



Sednaya Military Prison **Special Report**

Introduction:

This report examines in details the conditions of prisoners and the disastrous circumstances they have to suffer in one of the largest military prisons of the Syrian military intelligence, and the barbaric executions committed against them on a daily basis. We counted in this report on the testimonies of many prisoners who have spent long periods inside the prison, but we essentially relied on the testimony of one of the detainees who was sentenced to death by the field court, but was released from the prison through one of the clandestine exchange deals with the Regime in the month of October this year. For the security and safety of the witness who was still inside Syria, we will not use his real name and we will use the alias name of 'Moaz' instead when referring to him throughout the report until he's able to make a live testimony before an international commission of competent jurisdiction.

The Beginning:

Between 1978 and 1979 the Syrian authorities acquired 1500 hectares of agricultural land from its original owners in Sidnaya plain. The alleged reason of this action was to establish a hospital for communicable diseases in the region that is known for its clean and dry air, and despite the fact that the landowners filed a court case attempting to be compensated for the value of land by the Syrian government, the case wasn't settled until the end of the nineties and the compensation was based on the land evaluation of the seventies.

The military facilities' authority started building Sednaya prison in 1981. Work was completed in late 1985, and delivered to the military police permanently in September 1987. Hundreds of detainees were transferred to the prison immediately some Islamists and communists from the centers of intelligence but mostly they were transferred from the infamous Tadmur/ Palmyra military prison.

The prison is directly supervised by the military intelligence division and through military police officers.

Building description:

Prison takes the form of three crossed sides (similar to the Mercedes brand) meeting at one area called the gun. In the middle of this gun there is a metal observation tower where an armed guard sits. This guard is the only person holding a weapon on this floor. This building is known by the red prison.

Each side of the building consists of three floors. In each floor there are twenty U shaped dormitories, 10 on the right and 10 on the left. Each dormitory is (8×6) square meters. There is a bathroom (a sink, and a toilet seat) , the rooms share a light shaft that also serves for ventilation. Each of these dormitories accommodates twenty prisoners, usually the estimated number of prisoners is between eight to twenty prisoners in each dormitory, however, it now contains at least 70 detainees, and according to a detainee (Ayham 23 years old) many of them died as a result to suffocation and poor ventilation, especially that most of the prisoners suffer from critical health conditions.

In the basement there is an unused restaurant and bathrooms. At the bottom of the cellar, two floors underground one can find the dim solitary cells that delve deep into the darkness and the unknown where many prisoners passed away and no one knew about them. Currently, more than 8 prisoners are thrown in each of the solitary cells.

The second building of the Sednaya prison is a modern construction built in the nineties, dedicated to military prisoners who are serving time for military or criminal cases. This is known as the white prison.

Three fortifies walls with barbed wires surround the prison and land mines were planted all around the walls.

On the outside, an entire military battalion under the third brigade of the Syrian army fully armed with weapons and vehicles and soldiers' carriers. On the inside, secret military police guard the prison with full equipments such as tanks and BTR vehicles following the 2008 riot.

According to the testimony of one of the defecting officers who served previously in protecting the prison, the orders are to withdraw to the ammunition depots in case the prison is attacked by the free Syrian army and to stay far from the main prison building as it would be completely destroyed by the Air Force including all the detainees inside the prison.

Number of detainees:

Since the outbreak of the peaceful protests in mid-March 2011 and the increased random campaigns of arbitrary arrests against activists, the number of prisoners is constantly increasing in the military prison. Based on the multiple coherent testimonies obtained by league, the prison currently has fourteen thousand prisoners; most of them underwent fake trials before the military field court and were unlawfully sentenced with serving prison time ranging from execution to fifteen years of imprisonment. , and has a prison red 8000 detainees, including women and young adults (under 18), according to the witness Moaz who spent 19 months in the prison and witnessed many violations that will be later mentioned the context of the report. As for the new building, also known as the white prison, it contains about 6000 thousands prisoners, among them more than 4,000 officers of all ranks.

Conditions of detainees:

The suffering of detainees starts immediately upon arrival to the prison, when the bus carrying the detainees arrives to the prison yard, a reception party, as per the jailers, begins for the newcomers whereby members of the military police officers working under the protection unit inside the prison start beating detainees with clubs and rubber bars coupled with a tremendous amount of insults and swears, later personal belongings of the prisoners are taken away. The new prisoners are often thrown in solitary cells for a month to break their spirit after being flogged with a cable for hundred lashes as reported by one of the defecting officers.

