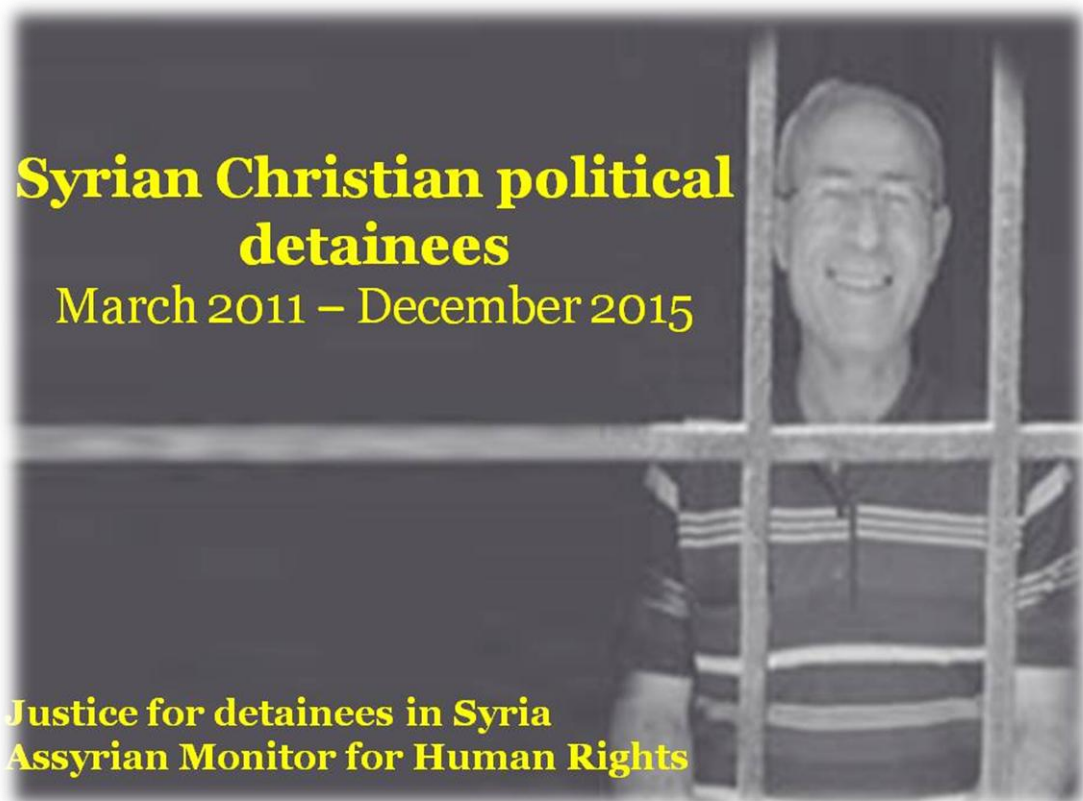


Syrian Christian political detainees

March 2011 – December 2015



**Justice for detainees in Syria
Assyrian Monitor for Human Rights**

10 December 2015

Introduction

Christians in Syria with their various ethnic and sectarian affiliations are among the oldest and most prestigious components of the Syria society. According to unofficial sources, Christians accounted for 8-10 percent of the total 24-million population in Syria in 2010, down from around 30 percent at the early twentieth century. The number has shrunk due to successive migrations and lower fertility rates.



Christians spread almost the entire Syrian territory. On the eve of the peaceful Syrian revolution, they accounted for more than 20% of the population of al-Hasaka province, with the majority of them being Syriacs, Chaldeans, Assyrians and Armenians. A small presence existed in both the Raqqa and Deir al-Zour provinces of the east. Christians (mostly Armenians) account for nearly 10% percent of the population in Aleppo and around 8 percent of the rural Hama, especially Mharda and Al-Suqaylabiyah and some neighborhoods in Hama city. They live in certain villages of Dar'a, south of Syria (mostly Catholics), as well as in rural Idleb in the north and certain villages and towns of the coastal region. Christians also live in some Damascus neighborhoods including Kassaa, Bab Touma, Bab Sharqi and Tabbaleh and in north-eastern rural Damascus, including Yabroud, Maaloula, Saidnaya and Maaret Saidnaya, where they make up more than 90 percent of the population. They also live in some districts of eastern and western Ghouta.

