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Glimpse




*A special issue in the highlight of the
International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances*





Glimpse Magazine in collaboration with Ta'afi Program at Kesh Malek organization are highlighting the enforced disappearance arbitrary arrest in Syria with a special issue in the **International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances**.

Ta'afi (meaning 'recovery' in Arabic) is a victim-oriented program launched by Kesh Malek in 2017, aiming to work with survivors of political detention and prisoners of conscience to support their reintegration into the community upon their release and settlement at a secure location



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Glimpse aims to shed the light on the Syrian Civil Society which was revived after the Syrian revolution in 2011, showing the civil initiatives and sharing inspiring stories led by grass-roots and civil society movement inside and outside Syria. Glimpse is envisioned to be a reliable resource for readers interested in knowing more about Syria, the history, the society, and the thousands-year-old civilization.

As a youth workgroup Coinciding with the beginning of the Syrian revolution in Aleppo Northern Syria "Kesh Malek" was formed. Its first activities were sharing and taking part in the peaceful movement, demonstrating and spreading demonstrators' demands of "Freedom, Justice, and Dignity." The paigns driven by the group's long term vision to reach a better future for Syria. As "an Independent Democratic Pluralism state, respects human rights and devotes citizenship and justice values."

Detention or
Disappearance
Death is the
inevitable end..

4

Lucrative
human-trading
Black Market

6

Syria: how
the distinction
between
enforced
disappeared
people
evaporates?

8

The Impact
of Enforced
disappearance
on victims
female
Family
members

12

Activities

14

INDEX

Detention or Disappearance ... Death is the inevitable end

By Muna Muhamed

Ta'afi program Coordinator

Detention or Disappearance... Death is the inevitable end.

Everything in my county is random and so is the detention. While you might be peacefully walking along the street minding your own business, a security service patrol passes by and stops you and makes you squat inside their car alongside others who were arrested during the day.

You might also be in the wrong place where the security ineligance is arbitrary arresting people in a neighborhood. Your face features might be found suspicious to the security men and order your arrest out of nothing.

Misfortune

This was simply what happened to my friend Ahmad. My friend is from Dir Ezzor city, northeast Syria. During his visit to Damascus, he stayed in a low-key district called Al-Dahadel where he sought safety from the attacks against his city.

That neighborhood became an

escape for him and the rest of his family members who fled from Dir Ezzor including his sister who was married to a police member.

In mid-November 2012, the security forces raided their area.

That day, the security arbitrarily arrested men of all ages in the neighborhood. In addition to Ahmad, my brother also was amongst them.

As the officer ordered them to queue at one of the town's walls, he started randomly choosing who is going to go back home, who is going to be taken to the jail, and who was to be executed at the scenes.

While my brother was lucky enough to be set loose, Ahmad was taken to behind bars. The officer told him "I do not like your face" then he ordered his men to put him in the car.

Disappearance Precedents

This was not the first time Ahmad got arrested. He was once detained in one of the demonstrations in our city, Dir Ezzor, at the onset of the Syrian uprising in 2011. I can until now recall how he used to stand on

the sidewalk overseeing the protestors chanting for freedom and dignity on the street.

That time he was arrested because he was not able to run away with his life quickly. He thought that if he stood still on the street, the police would not arrest him as he is not running.

Three days after his arrest, he was set free. His body was full of burses from the torture he had gone through.

He called me right after he was freed and told me that they were ruthlessly beating him up to give up the names he knows of who was protesting against the regime. He was so proud of himself not giving up on the security the names of his friends, including me.

After he was arrested from Al-Dahadel town, many other arresting raids happened in the surrounding areas. During the same period also, the police started to drop the detained people that they arrested and killed in the town. We were terrified that Ahmad could be one of them.

A week later corpses stopped to appear in the neighborhood. We had hope that he survived and did not die during the torture.

In mid-December 2012, the inevitable shocking news arrived. He is dead.

The police called his father to come to the military hospital to collect his belongings. It was his broken ID card only. That was it.

The Disappearance

With a tearful eye, my mom looked at me and told me to look after myself and be careful.

A few minutes later. I go down to the street. I looked around, and suddenly two men in a white car pushed me inside and took off hastily.

