



Fédération Euro-méditerranéenne contre les disparitions forcées
Euro-Mediterranean Federation Against Enforced Disappearances
الفيدرالية الأوروبية المتوسطية ضد الاختفاء القسري



لجان الدفاع عن الديمقراطية وحقوق الإنسان في سوريا
C.D.F.
COMMITTEES FOR THE DEFENSE OF DEMOCRACY FREEDOMS AND HUMAN RIGHTS IN SYRIA

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JOINT SUBMISSION BY FEMED, STJ AND CDF

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The **Euro-Mediterranean Federation against Enforced Disappearances (FEMED)** is a network of associations of families of missing persons and human rights organizations based in several countries of the Euro-Mediterranean region. Created to give a voice to families, FEMED has worked for many years to promote truth, justice and memory, to combat impunity, and to strengthen the capacities of victims and their relatives. Its work is based on advocacy, networking among families, support for local initiatives, and cooperation with international human rights protection mechanisms.

<https://disparitions-euromed.org/>

Syrians for Truth and Justice (STJ) is an independent Syrian human rights documentation and advocacy organization, active since 2016 in Syria, France and Lebanon. It addresses human rights violations committed by all parties to the conflict and has particular expertise in enforced disappearances, arbitrary detention, torture and violations of the rule of law. STJ combines legal documentation, field investigations and victim support, including in connection with recent cases documented after the fall of the regime.

<https://stj-sy.org/en/>

The **Committee for the Defense of Democratic Freedoms and Human Rights (CDF)** in Syria is a historic human rights organization, founded in 2001. Long engaged in documenting serious violations committed in Syria, including enforced disappearances, arbitrary detention and extrajudicial executions, the organization works alongside lawyers, activists and other civil society actors. It also contributes to advocacy for fundamental freedoms, the rule of law, and civil society participation in truth, justice and transitional justice processes.

I. METHODOLOGY

This submission addresses the human rights situation in Syria since the last Universal Periodic Review, with particular emphasis on enforced disappearances. It was jointly prepared by FEMED, STJ and CDF as a contribution to the fourth cycle of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of the Syrian Arab Republic, as part of its 54th session.

FEMED coordinated the joint drafting process and developed the overall structure of this submission. It also linked STJ's legal analysis with observations gathered during its field mission to Damascus in April 2026, during which it met with various Syrian actors, as well as with findings published by other non-governmental organizations, in order to support the legal analysis with concrete, field-based examples relating to the implementation of human rights. CDF contributed research focusing in particular on the situation of women in relation to enforced disappearances.

II. CONTEXT

1. Enforced disappearances constitute one of the most serious and systematic violations committed in Syria. They have affected tens of thousands of people, whose fate and place of detention remain unknown. This practice, used as a tool of repression, social control and collective punishment, has a lasting impact on families, communities and Syrian society as a whole.
2. Since Syria's last Universal Periodic Review, the human rights situation has undergone profound changes, marked both by an institutional transition that took place after December 2024 and by the persistence of serious violations, including enforced disappearances. As part of this transition, new national mechanisms have been announced or established to address the issue of missing persons and transitional justice. However, families continue to face great uncertainty regarding the fate of their loved ones, while transparency, access to information and the effective participation of victims remain limited. FEMED's exchanges with civil society and STJ's work show that expectations remain very high, particularly with regard to truth, the preservation of evidence and the recognition of the role of families.
3. The 2022-2026 period also confirms that enforced disappearances are not solely a matter of the past. Recent cases have been documented following the fall of the regime, demonstrating that the phenomenon persists and requires a comprehensive response addressing both past violations and new reports. The families interviewed highlighted the extent of needs in terms of documentation, psychosocial support, civil status, access to archives and the preservation of mass graves. Several Syrian organizations also pointed out that the situation varies from region to region and affects certain communities particularly acutely, including female-headed households, children, displaced persons, returning families, and several minorities affected by the conflict and the transition.