In Homs, significant numbers of Christians live in al-Hamidiya, Bustan al-Diwan, al-Armen neighborhoods, Fayrouzah and the suburbs of Zaidal. They make up about 60 percent of the population of Wadi al-Nasara (Valley of the Christians) west of Homs, and there are large numbers of Christians in certain southern Homs villages like Sadad and Rableh.

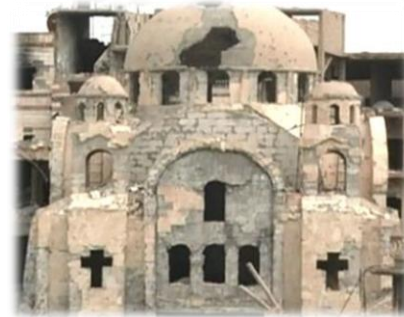
The number of Christians in Syria has diminished due to emigration caused by oppression, displacement and military operations between the parties of the Syrian conflict.

With the emergence of the mass anti-regime peaceful demonstrations demanding freedom and dignity on 15 March 2011, Christian communities were divided into three groups: pro-regime, anti-regime and neutral.

Christians effectively participated in those demonstrations. Christian opposition figures as well as Assyrian political parties called for the establishment of a civil, democratic government based on justice, equality and inclusion.

Like all other Syrian people, Christians faced oppression, detention and torture by the Syrian authorities, who arrest and even liquidate all opponents including peaceful protesters. Examples are numerous including the killing in Homs of young filmmaker Bassel Shehadeh and the arbitrary detention of many Christian activists, as took place in May 2011 when members and leaders of the Assyrian Democratic Organization (ADO) were arrested. Other figures with established anti-tyranny history were also arrested, including but not limited to Michel Kilo, George Sabra, Gabriel Kourieh, Khalil Maatouk, and Jries Altali.

The Syrian war has targeted Moslem and Christian places of worship alike. Forty-nine churches have been partially or totally destroyed throughout Syria since 2011. The location of the targeted churches are: Homs (10), Aleppo (13), Damascus (5), Deir Ezzor (5), Latakia (3), Idleb (3), Sweida (1) and Hasakeh (7).



According to the Syrian Human Rights Network, more than 250 Christians have been kidnapped by ISIL and 450 (including 28 women) detained by the Syrian authorities. Meanwhile, the fate of a number of Christian spiritual figures kidnapped in Syria is still unknown. The most prominent are Gregorios Yohanna Ibrahim (66 years), Syriac Orthodox Archbishop of Aleppo and Boulos Yazigi (56 years), Greek Orthodox Archbishop of Aleppo. Both were kidnapped in western rural Aleppo on April 23, 2013 by unidentified gunmen. The Italian Jesuit priest and peace activist Paolo Dall'Oglio (59 years), head of the monastery of Saint Moses the Abyssinian was kidnapped on July 7, 2013 while on his way to Raqqa to meet with ISIL members.

Syrian Christian political detainees (2011 – 2015)

On Friday, May 20, 2011, immediately after the end of a peaceful demonstration against the regime of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad in Qamishli, thirteen members (including four leaders) of the Assyrian Democratic Organization (ADO) were arrested at the organization headquarters and detained in the criminal security branch in Hasaka.

The detainees include: 1) **Malak Yacoub** 65, dentist and deputy head of the ADO politburo; 2) **Gabro Romanus** 58, secondary school teacher and ADO politburo member; 3) Eng. **Karam Dolli** 43, employee in the Agricultural Bank and ADO politburo member; 4) **Samir Ibrahim** 58, ENT doctor and member of the ADO Central Committee; 5) **Jacob Gharibo** 48, businessman; 6) **Barsoum yousef** 39, lawyer; 7) **Kaurih Shabo** 48, teacher; 8) **George Odisho** 27, university student; 9) **Hanna Isaac** 42, businessman; 10) Gandhi Safar 31, graduate student; 11) **Fahd Youssef** 32, university student; 12) **David Habib Korkis** 31, university student; 13) **Hanna Senharib Shabo** 29, graduate student.

