



# Revealing the Scale and Horror of Assad's Torture Chambers:

An Avaaz Brief on the Locations and Conditions of Syria's Detention Facilities

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## Executive Summary

- Avaaz has identified and verified the location of 416 detention centres being used by the Assad regime to imprison and torture regime opponents, a portion of which are listed below. Those locations can be found at this map: <http://disappeared.avaaz.org/detentioncentres.html>
- More than 617 people have been confirmed killed under torture by regime forces since the crackdown started on March 15 of last year.
- Bashar al-Assad's crackdown on Syria's popular uprising has claimed at least 6,874 victims and seen a further 69,000 people detained over the course of the last nine months.
- Of the 69,000 detained since March, over 37,000 people remain in detention and some 32,000 people have been released, many of them bearing scars from torture and violence.
- Detention centres are managed by various government security bodies, including the Political Security, Military Security, State Security, and Airforce Intelligence. This report presents the organisational structure and detention centre locations within each province.
- Torture is prevalent and takes place in almost all detention centres. Most severe forms of torture take place in the military, security and air force intelligence branches where victims are interrogated before they are sometimes transferred to prisons. Most former detainees have reported that conditions in prisons are less terrible than those of state branches, as they receive some food in prisons. Aside from torture, many of the detainees gave information about severe overcrowding.
- In addition to the listed prisons, there are several locations for illegal, make-shift detention centres, including local schools, soccer fields, movie theaters, hospitals, factories, sport stadiums, warehouses, abandoned buildings, and underground storage areas. There are individual military detention facilities on every single military base in Syria.

## Methodology

The research was conducted by 23 human rights researchers inside and outside Syria. The names and locations of detention centres were initially cited by survivors, family members and friends interviewed in connection with Avaaz's ongoing work to verify disappearances and casualties in Syria, which included information on illegal detention and death under torture. The work of confirming death tolls is conducted by 58 monitors across Syria. On the basis of this primary information and statements from victims of torture and illegal detention, the research team drew up a list of detention centres and torture techniques. The team then verified the data on detention facility locations, descriptions and torture techniques by comparing them with other detainee statements and intersecting the data by interviewing numerous torture survivors and former detainees who had been released from the same locations and had faced similar accusations. The team also interviewed recently-released former prisoners of conscience (who had been detained prior to the uprising) and documented information they had received from detainees. The names of officers involved in torture (including ordering detention in facilities where torture occurred; ordering torture; or giving on-site, direct orders to torture), or signing orders for executions of defected soldiers, came minimally from 11 eyewitnesses, including at least one former member of the military. In three cases, 27 eyewitness provided evidence on the names of officers who ordered their detention and torture. Confirmation from insider sources working for the regime was used to confirm information about torture and detention facilities but not to research individual names.

The research was conducted in Arabic then translated to English.

Three local organizations contributed information which Avaaz independently verified.

# I. Torture Methods Employed by the Syrian Regime

Former detainees have described numerous brutal torture methods employed by the regime. Transcriptions of survivors' testimonies are included according to the location where the torture was perpetrated. Some torture methods commonly employed by Syrian regime torturers are listed below:

- The German Chair - The detainee is tied to a metal chair with moving parts, then the chair is folded backwards so that it places extreme pressure on the prisoner's spine and leads to a quasi-permanent asphyxiation. This treatment may cause vertebrae to be fractured, a paralysis of the arms for months, chronic headaches, hypertension, urinary tract infections and stomach and intestinal problems.
- Electrocutation, applied to genitals and other body parts.
- The Wheel - The detainee is put inside one or two tires of a large vehicle. The detainee's feet and legs are inserted first, then the detainee is folded over, with hands tied behind the back, and the head is inserted into the tire so that the detainee is in a "U" shape with only the head and feet on the wheels; the detainee is beaten on his face and feet until they bleed.
- Removal of fingernails and toenails.
- Suspension by the hands from the ceiling being made to stand or dangle for days.
- Severe beating on the head and body, or smashing detainee's head against radiators or walls.
- Extinguishing cigarettes on the body.
- Sleep deprivation.

