two months in several places of detention, including six days in Branch 291.<sup>44</sup>*

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After the first week they took me for questioning. They read to me what they said I had confessed to while in the Military Intelligence branch in Aleppo. But the information was completely different [from what I told the interrogators there]. It said that I had confessed to carrying weapons, that I was part of gangs, that we communicated with other gangs and so on. I denied everything for three hours. Then they placed me facing a wall with my hands cuffed behind my back for seven or eight hours.

The next day the interrogation continued. They started threatening me and my family. They said that if I don't confess they would bring in my mother and siblings and rape and abuse them. He was going through my phone, asking about names.

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<sup>44</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Khalil, January 8, 2012.

They beat me with batons and electric cables before they again made me stand for three, four hours before they brought me back to the cell. The same routine took place three, four days in a row.

We could hear people from other cells being tortured, including women who were screaming when they slapped them.

Some people were held standing against the wall deprived of sleep for up to seven days. They would just lose it and started confessing to everything without even being asked.

*—Fawzi who was detained for the second time on August 6 and spent about 70 days in detention, including about 40 days in Branch 291.<sup>45</sup>*

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Because they said I organized demonstrations they tortured me with electricity. They hooked it up to my ear. I was in a cell with 40 people. Twenty-seven of them were from Idlib, 10 from Daraa, and the rest from Deir al-Zour. We were three floors underground ... They beat me in the interrogation room while I was blindfolded. I was standing and one person was beating me. I confessed to going to demonstrations ... They took me to another guy who put the electricity on my ears. This was in one big room. There were lots of people standing there.

*—Ammar who was detained in June 2011 and spent almost two months in detention.<sup>46</sup>*

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<sup>45</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Fawzi, January 6, 2012.

<sup>46</sup> Human Rights Watch Interview with Ammar, January 9, 2012.



## Branch 235 (“Palestine Branch”) – Damascus<sup>47</sup>

### OFFICERS IN CHARGE OF FACILITY:

- Brig. Gen. Muhammad Khallouf <sup>48</sup>

### LOCATION:

Coordinates: 36.319008, 33.491501  
Damascus city. Mohallak al-Janoubi (the Southern Interchange) road on the northwestern corner of intersection with Damascus Airport Motorway.

### DOCUMENTED METHODS OF TORTURE AND ILL-TREATMENT:

Beating; beating with objects; *dulab*; electrocution; *shabeh*; threats.

### GENERAL COMMENTS:

Several former detainees said that Branch 235, or the “Palestine Branch” as it is often called, is one of the most feared detention facilities. According to former detainees, Branch 235 has several underground floors where detainees are kept. Former detainees said that they were held on the second or third underground floors. Detainees were interrogated both on the third underground floor and on the ground floor.

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<sup>47</sup> Human Rights Watch interviewed ten people who suffered or witnessed torture in this facility.

<sup>48</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Ghadi, January 7, 2012. Media reported that Muhammad Khallouf defected in January, 2012, but Human Rights Watch has not been able to verify this. See for example, Shaher `Ayyad, “Khaddam Reveals to Al-Masry Al-Youm Details of the Failure of the Assad Family’s Attempt to Flee,” Al-Masry Al-Youm, January 30, 2012, <http://www.almasryalyoum.com/node/629086> (accessed June 25, 2012).

## STATEMENTS BY VICTIMS AND EYEWITNESSES:

They interrogated me twice. The first time they used the *dulab*. They put my legs and head through the tire and beat me up with cables. The more I moved, the more they beat me. They hit me more than 100 times in an hour. My legs were so swollen afterwards I could hardly walk. The second time they used electricity. I was kneeling and they used an electric stick to shock me on my stomach, back, and neck.

I was placed in a small cell with no ventilation or light. There were about 60 people in there. The cell measured three by four meters. We took turns sleeping and we took turns taking our shirts off and waving them to move the air.  
—*Marwan, who was detained in Daraa in June 2011 and spent about four months in detention, including about a week in Branch 235.*<sup>49</sup>

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When I arrived at the branch they welcomed me by beating me 12 times with cables. Others were hit more. I was in the Palestine Branch for two days. They summoned me to interrogation. The other detainees said that I would not be hit if I stuck with the confession. I was hit five times with cables during that interrogation. During the next interrogation they told me that the crime was very serious and that they would send me to the General Intelligence Directorate. They hit me 15 times.  
—*Twenty-three-year-old Rudi, who was detained in Aleppo on October 17 and spent 47 days in detention, including two days in Branch 235.*<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Marwan, November 1, 2011.

When we arrived at Branch 235 they started beating us as soon as they pulled us out of the bus. They gathered us in a big room and started calling out names. The detainees with identification cards were sent to cells. About 50 people didn't have any papers and officers told the soldiers to "have fun with them."

I was sitting on my knees, facing the wall. They hit us on the back of the neck with a thick stick. When they called somebody's name, five people would be standing at the door and beat us with cable-wires, sticks, and batons. They beat us for about 30 minutes before they took us to the next room and stripped us naked. Then they started beating us with a thick belt, which we called the "five-layer-belt" because they had wrapped several belts together with plastic tape.

—Sixteen-year-old Talal, who was detained in Daraa on April 1 together with his 23-year-old brother. He spent 11 days in detention, nine of them in Branch 235.<sup>51</sup>

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They took my fingerprints and beat me. I was barefoot. They beat my head against the wall and then they took me to the interrogation room where they continued to beat me and gave me electric shocks. After 30 minutes they took me two floors underground where they kept me for five days.

There was another interrogation. It was the same thing, but this time I noticed that somebody was writing. Somebody beat me

with their fist and chipped my tooth. They pushed me to the ground and continued to beat me. They made me fingerprint four different documents.

—Twenty-one-year-old Samer, who was detained in Tal Kalakh on May 14 and spent five days in detention in Branch 235.<sup>52</sup>

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On the eighth day they moved me to Branch 235 together with another detainee who was there because he had been interviewed by Al Jazeera. I stayed there for eight days and they beat me all the time. The Al Jazeera guy was kept in handcuffs all the time and he later told me that he was kept in a solitary cell. We were ten people together in a four-by-four meter large cell. We were all from different places.

—Twenty-nine-year-old Wael, who was detained in Tal Kalakh on May 14 and spent eight days in detention in Branch 235.<sup>53</sup>

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I was there ten to fifteen days. Right away there was violence. They put me in a solitary cell after 30 minutes of beating. I was in the cell for five days. The only food I got was bread. There was water in the cell, from a faucet, but it was dirty. It ran yellow and sometimes red. During the interrogation they would ask me if I carried weapons and I said no. They hung me from my wrists, *shabeh*, so I was just on my toes. They would throw water on me and hit me with an electrical cable. They would throw hot water – it wasn't boiling, but hot – on us when we passed out

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<sup>50</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Rudi, January 6, 2012.

<sup>51</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Talal, November 4, 2011.

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<sup>52</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Samer, July 28, 2011.

<sup>53</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Wael, July 28, 2011.

to wake us up ... There was torture every day except the last two.

—Nabih, who was detained in Latakia in June 2011.<sup>54</sup>

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After we arrived at the branch they put me in a room, where from the sounds of voices it seemed like more than 15 people beat me ... I was in the room for a while, they left me on my knees for three hours. It was like a corridor with people coming and going. As they came and went they would beat me with their hands, legs, *Kalashnikovs* [assault rifles], and electrical cable, and they were swearing. Then they put me in a room with an interrogator ...

The interrogator is not a human being. He is not normal. He was giving orders to four other people in the room. They put me on the ground. It is a beating you cannot describe. They beat my back and feet with a big electric cable. I couldn't sleep on my back for 25 days. There are still scars on my back.

They threatened to bring my mother. They asked whether I wanted them to bring my wife here and have all the guys sleep with her. Let your God come release you ... I reached a point where I could not feel at all ...

Then he took me down to the prison ... Two guards met us behind a big metal door ... These two untied my hands and blindfold and started beating me again. They beat me in an unimaginable way. It was just with their hands and just on the face.

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<sup>54</sup> Human Rights Watch Interview with Nabih, January 7, 2012

You don't understand how difficult it is to bear the beating from the prison guards. They know better than anyone how to swear, humiliate, and beat. You can't take it ... It takes you away from anything called humanity.

—Samir, who was detained in Damascus in July 2011.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Human Rights Watch phone interview with Samir, December 14, 2011.

## Branch 248 – Damascus<sup>56</sup>

### LOCATION:

Coordinates: 36.274066, 33.507938  
Damascus city. “Street of Branches.”

### DOCUMENTED METHODS OF TORTURE AND ILL-TREATMENT:

Beating; beating with object; electrocution; *dulab*.

### GENERAL COMMENTS:

Branch 248 has detention facilities underground.

### STATEMENTS BY VICTIMS AND EYEWITNESSES:

When I arrived at Branch 248 I was screaming from pain because my legs were broken [from gunshot injuries]. They laid me down in an underground corridor. After five minutes five guys came and started to beat me. I was still blindfolded, but I was able to see a bit under the blindfold. They punched me in the face so I started bleeding from the nose. They left me alone when I pretended to be unconscious. Afterwards another guy came and smacked my head into the ground. Finally an officer came. They wanted to transfer me to a cell, but there was no room for anybody with broken legs so they transferred me to hospital 601 instead. After six days in the hospital they took me back to 248. In the cell, two guards held my legs apart and beat me in the groin.

—Thirty-two-year-old Hussein, who was detained in Dāraa at the end of April after he was shot in both legs.<sup>57</sup>

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In Branch 248 we were five in a cell that was 3.5 meters by 150 cm. I knew the size from the tiles.

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<sup>56</sup> Human Rights Watch interviewed eight people who suffered or witnessed torture in this facility.

<sup>57</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Hussein, November 2, 2011.

There was no blanket, nothing. There was no bathroom in the cell. We had a bottle of water which we would fill from the bathroom. I spent 20 days in the cell before they moved me back to Branch 291.

—Ammar, who was detained in June 2011.<sup>58</sup>

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When I arrived [from the military intelligence facility in Homs to Branch 248] the treatment was also very bad. They took my clothes off and blindfolded me. They were beating me while I was naked, in front. They beat me with whips all over my body. My whole body swelled. They took me to a solitary cell. The torture noises were much worse here. It was forbidden to sit or to sleep. I was chained and standing the whole time. For more than three days I didn’t sleep. I couldn’t close my eyes. The next day they took me to the head of the branch. He said, look, you confessed. He showed me my finger prints and said that the old interrogators would testify against me.

