

Sexual Abuse: “A Scar of a Lifetime”

Rape in Syrian Security Branches: Seven Raped Women in Hama Security Branch

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Introduction:

SNHR documented the rape of seven women in Hama State Security Branch. In previous reports we discussed different violations committed against Syrian women during the past five years, however, in this report we focus on rape crimes solely, where our documented victims were raped repeatedly on a daily basis. These cases are only a few of many documented cases that reveal the scope of sexual violence being committed against Syrians in all security branches and in different governorates.

The seven rape victims were arrested without a warrant. Arbitrary arrests have become a systemized policy for government forces. Therefore, it is worth noting that security forces have formed a habit since 2011 in arresting individuals without a warrant or a court verdict in order to disclaim any responsibility towards any acts of violence or sexual abuse. On the contrary, security or government forces who commit these violations are granted immunities from the government itself.

SNHR documented the arrest of not less than 117 thousand persons, including 7080 women since the beginning of uprising in March 2011.

This mounting number of arrested individuals is due to several reasons:

A great number of detainees were imprisoned since their relatives, siblings, or family members were involved with armed opposition groups or since they provided humanitarian aid to people in need.

Most of the arrest cases are conducted randomly against people who are not involved in protests, relief aid, or military actions.

The Syrian regime imprisons a great number of detainees despite judicial orders for their release. We discussed extensively in a previous report the Syrian judiciary system in "[The Anti-Terrorism Court](#)" report.

The great majority of the detainees are Sunnis. Violations and sexual abuse are also being committed against Sunnis. This type of violence and torture has a blatant sectarian dimension indicated by the seven victims in their testimonies. We stated in previous reports that sometimes the rape happens in the presence of the woman's husband, father or children in order to make the victims feel ashamed, defeated and devastated.





The Syrian government denies all these accusations and blames Al Qaeda and terrorist groups for these violations; in addition they prohibit us, all human rights groups, and international committees from investigating in these cases.

Mr. Fadel Abdul Ghani, chairman of SNHR, says:

“Systematic rape crimes being committed by government forces against individuals will have adverse effects on the Syrian society. These scars will be there for a long time, probably for generations. Victims’ lives and families will be tremendously affected, which endangers the cohesion and family ties in the Syrian society. All these violations shall compel the victims and their families to backlash at their perpetrators. Dozens of victims’ families told us: ‘what do you want us to do to those who raped our women?’”

SNHR met three of the survivors in Al Rihaniyi town in southern Turkey. They were raped by government forces in the State Security Branch in Hama during their detention period in August 2012. We also spoke to four different female detainees who were arrested during the same period in the same security branch. We did not meet those survivors in person; however, we conducted skype or phone interviews with them individually, in separate times and without the knowledge of the other victims.

The victims’ testimonies were identical to a great extent, which led us to believe that the incidents happened as follows:

A clash happened between the government forces and the Free Syrian Army, where a number of government forces died. Three days later, government forces stormed Al Qusur neighborhood in Hama and arrested seven women who were related to the FSA or armed opposition groups. The women were taken to Hama State Security Branch. They were arrested, tortured and mass raped repeatedly on a daily basis.

All interviews were conducted using Arabic language and SNHR clarified the aim of these interviews to the victims. The survivors granted us their approval to conduct these interviews; however all of the victims requested pseudo-names fearing their own safety and their relatives. The victims did not receive any financial amount of money.





Sexual violence as a government policy:

Since the beginning of the uprising, government forces used torture methods, siege, destruction, shelling and displacement as a means to quell the people's demands; however, they did not stop there. Government forces used rape and sexual abuse as a mean to suppress people. Sexual abuse along with torture became a strategic policy used by government forces to impose fear on citizens. Along with the government invasion, shelling and destruction, security forces used rape and sexual abuse as weapons that are just as lethal as bullets and mortars to human beings. You can have more information about the “[Most Notable Sectarian and Ethnic Cleansing Massacres](#)” here.

In a conservative society like the Syrian one, it is difficult to document cases of sexual abuse or rape. While documenting these kinds of violations, we were met with different challenges and obstacles:

Government authorities prohibit any kind of documentation of human rights violations, including International Humanitarian organizations.

Sexually abused victims refuse to talk about their ordeals due to the psychological trauma they were subjected to.

The Syrian society has lost its faith in any documentation process after five continuous years of violations and impunity of perpetrators.





Due to all the aforementioned reasons, what we were able to document was the bare minimum of violations of 52 sexual abuse cases. However, based on our estimations, not less than 7500 sexual abuse cases were committed against detainees or prisoners. A great number of these violations were committed against individuals less than 18 years old.

A number of these violations were committed before the interrogation process. Women were forced to undress as an excuse for the interrogation.

SNHR archived sexual abuse cases after meeting the victims inside or outside Syria. It should be noted that not all arrested or detained women in security forces detention centers are subjected to rape. Some women were sexually harassed or abused.

