

“Ain Issa Camp” Destination for the Fleeing from Deir ez-Zur Battles and Prior to that the Fleeing from Ar-Raqqa Battles
“Up To Five Thousand Displaced People Arrived the Camp after the Battles of Deir ez-Zur Province”

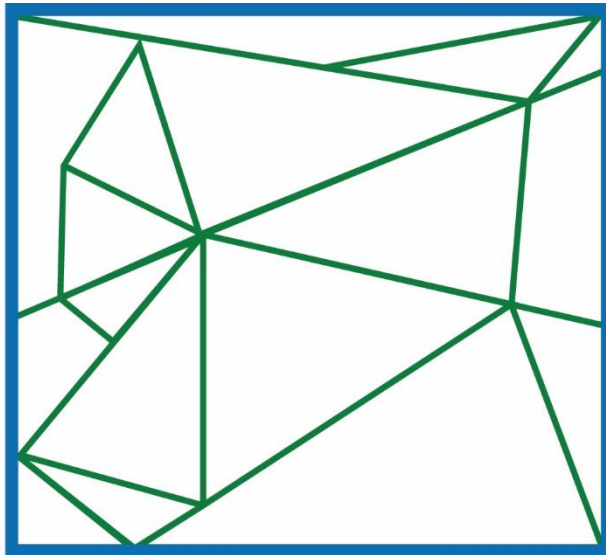
About Syrians for Truth and Justice/STJ

[Syrians for Truth and Justice /STJ](#) is a nonprofit, nongovernmental, independent Syrian organization. STJ includes many defenders and human rights defenders from Syria and from different backgrounds and affiliations, including academics of other nationalities.

The organization works for Syria, where all Syrians, without discrimination, should be accorded dignity, justice and equal human rights.

سوريون
من أجل
الحقيقة
والعدالة

Syrians
For Truth
& Justice





Preface:

Thousands of displaced persons in Ain Issa Camp, about 55 km north of [Ar-Raqqa](#) city, are still suffering very difficult humanitarian conditions owing to the lack of basic services provided to them, such as shortages of foodstuffs and poor medical status. According to a [Syrians for Truth and Justice/STJ](#) reporter, dozens of families did flock, and are still, daily to the camp, fleeing the military operations that [Deir ez-Zur](#)¹ province witnessed and has been witnessing against the organization of the Islamic State or as it is known as ISIS². Besides, the camp is a shelter for thousands of families that displaced from Ar-Raqqa during the fierce battles in the city just before controlling it by Syrian democratic forces/SDF³ of and expelling ISIS troops on October 21, 2017.

¹ On September 9, 2017, the "Deir ez-Zur Military Junta", affiliated with the Syrian Democratic Forces/SDF, launched the battle of the "Island Storm", backed by international coalition forces in order to control the remaining southern countryside of al-Hasakeh which is under the control of the Islamic State/ISIS, in addition to eastern regions of the Euphrates, which administratively follow Deir ez-Zur province.

The Syrian regular forces had previously announced, in June 2017, the battle of Deir ez-Zur in order to expel Islamic State militants from the western side of the Euphrates River, these battles accompanied with very violent Russian and Syrian bombardments as well as airstrikes by international coalition aircrafts, and led to daily displacement of people of Deir ez-Zur. The number reached from 1,500 to 2000 displaced who headed towards areas held by Autonomous Administration.

² Islamic State, also known as ISIS, emerged for the first time after the conflict onset in Syria in 2011, under the name of Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sham. But in April 2013 it was promoted as a result of a merger between Islamic State of Iraq on the one hand and al-Nusra Front, on the other hand, before the latter refused to do so, and asked al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri the new organization to focus on Iraq, and leave Syria to al-Nusra Front at that time.

Prior this date, the organization was active in Iraq under the name of Jama'at al-Tawhid Wa'al Jihad" before becoming al-Qaeda in Mesopotamia after Abu Musab al-Zarqawi became the leader in 2004 and announced pledging allegiance to the former al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden.

After killing Abu Musab al-Zarqawi by US forces in 2006, Abu Hamza al-Muhajjer became the leader, and declared after a few months formation of the Islamic State of Iraq but under the leadership of "Abi Omar al-Baghdadi" and "Abu Hamza al-Muhajjer became an assistant of the leader of the organization.

Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, "Abdullah Ibrahim", the successor of Abi Omar al-Baghdadi had proclaimed, on June 29, 2014, forming The Islamic Caliphate, called himself "Caliph of the Muslims", and assigned Raqqa, a Syrian city, the capital of the organization.

³ It is known as QSD and as SDF in English; it is a coalition of fighters from different backgrounds (Kurdish, Arabic, Syriac, Armenian and Turkmen). It was officially established on Oct. 11, 2015 at a press conference in al-Hasakeh, and YPG is its basic nerve. It consists of 27 military faction, they are (Tajamouh alweat al-Jazira, The Kurds front, Jabhat Thwar Raqqa, Al-Sanadid Forces, Aleppo Ashaar Forces, North Sun Brigades, Ahrar Jarablus Brigad, Tajamouh Furat Jarablus Brigade, Al Furat Martyrs Brigade, Al-Sad Martyrs Battalion, Liwa Tahrir Brigade, Seljuk Brigade, Sultan Salim Brigade, Liwa al Qa'qaa, Special Task Brigade 455, Al-Hasakah Martyrs Brigade, Martyrs of Tal Brak, Brigade of Tal Hammais Martyrs, Al-Jazaa Martyrs Brigade, Rawia Martyrs Brigade Tajamouh alweat Al Furat, Karhok Brigade of the Martyrs, Mabrouk Martyrs Brigade, AinJalot Brigade, Brigade 99 Infantry, Syriac Military Junta, People's Protection Units YPG, Women's Protection Units YPJ). It is mainly supported by the US-led international coalition leading the war against ISIS in Syria and Iraq.

Autonomous Administration opened Ain Issa Camp in the north of [Ain Issa](#) town in October 2016 in order to house displaced persons fleeing Ar-Raqqa city and its countryside prior to the expulsion of ISIS troops. The camp has 1,135 tents, in addition to 9 tents of bigger size in order to receive the new displaced; the number of the displaced families to the camp since its establishment has reached about 1,500 families, which means about 8,000 displaced persons from various regions until the date of writing this report, as the administration of Ain Issa Camp sated.

Despite the presence of other congregations of displaced civilians, either near [ash-Shaddadi](#) town in the southern countryside of al-Hasakeh city, like Qana Camp, or even near Karama town east of Ar-Raqqa city, like Karama Camp; both are the first points of access for the displaced. Nonetheless, those displaced people always prefer to reach Ain Issa Camp, due to its distance from the areas of tension, and the services it offers are slightly better, compared to the congregations other civilians, as many residents of the camp confirmed to STJ in late September and early October 2017.



Image shows one of the families displaced at the beginning of October 2017 to Ain Issa Camp, north of Ar-Raqqa city.

Photo credit: STJ

The camp administration is expanding Ain Issa camp, in order to accommodate more displaced people from Deir ez-Zur province, cities of Mayadin, al-Bukamal among others. Raqqa Civil Council stated that the number of displaced persons in Deir ez-Zur has reached about 5,000 since September 18, 2017, mostly women, children, the elderly and those with special needs; the Civil Council has set up for about 100 temporary tents to accommodate them.



The approximate location of Ain Issa Camp.



Image showing a side of the tents in Ain Issa Camp, north of Ar-Raqqa city, taken in late September 2017.

Photo credit: STJ

First: Arrival Tents in Ain Issa Camp

There are 9 tents; the length of each one is 10 meters, with a width of 3 meters. They accommodate the displaced persons who newly arrive the camp, and each tent can accommodate approximately 7-10 families with very little and poor services. With the large rush of displaced persons from the areas of Deir ez-Zur, the camp's capacity to accommodate those fleeing the brutality of the war becomes more difficult.



Hadiya Mohammed, 40; fled with her family of 8 members from Madan town located in Deir ez-Zur province due to the intensity of military operations between Syrian regular forces on the one hand and ISIS, on the other. They arrived at Ain Issa camp on August 2, 2017, after crossing The Euphrates with difficulty to the other side; her husband remained behind the river and was unable to pass it, and in this regard, she spoke to STJ saying:

"The people in charge of the camp give us one meal a day, specifically in the afternoon, and we do not have enough mattresses nor blankets, so my children are always forced to sleep on the floor, besides, we use our clothes as pillows under our heads. Since we got to the camp, we have not seen any of its directors; all we wish from them is to help us provide blankets and mattresses for our children. I have been thinking seriously about leaving for Kalta village located in the southeast of Ain Isa Town, where some of my relatives live because the services are very bad here."