"We got the girl," the security person who was sitting next to me said to someone he was speaking to on the phone.

I was blindsided. I did not know where we were going. After a long drive, I figured that I was in the well-known with its nasty reputation security branch called the 215 branch of the military security or what is also known as the "the death branch".

In the first two months of my disappearance, I got to know from one of

the prison's jailors that Ahmad was here too before he died. I felt that his soul was around me.

His legacy of patience and loyalty to his friend will remain alive. He died because he was not able to bear the torture that they practice against him to inform them of our names.

Ahmad was a normal man. He played martial art trying to live his life away from politics. He did not know how to belong to us in the protests. He was living on his own.

Ahmad's mother could not believe or stand that her older son died. She died and so was his father shortly after Ahmad's death.

Ahmad At Ceaser photos

As the Ceaser Act and Pictures became the trend in Syria last June, one of our relatives skimmed through thousands of pictures and was able to identify Ahmad.

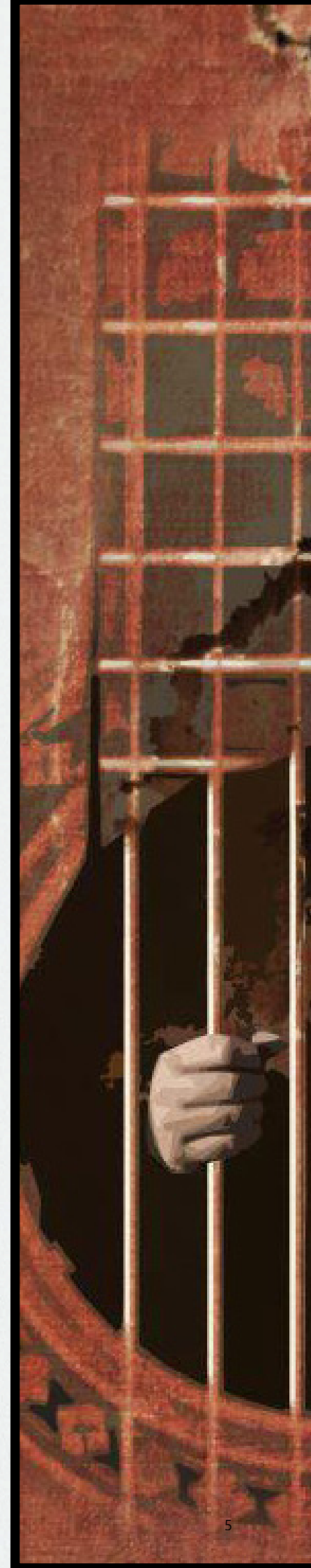
His face reflected how much torture he had suffered before he died. When I saw his pictures, I was utterly shocked... it was him; it was Ahmad.

While Ahmad did not make it, I survived the detention.

After a while and until now, I am working with a group of friends and activists that advocate and gather groups of survivors from the Assad regime's detention centers.

Through our work, we are striving to attain justice for Ahmad and thousands of others who died and are dying until now suffering all kinds of disgraceful and inhuman living conditions and torture.

They deserve a normal life like everyone else. They deserve justice. Our efforts will continue until Syria's prisons are free, but from the criminals who deserve it.



Lucrative human-trading

Black Market

Lucrative human-trading Black Market

According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, there are nearly 150 thousand Syrian enforced disappearance cases in the Syrian regime prisons as well as other factions across the country.

All of whom are trapped behind the bars, a family is looking for their daughter, son, mother, or father. Many of them are vulnerable to exploitation by security members forcing them to pay money in exchange for information about their relative's whereabouts.

They face schemes and exhaustion of their financial resources in an illicit backchannel to find if their loved one is still alive.

Disappeared in the middle of the street

Personally, in 2012, I was kidnapped once from the street. From in front of my house, an anonymous car kidnapped me and took me to what I released then was the 215-security branch.

None of my family members know anything about my life or death for nearly a month.

After a prolonged search and quiring the police, my family gave up the normal channels and asked a former member at the people's chamber who had ties with the security or at least

claimed as such.

