

## **In Contravention to the "Agreement Concluded" Syrian Regular Forces Forcibly Conscript Number of Duma Sons and Use Others for Looting Operations**

**Discontent by Locals Following the Entry of the Syrian Security Apparatus into the City**



## About Syrians for Truth and Justice

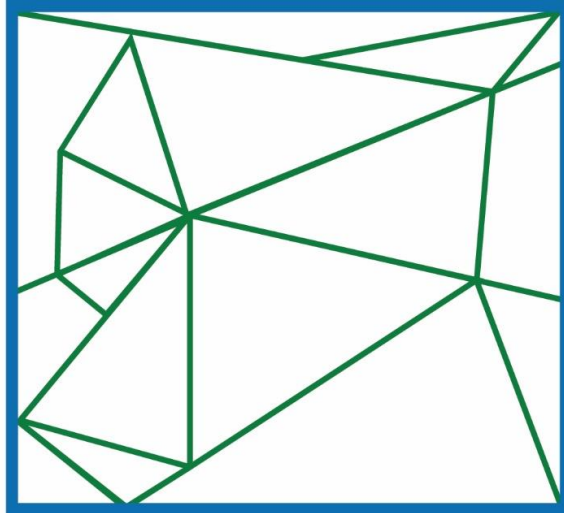
[Syrians for Truth and Justice \(STJ\)](#) is an independent, non-governmental and non-profit organization whose members include Syrian human rights defenders, advocates and academics of different backgrounds and nationalities. It also includes members of other nationalities.

The initiative strives for SYRIA, where all Syrian citizens (males and females) have dignity, equality, justice and equal human rights.

سوريون  
من أجل  
الحقيقة  
والعدالة  

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## **In Contravention to the "Agreement Concluded" Syrian Regular Forces Forcibly Conscript Number of Duma Sons and Use Others for Looting Operations**

*Discontent by Locals Following the Entry of the Syrian Security Apparatus into the City After  
Controlling it and Carrying out Looting Operations*



## Introduction

Duma city, located in Damascus countryside, witnessed a host of detentions of young men by Syrian regular forces. These arrests were sometimes for the purpose of forced conscription, and other sometimes for looting operations and stealing the citizens' property forces in towns and cities of Eastern Ghouta, Damascus countryside, during May 2018. According to many testimonies obtained by STJ, as soon as the Syrian regular forces and their allies entered Duma city<sup>1</sup> following its control under an agreement concluded between it and Jaysh al-Islam Apr 8, 2018, it arrested a number of young men from the city on their military checkpoints scattered throughout the city and used them for looting and stealing the property of citizens. In addition, it forcibly conscripted some of them and sent them to Yarmouk Camp to fight ISIS, which was controlling the area at the time<sup>2</sup>. According to eyewitnesses and activists from Duma, the arrests took place, despite the fact that the regular forces had abided in the most important item of this agreement not to harass or expose to any of Duma residents, nor to allow its troops and security elements to enter the city, but only to introduce troops to keep the order (civil police).

The Syrian regular forces had previously summoned several personalities, known to oppose the Syrian regime, in Duma for investigation, such as Khalil Aybour, head of the Local Council of Duma. Aybour has been summoned several times, most recently May 14, 2018, when he was detained for six hours in one of the security branches in Damascus, before being released later. According to STJ's field researcher, at the beginning of June 2018, other areas in Eastern Ghouta had also witnessed arrest campaign for reasons yet to be known, such as al-Marj area and Erbeen city. He said that many of Duma people preferred to leave their city because of fear and

<sup>1</sup>The Syrian regular forces and their allies could control the entire Eastern Ghouta following launching a fierce campaign on its towns and cities on February 18, 2018. The campaign ended on April 8, 2018, after a deal reached with Jaysh al-Islam in Duma on the same day. The deal states that Jaysh al-Islam militants release all the abductees detained in its prisons in Duma in exchange for allowing the fighters and their families, who do not want the settlement, to withdraw to the north of Syria. This deal was preceded by others with armed opposition factions there. The first deal was with Ahrar al-Sham al-Islamiyya Movement in Harasta on March 21, 2018, which states the exit of Ahrar al-Sham al-Islamiyya militants along with their families, as well as civilians who wish that, to the north of Syria. Another deal was concluded with Failaq ar-Rahman on March 23, 2018, which states to withdraw fighters of Failaq ar-Rahman and Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) and their families, in addition to the civilians who wish, to the north of Syria; this deal included the towns of Erbeen, Zamalka, Jobber, and Ein Tarma.

<sup>2</sup> The Syrian regime was able to control al-Yarmouk Camp on May 21, 2018, after an agreement with Daesh (ISIS).





the loss of confidence in the Syrian regular forces, which had already killed and displaced them, pointing that about 20 thousand people preferred to get out from Duma, whereas more than 80 thousand people preferred to remain there after the agreement was reached.

