

Charred, Mutilated Bodies Of Syrian Medical Workers – Part of Life-Saving Team Treating Wounded Protesters – Is Further Evidence of Government's Complete Disregard for Human Rights

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Bodies of Four Men Found, Three of Whom Were Medical Students Part of Team Treating Demonstrators in Makeshift "Field Hospitals"

(New York) -- Amnesty International said today the discovery of the charred and mutilated bodies of three young medical workers a week after their arrest in Aleppo city is further evidence of the Syrian government's appalling disregard for the sanctity of the role of medical workers.

The medical workers were part of a team of doctors, nurses and first-aiders who had been providing life-saving medical treatment in makeshift "field hospitals" set up to treat demonstrators shot by security forces who could not go to state-run hospitals for fear of being arrested, tortured or even killed.

Three men were students at Aleppo University – Basel Aslan and Mus'ab Barad were fourth-year medical students and Hazem Batikh was a second-year English literature student and a first-aid medic. A fourth charred corpse found with the men has yet to be identified.

They had been detained by Air Force Intelligence since their arrest in the city on June 17.

"The brutal killing of these young medics who took great personal risk to rescue and treat injured protesters is yet more evidence that Syrian government forces are prepared to commit unspeakable crimes to silence dissent," said Donatella Rovera, Amnesty International's senior crisis response adviser who recently returned from several weeks in Syria. "As casualties from the current unrest have mounted, President Bashar al-Assad's government has intensified its hunt for the wounded and for those who provide life-saving emergency treatment to them.

"Such violations are part of an increasingly entrenched pattern of crimes against humanity being perpetrated with impunity by Syrian government forces," Rovera said.

The three students' burned bodies were found in the early hours Sunday in a burned-out car in the Neirab area of Aleppo's northeastern outskirts.

Medical personnel who saw the bodies at the morgue told Amnesty International that Aslan had a gunshot wound to the head and his hands were tied behind his back.

One leg and one arm were broken, several teeth missing and the flesh was missing from his lower legs, leaving the bone exposed. Some of his fingernails had been removed.

The bodies of the others were more heavily burned and also bore other wounds. Amnesty International has seen images of the corpses that back up these descriptions.

The students' identity and university cards were found intact alongside their bodies, indicating they had been left there after the bodies were burned.

Shortly after the three students were arrested, one of their parents called their son's phone and an unidentified man reportedly answered, saying: "You don't know how to raise your son. We will teach him how to behave."

During their detention by Air Force Intelligence, their friends tried in vain to seek their release. Senior Air Force Intelligence officers - who allegedly had released detainees in exchange for bribes in the past – told their friends "to forget them."

Security forces have routinely responded to peaceful protest demonstrations in Aleppo city by firing live rounds into the crowds and arresting and torturing known or suspected protesters and their supporters. As more frequent and larger demonstrations have taken place in the city in recent weeks, the security forces' crackdown has become increasingly brutal and widespread.

In late May, an Amnesty International delegate witnessed security forces firing live rounds indiscriminately against peaceful demonstrators in Aleppo on several consecutive days, killing and injuring demonstrators and bystanders, including several children.

From the outset of the protests which began in February 2011, Syrian government forces have been targeting doctors and other medical personnel suspected of providing life-saving emergency treatment to protesters and bystanders wounded in deliberate and/or indiscriminate attacks.

Amnesty International documented such attacks in a report published last October.

Government forces and militias also systematically destroyed and burned down field hospitals and clinics in towns and villages they attacked.

"Medics and first-aiders working amid unrest and conflict take enormous risks to provide immediate life-saving care to the injured and evacuate them to safety. In Syria such risks are magnified by a government policy to target medical personnel and to exact retribution against them," Rovera said.

As early as April of last year, Amnesty International concluded that crimes against humanity were being committed amid the Syrian government's crackdown on protesters that began in March last year.

It has repeatedly called on the UN Security Council, particularly on the uncooperative members of China and Russia, to refer the deteriorating security situation to the International Criminal Court (ICC) and make clear that the crimes are subject to universal jurisdiction.

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