The former politician and current broker asked for a large sum of money in exchange for his services. He claimed that he needed to pay for other figures inside the prison to get the information about me to my family. They ended up paying him 350 thousand SYP which qual at that time nearly 7.5 thousand USD.

My mom wanted to pay for everything she had ever owned to know if I am alive or not. She was in despair.

Other intelligence members also started blackmailing my family. The security persons started to ask my family for more and more money if they needed to know where exactly I was imprisoned. Their efforts were fake. They did not know where I was, nor they did contact anyone to know where I was.

Organized Mafia

As the participation in the uprising in Syria increased month after month, the Syrian inelegance brutality multiplied as well. The detention and kidnapping of people by security intelligence militants surged.

Kidnapping civilians whether anti-government or not from the streets and blackmail their families for large

sums of cash.

Ahmad, a Syrian journalist, had his brother detained by the police in 2013 from their house. Since this incident occurred, they have been desperately seeking any way to know where he is but without luck.

"We also paid a lot of money to brokers, security members, and even officers who promised us that to tell us his whereabouts. He asked my mom's ID card to start the search which we give him."

"He kept asking for money now and then to contuse his search. Our life became unbearable and we struggled a lot financially. It became a nightmare.

Ahmad explains that the broker started to blackmail my mom and theatre her to give him more money or he will write a report against him to the security intelligence, so they arrest her too.

"The broker's nightmare ended with the horrific news that we were informed later about his death. The police contacted us to go and pick up his body, belongings and death certificate," he adds

Illicit Profit

In an investigation published by The

Guardian that interviewed 100 families who had their relatives disappeared or detained in Syria.

The report indicates that the average amount that these families have paid to security intelligence affiliated brokers almost reach 10.000 USD.

As a result of the blackmailing, many families lost their homes and in the pursuit of knowledge and closure of their dilemma.

Aya who was detained with her children by the police had her husband selling all of their property to a "lawyer broker". The broker was known for running a corrupted network in the judicial system amongst judges and security intelligence. Aya's husband ended-up selling and borrowing a large sum of money to get them out of prison.

Later, they had to run away from Syria following the continuation of the threats of re-arresting her by the police and security intelligence unless they paid more money.

Detainees exchange deals

After years of brutal fighting and enormous losses of lives, the Syrian regime who was backed by Russia, Iran, and other paramilitary militants, recaptured large swathes of lands that were once under the op-

position control.

After conducting systematic starvation and indiscriminate bombardment operations as well as siege, the regime recaptured many areas by implementing reconciliation agreements with the opposition factions.

The reconciliation deals encompassed blackmailing by the regime forces against the residents who stayed or wanted to come back to their hometowns. Many families had to pay bribes to brokers related to the regime forces to avoid harassment or erase their relative's names from the detention lists.

Another channel for releasing detainees was through regime-opposition

exchange deals. Families had to register their disappeared or detained family members in the opposition-held areas to be on the waiting list if any future deal took place.

However, even if the regime releases someone in an exchange deal, it does not mean that he is innocent of the charges against him or her. If they ever go back, they are more likely to be detained once again.



Syria:

how the distinction between enforced disappeared people evaporates?

When the peaceful revolution stormed Syrian cities and villages in 2011, the essential demand of the very first protests was undoubtedly the release of political prisoners. The demands that escalated had been fuming for many years striving for dignity, justice, and freedom. Syrians took to the streets to demand their salvation and release.

However, the regime implemented its inherited dictatorship method to squash the civil rights upheaval. Hundreds got killed during the protests and thousands of others disappeared by state-affiliated security intelligence across the country.

The Syrian regime has always used enforced disappearances

and torture as part of a systematic terrorizing policy against civilians before and after 2011. More than 100,000 men, women, and children have been forcibly disappeared in Syria since March 2011, according to the Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) and other human rights groups last year.

Terrorizing tactics

Thousands of people in Syria have gone missing without a trace and continue to disappear throughout the raging war. The victims of enforced disappearances who had cut off from the outside world, crammed into overcrowded, covert cells where torture is a daily practice, diseases are prevalent, and death is a dream.

Ahmed Mana'an, a brother of a disappeared person in the Damascus

215 branch since 2012 said that the victim's families are forcibly living in turmoil with risky leeways of finding their beloved fate. Through those channels, they dream and hope to see them in the future.

