

**30 August 2025**

On the International Day of the Disappeared, we stand in solidarity with the thousands of families across Syria and the region who continue to seek truth, justice, and closure for their missing loved ones.

The recent discovery of mass graves in northern Syria, believed to contain victims of arbitrary detention, summary executions, and enforced disappearances, has once again brought to light the immense suffering endured by families, and the ongoing failure to uphold basic legal and humanitarian obligations.

Under international humanitarian law and human rights law, parties to conflict have an obligation to search for the missing, identify remains, and inform families. The right to know is not a political choice, it is a legal right and a moral imperative. Enforced disappearance is a grave violation that - when committed systematically - may amount to a crime against humanity.

Transitional justice processes cannot afford to ignore the plight of the missing and their families. Truth, justice, reparations, and guarantees of non-repetition must place survivors and victims at the center. Any meaningful path forward requires:

- Independent investigations into mass graves and sites of detention
- Preservation and protection of forensic evidence
- Full support for mechanisms that trace the missing and engage directly with families
- Legal accountability for perpetrators of disappearance and other violations
- Active participation of families - especially women, who often lead these searches - in shaping justice and memory processes.

The establishment of the National Commission for the Missing in Syria last May marks a significant step forward. Its mandate must be fully supported, resourced, and protected from political interference to ensure it can deliver truth and dignity to victims and their families.

Today, we remember those who are missing, and we reaffirm our commitment to the families who continue to live in painful uncertainty. Their pain is not invisible, and their struggle is not forgotten.

At the IHL Centre, supporting the families of the missing and advancing pathways to justice is not only part of our mandate, but also at the heart of our work. Justice requires more than acknowledgment; it demands action.