Abdullah Mohammed, 18, also displaced from Madan town as a result of heavy shelling in the town by warplanes affiliated with the Syrian regular forces and its allies. He arrived at Ain Issa camp on August 2, 2017, and he assured to STJ that the warplanes were not only targeting the sites of ISIS organization in Madan, but they were also shelling everywhere in the town, either by cluster munitions or even explosive barrels, and in this connection, he continued:

"I fled with my family, composed of 10 people from Madan, and we got to Buhamad village, then we crossed the river by a ferry to an island on the other side. We continued our journey by a car to Ain Issa Camp, where its administration received us but did not provide us with any services; they just let us share the tent with other families in a large tent. However, bread and food here in the camp are much better than dying in Madan."



Image of the witness, Abdullah, one of the displaced persons in the Ain Issa Camp, north of Ar-Raqqa city, taken in late September 2017.

Photo credit: STJ

Zahra Abdul Samad, 37, is married with 9 children, she displaced due to the sneaking of some ISIS fighters into her hometown, Ain Issa, in mid-2014. She, along with her family, headed towards Tishreen village located near Ar-Raqqa, where she stayed there for two years and then went to Ain Issa Camp, when it was set up in late 2016. Zahra worked alongside the Syrian Democratic forces/SDF in checkup women, she talked about the situation in Ain Issa camp to STJ, saying:

"I volunteered in the inspection section to help SDF to protect our families as well. Once and during my work in the inspection, I found a woman who claimed she was pregnant and that she wants to reach Tell Abyad Hospital located in Tell Abyad town, north of Ar-Raqqa city, but we discovered that she was wearing booby-trapped on her body, and immediately we arrested her. In another occasion, we found some weapons, hashish, and drugs in the suitcases of some of the displaced women to the camp, as the organization ISIS believed that SDF do not exposed to women, so they were hiding their weapons, money and drug pills in their women's bags."



Zahra added that she had also volunteered along with other women to serve food for the displaced in the arrival tents as soon as they arrive. Zahra and the other women were cooking in a small tent at first; they were working from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m., in order to provide two meals for the residents of the camp. Three months ago, a civic organization adopted Zahra and her colleagues, and paid each one of them a monthly salary that reached 75 thousand Syrian pounds.

In another testimony of a woman⁴ who displaced to Ain Issa camp from Ar-Raqqa before SDF control it in October 2017, she confirmed that ISIS fighters prevented people from leaving, but she managed to escape from al-Mshalab neighborhood in Ar-Raqqa, specifically in the early morning hours and away from sight of ISIS fighters. She continued:

"I fled with my 9-member family, and then headed to a farm in al-Qadisiyah village, east of Ar-Raqqa, and we walked for four straight hours, whereas the horse's cart carried our stuff. We got to the farm where we stayed for two months, and we did not have any money to buy our food nor drink, until we heard about Ain Issa Camp, so we headed to it in July 2017."

Many of the interviewed displaced persons were talking about the exploitation they had been subjected to by human smugglers while fleeing from ISIS control areas given the areas were filled with mines planted by ISIS fighters, as well as there were headquarters and checkpoints run by ISIS in several places. All this forced people to seek a smuggler to bring them to the Euphrates River, According to STJ reporter.

⁴ She refused to disclose her identity for security purposes.



Image of one of the displaced families in the arrival tents in Ain Issa Camp, north of Ar-Raqqa, taken late of September 2017.

Photo credit: STJ



Another image shows some displaced children in the arrival tents in Ain Issa Camp, north of Ar-Raqqa, taken late of September 2017. Photo credit: STJ



Second: The Situation of the Residents of the Camp

According to STJ reporter, the tents in Ain Issa Camp are divided into 8 sections; each section contains (130-150) tents, housed by families that want to stay in the camp until security situations calm down in their areas or until they move to another place. Once they enter the camp, each family gets a tent with an area of 16 square meters, plus a number of mattresses, blankets, kitchen utensils and a rechargeable lamp. However, poor regulation and lack of materials have led to significant differences in the living conditions among the camp population.