"This has been used the regime relentlessly to instill anxiety and suffering amongst the revolting population, which was not simultaneous,"

"It was an organized tactic fostered by the Syrian regime to undermine the democratic upheaval and to intimidate, terrorize and tear apart society," he adds.

Enforced Disappearance VS Detention

With the overwhelming number of protests during the revolution, the security apparatus shored up its

of arrest where legal constraints; though theoretically in a state where the rule of law is respected and followed.

On the one hand, detention is the process whereby a state or private citizen lawfully holds a person by removing their freedom or liberty at that time.

Disappearance applies when a person is detained, abducted, or arrested by a state or state proxies operating, who then-the state-denies the person is being detained or conceal their location, placing them outside the protection of the law.

"It is the detention of persons without a legitimate reason or with no legal fair procedures, usually preceding disappearance. This is how most of the Syrian detention occurs.

"Although many disappeared families do know that the regime or their unofficial arms kidnapped their relatives, they wouldn't know anything about whereabouts. They subsequently can not take legal actions, such as appointing lawyers and so on." Khaseem said.

Hence, arrests in Syria are almost equal to enforced disappearance. The lack of information provided by the state apparatus about arrests, the detention centers, and the detainees where about is unknown vicinity.

Haleem Kawas, an Advocacy Manager at Kesh Malek, explains since victims' disappearance or detention, their relative connection channels with them and lacks information on the person.

Authorities intentionally refuse to disclose that a person was forcibly removed from public view and or give any helpful information to the victim's family about his or her whereabouts amid blackmailing them financially.

As a result, victims are placed outside the protection of the law.

"In most cases, the only verifiable information provided will relate to the circumstances in which the victim was last seen alive and free,"

"Enforced disappearance is a crime under international law and places individuals at serious risk of extrajudicial execution, torture, and other gross human rights violations," Kawas adds.

Who & Where the Abduction is Taking Place?

The ways in which the Syrian regime fought to conspire its state-terrorizing plan to squash the protestors, was through wide-scale arrests aimed to instill fear and hold back the uprising expansion.

Kawas explains that in Aleppo and other provinces across Syria, Assad's security branches scattered their security-intel personals across the city districts, namely where the demonstrations erupted.

Male and female were being asked to present their ID cards and military-notebook (male only) to be checked on a daily basis.

The checkpoints that were under the command of local "Shabiha" (Armed Civilians who were recruited and followed the intelligence orders) were a cornerstone to the regime. They arrested hundreds of people whom they suspected to partake in the anti-regime protests

The abduction, according

to Kawas, was conducted via the checkpoints also allocated between Syria's cities and countryside and did not even exclude neutral civilians seeking ransoms in exchange for their release.

"Pilot Checkpoints also were a horrifying nightmare to pro-revolution activists at the onset of the uprising by the security intelligence," Kawas adds.

A cash bull for the regime

Family members who seek knowledge about their loved ones asking about their destiny are often at risk of arrest themselves just because they are asking about their disappeared relatives.

The lawyer explains that many men and women went to Damascus to look for their disappeared

sons at checkpoints or security branches. Many disappeared ever since until now.

"Enforced Disappearance family do not have even the leverage to ask or seek the legal channels to learn about what happened to their loved once,"

"The risk of querying about a relative detained in the detention centers of secret intel cells gives them little choice but to resort to using black-market backchannels," he said.

The Syrian regime is employing a strategy of subjecting thousands of their own people, whether involved in anti-regime deeds or not, to enforced disappearance as both a means to crush the revolution and to fund its paramilitary militants.

"The authorities are using enforced disappearances to generate money. These illicit acts amount to a war crime or crimes against humanity," Khaseem adds.

He explains that using the black market to sabotage desperate families who were being given false information after paying thousands of dollars, only to find out the fate of their disappeared relatives remains uncertain.

"While thousands are trapped in the death detention centers, the security intelligence continue to exploit these families seeking dirty-cash,"

"They continue their human rights breaches without holding preparators accountability nor justice to the victims," Khaseem adds.