The Syrian regular forces had carried out a host of arrests in the Yarmouk Camp, south of Damascus, after controlling it on May 21, 2018, and reaching a deal with the Islamic State (ISIS). STJ prepared a flash news concerning this incident titled "[Arrests in Yarmouk Camp after Being Taken Over by Regime Forces- More than 20 people arrested and taken to an unknown destination by Syrian regular forces on May 23, 2018](#)". STJ had also prepared reports regarding the fiercest military campaign on Eastern Ghouta, in general, on Duma in particular. One of the reports was entitled "[Violent Incendiary Weapon Attacks Targeting Douma on 22 and 23 March 2018- During these Two Days, 22-Air Strikes Hit Douma with Incendiary Weapons Loaded with Phosphorous-like Substances.](#)"

## First: Contravention of the Agreement Terms

One of the most significant items of the agreement signed between Jaysh al-Islam and the Syrian regime and their allies Apr 8, 2018 was the latter's pledge not to introduce its troops into Duma, but only to send forces to "keep order", which is a civil police. Furthermore, another most important item was to settle the situations of anyone who wish to stay inside Duma, and to allow those who want to leave. This was confirmed by Ahmed Abdulaziz/alias<sup>3</sup>, an activist who was familiar with details of the agreement reached as he spoke to STJ, saying:

**"After long consultations between the negotiating delegation of Duma with the Russian side, an agreement was reached to cease fire and evacuate many opposed people from Duma. However, while the fighters were just starting to get out of the city, the regime forces began to sneak, attacking those they could reach being locals or houses. I was the last one to get out of town on April 14, 2018; on this particular day, the regime forces accompanied by the entire security apparatus entered the city ripping up the most important item of the agreement, which is to limit itself to the provision of forces to keep security. After that, it divided Duma**

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<sup>3</sup> An activist who had recently displaced to the north of Syria.



into four sectors, where a security branch will be in charge of each single sector, including the state security, the military security and the air intelligence branch; all of them started to fight among themselves about these areas, since the loot was too large as they thought."

Abdulaziz continued that Syrian regime and its allies had made a promise to the people not to be harass them, noting that during the first days of their entry, they arrested two civilians but released them soon, and began to tighten on the civilians present in the city. In this regard, he says,

"The regime has showed itself to be a dove of peace, but after the deployment of elements of the security branches and installing military checkpoints in most areas of the city, some of these checkpoints started to send numbers of young people to use them for theft and looting of property. Among those people was my cousin, who served them by force for uninterrupted six hours. On May 8, 2018, things evolved; some of these checkpoints along with some patrols operated in the al-Quwatli Street, Sa'ada Bakrey area and in the Grand Mosque, arrested many young people whose age was from 18 to 30, then gathered them near al-Ansar Mosque in the town, and placed them in three buses and drove them to an unknown destination. It turned out later that they had been taken to a security branch in Kafr Sousa area inside Damascus."

Abdulaziz said that news of sending several youths to compulsory service spread in Duma soon, pointing that many locals now do not allow their children to get out fearful of being sending to compulsory service by Syrian regular forces, other young men began to look for a safe place to hide. In this regard, he continued,

"I learned through one of the young men taken to the security branch that after their arrival, an officer talked to them about the need to serve their country and defend it; the officer intimidated them sometimes and at other times offered them material lure, and promised to pay them monthly salaries of SYP 75,000, in addition to let them obtain specifications within their city. Consequently, around 20 youths were persuaded and recruited into the ranks of the Syrian regime, but the rest refused and preferred to return to their city. However, on their way back, soldiers of the regime assaulted them and beat them very severely, besides

they took some young men to the Yarmouk Camp to fight ISIS. Seven of them were killed and their bodies returned to Duma."

## Second: Tightening on Activists and Opposition Figures in Duma

Syrian regular forces not only took a number of Duma's young men to compulsory conscription, but following entering the city, it summoned many activists to security branches and investigated them for long hours, according to Siraj Slik/alias<sup>4</sup>, an activist from the city who obtained his information through local sources close to him in Duma. He said in this regard,

"The regime began to focus on some figures known for its opposition in Duma, and he summoned some doctors from Duma and imposed on them to make statements denying targeting Duma with poisonous gases on Apr 7, 2018. Furthermore, on April 14, 2018 it summoned Dr. Basil Oyoum for investigation, as well as the engineer Khalil Aybour, head of the Local Council, who was one of those preferred to stay in Duma and showed a willing to cooperate with the Syrian regime in the administration of the city council, but all this did not prevent the Syrian regime from summoning him repeatedly to the security branches for investigation. The first time was on April 15, 2018 and the latest on May 14, 2018, when he was held for six continuous hours inside al-Khateeb Branch in Damascus but was released later."

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<sup>4</sup> He displaced recently to the north of Syria.



Image of the engineer Khalil Aybour, head of the Local Council of Duma city. Photo credit: [The Local Council of Duma](#).

Slik added that following the release of the engineer Khalil Aybour, communication with him was not easy, since Aybour cut his contact with all the people, and nobody knew the course nor details of the investigation. Slik was likely that most of the investigations were about the period when he was head of the Local Council in Duma and his membership in the province of Damascus Countryside affiliated to the Syrian Interim Government. He concluded,

**"We can no longer contact with all the people who remained inside Duma, and it is clear that many of them are afraid of security prosecutions."**