4. In this context, this document focuses on developments since Syria's last review and on four priority issues: the persistence of enforced disappearances, including those that have occurred since 2024; the protection of archives, mass graves and evidence; the effective participation of families and civil society; and the need for a clearer legal and institutional framework, in line with international standards.

III. LEGAL AND INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

III.1 Legal and institutional framework relating to enforced disappearances and the transition

5. Syria is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and to the Convention against Torture. Enforced disappearances engage several non-derogable and interrelated rights, including the right to life, to liberty and security of person, to recognition as a person before the law, to freedom from torture and other ill-treatment, and to an effective remedy. Syria has not ratified the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (ICPPED). Nevertheless, this Convention constitutes the main international reference on prevention, investigation, search, accountability and reparation, while the prohibition of enforced disappearance is absolute under international law.¹ The ICPPED requires States to criminalize enforced disappearance as an autonomous offence, to prohibit secret detention, to maintain accurate and accessible registers of persons deprived of their liberty, to promptly investigate allegations, to search for disappeared persons, to protect complainants and witnesses, and to guarantee victims' rights to truth, justice and reparation. These four elements, truth, justice, reparation and guarantees of non-repetition, are precisely what Syrian families themselves are calling for. Indeed, during interviews conducted between May and June 2025, families of victims of enforced disappearance consistently called for knowledge of the fate of their loved ones, for those responsible for these acts to be held accountable, and for financial and social support.² The ICPPED also recognizes the continuous nature of enforced disappearance: this violation does not end with a change of government, the opening of a detention centre, or the presumed death of the disappeared person, but continues until their fate and whereabouts have been clearly established.³

6. Syria's domestic framework remains fragmented and does not provide for a comprehensive legal regime governing enforced disappearances. The Penal Code addresses certain related acts, including unlawful deprivation of liberty and abduction, and Law No. 16 of 2022 criminalizes torture. However, these provisions do not define enforced disappearance

¹ International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, arts. 2(3), 6, 7, 9 and 16; Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, arts. 2, 12–14; International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (ICPPED), arts. 1–2. Available at: [ICCPR](#); [Convention against Torture](#); [ICPPED](#) (accessed 14 July 2026).

² Amnesty International, *Truth Still Buried: The Struggle for Justice of Disappeared People's Families in Syria* (MDE 24/0167/2025, 29 August 2025) p.27

³ ICPPED, arts. 4, 12, 17–20 and 24; UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances, General Comments on Enforced Disappearances, including the general comment on enforced disappearance as a continuous crime. Available at: [ICPPED](#); [WGEID General Comments](#) (accessed 14 July 2026).

in accordance with international standards and do not regulate its specific elements or consequences. National law does not yet establish a comprehensive framework addressing the continuous nature of the offence, command responsibility, appropriate statute of limitations rules, a broad definition of the term "victim," mandatory detention registers, independent search and investigation procedures, or families' rights to information, truth and full reparation.⁴ The absence of an autonomous offence is not merely a formal legislative gap: treating enforced disappearances solely under offences such as abduction, unlawful detention or torture can fragment investigations and obscure the full range of conduct that places a person outside the protection of the law. It can also prevent the authorities from addressing the entire chain of responsibility, including officials who authorize, facilitate, conceal or fail to prevent the disappearance, and from recognizing the distinct and ongoing harm inflicted on relatives who are denied reliable information.⁵

7. The Constitutional Declaration of 13 March 2025 introduced relevant guarantees. Article 12 incorporates the rights contained in human rights treaties ratified by Syria; article 17 protects the observance of procedural guarantees and judicial oversight; and article 18 expressly prohibits enforced disappearance and torture, and provides that, except in cases of flagrante delicto, no one may be arrested, detained or deprived of liberty in any manner whatsoever without a judicial decision. Articles 48 and 49 further provide for transitional justice and the establishment of a victim-centred commission responsible for ensuring accountability, truth and justice.⁶ These guarantees constitute an important normative recognition, but remain insufficient in the absence of implementing texts, accessible complaint procedures, independent judicial oversight and effective remedies. This gap is confirmed by the testimonies of the families themselves: contrary to the victim-centred approach envisaged by article 49, families are not meaningfully involved in search mechanisms and remain insufficiently informed of the remedies available to them under national or international law.⁷

