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“Killed by the Same Hands that first arrested him”

Account of the Survivor/victim Yusuf Rakan Aba zaid



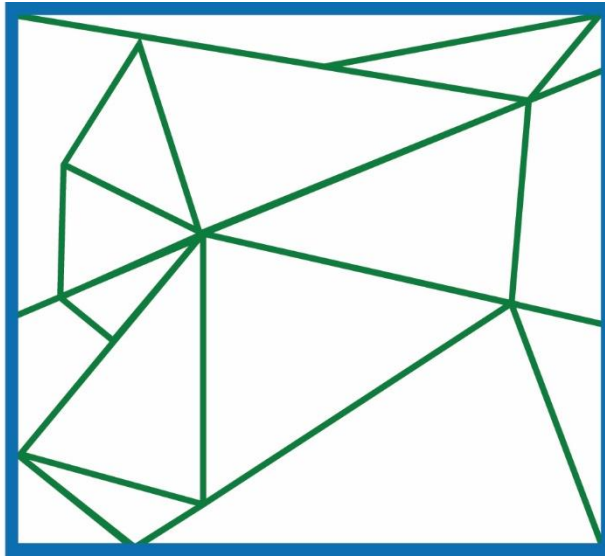
About Syrians for Truth and Justice/STJ

[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.

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Image of the young man Yusuf Aba Zaid prior to arresting him at the Air Force Intelligence Branch in Daraa on September 7, 2012.

Photo Credit: Yousef Aba Zaid’s family.



• Preface:

It was only one day after the detainee Yusuf Aba Zaid got out of the Syrian jails when he was killed as a result of shelling [Western Ghariyah](#) located in Daraa countryside by the Syrian regular forces. However, Yusuf had spent five consecutive years in the Syrian security apparatus-operated detention facilities where he was subjected to various forms of torture and ill-treatment like many other detainees.

In 2012, the Air Intelligence Forces Branch in Daraa arrested Yusuf Aba Zaid and transferred him among number of security branches during the five-year detention. On June 12, 2017, he was released but his release coincided with the military campaign led by the Syrian regular forces backed by Russian warplanes on Daraa and its countryside and on June 13, 2017, he was killed after being hit by shrapnel, which means that he died just one day after his release.

"I still remember how Yousef repeated saying: Those who get out safe from the vaults operated by the Syrian regime are just like newborn children. He used to call himself the lucky man and talked about starting a new life after surviving the inevitable death in the security apparatus vaults."

The phrases with Abu Uday commenced talking about his brother Yusuf in his testimony¹ to the [Syrians for Truth and Justice/STJ](#).

First: Aspects of Yousef Aba Zaid's Life

Youssef Rakan Aba Zaid was born in [Daraa Al-Balad](#) in 1984; he could not complete his study so he could only obtain the preparatory certificate as he held the task to bring a living to his family in an early stage of his life. He dreamed, like any young man, to get married, to have a wife, children and a family. He worked as a lorry driver to transport goods between Jordan and Syria, but his detention changed his whole life course according to his brother who continued:

"With the onset of non-violence movement in Daraa against the regime, Yusuf was transporting medicine and medical supplies from Jordan to the medical centers in Daraa which were supervised by members of the Syrian armed opposition. He smuggled these cargos through the border crossings between Jordan and Syria by paying bribes to certain elements of the Syrian regular army at Old Customs cross point, and he continued his work until mid-2012 when elements of the Air intelligence Forces at the crossing point revealed him, arrested him, and confiscated all the medicines he was transporting. Anyway, he managed to escape because some elements, whom he was dealing with, helped him, but

¹ The interview was conducted on July 17, 2017, by STJ's field researcher in Daraa.



subsequently his name was circulated to most of the Syrian regular army security-operated check points."

On September 7, 2012, elements of a mobile security patrol, a moving checkpoint, affiliated to the Air Intelligence Force Branch in Daraa arrested Yusuf from the famous Square Dawar al-Barid, his brother said.

Second: The "trip" of Yusuf Aba Zaid in the Security Branches

Yusuf spent more than eight months in the Air Intelligence Force Branch facilities in Daraa. He was detained for three months in a cell "communicado" where he was subjected to various kinds of torture and beatings all over his body, as well as being electrocuted by the interrogators who wanted to extract coerced confessions. His brother Abo Uday informed the details that his brother had mentioned before his murder, Abo Uday said:

"Yusuf told me that they had interrogated him for about eight times, and in every single time he was subjected to a different kind of torture. Each session used to last more than two hours before they brought him back to the solitary confinement. However, the constant torture that he was subjected to, lack of food, and lack of treatment caused him a strange disease; he underwent a constant vomiting and was unable to stand still. After spending about eight months in the Air Intelligence Force Branch facilities in Daraa, they charged him of being a terrorist and a supporter of the armed groups. On May 27, 2013, they transferred him to the Military Police Branch in Daraa bearing his pains and illnesses as well. Throughout this time, my family and I thought that he was killed under torture, especially since his fate remained unrevealed."