## II. Detention Centres Located in Syria

Information about the following detention centres was documented by Avaaz researchers on the basis of information provided by numerous former detainees. Where possible, verified details about the detention facility conditions and personal testimonies are provided; in other cases, Avaaz researchers have verified the location and nature of the detention facility.

### **HOMS**

- **Airforce Intelligence**
  - Located on Hama Road. A former detainee reported that he was amongst 14 other detainees held in a 2m meter by 2m room. Avaaz has received graphic evidence of 16 detainees who were killed under torture. In the photographic evidence, many of the bodies show signs of having had their eyes gouged out. Survivors have left the branch with severe disabilities after interrogation and torture. Length of detention differs in this branch with some detainees held only between 1-4 days, while others are held for weeks.
  
- **Military Security Branch**
  - Located in Al-Qusair, al-Jala' Street, Homs.
  
- **Political Security Branch**
  - Located 100 meters away from the above Military Security Branch, al-Qusair, Homs.
  
- **Homs Central Prison**
  - Homs Central Prison detainees were on strike in early January to protest the living conditions at the prison. 4,000 detainees are currently being held, at several times the capacity of the prison. The official capacity of the cells is 56 prisoners, but around 300 are currently crammed inside each. Food is still provided for only 56 people per cell, however, so prisoners are forced to divide up these meager rations, which are just enough to keep them alive. Detainees have described sleeping amongst piles of garbage and being held in freezing conditions, with at least 3 people sharing a single, filthy blanket in most cases. High-profile activists such as Najati Tayara, the father of SNC member Naji Tayara and a long-time anti-regime activist, were held and participated in the strike here.
  - Avaaz has obtained information that between 50 and 100 detainees are being introduced almost daily (at the time of writing) without any detainees being released. The dormitories have about 65 beds but, because there are 300 detainees, the detainees take turns sleeping on beds and on the ground due to overcrowding. Each dormitory has 3 toilets for 300 people. The water is almost always cut. As there is no sanitation, the garbage accumulates in the cells, and the detainees have to live amongst it. Insect populations thrive as a result

of these conditions, causing skin rashes and boils. Lice have also afflicted the detainees because of the dirty conditions and no access to showers or baths. Many cases of food poisoning are reported.

- **Deir Mkhales Church**

- Located between Nezha and Deir Mrejeh in Bab Sibaa, Homs.
- Mohammad, one of those detained at the church said: “About 20 people were detained initially, but more came in at a later time, after I had been released. Detainees there face severe beatings. This is a temporary detention facility. We are held there for a few hours and beaten but then we are either released or taken the Military Security Branch in Bab Sibaa”.

- **Criminal Security Branch**

- Located in Zaidal, on the outskirts of Homs.

- **Homs Military Hospital**

- Former detainees reported the use of brutal torture.
- ‘Omar’ was held here after he was injured. He said: “My family paid, and so I was eventually released and faced no torture whilst inside, but others did. I was chained to the bed, but when the door of the room was open, I could see that there was a room across the corridor that was locked for 15 days. When I got transferred to the Airforce Intelligence Branch after the hospital, I met the detainees held in that room. They had started out as 20 people in that room, but some had died. They had not been fed for the entire duration of their detention. In the room where I was held, an injured man on the bed next to me was beaten at least once a day. His leg wasn’t treated. I could see the worms and small insects crawling in and out of the wound with my own eyes. In the same hospital, they would use a drill to gouge out eyes. They also used an iron welder to burn the flesh off your body as you are awake. In some cases also, they would use brute force to pull your hair out. At the hospital, they also used the method of hanging you upside down. They kept people hanging like that for days. Sometimes they changed the method of torture according to your “crime”. For photographers and videographers, they broke their arms, their wrists, and individual fingers. They also gore their eyes out.”

