



January 2019

كتاب عن طريق الوزارة تم تحويله الى الكبريت

اسماء الذين صرفوا من الخدمة بناء على قرار الوزارة رقم [redacted] تاريخ [redacted]

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بموجب القرار رقم [redacted] /و تاريخ ٢٠١٤/٤/١٦

قرار [redacted] /و تاريخ ٢٠١٥/٢/٥

[redacted] تاريخ ٢٠١٥/٤/١٣

[redacted] تاريخ ٢٠١٥/٤/١٣

بموجب القرار [redacted] تاريخ ٢٠١٦/١/٢٤

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Mass Dismissals, Fines & Prison Sentences for over 400 Employees in al-Qunaitra

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Introduction

Having reclaimed al-Qunaitra province in late August 2018, the Syrian government commenced dismissal decisions against teachers and civil servants between September 10, and October 23, 2018.

An estimated 50 teachers, 40 employees of the Health Directorate and 300 employees of the Agriculture Directorate were all fired without knowing why or for alleged reasons, foremost of which were; evading the reserved service, engaging in terrorist acts and collaborating with unauthorized actors.

STJ's field researcher affirmed that the government's initial action after seizing al-Qunaitra, was to summon all teachers in the province and the employees of the Health and the Agriculture Directorates, to be interrogated in the Political Branch and the Air Force Intelligence Branch, and thus dismissed, sentenced to prison or penalized with a fine of up to S.P 300,000.

The heads of the educational directorates, health directorate, and agriculture directorate attributed the dismissal decision to the lack of communication of the employees with their directorates. Therefore, they were considered as 'resigned'.

Whereas the locals assumed that this action was a maneuver used by the Syrian government to circumvent the settlement agreement reached in the province in July 2018, which provides for the government not to hold accountable or arrest civilians who had settled their status. Additionally, the locals said it was a collective punishment to those accepted to live under the control of the armed opposition groups.

Similarly, the Syrian government dismissed 71 teachers in al-Sweida province on August 13, 2018, for refusing to serve the compulsory military service.¹ The same scenario was also repeated in Daraa.

I. The Syrian government regains control of al-Qunaitra

Al-Qunaitra province lies southwest Syria at estimated 1200 KM² along the occupied Golan Heights. The armed opposition groups² managed to capture this province in late 2013, and to extend their control on about 80% of the areas between Jubata al-Khashab town in the north and Ghadir al-Bustan in the south as of May 2017.

¹ "The Syrian Government Dismissed 201 Teacher for Evading Reserve Military Service", STJ, October 1, 2018, <https://www.stj-sy.com/ar/view/805>.

² The most prominent armed group was the Southern Front or *Al-Jabha Al-Janoubia* which was formed on February 14, 2014 and included the military assemblies of the Syrian Revolutionaries Front, Qunaitra Military Council, as well as some Islamic groups which were controlling al-Qunaitra such as Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, Ahrar al-Sham al-Islamiyya, and Islamic Mouthana Movement. Additionally, the province was full of sleeper cells and groups affiliated to the Islamic State organization (ISIL).

In July 2017, al-Qunaitra was included in the de-escalation zone in the south³ along with Daraa and al-Sweida, following an agreement brokered by Russia, Jordan and the United States; the hostilities were halted accordingly until August 2018, when the Syrian army backed by Russian Air Force, decided to undertake an offensive to retake the province, to force the residents to sign a reconciliation agreement and to reactivate the government departments.

In July 2018, the opposition groups, represented by those of the Southern Front, in southern al-Qunaitra, announced their consent to conduct a reconciliation/settlement⁴ with the Syrian government. In August 2018 the Islamic State, aka ISIL, which was controlling Hawd al-Yarmouk in Daraa, took advantage of the prevailing situation to attack and consequently capture southern villages in Qunaitra; such as Qusyba, Qarqas, al-Rafid, Ghadir, al-Bustan, al-Ma'Iqah, Saida al-Golan. However, the armed groups, notably Liwa Maghawir al-Golan, Liwa al-Sabteen, and Liwa Mo'az Bin Jabl, formed an alliance with the Syrian Army to fight against ISIL, and they managed to expel it in late August 2018.

Thus ended the rebel groups' four-year rule over al-Qunaitra, during which civil society activists form local governance structures, as they established about 33 local councils, two field hospitals, and eight medical facilities, between 2014 and 2018. Besides, they managed to reactivate 75 educational facilities.

AS for the agricultural activity, it was hindered due to the Islamic groups' acts, including Ahrar al-Sham al-Islamiyya and Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), who turned the agricultural institutions into military headquarters and rendered them inoperable in late 2015.