8. Presidential Decree No. 19 of 17 May 2025 established the National Commission for Missing Persons, an independent body responsible for investigating and shedding light on the fate of missing persons and victims of enforced disappearance, recording cases, creating a national database and providing legal and humanitarian support to families.⁸ The establishment of a specialized national body constitutes a major institutional advance. Public statements subsequently indicated that its mandate covers cases occurring from 1970 onwards and that it had begun recording mass graves and developing a digital platform. The Commission has also concluded cooperation agreements with the Independent Institution on Missing Persons in the

⁴ Syrians for Truth and Justice (STJ), "Syria: National Laws Fall Short of Preserving the Rights of Missing Persons and Supporting their Families", 10 August 2023; STJ, "Syria: Anti-Torture Law Issued 35 Years After the Convention against Torture Went Effective", 12 July 2022. Available at: [STJ missing-persons law report](#); [STJ anti-torture law analysis](#) (accessed 14 July 2026).

⁵ OHCHR, Reporting under the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance: Training Guide, Part I; STJ, Input to the Human Rights Committee Regarding Syria's Compliance with the ICCPR, 11 June 2024. Available at: [OHCHR CED Training Guide](#); [STJ ICCPR submission](#) (accessed 14 July 2026).

⁶ Constitutional Declaration of the Syrian Arab Republic, 13 March 2025, arts. 12, 17, 18, 48 and 49. Available at: [Constitutional Declaration](#) (accessed 14 July 2026).

⁷ Report FEMED Mission Syria April 2026, page 2

⁸ Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA), Presidential Decree No. 19 of 2025 establishing the National Commission for Missing Persons, 17 May 2025. Available at: [Decree No. 19](#) (accessed 14 July 2026).

Syrian Arab Republic (IIMP) and other specialized actors.⁹ However, Decree No. 19 does not set out the detailed legal and operational guarantees required for the establishment of an effective, rights-based search mechanism. The publicly available texts do not clearly establish the Commission's power to compel the production of State and non-State documents, to secure relevant sites, to transmit evidence for the purposes of criminal investigations, or to require the cooperation of public bodies and integrated armed formations.

9. Nor do they comprehensively regulate case registration and follow-up, timeframes for communication with families, review procedures, the protection of data and witnesses, the chain of custody of evidence, or public accountability. Families themselves have criticized this largely technocratic approach: many of them indicated that they are still regarded as mere beneficiaries of existing mechanisms, or even as actors complicating procedures, rather than being recognized as an essential resource for documenting the crimes.¹⁰ A related challenge lies in the isolation of a significant proportion of families, often separated by geographical, economic, political or community-based barriers; strengthening links between victims and their families should therefore be regarded as a strategic priority.¹¹ The Commission's humanitarian and truth-seeking mandate should complement, rather than replace, independent criminal investigations, through clear coordination with the judicial and forensic authorities, civil registry services, the IIMP, the IIM and Syrian victim advocacy and documentation organizations, subject to appropriate confidentiality safeguards.

10. Presidential Decree No. 20 of 17 May 2025 established the National Commission for Transitional Justice, but limits its stated objective to uncovering serious violations "committed by the former regime," prosecuting those responsible, providing reparations to victims, and ensuring non-recurrence.¹² This perpetrator-focused limitation risks excluding victims of violations committed by other parties to the conflict, integrated armed factions, de facto authorities and actors operating during the transition, including persons subjected to enforced disappearance after 8 December 2024. Decree No. 20 should therefore be amended, and article 49 of the Constitutional Declaration implemented, in order to ensure equal recognition of all victims, regardless of their identity, presumed affiliation, ethnicity, religion, gender, place of residence, the date of the violation or the presumed perpetrator. A selective approach would create hierarchies among victims, undermine public trust and artificially separate unresolved cases inherited from the past from new disappearance-related violations, which require a coherent framework for search, accountability and reparation.¹³

