

**Syria Prisons Are 'Human Slaughterhouses,' Ex-Detainee Says**  
**By Jamal Halaby**  
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A prominent Palestinian writer who was jailed in Syria for nearly three weeks described the facilities as "human slaughterhouses," saying security agents beat detainees with batons, crammed them into stinking cells and tied them to beds at night.

Salameh Kaileh, 56, was arrested April 24 on suspicion of printing leaflets calling for the ouster of Syrian President Bashar Assad, who is fighting a 15-month-old uprising against his rule. Kaileh's story offers a rare inside glimpse into the conditions faced by detainees held by the country's feared security services.

"It was hell on earth," Kaileh told The Associated Press on Sunday, nearly a week after Syrian forces released him and deported him to Jordan. Speaking at his friend's home in an Amman suburb, Kaileh had bluish-red bruises on his legs, which he said were the result of beatings with wooden batons that were studded with pins and nails.

"I felt I was going to die under the brutal, savage and continuous beating of the interrogators, who tied me to ropes hung from the ceiling," said Kaileh, a soft-spoken man with a shock of white hair who appeared frail, barely able to stand on his feet.

Born in Birzeit, West Bank, Kaileh has suffered under the regime in Damascus before. He was imprisoned by the Syrian government in 1992 for eight years because of his alleged links to underground Syrian communist and leftist opposition groups. A well-known leftist, he has written books on subjects ranging from Marxism to Arab nationalism.

This time, he was held in at least four detention centers after security forces arrested him at his home in Damascus, the Syrian capital where he's lived for more than 30 years.

Kaileh denied printing the leaflets, which he said angered the regime because they read: "For Palestine to be free, Syria's regime has to fall."

Syria often has touted its support of the Palestinian cause to boost its credentials as a bastion of Arab nationalism.

Kaileh's detention caused an outcry by Arab intellectuals, who called for his release and lashed out at Assad – whose crackdown has not spared other intellectuals and artists.

Ali Ferzat, a political cartoonist whose drawings expressed Syrians' frustrated hopes for change, was beaten by masked gunmen as he left his Damascus studio last August. The assailants broke his hands and dumped him on a road outside Damascus.

A group of intellectuals and artists, including Syrian actress May Skaff, were rounded up and jailed for a week last summer after holding a protest in Damascus.

Recalling his arrest, Kaileh said Syrian intelligence stormed his house in an upscale Damascus district shortly after midnight. "They handcuffed and blindfolded me, took my three laptops, cell phones and any shred of paper they could lay their hands on."

"I told them I had nothing to do with the leaflets, but the interrogators insisted that they had information I was distributing them and that I had printed them out," he said.

He said Syrian security wanted to intimidate him by being "disdainful to Palestine and the Palestinian people, cursing us and saying the Israelis were better than us."

In one of the detention facilities in Mazeh – a Damascus suburb – Syrian security threatened they will "rape me and tape it to put the clip on the Internet," he said.

Rights groups have accused the Syrian government of torture of detainees. Claudio Grossman, the chairman of the U.N.'s Committee Against Torture, said this month that the Syrian government has carried out widespread killings, torture in hospitals, detention centers and secret detention facilities, as well as torture of children and sexual torture of male detainees.

Kaileh said he shared a cell with at least six army defectors and several doctors who had treated wounded civilians.

At night, he said he heard other prisoners "cry and scream while they were beaten."

Days later, Kaileh said he was admitted to a government hospital to treat his leg wounds. There, the conditions were "worse than in the detention centers."

He said he was squeezed into a small room with 30 other prisoners, mostly activists who allegedly participated in anti-government protests.

"The room was barely enough to accommodate five people," he said. "It was filled with body stench, dirt, urine and stool. Two people shared small beds and were tied to them, the food was lousy and we couldn't eat properly because our hands and feet were handcuffed day and night."

"We were not allowed to go to the restroom," he said. "Still, we were beaten if we urinated in our sleep."

"The detention facilities I was taken to were human slaughterhouses," Kaileh said.