## ***DAMASCUS / DAMASCUS SUBURBS***

### **“BRANCHES” STREET**

In Damascus, there is a street called the “Branches” street because of the large number of state security branches. This street is behind al-Jamerek Building, in Kafr Souseh. The branches on this street are as follows:

- **Military Raids Branch**



- **Military Investigations Branch (Branch 228)**

- “Khaled” gave Avaaz his account of torture while detained there: “In this branch, one of the techniques is that they put the head of someone and squeeze it between two iron walls, and this sometimes smashes their heads in -- some people have died from that. Another is a wooden bed of two pieces that folds together at the middle. It’s called the German Chair. Sometimes they put you on your stomach and they fold it so that your legs reach your head and your spine is broken and you are paralysed. The “wheel” was the easiest. I loved it in comparison to the other instruments they used. [See description above.]

“In general, first you are detained and taken to security forces branches, then to see a judge, then you go back to the branch where they start a file for you, and then back to the judge where you get a sentence. We in the security branches *dream* of the paradise that is prison. Because in the prisons you live a normal life but you are detained. In the security branches, you are not human, you are stripped of all your rights, you are all the time humiliated. You are starved, without water and food or even your right to go to the toilet. In this branch we were 40 persons in a 10 metres squared room. We were allowed to go to the toilet twice, sometimes three times a day but that was torture in itself. You have 8 seconds to do your business. They count and then kick the door in, sometimes they kick the door so hard that it hits your head and your head bleeds. Speaking is forbidden. Sleeping should not be forbidden but sometimes it is. By the rules of the security forces branch, you are only forbidden sleep from morning to afternoon, but the head of the prison would play with you, sleep deprive you, torture you. They used to laugh and mock us. There are elderly men held there – a 70-year-old man was humiliated and his sons were with him. He was punished before his sons. It was a painful scene for us. To see your dad being tortured because he is old. He gets hit on his way to the bathroom because he can’t run fast enough and he can’t go fast enough. And it hurts you to see your elderly father suffering from hunger.

This branch is specialised for defected soldiers. Sometimes even before you defect, even if you show a sign of remorse about shooting demonstrators you are imprisoned and taken to this place. There was one man who was tied on the door of a single cell. He was allowed some food twice a day and toilet trips twice a day. Sometimes he was forbidden the toilet trips and had to go on himself. Some cells in the branch are so small you can’t measure them by metres but by centimetres. Even if you are on your own there is no room to sit down, only enough room to stand. If you are sick, they won’t bring a doctor. But they will bring a doctor in cases where they see that you are close to death because at times it is their responsibility to keep you alive.”

- **General Headquarters of Intelligence (Branch 285)**

- This branch is notorious for its use of torture of prisoners of conscience.
- “Manhal” gives an account in English of being held and tortured at Branch 285 for

64 days: "What happened to me is a catastrophe actually. I have been detained, someone had told them about me. They caught with me all my devices, the Thurayas, and my tools and some videos and all. I was detained for 64 days. I was tortured on my fingers and toes, and my nails have been removed. I was in a really, really bad situation. No water, no food, no toilet, no place to sleep until I confessed and they always beat me. I have seen death, I've been tortured almost to death. After, I confessed and then they tortured me. They made me stand up for days. They tie your hands on metal and you still stand. For 7-8 days actually that happened to me. They gave me little food, just enough not to die. Many things have happened. I'm really, really... I can't say. I can't tell. My tears are on my chest for what I remember now, for what happened to me.

"They used electricity. They put it on sensitive areas on your body. They tell me, they curse me "you are an activist". You can't imagine how barbarous they are. They told me "you want freedom, you are an activist" and then they started torturing me. They put me 3 days in open air, standing up, tied, no food. They poured water on my body and they started beating me, beat beat beat. My skin became blue.

"I saw Shabiha enter the place where I was, and they took me and they injured me many times before I got to the building of the security forces. I've seen death actually. Nobody can imagine what happened to me. I left many people in the same situation. We were about 15 people in a 10-square-meter room without air, without even a window. We don't sleep, we just sit on each other. They gave us 2-3 litres of water for all of us and some bread. You just sit, we live sitting. You just sit on your back and you have about 30 cm square. That is your share. You sit on that 30 cm square.

