

The Testimony of the Previous Detainee: Muhammad Mustafa Darwish

**On the "Invented" Torturing Methods in Branch 215 and
Branch 248**

Military Intelligence Division

Violation Documentation Center in Syria

November 2013



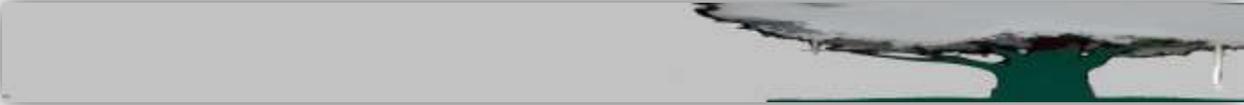
Introduction:

[Violation Documentation Center](#) tries- through releasing these reports about Branch **215** and Branch 248 that are affiliated to the Military Security Division, the Military Security in Damascus- to gather as much evidence and testimonies that describe the sufferings of detainees in the Syrian Security detention cellars, and to shed light -once again- on the brutal acts the regime forces are practicing on the detainees in order to extract confessions under duress and coercion. However, as the Syrian revolution is approaching its third year, we are still being surprised by the "invented" torturing methods that are intended to destroy all that are exposed to psychologically and physically, which explains the huge number of martyrs- documented by **VDC**- who have died under torture (in Branch 215 and Branch 248) and who are estimated by other detainees by thousands of martyrs (either due to torture or due to sickness).

VDC has issued a [detailed investigation on Branch 215, Raid Brigade](#), and conducted many interviews with several eyewitnesses. The report concluded that the regime forces have buried thousands of detainees bodies in two areas in Damascus Suburbs: Martyrs Cemetery in Najha and Bahdaliyah Cemetery in Damascus Suburbs that is relatively close to the former cemetery. The aforementioned branch is located against The Ministry of Electricity in the 6th May Street, next to Branch 248, on the coordinates:

33.507379N, 36.274010E





The Detainee's Testimony to the Violation Documentation Center:

Muhammad Mustafa Darwish, mother's name *Amira*, born in 1974, from Frika Village, Ihsim, Al Zaweya Mountain in Idlib Governorate. He was arrested on 9-4-2012 in an ambush set for him by members of the Military Intelligence Division- specifically the Raid Brigade, known as Branch 215- in a Southern neighborhood in Damascus.

Muhammad says:

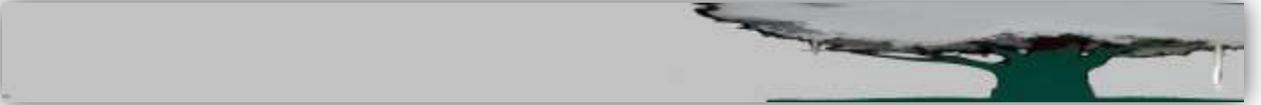
I was a relief activist in Damascus. However, the regime forces have arrested me while doing my humanitarian job of relieving displaced people from several regions and governorates, specifically the people of Homs. and I was active in the southern regions of Damascus such as Sbeneh, Hajira, Ghazal, Yalda.....etc, and I got arrested in an ambush by a security agent named *Abu Yazan* who has informed about me giving my car's number plate and my mobile number to the branch in question. I believe I was under surveillance. The arrest went on very badly as Abu Yazan invited me to a house whose residents- as he claimed- needed relief supplies, and when I got there, I was surprised that about 150 security agents, whom I later knew they were of the Raid Brigade, The Military Intelligence known as Branch 215- surrounded the house and the whole area, cuffed my hands and threw me upside down in a car. One of the agents has sat on my head all the way to the branch, which prevented me from breathing properly.

In Branch 215.....The Hell Branch

When I got to the branch, they put me in a 20*6m dormitory which used to be a "firing field" inside the branch as there was strange machinery and the walls were covered with wood, cork and caoutchouc to stop the bullets during training. That dormitory was two stories under the ground to the left of the detention entrance, while on the right were several cells for the detainees.

