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# «Four Years of Darkness»

Testimony of Widad Dawood the Yazidi Survivor from Islamic State - ISIS Grip

## About Syrians for Truth and Justice/STJ

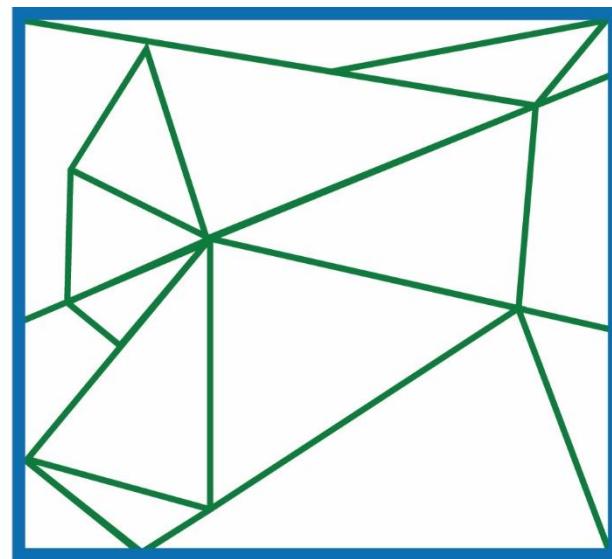
Syrians for Truth and Justice /STJ is a nonprofit, nongovernmental, independent Syrian organization. STJ includes many defenders and human rights defenders from Syria and from different backgrounds and affiliations, including academics of other nationalities.

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

سوريون  
من أجل  
الحقيقة  
والعدالة  

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Syrians  
For Truth  
& Justice



## Preface

With the escalation of military operations in Deir ez-Zur province<sup>1</sup> against ISIS<sup>2</sup>, and after Syrian Democratic Forces/SDF<sup>3</sup> controlled Raqqa city, and wrested it from the grip of ISIS on October 20, 2017, many Yazidi women managed to escape from the grip of ISIS and access to different areas, including areas controlled by SDF, those women who had been held by ISIS for many years, such as Widad Dawood, the survivor from the village of Kojo, north Iraq, 33, a mother of four children. However, she managed to flee of ISIS agents after four long years of detention, she succeeded in reaching the town of Qamishli on November 19, 2017, and she reported to Syrians for Truth and Justice/STJ in November 2017, that she had forgotten a large part of her story, given the amount of agony she had tasted on the hands of ISIS agents, anyway, she incepted by saying:

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> 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 for 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-Muhajer became the leader, and declared after a few months the formation of the Islamic State of Iraq but under the leadership of "Abi Omar al-Baghdadi" and "Abu Hamza al-Muhajer 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, the formation of The Islamic Caliphate, called himself "Caliph of the Muslims", and assigned Raqqa, a Syrian city, the capital of the Organization.

<sup>3</sup> Syrian Democratic Forces: also known as SDF forces, is a coalition of Arab, Kurds, Syriac, Turkmen and other combatants, that announced forming SDF on October 11, 2015, and People's Protection Units YPG form its backbone. SDF constitute of 27 military factions (Special Task Brigade 45, 99 Infantry Brigade, Liwa al-Qaqa, Kurds Front, Seljuk Brigade, Sultan Salim Brigade, Ein Jalot Brigade, Aleppo Ashaar forces, Tajamouh alweat al-Jazirah, al-Jazaa Martyrs' Brigade, Tal Hammise Martyrs, Brigade Martyrs of Tal Brak, Karhok Martyrs Brigade, the Martyrs Brigade of Mabrouk, al-Hasakah Martyrs Brigade, Rawia Martyrs Brigade of Tajamouh alweat alFurat, Tajamouh Furat Jarablus Brigade, Ahrar Jarablus Brigade, Euphrates Martyrs Brighade, al-Sad Martyr Battalion, al-Sanadid forces, Liwa alTahrir, the Syriac military junta, the North Sun Brigades, Jabhat Thwar Raqqa, People's Protection Units/YPG/ and women's Protection Units/YPJ/). It is mainly supported by the International Coalition leading the war against ISIS in Syria and Iraq, led by United States of America.

**"I exposed to various types of torture by the agents of the organization, as they had pulled me behind the cars, electrified my head and hit my back by cables, I also recount that they tied me to a pole and sprayed kerosene on me, that what I can remember from torture I exposed to."**

## First: Entry of ISIS into Kojo Village

Prior to the entry of ISIS into Kojo village on August 3, 2014, she had married to Shaker Mahmood Jello, who was three years older than her, and worked as a Kurdish teacher in the village school, Widad had four children: Saber (20), Jaber (19), Samer (14), and Rizan (12) years.

