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ACS Commends Federal Grand Jury Indictment of Former Syrian Official for Torture, Reaffirms Commitment to Justice for Victims

Washington D.C., December 13, 2024—The American Coalition for Syria (ACS) welcomes the addition of torture charges by a federal grand jury against Samir Ousman Alsheikh, a former Syrian official who was arrested for immigration fraud in Los Angeles in August 2024. The superseding indictment adding torture charges against Alsheikh is another critical step toward accountability for the atrocities committed under the Assad regime, and it comes on the heels of indictments for war crimes against two other high-ranking Syrian government officials.

Alsheikh served as the head of Damascus Central Prison, also known as Adra Prison, from 2005 to 2008. During his tenure, he allegedly ordered and personally participated in the torture of political and other prisoners. Adra Prison became notorious for methods of torture such as the “Flying Carpet,” which caused severe physical and psychological harm to detainees.

In 2011, Alsheikh was appointed governor of Deir Ez-Zour Province by Bashar al-Assad, where he continued to support the regime’s campaign of repression. After fleeing Syria in 2020, Alsheikh immigrated to the United States and applied for U.S. citizenship in 2023, allegedly concealing his role in these crimes to gain entry.

The grand jury’s superseding indictment adds charges of torture and conspiracy to commit torture to previous immigration fraud charges, ensuring that Alsheikh stands trial for his heinous crimes in Syria and that such evidence will be brought to light for the world to see. If convicted, Alsheikh faces decades in prison.

“This indictment is an essential step not only toward justice for the victims of Samir Alsheikh’s crimes but also toward ensuring the world never again tolerates such atrocities,” said Sameer Sabounji, Policy Officer & Staff Attorney for the American Coalition for Syria. “We look forward to the United States and the international community continuing to hold perpetrators accountable, so that we may learn from these crimes and never see a brutal regime like this again.”

The American Coalition for Syria applauds this decisive action by the U.S. government and emphasizes the importance of ensuring that the United States remains a safe haven for victims—not perpetrators—of human rights abuses. This indictment sends a strong message that those who commit crimes against humanity will not escape justice, no matter where they try to hide.