The number of detainees in that "firing field" was about **440**. We had to sleep in turn, and when sleeping, we had to sleep sitting. During the first six days, we were beaten collectively in a very savage way as the agents showered us with whips that each detainee got whipped for **100** or **a50** times daily. Some of the detainees called me " Abu Zreik/the Bluish man" on account of the number of bruises and whips on my body. It was beating for the sake of beating as we were neither asked about any information nor interrogated.

On the next week, they took me to the six floor, known as the General Branch or the General Command- Branch 93, where the Investigation Administration was. We were completely naked except for the piece of cloth by which they covered our eyes. As soon as I got there, one "high rank officer" started beating me severely because I said that "we are not humans, we are being treated as if we were a herd of goats" in rejection of taking off our clothes and leaving us completely naked.



When the interrogation began, the interrogator told me that I was charged of distributing "terrorism materials" to extremists of Al-Qaeda and the Wahhabis. I denied all the charges and told him that I had been helping those in need of the innocent people who are the people of my country, and that they all were from Homs, then the interrogator told the agent who was standing behind me to take me to room (6) which was a room for torturing. However, at that day, they did not beat nor torture me; they just took me back to the dormitory. Two days later, they called me again and wrote down all my personal information, then the torture began.....

The agent who was torturing me (about 185 cm tall, blond with green eyes) was a Sunni, and he was insulting our honors terribly and he kept threatening to assault our honor. He used to bring agents and ask them " who love the President Bashar Assad?" and continued saying "those who love the President should whip these detainees for 150 times unceasingly and relentlessly". They were four agents mostly, and they whipped and beat us without stopping at all. That torturing has lasted for four successive days during which I was asked to confess providing the Free Syrian Army with weapons.

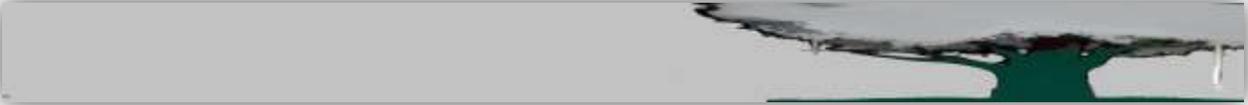
However, the methods of torture have evolved on the fifth day as they began using new ways against me , especially the "Hanging". As they were beating me – when I was "hanged"- they uprooted a toe nail of my right foot , and on the seventh day they broke my left leg using a thick stick. That was all accompanied with electrifying my body. Another new method was putting my head in a "plastic bag", tie it with a rubber on the neck, which made breathing very difficult as the amount of oxygen ran out rapidly, and we thought we would die suffocated.

They have also used to put us in a small pool, about 1 m² space and more than 150cm depth, where they left the detainee for more than 72 hours after they put a lid on that pool with a hole of 15cm diameter that allowed the detainee to breath. The detainees had to "relieve nature" in the same pool while inside it. As for the food, they threw it through that hole, and if the detainee were lucky, some of the food would fall in his mouth, or he would have to eat it after it was mixed with the dirty water.

* * * * *

An imaginary picture of the "Plastic bag" torturing method:





A very strange and brutal way of torturing was carried out against me and tens of other detainees. It was about fixing something like the bicycle cogwheel in the corner, 25 cm above the floor, and putting a stick between the two walls, 50 cm above the floor so that we have a right-angle triangle; whose hypotenuse is the stick between the two walls. Another big cogwheel- with an iron hand to rotate it- was fixed 150 cm above the floor and connected with the small cogwheel with an iron chain. The detainee is put in this triangle with his bottom on the floor, his feet and face meet near the stick and his back on the small cogwheel. The officer rotates the big cogwheel which, in turn, rotates the small one behind the detainee's back causing cuts and extreme pain. Old officers knew how to use that machine that they didn't rotate the cogwheel in a full circle as it would cause a big cut on the back. However, the agents rotate it fully causing- in most cases- deep cuts on the detainees backs, which, consequently, result the detainees to faint and thus need to be hospitalized.