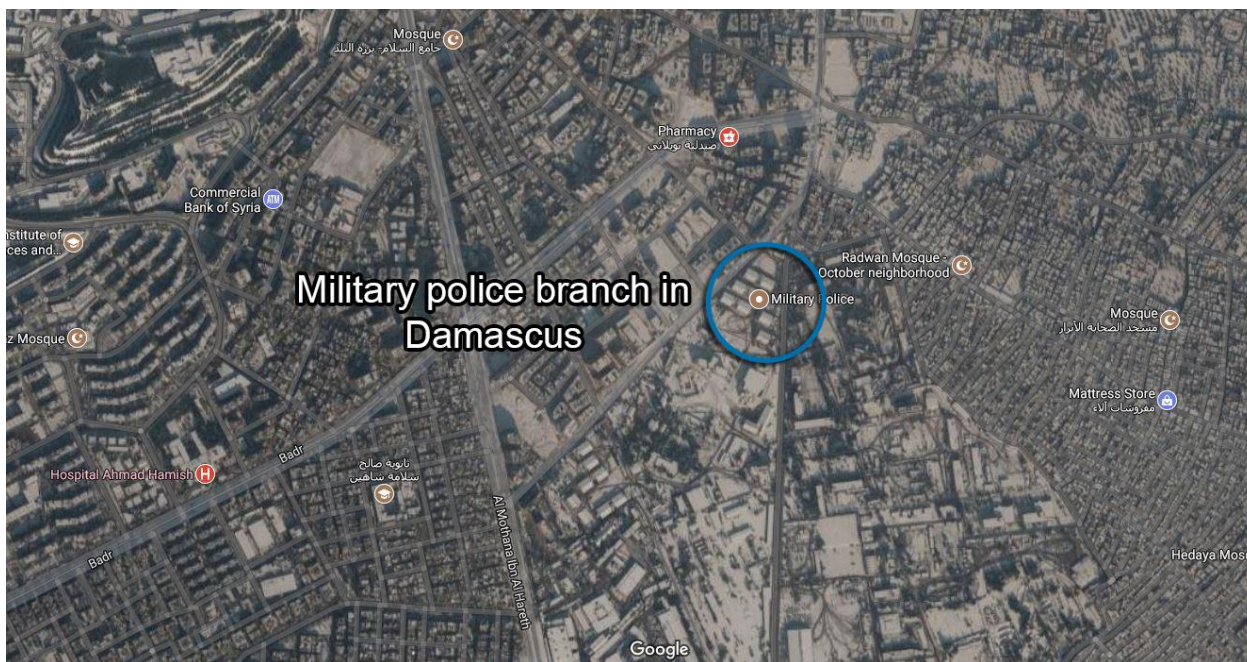


A satellite image shows the location of the Air Intelligence Force Branch in Daraa where Yusuf Aba Zaid was taken on September 7, 2012, and was subjected to various kinds of torture during his detention that lasted more than eight months.

