

Fear Allah and Repent to Him, Now Your Hands Will be Amputated

Account of the Witness Soud al-Houtaimi, one of the Detainees in the Islamic State Detention Facilities in Abu Kamal/Deir az-Zor



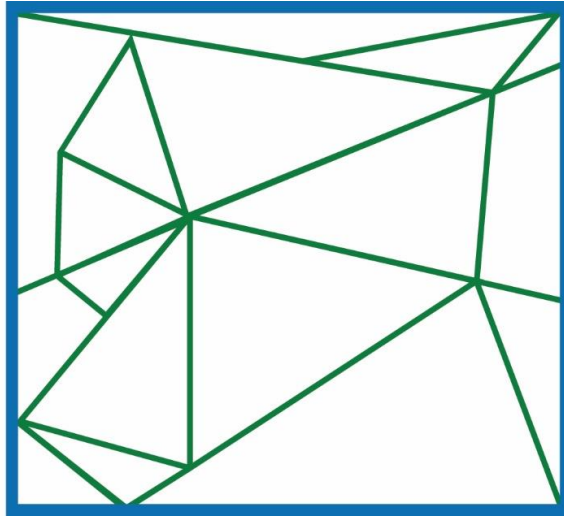
About Syrians for Truth and Justice-STJ

[Syrians for Truth and Justice \(STJ\)](#) is an independent, non-governmental and non-profit organization whose members include Syrian human rights defenders, advocates and academics of different backgrounds and nationalities. It also includes members of other nationalities.

The initiative strives for SYRIA, where all Syrian citizens (males and females) have dignity, equality, justice and equal human rights.

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For Truth
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Facilities in Abu Kamal/Deir az-Zor



Introduction

February 11, 2017, ISIS arrested both Soud al-Houtaimi and his friend in [Abu Kamal](#)¹ city located in Deir az-Zor. After 119-days arrest, ISIS organization condemned them of theft and assault on an element of ISIS and amputated their hand.

"fear Allah and repent to him, now your hands will be amputated", those were the expression that stuck in Soud's mind, as he narrated to STJ, because it was the last statement addressed to Soud al-Houtaimi and his friend Ahad ash-Sheikh, prior to implementing the theft penalty code; this code states to amputate the right hand of any person proved to be convicted of theft, according to the laws imposed on the people in its areas of control and "alleges of applying" the Sharia laws.

First: Profile of Soud al-Houtaimi Life

Soud Aboud al-Houtaimi was born in Abu Kamal located in the countryside of Deir az-Zor in 1983. He is single and works in construction to support his old parents and his brother who is with special needs.

On Saturday 11, February 2017, Soud was arrested by ISIS, along with his friend, on a checkpoint installed by ISIS in Abu Kamal. It should be recalled that ISIS was expelled from Abu Kamal in November 2017.

Second: Details of the Arrest of Soud al-Houtaimi

In July 2014, ISIS managed to expand control on the entire city of Abu Kamal, located on the Syrian/Iraqi border, following 3-days battles against groups of the Syrian armed opposition and groups of al-Nusra Front. At the time, the majority of elements of al-Nusra Front pledged alliance to the Islamic State (ISIS) whereas combatants of the armed opposition groups refused to pledge alliance to ISIS. Therefore, clashes between the armed opposition and ISIS militias took place and ISIS succeeded in controlling the whole city.

¹ ISIS controlled the city of Abu Kamal in July 2014 until late 2017 when the Syrian regular forces, supported by its allies of Iraqi Shiite factions, the Lebanese Hezbollah, the Iranian Revolutionary Guards, and the Russian air Force, were able to expel ISIS militias of the city on November 19, 2017.



Soud al-Houtaimi, at the beginning of his speech to STJ, mentioned that his living conditions deteriorated too much when ISIS was controlling the city because of the recession in the field of construction and the decline of the urban sprawl. Nonetheless, he never thought he would be arrested by ISIS, but it happened on February 11, 2017. In this regard, he says,

"I worked in Abu Kamal in a construction workshop, my friend Ahad Mohammed ash-Sheikh, who hails from [Hatlah Tahtani](#) village that administratively follows [Deir az-Zor](#), worked with me and lived in Abu Kamal. Days passed and there was lack of job opportunities because ISIS controlled the city, so people started to search for any job that might support them, like collecting waste that contain copper or any other material. One day, my friend and I were walking in the street and suddenly we saw copper wire laid on the pavement; it was obvious that it did not belong to anyone as it was scattered in the street, Since we desperately needed something that could make some money, we took the copper wire and never thought that it was considered as a theft or something like that. We have never ever stole anything. Therefore, we took this thick wire, almost two meters and a half, and we decided to sell it and share the money. However, before we could sell the wire, while we were going to the market an hour before sunset, a checkpoint installed by ISIS in the middle of the city halted us, just one element was there with his rifle, type M14, on his shoulder. My friend and I were riding a motorbike, and each one of us had a knife to use it for work as well as some packets of cigarettes, Alhamraa among others. For the copper wire, we had rolled it in a big sack and we hold it on our motorbike."

