

Human Rights Commissioner on systematic torture and abuse in Syria

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19.08.2016 - Press release 

Bärbel Kofler, Federal Government Commissioner for Human Rights Policy and Humanitarian Aid at the Federal Foreign Office, issued the following statement today (18 August):

I am greatly concerned by the recent report by Amnesty International on the situation in prisons operated by the Syrian regime, which documents the systematic attack on the civilian population as part of a state policy that constitutes a crime against humanity.

Torture, abuse, sexual violence and barring access to medical care, as well as the use of hunger as a weapon, are everyday forms of the regime's warfare. Hundreds of thousands of randomly selected civilians, often women and minors, have been made to suffer torture in the country's government detention facilities. This had already been documented by the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic of the United Nations Human Rights Council in its report, published in February 2016, on deaths in Syrian prisons. Amnesty International has put the spotlight on this brutal system of torture once more in its report published today entitled "It breaks the human. Torture, Disease and Death in Syria's Prisons".

This shows once again how urgently we need channels of communication in order to put an end to these grave human rights violations. The release of all those who have been arbitrarily detained by the Syrian regime is a non-negotiable right. This is an indispensable precondition for any political settlement and must not be allowed to become a bargaining chip. The work of courageous activists – who sometimes put their own lives on the line in the process – to document these crimes is of inestimable value, and I hold their contribution in the highest regard.

Info

Background information

Since the beginning of the crackdown on the initially peaceful protests against the regime of Bashar al-Assad, more than 250,000 people have died in the war in Syria. While all parties to the conflict have committed systematic human rights violations, the Syrian regime is responsible for the overwhelming majority of cases. Alongside starving the civilian population of whole cities and the targeted use of heavy weapons against the population, torture, abuse and sexual violence perpetrated by the country's security and intelligence services against arbitrarily detained civilians is characteristic of the regime's policy.

Conservative estimates have put the number at well over one hundred thousand arbitrarily detained citizens so far, as well as over 17,000 deaths as a result of torture. The victims are often selected at random, with increasing numbers of them women, and come from all sections of society. They disappear into one of the many (secret) prisons, where they are often detained for months or even years under the most undignified conditions and are deliberately abused. Sexual violence is the order of the day. The unimaginable extent of the torture and details of this vile system have been well documented by a wide range of human rights organisations, and especially by the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic of the United Nations Human Rights Council.

Amnesty International's report "It breaks the human. Torture, Disease and Death in Syria's Prisons" published on 18 August 2016 can be found here:

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde24/4508/2016/en/>

Information on the work of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic of the United Nations Human Rights Council can be found here:

<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/IICISyria/Pages/IndependentInternationalCommission.aspx>

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