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*The Depot Belongs to an Arms Dealer Affiliated with Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham/HTS*

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## Preface

At least 67 killed and more than 70 injured in a massive ammunition depot explosion rocked Sarmada town<sup>1</sup> on August 12, 2018, which, according to many testimonies obtained by STJ, caused by an unexplained fire broken in it. The depot located in a residential area inside a populated building which resulted to its destruction and several nearby residential buildings which were collapsed completely over their inhabitants.

The exploded depot belongs to Abu Yazan al-Masri, an HTS agent, and is one of the important arms dealers in northern Syria. He also had ties with most of the armed factions in the region.

The depot is in a residential building consists of two blocks, five storeys each, populated by IDPs from Homs, Damascus countryside, Aleppo and Idlib provinces, STJ field researcher reported.

The fire caused the ammunition within the depot to ignite then great fires set and caused a huge blast. Full buildings collapsed over the heads of the residents. Among the dead were four administrative officials in the economic office of HTS. Fire was set in the adjacent building as well. The explosion was the first of its kind in Sarmada which caused a state of horror among the locals and IDPs.

HTS has recently investigated the incident but the findings have yet to be revealed. It's worth mentioning that insecurity has recently prevailed in Idlib as it witnessed number of violent incidents.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Located in Idlib countryside near Bab al-Hawa border crossing between Syria and Turkey, controlled by Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham /HTS.

<sup>2</sup> "A Remarkable Increase In Killings and Abductions of Civilians Due to Insecurity- Idlib province", STJ, July 5, 2018; <https://www.stj-sy.com/en/view/618>, (Last visit: August 30, 2018)

## Details of the incident

At 4:20 a.m. on August 12, 2018, successive explosions shook Sarmada town, as reported to STJ by Ibrahim al-Issa, a survivor, who said:

**"I displaced with my family from Homs province towards Sarmada eight months ago. We resided in a building near Bab al-Hawa, border crossing with Turkey. On August 12, 2018, we heard screams and several small explosions, I rushed to the balcony and saw that the adjacent building was on fire. Within minutes, I hurried with my children and pregnant wife downstairs to ride the car and fly away, but ammunitions blast got greater and the fire was spreading rapidly and taking over everything. It was rough moments, we got stuck downstairs while it was set on fire, the civil defense arrived but the situation became more dangerous, as the buildings started falling very suddenly and rapidly. I've survived but my children and wife didn't, I look for their bodies everywhere but with no avail. I didn't even imagine my family to die in an ammunition depot explosion after we fled bombardments in our hometown. My life has become a living hell."**





Aftermath of the ammunition depot explosion in Sarmada town. [Photo credit: the Syrian Civil Defense in Idlib province](#)

Ghaith al-Haj, a media activist from Sarmada, told STJ that the police asked for the ID before allowing anyone to go in the blast site, and most of the witnesses he interviewed, assured that what happened was an explosion of an ammunition depot.

**"Half an hour following the explosion, the rescue teams managed to get out some people alive, including a child, from under the rubble. The depot blast death toll reached 36 and rose later, by 8 p.m., to 67, mostly women and children, it also resulted in 70 injuries, 17 of which were transferred to Turkish hospitals for being serious, which means the number of deaths is likely to rise. The depot's building and the adjacent were all destroyed, which most of their residents were IDPs, according to the Syrian Civil Defense in Sarmada. Regarding the cause of the explosion, most witnesses assured that it was an ammunition depot blast, that it can't a missile or a car bomb since it didn't leave a big crater. It was found out that the depot owned by a person called Abu Yazan al-Homsi from Homs province; who lost his family in the explosion as well." Al-Haj added.**

Mohammed al-Hussein, a witness from Sarmada who lives near the impact site, reported that on the dawn of August 12, 2018, he heard successive small explosions followed by a huge explosion and great fires. He told STJ:

**“I was 200 meters away from the blast site, the scene was horrific; there were intermittent explosions, their sound was like ballistics. The Civil Defense teams were attempting to put out the fire when the rescue teams and the emergency teams arrived. It found that it was a blast of an ammunition depot, which belongs to an arms dealer identified as Abu Yazan al-Homsi who lives with his family in the same building which was razed to the ground. The deaths resulted from this tragedy event reached 67 including women and children, dozens of unidentified victims and some fighters of armed factions. In response to the incident, we, Sarmada townspeople, issued an official statement represented by “Free Sarmada Revolutionaries” in which we stressed that anybody shall be denied endangering the lives of civilians by placing a weapons depot in a civilian place”.**