Abdulwahab al-Mohammad 42, a resident of Ain Issa Camp, had succeeded to reach the camp in May 2017. Concerning the difficult humanitarian situation in the camp, he said to STJ:

"More than a year ago, I displaced with my family, composed of 7 members, from Dayr Hafir village, east of Aleppo, because of the outbreak of military clashes between Syrian regular forces and Syrian armed opposition factions. We headed to al-Mehdom village in Aleppo countryside and from it to as-Salhabiah village, west of Ar-Raqqa, and after a long and hard journey, we reached Ain Issa camp, and as soon as we arrived there, they gave us three mattresses and three blankets, and told us that this was our only entitlement."

According to STJ reporter, Ain Issa Camp has 76 bathrooms, 120 toilets, 46 kitchens, and about (200) water reservoirs distributed throughout the camp. The camp residents are suffering from a substantial food shortage, given the camp administration provides only one meal for these displaced persons. Because of the people's need for money to get food or clothing, many of them have resorted to selling aid provided to them by the organizations. In this regard, Abdulwahab Mohammed said to STJ:

"International organizations hand over assistance to UNHCR staff who are in the camp and, in the process of distribution, the first tents receive enough aid, whereas a large section of tents do not get anything. There is no specific mechanism for providing aid and food parcels, the distribution is carried out randomly, let alone the corruption and nepotism during the distribution process."



Image of Abdulwahab Mohammed, a displaced person in Ain Issa Camp, north of Al-Raqqa, taken in late September 2017.

Photo credit: STJ

Hussein Ali Sharif, born in Ar-Raqqa in 1971, succeeded in reaching Ain Issa Camp on June 21, 2017 after several attempts to flee from Ar-Raqqa, which was then held by ISIS, he said:

"On June 8, 2017, my family and I tried to flee from Ar-Raqqa, but ISIS fighters revealed our plan and took our identity cards and about thirty thousand Syrian pounds I was carrying with me as an expense to me and my family. One of the fighters told me that I had to get our identity cards from one of its centers located in Ar-Raqqa, but I searched for our identity cards in all the centers, and I did not find them, since ISIS fighters used to take identity cards in order to escape using them, so that they would not be revealed by SDF. In another attempt to flee, I went with my family towards al-Kasrat village in the southern countryside of Ar-Raqqa; we crossed the river by a small ferry, and then headed to SDF-held al-Karama village near Ar-Raqqa. In Al-Karama Camp, we stayed for about 4 days, and because of the deterioration of the humanitarian situation, we went to Ain Issa Camp."



Concerning the tragic situation in the camp, Hussein continued that there were thefts committed by staff of the camp administration without account. Hussein also noted that there are cars full of things that were supposed to be distributed to the camp residents a short time ago, but they were stolen, and no one mentioned them. Hussein confirmed that the monthly aid is provided to them with the beginning of each month, the aid includes (6) bottles of oil, a bag of rice, and (5) kilos of sugar, as well as some other stuff, such as bulgur, peas and salt. He explained that the electrical installations do not reach the tents, as it is only used to illuminate the camp, this prompt the displaced to use hand-held lamps that are charged by solar energy to light the tent at night.

Third: Accounts of the Displaced from ISIS and Reasons of their Escape

Zahra Abdel Samad said that she was forced to flee from her hometown of Ain Issa to Ar-Raqqa several times in 2014. When the opposition factions controlled the town and wrest it from Syrian regular army in late April 2014, Zahra was forced to flee towards Syrian regular forces-control areas in Ar-Raqqa, just prior ISIS control it in January 2014, she said:

"Following ISIS control over Ar-Raqqa, the city witnessed heavy shelling; we were living in the neighborhood adjacent to "Dawar an-Na'em" area; we saw acts of beheading there, and our children were afraid to sleep from the horror of these scenes. I remember very well how "Dawar an-Na'em, which means Paradise Roundabout" used to be filled with heads on the bars of the fences, therefore, it was called later "Dawar al-Jahim, which means the Hell Roundabout", besides, the Syrian/Russian aircraft have always bombarded this Roundabout, and on several occasions our house has been subjected to cracks as a result of this bombardment."



