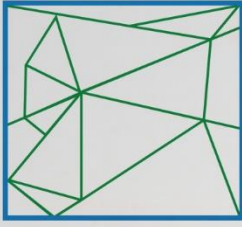


سوريون
من أجل
الحقيقة
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Syrians
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Syrian
citizenship
disappeared
report

November 2018

ملف
البيان

How could you be a Foreigner with an Arabic Tongue

Statement of Mahmoud al-Muhammad
bin Ismail



"How could you be a Foreigner with an Arabic Tongue?!"

Statement of Mahmoud al-Muhammad bin Ismail

Mahmoud always feels ashamed whenever he present his “

red card, that he considers worthless, since it is for stateless Syrian Kurds, who are deprived of all of his citizenship rights.

Mahmoud al-Muhammad bin Ismail was born in the al-Qahtaniyah/Tarbassiyah town in al-Hasakah Governorate in 1960. He is now married with nine children. Most of Mahmoud's family members are stateless, specifically *ajanib*¹ including his father and children. Mahmoud spoke to STJ field researcher during an interview conducted in March 2018:

"My father owned a small shop in Soufia village, al-Qahtaniyah, which was the only one of its kind there, and he was well known among villagers. He became an *ajnabi* as a result of the census, without knowing why and his status was transmitted to me and my siblings. However, in spite of this, my brother was forced to perform compulsory military service in the Syrian army, spending three years and a half in Ad Dumayr city-Damascus countryside, before he was discharged and given back his red card. After three months, his name was included in reserve military service lists, but he went to the Conscription Division and told the officials that he would not serve this time, even if they threatened to chop him to pieces. He asked them to grant him Syrian nationality, but they refused, they took his service book and asked him to leave."

Mahmoud always feels ashamed of his red card, so he hated to travel inside the Syrian governorates because he had to present it to the checkpoints agents. When on one occasion, while travelling to Palmyra city, Syrian police officers stopped the bus, and asked for IDs, they mocked him:

"When they saw my red card, they asked: "what is this stuff?" I answered that it is my identification certificate which I hold instead of the ID since I'm an *ajnabi*. One of them laughed at me saying: "how could you be a foreigner with an Arabic tongue?!" I replied: "If you don't know the meaning of *ajnabi*, go and ask those above you". Thank God, I wasn't grounded after I mocked him."

In 2011, following the announcement of the naturalization of the *ajanib* decree, I headed to the village market where many people had gathered, as reporters of the pro-government Addounia TV channel were holding meetings with the villagers asking about the decree. They asked me for an interview since they were told that I'm an *ajnabi*. I got scared at first but then I decided to talk about my suffering. I told them that I had lived all my 50 years as a stateless, and now I'm proud of my red card. That the ID means nothing to me, but it could be useful for my children."

¹ Sing. *ajnabi*/*ajnabiyah*, literally »foreigners« i.e. stateless. unregistered stateless people.

As a stateless, Mahmoud was not able to choose the profession he liked to practice. He was once offered to work as a driver in the "Fire department" in the Rmelan town in al-Hasakah Governorate, but when the officials learned that he was *ajnabi* he was rejected:

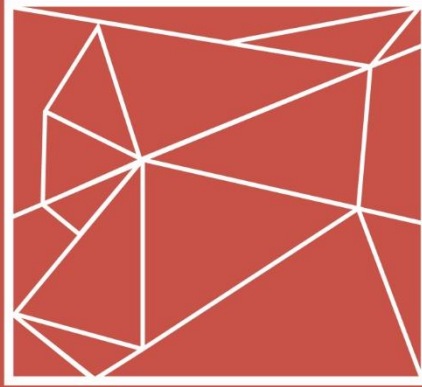
"I was offered a job as a driver on Damascus road by a company, but when they found out that I am an *ajnabi*, because it was written on my driver's license, they declined it. I also remember when I went to a hotel in Damascus to stay in, the owners asked me to get permission from the Hotel Division first. I would very much have liked to travel to Lebanon, but I was not permitted, while my friends with Syrian nationality used to travel there easily. As for my children, although they were very good at school they couldn't complete their education. Two of them dropped out after the secondary level, and another did not complete his university studies. They always said, "Why should we study if we won't be employed eventually?""

Mahmoud submitted his papers several times to the Civil Status Department in his hometown, hoping to obtain Syrian citizenship. Following decree No. 49, on naturalization of *ajanib* in 2011, he went to the Civil Status Department in Damascus to explain his status to them:

"I explained my legal status and the difficulties it caused to me in life, like being a taxi driver with a personal driver's license not a chauffeur license, and how I was often given traffic tickets because of that. They gave me an exception to obtain one, and when I returned to al-Hasakah I managed to get an operator's license, class D, which is the best of its kind. However, I was stopped once by a traffic officer, who asked me to present my driver's license, and when I showed him both the operator and the personal ones, he wondered how an *ajnabi* could obtain an operator license. He accused me of falsifying it, and I was taken to the police station as a result. They confirmed my words, and the officer-in-charge asked the policeman to apologize, but he said, "This is the first time I see an *ajnabi* holding an operator's license!"

After numerous attempts, Mahmoud managed to obtain Syrian citizenship, but he said that it was too late and he no longer needed it, since he became an elderly.

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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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