The Syrian authorities also arrested two Assyrian university students by the names of **Samuel Joseph Saume** (22 years) and **George Abdul Masih Behno** (23 years), in Aleppo on November 30, 2011. They were released on December 13, 2011 on bail.

Fahmi Youssef: A leading member of the opposition Syrian Democratic People's Party, who remained in hiding between 1987 and 2002. He is a member of the Assyrian component and was arrested three times, on April 28, 2011, late October 2013 and August 2, 2014.



Bassam Ghaith : He was detained first for more than four years (1987-1991) for being a member of the Syrian Democratic People's Party. He was arrested again on April 20, 2014 at his house in Yabroud, rural Damascus. On September 24, 2014 his family was contacted and told that he had died of a heart attack.



Mousa Hanna Issa: Attorney and leading community figure in Hasakeh, he was renowned for being an advocate of public freedoms and human rights for decades. He is a member of the Syrian National Bloc and legal adviser to civil society organizations in Hasakeh. He was arrested by the Syrian intelligence in Qamishli airport, northeast of Syria, on October 13, 2014. He was released on November 6, 2014.



Gabriel Moshe Kourieh: Head of ADO politburo, he was arrested by the state security branch in Qamishli on December 19, 2013. One and a half months later he was moved to Adra prison in Damascus, where he is still waiting for prosecution before the Terrorism Court. The Terrorism Court replaced the Supreme State Security Court.



Sait Malki: President of the Syriac Cultural Association in Qamishli and Vice Chairman of the Syriac Union Party in Syria, he was arrested by the Syrian authorities in Qamishli Airport on August 12, 2013 and moved to Damascus, amid unconfirmed reports about his death under torture.

Dr. Salem Jries Marroush: Medical doctor working for the Horani Hospital in Hama, he was arrested from his private clinic by the Syrian Air Force Security on August 6, 2012. He was later moved to several different security branches in Damascus, including Branch 215. More than two years ago, his family lost contact with him; his whereabouts remain unknown.



Robil Bahho: member of the Syriac Union Party in Syria, he was arrested from his home in Qamishli on 6 June 2013 and was released in December 2013.

Dr. Samir Ibrahim: member of the ADO Central Committee and head of the Syrian Christian Relief Organization, he was arrested by the state security branch on 25 July 2013 on the Damascus-Berut highway. He was prosecuted before the terrorism court on 5 October 2013 and was released on 2 March 2015.



Abjar Kourieh: Lawyer, head of the ADO Qamishli region, and public relations officer in the Assyrian Association for Relief and Development, he was arrested on May 14, 2014 in Damascus, while referring to a civil service agency. He was released on August 5, 2014.

Ibrahim Malki: Member of the Syrian Democratic People's Party and the Assyrian Chaldean Syriac component, he was arrested multiple times. Dates of arrest include 2006; June 20, 1997; October 9, 2011; December 20, 2012; and finally at his home in Qamishli on November 3, 2013

Catherine Jries Altalli: Lawyer and human rights activist, she was arrested by the security forces in May 2011 in the Barzeh neighborhood of Damascus after her participation in a peaceful protest.



Hadeel Kouki: Student in Aleppo University, she was arrested three times in 2011 for organizing and participating in peaceful demonstrations

Khalil Maatouk: Prominent lawyer and human rights activist, Executive Director of the Syrian Centre for Legal Studies and Research and founding member of the Syria Bar Association, he defended political prisoners before the Supreme State Security Court and other courts. He was arrested by the Syrian authorities on October 2, 2012 at a security checkpoint in Sehnaya, while on his way to his office in downtown Damascus.



Ranim Maatouk: She was arrested in her home by the Syrian authorities during a neighborhood-wide security check on February 1, 2013. She was taken to Branch 311 of the military intelligence in Kafar Souseh, Damascus where she remained for two months. After two months, Ranim was moved to Adra prison. She was released on June 12, 2014.