After a month in solitary confinement, the detainees are distributed to group dormitories in the red prison begins where another kind of suffering and psychological and physical torture begins. In addition to overcrowding and prevalence of cases of severe illness, the head of the dormitory should submit a daily list of ten names to receive harsh punishment supervised by Lieutenant Fadi Suleiman who is responsible for acts of torture leading to death in many cases.

Inside the dormitory, it's strictly prohibited to speak aloud and to pray. You can only hear the cries of the prisoners' pains especially of the sick ones. Those who violate these orders are subjected to harsh punishment in the solitary confinement after being hit with the steel cable (an instrument of torture commonly used in Syria. It consists of an electric cable containing metal wires coated with textured rubber).

As for the white prison, it houses about 6,000 prisoners, including 4,000 officers what means tha both prisons share common conditions. However, the

prison's administration deliberately forces the detained officers to wear their military uniforms inside out, and to sit in painful and humiliating positions throughout the day.

All detainees undergo the same level of torture, humiliation and degrading treatment by wardens and guards who are mostly not over twenty years old. Common methods of torture in Sednaya prison, in addition to slapping and kicking:

1 - Whipping: with a tool that is usually made of hard rubber strengthened to become whip like.

2 – The tire: A car tire where the prisoner is placed inside it to become helpless and unable to move during the beating with sticks, whips, and cables.

3 – The plastic stick: a stick of usually used for swage purposes, strengthened with another stick on the inside.

4 - Electrocutation: an electricity cable is attached to the prisoner with the power of 220 volts. Electric stun sticks are also frequently used.

5 - Deprivation of sleep, food, and water for long periods of time.

6 – The flying carpet: where the prisoner is placed and fixed still onto a pliable wooden board as he gets tortured without any ability to move.

7 – Spanking feet: Where the feet of the detainee are closely attached and fixed before the warden whip them all the while cold water is poured all over the prisoner's body.

8 – Burning the prisoner's body with cigarettes and acids.

Juvenile prisoners:

In addition to the women's dormitory (we were unable to know the number of women prisoners), the red prison contains large numbers of children or juveniles who have been convicted and prosecuted in violation of all norms and laws before the military field court, a lot of them were sentenced for fifteen years. According to Moaz, our witness, the number of juveniles in Sednaya prison is around 2500 detainees!!! Who are subjected to the worst kinds of psychological and physical torture in addition to sexual abuse by prison wardens.

According to the testimony of Moaz who was detained there which he provided to the Syrian league for human rights, he witnessed the execution of the juvenile Adnan Gizawi in April / April 2012. We quote him: (the harshest event I have witnessed was what happened before my eyes to Adnan Gizawi, a 16 years old boy from Jobar's orchard in Baba Amr in Homs as he was brought from one of the intelligence branches where he spent long months.

He was accused of spitting on the statue of former President Hafez al-Assad ... the guards following the orders of Lieutenant Fadi Suleiman threw him on the ground handcuffed and began stabbing him with knives, trampling him, cursing, and beating him till he died. He was screaming and yelling, but I could not do anything for the boy).

Healthcare:

The healthcare system in the prison is completely non effective and the prison management deliberately ignores the sick prisoners and neglects those with critical cases till they die slowly without any concern about the detainees who are suffering badly as a consequence to severe torture during investigation at the intelligence centers or during their time served at the red prison, says Maaz: (I witnessed the death of 28 detainees at our dormitory during my time there. It was possible to save them all but each detainee who knocked the dormitory's door seeking medical help was punished by being beaten 50 times with the cable. As a result, everyone refrained from asking for medical help and surrendered to their destiny praying to god for mercy. One of the detainees persistently asked to see a doctor, upon that, one of the male nurses gave him a shot in his neck and asked us not to disturb him because he is sleeping. In the morning, he was a dead body and his face was blue. We later found out that the nurse him an air needle in his vein that killed him in two minutes. This was a message for all of us).

Many serious infectious diseases are widely spread among the detainees such as tuberculosis and typhoid fever, in addition to skin diseases and infections resulting from torture and decaying wounds and gangrene.

As for food, it is one daily meal consisting of half a loaf of dry bread (often topped with a layer of mold) with some jam. In many cases, prisoners were provided with only one meal every two days. The prison management often cuts off the water in dormitories for ten consecutive days as a punitive action to increase the daily suffering of detainees.