They took me to the torture room and I would hear noises that were just unreal. When they took me to this room they were mostly beating me with a whip. I was blindfolded. They used electricity, how am I going to tell you, in sensitive places. Now it is four months later and there are still marks on my body. After I was tortured they put me in my cell. For three days I was just tortured. No interrogation, nothing. No one spoke with me. After three days of torture they took me to interrogation. I was here for six [days]. I was not allowed to sleep, not allowed to sit. If they saw me sitting they would put me in the tire and would hit me with a whip.

—Munir, who was arrested in May 2011 in Homs.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Ammar, January 9, 2012.

## Branch 227 – Damascus<sup>60</sup>

### OFFICERS IN CHARGE OF FACILITY:

- Maj. Gen. Rustom Ghazali (head of branch)<sup>61</sup>

### LOCATION:

Coordinates: 36.274689, 33.510586

Damascus city. May 6 Street on the corner with Omar Bin Abdulaziz Street, near the Ministry of Higher Education.

### DOCUMENTED METHODS OF TORTURE AND ILL-TREATMENT

Beating; *falaqa*; *shabeh*; exposure to cold; stress positions.

### GENERAL COMMENTS

Branch 227 is the Military Intelligence branch responsible for Damascus governorate outside of Damascus city. One former detainee said that the underground detention facility included both individual cells and a big room measuring about 100 square meters, which held about 400 people when he was there. At some point, according to this detainee, some of the older detainees were transferred to a different cell with slightly better conditions.<sup>62</sup>

<sup>59</sup> Human Rights Watch phone interview with Munir, November 21, 2011.

<sup>60</sup> Human Rights Watch interviewed three witnesses who suffered or witnessed torture in this facility.

<sup>61</sup> Mustafa told Human Rights Watch that he was brought before Rustom Ghazali and that Ghazali was the one to give orders to beat him. Human Rights Watch interview with Mustafa, October 27, 2011. See also Human Rights Watch interview with Fares, May 23, 2011; Ghadi, January 7, 2012. The Council of the European Union imposed travel restrictions and an asset freeze on Rustom Ghazali (also spelled Rustum Ghazali) on May 9, 2011, for being “involved in the repression against the civilian population” in Syria. Council Regulation (EU) No. 442/2011 of 9 May 2011.

<sup>62</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Mustafa, October 27, 2011.

## STATEMENTS BY VICTIMS AND EYEWITNESSES:

They brought me to confess on August 12. There weren’t really any questions – mostly beatings. They used *falaqa* and *shabeh* on me and soaked me with cold water. I passed out twice during the interrogation session. They used cold water to wake me up both times. The torture took place in the corridor. They also brought 14/15-year-old boys there. When I went back to the cell, the other people in the cell were crying. They had heard my screams. The skin on my right foot broke because of the swelling from the beating. —*Fifty-seven-year-old Mustafa, who was detained in early August 2011 and spent almost two months in detention. Human Rights Watch saw scars on Mustafa’s right foot, allegedly from swelling after the beating.*<sup>63</sup>

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From the army base they took us to Branch 227 where we arrived around noon. They tortured us until 9 p.m. In the beginning they kept us standing on our toes with our hands up in the corridor, blindfolded. Anybody walking by would hit us. Then they pushed us down the stairs – about 15-20 steps – and we were placed in a cell measuring about two by six meters with 50-60 detainees.

On the fifth day the guards summoned us for interrogation. The interrogator was kind, but then three officers took me to the torture room. They hit me a lot, but didn’t say anything. After ten days in detention they released me, but gave me a paper saying that I should come back to Branch 227 for further interrogation.

—*Twenty-year-old Lutfi, who was detained in his military unit after an officer accused him and four others of planning to defect.*<sup>64</sup>

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Lutfi, January 8, 2012.



## Branch 215 – Damascus<sup>65</sup>

### OFFICERS IN CHARGE OF FACILITY:

- Brig. Gen. Sha'afiq<sup>66</sup>

### LOCATION:

Coordinates: 36.274010, 33.507379

Damascus. On "Street of Branches," next to the Carlton Hotel.

### DOCUMENTED METHODS OF TORTURE AND ILL-TREATMENT:

Beating; beating with object; *shabeh*.

### GENERAL COMMENTS:

Branch 215 has detention facilities underground. One former detainee said that there were 76 people in a cell measuring 11 by 3.80 meters.<sup>67</sup>

### STATEMENTS BY VICTIMS AND EYEWITNESSES:

When we arrived they started punching, kicking, and beating us with cables. The next morning they started interrogating us. We received no food for four days. They brought water only on the third day. Those asking for food were beaten.

On the fifth day it was my turn to be interrogated. They took me to a different room and started reading the statement from Idlib. When I said that they had forced me to confess about the *Kalashnikov* somebody

handcuffed me to a pipe below the ceiling. This was around 2 p.m. I could just barely reach the floor with my toes. The next day a kind guard loosened the hand-cuffs a bit so I could stand on my feet. I was kept like this for three days. I was not even allowed to go to the toilet.

*—Thirty-one-year-old Khalil, who was detained during a protest in a town close to the Turkish border on June 29 and spent five days in Branch 215. Khalil showed Human Rights Watch marks from the handcuffs on his wrists.<sup>68</sup>*

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They moved us to a cell measuring 11 by four meters with 76 people. There was no air-conditioner, no bathroom. We were allowed to go to the toilet three times per day. Food was very bad. Many people were about to die because of medical problems such as heart, diabetes, high blood pressure, asthma, and allergies. During the 40 days I spent there, I showered only two or three times. There were lots of lice. The guards would hit us when we went to the bathroom, but they didn't take me out for interrogation.

*—Yamen, who was detained in the Daraa governorate on July 3 and spent two months in detention, including 40 days in Branch 215.<sup>69</sup>*

<sup>65</sup> Human Rights Watch interviewed four witnesses who suffered or witnessed torture in this facility.

<sup>66</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Omar, June 11, 2012.

<sup>67</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Yamen, November 2, 2011.

<sup>68</sup> Human Rights Watch interview Khalil, January 8, 2012.

<sup>69</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Yamen, November 2, 2011.

## Branch 245 – Daraa<sup>70</sup>

### OFFICERS IN CHARGE OF FACILITY:

- Colonel Loai al-Ali (head of branch)<sup>71</sup>

### LOCATION:

Coordinates: 36.09988, 32.627697

Daraa city. Hanano street.

### DOCUMENTED METHODS OF TORTURE AND ILL-TREATMENT:

Beating; beating with object; hanging upside down; *dulab*.

### GENERAL COMMENTS:

Former detainees said that they were kept underground, usually for a relatively short time, before they were transferred to detention facilities in Damascus. Witnesses described the detention facility as having ten cells along a two-meter-wide corridor, that torture took place in the corridor, and that there is an interrogation room at the end of the corridor.

### STATEMENTS BY VICTIMS AND EYEWITNESSES:

As we walked down the stairs people on both sides were hitting us with cable-wires and other objects. You didn't know where the blows were coming from. Then they took us to the interrogation room.

It was brutal. They didn't ask any questions. They just hit us. You didn't know when you would be hit or hit a wall.

They took us out of the interrogation room and made us face the wall, standing on our knees. If somebody moved, relaxed, or tried to adjust their position, somebody would hit them. We were blindfolded. We stayed there until a new shift arrived, perhaps for one day.

We only spent 15-20 minutes in the interrogation room. They used the tire method on us. At first an officer interrogated and tortured me, then another came. They kept accusing me of having killed two people.

—*Mohsin, who was detained in Daraa near the Omari mosque on March 23.*<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Human Rights Watch interviewed six people who suffered or witnessed torture in this facility.

<sup>71</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Halim, November 3, 2011. The Council of the European Union imposed travel restrictions and an asset freeze on Loai al-Ali (also spelled Lu'ai al-Ali) on November 14, 2011, for being "responsible for the violence against protesters" in Daraa. "Council Implementing Regulation (EU) No 1151/2011 of 14 November 2011 implementing Regulation (EU) No 442/2011 concerning restrictive measures in view of the situation in Syria," Official Journal L 296/3, November 15, 2012, [http://www.damaskus.diplo.de/contentblob/3335114/Daten/1737139/COUNCIL\\_IMPLEMENTING\\_EU\\_REGULATION\\_No\\_1151\\_2011\\_of\\_14Nov11\\_Syria\\_eng.pdf](http://www.damaskus.diplo.de/contentblob/3335114/Daten/1737139/COUNCIL_IMPLEMENTING_EU_REGULATION_No_1151_2011_of_14Nov11_Syria_eng.pdf) (accessed June 25, 2012).

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<sup>72</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Mohsin, November 3, 2011.



They removed our blindfold when we arrived and then they took us underground. They made us stand up against the wall. The cells were packed. They took us one by one for interrogation. They asked about armed people. When I said that I didn't know anybody, they told me to "just pick somebody."

They insulted us, calling us "traitors" and cursing us. They took us to a yard outside, made us lay down, and started beating us. They told us that they didn't torture people in Daraa, so we'd better confess before they transferred us to Damascus.

—Ayoub, who was detained in Daraa in April together with his brother.<sup>73</sup>

<sup>73</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Ayoub, November 4, 2011.

## Aleppo Branch<sup>74</sup>

### LOCATION:

Coordinates: 37.108498, 36.199165

### DOCUMENTED METHODS OF TORTURE AND ILL-TREATMENT:

Beating; beating with object; *basat al-reeh*; *shabeh*, electrocution, *falaqa*; threats.

### GENERAL COMMENTS:

Former detainees said that detainees were kept underground, but that at least some interrogations took place on the second floor. One detainee estimated that there were about 400 people in the underground facility when he was there in August 2011.<sup>75</sup>

### STATEMENTS BY VICTIMS AND EYEWITNESSES:

They first beat me for a day with just some very basic questioning. At night they started the interrogation. I was in a big hall. There were many other people there. I was in my underwear, blindfolded so I couldn't tell exactly how many people and guards were beating us. They took away our possessions and took more info.

They took me to a one by 1.5 meter cell. I was there alone for about four, five hours, and then they took me for interrogation.

