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The witness Rasheed Hasan Hussein

**We have been like"  
strangers in our own  
"country**

Statement of Rasheed Hasan Hussein



Syrian  
citizenship  
disappeared  
report

October 2018

**"We have been like strangers in our own  
country"**

*Statement of Rasheed Hasan Hussein*

Rasheed was not able to master the Arabic language and not permitted to pursue education. Instead, he was forced to work as a house-painter at an early age to earn a living because he was the sole breadwinner for his family.

Rasheed Hasan Hussein was born in Ras al-Ayn, Sari Kani in 1977. He is married with two daughters. Today, 56 years after the special census that was conducted in 1962, Rasheed's family is still stateless, specifically from the *maktumeen*<sup>1</sup> class in Syria, which reinforced their sense of despair. Regarding this, Hussein spoke to STJ in July 2018:

**"All of my 11 family members including me are still stateless, except my mother who is a Syrian-born citizen. Following the issuance of Decree No.49 on the nationalization of *ajanib*, I submitted my papers to the Personal Status Department, and followed-up the matter for a full year, but to no avail. Every time I went there, the employees told me that they had received information said that the Syrian government would grant citizenship to *maktumeen* after it got done with the *ajanib*<sup>2</sup>.**

**I waited for more than a year, through which I followed-up the procedure of acquiring citizenship, and renewed my identification certificate at the Sharia Court in Ras al-Ayn, Sari Kani, in order to submit it to the Personal Status Department when the decree of nationalization of *maktumeen* would be issued. However, I was deeply disappointed later in mid-2012, when the same employees told me that the government wouldn't grant citizenship to *maktumeen*, and that decree No. 49 mentioned the *ajanib* only and didn't extend to *maktumeen*. Since then, I have been to the Personal Status Department several times to follow-up the matter, but with no result. However, by the beginning of 2018, some of my *maktumeen* relatives managed to obtain citizenship and received the family book through a lawyer who has ties to Syrian government, after paying 2 million Syrian pounds per family book. They told me that it was the only way to become citizens. Actually, I went to that lawyer and he told me that he could help me get nationality in legal ways, changing our legal status from *maktumeen* to *ajanib* and then to citizens, according to decree No. 49, in exchange for 2 million Syrian pounds. It did not include the costs of the family book and the IDs of all the family members. But, alas we don't have any leverage, we are poor and have nothing to count on, thus we will remain stateless, waiting for something to change."**

Rasheed works as a house-painter, to earn his family's livelihood, since he is its only breadwinner:

**"I've been working in house-painting since I first got into the workforce. It's the only way to secure a living for my family, which consists of my wife, daughter, mother and sisters,**

<sup>1</sup> Sing. maktum/maktumah, i. e., unregistered stateless people.

<sup>2</sup> Sing. ajnabi/ajnabiyah, literally »foreigners« i.e. stateless. unregistered stateless people.

since I am not permitted to work for governmental institutions, because I'm a *maktum*. Even the private sector doesn't prefer to employ us due to the fact that we have no recognized official identity documents. That is why we are so poor, we only have a house in Ras al-Ayn/Sari Kani, which we inherited from my father, and is still registered in the name of one of his friends, because we do not have the right to own real estate, land, car or anything else. Unfortunately, our status has not changed after the decree No. 49, as we expected, and I wonder when we will get our legitimate right to be citizens."

Rasheed Hussein acquired Arabic-language literacy before he dropped out of school when he was only at the sixth grade, to earn a living for his family, which still suffers the deprivation of the most basic social rights:

"All my family have not been taught beyond primary school, because we are not entitled to a graduation certificate from Syrian universities, public and private. Even our enrolment in primary school requires a residence permit from the *mukhtar*<sup>3</sup>, so I dropped out at the sixth grade in order to earn an income. I kept reading books and magazines, so that I wouldn't be ignorant. Regarding health care, we are not permitted to receive treatment in government hospitals, except in emergency. We still have to get treatment in private hospitals and clinics, that are expensive."

Rasheed Hussein said that it's really difficult to get used to being *maktum* in Syria:

"We did not have the right to stand for election or to vote at any stage of the political process in Syria, because we did not have any proof of identity. However, over the last four years, we have exercised those rights in the Autonomous Administration elections, because they are not recognized by the Syrian law, which considers us as strangers or outsiders. Even worse, since we are not considered Syrian citizens, we are not allowed to travel abroad, and can only move inside Syria. We are also not permitted to stay in hotels, since we don't hold IDs. Furthermore, mine and my brother's marriages are not legally registered, but just under an Islamic marriage contract. I do not have any Syrian documents so far, except for the identification certificate certified by the Sharia Court in Ras al-Ayn/Sari Kani, which proves that I am a *maktum*."

"Rasheed Hussein" said that the only way to compensate the *maktumeen* is by granting them citizenship and apologize to them:

"I've gone through many awkward situations all my life because of being a stateless. Our situation is more difficult than the *ajanib*'s, since they hold a proof of identity the red cards. They are still mocked by some people who called them "the cows' cards". I recall when I was in the elementary school, that some students used to mock me unintentionally because I am a *maktum*, I was also not allowed to participate in school activities such as the pioneer competitions and the Vanguard Camp, which led me to

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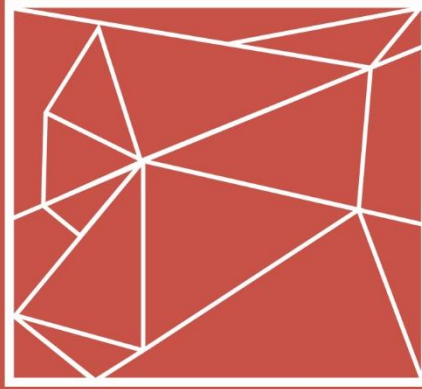
<sup>3</sup> The head of the neighborhood.



alienation, and I started to feel that studying is useless. We have been treated as strangers in our country. The situation outside al-Hasakah was far worse. The employees of government institutions and the ordinary people are not familiar with the *maktumeen* issue, and when I tell them that I don't have a Syrian ID, they think I'm a foreigner.

In my opinion, the only way to compensate the Kurds is to grant citizenship to all the *maktumeen*, and to give them all the legal documents to be rehabilitated. I just hope it's soon. Besides, males over the age of 19 must be exempted from military service.”

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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