Prison visits:

Most military prisoners in the white prison are deprived of visit and their mere existence in the prison is often denied by the Syrian authorities. As for the rest of the prisoners in the red prison, the visit for them is an additional journey of torture as all detainees receive an extra session of torture in addition to swears, slaps, and kicks on their way to the assigned visit place which consists of a small hall separated from the visitors by two metal nets and a corridor one meter wide where guards are roaming. Prisoners are not allowed to speak about any details relevant to their conditions in prison as

they can only tell their families visiting that they're fine and everything is going well, otherwise they will face a very harsh punishment. Despite the hardship and suffering of the families of the prisoners have to go through when coming visit, the prison administration only allows three minutes as the duration of the visit !!!

Most of the time, visitors are humiliated by forcing them to walk from the main gate of the prison for a distance of three kilometers during which guards insult them and say: " If you raised your children properly, they would not be here ! ! ! ! "

Executions:

Since the beginning of 2012 as a result of issuing many death sentences against activists by exceptional military tribunals, the prison's administration took on executing detainees at midnight every Monday and Thursday of each week, and bodies were disposed in the early morning hours as they were transferred to unknown destinations and families of victims were never informed.

The Syrian human rights league mentioned in a previous statement dated / April 2013 that more than 480 detainees were executed in the prison in the period between 6/4 and 13/4/2013 and indicated that the prison authorities burned a large number of corpses as local people living in the vicinity of the prison noticed the smoke produced by the burning process as well as distinctive smell of burning corpses.

According to the testimony of one of the defecting officers, forty detainees were executed every week in two batches on Monday and Thursday, and the executions were carried out by hanging the detainees to death under the supervision of the director of the prison and the military prosecutor and the presence of the Mufti of Damascus most of the time.

Recently, according to the horrifying testimony of Moaz, the executions take place every day against 40 prisoners at midnight in the presence of the prison director, a number of officers, the military prosecutor Mohammed Kenjo, and President of the field court Mohammed kharfan. The prison's administration forces many of the detainees sentenced to death to attend executions in the field which breaks most of them completely. Moaz, sentenced to death by the military field court and attended many of these executions and the new brutal way followed by the prison's administration in executing these unlawful death sentences; says: (prisoners are brought handcuffed and put on the ground on their backs, and their feet are tied to a parked military vehicle. The hanging rope is tied around their necks. The ropes are tied to another military vehicle.

The process of execution takes place at the behest of the prison director and the second car moves forward violently which leads most of the time to a complete separation of the head from the body. All of this happens in an atmosphere of terror and panic among the rest of the detainees).

The bodies are usually buried at dawn in a mass grave that exists for this purpose within the prison and it is located near the women's dormitory at the red prison. More recently, the prison authorities are transferring the bodies via closed cars in the early morning hours to an unknown destination.

Moaz, the witness who asked the league to convey the pleas on behalf of his inmates still in the red prison waiting for death, considers himself among the very few lucky people who were reborn according to him as that who enters Sednaya prison can only leave it a dead body or in best case scenario a distorted creature far from being a human being as a result of the disastrous conditions never witnessed in the history of mankind.

Recommendations:

The Syrian human rights league considers all the crimes and atrocities committed against the prisoners in Sednaya military prison, crimes against humanity and perceives those responsible for the prison administration and the security authorities directly supervising it as criminals against humanity who must be prosecuted and held accountable before international justice. It also sees the behavior of the executioners managing the prison as a systematic behavior in all most branches of intelligence and interrogation and detention centers of the Syrian government where atrocities and crime are perpetrated constantly against the detainees. Therefore, the Syrian human rights league calls out for the following:

- 1 - Immediate need to clarify the fate of thousands of detainees and to enable parents to find out the circumstances of their sons' death and burial places.
- 2 - Urgent intervention by the international community organizations to put an end to unlawful mass executions of prisoners as these sentences are issued by the special court for where no conditions of fair trials exist.
- 3 - Compel the Syrian government to open prisons and detention centers to international missions of international and humanitarian organizations.
- 4 - Formation of an international committee with broad powers to investigate crimes committed by the Syrian authorities within the prisons and jails against thousands of Syrians.
- 5 - Refer the Syrian file to the International Criminal Court as soon as possible and consider all those involved acts of murder, torture, and forced disappearances during the war in Syria war criminals and criminals against

humanity, led by the criminal Bashar al-Assad as he is the top of the military and political pyramid in the country, and is directly responsible for the killing orders since the early days of the outbreak of the Syrian Revolution that took place in mid / March 2011.