When they found out that I was a pharmacist they started beating me more, saying that as a government-educated professional I should

support the government. I had also lived in Saudi Arabia, so they beat me more for that. It lasted for five, six hours. They just kept accusing me of different things and forcing me to confess, asking for names.

Then I went back to the cell. It was four days of interrogations. Ten days in total. They didn't take me out for the last six days.

On the first night of interrogations they also took me into a torture room. I was blindfolded with hands tied behind my back. They tied me, put me on the ground, and started beating me. They used a type of rack, some board under my legs and a cable that they turned to crack and twist my legs back. And they beat me with a cable.

—Fawzi, who was detained in Aleppo during a demonstration on April 20 and spent ten days in detention in the Military Intelligence branch in Aleppo.<sup>76</sup>

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It was the same routine as the first time, but this time they used a different torture method, the *shabeh*, hanging by the wrists from the ceiling, while being beaten by cables, batons, and electric batons. There were other people hanging next to me, maybe four or five.

They beat me until I fainted or passed out. It hurts to the point when you can't feel it anymore. They tested it out by putting out a cigarette on me. If you can't feel it, they stop because there is no point in beating you further.

<sup>74</sup> Human Rights Watch interviewed three people who suffered or witnessed torture in this facility.

<sup>75</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Fawzi, January 6, 2012.

<sup>76</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Fawzi, January 6, 2012.





Then after six or seven hours they poured water on me and put me into a single cell for several hours while they were working on the others. We could hear people being tortured like that all the time. There are people there who torture like that all the time.

Then they took me for interrogation. I was still bleeding. They asked the same questions. They remembered me from my first detention so the beating increased with punches, slaps, and batons for about one and a half hours.

By this time there were some 400 people [detained] there so they didn't have time for lengthy interrogations. The guards kept

hitting us all the time, when bringing food, taking you to the bathroom, etc.

The next time I was interrogated by a “committee” of interrogators. They asked about our “organization.” They got into my e-mail and saw my communication. The interrogations took place the first three days. They kept me for another four days.

—Fawzi, who was detained for a second time in Aleppo during a demonstration on August 6. He spent 70 days in detention.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Fawzi, January 6, 2012.

They took me to the second floor for interrogation. They asked about phone numbers, e-mail, and Facebook accounts. They claimed that I had two accounts, but I denied it.

The next Friday they took me at 8 a.m. and interrogated me until 9 p.m. They used *falaqa*. They used a wooden stick and leather to tie my legs together and then they hit me on the soles of my feet. It hurt. They hit me a lot.

They then hung me up in *shabeh* while they used a cable to hit me on my back. They kept me like this the whole day. They just took me down five times to give me the *falaqa*. They also gave me electric shocks. They placed wires on each leg. When they threatened to attach the wires between my legs I admitted to everything that they wanted. The interrogation continued the next day, but by then I was not able to stand on my own.

*—Rudi, who was detained for the second time in Aleppo on October 17 and spent 47 days in detention, including about five days in the Military Intelligence branch in Aleppo.<sup>78</sup>*

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<sup>78</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Rudi, January 6, 2012.

## Branch 271 – Idlib<sup>79</sup>

### OFFICERS IN CHARGE OF FACILITY:

- Brig. Gen. Nawfel al-Hussein (head of branch)<sup>80</sup>

### LOCATION:

Coordinates: 36.634163, 35.922901

Idlib city. On the same street as the statue of Ibrahim Hananu, around 300 meters to the south of the statue, in front of the Political Security branch.

### DOCUMENTED METHODS OF TORTURE AND ILL-TREATMENT:

Beating; beating with object; *shabeh*.

### GENERAL COMMENTS:

Former detainees said that detainees were kept both underground (four or five steps down) and on the ground floor. One former detainee estimated that there were 200 to 300 detainees in the detention facility.<sup>81</sup> There were about 20 single cells on the underground floor.

### STATEMENTS BY VICTIMS AND EYEWITNESSES:

They started torturing me immediately. They started hitting me with cables, but I couldn't see anything because I was blindfolded. They hit me on the head and shoulders. They didn't hit me as much as the others because my family had paid them money, which I found

out afterwards. Two guys were standing behind me and hit me when there were no questions. They allowed me to rest for two hours, then they brought me in for a second interrogation. It was the same questions. I gave them names of people who had died to not get anybody in trouble, but they knew that they had been killed and hit me again.

—Thirty-seven-year-old Yousef, who was detained in Jisr al-Shughour on September 14. He was detained for two months, including one month in the Military Intelligence branch in Idlib.<sup>82</sup>

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From the first day of the detention they started taking me to interrogations, every day for a week, but for different lengths of time, from half an hour to eight hours. They found some revolutionary songs on my mobile, so they were beating me for that.

Then they took me to the corridor and hung me up in *shabeh*. Whoever walked by could beat me. The longest time I stayed there was three hours, but others stayed even longer – up to six or seven hours.

After seven days they moved me to a better cell and brought me better food to make me change my mind and call my brother [to convince him to turn himself in]. The cell was five by eight or ten meters and there were 250-300 detainees there. The cell smelled like shit so even the single cell felt better.

On the 13th day I called my brother. I just couldn't take it anymore. They told me to ask him to come. But my brother didn't pick up.

<sup>79</sup> Human Rights Watch interviewed seven people who suffered or witnessed torture in this facility.

<sup>80</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Isam, January 7, 2012; Ghadi, January 7, 2012; Imad, January 8, 2012; Najib, January 10, 2012.

<sup>81</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Isam, January 7, 2012.

<sup>82</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Yousef, January 9, 2012.





He knew I was detained. Then they took me to the [Idlib] Central Prison.

—Isam who was detained from his shop in a town near the Turkish border on July 31 because his brothers had participated in demonstrations. He spent 53 days in detention, including 13 in Branch 271.<sup>83</sup>

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When we arrived at the Military Intelligence branch in Idlib they started interrogating us, asking us the same questions about smuggling. When I told them that I had

confessed under torture they started beating me until I again agreed to confess to anything.

They put me into a big room with perhaps 70 people. There was no room to sleep. It was on the same floor as the interrogation room. They just gave us little pieces of bread with potatoes and *labneh* [strained yoghurt]. Several prisoners had infections and problems breathing. I stayed there for one night and then they moved us to the Criminal Investigative branch.

—Hassib, who was detained in the town of Bdama during the last week of Ramadan.<sup>84</sup>

<sup>83</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Isam, January 7, 2012.

<sup>84</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Hassib, January 7, 2012.



## Homs Branch

### OFFICERS IN CHARGE OF FACILITY:

- Muhammad Zamreni<sup>85</sup>

### LOCATION:

Coordinates: 34.719236, 36.708575

Al Hajj Atef Square in the Al-Mahatta neighborhood.

### DOCUMENTED METHODS OF TORTURE AND ILL-TREATMENT

Beating; beating with object; electrocution; shabeh; dulab; falaqa, balanco.

### GENERAL COMMENTS:

Former detainees told Human Rights Watch that detainees were kept in two buildings in the Military Intelligence branch in Homs. One former detainee estimated that there were about 300 other detainees in the cell where he was kept..

### STATEMENTS BY VICTIMS AND EYEWITNESSES:

They brought us inside the base and marched us between two lines of soldiers who were beating us with cables. In a corner of an open space they handcuffed me to a guy who had a broken leg. Then they brought me to an interrogation room. On the way I could hear people screaming. I know I was inside a building even though I was blindfolded. I could hear the interrogation.

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<sup>85</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Ghadi, January 7, 2012.

Once they got to me they started saying that I was the leader of the revolution and asking me what was going on in my battalion. I said I didn't know so they used an electric stun-gun on me and beat me with cables. They handcuffed me to a pipe in the ceiling so I couldn't touch the floor. I was hanging like this for six hours. Three people kept beating me, asking questions. They threw water at me and used stun-guns. When I didn't talk they moved me to a cell. It was three by three meters and they packed about 25 people in there. We were squeezed and kneeling on the floor. We spent the night like that. The next day they started the interrogation again.

They pushed my legs and head through a tire, flipped me on my back, tied my legs, and started beating me on the soles of my feet. They kept torturing me for seven days. On the eighth day they moved me to the Palestinian Branch in Damascus.

—Twenty-one-year-old Samer, who was detained in Tal Kalakh on May 14 and spent eight days in detention in the Military Intelligence branch in Homs.<sup>86</sup>

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In the morning on the second day they brought me up, blindfolded, to torture me. There were a lot of them, perhaps 10 people, hitting me in the face, stomach, and legs. They used the *balanco* method on me – it is like a chain that they hang meat on.

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<sup>86</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Samer, July 28, 2011.



They raised me from my legs so that all my weight was on my hands and legs. The cable cut off my circulation. There is a wooden beam in the ceiling and they hung me from it with just my toes touching the floor. This was the hardest torture, worse than electricity. I told them, “I will confess to everything. Just bring me down.” I told them, “For God’s sake, take me down.” There were three to four people next to me in the same state. I could tell from the sounds next to me and the yelling, and I said, “Let me down, let me down.”

They took me to an office with an officer. He had a whip – sort of like an electrical cable;

and they raised my legs and he started beating me on my whole body. He was interrogating me, saying that they had my camera and that they knew that I was sending material to Al Jazeera. They took my head, pulled my hair, and hit my head on the table. The next day they beat me with a whip.

—Munir, who was arrested in May 2011 in Homs.<sup>87</sup>

<sup>87</sup> Human Rights Watch phone interview with Munir, November 21, 2011.

## Latakia Branch<sup>88</sup>

### OFFICERS IN CHARGE OF FACILITY:

- Maj. Gen. Riad al Ahmed (head of branch)<sup>89</sup>
- First Ass. Abu Ali Masri, (head of interrogation)<sup>90</sup>

### LOCATION:

Coordinates: 35.52067, 35.794256

Mashrou` Al Awqaf, in front of the Yassine Mosque.

### DOCUMENTED METHODS OF TORTURE AND ILL-TREATMENT

Beating; beating with object; stress positions (standing); basat al-reeh.

### GENERAL COMMENTS

The Military Intelligence branch in Latakia has a detention facility underground, about ten steps down a staircase.

wouldn't listen and told me to shut up. Eventually I fell over.