"After they have got my confession, they made me stamp with my finger many papers. And they put me back, and they forgot me for a while, just torturing me, not asking for confessions or taking me to the detective's place. After I confessed, I was tortured again. The torturing was all around. You don't have a toilet. If you want to go to the toilet, you would be beaten many times. So you don't feel your want. You hate the feeling that you'd like to go to the toilet. If they got you to the toilet that they'd count.. "1,2,3...". If you haven't finished they start beating the door on you and pouring water and getting you out.

"There are many ways of torturing, I can't express it in English. They put you in a tire. They put you on your back and then you enter your legs, and then they put your head inside the tire. You are like the letter U inside the tire. And your hands are tied. They put you on your back so that your legs are up. And then they start beating you on your legs. They don't hit you with sticks, sticks are like silk! They take copper pipes and they hit you with them.

"The way I got out was that the judge saw my confession, and he saw my body and that my nails were removed. And he realised, and I told him, that I was innocent and had confessed under torture so he let me out. My ribs have been broken also. So I confessed that I killed security forces which is not true. But I didn't confess to having weapons, I don't know how to use arms. They accused me of being a terrorist. They accused me of killing Syrians, of cursing

Mr President, and going to the TV channels and giving them untrue news. I confessed to being an activist and speaking to the foreign media and defining human rights. And that is the catastrophe, that I am calling for human rights. They accused me of being a political activist but I didn't confess to that. Having the tools that I have, that is crime, like my Thuraya for example. They stole all my money.

"I was released on the 20th of October at noon. The judge didn't condemn it, but he did register that this confession had been taken under torture. So he didn't accept that. He doesn't know anything about what's happening. I just told him 2-3% of what happened and then he released me. He can't do anything actually but release me. There are many cases. I got to death actually. Everyone in there, we have all been tortured, some people more than other people. They are all tortured, unanimously, without knowing what is your crime. But if they knew that you are an activist, an educated man, that's a catastrophe. The jail men and the detectives, they hate us. They hate educated people. They tried many times to discover the Skype password but I denied that I had a Skype account. If they had seen it and I confessed that you are the human rights that I am getting in contact with, that would be a catastrophe for me. You wouldn't see me."

- **Damascus Intelligence Branch** (Branch 227)
  - This facility contains two detention facilities, and an interrogation room on the ground floor.

#### **OTHER DETENTION FACILITIES LOCATED IN DAMASCUS / DAMASCUS SUBURBS:**

- **Damascus Suburbs Military Security Branch**
  - Located in the middle of al-Mazze Highway, near al-Moshtahed roundabout, this is a notorious prison known for its torture of demonstrators.
  - Director of the Branch: Rustom Ghazaleh.
- **41st Special Forces Battalion Building**
  - Located under Harasta Bridge.
- **Palestine Branch** (Branch 235)
  - Located on Airport Road, near the Mechanical Engineering College. The basement of this branch is a prison. There are 16 dormitories and 32 solitary confinement chambers. Every dormitory holds between 30-50 detainees, although in theory, the capacity of the rooms is 20. There are another 6 holding cells on the ground floor.
- **Duty Patrols Branch** (Branch 216)
  - This branch is located near the Palestine Branch. The Duty Patrols Branch is made up of several buildings, one of which contains an underground prison.
- **Counter-Terrorism Branch**
  - This branch is located in Jisr al-Abyad district.

- **Damascus Suburbs Political Security Branch**
  - Located at the end of al-Mazze Highway, behind the blood bank. This branch is the administrative headquarters for the remaining political security branches in the Damascus Suburbs.
  - Former detainee Mohammad told Avaaz: “There is a prison on the 5th floor and holding cells underground. There are prisoners that have been held there for 4 years. Some have been subjected to this severe torture, including electrocution, over the length of their 4-year detention.”
  
- **Jibbe Political Security Branch**
  - Located in the Jibbe area, near Mazraa, this branch is known for widespread use of torture, including electrocution.
  - Former detainee Rami said: “We were taken from a demonstration in the suburbs and loaded onto a bus and taken to the Political Security Branch in Jibbe, I was held here for 3 days, and I just want to emphasise that although my experience was harrowing, it was nothing compared to what most people face. For 3 days I was kept standing on my feet and beaten almost constantly. I was deprived of sleep and food. Sometimes they would suffocate me with a blanket and tie it around my neck. They didn’t electrocute me, but someone that had argued with the security forces on the bus was electrocuted constantly over the period of the 3 days that I was there. I heard many screams. The prison was underground and there were solitary confinement rooms where people were held. I wasn’t held in one of those because there wouldn’t be enough space for the beating. I was held in a room in the branch, not a cell.”
  
