

Advocacy dossier

Bassel Khartabil Safadi

باسل خرطبيل الصفدي

Forcibly disappeared **Syria**

Bassel Khartabil Safadi was a Syrian-Palestinian software engineer and free expression advocate, Creative Commons' lead in Syria, who was arrested by Military Intelligence on 15 March 2012. He was executed in October 2015, days after his transfer from Adra prison, apparently under a military field court sentence; his family learned of it in August 2017 and his body has not been returned.

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The case at a glance

Bassel Khartabil Safadi was a Syrian-Palestinian software engineer and free expression advocate, Creative Commons' lead in Syria, who was arrested by Military Intelligence on 15 March 2012. He was executed in October 2015, days after his transfer from Adra prison, apparently under a military field court sentence; his family learned of it in August 2017 and his body has not been returned.

Status **Forcibly disappeared**	Arrested **3 Oct 2015**	Country **Syria**
Sentence Death sentence, apparently issued by a military field court; executed in October 2015		

What we ask

We call on the authorities to:

01 Immediately disclose the location, legal status, and condition of Bassel Khartabil Safadi.

02 Grant unrestricted access to family and independent legal counsel.

03 Bring Bassel Khartabil Safadi promptly before a competent judicial authority, or release them.

04 Investigate the disappearance as a crime under international law and hold all responsible officials accountable.

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How the case unfolded

March 2012

Torture

Tortured in a Military Intelligence facility after his arrest

A relative told Human Rights Watch that after his arrest in March 2012 he was tortured in an unofficial detention facility run by Military Intelligence. The joint statement of rights groups in 2017 said he was subjected to torture and other ill-treatment in detention.

15 March 2012

Arrest

Arrested by Military Intelligence and held incommunicado

Syrian Military Intelligence arrested Bassel Khartabil Safadi on 15 March 2012, the first anniversary of the uprising, and held him incommunicado for eight months.

December 2012

Transfer between places of detention

Transferred to Adra prison in Damascus

In December 2012 he was moved to Adra prison in Damascus, where his wife, Noura Ghazi Safadi, was able to visit him. Rights groups and his wife said he was routinely denied access to his family and lawyers.

December 2012

Hearing

Appears before a military field court

In December 2012 Bassel Khartabil Safadi appeared before a military field court. He never heard a verdict. Military field courts hold closed proceedings that do not meet minimum international fair trial standards.

2013

Other act

Receives the Index on Censorship Digital Freedom Award while in prison

In 2013, while detained, he received the Index on Censorship Digital Freedom Award. The previous year Foreign Policy had named him one of its Top 100 Global Thinkers of 2012.

21 April 2015

Other act

UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention calls for his release

On 21 April 2015 the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention declared his detention a violation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and called for his release. The Syrian authorities did not free him.

October 2015

Extrajudicial killing

Executed days after his transfer from Adra prison

Bassel Khartabil Safadi was executed in October 2015, days after he was taken from Adra prison, apparently under a death sentence issued by a military field court. Amnesty International described his death as an extrajudicial execution. The Syrian authorities never made the execution public.

3 October 2015

Start of enforced disappearance

Moved from Adra prison to an undisclosed location

On 3 October 2015 he told his family that he was being transferred from Adra prison to an undisclosed location. It was the last time they heard from him. The family later received unconfirmed information that he may have been taken to a military field court at the Military Police base in Qaboun, Damascus.

1 August 2017

Other act

His wife announces that he was executed in 2015

On 1 August 2017 his wife, the lawyer Noura Ghazi Safadi, announced on Facebook that she had received confirmation that he had been sentenced to death and executed in October 2015, days after he was taken from Adra prison. Until then the family had no information on his fate.

2 August 2017

Other act

33 organisations condemn the execution and call for an investigation

In a joint statement, 33 organisations, including Amnesty International and the Gulf Centre for Human Rights, condemned his extrajudicial execution, called for an investigation, and urged the Syrian authorities to disclose the circumstances of his death and to end extrajudicial executions, enforced disappearances, arbitrary arrests and torture.

03
The full story

Update, 12 November 2026: Bassel Khartabil Safadi was arrested in March 2012 and executed in October 2015, days after his transfer from Adra prison; his family learned of the execution in August 2017. His remains have not been returned to his family, and no one has been held to account.

Background and Work

Bassel Khartabil Safadi was a Syrian-Palestinian software engineer and free expression advocate who used his technical skills to widen access to information online in Syria. He was the Syria lead for Creative Commons, co-founded Aiki Lab, a collaborative technology space in Damascus, and contributed regularly to Wikipedia. In 2005 he started the New Palmyra project with a team of artists in Damascus to model the ruins of the ancient city digitally, work he continued until his arrest. In 2012 Foreign Policy named him one of its Top 100 Global Thinkers, citing his insistence on a peaceful Syrian uprising and his role in connecting Syria to the online community. He was married to the human rights lawyer Noura Ghazi Safadi.

The Arrest

Syrian Military Intelligence arrested him on 15 March 2012, the first anniversary of the uprising, and held him incommunicado for eight months. A relative told Human Rights Watch that he was tortured in an unofficial detention facility run by Military Intelligence. No charge against him was made public.

Detention Conditions and Health

In December 2012 he was moved to Adra prison in Damascus, where he was subjected to torture and other ill-treatment, according to a joint statement by rights groups. His wife was able to visit him there, but rights groups said he was routinely denied access to his family and lawyers. In 2013, while in Adra, he received the Index on Censorship Digital Freedom Award.

Legal Proceedings

In December 2012 he appeared before a military field court, a body that sits in closed session and does not meet minimum international fair trial standards. He never heard a verdict. On 21 April 2015 the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention declared his detention a violation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and called for his release; the Syrian authorities did not release him.

On 3 October 2015 he told his family that he was being transferred from Adra prison to an undisclosed location. It was the last time they heard from him. The family later received unconfirmed information that he may have been taken to a military field court at the Military Police base in Qaboun, Damascus.

The Execution

On 1 August 2017 Noura Ghazi Safadi announced that she had received confirmation that her husband had been sentenced to death and executed in October 2015, days after he was taken from Adra prison. Amnesty International described his death as an extrajudicial execution. The Syrian authorities never announced the execution, and his body was not returned to the family. In a March 2026 article,

Noura Ghazi wrote that his father had received a death certificate in July 2018 and that she obtained the document recording his death sentence in October 2025, after the fall of the Assad government.

International Response

On 2 August 2017, 33 organisations, including Amnesty International and the Gulf Centre for Human Rights, condemned his extrajudicial execution and called for an investigation. They urged the Syrian authorities to disclose the circumstances of his death, to end extrajudicial executions, enforced disappearances, arbitrary arrests and torture, and to release everyone detained for peacefully exercising their rights. Creative Commons said it was outraged to learn of his death. Human Rights Watch wrote that he paid with his life for non-violent resistance.

Latest updates on this case Scan the code or visit: https://humena.org/defenders/bassel-khartabil-safadi/

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