Soud added that the element in the checkpoint glimpsed the copper wire and thought it was a gun, but Soud and his friend asserted to him that it was just a copper wire, so the element ordered the two to get off the motorbike, but Soud's friend assaulted the element using his "knife" fearful of being arrested, and hurt the element in one of his legs. Then Soud said,

"we were very frightened after what happened so we decided to leave our motorbike and everything behind us and escape, but the armed element, an Iraqi one, directed his rifle towards us and threatened to kill us if we tried to move or escape. After that, he called for support through his wireless set, and within minutes, security patrols of ISIS, mostly Iraqis, arrived. They circled us after seeing that the element was injured and was hurting; they started to beat us violently in the middle of the street until the sunset, then they blindfolded



us, handcuffed us, and placed us in back seat of their vehicles. They went on beating us with iron bars and trod us until we hurt too much; the beating traces are still apparent over my body until now. After all, they drove us to the Islamic Police Station within Abu Kamal."

Third: the Islamic Police Station in Abu Kamal

When both Soud and his friend arrived at the Islamic Police Station² located in Abu Kamal, elements of ISIS began the investigation with them. They were both subjected to very bad beating for days, then they were transferred to the jail that was called "Point 53" within Abu Kamal. Despite all of what happened, Soud insisting in denying the theft charges against him by ISIS, and he narrated his first days at the detention saying,

"in the prison "Point 53" we were subjected to very bad beating as well. One of those who involved in beating us was identified as Abu Laith, who hails from [Tawatha](#) village that follows Abu Kamal and was the command of the Islamic Police Station, he was the Emir "prince.

For my friend who was detained with me, he was 10 years younger than me, and was my neighbor. However, ISIS wanted us to confess many accusations but we replied that our only accusation was that of theft, knowing that we did not steal, rather we found the copper wire in the street. They beat us so violently while questioning "to whom are you affiliated? to the new Syrian army? or to the democratic army- he meant Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF)? or the regime "Nazarenes"-he meant the Syrian regular forces? They even accused us of prostitution among others."

² The Islamic Police Station or "al-Hisbah Center" is a security apparatus affiliated to ISIS, and is inspired from the Islamic Sharia to promote virtue and prevent vice. ISIS presents the "al-Hisbah Center" to be the religious police, which is concerned with the slightest religious issues such as the color of the women's dress, the length of men's clothes, and other sins such as theft.



Image of the survivor Soud al-Houtaimi, taken in May 2018. Photo credit: STJ

Fourth: Prison "Point 53" in Abu Kamal

During the period when ISIS controlled Deir az-Zor, the countryside of the province contained several jails, but the jails established in Abu Kamal were the most secret and guarded, as it contained inmates from ISIS themselves along with journalists and important personalities whom ISIS organization chose to put them there, given the easiness of transporting them to Iraq in case of any storming or shelling or airborne operation by the international coalition forces. Soud mentioned that he was taken to the jail "Point 53" in Abu Kamal along with friend and remained for 115 days after staying in the Islamic Police Center for few days. Soud summarized the 115 days of detention saying,

"in Point 53, we were detained for about four months, and they investigated us for four times. The charges were the same, but we confessed none, so they subjected us to shocking torture. They persisted in torturing us with Shabeh position or aqrab (scorpion) position, where you are hanged to the roof by your hands and eyes blindfolded, and your toes hardly



touch the ground. Certainly, this method coerced you to confess everything you know as a result of the horrible pain it causes in the body. I experienced this method of torture twice, they would keep me hanged until it is time for prayers because I told them that I pray in order they let me down. Actually, every detainee in ISIS detentions has to do the five prayers, willy-nilly, and everybody is watched by monitoring cameras for this purpose. They untied me from the roof only in times of prayers or food, and they sometimes fed me while I was hanged; they put food inside my mouth with a spoon without let me down. Anyway, I was unable to eat because of torture, fatigue, lack of physical rest and proper position to eat."

Five: Amnesty for Prisoners Condemned of Theft

Four months after detention in prison "Point 53", Soud thought that it is time for freedom after he was informed of an issuance of an amnesty for him along with all prisoners condemned of theft, but he was disappointed, and he narrated to STJ the following,

"following 118 days of arrest, one day, an emir of ISIS from Iraq came; it was said he was the vice of Wali (custodian) of Raqqa. But prior to his visit, the elements in the prison had told my friend and I that we were sentenced of "optional exemption", which we did not understand what it really meant, we just understood that it was like an amnesty since we have committed nothing that deserved to be imprisoned on.