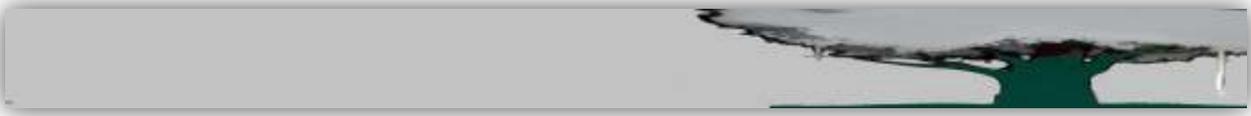
An imaginary picture of torturing by the bicycle cogwheel:



They also force the detainees to stand still for long hours (72 hours), and they use 'Reversed Hanging' i.e. upside-down hanging as they hang the detainee from one foot for long hours (also about 72 hours).

The following picture shows the abovementioned method:





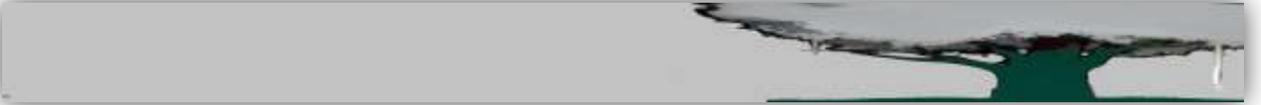
After all this torture, I confessed everything they charged me of regarding providing the Free Syrian Army (FSA) with weapons.

*The widespread diseases, especially those caused by torturing wounds were another agony. For example, during one of the torturing sessions, they beat me with a thick stick, as I have previously mentioned; the thing that led to breaking my left leg. They didn't splint it, however, One of the detainee, a pharmaceuticals student, helped me fixing it by a stick which helped mending my leg.

Moreover, we were prohibited from going to the toilet more than once in the 24 hours for no more than three minutes only, and we had to drink from the toilet water as we didn't have any in cell. We were about 134 detainees in a 3.5*4.5 m room. Due to the lack of space, we had to sleep standing. The rest period, in which we could squat, was two hours only for each detainee. I was one of those who got "hallucinations" (detachment from the surroundings) similar to memory loss. During this "hallucination" period that lasted for 16 days, I used to pee on the other detainees as they informed me later. Skin diseases were also terribly prevailing among detainees, most of whom have chronic ulcerations, some of which were so bad that tiny yellow worms came out of them.

The officer responsible of torturing in Branch 215 has always asked the guards about the charges of each detainee to choose the 'torture room' accordingly. For example, detainees with 'terrorism' or 'carrying weapons' charges were taken to room 6 in which 80% of those who entered it passed away, especially those transferred from Sidnaya Military Prison.

In regard to food, we had a piece of bread and one or two eggs for eight detainees in the morning. For lunch, they provided something that looked like lentil soup, however, it was boiling water with some lentil in it. The dinner was a piece of boiled potato. There was no showers allowed at all in Branch 215. Detainees suffered lice all over their bodies, in addition to the horrible smell of sweating as it was so hot.



In Branch 215, specifically in the corridor of the sixth floor, there were the following rooms:

***The First Room:** on the left is the detainees' deposit room or what is called 'The Accounting Room' where they steal the deposits (money, mobile phones, etc) of the detainees. Simply, it was a room for 'stealing'.

***The Second Room:** clothes room.

***The Third Room:** where all the agents and spies hand over their reports about activists from all cities. Some of these spies were women.

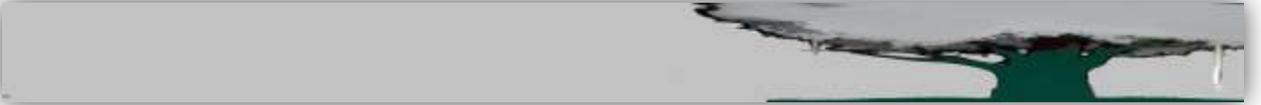
***The Forth Room:** a room with a thick brown curtain at the entrance, behind which is a place for torturing women as we heard them screaming due to the brutality of torture.