⁹ SANA, "National Commission for Missing Persons: 63 mass graves documented, plan to launch digital platform", 18 August 2025; IIMP, timeline of cooperation with the National Commission for Missing Persons, including the Joint Declaration on the Principles of Cooperation, November 2025. Available at: [SANA update](#); [IIMP timeline](#) (accessed 14 July 2026).

¹⁰ Report FEMED Mission Syria April 2026, page 2-3

¹¹ Report FEMED Mission Syria April 2026, page 2-3

¹² SANA, Presidential Decree No. 20 of 2025 establishing the National Commission for Transitional Justice, 17 May 2025; STJ, Syria Justice and Accountability Centre, and Justice for Life, "Syria's Transition: An Analysis of Selected Decisions and Decrees Issued in 2025", 21 April 2026. Available at: [Decree No. 20](#); [STJ decisions and decrees analysis](#) (accessed 14 July 2026).

¹³ STJ and other Syrian organizations, "Joint Statement on Decree No. 20 Stipulating the Establishment of a National Commission for Transitional Justice", 23 May 2025; STJ and Syrian victims' associations, "Position Paper – On the Transitional Justice Process and Cooperation with the National Transitional Justice Commission", 28 April 2026. Available at: [Joint statement on Decree No. 20](#); [Position paper on transitional justice](#) (accessed 14 July 2026).

11. The opening of former prisons and security branches after 8 December 2024 has not shed light on the fate of the many persons who had disappeared prior to that date and who were not among those released. 181,312 cases¹⁴ remain pending until the fate and whereabouts of the persons concerned have been established through individualized, reliable and verifiable procedures. The authorities have an ongoing obligation to conduct searches, carry out investigations and provide families with accurate information, particularly where evidence indicates that the person may have died in detention, been transferred, executed or buried in an unidentified location.¹⁵

12. The failure to secure former places of detention, intelligence service archives and related repositories immediately after the change of power exposed essential documents to the risk of removal, loss and destruction. This illustrates the absence of an effective legal and operational framework to control access to evidence, inventory and preserve it, ensure the chain of custody, and transfer it to the competent institutions.¹⁶

13. Recent documentation by STJ and the Commission of Inquiry confirms that enforced disappearances and incommunicado detention have continued since 8 December 2024, demonstrating that the legal framework must address both unresolved legacy cases and recently reported violations, regardless of the responsible actor or region.¹⁷

14. Recent violations have also targeted specific groups, particularly Alawite and Druze communities, against the backdrop of the continued occurrence of enforced disappearances and abductions following the fall of the regime. This underscores the need for a non-selective public response grounded in the equal treatment of all victims. STJ has submitted 22 recent cases of enforced disappearance to the United Nations Working Group, primarily concerning Alawite victims from al-Qadam.¹⁸ These disappearances and their consequences are concentrated in areas inhabited by these communities, including Damascus, the coastal region, Homs and Hama, Dayr al-Zawr, Raqqa, al-Jazira, Suwayda, Yarmouk, Eastern Ghouta, Idlib, and areas

¹⁴ Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR), *Fourteenth Annual Report on Enforced Disappearances in Syria on the Occasion of the International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances*, August 2025, p. 7

¹⁵ IIMP, "Families must be at the center of the search for the missing", 12 December 2024; STJ, Input for the WGEID Thematic Report on Enforced Disappearances and Memorialization, 16 April 2026. Available at: [IIMP statement](#); [STJ WGEID memorialization submission](#) (accessed 14 July 2026).

