PRESS RELEASE

District Court of The Hague sentences Mustafa A., member of Liwa al Quds, to 12 years in prison for crimes against humanity and war crimes in landmark case

The Hague, 22 January, 2024: The District Court of The Hague today delivered its verdict in the case of the Dutch Public Prosecutor against Mustafa A. (member of Liwa Al Quds). The court has found him guilty of crimes against humanity, war crimes, and participation in Liwa al Quds' militia activities, specifically related to the violent arrest and subsequent torture of a civilian in January 2013 in the Al Nairab camp outside of Aleppo.

The court sentenced him to 12 years in prison for crimes against humanity and war crimes in the form of deprivation of liberty (as direct perpetrator) and torture in detention (as an accessory), as well as for his participation as a leader in a criminal organisation, Liwa Al Quds, which aims at committing crimes against humanity and war crimes.

The Nuhanovic Foundation and the Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression (SCM) both welcome this momentous decision by the Court, which represents a significant step toward justice for victims and survivors of international crimes in Syria, reflecting the importance of accountability for those accused of such heinous crimes. Both organisations would like to extend their thanks to all witnesses and victims involved in this case for their commitment in the pursuit of justice.

While this verdict cannot undo the pain and suffering endured by the victims, it serves as a testament to the resilience of the law in holding individuals accountable for their crimes. The Nuhanovic Foundation and SCM remain committed to supporting survivors and advocating for justice in cases of international crimes.

In this context, lawyer Mazen Darwish, the General Director of SCM, said: "Establishing accountability through the prosecution of individuals responsible for grave crimes is a crucial stride towards building sustainable peace in Syria. By fostering collaborative channels between Syrian human rights organisations and local authorities, we can contribute to the safety and peace of not only Syrian civilians but also host communities."

This case marked the first time that a member of an organisation linked to the Assad regime has faced trial in a Dutch court, and is groundbreaking both for its innovative approach to victim engagement and for the legal precedents it is setting. The case was initiated based on a complaint submitted by SCM in June 2020, who began investigations into the suspect and provided information and evidence to the Dutch investigating authorities from its database.

Both SCM and The Nuhanovic Foundation cooperated with the Public Prosecutor's Office to facilitate the participation of witnesses and a direct victim of the crimes. Concurrently, the Nuhanovic Foundation extended ongoing support to the case, offering legal and logistical aid.

Fritz Streiff, Project Manager at The Nuhanovic Foundation, commented: "This is a good day for the survivors and their families in this individual case and beyond because, even though it took a long time, justice was done today. The verdict is groundbreaking as we now also have a Dutch court that has added to the official legal record showing the Assad regime has committed crimes against humanity. It also confirms that Liwa al Quds is a criminal organisation, paving the way for more arrests and similar trials in the future."

The Nuhanovic Foundation and SCM have collaborated to answer frequently asked questions about the case, which can be found here.

Media Inquiries

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About The Nuhanovic Foundation

The Nuhanovic Foundation is a non-profit organization dedicated to advocating for the rights of victims of conflict and human rights abuses. Through legal initiatives, awareness campaigns, and support programs, the Foundation strives to ensure that justice is accessible to those who have suffered in the face of conflict.

For more information, visit www.nuhanovicfoundation.org.

About Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression

Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression (SCM) is an independent non-governmental non-profit organization. We seek to build a society that guarantees freedom of expression and belief, human rights, and justice. Our vision is a democratic world based on justice, freedom, equality, and respect for human rights and dignity. Since its establishment in 2004, we work to defend oppressed individuals due to their beliefs or opinions, as well as promoting human rights and supporting and developing independent, critical and professional media. SCM is in special consultative status with UN ECOSOC since 2011.

For more information, visit www.scm.bz/en/