Laborious Operation

In the black market, usually, mediators affiliated to the intelligence are paid bribes ranging from hundreds to tens of thousands of dollars by family members. Some families have given up their homes and sold it to use what was their entire life savings to pay bribes to learn the fate of their relatives.

In 2015 Mana'an said that he had borrowed around 10.000 USD in an endeavor to find out his brother's whereabouts. The source told me that he was alive and was being held in the 215 branches in the capital.

"This information made me feel hopeful that my brother was alive. Despite paying a large sum of money, but receiving the news

that he was alive made it worthwhile,"

However, he found out through a survivor who was freed last year, that he was dead in 2015.

"It was a scheme, It was devastating." He added.

International Negligence of Peace Prerequisite

The UN continues to ineffectively tackle the continued crime of enforced disappearances in Syria.

Apart from the UN Security Council 2474 in 2019 and 2139 Resolutions in 2020 and 2014 respectively, which called for an end to enforced disappearances, no further steps have been implemented to ensure it actually happens.

Kawa asserts that if words that are not coupled with concrete action, they will not help the victims of

enforced disappearances nor the victims themselves.

"The UN Security Council must make more effective actions and execute more pressure on the Syrian regime and its allies in Mosco to end enforced disappearances and clear its prisons from unlawful detention,"

"Forced disappearances have already crushed and turned the Syrian people's lives upside down. The perpetrators should no longer escape with having their crimes open-ended," he adds.

The devastating and recurred crimes and their devastating physical and psychological scars of detention, deepen, and shatter the community if they remain open.

For Syria to overcome the devastating aftermath of the authoritarian regime's war against its own people and the terror and trauma of detentions, it needs to be awarded justice and acknowledgment.

"No country can be rebuilt on top of such pain and suffering," Mana'an said.

"We will not rest until justice is delivered. The international community must understand this and act accordingly to save Syria's disappeared and accelerate its recovery."



The Impact of Enforced disappearance on victim's female Family members

Laws Inequality toward female Family members

According to the 2006 International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearances, outlines both the disappeared and their family members as victims of enforced disappearances.

As in most conflicts around the world, the Syrian women comprise a minority among the disappeared but undergo excruciating economic, social, and psychological struggles and disadvantages due to the disappearance of their male family members. Mothers, spouses, and daughters of whom forcibly disappeared are often-times left to face various challenges coupled with pre-existing gendered laws and social norms.

Yet, their experiences are often disregarded or marginalized at any political discussions on missing persons and detainees.

Zeina Kayyali explains that the Syrian social and legal transcripts encompass patriarchal pre-determined cultural norms, as well as socioeconomic conditionality that

tends to place more significant perils of gendered harms on women than men in case of their disappearance.

This harm is reflected in Syria's exclusionary and prejudiced laws, uniquely in regard to marriage, inheritance and property rights, and sexual crimes which exacerbate and hollow a systematic, institutionalized inequality.

"The ambiguous status of the disappeared has usually abandoned women, leaving them outside the support schemes parameters that were commonly available for other families in the Syrian laws," she adds.

Unfair Laws

The Syrian Property ownership laws and the dilemmas it puts women under at the absence of the male, whether a father, brother or spouse. She explains that this inequality is a highly critical issue to address, as the men in the family predominantly own property, due to state regulations and the embedded Islamic disciplines.

"Even if they could gain and afford legal assistance, their claim on their

estate is at a disadvantage in the absence of their spouses,"

Women are even exposed to lose their rights over their properties to the state or the husband's family members because their -legal guardian- is absent" Kayyali adds.

On the same token, as fathers are the primary guardian of children according to Syrian personal status law, women have no legal authority over their children's custody. Huda Sarjawe, an advocate based in north Syria explains custody to become the right the father's family.

Mothers become reliant on their male partners' consent to be able to travel with or do administrative work for their children.

"Without the paper that she luckily obtained, she would not have been able to move or travel outside the country", she adds.

Women have to obtain a birth certificate and custody so that they can freely take out their children with them. This makes them vulnerable to the father's family's harassment or arguments over the custody papers attainment.

Salwa, who is speaking under the condition of anonymity, a 31 years old wife of Ahmad who disappeared in Hama in 2014, explains that she had undergone a tedious process before he managed to get custody paper from the father's family.