¹⁶ Association of Detainees and the Missing in Sednaya Prison, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, "Syria: Preserve Evidence of Mass Atrocities", 23 December 2024; IIMP, "Families must be at the center of the search for the missing", 12 December 2024; STJ, Input for the WGEID Thematic Report on Enforced Disappearances and Memorialization, 16 April 2026. Available at: [Amnesty/HRW/ADMSP evidence report](#); [IIMP statement](#); [STJ WGEID memorialization submission](#) (accessed 14 July 2026).

¹⁷ STJ, "STJ Submits Twenty-Two Individual Complaints to the UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances", 16 March 2026; STJ, "Syria: Documentation of Enforced Disappearances and Arbitrary Arrests in the al-Qadam Neighborhood of Damascus", 23 June 2025; STJ, "'Living Between Hope and Fear': Testimonies Documenting the Persistence of Enforced Disappearance in Post-Assad Syria", 29 August 2025; STJ, "Behind Closed Doors: Afrin's People Between Detention and Denial", 6 May 2026; STJ, "Syria: Arrests and Abuse of Kurds During Aleppo Escalation (January 2026)", 9 April 2026; STJ, "North and East Syria: Killings, Detentions, Disappearances, and Torture During the January 2026 Events", 8 July 2026; STJ, "Abduction in Syria: Alawite Women Most Targeted Amidst Transitional Government Inaction", 23 February 2026; Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/61/62, 12 March 2026, paras. 50 and 94 and Annex I, paras. 44–48 and 155–158. Available at: [STJ 22 WGEID complaints](#); [STJ al-Qadam report](#); [STJ Living Between Hope and Fear](#); [STJ Afrin report](#); [STJ Aleppo report](#); [STJ North and East Syria report](#); [STJ Alawite women report](#); [A/HRC/61/62](#) (accessed 14 July 2026).

¹⁸ Report FEMED Mission Syria April 2026, page 9

of return.¹⁹ Search, documentation and victim support mechanisms must therefore apply to all victims without distinction, including in regions where specific communities have been targeted. Responses to enforced disappearances remain uneven, and certain categories of victims continue to receive less recognition, increasing the risk of a selective collective memory and the exclusion of certain families.²⁰ The authorities should therefore establish an inclusive framework based on the principle of equal treatment for all victims, irrespective of the region concerned or the alleged perpetrator.

15. Articles 21 and 22 of the Syrian Constitutional Declaration of 13 March 2025 require the State to protect the dignity of women, guarantee their social, economic and political rights, and protect children from exploitation and abuse, while ensuring their right to education and health care.²¹ In practice, these guarantees have yet to be fully realized for women and children affected by enforced disappearances. The loss of the primary breadwinner, obstacles relating to civil registration, inheritance, child custody and access to official documentation, as well as barriers to employment, vocational training, education and support services, continue to leave many families in a situation of persistent vulnerability. The authorities should therefore translate these constitutional guarantees into concrete measures providing protection, psychosocial support, administrative assistance and access to legal remedies for the women and children concerned, which is not currently the case.²²

16. Accordingly, the establishment of the two commissions has not yet been matched by a comprehensive and enforceable legal framework capable of preventing new disappearances and resolving all outstanding cases without discrimination.

17. Another challenge related to the international legal framework is that the International Criminal Court (ICC) cannot investigate crimes committed in Syria, as the country is not a party to the Rome Statute, the treaty establishing the Court. Unless Syria ratifies the Statute or accepts the Court's jurisdiction through a declaration, the ICC can only be granted a mandate to investigate crimes committed in Syria if the situation is referred to it by the United Nations Security Council. However, such a referral has faced political obstacles: in 2014, the Russian Federation and China vetoed a Security Council initiative that would have granted the ICC jurisdiction to prosecute serious crimes committed by all parties to the Syrian conflict, including war crimes and crimes against humanity.²³

¹⁹ STJ, "Syria: Documentation of Enforced Disappearances and Arbitrary Arrests in the al-Qadam Neighborhood of Damascus," 23 June 2025. Available at: [Syria: Documentation of Enforced Disappearances and Arbitrary Arrests in the al-Qadam Neighborhood of Damascus](#) (accessed 14 July 2026).