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم  
 بيان هام من ثوار سرمدا  
 البيان رقم ( 1 )

بعد المأساة التي تعرض لها الأهالي صباح يوم الأحد الموافق 12/8/2018 في  
 حادثة التفجير والتي تسببت بإنهيار مبنيين كاملين فوق رؤوس قاطنهم مما أسفر عن  
 عشرات الشهداء والجرحى فإننا ثوار سرمدا نهيب بأهلنا القاطنين في سرمدا ما يلي :

1- تبلغنا عن أي مستودع يشك بأنه يحوي على مواد متفجرة أو أسلحة داخل المدينة ونحن  
 سنقوم بإخراجه بالتعاون مع الجهات المختصة فوراً حتى لو اضطررنا لاستعمال القوة.

2- قبل شراء أي شقة في أي بناء سكني الطلب من صاحب البناء إبراز الورقيات  
 والمخططات التي تثبت سلامة ومثانة البناء ومراجعة المجلس المحلي للتأكد من مصداقية  
 هذه الورقيات.

3- التعاون مع المجلس المحلي وتبليغه عن أي تجاوز بأمور البناء وذلك للمساعدة في  
 إيقاف التجار المتجاوزين عند حددهم.

الرحمة لشهدائنا والشفاء العاجل لجرحانا  
 والنصر لثورتنا بإذن الله

ثوار سرمدا الحرة  
 14/8/2018

لنعبيدها سيرتها الأولى

The statement issued by the Free Sarmada Revolutionaries on August 14, 2018 regarding the  
 explosion of an ammunition depot in Sarmada. Photo credit: [Sarmada Coordination](#)

The director of the Civil Defense center in Harem district located in Idlib testified to  
 STJ that at 4:20 a.m. on August 12, 2018 he heard a huge explosion that shook Sarmada near  
 Bab al-Hawa border crossing with Turkey. He added that the Civil Defense team headed to  
 the impact site as soon as they heard the explosion.

**"Immediately after the fire fighters put out the fires the rescue teams started  
 removing rubbles. Some buildings were razed to the ground which required cranes  
 to lift. We managed to pull 17 persons alive, including women and children, and we  
 documented the death of 67 others and the injury of dozens. The Civil Defense team**

continued working until the next day attempting to rescue as many as possible. it was a rough day for civilians and the civil defense teams as well". He recounted.

The Syrian Civil Defense in Idlib province posted a statement on its official Facebook page on August 12, 2018, stating that an unknown huge blast hit the square of the old Bab al-Hawa border crossing located in Sarmada killing dozens and the number is likely to increase.



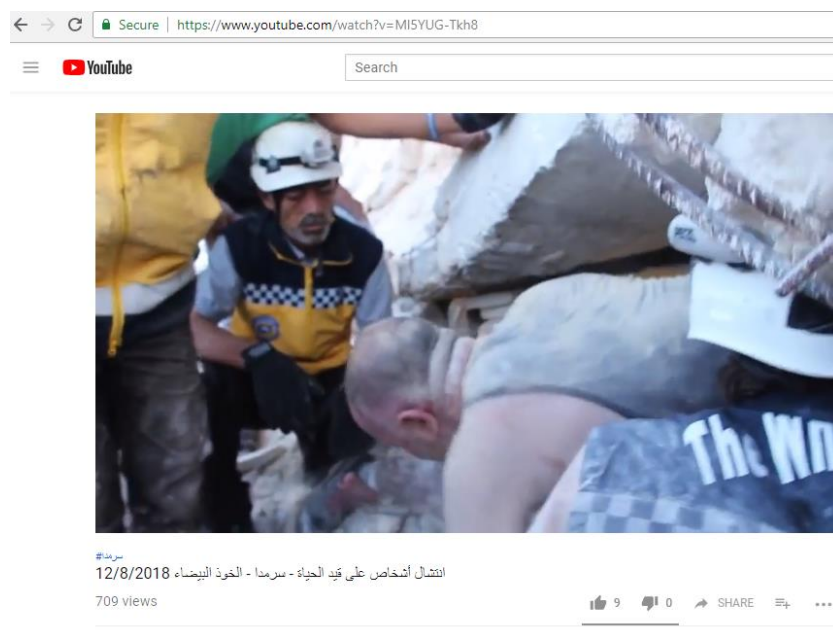
The statement posted by the Syrian Civil Defense in Idlib province regarding the blast in Sarmada on August 12, 2018. Photo credit: [the Syrian Civil Defense in Idlib province](#)





Attempts by the Civil Defense pulling out the trapped from under the rubble following the explosion that shook Sarmada city on August 12, 2018. Photo credit: [the Syrian Civil Defense in Idlib province](#).