There were nine inmates who stayed in the same jail with me and my friend, mostly from Iraq, they were also subjected to torture regularly with aqrab (scorpion) method among others. The charge of all of us was theft. When we inquired ISIS elements about the meaning of "optional exemption", they replied it was a judgment passed by the Islamic Caliphate in Raqqa and that the vice of Wali would inform us, but the vice of Wali just said we would be released without mentioning anything about what they call "optional". However, we were disappointed when both judges Abu Ahmad al-Maghrabi, from Morocco, and his deputy Abu Walid al-Iraqi, from Iraq, implemented the rule of retribution against us. We have been presented in front of the court for three times and never admitted anything, they have falsified the confession papers and wrote it was theft. In the afternoon of June 9, 2017,



specifically on the fourteenth day of Ramadan, following four months, except one day, of our arrest, they took my friend and I from the jail claiming that al-Hisbah apparatus is awaiting for us, and drove us back to the Islamic Police Station in Abu Kamal. We stayed for few hours while we were blindfolded, and we learned that al-Hisbah would come to take us."

Sixth: Implementation of the judgment

Saud remembered moments still engraved in his memory about the details of his hand amputation, notably that ISIS gunmen carried out the rule of retribution in the middle of Ramadan, although he was fasting. He said to STJ,

"Members of al-Hisbah came and asked: Where are those two who resisted an element of ISIS? Then one element pointed at us, and members of al-Hisbah asked us while we were blindfolded, how long have you two been in prison? we replied: for four months. He said: fear Allah, ask him for forgiveness, and repent to him, now your hands will be amputated. We answered: No God but Allah! Allah is the one who blessed us with our hands and he is the only one who can take them back, and no doubt that everything Allah has decreed will happen by His will. After that, they took my friend and I to a village called [al-Jalaa](#) that administratively follows Abu Kamal. All the way long, we were blindfolded in the car. I knew they were tying up my friend's hand and injecting him with anaesthetics drugs, so they could execute the rule of retribution, which was amputating his hand. After they asked where he was from, my friend answered that he was from Hatlah village in Deir az-Zor. they asked me the same question, and an element replied that I was from Abu Kamal, so they said they would implement my penalty in al-fayhaa Square in Abu Kamal. They did got off my friend from the car and drove me until we arrived at the square."

Soud added that when he arrived in al-Fayhaa square in Abu Kamal, members of al-Hisbah read out a statement in front of him saying that both Soud al-Houtaimi and his friend Ahad Mohammed al-Sheikh, were convicted of stealing and assaulting the elements of ISIS organization, and that the right hand of each of them will be amputated. Very quickly, members



of al-Hisbah got off Soud from the car, handcuffed him, and injected him with three anesthetic injections, which he felt its prick. In this regard, he continued:

"Each member of al-Hisbah grabbed one of my limbs and prevented me from movement; although I was blindfolded, I knew they were Iraqis through their dialect, I told them that I was fasting, so they answered that I was permissible to break the fast according to the Sharia. After that they asked me to get down on my knees and stretch my right hand, so I did. I did not feel my hand as if it was paralyzed due to the anesthesia. They tied one of my fingers with a fine thread and an element pulled it hard in order to clarify the hinge joint. There was an element carrying a sharp machete to hit with. I felt nothing but three strikes with a machete on my right hand. Then I found them carrying me to the ambulance and my right hand was cut off, and they asked me to lay on my back in the car. There, I found my friend bleeding after they had amputated his right hand as well. Even though the amputation was in the afternoon, they performed the surgical work before the evening given the hospitals were piled up with their gunmen, because aircraft of the international coalition was bombarding their positions at the time. There were dozens of wounded of them".



Image of the survivor Soud al-Houtaimi, taken in May 2018. Photo credit: STJ



By the evening, Soud was entered into the surgical room before his friend as his hand was bleeding hard. He was injected with two anaesthetics, and he woke up from his coma on Saturday dawn, 10 June 2017. He found his hand amputated, bandaged and tied to his neck, and there was one of the nurses who was changing the bandage. For his friend, Ahad, he woke up about a quarter of an hour later, and on the same day, elements of ISIS released them.

Seventh: Fleeing ISIS-Held Areas

The tragedy of Soud did not end despite being released by ISIS, as he could not lead his life as usual. Therefore, he had to flee with his friend Ahad from ISIS-held areas because they were frightened of the harm that may be inflicted on them by ISIS organization. Soud ended his speech to STJ saying,

"My friend and I fled from Abu Kamal six days after the incident because we were constantly watched by their elements. On Friday, 16 June 2017, I left Abu Kamal for the village of al-Asharaa located in the countryside of al-Mayadin where I had some relatives. I stayed for two days then I went to Mansoura village in Raqqa. After that, I went to Azaz in Aleppo countryside where I remained for 10 days. After all, I displaced to a camp in Mabrouka town in the countryside of Ras al-Ayn/Sri Kani."

❖ *The interview was conducted in May 2018.*