- **Political Investigation Branch**
  - Located in front of al-Fayha’ Sports Hall on al-Adawe Street. The prison is in a basement and it holds 23 solitary confinement chambers.
  
- **Maisat Branch**
  - Located near Mir al-Jebbe roundabout.
  
- **Adra Prison area**
  - There is a building south of the main Adra Prison building which has been converted into a prison for political detainees, where the worst forms of torture have been documented. Avaaz has confirmed 14 cases of execution; bodies are buried in the prison yard.
  - In an account from the main prison, former detainee Omar said: “There are many solitary confinement chambers. They are 2 metres in length, 65 cm in width, and 2.5 metres in height. There is a toilet in the same room and sometimes 3 people are held in this tiny, dark tunnel at once. I was in a cell that officially had a capacity of 36 people but we were 120. That was in first wing. Prison food at Adra was sufficient, in the Branches though, they don’t feed you.”
  - In 2010, the prison held 7,000 prisoners, amongst them 12 women. Prominent

opposition members were held there such as Anwar al-Bunni, Mas'ud Hamid, Haitham al-Maleh, and Kamal al-Labwani.

- **Sednaya Political Prison**
  - This prison is under military control and has a capacity of 15,000. Each dormitory is 16 square meters and holds 40 detainees.
- **State Security Headquarters**
  - Kafr Souseh, near al-Mushtahed Roundabout. There are two prisons, one on the East Wing and one on the West Wing.
- **al-Khatib Branch**
  - Located on Baghdad Street, it currently holds 41 detainees. Almost all detainees are from Douma.
- **Presidential Palace**
  - This is a security branch located in Mount Qasyoon.
- **Airforce Intelligence Branch**
  - Located at al-Mazze Military Airport. Known to be one of Syria's most brutal detention centres. The administration of the branch is in Tahrir Square in Zablalani.
- **Airforce Intelligence Area branch**
  - Located in Harasta on the Arbeen junction. Holds over 2,000 detainees. Most detainees from Qaboun are held at this branch.
- **Criminal Security Branch**
  - Located in al-Jamerek Square.
- **External security branch**
  - Located in Al-Maliki district.

#### **Selection of other known detention locations in Damascus / Damascus suburbs:**

- **Nejha Branch**
- **Douma Mayor's Office**
- **Douma Prison**
- **Douma Women's prison**
- **Information Security Branch**
- **al-Tal District Prison**

#### ***HAMA***

- **Hama Military Security Branch (Branch 219) -**

- Head of branch or former head of branch: Mohammad Mefleh. Mohammad Mefleh is reportedly responsible for the June 3rd “Friday of the Freedom of the Children” massacre where the recorded number of deaths was 78, but activists believe the casualty toll to be far higher. Activists also claim that Mefleh was promoted to the position as head of branch because of his role in the massacre. (He may now have been transferred to Aleppo; further verification is needed.)
- Former detainee Samer said: “The amount of torture is unbelievable. They hit you everywhere including sensitive parts of your body. They would hang you by the hands for 2-3 days; some were hung by the hands for a week. When they let them down they couldn’t use their legs anymore. People are tortured sometimes by sticking wooden sticks in their anuses. They torture everyone there with no exceptions. Some are held for long periods of time, for example 4-5 months. Some are held for a week. The random arrests are held for less time, but they are tortured too. There are no exceptions. I was very lucky, I was tortured for only 10 days. It’s very normal to see people with broken arms and jaws that are untreated there for weeks. It’s happening in security branches all over Syria.”

- **Hama Central Prison**

- **Hama Prison**

- Located near the industrial district.