Then they tied my hands and feet to a wooden stick. They put a tire around my knees and flipped me over so that my face was on the floor and two of them stepped on the stick on both sides. They beat me with a cable. They released the handcuffs twice to make the blood flow back in my legs and then they put me back. They didn't ask any questions for about four hours. Afterwards I couldn't stand on my feet so they dragged me back to the cell. I can't say how many days I was in that cell. I could hear the voices of other detainees, but I couldn't talk to them. At some point they took me to the major general who was in charge of the branch. He wanted me to work for them, but I refused.

—Kamal, who was detained in Latakia on April 22.<sup>91</sup>

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### STATEMENTS BY VICTIMS AND EYEWITNESSES:

An hour after I arrived they took me to the interrogation room. The room had just a lamp. They told me not to move and that if I moved they would hit me. My hands were tied and I was blindfolded. I just stood straight. This lasted for about eight hours. I was ready to say anything to get me out of there, but they

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<sup>88</sup> Human Rights Watch interviewed five people who suffered or witnessed torture in this facility.

<sup>89</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Talib, January 10, 2012.

<sup>90</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Salim, January 12, 2012.

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<sup>91</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Kamal, January 10, 2012.





[After arriving to the facility] they told me to call my dad and to tell him to pick me up from a particular location. I called my dad and told him I was detained and then they started beating me. They beat me with an electrical cable on my kidneys, chest, and feet. They put me on the flying carpet. They had a wooden stick. They put it in the rear, but they didn't use it with me. The officer wouldn't let them. I stayed there for six days and still have back pain. I was in a single cell. They left me for three days with no food. Finally, they gave me a piece of bread, that's it. There was water from a faucet that hits your knee when you are sitting in the cell. It was a low ceiling, you

can't stand. You have to sit with your knees to your chest. The bathroom was outside. You knock on the door to ask them to take you to the bathroom and they beat you. There was no light inside.

—Nabih, who was detained in Latakia in June 2011.<sup>92</sup>

<sup>92</sup> Human Rights Watch Interview with Nabih, January 7, 2012.

## AIR FORCE INTELLIGENCE DIRECTORATE

Director: Maj. Gen. Jamil Hassan<sup>93</sup>

### Mezzeh Airport Branch – Damascus<sup>94</sup>

#### OFFICERS IN CHARGE OF FACILITY:

- Brig. Gen. Abdul Salam Fajr Mahmoud  
(director of investigative branch)<sup>95</sup>

#### LOCATION:

Coordinates: 33.484886, 36.223209

Mezzeh military airport, southwest of central Damascus.

#### DOCUMENTED METHODS OF TORTURE AND ILL- TREATMENT

Beating; beating with object; shabeh;  
electrocution; threat to detainee; dulab;  
falaqa, burning with hot water and acid.

#### GENERAL COMMENTS

The Mezzeh airport branch of the Air Force Intelligence contains at least three detention facilities, including a hangar. Former detainees described one of the detention

facilities, possibly the building of the investigative branch, as a large, white, one-floor, flat building, with barbed wire on surrounding walls. There were two underground floors with low ceilings. The first underground floor held collective cells, while the second underground floor held at least twelve individual cells and a large room used for torture. Former detainees and defectors said that detainees were usually gathered in a yard before they were taken to the detention facilities. The yard was also used as a place for torture.

Many of the former detainees at Mezzeh airport came from Damascus city suburbs or nearby towns such as Douma and al-Mu`damiyyeh. But Human Rights Watch has also documented the presence of detainees in Mezzeh airport from other areas, such as Daraa. Several former detainees said that they were transferred to or from the army's 4th Division base, which is located close by.

#### STATEMENTS BY VICTIMS AND EYEWITNESSES:

I saw people being tortured there both when I was detained and when I worked there. The mildest form of torture is hitting people with batons on their arms and legs and not giving them anything to eat or drink. Then they would hang the detainees from the ceiling by their hands, sometimes for hours or days. I saw it while I was talking to the interrogators. They used electric stun-guns and an electroshock machine, an electric current transformer. It is a small machine with two wires with clips that they attach to nipples and a knob that regulates the current. In

<sup>93</sup> The Council of the European Union imposed travel restrictions and an asset freeze on Jamil Hassan on May 9, 2011, for being "involved in the repression against the civilian population" in Syria. Council Regulation (EU) No 442/2011 of 9 May 2011.

<sup>94</sup> Human Rights Watch interviewed nine people who suffered or witnessed torture in this facility.

<sup>95</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Sayid, June 20, 2012; Rami, October 28, 2011.

addition, they put people in coffins and threatened to kill them and close the coffin. People were wearing underwear. They pour hot water on people and then whip them. I've also seen drills there, but I've never seen them being used. I've also seen them using martial arts moves, like breaking ribs with a knee kick. They put pins under your feet and hit you so that you step on them. I also heard them threatening to cut off the detainees' penises.

—Rami, who was an officer at the Air Force Intelligence base at the Mezzeh Airport and was later detained there. He defected in August 2011.<sup>96</sup>

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I participated in escorting detainees from the protests to the yard at the Air Force Intelligence base, and then to the detention facilities. In the yard we started beating people randomly, without asking them any questions. We brought wounded people to the same yard and beat them as well. We had one doctor in the branch. Somebody would ask the guards to take one of the detainees to the doctor, and the guards would be beating him on the way. In the gym area [close to the investigation branch] the guards used to hang detainees by their hands, give them electric shocks, or beat them with whips. I could see it when I dropped off the detainees. I couldn't even sit in my office, which was close to the gym, because of the sounds of torture.

—Jad, who served on the Air Force Intelligence base in Mezzeh for 1.5 years before he defected in August 2011.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Rami, October 28, 2011.

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They hung me up in the *shabeh* position three times. The first time I was hanging for eight hours, handcuffed to the wall and pulled up. After a while I lost consciousness. The two other times they hung me for two to three hours.

They hit us with electric prods and cable wires. They also threw acid from a car battery on my leg. They made me lay down, handcuffed to the table. Then they would bring the feet to my face and beat the soles of my feet. They also used the tire method. They forced my feet, hands, and head through the tire, they flipped me on the back and beat the soles of my feet. They also handcuffed my hands under the knee and used a stick to hang me up between two beds. They kept me like this for one or two hours, once or twice a day for four days.

—Forty-eight-year-old Zakhya, who was detained in the Damascus governorate on May 28. Human Rights Watch saw scars on his legs, allegedly from the use of acid.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Jad, November 1, 2011.

<sup>98</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Zakhya, October 29, 2011.

## Bab Touma Branch – Damascus<sup>99</sup>

### LOCATION:

Coordinates: 33.517811, 36.313969

Between Al Manama Street and Gibran Khalil Street, close to Tahrir Square.

### DOCUMENTED METHODS OF TORTURE AND ILL-TREATMENT

Beating; beating with object; electrocution; dulab; balanco; shabeh; burning with cigarettes.

### GENERAL COMMENTS:

According to a former detainee who spent five months in the old department building in the Bab Touma branch of the Air Force Intelligence, the facility consists of 43 individual cells, each holding up to three people, and two group detention rooms, each holding up to 90 people.<sup>100</sup>

nurses always had a wooden stick in their hands in case the officers needed support to torture the prisoners. I saw officers torturing over 30 men with thick wooden sticks, electric stun-guns, and *balanco* while I was tied in the courtyard. They tied and hung me from my hands with my legs loose and my toes were half a centimeter above the ground. They also tortured me with the tire method.

*—Bashir, a medical student who was arrested at Damascus University on August 22 and spent five months in detention.<sup>101</sup>*

### STATEMENTS BY VICTIMS AND EYEWITNESSES:

Three days after I was detained they took me to see the interrogator. Before entering the interrogation room they slapped, beat, and kicked me with their black boots, used an electric stun-gun on me, extinguished cigarettes on my back, and stepped on me.

During my detention I once fainted because I was very thirsty. A nurse who barely knew how to provide medical care came to check on me, but instead of helping me he started beating and slapping me to wake up. The

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<sup>99</sup> Human Rights Watch interviewed two people who suffered or witnessed torture in this facility.

<sup>100</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Bashir, January 25, 2012.

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<sup>101</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Bashir, January 25, 2012.



## Daraa Branch<sup>102</sup>

### OFFICERS IN CHARGE OF FACILITY:

- Col. Qusay Mihoub (from Damascus; sent to Daraa at the beginning of protests to oversee operations there)<sup>103</sup>

### LOCATION:

Coordinates: 32.622852, 36.124829

### DOCUMENTED METHODS OF TORTURE AND ILL-TREATMENT

Beating; beating with object.

### GENERAL COMMENTS:

The Air Force Intelligence Branch in Daraa has an underground detention facility with at least one cell measuring about 16 square meters. One detainee estimated the cell contained 130 people when he was detained there in June 2011.<sup>104</sup>

### STATEMENTS BY VICTIMS AND EYEWITNESSES:

I went to the funeral at the cemetery. After the security forces let us out of the cemetery, they opened fire. I just laid down. The shooting continued for 10 to 15 minutes. Afterwards, when I stood up somebody hit me in the back of my head with a stick. I fell down, but they continued to beat me. They hit me over the eye with a stick.

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<sup>102</sup> Human Rights Watch interviewed three people who suffered or witnessed torture in this facility.

<sup>103</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Sayid, June 20, 2012.

<sup>104</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Marwan, November 1, 2011.

When I woke up I was in the Air Force Intelligence branch. There were four people in the cell. I was then taken out of the cell and beaten in the corridor. They then took me to an open yard outside where they beat me for two hours before they brought me back to the cell and then transferred me to another branch.

Twenty-three-year-old Fahim, who was beaten until he lost consciousness at a funeral in Daraa on August 8. He spent three days in detention.<sup>105</sup>

For a couple of hours we waited and then they started interrogating us one by one in a solitary cell with two other people. They then took me to a torture room.

It was a room underground. There was a chair where the interrogator sat, and a table. Two people in the room were beating me with a one-meter long cable with metal wire inside and plastic on the outside, accusing me of taking part in the protests and of carrying weapons. I was on my knees with hands behind my back. The other one was using his boot to beat me on the mouth. I was bleeding. They showed me a picture of Bashar Assad and asked who it was? I said, "The president." They said, "No, it is God." One of them put a boot on my neck and the other shoved the photo under my nose. This lasted for about an hour.

Then they took me back to the cell where there were about 130 people. The cell measured four by four meters. People were on top of each other, standing, lying, etc.