"I spent more than four months of back and forth with the family to obtain the needed paper before I flee the country,"

The Syrian patriarchal laws stream gender-based discrimination against women and give men inferior power over women in all of their life's aspects," she adds.

Legal Loopholes

Kayyali explains that if their male inferior is missing, their lives would be turned into a legal dilemma. This subordination makes them vulnerable to another male member of the family who is more likely to exploit their needs.

"If the spouses did not sign such papers before their disappearance take place, the guardianship is automatically transferred to the uncles and male in-laws,"

"The legal impact means that they cannot get engaged or remarry, inherit, or travel with their children from a place to another. They would require either the consent of the husband or proof of his death to which she cannot do," she adds.

This puts women in high risks of and difficulties to move with children to a safer





country, let alone vulnerable to get blackmailed or deprived of their children by their in-laws at times of disagreement.

“The examination of the gendered repercussions of enforced disappearance is crucial to explore the changes in gender roles, relations, and identities brought about by the conflict,”

Increasing responsibilities

While the compelling challenges that women endure had significantly surged as their role has shifted, the patriarchal social framework continues to be the same and increased in some societies and sectors across the Syrian communities who have been ruled by various authoritarian, exclusionary hegemonic powers.

Asma Ali, a gender and women rights activist from Idlib, said that women who are left behind experience an increased workload, liabilities, and vulnerability, though without protection from exploitation.

“Because of the traditional gender roles in Syrian society, they are more likely to fall into poverty, depression, and isolation,” she said,

The activist highlights that the gendered effects of disappearance on Syrian families make a transformative change to the disappeared person families’ life. If the primary supporter of the family has gone missing, women would find themselves without income for their families and therefore are more vulnerable.

What is more overwhelming is, during the raved war, women have to go through intense psychological pressure.

The dilemma arises as many Syrian women do not have any proof of the arrest nor death and therefore remain in an open-ended legal quandary.

“This pressure executes a disproportionate cross-mental and physical deterioration on women to continue being the caregiver to the children while living through despair, anxiety, and hopelessness,” says Ali.

Subsequently, Kayyali explains that gen-

der-based discrimination in laws and policies hinders the full realization of the human rights of women and limits their autonomy and participation in aspects of public and political life.

“The socio-economic impact of disappearances is profoundly tangible and, in turn, renders women and their children more exposed to exploitation and social marginalization,” Kayyali adds

Enforced disappearance of female capacity building

The disappeared and detained female relatives are taking on new obligations and roles in their families as a financial provider, and more importantly, as decision-makers in the affairs of their dependants.

Increased educational opportunities can allow female relatives to survive with their families and fight for their relative’s freedom, as well as to increase their self-reliance and confidence.

“Work-hunting workshops and training for female relatives can expand the number of jobs they can pursue, as much as access to higher education can be for those with adequate former formal training,” said Kayyali,

Although the toll enforced disappearance experience takes on them and their families are unimaginable; still, with constructive targeted capacity building, training provision, women are and can be more resilient agents of change and not only victims.

Kayyali makes the assertion that both literacy and educational capacity building opportunities are identified by the female relatives as a fundamental factor to navigate their responsibilities.

Furthermore, to bring those females to be on the civil society leadership trajectory of advocacy for their loved ones, there is a compelling need to integrate them into the executive level of leadership.

“This will put the right person in the right position, at the negotiation table,”

“As a result, pressurizing the decision-maker who will be bombarded by those women with enforced disappearance cases and evidence,” she adds.

Activities

1- "Art on the rubble"

On the 9th of August artist and painter Rami Abdul Haq launched his art gallery on the rubbles of destroyed houses.

The gallery "Kamat Thawreya" was created to show and remind people of some of the revolution's influential figures who made a big contribution to the Syrian struggle for freedom and dignity.

Some of the pictures draw attention to some people who were killed and others are still alive as per Raed Al-Fares, Basel Shehada, Khaled Al-Essa, and Basel Zerae.

"The gallery according to the artist is a message of gratitude for the sacrifices they made in the pursuit of the revolution's demands.

2- "Young Mothers Club"

As the early marriage in Syria remains unsolved, many young brides suffer on their own the consequences of being married, pregnancy, and other issues.

