



WAR CRIMES IN SYRIA: SWITZERLAND ISSUES AN INTERNATIONAL ARREST WARRANT FOR THE EXTRADITION OF RIFAAT AL-ASSAD

(Geneva, 16 August 2023) - The Swiss Federal Criminal Court (FCC) has ordered the Federal Office of Justice (FOJ) to issue an international arrest warrant for former Vice President Rifaat al-Assad in connection with the proceedings he has been facing since 2013 for his alleged role in the massive war crimes committed in the city of Hama in February 1982. TRIAL International calls on the Swiss authorities to swiftly indict and bring to trial the man nicknamed the "Butcher of Hama", now aged 85.

After a lengthy investigation, [criticized](#) by TRIAL International for its delay, the Office of the Attorney General (OAG) finally issued an international arrest warrant for Mr. al-Assad in November 2021. At that time, Mr. al-Assad had just fled France, where he was a resident and had been sentenced to four years of imprisonment for various economic offences. In December 2021, however, the FOJ refused to issue the international arrest warrant.

In a ruling dated 19 July 2022 – kept confidential until now to ensure the effectiveness of the measure – the FCC ordered the FOJ to issue the arrest warrant for Mr. al-Assad, confirming the competence of the Swiss authorities to prosecute him and request his extradition to Switzerland.

For Benoit Meystre, legal advisor at TRIAL International, "It is to be welcomed that the prosecuting authorities have finally decided to request Mr. al-Assad's extradition, although it is regrettable that we had to wait until his return to Syria before demanding he appear before the Swiss courts".

As a reminder, TRIAL International [filed a criminal complaint](#) before the OAG against Rifaat al-Assad, uncle of current dictator Bashar al-Assad, in December 2013. The "Butcher of Hama" has since been under investigation for his alleged role in the massacres committed in February 1982. The Syrian Defense Forces, commanded by Mr. al-Assad, were guilty of executions, enforced disappearances, rape and torture on an unimaginable scale. According to various sources, between 10'000 and 40'000 people were killed in the span of only three weeks.

More than 40 years after the Hama massacre, TRIAL International believes that it is more necessary than ever that the OAG investigation be closed as soon as possible, so that a trial can be held in the near future. Given Mr. al-Assad's advanced age, any further delay risks depriving the victims of a trial aimed at bringing them justice.