The two older boys had completed their primary and intermediate education, and the parents intended to send them to Dohuk, the Iraqi city, to complete their education, but the entry of ISIS fighters into the village shattered their plans, and in this regard Widad said:

**"Before ISIS entered the village, three of their elements came to the head of the village/mukhtar " Naif Jaso ", and we had already learned that the fighters of the organization intended to control our village, so the villagers met with those elements to see their demands, meanwhile some families fled the village while some remained to protect their properties, and the Peshmerga forces<sup>4</sup>, who charged with protecting us, also escaped."**

The villagers concluded from the three members of ISIS that they (ISIS elements and the villagers) were brothers and one family, and that ISIS would not abuse or kill anyone, the only thing they wanted from them is to embrace Islam. The talks between the villagers and the three ISIS agents lasted thirteen days. Meanwhile, ISIS stalled checkpoints around the village and then entered and seized the weapons of the inhabitants, Widad continued:

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<sup>4</sup> Kurdish Peshmerga troops are the military force of the Iraqi Kurdistan Regional Government, numbering tens of thousands.

**"One day, while we were preparing lunch, men came and told us that the agents of the organization asked the villagers to attend and assemble at the school, and bring all our money and cell phones. At first, we thought they were going to ask us to embrace Islam and stay at home, we didn't know their hidden intentions then. Therefore, the majority of the families gathered at the village school, the Mukhtar of the village stood up among the crowds of people, and asked them to throw their money and gold on the ground, otherwise the fighters of the organization will cut our heads, we were so scared and we threw out what we had, and then the ISIS agents separated women and children from men, they took the men by cars to an unknown destination, and told us that they killed our husbands", but we did not believe it. However, later we learned that they had deployed the men in several Iraqi cities, including Mosul, Sinjar and al-Ba`aj and others."**

On the same day, Widad said, ISIS fighters took women to an institute in the town of Sinjar, where they stayed there till the morning, meanwhile the agents of the organization took adult boys to an unknown place, including Widad's boys. As for adult girls, we later learned that the organization transferred them directly to Syria, she said that the following day ISIS agents took them with the rest of the women to a desert that they had never seen before, then the elderly women were taken to an unknown location, and Widad recounted these scenes saying:

**"We were crying fearing from the fate that awaited us in the middle of the barren earth and the valleys that they drove us to. Suddenly we heard shooting, ISIS agents informed us that they had killed our old moms, and we saw the agents taking them to the valley, but we didn't know if they really killed them or not. Then they put us, I mean women, in a prison in the Iraqi city of Tall Afar<sup>5</sup> for a month, where we tortured bitterly, there were no mattress, no blankets, no carpet to sit on, we sat on the ground and they were feeding us rotten food, and**

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<sup>5</sup>Tall Afar Prison is located in the northern Iraqi district of Tall Afar, 80 kilometers west of Mosul, and was found by the Iraqi federal Police on Aug. 28, after operation military "[We are coming, Tall Afar](#)", carried out by Iraqi forces against ISIS in the Tall Afar district, and in late August the commander of operations Lieutenant-Abdul-Amir Rashid Yarlah announced the end of the military operation by taking control of the Tall Afar district.

The town of Tall Afar was liberated 40 days after the end of military operations in Mosul, which lasted for about nine months since its launch in October 2016.

According to police commander Raed Shaker Jawdat, the prison had rooms and cells for arresting and torturing people, and he found a lot of drugs and pills inside it.

***for the infants, they were crying out of hunger, and if any woman asked for food, for her child, they hit her with sticks and called her infidels," and I remember exactly how they were telling us that they wished to starve us to death and that we deserve this torture but it is still little. "***

Widad recounted some of the scenes that had stabilized in her memory during her detention in Tall Afar prison, as there were children whose tongue had been "out of their throat" because of thirst, ISIS agents didn't care about them at all, and after spending a month in Tall Afar prison, specifically in September 2014, the "Yazidi women transferred to the Iraqi village "Qezzel Qayu", which was mostly inhabited by Shiite community, but they deserted their village after ISIS entered it. In this regard, Widad continued:

***"Every three or four families were placed in one house in the deserted village, and I remember well that the village mosque, with pictures of Al Hasan and Al Hussein, was blown up. In an attempt by some of the Yazidi women to not give up to the agents of the organization, few of them hid their cell phones as they didn't deliver them to ISIS agents, and communicated with the Kurdish forces to give them information about ISIS troops and fighters. However, once the organization fighters revealed those women, they collected them at the "Qezzel Qayu" school, and asked each one with a mobile phone to reveal it and put it on the floor, otherwise the consequence would be to cut off their heads, so indeed many of them took out their phones. "***

## Second: The Harshest Forms of Torture

Widad noted that her sister stayed with her in the village of Qezzel Qayu, and that she was one of the women who owned a mobile phone, but did not disclose it to the agents, as she hid it in the daytime by putting it under ground, and using it at night to connect with the Kurdish forces, Widad pointed out that her sister had managed to flee in coordination with the PKK fighters, who promised to rescue her if she could pass the "Khane" factory near the town of Sinjar, she went on saying:

**"My sister asked me to run away with her, but I thought to myself that my husband and children are held by ISIS, and I live in hope to meet them one day, so I refused to run away with my sister and other women and girls, they were(16)."**

Widad can't remember the date when those women escaped at, but she remembered that the fighters of the organization came to her following their escape, and took her with one of her relatives to their military point in the village of "Qezzel Qayu" They tied her hands and blindfolded her, and practiced the most severe forms of torture, such as pulling her behind the cars and electrified her head and bit her back with cables, because she did not inform them that her sister and the rest of the women were planning to escape. Moreover, Widad only said that the agents of the organization handcuffed her to a pole and sprayed her with kerosene, as she did not remember what happened to her because she was unconscious, but her cousin told her how they tortured her.

### Third: The Journey to Syria

Two months after they were detained in the village of "Qezzel Qayu", ISIS agents transferred Widad along with the rest of the women to Syria, specifically to the village of "Sluk<sup>6</sup>" located north of the Syrian city of Raqqa about 90 km, where they stayed for 13 days, until Widad was gift to Abu Ibrahim al Ansari family, who was working days and nights on making explosive belts for the purpose of serving the organization, as she expressed. Widad continued saying:

**"I stayed with the family of Abu Ibrahim al-Ansari for almost a month with four other women, but later agents of the organization took two women, so I stayed with another girl identified as Miasa, we were helping Abu Ibrahim al Ansari's wife to prepare food for 150 agents of ISIS. And then a Jazrawi man<sup>7</sup>, Abu Omar al-Najdi about 37, bought me to serve his wife,**

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<sup>6</sup>This area follows Raqqa, which was controlled by the People's Protection Units/YPG in mid-June 2015, and the People's Protection Units, which are defined as YPG is the military forces of the Democratic Autonomous Administrative announced by the Democratic Union Party/PYD in the northern Syrian regions, and the Kurdish units are the backbone of SDF , composed of several military factions of the various parts of the region and supported by the Allied Coalition forces in their war against ISIS.

<sup>7</sup> Al Jazrawi is the name of the inhabitants of the Syrian island areas in north-eastern Syria up to the Euphrates river, near Deir ez-Zur and Raqqa provinces.

*meantime, my son, Rayzan, was accompanying me, but they called him Hamza and called me Um Hamza(Hamza's mother), and I kept telling them that I was 40 years old so I wouldn't have to be sold and bought for sex."*

The man who bought her "Abu Omar al-Najdi", had four wives, one of them was Turkish, and Abu Omar had divorced her and she went to her country, while the rest of his three wives had been housed in separate houses, and Widad worked for his wife who comes from Raqqa and lived in the village of Kabasin, follows Aleppo province, Widad later learned that "Abu Omar al-Najdi" was trading women and Sabaya, and in this regard she continued:

*"I was convinced with my state in Abu Omar's house, and especially that my son was with me, and I was servicing his sick wife who considered me as her mother, I stayed there about six months, and the house, I stayed in, had a lot of women and slaves who were sold and bought. Anyway, Abu Omar gave us just what left in the deserted houses such as lentils, bulgur and others, and I cooked it for Sabaya women, although we asked him to bring us food but he didn't bring even bread. "*

## Fourth: A failed Attempt to Escape

Abu Omar al-Najdi bought Widad to another man named "Abu Muhammad al-Ansari", about 50 years old, and worked on buying and selling petroleum products in a few quantities to live and push poverty from his family, that man had a Kurdish friend named "Mahmud", and they worked together in trading oil, Widad pointed out that the two friends were working to rescue the Yazidi women from ISIS's grip, and in this regard, she added:

*"Abu Omar sold me to Abu Muhammad al Ansari" along with four other Sabaya with their children, so the number was (16) including the kids, and he bought us for the purpose of delivering us to al-Kurds in Syria. However, one night his friend Mahmoud came and told us that he was going to deliver us to our families and he asked us to endure hunger and thirst*

***because he would not be able to see us again until he completely smuggled us, knowing that Abu Muhammad and Mahmoud had bought those women with their children by 35 million Iraqis.***

" One night a man knocked the door of the house, where they stayed," said Widad, who told him that she could not open the door, since all of them are women and there was no man in the house, but he threatened her with gunfire if she did not open the door, so Widad opened the door out of the fear, she saw a large number of ISIS fighters were masked and gathered at the door of the house, and they asked Widad and the rest of the women to prepare themselves for departure, the agents were accompanied by the "Abu Muhammad al-Ansari", who had bought them, handcuffed and blindfolded, concerning that Widad said:

***"ISIS" agents were talking about "Abu Muhammad al Ansari", saying that he had two wives and worked on selling petroleum products, he was poor, so how could he buy these women with such a large amount, unfortunately, they revealed Abu Muhammad 'intention to send us to the Kurds and as a result they put him in prison and confiscated all his properties, as well as they wiped him (150) lashes and expelled him from his village. Meanwhile agents of the organization transported me together with the rest of the women to al-Bab prison in Aleppo province, it was a large prison and housed many prisoners women, I remember exactly how the prison was dark due to its location underground, and how we couldn't breathe there from the lack of air. One time a member of ISIS looked at us from the hole of the door and said that our situation was difficult here, and as a result he succeeded to get us out of prison and take us to a house in the neighborhood, where he took care of us until the fiftieth man's trial "Abu Muhammad al-Ansari" finished."***

After the failure of Widad and her colleagues to flee, they were presented as gifts to ISIS agents without a material fee, they were obtained by a person identified as "Abu Obeida al-Lebi" and he used them to serve their headquarter in the thermal power plant 30 km east of Aleppo city, where Widad prepared food for ISIS agents and washed their clothes. Anyway, they stayed there for about two years with her child, who bathed the agents and serviced them, as she said, after two years, Abu Obeida al-Lebi was forced to sell Widad and her son because he had a lot of debts, and in this regard, Widad continued:

***"Abu Obeida told me that he would sell me to people from Libya, since I am a good woman, indeed he sold me and my child to a man named "Abu Mu'awiya al-Lebi", who owned another 13-year-old Sabaya, but this man later refused to buy my son on the pretext of not having enough money, so I cried a lot and threatened them with an outrageous act if they part me from my son, they told me that they would not take my son away, but they were liars, so I prayed the Lord of the Worlds against him because he depart me from my son., in just four days, a rocket hit and killed him instantly, and after that I was sold to another man named "Abu al-Baraa al-Jazrawi ", who was a very bad person, I suffered from starving, and I stayed for about a month, and complained about my fatigue and tragedy in the service of his children and his wife, and asked him to sell me to another, or I will escape by my way without anyone's permission, so I had been sold to another man who lives in al-Mayadeen in Deir ez-Zur, called Abu Salem al Jazrawi, and I moved to stay in his house, I stayed for about a month to serve his wife until she put her new baby, "Abu Salem" was a good person, the matter that urged me to ask him to search for and find my son, Abu Salem finally succeeded in finding him and asked the owner to sell it, but he refused."***

## Fifth: Approaching the End of the Tragedy

She added that she had asked Abu Salem to kidnap her son and bring him to her because she felt that the latter wanted to deliver her to the Kurd's hand, which resulted in greater insistence on finding her son. Widad pointed out that meanwhile, during November 2017, the people of Mayadeen in south-east of Deir ez-Zur about 45 kilometers, fled from the intensification of the aerial bombardment of the aircraft to the countryside, and Abu Salim had kept Widad with a

person near the town of al-Sha'ara, about 60 km south east of Deir-ez-Zur. Widad talked about her flight from ISIS's grip:

*"Abu Salim al-Jazrawi was cooperating with SDF, as he was able to smuggle me into wilderness to a safe place, and he told me that he would hand me over to SDF whom worked hard to find a way out. However, I was accompanied by three cars in the escape operation and the car that transferred me was in the middle, along the way I saw people run away, and Abu Salem promised to send my son, whom I would not go out without, after me. My flight lasted about a whole day, and I arrived to Qamishli town which follows Autonomous Administration on November 19, 2017."*



Image showing pictures of Widad's children with her husband, whom were detained by ISIS fighters four years ago, as their fate is still unknown up till now. Photo credit: STJ

Widad stated that during her four-year detention period at the hands of ISIS, she was praying and fasting and was forced to memorize verses of Holy Quran, describing that period as dark, because she did not know day time, the agents of the organization were covering her eyes with the rest of her colleagues in the streets, so they didn't know anything about their secrets, and she also pointed out that the majority of the organization's dead agents were immigrants, she added:

***"ISIS's women were scared that they would be Sabaya, as their men enslaved Yazidi women, and they said that they are not afraid of Kurds as much as agents of the armed opposition, as they say that the Kurds are more merciful than the armed opposition agents, that if they are arrested by the "Free Army" They will make them slaves to the Iranians, and that was their biggest fear."***

Widad noted that ISIS agents prevented her from speaking in the non-Arabic language, that made Widad forget her mother tongue, except she often tried to regain secretly some of Kurdish vocabulary for herself, but her greatest concern was leaving her son with the elements of the organization, she has great fear of being harmed or ill-inflicted by them, as she hopes to return soon, and when she was asked about her wish for life after her salvation from ISIS, Widad just said:

***"I hope I can carry the weapon to fight ISIS and restore my dignity and the dignity of all the Yazidi women."***

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