

Syria torture accounts reinforce human rights concerns

By James Reynolds BBC News, Antakya, southern Turkey

"They kicked us in the head," says Ahmed, a former Arabic teacher from the Idlib province of northern Syria.

"They took their boots and forced them into our mouths. They did this to make us say 'There is no God but Bashar [al Assad.]' I refused, so the soldier broke my nose.

"I started bleeding and my blood was on the soldier's shirt. He told me that I had dirtied his shirt with my bad blood."

Ahmed does not hesitate as he recounts what happened to him at the end of last year in Syria.

Along with many others, he took part in opposition demonstrations. For this, he was arrested by Syria's security forces.

"They tied our legs together so we couldn't escape," he recalls.

"They tied our hands behind our backs with metal and tightened it so we couldn't move. They covered our eyes and we were bleeding from injuries."

At one point Ahmed says that the beatings were so bad that he offered to pay his guards to kill him to end his pain.

Ahmed has now escaped to southern Turkey, where he joins more than 30,000 Syrian refugees.

The headmaster at Ahmed's government school also came into exile.

Dalal was a history teacher before he took over as the school principal, and he too was detained for protesting.

'Psychological pressure'

"Our cell was no more than 50 square metres with at least 120 people inside and no difference between educated and uneducated - everyone was together," Dalal recalls at length.

"There was only one toilet inside the room for everyone. While you are in the room you hear some sounds of people being tortured in the next room.

"At that point you pray to God that what is happening to the others will not happen to you.

"In order to sleep half of the people stand up and the others sleep for six hours. When they wake, we swap over. We have to sleep just on the stone floor.

"And the room has only small windows near the roof - all we can see is whether it is day or night.

"The questioning begins with psychological pressure. The soldier opens the door by kicking it and takes your shirt off.

"He insults you, he swears at you. And then the questioning starts and the soldier makes you lay down and starts to kick you.

"If you deny their accusations then you are whipped until you admit to things you haven't done. If you deny again and again then the torture gets worse.

"They threaten you with electric shocks and they threaten your wife, your children, " Dalal says.

'Living dead'

The accounts given by the two men reinforce many of the findings of the new [Human Rights Watch report](#) into torture in Syria.

The organisation accuses the Syrian state of using 27 detention centres and pursuing what amounts to a state policy of torture.

It calls for the UN Security Council to refer the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court. But this is a move that can be blocked by Syria's most powerful ally, Russia.

For now, at least, the refugees from torture do not believe that they can go back home.

"No no never," Dalal says.

"The name for us is the living dead. In case we are arrested they will kill us either by a rocket or by arresting us and torturing us."