On the right, there were three interrogation rooms and at the end of the corridor, there was another place for torturing women.

Muhammad adds:

In Branch 215, there were more than 40 detainees were children under 15, and more than 50 were university students, most of them were first year students (18 years old). They were detained during arbitrary raids One of the torturing tools I saw in the Branch, specifically in Interrogation Room no.4, is a car chassis (4 meters length, 7 cm width) with 'Made In Iran' on it. However, I have no idea how they use it as I wasn't nor did I see anyone else tortured with it.

One of those who tortured me is called *Hamodi*. He is from the eastern part of Aleppo and has got a golden tooth on the left side of his teeth. He is 175 cm tall and about 75 kg weight. The officer responsible for interrogating me was about 167 cm tall and has got a dark skin and a moustache. He is a little bit bald and has, I believe, a rank of 'First Assistant'.



In Branch 248, Military Security:

One month later, I was transferred to Branch 248, a subsidiary of The Military Security right next to Branch 215. They put me, along with seven other detainees, in a 120*120 cm toilet room. We were naked except for the underwear. We peed on each other in the same place. Among these seven detainees, there was *Abu Khalid*, the Imam of a mosque in **al-Rastan** in **Homs** for the charge of 'instigating demonstrators'. He was detained along with his three children; one of them is *Abdulkader*. There was, also, another detainee from **Homs**; *Mohamad Anas Yasin Tabbaa*. His story was one of the most tragic stories that I can vividly remember as he confessed, under brutal torture, that he raped his mother, his sister and his sister-in-law.

The torturing place in Branch 284 is room 4, which is 6 m² and whose floor is filled with stones on which they drag the detainee with his face against the floor until the blood covers his face.

Witness assured- swearing to God- that he saw the feet of a detainee that had been cut by a power saw.

I have also met- in that same branch- *Assad al-Noimi* a relative of the defected major *Maher al-Noimi*, who died on my feet when I was hanged from one foot. He was shot with two bullets in the chest and killed in a very brutal way as four agents kept kicking him on the head and the neck until they broke his throat and he passed away.

On 14 June **2012**, I was transferred to The Military Court in Damascus, al-Jamarik area, where they issued an arrest warrant no. 6359 against me. After that, I have stayed in Branch 215 and Branch 248 for 65 days in addition to 15 days in al-Qaboun Military Police. Then, I have spent 5 months in Adraa Central Prison. I have hired an advocate who has charged me with 250,000 sp. I have also paid 100,000 for a 'blood dealer' or a broker who would convince the Judge to release me which was on the mid of Jan 2013. Later, my advocate told me that I was in absentia sentenced to ten years of prison.

In Branch **215**, I met a detainee from al-Mazza , Sheikh Saad called *Fawzi* who was a university student that has been exposed to an extreme torture.

According to the witness's estimation, there are more than **5000** detainees in Branch 215, one of whom is *Zedo Hamam*, a Kurdish pharmaceuticals student. He also retails some other stories he witnessed such as hitting a detainee directly on the eye by the bottom of a rifle, and breaking the teeth or the fingers of others.

This interview was conducted by VDC member Musaab al-Shbaib in Idlib, November **2013**.

