

Mass grave uncovered in Syria

- [english] - Region - North Africa & Middle East - Syria -

Publication date: Tuesday 17 May 2011

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Authorities must stop further killings of civilians and respect the right of families to know the fate of their relatives

The International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) and the Damascus Center for Human Rights (DCHRS) have been informed by cross-checked sources that a mass grave containing the remains of at least 13 bodies was uncovered on May 16 morning near Daraa in area called Talit Mohammed Assarie.

According to witnesses, the mass grave contains the remains of 13 people including women and children, 8 of them have been identified and are members of the Abazied and al-Mahmaed families. Abdulrazaq Abdulaziz Abazied (Abu Samer) and his four sons as well as three persons from the al-Mahmaed family lived together in a house, which was targeted by the army during the attack on Daraa at the beginning of May, according to nearby residents.

It is not clear when those people died, but Daraa residents say dozens of civilians were killed during the military assault on the city's old quarter.

Authorities cordoned off the area on the outskirts of Daraa soon after the bodies were found by villagers digging in farmland. The villagers have been prevented from identifying the bodies. The security forces which took control over the area also allegedly confiscated their mobile phones.

FIDH and DCHRS stress that on April 24, tank-backed Syrian Security forces took siege over the city of Daraa for more than ten days, preventing residents from leaving their homes and resulting in very difficult humanitarian conditions. Security forces cut electricity, landlines, and mobile coverage before undertaking its attack on the city; furthermore, they took out water reservoirs on the tops of building by firing live bullets at them. Lack of food, water, and children's milk remain serious concerns for residents in Daraa.

Already during the siege of Daraa, an eyewitness had told DCHRS that army and security officers were preventing residents from leaving their homes or even from removing dead bodies from the streets. "Dead bodies remain in the streets for more than 24 hours and then disappear.", as recalled by our organisation in a statement dated May 4, 2011 (<http://www.fidh.org/Daraa-Ten-days-of-massacres>).

FIDH and DCHRS condemn the ongoing harsh repression by the Syrian authorities against civilians. Our organisations urge the Syrian authorities to stop further killings of civilians; to uncover mass graves and respect the right of families to know the fate of their relatives including by restituting the bodies. International crimes - that fall under the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court (ICC) - are being perpetrated by the Syrian authorities. FIDH and DCHRS then reiterate their call to the international community to act immediately in order to urge the Syrian authorities to put an end to these crimes against civilians.