

Thank you, Chairman Menendez and Ranking member Risch for holding this hearing, and thank you Senator Risch for inviting me to speak. I am honored to give my testimony before this storied committee. Thank you for giving me a chance to bring my voice to the United States Congress, government, and most importantly to the American people whose democracy inspired our revolution in Syria over a decade ago.

On March 11th, 2020 the military photographer and defector Caesar shared his story with you. Every day, he photographed bodies that had been detained, tortured, and murdered in Syrian regime dungeons. The signs of torture were clear, and the photographs were here, on display in front of your honorable committee. You saw it with your own eyes. Innocent civilians experiencing the most brutal methods of torture - burning, strangulation, sodomy, and ultimately death. All for daring to dream for a free Syria.

Now, over two years later, nothing has changed in Syria. The Assad regime is no less brutal, the Syrian people are at no less risk. How many more times does a witness to war crimes need to sit in front of you and describe the horrors of the Assad regime?

I hope that by sharing my story, it may spark something inside you, and maybe even renew hope for the future of Syria. Every time I tell my story, it takes a toll on me. But all I have is my voice, and I will speak until I can't anymore.

I was witness to mass graves in Syria from 2011 to 2018 where men and women, children and elderly, were tortured, executed, gassed, and bombed by the Assad regime, Iran, and Russia and then callously thrown into trenches, their fate unknown to loved ones. Their lives have been lost; they cannot be saved. And they demand accountability. But the reason I am sharing my story today, is to tell you that they are digging mass graves right now to bury more victims of Assad, Iran, and Russia.

I am a civilian. Before the war, I was an administrative employee of the Damascus municipality. My job was to help families make final preparations for their loved ones' passing. Each funeral was dignified with religious prayers and rituals, and all were properly laid to rest. Family members were given the opportunity to say goodbye, and the sanctity of every grave was respected.

In 2011, my office was visited by regime intelligence officials, and I was ordered to work for them. When the regime asks for something, you don't say no.

I was not prepared for the horror of my duties. Every week, twice a week, three trailer trucks arrived, packed with 300 to 600 bodies of victims of torture, bombardment, and slaughter. Twice a week, three to four pickup trucks with 30 to 40 bodies of civilians that had been executed in Saydnaya Prison, arrived for disposal in the most inhumane way.

After seven years of bearing witness to these atrocities, thanks to God and the ineptitude of the regime, I was able to escape Syria and follow my family to Europe. There, it was not only my duty, but my honor to testify before the German national court in Koblenz, and seek some semblance of justice to hold war criminals accountable for the ongoing atrocities in Syria.

I have never been able to forget what I saw; the countless bodies I buried. It keeps me up at night, and I will never sleep soundly carrying this burden. No one should, because these massacres are still happening. There are, according to conservative estimates, at least 150,000 missing and unaccounted for Syrians. Their families have no closure, holding out hope for any bit of information. My heart is heavy with the knowledge that many are, at this very moment, experiencing inhumane torture at the hands of the Assad regime, and some, I know exactly where they are- piled into mass graves that are still being dug today. I know this because others who worked with me on the mass graves have very recently escaped and confirmed what we have been hearing.

The Syrian people have suffered enough. Over the 11 years of war, hundreds of thousands of innocent civilians have not just been executed, but starved, tortured, raped, burned, and murdered in the most sadistic ways one can imagine. Men and women, children and elderly, innocent people slowly tortured to death, screaming in the darkness while the world looks the other way. Those lucky enough not to be imprisoned live in fear every day, targeted with chemical weapons, cluster bombs, and internationally banned weapons. Among those murdered are Americans, including journalists and humanitarian workers. I will never forget how Assad's forces ridiculed and laughed about the fact that they tortured, murdered and buried Americans and Europeans too.

As the leader of the free world, America should set the example and live up to its values- the international order depends on it. When the international community fails to condemn crimes against humanity- genocidal massacres, the bombardment of hospitals and schools, enforced disappearances and detention- criminal regimes will continue to push the limits, unhindered.

Russia, by its own admission, tested over 200 weapons on civilians in Syria. The international community looked the other way, and now, Russia is using those same weapons and tactics in Ukraine that it honed in its 7 years waging war against the Syrian people. Where is the line? Chemical weapons against innocent civilians was not the line in Syria. The playbook of these tyrants is written, and I fear the worst for the Ukrainian people. Enabling Assad enables Putin, and stopping Assad hurts the Russian dictator. We must finally learn from the past and not let this never again moment happen, yet again.

I lived with death for 7 years; with dead bodies and soulless intelligence officers. It might seem unimaginable to you, so let me share some of the horrors that have never left my mind. One day, one of the trailer trucks dumped its contents of several hundred dead, mangled corpses into the trench in front of us. Unexpectedly, we saw a flicker of movement. There was a man near-death desperately using his last reserve of energy to signal to us that somehow, he was still alive. One of

the civilian workers, crying, said that we had to do something. The intelligence officer supervising us ordered the bulldozer driver to run him over. The driver could not hesitate, or else he would have been next. He ran over the man in the trenches, killing him. As for the young man who had dared to shed tears over the victim of Assad's regime, we never saw him again.

Once, I had to visit the farm of an intelligence officer. When I arrived, there were about 10 of them there eating and drinking. More surprisingly, there were also 15 young men handcuffed, blindfolded, and naked on the ground. One of the intelligence officers ordered another soldier to untie the civilians and let them go. The blindfolds and handcuffs were removed, and I remember the confusion and fear in the young men's eyes. An intelligence officer asked what they were waiting for, and told them to run, and they took off. Then, another officer grabbed his rifle, and picked the young men off, one by one. Every last one was murdered, and then Assad's officers continued on with their festivities.

I buried so many children tortured to death, and I remember them all. I buried a mother still holding her infant to her breast as their lifeless bodies were thrown in the trench. One day, I was at Tishreen military hospital where bodies are processed before being sent to the mass graves, and there was a body of a little girl only 6 or 7 years old. Her little lifeless body showed signs of terrible torture. The doctor at the hospital took me aside and told me he was ordered to write that she died of cardiac arrest, but in reality she had died as she was being continuously and horrifically raped by 11 Assad regime intelligence officers.

As members of the United States Senate, you all have the power to change the world. By sharing my story, I am taking this burden off of my shoulders, and sharing it with all of you. This is now on your shoulders, and your conscience. Take heed of what is happening in Syria. Although hundreds of thousands have already been murdered and disappeared, and millions displaced, the worst is still yet to come. It can be prevented but I beg of you- do not wait a second longer. Take action.