- **Computer Technology Institute**

- Located in Alqusor district. Temporary detention torture facility: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XPIInQOL-CkM> (filmed by Avaaz citizen journalist “Manhal”)

## ***ALEPPO***

- **Aleppo Central Prison**
- **Aleppo State Security Branch**
- **Jabal Samaan**
- **Qalaat Halab Prison**
- **Airforce Security Branch Prison** - located in al-Zahra’, near an orphanage.

## ***DARAA***

- **Air Force Intelligence Special Operations Branch**
  - Former prisoners report more than 5,000 detainees are held here.

## ***DEIR EZZOR***

- **Deir Ezzor Prison**

## **LATTAKIA**

- **Civil Prison**
  - Located in al-Maghrabi al-Arabi Street behind the courthouse.
- **Political Security Branch**
  - Located on Revolution Highway near the water company. The prison is on the ground floor.
- **Military Security Branch**
  - Located at the Haroun roundabout, across from al-Hassan Mosque.
- **State Security Branch**
  - Located next to the water company.
- **Air Force Intelligence Branch**
  - Located in Mashrou' al-Sabe' near Nour Records. The prison is two floors underground.
- **Criminal Security Branches**
  - One branch Located in Teshreen neighbourhood, if one enters from al-Zaqraqiye.
  - Another branch is located in Harasta area.
- **Navy Administrative Headquarters**

## **SCHOOLS AND SPORTS FACILITIES IN LATTAKIA**

These facilities in Lattakia are being used by the regime to hold detainees illegally:

- **Jul Jamal School**
- **Sports Centre**
  - Located in Ramel al-Jnoubi, al-Taqasi Square, Beit Jomaa Building.
- **Soccer Stadium**
- **Lattakia Sports City - Sports City Road**

## **HASSAKEH**

- **Hassakeh Central Prison**

## ***IDLIB***

- **Jisr al-Shaghur Detention Centre**
  - Detention centre in the countryside near Hloz village.

## ***TADMUR***

- **Tadmur Prison**
  - Located in the deserts of Tadmur, about 125 miles northeast of Damascus.

## ***TARTOUS***

- **Tartous Prison**
  - Activists and human rights researchers approximate that several thousand people are currently detained here.

## ***SUWEIDA***

- **Suweida Civil Prison** Located near Al-Masaken district.
- **Qanawat State Prison**



**Locations of detention centres in Syria confirmed by Avaaz**



### **III. Syrian Regime Officers Suspected of Involvement in Torture**

Numerous Syrian regime officers were named as being involved in ordering, directing or overseeing torture. A list of 13 of these individuals, named by at least 11 sources, is provided below but not described in great detail for security reasons. The information below represents a partial list of officials named to Avaaz in connection with torture.

#### **1. State Security Intelligence**

##### **Major General Ali Mamlouk**

- Head of State Security, also acts as head of coordinating body between security branches (Head of General Security Directorate).
- Ordered and signed detention orders for thousands of Syrian people.
- Interviewed prisoners of conscience before their release and imposed terms and conditions of their release (most were detained again for refusing to comply with terms of release or fled the country).

##### **General Zuhaier Al Hamad**, Deputy of Major General Ali Mamlouk. State Security

- Ordered and observed the construction of the torture detention centre next to Adraa central prison.

##### **General Nazih Hasoun** - State Security

- Ordered torture of detainees

##### **General Thair Al Omar** - State Security

- Ordered torture of detainees

##### **General Hafiz Makhlouf** - State Security

- Ordered torture
- Signed detention orders
- Participated in interrogation of activists after torture and sent many to torture by verbal order.

#### **2. Military Security Intelligence**

##### **Major General Abd Al Fatah Qudsia**, Head of Military Security Intelligence

- Ordered the establishment of field military courts for defected soldiers.
- Ordered executions of defected soldiers.

##### **General Ali Younis**, Military Security

- Acted as a judge in the field courts.
- Ordered detentions and torture of hundreds of civilians in Kafarsouseh Military security branch

**General Adnan Assi**, Military Security

- Ordered detention and torture of thousands of civilians in military branches all over the country.

### ***3. Palestine Security and Detention Centre, Damascus***

**General Mohamed Makhoulf**, Head of Palestine Security Branch

- Observed and managed the interrogation, detention, torture and forced confessions of thousands of detainees in the infamous branch.