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<sup>105</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Fahim, November 3, 2011.



About 10 of the 130 were not severely beaten. Clearly one of them was a spy, but we didn't know which one. They told us, "Welcome to the Air Force Intelligence. Here you will lose your faith in God."

*—Marwan, who was arrested at his house in the Dael town in the Daraa governorate in June. He stayed one night in the Air Force Intelligence branch before he was transferred to another detention facility.<sup>106</sup>*

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<sup>106</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Marwan, November 1, 2011.

## Homs branch<sup>107</sup>

### OFFICERS IN CHARGE OF FACILITY:

- Brig. Gen. Jawdat al-Ahmed<sup>108</sup>

### LOCATION:

Coordinates: 34.750208, 36.714788

By the Jawiya Roundabout, in front of the Ministry of Agriculture.

### DOCUMENTED METHODS OF TORTURE AND ILL-TREATMENT

Beating; beating with object; threats to detainee; stress positions; dulab.

## STATEMENTS BY VICTIMS AND EYEWITNESSES

They took us to the Air Force Intelligence branch [in Homs]. We were six in one cell. The bathroom was outside and we were allowed to use it twice a day. They would count, "One, two, three," and you had to finish. If not, you would get the *dulab*. They put you in the tire and beat you with a baton. It is unreal. It can't be explained. Even today, three months later, my legs still have marks. They started beating me and accusing me of shooting at the school. They tie you and pull you with a rope and they beat you. You can just move your head, and you are blindfolded. They were threatening me, saying I should confess that I was carrying weapons, shooting at the army and checkpoints.

*—Toufiq, who was arrested on August 22, 2011.<sup>109</sup>*

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<sup>107</sup> Human Rights Watch interviewed two people who suffered or witnessed torture in this facility.

<sup>108</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Sayid, June 20, 2012.

## Latakia Branch<sup>110</sup>

### OFFICERS IN CHARGE OF FACILITY:

- Col. Suhail Al-Abdullah

### LOCATION:

Coordinates: 35.529489, 35.799074

### DOCUMENTED METHODS OF TORTURE AND ILL-TREATMENT

Beating; beating with object; electrocution; falaqa; dulab; threats; sexual abuse.

### GENERAL COMMENTS:

The Air Force Intelligence Branch in Latakia has a detention facility underground.

### STATEMENTS BY VICTIMS AND EYEWITNESSES:

The interrogator ordered me to tell him everything. I told him I don't know anything, but if he has questions I will answer. He asked the officers to take me away to teach me a lesson and then bring me back. The officers took me to the adjacent room. They started hitting me until I fell on the ground. They made me lie on my back and put my legs inside the tire and then pushed my head and my hands inside the tire as well. They then started hitting me with an iron stick on my knees. Afterwards they poured water on my legs and took me to see the interrogator. I later found out that they poured the water in order for the blood to circulate again through my legs.

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<sup>109</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Toufiq, November 23, 2011.

<sup>110</sup> Human Rights Watch interviewed three people who suffered or witnessed torture in this facility.

I don't know for how long they hit me. There were two people hitting me. The interrogator repeated the same questions which I didn't have answers for. He told the guards to take me to the cell and told me to ask my cell mates what will happen to me if I don't tell him everything I know. They took me to the prison cell without my clothes and poured water on the ground so that I couldn't sit or sleep.

—Chahid, who was arrested at his house on May 20, 2011.<sup>111</sup>

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We went upstairs one floor to the office of the director of the branch. His deputy started asking me questions. Why was I there? He accused me of going to demonstrations and said that someone was paying me money to go to demonstrations. That I work in weapons smuggling and for Hariri [Saad Hariri, former prime minister of Lebanon]. I denied it.

Then they took me down to the interrogation room for torture. It was one floor underground. They tied me to an electricity chair. They were asking the same questions and cursing and beating me. They hit me with their hands and feet and there was a battery with a cable that was connected to my finger.

[Later] they hit the bottoms of my feet with a stick. There was a thick belt tied around my legs so that I couldn't move them. I was lying with my face on the ground and my feet up. There were two people beating me with a silicon stick. One was standing on my neck. You prefer death. You hope to die. The entire

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<sup>111</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Chahid, October 27, 2011.

time I was in detention my family knew nothing about me. They didn't know whether I was dead or alive.

*—Fadi, who was detained around April 2011 when he went to the Air Force Intelligence branch seeking information about his missing relative.<sup>112</sup>*

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[At the Air Force Intelligence branch in Latakia] they took me downstairs, two sets of stairs with a turn. Each 15 steps ... I couldn't see and my hands were tied [I was naked]. We were in the interrogation room. They were beating me for the first hour with their hands. Then they used a wood baton. I didn't confess. The interrogator said, "Bring me the electricity." ... The guard brought two electric prongs. He put one in my mouth, on my tooth. Then he started turning it on and off quickly. He did this seven or eight times. I thought, this is it. I am not going to leave this branch.

Then they started asking, "Will you confess now?" I said I had nothing to confess to. They removed the electricity from my tooth and put it on my knees. Here they used the electricity the longest. It is still marked. They would put it on for a long time and then take it off. They started torturing me here (gesturing toward his genitalia) [with the electricity]. They were also beating me and there was a guard behind me turning the electricity on. I passed out. They were beating me and shocking me. The interrogator was beating me with a cable over my whole body. I still didn't have any clothes on ... They asked me every thirty minutes if I would confess. I said no. At a point they said

"We will kill you," and I said, "Ok, ok. Kill me. Death is better than the torture you are putting me through." When he shocks you the electricity hits your whole body. I was there for hours. They had to carry me on a mattress to the cell. I couldn't walk after that.

*—Salim, who was arrested in June 2011 while on a two day break from his military service.<sup>113</sup>*

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<sup>112</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Fadi, January 10, 2012.

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<sup>113</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Salim, January 12, 2012.

## POLITICAL SECURITY DIRECTORATE

Director: Mohamed Dib Zeitun<sup>114</sup>

### Mezzeh area – Damascus<sup>115</sup>

#### LOCATION:

Coordinates: 33.498932, 36.239601

#### GENERAL COMMENTS:

Former detainees told Human Rights Watch that the Political Security branch in the Mezzeh area contained detention facilities underground. One detainee said that he and 25-30 other detainees were held in a cell with the number 21 on the door.

#### DOCUMENTED METHODS OF TORTURE AND ILL-TREATMENT

Beating; shabeh; electrocution; threats to family; burning with cigarettes.

#### STATEMENTS BY VICTIMS AND EYEWITNESSES:

An officer accused me of taking money from Lebanon to bring down the regime. After calling an assistant they beat me up, took me to a room close to where they torture people and hung me up with a long chain handcuffed

<sup>114</sup> The Council of the European Union imposed travel restrictions and an asset freeze on Mohamed Dib Zeitun (also spelled Zaytun and Zeitoun) on May 9, 2011, for being “involved in the violence against demonstrators” in Syria. Council Regulation (EU) No 442/2011 of 9 May 2011.

<sup>115</sup> Human Rights Watch interviewed four people who suffered or witnessed torture in this facility.

to my wrists so that only my toes touched the floor. They kept me hanging like this for three hours.

Back in the cell I couldn’t sleep because it was close to the torture room. They were beating people and using electric sticks. I could hear the screams.

The next day they hung me up again. Many people were hanging like this – in the *shabeh* position. Every 30 to 45 minutes somebody came to hit me. There were six or seven people hanging like this at any given time.

Everybody was beaten up. Some could not bear the pain so they collapsed and lost consciousness. They didn’t concentrate on me. When I fell asleep they threw water on me demanding that I stand up.

On the third day, the officer threatened to bring my family and torture them. One prisoner was beaten up in front of me. He confessed. The officer told the others to take him back to the cell and treat him well. Then two of his assistants held my legs up and the officer used a stick to beat me on the legs and on the rest of the body. They extinguished cigarettes on my hands and feet. They also placed me in front of a wall. The agents would have fun by banging my head into the wall or hitting me in the groin.

On the fourth day, they transferred me from an individual to a regular cell. Newcomers were always put in individual cells. We were not allowed to talk. We would just sit next to each other in silence. When officers came near the cell, everybody was supposed to stand up, even those who were sleeping. If not, they would beat us up.

Some had black spots from electrocution. Some couldn't walk to the bathroom on their own. Some who had written slogans had their hands burned with cigarettes. My hands were burned as well. I eventually confessed, but was then beaten again for the crimes that I confessed to.

—Farid, who was detained for 25 days.<sup>116</sup>

## Idlib Branch<sup>117</sup>

### OFFICERS IN CHARGE OF FACILITY:

- Atef Najib (head of branch; former head of Political Security in Daraa)<sup>118</sup>

### LOCATION:

Coordinates: 35.926529, 36.629993

### DOCUMENTED METHODS OF TORTURE AND ILL-TREATMENT

Beating; beating with object; electrocution; basat al-reeh.

### GENERAL COMMENTS:

The Political Security Branch in Idlib has a detention facility underground, consisting of five common cells on the left side of a corridor and single cells and a restroom for the officers on the right side. There is an investigation room on the same floor. Two former detainees said independently that detainees were tortured with electricity in the corridor.<sup>119</sup>

### STATEMENTS BY VICTIMS AND EYEWITNESSES:

They brought us to the head of the branch, Atef Najib, the one who was transferred from Daraa. He asked our names and then told the others that they should take us down and “show us their hospitality.”

They took us one floor underground and started beating us with cables and electric

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<sup>116</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Farid, October 27, 2011.

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<sup>117</sup> Human Rights Watch interviewed nine people who suffered or witnessed torture in this facility.

<sup>118</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Sultan, January 7, 2012.

<sup>119</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Wadih, January 7, 2012; Abdallah, January 8, 2012.

sticks. They put us on a rack device. They kept beating and insulting us until eight o'clock in the morning. My body was all black from beatings. At that point they didn't ask any questions.

They put 25 of us in a cell measuring four by four meters. Five of them were arrested with me. Every time they opened the door they would beat us.

*—Sultan, who was detained on May 15 on the road between Latakia and Jisr al-Shughour.<sup>120</sup>*

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One of the detainees in our cell was taken out for interrogation because they found the name of an activist on his phone. They tortured him with the flying carpet and beat him with cables. They electrocuted him six or seven times on different parts of his body. He was unconscious when they brought him back to the room. He was peeing blood for three days. When we were released he still stayed in the prison.