²⁰ Syrians for Truth and Justice (STJ), "Input for the WGEID Thematic Report on Enforced Disappearances and Memorialization," 18 February 2026. Available at: [Input for the WGEID Thematic Report on Enforced Disappearances and Memorialization](#) (accessed 15 July 2026).

²¹ Syrian Arab Republic, *Constitutional Declaration*, 13 March 2025, Articles 21 and 22.

²² Lina Ghoutouk, "Wives of the Disappeared in Syria: Voices in Legal Limbo," The Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy, 10 December 2025. Available at: [Wives of the Disappeared in Syria: Voices in Legal Limbo](#) (accessed 15 July 2026).

²³ Amnesty International, "ONU. Le veto de la Russie et de la Chine à la résolution sur une saisine de la CPI pour la Syrie est «impitoyable»," 22 mai 2014. Available at: [ONU. Le veto de la Russie et de la Chine à la résolution sur une saisine de la CPI pour la Syrie est «impitoyable»](#) (accessed 15 July 2026).

III.2 Previous UPR cycle

18. This section focuses on the endorsed recommendations most directly related to enforced disappearances, arbitrary and secret detention, missing persons, mass graves, investigations, reparations and cooperation with international mechanisms. Implementation is assessed on the basis of concrete legal, institutional and individual-level measures undertaken up to July 2026.

III.2.1 Selection of the Most Relevant Supported Recommendations

19. Among the recommendations supported by Syria during the third cycle, the following are the most relevant to this contribution:²⁴

Rec. No.	State	Substance of the Supported Recommendation
133.120	Sweden	Publish official lists of persons held in Syrian detention centres and of persons who died in detention facilities and prisons.
133.121	Switzerland	End enforced disappearance and arbitrary and incommunicado detention, and cooperate fully with actors searching for and identifying disappeared persons.
133.141	Argentina	Urgently protect mass graves with forensic expertise so that evidence is preserved and bodies can be identified and returned to families.
133.149	Luxembourg	Release persons arbitrarily detained and create an independent mechanism to clarify the fate of all missing persons.
133.151	Albania	End arbitrary detention, torture, abduction and enforced disappearance and establish an independent mechanism to clarify the fate and whereabouts of missing persons.
133.155	Chile	Facilitate an independent mechanism with an international mandate to coordinate and consolidate reports of missing persons, including victims of enforced disappearance.
133.159	Costa Rica	Guarantee independent and impartial investigations into human rights violations and provide forms of reparation and compensation to victims.
133.162	France	Release persons arbitrarily detained, report on the fate of missing persons, and end executions, torture and other inhuman practices in all places of detention.

²⁴ Human Rights Council, Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review: Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/50/6, 31 March 2022, recommendations 133.120, 133.121, 133.141, 133.149, 133.151, 133.155, 133.159 and 133.162; Human Rights Council, Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review: Syrian Arab Republic – Addendum, A/HRC/50/6/Add.1, 1 June 2022. All eight recommendations were supported by Syria. Available at: [A/HRC/50/6](#); [A/HRC/50/6/Add.1](#) (accessed 14 July 2026).

III.2.2 Assessment of Implementation

20. Recommendations 133.120 and 133.162 have not been implemented, while recommendation 133.121 has been only partially implemented. Before December 2024, the former government did not publish comprehensive and reliable lists of persons detained or deceased in custody, disclose the fate and whereabouts of disappeared persons, or end arbitrary and incommunicado detention. The opening of a number of prisons and security facilities after 8 December 2024 resulted in the release of some detainees but did not clarify the fate of many persons previously disappeared. No comprehensive, verified and publicly accessible national mechanism or list providing information on current detainees, deaths in custody and unresolved disappearance cases has been made available. Moreover, enforced disappearances and incommunicado detention did not cease after the transition. STJ documented new cases and submitted 22 individual complaints to the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances in March 2026. The Commission of Inquiry also found that, in eight cases ongoing as of January 2026, government forces denied holding persons last seen in government custody, amounting to enforced disappearances.²⁵

