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Daily report on the situation of Palestinian refugees in Syria

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March 4, 2018



"AGPS: Concerns Raised over Secret Executions against Palestinian Refugees in Syria's Sednaya Prison"

- Migrant Boat from Lebanon Drowns at Sea
- Saudi Arabia Transfers \$50 Million Pledged to UNRWA
- Leisure Activities Held for Palestinian Children in AlAyedeen Camp in Hums

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Latest Developments

AGPS has been deeply concerned about the simmering executions carried out against detainees, among them Palestinian refugees, in Syria's Sednaya military prison.

A report published by the Washington Post daily said President Bashar AlAssad's army is doubling down on executions of political prisoners, with military judges accelerating the pace they issue death sentences, according to survivors of the country's most notorious prison.

In interviews, more than two dozen Syrians recently released from the Sednaya military prison in Damascus described a government campaign to clear the decks of political detainees. The former inmates said prisoners are being transferred from jails across Syria to join death-row detainees in Sednaya's basement and then be executed in pre-dawn hangings.



Yet despite these transfers, the population of Sednaya's once-packed cells — which at their peak held an estimated 10,000 to 20,000 inmates — has dwindled largely because of the unyielding



executions, and at least one section of the prison is almost entirely empty, former detainees were quoted by the Washington Post as stating.

Some of the former prisoners had themselves been sentenced to hang, escaping that fate only after relatives paid tens of thousands of dollars to secure their freedom. Others described overhearing conversations between guards relating to the transfer of prisoners to be killed. The men all spoke on the condition that their full names not be disclosed out of fear for their families' safety.

According to two former detainees who have passed through the Damascus field court, located inside the capital's military police headquarters, the rate of death sentences has sped up over the past year as the attitudes of court officials hardened. These two men had each appeared twice before a military field court judge, once earlier in the war and once this year, and were able to compare the way this secretive court operates.

"There was no room for leniency," one man said. "Almost everyone in that room was sentenced to death. They were reading the sentences aloud."

Even before they reach the gallows, many prisoners die of malnutrition, medical neglect or physical abuse, often after a psychological breakdown, the former detainees said.

One former prisoner said guards had forced a metal pipe down the throat of a cellmate from the Damascus suburb of Darayya. "They pinned him to the wall with it and then left him to die. His body lay



among us all night,” said Abu Hussein, 30, a mechanic from the western province of Hums. Another described how prisoners in his own cell had been forced to kick to death a man from the southern city of Daraa.

The Syrian government did not respond to requests for comment for this article. The government has never acknowledged the execution of prisoners or released figures on executions. No independent figures are available, The Washington Post added.

Satellite imagery of the Sednaya prison grounds taken in March shows an accumulation of dozens of dark objects that experts said were consistent with human bodies. The imagery was obtained by The Washington Post, which asked forensic experts to review it.

Other satellite imagery of military land near Damascus, previously identified by Amnesty International as a location of mass graves, appears to show an increase in the number of burial pits and headstones in at least one cemetery there since the start of the year. Defectors who worked in the military prison system said this area, located south of the capital, is the likely location for the mass burial of Sednaya prisoners.

In the cemetery on the road running south from Damascus, dozens of new burial pits and headstones have appeared since last winter, according to The Washington Post.

A chilling Amnesty International report published in 2017, exposed the “cold-blooded killing of thousands of defenseless prisoners” in a Syrian government jail where an estimated 13,000 people have been



hanged in the past five years, and where mass hangings of up to 50 people at a time occur every week, sometimes twice a week.

Most of those hanged were civilians believed to have been opposed to the government, with the killings taking place in great secrecy in the middle of the night. The executions take place after one- or two-minute lawyer-less “trials” using “confessions” extracted through torture, added Amnesty.

Several cases referred to by Amnesty International match data released by AGPS as regards the psycho-physical torture and the dire detention circumstances in Syrian government jails.

AGPS kept record of the secret incarceration of 1,711 Palestinian refugees in Syrian state penitentiaries. Dozens are feared to be among the casualties of the Sednaya mass-executions.

Based on affidavits and interviews held with activists, ex-detainees, and families of missing Palestinians, AGPS found out that 565 Palestinians were tortured to death in Syrian state jails, including in Sednaya lock-up.

The figures are expected to be much higher due to difficulties in the documentation process and the government reticence to disclose the fate of Palestinian refugees held in Syrian penal complexes.

Difficulties in documentation also stem from the families’ reluctance to reveal the fate of their missing relatives over retaliation concerns.



In another development, a boat carrying eight illegal migrants and which set sail from Lebanon capsized on way to Cyprus.

A migrant from Syria who was rescued off Cyprus after the boat capsized told police another seven migrants had drowned.

Cypriot rescue workers said the 32-year-old was picked up at sea Thursday by a U.S.-flagged cargo vessel and airlifted to a hospital on the Mediterranean island suffering from hypothermia.



The man told police Friday that he was the lone survivor from a group of eight migrants who left Lebanon on December 21 in a boat they had purchased, Cypriot state radio said.

The migrants tried to use GPS to navigate their way to Cyprus but lost direction and ran out of fuel before their boat capsized in stormy seas on Tuesday, the radio cited a police source as saying.

Over the past months, there has been a steady flow of Syrian migrants arriving in Cyprus from Turkey and Lebanon.

According to AGPS data, 51 Palestinian refugees drowned at sea onboard Europe-bound vessels.



Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia transferred \$50 million to UNRWA, weeks after it pledged to deliver the sum to the UN refugee agency.

Dr Abdallah AlRabeeah, Supervisor General of the King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Centre (KSC) and Commissioner-General Pierre Krähenbühl of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) signed, on 28 November, an unprecedented US\$ 50 million agreement which confirmed the pledge of US\$ 50 million made by King Salman bin Abdulaziz AlSaud in support of the Agency's core services.

UNRWA is confronted with an increased demand for services resulting from a growth in the number of registered Palestine refugees, the extent of their vulnerability and their deepening poverty. UNRWA is funded almost entirely by voluntary contributions and financial support has been outpaced by the growth in needs. As a result, the UNRWA program budget, which supports the delivery of core essential services, operates with a large shortfall.

UNRWA is a United Nations agency established by the General Assembly in 1949 and mandated to provide assistance and protection to some 5.4 million Palestine refugees registered with UNRWA across its five fields of operation. Its mission is to help Palestine refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, West Bank, including East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip achieve their full human development potential, pending a just and lasting solution to their plight. UNRWA services encompass education, health care, relief



and social services, camp infrastructure and improvement, protection and microfinance.

Civil Action

The Palestinian Scouts Association in partnership with the Palestinian Red Crescent Society staged activities for children in AlAyedeen Camp for Palestinian refugees in Hums.

Games and workshops were held for children and people with special needs. Gifts were also distributed during the event.