Hence, the Ihsan organization established a "Young mother" club.

The club supports young mothers with awareness sessions surrounding sexual and pregnancy health as well as mental support.

The club also supported the participants with various spectrums of information about how to eat and maintain good health and well-being during the pregnancy period to have a healthy child and reduce the likelihood of delivering an ill-baby.

Salwa who is the manager of the mental support section in the organization said that the objective of these sessions is /to capacitate women with a better understanding of the responsibility they have once they are pregnant.

3- Governance Training Workshop

In line with its women capacity building vision, Watad training and research organization had conducted a new governance System training workshop for a group of female actors in AL bab city.

The training covered different subjects surrounding the statues of states internationally. i.e. simple state and federal states.

The sessions also taught the participants about the social contract importance in the state's establishment. The politically centralized and decentralized states. The republican, presidential ruling systems.

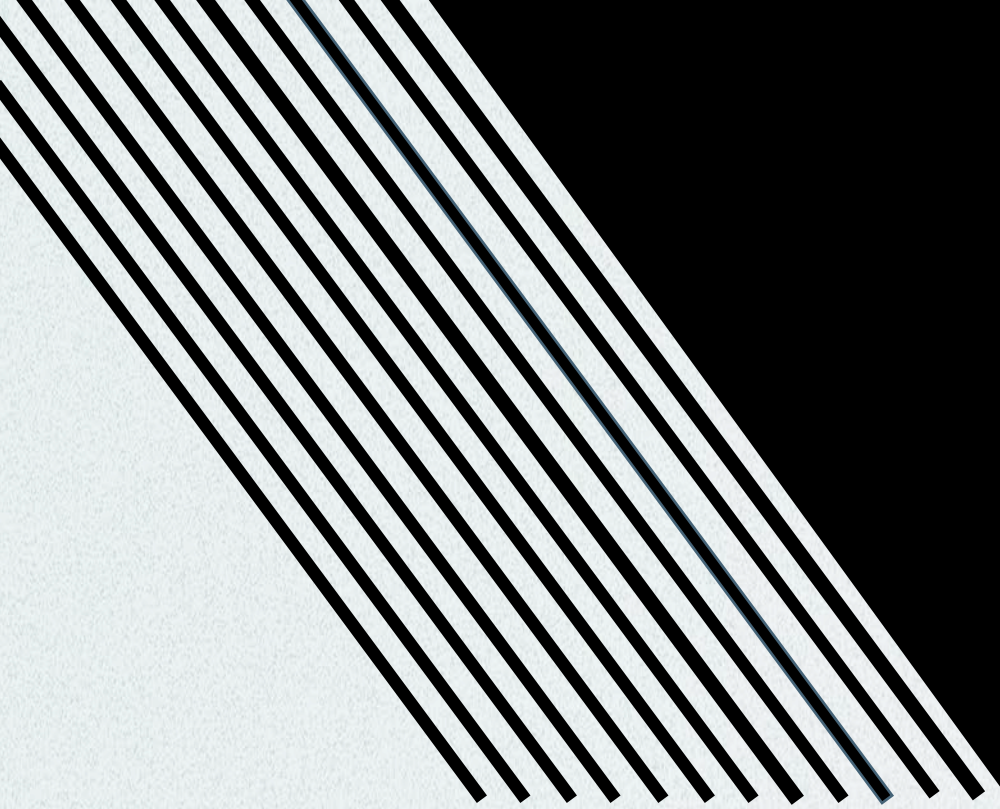
The training participation reached 17 female attendance from different civil society representatives.

4- The Women Support Unit (WSU)

In line with its activities to support and capacitate the grassroots female actors with much-needed knowledge and awareness courses about "Advocacy and Mobilization" and the pivotal role of both subjects to drive social change at all levels locally and internationally.

The WSU conducted a two days course including 17 female civil society and local actors in Ezaz and Mare cities in northern Syria between 22 and 23 of August.

The course enabled the participants to have a swift overview surrounding advocacy mechanisms and applications. Alaa Abdullah gave them a simplified understanding of the concept and dynamics to which advocacy and mobilization better work to meet the objectives they aim to achieve.



nto the Syrian civil society