21. Recommendations 133.149, 133.151 and 133.155 have been partially implemented. The establishment of the IIMP by the General Assembly did not itself constitute implementation by Syria; however, subsequent cooperation by the transitional authorities with the IIMP, the creation of the National Commission for Missing Persons, the November 2025 Joint Declaration on the Principles of Cooperation and the development of a joint work plan represent partial progress towards the institutional elements of these recommendations. Publicly available information does not yet demonstrate that binding procedures are operational for access to archives and records held by State and non-State actors, transparent case registration and family follow-up, data and witness protection, referrals for criminal investigation, review mechanisms or measurable case-level results. The continued documentation of new disappearance-related cases also shows that the preventive elements of recommendations 133.149 and 133.151 remain unfulfilled.²⁶

22. Recommendation 133.141 has been partially implemented, but the most time-sensitive obligation was not met at the outset of the transition. In December 2024, detention facilities, intelligence premises, official records and suspected mass-grave sites were not consistently secured. Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and the Association of Detainees and the Missing in Sednaya Prison documented that official records were left unprotected and that material was removed, looted, burned or destroyed, jeopardizing searches, identification and

²⁵ Amnesty International, *Truth Still Buried: The Struggle for Justice of Disappeared People's Families in Syria*, MDE 24/0167/2025, 29 August 2025; STJ, "Living Between Hope and Fear": Testimonies Documenting the Persistence of Enforced Disappearance in Post-Assad Syria, 29 August 2025; STJ, "STJ Submits Twenty-Two Individual Complaints to the UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances", 16 March 2026; Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/61/62, 12 March 2026. Available at: [Amnesty: Truth Still Buried](#); [STJ: Living Between Hope and Fear](#); [STJ: 22 WGEID complaints](#); [A/HRC/61/62](#) (accessed 14 July 2026).

²⁶ General Assembly resolution 77/301, Independent Institution on Missing Persons in the Syrian Arab Republic, 29 June 2023; IIMP, *Timeline*, entries for April 2024, November 2025 and January 2026; Presidential Decree No. 19 of 2025 establishing the National Commission for Missing Persons. Available at: [UNGA resolution 77/301](#); [IIMP timeline](#); [Decree No. 19](#) (accessed 14 July 2026).

future criminal proceedings. Subsequent measures are relevant: by August 2025, the National Commission for Missing Persons reported that it had documented 63 mass graves, was preparing a digital platform and was prioritizing forensic and legal training. Nevertheless, comprehensive and published national protocols for site protection, access control, forensic recovery, chain of custody, preservation and coordinated identification have not yet been shown to be fully operational across the country.²⁷

23. Recommendation 133.159 has not been implemented. Syria has not yet established a comprehensive, independent and impartial process capable of investigating enforced disappearances committed by all State and non-State actors and across all relevant periods. Decree No. 20 of 2025 restricts the stated mandate of the National Commission for Transitional Justice to grave violations “caused by the former regime”, creating a risk that victims of other perpetrators and violations committed during the transition will be excluded. Families continue to lack an accessible, transparent and comprehensive reparation programme addressing restitution, compensation, rehabilitation, satisfaction and guarantees of non-repetition. Limited investigations or individual proceedings do not amount to implementation of a nationwide accountability and reparation framework.²⁸

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. By the midpoint of the next UPR cycle, ratify the ICPPED and recognize the competence of the Committee on Enforced Disappearances under articles 31 and 32.
2. Within twelve months of the adoption of the UPR outcome, adopt legislation defining and criminalizing enforced disappearance as an autonomous offence in full conformity with the ICPPED.
3. Within twelve months of the adoption of the UPR outcome, adopt a comprehensive law regulating the search for missing and forcibly disappeared persons, guaranteeing the independence and adequate resources of the National Commission for Missing Persons, its necessary powers to access records, places of detention and relevant sites, and the rights of families to participation, information, review and remedy.
4. Within twelve months of the adoption of the UPR recommendations, ensure that the law governing the search for missing persons and victims of enforced disappearance does not treat families merely as beneficiaries of mechanisms or as actors who may complicate procedures, but rather recognizes them as central actors and an essential resource for documenting crimes and identifying those responsible for enforced disappearances.