Youssef Abdelke: A Syrian and international painter, well-known for his opposition to the Syrian regime through his cartoons and drawings in various Arab and international media, he was arrested by the political security branch at a checkpoint in the Syrian port city of Tartous on July, 19 2013. He was released on August 22, 2013.



On 23 February 2013, the Syrian security forces arrested **Barsom Barsom** (university student and member of the Syriac Union Party) and **Sarkon Youssef** (businessman) in Qamishli for distributing humanitarian aids.

On 2 April 2013, the Syrian regime arrested five members of the Syriac Union Party from their homes in Qamishli and Malikiyah (Hasakeh province). This came two days after a peaceful protest followed by an event organized by the Union to celebrate the Assyrian Babylonian New Year on 1 April in Qamishli. The five detainees were: 1) **Mirza Hanna**, Malikiyah; 2) **Hanan Wardo**, Malikiyah; 3) **Afram Ibrahim**, Malikiyah; 4) **Sawsan Moshe**, Malikiyah; and 5) **Hanna Lahdo**, Qamishli.

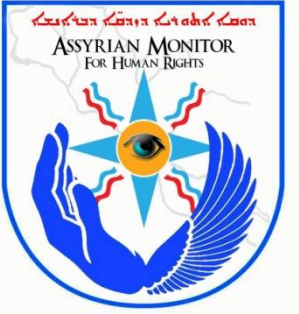
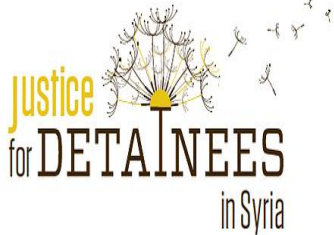
An unidentified security force, accompanied by masked members of the National Defense Army (a Syrian regime militia), raided the ADO office in Hasakeh on 19 November 2013. They confiscated all the office properties and arrested two persons: **Senkhero Dasho** 55, employee and

leading ADO member in Hasakeh region and **George Odesho** 28, university student and ADO member. They were both released later.

It is worth mentioning that a number of Syrian Christians in the opposition decline from giving details about their identity, date of detention, experience in prison including methods of torture due to safety reasons for them and their families in Syria. A number of such cases have been documented through confidential channels.

In the end, we should say that the detention for political and rights activists has been a daily practice of the Syrian regime for more than four decades. Opposition activists are detained regardless of their religious, ethnic or political orientations.

This report has been produced by:

- **Assyrian Monitor For Human Rights:** An independent non-governmental non-profit organization founded on August 1, 2014 to raise awareness about human rights violations against the Assyrian / Christian community in the Middle East, and also to strengthen and enhance the values of democracy and diversity among different ethnic and religious groups in the Middle East as a way to promote constructive participation and tolerance, in addition to supporting women and children issues.
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- The logo of the Assyrian Monitor For Human Rights is a shield-shaped emblem. At the top, there is a line of text in Syriac script. Below that, the words "ASSYRIAN MONITOR FOR HUMAN RIGHTS" are written in a serif font. The central part of the logo features a blue star with a yellow eye in the center, surrounded by two blue hands holding it. The background of the shield is white with a faint map of the Middle East.
- **Justice for Detainees in Syria:** a non-profit, non-governmental human rights organization founded in 2015 to defend the rights of Syrian political prisoners and uphold their dignity. The JDS accomplishes this mission through the documentation of violations of political prisoners' human rights, provision of aid to detainees and their families, and advocacy for their release and rights. JDS aims also to support efforts to hold accountable all those who violate the rights of detainees in Syria.
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- The logo for Justice for Detainees in Syria features the word "justice" in a yellow, lowercase, sans-serif font. Below it, the words "for DETAINEES" are written in a larger, bold, black, uppercase, sans-serif font. At the bottom, "in Syria" is written in a smaller, black, lowercase, sans-serif font. The logo is decorated with a stylized dandelion seed head and several small birds flying in the background.