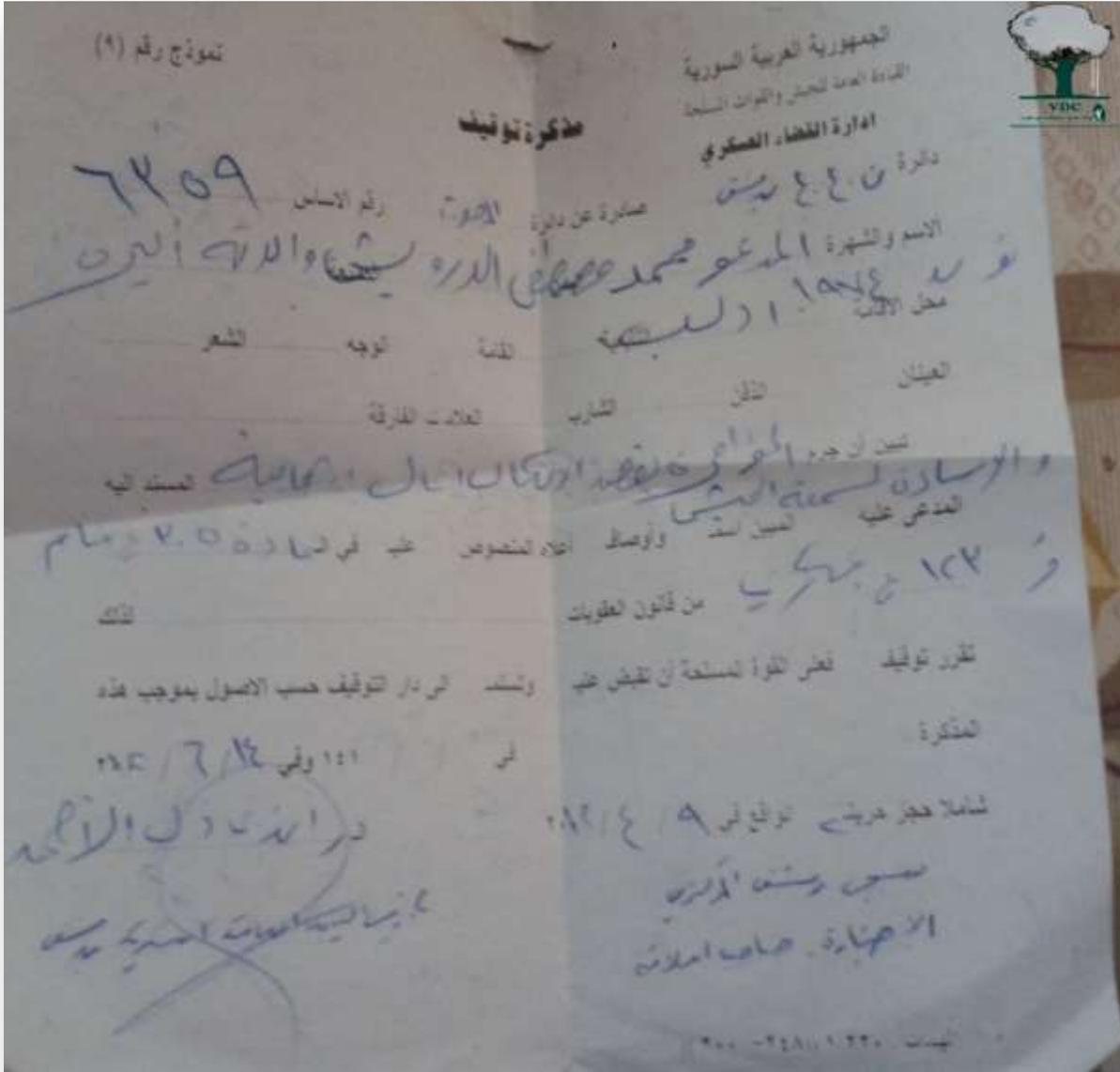
A picture for *Mohamad's* left leg showing the marks of the fracture:



Another picture shows the traces of electrifying:



A copy of the arrest warrant issued by The Military Court:



A copy of Mohamad's Adraa Central Prison's ID where he spent more than six months in a row without being sentenced:

الجمهورية العربية السورية
الشرطة
فرع سجن ادراا

رقم الزيارة
الخاصة

بطاقة زيارة

اسم المسجون: محمد الرويش بن مصطفى والنه اميرة

الجنح: الثالث

الغرفة: ٣٠٧

المسموح لهم بالزيارة

اسم الزوجة:

اسماء الأخوة: علي يوسف فايد المسن المسن

اسماء الأبناء:

رئيس فرع المسجن

يوم الزيارة: الأحد

٢٠١٢/٠٦/١٤

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