²⁷ Association of Detainees and the Missing in Sednaya Prison, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, “Syria: Preserve Evidence of Mass Atrocities”, 23 December 2024; Syrian Arab News Agency, “National Commission for Missing Persons: 63 Mass Graves Documented, Plan to Launch Digital Platform and Subsidiary Card”, 18 August 2025. Available at: [Amnesty/HRW/ADMSP evidence report](#); [SANA: 63 mass graves](#) (accessed 14 July 2026).

²⁸ Presidential Decree No. 20 of 2025 establishing the National Commission for Transitional Justice; STJ, Justice for Life and Syria Justice and Accountability Centre, Syria’s Transition: An Analysis of Selected Decisions and Decrees Issued in 2025, 21 April 2026; Amnesty International, Truth Still Buried, 29 August 2025. Available at: [Decree No. 20](#); [STJ decisions and decrees analysis](#); [Amnesty: Truth Still Buried](#) (accessed 14 July 2026).

5. Within twelve months of the adoption of the UPR recommendations, establish reparations programmes for victims and their families, including restitution, compensation, rehabilitation, measures of satisfaction and guarantees of non-repetition, in recognition of the psychological trauma and financial hardship resulting from the disappearance. Such reparations should also include symbolic recognition of the suffering endured by victims and their families.
6. Within six months of the adoption of the UPR outcome, amend Decree No. 20 of 2025 and any related instruments to ensure that transitional justice and missing-person mechanisms cover violations committed by all State and non-State actors, without temporal, geographic, identity-based or perpetrator-based discrimination.
7. Within six months of the adoption of the UPR conclusions, adopt implementing measures under Decree No. 20 of 2025 to ensure that transitional justice and missing persons search mechanisms explicitly protect and include Alawite, Druze, Kurdish, Christian, Syriac, Palestinian, Sunni and other communities through minority-sensitive outreach activities and equal access to information, registration and follow-up procedures.
8. Within twelve months of the adoption of the UPR conclusions, adopt and implement gender- and child-sensitive support measures for women and children affected by enforced disappearances, in accordance with articles 21 and 22 of the Constitutional Declaration, including access to psychosocial support, assistance with civil registration and the acquisition of identity documents, legal assistance on inheritance and child custody matters, as well as concrete measures to facilitate access to education, health care, employment and training.
9. Immediately secure all remaining former detention facilities, archives, records and suspected mass-grave sites and, within six months of the adoption of the UPR outcome, adopt and publish binding national protocols governing access control, inventory, digitization, forensic documentation and chain of custody.
10. Within six months of the adoption of the UPR outcome, adopt and publish binding coordination and data-sharing protocols among the National Commission for Missing Persons, judicial and forensic authorities, civil registries, the IIMP and the IIIM, with safeguards for confidentiality, transparent and informed data-sharing procedures, data protection and witness protection.
11. Immediately end secret and incommunicado detention; ensure that every person deprived of liberty is registered from the outset, held only in an officially recognized place of detention, promptly brought before an independent judicial authority, and granted access to family members and legal counsel.
12. Within six months of the adoption of the UPR outcome, establish a secure and accessible mechanism through which families can obtain verified, case-specific information on the detention, transfer, death, fate or whereabouts of their relatives, and publish an updated list of all officially recognized places of detention.

13. Within twelve months of the adoption of the UPR conclusions, take concrete steps towards the ratification of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, including by completing the necessary national procedures and developing any required implementing legislation for accession to and cooperation with the Court, with a view to completing ratification within two years.