SNHR noticed that in 2014 and 2015, government forces used sexual violence against women more aiming to blackmail women especially inside besieged areas in exchange of their departure or if they wanted to bring in food and medicine to the blockaded regions.

Pregnancy is the worst that can happen to a woman who has been raped since it provides material evidence. Raped women usually tend to deny being raped fearing the social consequences of it.

Raped Women's Testimonies:

Mrs. (Marya Kh.), born in Hama governorate on 1986, is a mother of three children and her husband was a detained local activist. On 3 August 2012, at 9 a.m, she was with her three children at her mother's house in Al Qusour neighborhood in Hama city. Almost 30 officers from the State Security Forces stormed their house without a warrant and took her forcibly to their car while her mother and children were screaming. Security forces also arrested a number of women from the same neighborhood and all of them were taken to the State Security Branch.





Maria told SNHR what happened with her:

“After four hours of being taken to the security branch, I was asked to go to the interrogation room. A security officer called “Abu Ali”, later we knew that he was from Tartous, took me to the interrogation room upstairs. Meanwhile, the officer was cursing me and hitting me on my mouth. He broke two teeth from my upper jaw and I started bleeding. In the interrogation room, an officer called “Suliman Jomaa” and another person called “Mulham” conducted the interrogation with me. The officer asked me questions about my revolutionary activities, but most of the questions were about members and leaders from the Free Syrian Army in the neighborhood.

I was tortured for three days, continuously and violently. The interrogation started at 2 p.m and lasted till 8 p.m. Every day, two of the female detainees were taken to Officer Suliman Jomaa’s office. His office had bedroom with two beds, a bathroom and a refrigerator that was full of alcoholic drinks.

On the fourth day of my arrest at 9 p.m, and after the interrogation, beating and cursing stopped; I was taken to the office of the same officer who conducted the interrogation with me, “Suliman Jomaa”, with another female detainee. As soon as we entered the office, we noticed that two persons were laughing. Later, we knew that they were the officer’s friends.





Officer Jomaa ordered the female officers to undress us. We tried to resist, but it was in vain. The perpetrators started to laugh afterwards while they were drinking, then, the mass rape started. Officer Suliman and two of his friends took turns on raping me. I believe that they were not from the same security branch.

Officer Suliman raised his voice talking to the detained men next to his office with an obscene and sectarian language. He said sarcastically: “this is the freedom we will give you, you dogs”, then continued to rape me.

After that day, I was repeatedly raped with the six other women during all the time I was arrested, which was 24 days.

I was released after an exchange deal between government officers and Free Syrian Army battalions in Hama. I can never forget what happened with me as long as I live. I will never get my right back from them. I will receive no justice.”

Mrs. (F.K), from Hama governorate, was born in 1981, married and a mother of five children. She did not participate in any protests; however, her brother was a member in an armed opposition group in Hama city since 2012. Mrs. F.K is from a family known in the neighborhood for participating in protests. Her family received a number of threats of being arrested and detained in the summer of 2011 by government forces.

Security forces arrested four of her family members in 2011. Later, in 2012, their fate became unknown and in SNHR we recorded them as “forcibly disappeared” individuals.

Mrs. F.K was arrested from her house in Al Qusour neighborhood in Hama city on 3 August 2012 after three days of clashes between FSA and security forces. A number of security forces were killed; as a result they retaliated by arresting and raping women related to the Free Syrian Army.

In her testimony for SNHR, she said:

“After I was taken from my house in the military vehicle, I discovered that they arrested a woman before they arrested me. The woman was called Maria Kh. As soon as I sat in the car the officers started to kick me and I arrived to the security branch unconscious. I remember that I was thrown on the floor in a dungeon. Due to that I regained my consciousness and my veil was taken off my head. I was not able to see properly and I had a sever nose bleed from the beatings I took in the car. I re-





mained like that for four or five hours. The dungeon had a yellow dim light that was irritating. I had six other women with me in the same cell who suffered as I did. They were beaten and sobbing. All I cared about was to find a piece of fabric to cover my head. I did not know that what I was going to experience was more horrific.

After five hours, an officer called "Abu Ali" came and took a woman from the cell. She was begging him to leave her, but instead, he cursed and hit her. He spoke to her with an obscene and sectarian language. After a while ago, we heard her voice and her sobbing sound when they started torturing her. Every woman of us just waited for her turn to have the same destiny. It did not take Abu Ali more time to come back to our cell again and take another woman. The same scene kept being repeated over and over again with all the women in the cell. It was my turn then. Abu Ali came, called my name and took me to a room where an officer and his assistant, called Mulham, were present there.