The Syrian Civil Defense in Idlib province published a [footage](#) on August 12, 2018, shows its teams' attempts to pull out the survivors trapped under the rubble as a result of the ammunition depot explosion in Sarmada on August 12, 2018.



A still taken from the [previous footage](#) showing attempts by the Syrian Civil Defense to get out the trapped from under the rubble.

STJ field researcher documented some victims of the ammunition depot explosion in Sarmada, on August 12, 2018:

- **Civilian victims**

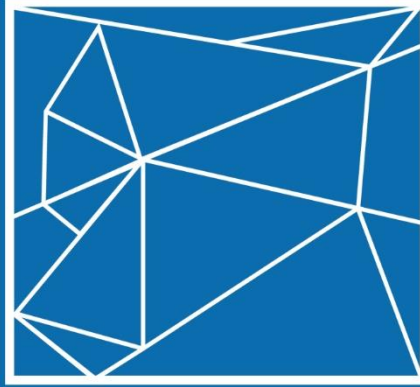
1. Tasneem Ahmad Omar al-Ahmad (a girl child), from al-Tah city.
2. Shahad Mahmoud Omar al-Ahmad (a girl child), from al-Tah city.
3. Reem Ahmad Omar al-Ahmad (a girl child), from al-Tah city.
4. Omar Mostafa Omar al-Ahmad (a child), from al-Tah city.
5. Elav Mostafa Omar al-Ahmad (a girl child).
6. Islam Abdelhadi Farzat (a girl child), from Rastan.
7. Lubna Zaher Sa'ad al-Din (a girl child), from Rastan.
8. Lamis Zaher Sa'ad al-Din (a girl child), from Rastan.
9. Mohammed Abdelhadi Farzat (a child), from Rastan.
10. Rasheed Basel Mansour's child son, from Homs.
11. Reem Hamdan's child son, from Rastan.
12. Rahaf Ibrahim al-Issa (a girl child), from Rastan.
13. Lana Ibrahim al-Issa (a girl child), from Rastan.
14. Mahmoud al-Issa's child son, from Homs.
15. Basim Mansour (a child), from Homs.
16. Lojayan Abdelhadi Farzat (a girl child), from Rastan.
17. Mahmoud al-Issa's wife, from Homs.
18. Um Riyad, wife of Fadel al-Issa, from Homs.
19. Aynan Ayoub, from Homs.
20. Reem Hamdan, from Rastan.
21. Mariam Ayoub, wife Abdelhadi Farzat, from Rastan.
22. An unidentified woman.
23. Rashed Basil Mansour's wife, from Homs.
24. Wafa'a Ali al-Hassoun from al-Tah, wife of Mostafa Omar al-Ahmad.
25. Marwa Qattini from al-Tah, wife of Ahmad Omar al-Ahmad.
26. Ruba Awad, from Darayya.
27. Zaher Sa'ad al-Din's wife, from Rastan.

28. Ahmad Mohammed Omar al-Ahmad, from al-Tah.
29. Adnan Qaddour al-Ahmad, from al-Tah.
30. Baraa Sa'ad al-Din, from Rastan.
31. Zaher Sa'ad al-Din, from Rastan.
32. Shukri al-Homsi Abu Hozayfa, from Homs.
33. Abdulfatah al-Homsi, from Homs.
34. Abdelhadi Farzat, from Rastan.
35. Rasheed Basil Mansour, from Homs.
36. Mohammed Bahbouh, from Homs.
37. Taha Jober, form Homs.
38. Bashar al-Issa, from Homs.

- **Deaths of HTS**

1. Abu Abdul Rahman, the general director of HTS's economic office.
2. Abu Hozayfa, the follow-up department official of HTS's economic office.
3. Abu Yaser, the follow-up department administrative official of HTS's economic office.

سوريون  
من أجل  
الحقيقة  
والعدالة  
Syrians  
For Truth  
& Justice



## About Syrians for Truth and Justice:

**STJ** is an independent, nongovernmental organization whose members include Syrian human rights defenders, advocates and academics of different backgrounds and nationalities.

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

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