### ***4. National Security - External Division***

**General Fouad Fadel**

- Ordered detentions and torture of three journalists, including Algerian journalist for Le Monde newspaper, Khaled Sid Mohand.

### ***5. Air Force Intelligence***

**Major General Gamil Al Hassan**

- Ordered torture and detentions.

**General Adib Salamah**, head of investigations team.

- Ordered and participated in interrogations and torture of detainees.

### ***6. Political Security***

**Major General Mohamed Deeb Zaitoun**

- Ordered detentions and torture.

# APPENDIX

## Press Release

### Revealing the Scale and Horror of Assad's Torture Chambers:

#### An Avaaz Report on the Locations and Conditions of Syria's Detention Facilities

On Thursday, 12 January, the global campaigning organisation Avaaz published a brief on the horror and scale of the Syrian regime's detention facilities, as the Arab League observers continue their mission inside the country.

Bashar al-Assad's security forces are detaining and in most cases torturing Syrian citizens opposed to the regime in overcrowded prisons, jails and illegal detention centres across the country. Avaaz has compiled the locations of these dungeons -- which even include schools -- and the names of regime loyalists running the facilities and the torturers-in-chief setting detention policy at the highest levels.

Human rights activists working with Avaaz across Syria have catalogued first-hand accounts of horrific torments and conditions suffered by peaceful protesters and ordinary Syrians caught up in the brutal crackdown, rotting inside the Assad regime's notorious jails and prisons.

More than 617 people have been confirmed killed under torture by regime forces since the crackdown started on March 15 of last year. Bashar al-Assad's crackdown on Syria's popular uprising has claimed at least 6,874 victims and seen a further 69,000 people detained over the course of the last nine months.

**Stephanie Brancaforte, Campaign Director at Avaaz,** said: "Assad's henchmen have tried to break the pro-democracy movement in these torture chambers, but brave Syrians are still standing up for their rights -- and demanding that the Arab League not betray their overwhelmingly peaceful struggle. A credible Arab League mission would visit these torture chambers and ensure the regime immediately end these atrocities. Enough is enough - it's time for the UN to sanction Bashar al-Assad and his band of torturers and refer them to the International Criminal Court for crimes against humanity."

In August in Hama, Avaaz activist "Manhal" was arrested by security forces after being found in possession of a Thuraya satellite phone and several videos of demonstrations. He was taken to the Military Intelligence Branch - Branch 285 - in Damascus and held for 64 days. "**Manhal**" said: "They pulled out my fingernails and toenails. They made me stand up for 8 days, tying my hands on metal bars above my head. They gave me no water, no food, no toilet, no place to sleep until I confessed to being a terrorist, and they always beat me. I have seen so much death, and I've been tortured nearly to death. They used electricity. They put it on sensitive areas on your body. They poured water on my body and they started beating me, beat beat beat. My skin became blue. My ribs were also broken. We were about 15 people in a 10-square-

meter room without air, without even a window. We didn't sleep, we just sit on each other. They gave us 2-3 litres of water for all of us per day and just some bread. I left many people in the same situation.”

In Damascus, there is a street known locally as “Branches Street” due to the number of state security branches situated there, some of them underground, where torture and overcrowding are known to be commonplace. Some of the regime’s most notorious torture chambers can be found behind al-Jamerek Building in the Kafr Souseh area of the capital, including the Military Raids Branch, Military Investigations Branch (or Branch 228), Damascus Intelligence Branch (or Branch 227) and two detention facilities – one on the 4th floor, and one on the ground floor.

Avaaz's research adheres to a strict verification process. Each death or arrest is confirmed by three independent sources, including a family member of the deceased and in the case of a death, the imam who performed the funeral procession.

Working with a team of 58 human rights monitors in Syria, in addition to partner organisations on the ground, the global campaign organisation Avaaz has verified the deaths of 6,874 people in Syria between March 15 to December 9 of last year.

Of the 69,000 detained since March, over 37,000 people remain in detention and some 32,000 people have been released, many of them bearing scars from torture and violence.