*—Jalal, who was arrested on June 25 from his village in the Idlib governorate and spent 45 days in detention, including 19 days in the Political Security branch in Idlib.<sup>121</sup>*

They brought me to the interrogation room along the same corridor. They tied my hands, but didn't blindfold me. One officer was sitting at a desk and another was standing next to him. He addressed me in a very insulting way. When I didn't answer he got up and just kicked under the chin with his foot. I fell and he kicked me again. They accused me of

participating in the uprising, but I said that I just went to the funeral of the martyrs. He said that they are not martyrs, but pigs. He called someone else and told him to "teach me" because I called the dead protestors martyrs.

He took me to the corridor, tied me to the door, and started giving me electric shocks. I couldn't tell what they used to give me the shocks. I stayed there for an hour. They gave me shocks about every five minutes, each one lasting for a few seconds. My head was just hanging. I couldn't hold it up. I passed out, but then they poured cold water on me.

When they released my hands I fell on my face. I couldn't stand up so they started kicking me. I ended up crawling back into the interrogation room. The interrogator asked me whether I still thought of the dead as martyrs. I answered that I didn't anymore and that they are just dead persons.

*—Abdallah who was detained for one day in mid-April after having attended a funeral in Jisr al-Shughour.<sup>122</sup>*

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<sup>120</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Sultan, January 7, 2012.

<sup>121</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Jalal, January 8, 2012.

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<sup>122</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Abdallah, January 8, 2012.

## Homs Branch<sup>123</sup>

### OFFICERS IN CHARGE OF FACILITY:

- Brig. Gen. Hussam Luqa (Since April 2012)<sup>124</sup>
- Brig. Gen. Nasr Al-Ali (Until April 2012, Al-Ali then assumed the position of head of Daraa branch)<sup>125</sup>

### LOCATION:

Coordinates: 32.63028, 36.108284

### DOCUMENTED METHODS OF TORTURE AND ILL-TREATMENT

Beating; beating with object; shabeh; dulab; electrocution; balanco.

### GENERAL COMMENTS:

The Political Security branch in Homs has a detention facility on the second underground floor. According to one former detainee, the facility consists of nine individual cells and an interrogation room and torture room on the same floor.<sup>126</sup>

### STATEMENTS BY VICTIMS AND EYEWITNESSES:

They pushed me down the stairs to the basement where the interrogation room is. They took my ID and locked me in a two [meters] by one [meter] cell. There were about

nine individual cells. After two hours I went [was taken] to see the interrogator. He had a paper in front of him that said that I sent videos to Al Jazeera. I denied [it]. As a result, I stayed for seven days suspended from my hands. They let me down three times per day to eat. They used to beat me just for fun.

The basement was two floors underground. In front of the interrogation room there is another room that had all the torture machines. They accused me of inciting protests and possession of weapons. They tortured me several times. I saw one of the machines that looked like a table with straps to strap you on. There is one from under the back and other ones on the legs. After seven days, they moved me into solidarity confinement. The next day they put me in the tire. They put both legs in the tire and then they push my head inside the tire. I didn't confess so they put me three times on the electricity chair. They would torture me and put be back in the cell.

After 16 days, they transferred me from the cell to a room 20 by 15 meters that had around 60 people. Every day they release [some] and bring new people in.

—Twenty-five-year-old Ziad, who was detained on June 25, 2011 and released on November 12, 2011.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Human Rights Watch interviewed two people who suffered or witnessed torture in this facility.

<sup>124</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Hamad, April 25, 2012; Omar, June 11, 2012.

<sup>125</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Omar, June 11, 2012.

<sup>126</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Ziad, January 25, 2012.

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<sup>127</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Ziad, January 25, 2012.

## Latakia Branch<sup>128</sup>

### OFFICERS IN CHARGE OF FACILITY:

- Brig. Gen. Taha Taha<sup>129</sup>

### LOCATION:

Coordinates: 35.527367, 35.804268

### DOCUMENTED METHODS OF TORTURE AND ILL-TREATMENT

Beating; sexual abuse; threats; dulab; shabeh; basat al-reeh.

### GENERAL COMMENTS:

The Political Security branch in Latakia has an underground detention facility with an interrogation room on the same floor.

### STATEMENTS BY VICTIMS AND EYEWITNESSES:

They started beating us (40 persons) before they asked any questions. We were blindfolded and handcuffed. They kicked us with their boots and knocked out several of my teeth. They placed us in single cells and then took us out for hours at the time to beat us.

With the unmarried guys they made them strip and beat them on their private parts.

After about three days they put us in cells, seven people in each. We were all naked, so when they came back we could see that they were beaten and they were crying and peeing blood.

The cell was located four flights of stairs underground. It was cold and wet. The food was a piece of bread with some yoghurt. We stayed in that cell for five days, naked all the time.

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<sup>128</sup> Human Rights Watch interviewed six people who suffered or witnessed torture in this facility.

<sup>129</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Ghalib, January 7, 2012; Salim, January 12, 2012.

They interrogated me four times. Every time they tortured me, with punches, kicks, and hitting me with cables. They put me in a tire. They wanted me to confess to carrying arms and being a member of armed gangs.

They forced me to fingerprint some paper, but I'm illiterate so I don't know what it said.

Afterwards I was hiding in a private hospital. I had several broken ribs so I couldn't move. They released me in connection with the presidential pardon.

—Ghalib, who was arrested in mid-April after a protest in Latakia.<sup>130</sup>

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They undressed me, tied my hands behind my back and hit me on my private parts. They clipped my hands to a metal pipe and lifted me so that my feet hardly touched the floor. They kept me like that for two days. When they released me I couldn't stand, my feet were completely swollen.

I then spent five days in a single cell with six other people. After that 15 officers took me to a separate room. They were cursing my mother and sister and threatened to rape me. They put me on a flying carpet – I was lying on my back, tied to a board, and they lifted my head and legs. All this time I was undressed. They wrapped wires around my penis and turned on the electricity. I could just hear it buzzing. They did this maybe five times for about 10 seconds. I passed out.

When I regained consciousness they were pushing my legs and hands into a tire. My entire body was blue from beatings.

—Twenty-three-year-old Amer, who was arrested in March 2011 in Idlib province.<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Ghalib, January 7, 2012.



## Daraa Branch<sup>132</sup>

### OFFICERS IN CHARGE OF FACILITY:

- Brig. Gen. Nasr Al-Ali (Since April 2012. Used to be head of the Political Security Branch in Homs)<sup>133</sup>

### LOCATION:

Coordinates: 32.630235, 36.108123

### DOCUMENTED METHODS OF TORTURE AND ILL-TREATMENT:

Beating.

### STATEMENTS BY VICTIMS AND EYEWITNESSES:

They put me in a car and drove me to the Political Security branch in Daraa. There were about 50 other detainees there as well [who had just arrived]. I know because they listed all the names. Then they pushed us all on the floor with our faces down. We stayed like this for several hours. Anybody walking by would hit us and step on us. Then they placed us in a large vehicle and drove us to Damascus. Inside the vehicle, they used electric stun-guns on us if we talked.

—Jihad, who was arrested in Daraa on April 4, 2011.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Amer, January 10, 2012.

<sup>132</sup> Human Rights Watch interviewed three people who suffered or witnessed torture and ill-treatment in this branch.

<sup>133</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Sayid, by phone, June 20, 2012.

<sup>134</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Jihad, May 22, 2011.

## GENERAL INTELLIGENCE DIRECTORATE

Director: Ali Mamlouk<sup>135</sup>

### Branch 285 – Damascus<sup>136</sup>

#### OFFICERS IN CHARGE OF FACILITY:

- Brig. Gen. Ibrahim Ma'la (head of branch, since late 2011)<sup>137</sup>
- Brig. Gen. Hussam Fendi (head of branch, until late 2011)

#### LOCATION:

Coordinates: 33.499805, 36.291313

#### DOCUMENTED METHODS OF TORTURE AND ILL-TREATMENT

Beating; beating with objects; electrocution; basat al-reeh; stress position (prolonged standing); sexual abuse (prolonged nudity).<sup>138</sup>

#### GENERAL COMMENTS:

Branch 285 is part of the complex housing the General Intelligence Directorate Administrative Branch. According to a defector from Branch 285, the detention center is located under a garage. There are five floors above ground and two underground. The five floors above the ground are

offices. On the underground floors there are interrogation rooms and about 250 solitary confinement cells. There were 17 interrogation rooms, but then the number increased. There are also five large group cells on each floor. The entrance is located on the ground floor. The defector estimated that there might have been 1,500 detainees in Branch 285.<sup>139</sup> A former detainee said that he was kept in a cell measuring about 25 square meters together with 74 other detainees.<sup>140</sup>

#### STATEMENTS BY VICTIMS AND EYEWITNESSES:

We detained men there and some children aged 13 and older. I myself probably arrested 40 children who attended demonstrations. There were maybe 1,500 detainees there, coming and going.

They would torture with electricity. They would tie someone on an all-metal military bed and electrocute the bed or put water on the floor and make the person lie on top of it and use the electricity. I would sometimes go into the interrogation rooms, although I was not usually there, and this is where I would see this [torture in general] ... [another method was] they would make the detainee, with his hands tied by his head, and a metal pole sticking out of the wall digging into his back, stand on the wall. It causes pain to the back. Sometimes they would leave them naked, and the usual slaps and punches. You would see detainees passing out from this ...

<sup>135</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Fakhri, January 11, 2012. The Council of the European Union imposed travel restrictions and an asset freeze on Ali Mamlouk (also spelled Mamluk) on May 9, 2011, for being “involved in the violence against demonstrators” in Syria. Council Regulation (EU) No 442/2011 of 9 May 2011.

<sup>136</sup> Human Rights Watch interviewed three people who suffered or witnessed torture in this facility.

<sup>137</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Omar, June 11, 2012.

<sup>138</sup> Human Rights Watch Interview with Fakhri, January 11, 2012.

<sup>139</sup> Human Rights Watch Interview with Fakhri, January 11, 2012.

<sup>140</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Firas, November 3, 2011.