The questions were mainly about my brother and where he was. I answered that I did not know his whereabouts. The officer told Abu Ali "do what it takes". I begged him but he took me to the torture room. I went unconscious when I saw women hanged from their hands, and then I stopped processing everything. I woke up to find myself in a room. My clothes were ripped and I had bruises all over my face and body. After a while, Abu Ali came and took two other girls. The girls were away for five hours. We thought that they were in the interrogation or the torture room. Then, we heard the officers describing them with obscene language. We heard that Officer Suliman Jomaa and his friends raped them. When we heard what happened to the girls, we knew that we will face the same fate.

The next day, the same interrogation scenario was repeated with everybody, and then two girls were chosen to be raped by Officer Suliman Jomaa and his friends. The mass rape was brutal...

To me, the third day was my turn. After the interrogation was over, Abu Ali came and took me with another woman to the office. I was unconscious from how much I was terrified, that's when Abu Ali hit me. Officer Jomaa hit me as well and forced me to swallow some pills. I started hallucinating and was not able to concentrate but I remained awake. There was a woman whose job was to undress us, and then it started. The officer raped one girl at a time. The girl who was raped as well had a nervous breakdown. Even though, she tried to fight back but the officer violently slapped her more than one time, then he threw her on the bed then started to rape her. This was the final scene that I saw before I stopped feeling everything. Men whose hands were tied were crying when they saw us like that. They were forced to witness the rape and I remember that the office contained a desk and chairs and there was another room behind his office that has a bed or two as I remember."





Mrs. F.K told SNHR that the interrogations happened daily for all the women, but the rape was for two chosen women only after 4 hours of the interrogations. She was released after 24 days when the swap deal was made.

Mrs. N.F, is from Hama governorate, born in 1974, married and have seven children, one of them was detained in a state security branch due to his participation in the protests against the government. Government forces arrested her during the invasion campaign on Al Qusur neighborhood on 3 August 2012. She was arrested in order to exert a pressure on her son. Her detainment circumstances resemble the other afore-



mentioned cases and survivors' testimonies. However, when the officers raped Mrs. N.F, it was during the presence of her son while being handcuffed in the Suliman's office. Mrs. N.F told SNHR that her son died under torture after she was released few days after in the exchange deal.

Mrs. Kh. B., is born in Hama on 1981. She was widowed after her husband was killed with a sniper bullet by government forces during the "Freedom Children" week on 3 June 2011. Government forces arrested her after Al Qusur neighborhood was stormed on 3 August 2012 since she belonged to a family known to be opposing to the government. Her arrest details are similar to the aforementioned women.

Mrs. D. F., is from Hama governorate, born in 1979, married and a mother of two children. Security forces stormed her house on 3 August 2012 after he friend told government forces that D.F was involved in aiding injured victims in Al Qusour neighborhood. Her arrest and release details are similar to the aforementioned cases. After her release, she suffered from epilepsy since she was hit on her head.

Mrs. E.L, was born in 1971 in Hama governorate. She is married and does not have any children. Government forces arrested her with the rest of the women in Al Qusour neighborhood since her husband was involved in anti-government protests in 2012. Her testimony came almost identical to other survivors' testimonies. He arrest and release details are similar to the aforementioned cases.





Conclusions and Recommendations:

- Article 27 from Geneva Fourth Convention states:
“ Protected persons are entitled, in all circumstances, to respect for their persons, their honour, their family rights, their religious convictions and practices, and their manners and customs. They shall at all times be humanely treated, and shall be protected especially against all acts of violence or threats thereof and against insults and public curiosity.
- Women shall be especially protected against any attack on their honour, in particular against rape, enforced prostitution, or any form of indecent assault.
- Without prejudice to the provisions relating to their state of health, age and sex, all protected persons shall be treated with the same consideration by the Party to the conflict in whose power they are, without any adverse distinction based, in particular, on race, religion or political opinion.”

Article 93 from the International Humanitarian Law states:

“Rape, sexual abuse and other kinds of sexual violence are prohibited under any circumstances”

The Security Council in resolution 1325, stated that all countries have to abide to the International Humanitarian Law, especially in protecting women against sexual violence during armed conflicts.

Based on the above, SNHR states that:

Government forces committed rape crimes against women during their systematic target of civilians.

Government forces violated the rights of these women which amount to crimes against humanity and war crimes.

Government forces violated the International Humanitarian Law and the International Law of Human Rights, thus they can be held accountable to their crimes in courts of law.





Recommendations:

To the Security Council

1. To transfer the Syrian case to the International Criminal Court.
2. To impose sanctions on all the commanders that were involved in torture practices which violate the international criminal law and security council resolutions on Syria especially resolutions 2042 and 2139.
3. To bind the Syrian government and the various influential parties to fully cooperate with the Human Rights Council investigation committee in order to conduct a thorough investigation on torture inside detention centers.
4. To grant human rights organization access to any location in Syria.
5. To the International Community and Arab World:
6. Provide different kinds of rehabilitation, psychological, medical and social support for victims of sexual violence.

Acknowledgment

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