

PRESS RELEASE

Torture in Syria: Investigations in Austria are a first step – now arrest warrants must follow

Vienna/Berlin, 13 November 2018 – The road to justice for war crimes and torture in Syria also leads through Europe. After Germany, Sweden and France, Austrian authorities have initiated an investigation into the Syrian intelligence services for their role in systematic torture. The investigation was opened after 16 women and men filed a criminal complaint to the public prosecutor in Vienna in May 2018. “I hope that Austria will now follow the example of Germany and France and issue arrest warrants against senior officials of Assad’s torture system,” said one of the complainants, who was tortured in Damascus by the military intelligence service.

The criminal complaint against 24 high-ranking officials of the government of Bashar al-Assad is the first of its kind in Austria. It was compiled by the European Center for Constitutional and Human Rights ([ECCHR](#)) in Berlin and the Center for the Enforcement of Human Rights International ([CEHRI](#)) in Vienna. Their lawyers worked closely with Anwar al-Bunni (Syrian Center for Legal Research and Studies, [SCLSR](#)) and Mazen Darwish (Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression, [SCM](#)).

In another case concerning torture in Syria, the public prosecutor in Vienna is investigating a suspect from the city of Ar-Raqqa who has been living in Austria. ECCHR is also supporting the investigation in this case.

In Germany, [four similar complaints](#) contributed to an arrest [warrant against the head of the Syrian Air Force Intelligence Service](#), which was issued in June 2018. “The arrest warrant against Jamil Hassan was a milestone in the fight against impunity for torture in Syria,” said ECCHR General Secretary Wolfgang Kaleck. “The Austrian authorities should also request evidence from Germany and France – for example further testimonies or the photos and data of the [Caesar Files Group](#).”

Tatiana Urdaneta Wittek of CEHRI added: “The public prosecutor in Vienna has done important work in recent months. We are confident that the Austrian authorities will apply international criminal law as their colleagues did in Germany, France and Sweden. The crimes committed in Syria should be prosecuted throughout Europe.”

You can find more information on the case under [ecchr/syria/torture/austria](#)

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