The order [to interrogate] is irrelevant. You understand from the people around you what you are supposed to do. No one says, “Why are you shooting.” They say, “Shoot!” If you don’t beat or torture you fear for yourself. One time someone said to me, “Why aren’t you beating him. Hit him.” I didn’t want to defect. My dad told me to. The things he was seeing, I wasn’t seeing [while I was serving].

—Twenty-four-year old Fakhri, who used to serve in Branch 285 before he defected.<sup>141</sup>

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They didn’t ask any questions, but started torturing me right away. They took me underground, blindfolded and handcuffed. Once I stepped into a room, somebody kicked me from behind. I fell. They started beating me with everything they could find – sticks, cables, their fists, and legs. It lasted for about an hour. Afterwards, they took me to a different room for interrogation.

They asked me why I protested, what did I want. I didn’t tell them anything. An officer ordered a soldier to give me electric shocks. They sat me down. I was still blindfolded, but I could see under the blindfold that they put a clip on my left big toe. I then lost consciousness immediately.

—Twenty-seven-year-old Firas, who was detained on July 7 and spent 23 days in detention in Branch 285.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> Human Rights Watch Interview with Fakhri, January 11, 2012.

<sup>142</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Firas, November 3, 2011.

## Al-Khattib Branch – Damascus<sup>143</sup>

### LOCATION:

Coordinates: 33.520416, 36.311783

### DOCUMENTED METHODS OF TORTURE AND ILL-TREATMENT

Beating; beating with objects; stress positions; falaqa; electrocution; threats.

### GENERAL COMMENTS:

The Al-Khattib branch consists of three buildings. At least one of the buildings has an underground detention facility consisting of seven common and four individual cells

### STATEMENTS BY VICTIMS AND EYEWITNESSES:

I was called out for interrogation twice. The interrogation room was on the second floor. Everybody beat us up on the way. We were still blindfolded. During the interrogation I sat on my knees. They were punching and kicking me everywhere. It was more of an accusation than interrogation. On the way back they made me roll down the stairs. If they didn’t like it, they made me do it again.

—Thirty-year-old Bassam, who was detained just before a protest in Damascus in mid-July.<sup>144</sup>

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All night and day we heard the sounds from men being tortured. One person who helped organizing protests was forced to stand on his knees the entire time in the prison cell. During the investigation they threatened me that they would strip my clothes off and torture me with

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<sup>143</sup> Human Rights Watch interviewed four people who suffered or witnessed torture in this facility.

<sup>144</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Bassam, November 1, 2011.

the *dulab*. We didn't know what time it was so we couldn't know when prayer time was. We couldn't sleep because of the sounds of torture. The other girl with us in the prison cell told me that they slapped her several times and kicked her in the stomach.

I saw security forces slapping a 12 year old boy in the corridor. They also brought him to say that he saw us at the protest. But the boy swore that he has never seen us before; they believed him. [T]he cells are very close to each other and there was a peephole I used so I could see what was happening outside.

—Twenty-five-year-old Marwa [woman], who was arrested with her friend near a demonstration in Damascus in January 2012.<sup>145</sup>

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When we arrived at the Al-Khattib branch we saw men blindfolded, being tortured. I saw blood on the floor. They put us in a room and then a woman came and searched us after she ordered us to take off our clothes. We were three girls in the room. The first night there was no interrogation.

We could see the rooms around us because there was a small peephole with a net. We lost track of time. We were able to see how guys were being beaten and interrogated. Some men were not wearing any clothes and they were sitting in a prayer position. It was unbelievable how they were beating them with the electrical batons.

The next day they took us separately to see the interrogator. I was the first one to go. The interrogator asked me again to confess and give the names of my friends. If I did, he said, he would let me go right away. They took the

details of my Facebook account and started to search it. He saw that I was friends with one guy from Hama and started asking me questions about him. He asked me how I knew him and what was going on between the two of us. I explained we were only friends. Then he ordered me to tell him the guy's real name or else he would use the *falaqa*. Then he asked me if I'm a conservative or liberal, I told him I am neither this nor that. Then he asked me if the guy from Hama belongs to the Muslim Brotherhood. I told him of course he does not.

After he finished we went back to the room with my friend and the other girl. While we were in the room we heard someone screaming from the outside because he was in agonizing pain. He confessed the names of five of his friends. The same guy was brought in to the interrogation room and the interrogator asked him if he saw me at the protest and he said yes. They took the third girl for interrogation; we started hearing a woman screaming. We asked her when she came back but she said it wasn't her who was screaming. They were beating a child who was at the protest. It was I think the same child that the interrogator brought in and asked if he saw me at the protest. He said he didn't see us.

While we were there they brought in more than 50 detainees. On Friday they made us fingerprint a piece of paper that said we were in a protest chanting sectarian slogans, that we cursed the President and demanded the overthrow of the regime, and that we carried posters for the FSA. I fingerprinted the paper and two other blank ones.

—Twenty-two-year old Selma [woman], arrested with her friend in Damascus.<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Marwa, January 25, 2012.

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<sup>146</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Selma, January 24, 2012.

## Latakia Branch<sup>147</sup>

### OFFICERS IN CHARGE OF FACILITY:

- Brig. Gen. Khudr Khudr<sup>148</sup>

### LOCATION:

Coordinates: 35.529572, 35.803867

### DOCUMENTED METHODS OF TORTURE AND ILL-TREATMENT

Beating; electrocution.

based on my answers. They wanted me to work with them but I refused and that's when they used the electricity.

*—Twenty-eight-year-old Malik, who was detained in Latakia in late April 2011 and kept in detention for 15 days.<sup>149</sup>*

### STATEMENTS BY VICTIMS AND EYEWITNESSES:

I was on my knees in the interrogation room. I felt two people beating me. They were kicking and slapping me. The interrogator said there were witnesses against me saying that I organized demonstrations. He was saying that I encourage people to go out and demonstrate. I said no. They put me to one side and brought in another guy who came and said I paid him to go to demonstrations. I didn't recognize his voice. I signed a white paper saying I will not go to demonstrations or say Allahu Akbar. I was in detention for 15 days. I was in a solitary cell and didn't see anyone.

[There were kids there] and they were beating them. I heard them saying, "We don't know, uncle." One sounded like he could have been 13 years old.

They used electricity on me in places I can't talk about. They did it more than once. This was in the interrogation room. Every day there was an interrogation. Their questions were

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<sup>147</sup> Human Rights Watch interviewed two people who suffered or witnessed torture in this facility.

<sup>148</sup> Human Rights Watch interview, June 18, 2012.

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<sup>149</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Malik, January 10, 2012.

## Aleppo Branch<sup>150</sup>

### LOCATION:

Coordinates: 36.211922, 37.134705

### GENERAL COMMENTS:

Underground.

### DOCUMENTED METHODS OF TORTURE AND ILL-TREATMENT

Beating; beating with object; falaqa; electrocution; balanco.

### STATEMENTS BY VICTIMS AND EYEWITNESSES:

They took me to the State Security branch where they took my clothes off. My hands were tied with plastic cuffs behind my back. I was naked sitting on my knees. We were underground. They were beating me with their hands, and batons, and kicks. There were also people next to me being beaten.

There was one child who was eight years old who was with us and he was being beaten. I heard the soldiers asking each other, "Where is the kid?" He was in the mosque with us when we were picked up. As they were putting us in the van one of the security officers said to the driver [talking about the boy], "This one is a gift for you today." I don't know what happened to him.

They separated us by neighborhood. Those from Hama and Homs got the worst treatment. There was no food there. The next day they took me to [another facility].

—Twenty-three-year-old Suleiman, a student at Aleppo University, who was detained in August 2011 at a mosque.<sup>151</sup>

<sup>150</sup> Human Rights Watch interviewed two people who suffered or witnessed torture in this facility.

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The interrogator accused me of being associated with "terrorists." I denied it. He also wanted me to confess to being the organizer of demonstrations. I refused. Then another person entered the room and started beating me with a whip. A third person joined. They pushed me on the floor, made me raise my feet, and started beating me on the soles of my feet. After half an hour they took me back to the cell, saying I should think about what to say. They beat me like this two more times before they put me in a car and took me to the Air Force Intelligence branch.

—Nidal, who was detained in Aleppo on July 4, 2011.<sup>152</sup>

<sup>151</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Suleiman, January 8, 2012.

<sup>152</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Nidal, January 6, 2012.

## Idlib Branch<sup>153</sup>

### LOCATION:

Coordinates: 35.923065, 36.633038

### DOCUMENTED METHODS OF TORTURE AND ILL-TREATMENT

Beating; beatings with object; electrocution; pulling nails; stress positions; falaqa, shabeh; threats.

### STATEMENTS BY VICTIMS AND EYEWITNESSES:

They asked me if I went to demonstrations and I said, “Yes”. They asked how many, and I said, “A lot”. They didn’t beat me. They tried to discuss with me. I was blindfolded and there were three interrogators. During the interrogation my hands were tied.

The fourth day I went to interrogation and they started asking me about photos, I said no, I didn’t take photos, and he said they had someone who had informed on me. They started giving me names and I said no I didn’t know the people and they said in that case I would confess in their way.

Four of them were hitting me. They were hitting me on my feet from above, on my toes with a wooden baton. Another was hitting me with an electric baton and the other two were hitting me with their hands. I fell on the ground. I didn’t confess.

Then they tied my hands to a point high above my head. I could stand, but my hands were above my head. I was standing like this

for four hours. I had to stand on one leg. When I lowered a foot they beat me. I was blindfolded.

Then they took me to a torture room, to give me electric shocks. They beat me with a whip and electrocuted my toes. I didn’t confess to anything. If you don’t answer a question they shock you. It was like this for six hours every day. On the eleventh day there was a new interrogator who placed me on the ground, tied my hands, and beat me. He had a whip. My eyes were blindfolded. He was sitting on a chair and I was under him. He beat me with the metal whip on the bottom of my feet and on my thighs, and also above ... He pulled me by my toes. I thought, I’ve reached the end. He pulled my beard with pliers, pulled my nails. Half of the nail is still gone. Then they took me and hung me in the *shabeh* position from the door for six or seven hours. They threatened to bring my mom and my younger brothers. I didn’t confess to anything except for going to demonstrations.

*—Tarik, who used to photograph demonstrations and was arrested in Idlib on August 27 and spent 24 days in the General Intelligence branch in Idlib.<sup>154</sup>*

<sup>153</sup> Human Rights Watch interviewed three people who suffered or witnessed torture in this facility.

<sup>154</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Tarik, November 18, 2011.



## Homs Branch<sup>155</sup>

### OFFICERS IN CHARGE OF FACILITY:

- Brig. Gen. Firas Al-Hamed<sup>156</sup>

### LOCATION:

Coordinates: 34.734963, 36.698434

### DOCUMENTED METHODS OF TORTURE AND ILL-TREATMENT:

Beating; beating with object.

### STATEMENTS BY VICTIMS AND EYEWITNESSES:

Three guards took me to a cell and started beating me on the back, asking me what types of weapon we had and where we got them from. When I asked “what weapons?” they beat me again. Eventually I started agreeing to everything, to save my life. There was no place on my body that had not been beaten. They beat me with batons and cables. I would have agreed to owning a tank.

—Assi, who was arrested in Homs on July 1, 2011, and was kept in detention in the General Intelligence branch in Homs for six days.<sup>157</sup>

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There were many detainees with me. They were beating us on the head with the butt of their rifles. I couldn’t move my legs for ten days after I was released. I was in a cell measuring three by three meters with 40 detainees. It was so crowded we had to take turns sleeping. They made me fingerprint a

document, but I didn’t see what was written on it. I stayed in this place for two months.

—Chafik, who was arrested near the town of Talbiseh in April 2011.<sup>158</sup>

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They interrogated me the same day that I arrived but they already had all the information from the interrogations in the last branch in front of them. They were asking me questions and hitting me with the electrical cables on my back. They put me in a bigger individual cell. There were around 12 people in it. I stayed there for seven to eight days with nobody interrogating me. There was one guy with me in the cell who suffocated and died. It was very dark and speaking was prohibited. When we couldn’t breathe anymore we would hit on the door really hard until one of the officers opens the door for a couple of minutes and then closes it again.

When they took me for interrogation I saw around 14 men standing in the corridor and officers were hitting them with the back of their guns. They used the *balanco* ... with which they would hang me from the feet and my head down and they would beat me. He asked me the same questions. When he finished they took me to the cell.

—Twenty-five-year-old Ziad, who was detained on June 25 2011 and released on November 12, 2011.<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> Human Rights Watch interviewed three people who suffered or witnessed torture in this facility.

<sup>156</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Sayid, June 20, 2012.

<sup>157</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Assi, July 26, 2011.

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<sup>158</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Chafik, January 7, 2012.

<sup>159</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Ziad, January 25, 2012.

## AD HOC AND JOINT DETENTION FACILITIES

### Central Prison – Idlib<sup>160</sup>

#### OFFICERS IN CHARGE OF FACILITY:

- Bassel Bilal (police officer directly involved in torture)<sup>161</sup>
- Ahmad Kafan (police officer directly involved in torture)<sup>162</sup>
- Bassam al-Misri (police officer directly involved in torture)<sup>163</sup>

#### LOCATION:

Coordinates: 35.926587, 36.636158

#### DOCUMENTED METHODS OF TORTURE AND ILL-TREATMENT

Beating; falaqa; basat al-reeh; electrocution; sexual abuse.

#### GENERAL COMMENTS

The Idlib Central Prison consists of five floors, including the basement. According to a former prison guard, security forces took over the third floor and the basement of the prison at the end of April and started bringing detainees there because the other detention facilities were full.<sup>164</sup>

Most of the former detainees from the Central Prison interviewed by Human Rights Watch had been detained in connection with a massive arrest campaign following the killing of 120 members of the security forces in early June.<sup>165</sup> Several former detainees emphasized that there were children among the detainees and that they were being tortured as well.<sup>166</sup>

The former guard and detainees explained that a “security committee” of representatives from the main security and intelligence agencies was in charge of the third floor and the basement, but they also had seen the head of the prison there. Some detainees said that Political Security was mainly in charge of the third floor while Military Intelligence was in charge of the basement.

The third floor contained at least one big common cell, measuring about 50-70 square meters. While the number of detainees in the cell varied, it often contained 120-130 people. The third floor also contained several torture rooms with metal doors, interrogations rooms with wooden doors, and a medical room.<sup>167</sup> The basement was one big space – one former detainee estimated it to measure 400 square meters – which was divided into cells with partitions.

Security forces tortured detainees both on the third floor and in the basement. Several detainees and one former guard provided

<sup>160</sup> Human Rights Watch interviewed six people who suffered or witnessed torture in this facility.

<sup>161</sup> Three former detainees and a defector who used to work in the Idlib Central Prison told Human Rights Watch that the three named officers were directly involved in the torture and provided details about the torture methods used. Human Rights Watch interview with Isam, January 7, 2012; Imad, January 8, 2012; Jalal, January 8, 2012; Khalil, January 8, 2012.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid.

<sup>164</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Isam, January 7, 2012. A former detainee who was detained on June 9 told

Human Rights Watch that the security forces first took him to the Military Intelligence branch and then to the Political Security branch in Idlib, but because both were full they then brought him to the Central Prison. Human Rights Watch interview with Yazid, January 9, 2012.

<sup>165</sup> See, for example, “Syria Vows ‘Decisive’ Response in Jisr al-Shughour,” BBC News, June 6, 2011, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-13677200> (accessed June 25, 2012).

<sup>166</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Jalal, January 8, 2012.

<sup>167</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Jalal, January 8, 2012; Yousef, January 9, 2012.

detailed descriptions of how the three police officers listed above were directly involved in much of the torture on the third floor.<sup>168</sup>

The former prison guard, who was in charge of ordering food for the detainees, said that there were about 900 detainees in the basement and more than 300 on the third floor in October 2011. Former detainees provided similar estimates.<sup>169</sup>

#### STATEMENTS BY VICTIMS AND EYEWITNESSES:

After we arrived on the third floor, the guards started calling people. They had to be carried back to the cell on a blanket because of the torture. Some people's feet were red and swollen from the beating.

The next day they called my name. I couldn't walk because of the beating from the day before, but one of the guards hit me with a cable and I jumped to my feet.

They dragged me to a room with two benches. They put me on one of them and raised my legs and then they hit me 32 times on the soles of my feet. I couldn't speak. I would have told them anything.

Then they took me back to the cell, carrying me on a blanket because I couldn't walk. I put my feet in water and then I started crying.

After about 25 days [being tortured several times] they sent me down to the basement

where they interrogated me three times. It was even worse in the basement. They told me that they would not torture me if they believed me. "But if we don't," they said, "we will kill you." They put me in the flying carpet and said that they would hit me 130 times and that I should count. They said that they would start over if I didn't count correctly. When I had counted to 99 the interrogator used an electric prod on my back to make me stand and forced me back to the cell.

*—Thirty-one-year-old Yazid, who was detained on June 9 and spent 69 days in the Central Prison in Idlib.<sup>170</sup>*

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They forced me to undress. Then they started squeezing my fingers with pliers. They used a stapler to put nails in my fingers, chest, and ears. I was only allowed to take them out if I spoke. The nails in the ears were the most painful. They used two wires hooked up to a car battery to give me electric shocks. They used electric stun-guns on my genitals twice. I thought I would never see my family again. They tortured me like this three times over three days.

*—Thirty-one-year-old Khalil, who was detained in the Idlib governorate on June 29 and spent about two months in several places of detention, including about one month in the Idlib Central Prison.<sup>171</sup>*

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<sup>168</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Isam, January 7, 2012; Imad, January 8, 2012; Jalal, January 8, 2012; Khalil, January 8, 2012.

<sup>169</sup> A detainee who was held in the Idlib Central Prison basement in August estimated that there were 800 detainees there. Human Rights Watch interview with Isam, January 7, 2012. A detainee estimated that there were 300 people on the third floor in mid-July. Human Rights Watch interview with Khalil, January 8, 2012.

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<sup>170</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Yazid, January 9, 2012.

<sup>171</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Khalil, January 8, 2012.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report was researched and written by Ole Solvang, researcher in the Emergencies division, Anna Neistat, associate director for Program and Emergencies, and a researcher in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) division who preferred not to be named. Other staff members and a consultant, who also preferred not to be named, provided valuable research assistance.

Nadim Houry, deputy director of the MENA division; Clive Baldwin, senior legal advisor; and Tom Porteous, deputy program director, edited the report. Portions of the report were reviewed by Samer Muscati, researcher in the Women's Rights division, and Priyanka Motaparthi, researcher in the Children's Rights division. This report was prepared for publication by Adam Coogle, coordinator in the MENA division; Grace Choi, publications director; and Fitzroy Hepkins, production manager. Amr Khairy coordinated Arabic translation and provided production assistance. Accompanying multimedia was produced by Pierre Bairin, multimedia director; Amanda Bailly and Mariam Dwedar, assistant producers; and Anna Lopriore, multimedia producer.

We are deeply grateful to the individuals who shared their personal stories with us despite concern that they might face repercussions from the authorities. Their commitment to get their stories out despite the risks and challenges is an inspiration.



Since the beginning of anti-government protests in March 2011, Syrian authorities have subjected tens of thousands of people to arbitrary arrests, unlawful detentions, enforced disappearances, ill-treatment and torture using an extensive network of detention facilities, an archipelago of torture centers, scattered throughout Syria.

Based on more than 200 interviews with former detainees, including women and children, and defectors from the Syrian military, intelligence and security agencies, *Torture Archipelago: Arbitrary Arrests, Torture and Enforced Disappearances in Syria's Underground Prisons since March 2011* focuses on 28 of these detention facilities. For each facility, most of them with cells and torture chambers and one or several underground floors, we provide the location, identify the agencies responsible for operating them, document the type of ill-treatment and torture used, and name, to the extent possible, the individuals running them. The facilities included in this report are those for which multiple witnesses have indicated the same location and provided detailed descriptions about the use of torture. The actual number of such facilities is likely much higher.

The systematic patterns of ill-treatment and torture documented in this report clearly point to a state policy of torture and ill-treatment and therefore constitute a crime against humanity. The United Nations Security Council should refer the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court, adopt targeted sanctions on officials credibly implicated in abuses, and demand that Syria grant recognized international detention monitors access to all detention facilities, including those mentioned in this report.

*(above) A Syrian man holds a picture of a disappeared relative as people gather around UN observers in the village of Azzara in Homs province, on May 4, 2012.*

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*(front cover) Map showing the locations of detention centers that were identified by multiple witnesses.*