Zahra recalls that also "Duleh Roundabout" in the middle of Ar-Raqqa witnessed torture operations conducted by ISIS militants. There was also a prison for women who do not adhere to the regulations of the Organization. For example, uncovering their faces or eyebrows among other charges, citing an incident that occurred with one of the women who was pregnant, when ISIS agents accused her that she had uncovered her eyebrows, so they placed her in a cage located in "Duleh Roundabout", where she spent a whole night, and in the next day, the woman became lunatic and she lost her mind because of the horror and the panic she had experienced. Zahra added:

"Women were not allowed to go out without a muharam (a male relative), and the legal dress of women cost was about 6,000 Syrian pounds, although the financial situation of most families in the city did not allow them to afford it. Moreover, everyone in the city avoided contact with ISIS agents fearful of them, because if everyone opposed them, his life was turning upside down. I remained in this situation in Ar-Raqqa for about seven months, and then I went back along with my family to Ain Isa town that was then held by SDF on June 23, 2014. I remained there about 20 days before ISIS fighters could sneak inside the town by cars-bomb loaded with sheep, what compelled me to flee again."

Zahra added that she went to Tishreen⁵ village near Ain Issa town, where she suffered too much with her family, because ISIS agents accused her husband of working with SDF and providing water to them, although the drinking water in that village was not potable, and in every few period, the locals were buying a tank in order to manage their affairs. However, ISIS elements were not convinced by the version, as she expressed.

⁵ The village was then held by ISIS.



Maryam Suleiman al-Hammadi, 50, a woman who displaced from al-Kabash village, which was under ISIS control at the time, and near Ar-Raqqa, she fled with her son, who suffers from disabilities, and succeeded in reaching Ain Issa Camp in May 2017. In this regard, she said to STJ:

"I managed to flee with some villagers, through agricultural land west of Ar-Raqqa. I still remember how some civilians, who were fleeing, were exposed to mine explosions on the road, as ISIS fighters were sneaking among us in civilian clothing and riding motorcycles, claiming that they would guide us to the right way, and on their way back they were planting mines on the road, to prevent other groups escape from the same way."

In turn, Hussein Ali al-Sharif, recounted some of the practices of ISIS in Ar-Raqqa, noting that the majority of them were Turkish who obtained the German citizenship, as well as other nationalities such as Chinese, Chechen and Arab nationalities, such as Saudi Arabian, Moroccan and Qatari. In This connection, he continued:

"The task of the foreign fighters was only storming; some of them had considerable money and worked as traders. As I recall, there was a trader identified as Abu Yahiya al-Almani, the number one among ISIS in cars trade; there was also Abu Younis al-Almani, who was a merchant as well. The organization handed over its agents, who hold the Arab nationality, the rein of power of Ar-Raqqa."

According to Hussein Ali al-Sharif, ISIS was using both "Duleh Roundabout" and "Na'em Roundabout" located in Ar-Raqqa, as media points given the great overcrowding, in addition to the many shops there. He illustrated that fighters of the organization were placing two large screens in these areas to view their invasions, murders and beheading. He also noted that most elements of the organization had their own female captives/Sabaya to trade with, for example, girls at the age of 14 were sold for five thousand dollars or three thousand dollars. Hussein continued:



"When ISIS controlled Ar-Raqqa, most of the inhabitants of Ar-Raqqa left for Syrian regime-held areas, such as Damascus, Latakia, Tartous among others. Prior to that, Ar-Raqqa was a refuge for the people of provinces of Deir ez-Zur, Hama, Homs, Aleppo and other areas; people were mixed up and were living in schools as displaced or they were renting houses in Ar-Raqqa. Anyway, the organization was forcing people to stay in the city and not to leave it because they used people as human shields."

Hussein noted that ISIS fighters had a clever way to persuade young people and children to join them; this led Hussein to send his two sons to Turkey fearing that they would join the organization. Hussein added that the Organization had a monopoly on the fields of work in Ar-Raqqa, which means you either work with ISIS or you stay unemployed, and he said that ISIS paid the wages in dollars, and paid fully in order to tempt the young men, while corruption was in force among them to the highest degree.

Fourth: Health and Medical Care in the Camp

Among the internally displaced persons in Ein Issa Camp are 144 widow women, 76 divorced women, 191 disabled, and 706 children from newborn until the age of 16. There are also committees for health education and awareness-raising, but according to the available potentials. This was confirmed to STJ by Jalal al-Aiyaf, the chairperson of the Management Committee of Ein Issa camp, and in this regard, he spoke:

"Ein Isa Camp has a Médecins Sans Frontières health center to provide health services to the displaced, but the center suffers from a lack of doctors and kinds of medicines, for example, there is a gynecologist and a pediatrician, but they only attend once a week, and no one replaces them for the rest of the week."