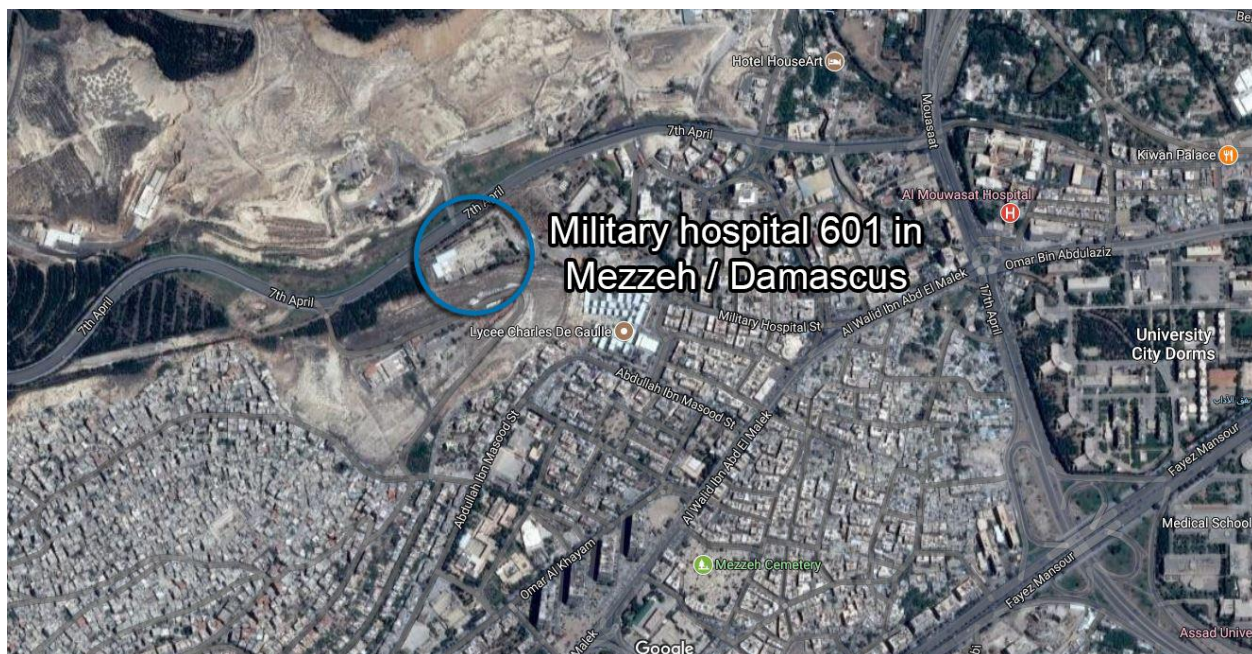


A Satellite image shows the location of the Military Police Branch in Daraa where Yusuf Aba Zaid was transferred and detained on May 27, 2013, after being accused of terrorism and support of the armed groups.

Abu Uday mentioned that Yusuf was supposed to be transferred to the central Gharaz prison in Daraa, but given the Syrian armed opposition siege in the area and the difficulty of access to the central Gharaz prison, he was entailed in the Military Police Branch facilities in Daraa until they transferred him on December 15, 2013, to the Military Police Branch in [Qaboun neighborhood](#) located in Damascus. However, and as a result of his deteriorated health situation, he was transferred to the 601 Mezzeh Military Hospital along with dozens of other inmates who were about to die, anyway, doctors treated them in a bad way, as Yousef confirmed. Two months later after treating him, his health improved so they transferred him back to the Military Police Branch in Qaboun neighborhood in Damascus. On June 6, 2014, he was transferred to Adra Central Prison located in Damascus countryside.



A Satellite image shows the location of the Military Police Branch in Qaboun neighborhood, Damascus, where Yusuf Aba Zaid was transferred and detained on December 15, 2013.



A Satellite image shows the location of the 601 Mezzeh Military Hospital, Damascus, where Yusuf Aba Zaid was transferred due to his deteriorated health situation, along with 10 other detainees who were about to die.



A Satellite image shows the location of Adra Central Prison in Damascus countryside where Yusuf Aba Zaid was transferred and detained on June 6, 2014.

Third: Release of Yousef after Five Years of Detention

Abu Uday added that his brother's case had been transferred to the Counter Terrorism Court in Damascus, where his family assigned him a lawyer in order to expedite the presentation of his file to the judge; the family found out that it was obliged to pay more than 400 thousand Syrian pounds, in this regard, he continued:

"On June 2, 2017, the verdict was pronounced and Yousef was sentenced to nine years. However, because of the Presidential Amnesty, the sentence was reduced to four years and four months, which he had already spent in the vaults of the security branches. On June 7, 2017, he was transferred to the Military Police Branch in Qaboun neighborhood; the next day he was transferred to the Criminal Security Branch in Damascus. On June 9, 2017, he was transferred to the General Recruitment Division to get a postponement of the compulsory service, as he is required for the reserve service in the Syrian regular army. He was released on June 12, 2017."



Fourth: Yousef Aba Zaid and the Few Hours of Freedom

June 12, 2017, at approximately 1:00 pm, Abu Uday received a phone call from an anonymous contact. He was traumatized by his brother Yousef's voice talking to him and telling him that he was coming to the family's house in the Western Ghariyah town located in the countryside of Daraa, the house where the family was displaced to during the war years. Abu Uday had conflicted feelings of joy and tears and it was only minutes to tell the entire family members of Yousef's release. Concerning the moments when the family was reunited again, he said:

"I still remember how we were overwhelmed with joy and tears at the same time when we saw Yousef, we felt like it was a dream, we could not sleep that night, our happiness for his return was imaginable. He told us some of the pains and suffering he underwent; we kept talking and talking until it was dawn. That day, Yousef saw only his family and some of his relatives and friends. I still remember well how eagerly he waited the next day to walk in the city's streets and inhale the air of freedom again."

Fifth: Yousef's Death a Day After his Release

The next morning at 8:15 am, June 13, 2017, Western Ghariyah town in the countryside of Daraa was exposed to a heavy artillery and rocket shelling by the Syrian regular forces launching from Khirbet Ghazaleh town and al-Tha'ala military airport in the countryside of As-Suwaida. One of the shells hit Yousef's family house, he was wounded by its shrapnel, and died at the spot, his brother Abu Uday testified and added:

"It was an irony of fate for Yousef to be released during the military campaign carried out by the regular Syrian forces in Daraa and its countryside. Just one day earlier Yousef was telling me about his ambition for a new life and his ambition to marry. We were barely happy to see Yousef, and barely knew about all the torments he suffered during the period of his detention, until he was settled by the same hands that first arrested him. The whole period that Yousef spent among us after his release did not exceed 18 hours."



Image shows Yousef Aba Zaid's body after the bombardment that affected his house in western Ghariyah town, in the countryside of Daraa, by the Syrian regular army on June 13, 2017.

Photo credit: Yousef Aba Zaid's family.

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