



## Statement by Bridges of Truth Member Organizations The Path to Accountability Through European Courts

The start to 2022 witnessed two important events in the efforts to achieve justice and redress for the victims of the Syrian government. The first was the sentence of life in prison issued by the Higher Regional Court in Koblenz, Germany, against Anwar Raslan, a former colonel in Syrian intelligence. The second is the start of the trial of Alaa M., a former doctor in military hospitals, before the Higher Regional Court in Frankfurt, who is accused of crimes against humanity, including premeditated murder and torture.

The Bridges of Truth project, a collaboration among nine organizations concerned with issues of the disappeared, the missing, and their families in Syria, welcomes the steps taken against both Syrian and non-Syrian war criminals by prosecutors and courts in Germany and other European countries, and commends the efforts of the many Syrian human rights organizations working in support of justice for the victims of war crimes and crimes against humanity in Syria.

The justice deficit is enormous and grows every day as atrocities by state and non-state actors continue unhindered for now. The Syrian government alone already bears responsibility for countless violations, including more than 150,000 Syrians disappeared into detention centers, tortured, and killed, in addition to thousands of other undocumented cases. Yet, the landmark trial and verdict in Koblenz, the first of a senior Assad government official for crimes against humanity, which involved over 4,000 torture victims, 27 murders, and cases of rape and sexual assault, offers hope that some justice can be and will be achieved for Syria's many victims.

The undersigned civil society organizations applaud the courage of survivors and witnesses who testified and provided crucial evidence during the Koblenz trial, at potential risk to themselves. Their contributions were essential for exposing the scale of atrocities perpetrated in Syria, which reinforced the resolve of the Koblenz Court to issue its sentence and helped show that the crimes committed by the government were part of a widespread and systematic

policy. Accordingly, we urge everyone who possesses information, evidence, or testimonies to consider submitting them, if it is safe to do so, to international mechanisms and courts, to contribute to the ongoing documentation efforts.

We believe that the sentence issued by the Higher Regional Court in Koblenz, Germany and the start of the trial of the accused, Alaa M. are good steps towards achieving justice for the victims and their families. They send a clear message to perpetrators of human rights violations that the prosecutors and courts can and will act; that impunity can come to an end; and that justice will eventually be served.

We all have a shared responsibility to make that happen reaffirm our commitment to help uncover the fate of the disappeared, missing and wrongfully detained, We urge local, national and international bodies to intensify their efforts and coordinate more closely in order to fulfill their commitments and provide the legal framework and implementation mechanisms to achieve justice and redress for all affected persons and their families, as well as to end human rights violations, such as torture and all forms of violence in the future of Syria.

**Signatories:**

International Center for Transitional Justice

Badael

Center for Civil Society and Democracy

Dawlaty

Lawyers and Doctors for Human Rights

Syrian Institute for Justice

The Day After

Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression