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## ***At Least, 40 Civilians Arrested Recently in Hama***

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Hama's Military Security Branch launched waves of arrests against civilians recently on malicious accusations or pretexts like 'having links with terrorists' inside the rebel-held areas in Idlib province, and many were arrested while commuting from Idlib to regime-held areas in Hama.

In December 2018, STJ, by its field researcher, obtained oral testimonies of newly released prisoners from Hama's Military Security Branch, where some of them spent several months, while others stayed for only few days.

In the month of November 2018 alone, some 40 people, including men, youths and women, were arrested under various pretexts by the Military Security Branch, headed by the General Wafiq al-Naser. They were captured either at the checkpoint at the entrance to the regime-held Morek town or on their way from Idlib to Hama to receive their salaries, according to STJ's field researcher.

A mother and her four-month-old baby, who had a heart condition, were among those arrested. They were captured on a malicious accusation, on 3 November 2018. However, the baby was freed after a large bribe was paid, while the mother was transferred to several security branches before she ended up in Adra Central Prison.<sup>1</sup>

## I. "That's how those who raised terrorists end"

Hussein M., 60, from Kafr Zita, a father of three opposition fighters on rural Hama frontlines, was arrested from his house in Hama in August 2018 and detained for four months in severe conditions at the Military Security Branch before being released in November 2018. He recalled:

**"At midnight, agents of the Military Security stormed my home. They forced me out savagely in the presence of my family and drove me to their branch, where I was thrown in a small cell. A while after, an officer called Ali, interrogated me. He mainly asked about my three sons and their whereabouts. I kept answering, I know nothing about them, he beat me brutally on the back until I could no longer stand or move. There were agents watching and laughing at me, they said literally "That's how those who raised terrorists end". They ignored all my pleas to take pity on my old age and beat me severely then sent me back to the cell which contained dozens of inmates. Two months later, my health situation deteriorated due to severe torture till I fainted one day, and a fellow detainee called for the prisoners saying, "there is a man here dying". They sent a doctor to examine me. I was**

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<sup>1</sup> "Hama: Mother and Her Infant Girl Arrested by Military Security Services due to Malicious Report", STJ, 7 December 2018. <https://www.stj-sy.com/en/view/1055>.

**diagnosed with renal failure, and thus released after enduring four months in custody".**

Fadi, a former detainee, testified about torturing inmates at the Military Branch in Hama saying that they were beaten by iron chains, and be strapped face-up on a foldable wooden board, and one end is brought up to the other, which cause severe pain to the spine. Torture used to take several consecutive hours to extract coerced confessions.

## **II. “He lost his mind being subjected to severe beatings”**

In mid-March 2018, the witness Amir. A. 38, who is a father of three children was arrested on charges of aiding opposition groups. He spent eight months in detention and released in November 2018.

He testified:

**"Military security agents arrested me in front of my children, my wife, and my mother. They pushed me down the stairs, and then put me in a Hilux truck. I remember that I got beaten on the head and blacked out. I regained consciousness in a dark cell full of mice and insects. After a while, I was taken to the interrogation room, where the story began. The interrogator was talking to a female stool pigeon saying 'do not worry. He is here and I will not let him go but to the grave'. Then, the interrogator enquired about my work. I told him I am an employee in a health facility. He accused me of treating wounded terrorists, but I denied. He started beating me on the head. He ordered the wardens to place me in a Shabah position (ghost) for two consecutive days so that they could extract coerced confessions. After they got enough of me, they threw me in a solitary confinement, bleeding. They denied me any access of water or food. They threatened to expose me to Shabah position once again if I keep denying."**

Days later, he was brought to the court in the al-Sharia neighborhood in Hama and forced to sign under baseless accusations and confessions. After that, he was transferred to the Hama Central Prison where he stayed for eight months. He was discharged after his family paid large sums of money to lawyers, the witness added.

**"I met a detainee who lost his mind due to sever beatings and torture. I remember once when I sat next to him, he held on to me and said "Mom, please hide me, I do not want to go to them. Mom, please". Although he was about 40 years old, he could not differentiate between his mother or any**

other person because he was beaten brutally. Constantly he knelt on his knees calling for his mother. He was detained on charges of aiding families of opposition fighters".

### III. "I was detained for sharing name with a wanted"

Ahmad. A. released recently from the Military Security Branch. He was captured at a Syrian regime-operated checkpoint on the Salamiyah-Homs road, for sharing name with an opposition fighter:

"During my imprisonment, I met tens of detainees who were either defectors wanted to return to 'the motherland', or military service evaders. They were tortured to confess names of activists, opponents, and fighters. There were also defectors who signed reconciliation with the regime. However, they were exposed to various types of torture, by electric shocks, Shabah position, or the "tyre" (dulab). At first, I was put in a cell, no more than 6 meters, with dozens of other detainees. We could not sleep since there was no enough space", Ahmad said.

Ahmad reported he saw a deserter from the Syrian army. He was detained, despite he had conducted reconciliation in Morek town in Hama. The deserter told Ahmad that he was interrogated to uncover names of media persons, deserters, and opponents to the government:

"That man told me that he surrendered after they arrested his septuagenarian mother and threatened to kill her. However, I was released after ascertaining my identity and they apologized saying that my name is similar to that of an alleged terrorist", Ahmad added.

### IV. "I spent six months in detention because of a malicious report"

In February 2018, Shadi. KG. 20, came back to Hama from Saudi Arabia to continue his education, but, however, he was arrested and stayed for six months in jail, and released later in August 2018.

"I was arrested from my home in Hama due to a false report filed against me. I was held in a solitary confinement. I heard screams of male and female detainees being tortured. I cried bitterly for them. After four days I was sent to the interrogation room, where a veiled man was sitting beside the interrogator, he pointed at me and shouted 'this is the man who does riot in the city. I recognized the voice, he was a stool pigeon from my neighborhood. I denied all the accusations, but an officer beat me savagely all over my body. He was shouting at me 'you want freedom, huh? take it'. After that, I was placed in a cell with several detainees. I stayed there for six months and then

freed in August 2018, by a prisoner swap agreement conducted between the Syrian regime and the armed groups”.

## V. Women arrested for their sons are in opposition-controlled areas

Women were not spared even, as in May 2018, Fatima Mohammed, 40, was arrested at the Karaj checkpoint at the center of Hama, on charges of contacting her relatives in the rebel-held city of Idlib, and thus took to the Military Security Branch.

She narrated to STJ:

**"I stayed in a jail runs by the Military Branch for four months. Many women were arrested being mothers to youths who live in opposition-controlled areas in Hama and Idlib. Additionally, several girls, under 15, and some university female students were arrested for having family members in the opposition ranks.**

**A woman was arrested because her husband was an activist. She was captured on her way back from Idlib. They threatened to arrest her one-year-old baby if her husband wouldn't surrender.**

**A 15-year-old girl and her mother shared the same cell with me. They were arrested because the father and son were opponents to the government. The girl survived a suicide attempt. She could no longer stomach the psychological torture being practiced over her and her mother. They both are still in captivity."**

## VI. "60 arrests recorded in two months"

Abu Adam, an activist, reported to STJ that the arrest campaign against civilians commuting from rebel-held Idlib to regime-held Hama has increased dramatically. At least 60 cases have been documented between October and November 3018. The government wants them to confess names of their relatives who live in the armed groups-controlled areas.

**"I was told by a civilian came from Hama that the regime's checkpoint near Morek town is the most notorious, the majority of the arrested have been captured at it. Female officers dressed in military uniforms are tasked to search only the women. One day, they found \$300 in the purse of a woman in her seventies, they shouted, she is a terrorist, and arrested her. The passengers begged the officers to let her go, but they were threatened with arrest, and the bus driver was ordered to leave. Later, we learned she was taken to the Military Security Branch of Hama", Abu Adam said.**



## 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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