Mona al-Ahmad's family, a family that has displaced from Ar-Raqqa to Ein Issa Camp since July 2017, has nothing but a tattered tent that lacks the simplest elements of living; the mother strives to secure a living for her family that consists of eight members, she says that her psychotic husband cannot do anything. Concerning the medical conditions in Ein Isa camp, Mona al-Ahmad said:

"One of my daughters who is 7 years old broke her leg while we were fleeing from the eastern neighborhoods of Ar-Raqqa, and after her leg was mend wrong, it broke again twice. Moreover, the medical staff in the camp did not oversee my daughter's treatment; and our financial situation is too bad, and there was a French female doctor who said she would cure my daughter's leg, but she never came."

Mona whose two of her daughters volunteered to join the "Asayesh Forces" and "Women's Protection Units/YPJ" affiliated with the Autonomous Administration, said that all she possess is a tent and three mattresses, where she merely said:

"No one listens, like talking to a brick; my children eat one meal a day and stay hungry until the next day's meal."



Image of Mona’s family, a family who displaced to Ein Issa Camp, north of Ar-Raqqa, taken in late September 2017.

Photo credit: STJ



Image shows the daughter of Mona al-Ahmed who broke her leg and the deterioration of her health situation due to lack of medical care in Ein Issa Camp, taken in late September 2017. Photo credit: STJ



Zahra Abdel Samad said that her seven-year-old son, is suffering from a shortness in the tendons of his legs, and is in dire need of surgery, but Zahra cannot not afford that because the camp lacks good medicine and medication. She said that if she treats her son outside the camp, it will cost her about 150 thousand pounds.

The same story appears to have occurred with Maryam Suleiman al-Hammadi and her handicapped son, who is in dire need of treatment, noting that inadequate medication in Ein Issa Camp has led to a deterioration of his health status, as she continued:

"One time, my son had convulsions because of the heat of his body, but the clinic staff could not assist him, or even give him an injection for antipyretic due to the unavailability of necessary medical supplies in the camp."

Maryam added that her eight-year-old son suffers from brain atrophy, and he needs medication periodically, but her financial situation is poor to provide the medication necessary for her child, in addition, these medicines are not available at the camp medical point and he also needs physiotherapy treatment. She concluded saying:

"In addition to my son's disease, our tattered tent needs to be mended, and I am still waiting the promises to be fulfilled, let alone when my son, Muhammad, exposes to harsh cold, his health worsens, but we have nothing to do."



Fifth: Needs and Promises

Jalal al-Aiyaf, the chairperson of the Management Committee of Ein Issa Camp confirmed to STJ that residents of the camp are primarily in need of money to be paid by cash, because food and drink can be secured for the displaced. The committee has the task of purchasing clothing and children's items. In this regard, he continued:

"Al-Moadaa al-Kheria Charity alongside Rojava Organization with the support of the World Food Program (WFP), are offering a food basket each month; the basket contains 5 kilos of rice, 5 Kilos of bulgur, 10 kilos of sugar, and 7 liters of oil plus lentils, beans and chickpeas. Several organizations have promised to give assistance in the few coming days, such as the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Syrian Red Crescent; there are also promises from other organizations to meet our needs like offering litters bins and some baskets that contain cans to cover breakfast and dinner meals. It is remarkable to note that the numbers of displaced persons to the camp are equivalent to those out of it, as some families take Ein Isa Camp a transit point, and then continue their journey elsewhere, whereas some prefer to stay in the camp hoping to return soon to their original areas until security is restored."



Image of Jalal al-Aiyaf, the chairperson of the Management Committee of Ein Issa Camp for internally displaced persons, north of Ar-Raqqa, taken in late September 2017. Photo credit: STJ



Most of the displaced persons interviewed by STJ reporter in Ein Issa camp believe that ISIS is an "international heresy" created to sabotage the country and kill people; its elements have accomplished their jobs and have been sent out by their sponsor states to their country or they will be used in other countries.

For her part, Zahra Abdel Samad appeals the world to stop providing support to ISIS, she said:

"There are states who support ISIS, and now they are themselves suffering from ISIS. We have enough destruction and killing of our young people, and enough deprivation of children from their mothers and their schools."

It is worth mentioning that Ein Issa Camp is one of several camps built by Autonomous Administration in its areas, so that it can become a refuge for thousands of displaced who flee from military operations.