Abu Sa'eed, an activist from al-Qunaitra⁵ reported to STJ:

"The Syrian government is unable to operate all its institutions since it is facing a stifling financial crisis in al-Qunaitra province therefore it dismissed employees, accusing them of evading military reserve service,

³ "Russia: Only Syrian army should be on country's southern border", sputnik news, July 4, 2018,

<https://arabic.sputniknews.com/russia/201807041033530293-%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%81%D8%B1%D9%88%D9%81-%D8%AE%D9%81%D8%B6-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%B5%D8%B9%D9%8A%D8%AF-%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A7-%D9%82%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A9/>.

⁴ According to STJ's field researcher, the settlement agreement signed in Nawa city, north of Daraa, on July 19, 2018 between the armed opposition groups and the Syrian army in al-Qunaitra provided several items, the most important was: an immediate end of crossfire until unsettled date; resolving the status of armed group elements who wish to remain after a general amnesty, ensuring that the Syrian government does not prosecute the dissidents of Syrian army nor the civilians who have been former members of the armed opposition groups; granting a deadline of six months to those who failed to perform compulsory service; and evacuating everyone who does not want (settlement) to Idlib.

⁵ He has recently displaced to the north of Syria.

involvement in terrorist activities, or collaborating with unauthorized actors. Many employees were dismissed without knowing why.”

In late August, after the reconciliation agreement was reached in al-Qunaitra, the government fired up to 50 teachers, 40 employees from the Health Directorate, 60 employees from the Agriculture Directorate, and 22 employees from the Real Estate Directorate, as a form of a collective punishment by the Syrian government against al-Qunaitra people. That created many vacancies in the government establishments, Abu Sa'eed confirmed.

II. Dismissal of teachers in al-Qunaitra

A great educational gap left by the opposition groups after their five-year control over al-Qunaitra.

The Free Educational Directorate of the Syrian Interim Government's 2017-2018 report assessed that only 30 schools out of 95 were operating in al-Qunaitra, due to battles between the rebel groups and the Syrian Army, which resulted in their destruction or being turned to shelters for civilians or to military headquarters.

200 out of 386 teachers with different specialists were sacked during the armed groups' rule over the province. Knowing that the schools were still following the Syrian government, and some teachers used to commute to the regime-controlled areas to get their salaries, but others didn't fear of arrest.

However, on September 10, 2018, when the Syrian Government back to control the province, things got worse. All teachers were summoned to the regime's Political branches or to the Air Force Intelligence branches for questioning, to be dismissed afterwards for different alleged reasons.

A 29-year-old teacher, who was among those dismissed told STJ that he got a permanent teaching post only in 2013 and goes on to say:

"I taught for seven years before the armed opposition groups controlled al-Qunaitra and I went on practicing teaching when they controlled. But I did not review the finance office of the Syrian government to receive my salary fearful of arrest. Several of my colleagues did and they never came back. Therefore, the educational supervisor pledged to follow-up my financial affairs in the Educational Directorate of the Syrian government as a routine procedure. Since April 2018, the Syrian government have supervised the educational process in al-Qunaitra, and it summoned me for investigation and then fired me without telling me why.”

III. Confiscation of movable and immovable property for alleged 'involvement in terrorist acts'

Seizing assets was another unjust decision the Syrian government applied against al-Qunaitra teachers. All the teachers' unpaid salaries, during the period of rebels' control, were seized as well as their immovable assets.

Masoud, 42, has been a teacher for 28 years before being dismissed recently. He told STJ:

"In early October 2018, when I was at the Educational Directorate of the Syrian government for some annual routine procedures, I was told that I was discharged from service and that all my previous salaries were seized for being charged with the involvement in terrorist acts, which they didn't tell."

IV. Filing petitions

The sacked teachers filed petitions for the Prime Ministry of the Syrian government to revoke dismissal decisions. The teachers are optimistic that their calls will achieve the intended goals soon;

"On October 4, 2018, we initiate a petition to the Prime Ministry, and requested the rescinding of the dismissal decisions which fired more than 50 teachers. Our petition was accepted, and it was answered by reinstating only 11 teachers.", said one of the teachers.

According to the teachers interviewed, the Educational Directorate of the Syrian government accepted to reinstate some of the teachers due to the fact that there is acute shortage of qualified teachers in al-Qunaitra schools, which obliged to hire people with secondary-level education.

V. Decisions to dismiss, fine and imprison employees of the Agriculture Directorate

In late August 2018, resolutions issued against employees of the Agriculture Directorate, more severe than those adopted against teachers. Estimated 300 workers in the agricultural extension units, plant nurseries and the scientific research institutions, in al-Qunaitra province, were dismissed under a decision issued by the Prime Ministry of the Syrian government. One of the dismissed workers spoke to STJ saying:

"The Prime Ministry issued decisions to fire employees, to fine each one with more than SYP 300,000, and to sentence them to imprisonment for terms

between six months and three years. As a result, all my colleagues did not want to go back to work. We hope these decisions are revoked because we are not the ones to blame for the armed groups' controlling on the agricultural establishments and turning them to military headquarters."

VI. Staff of the Directorate of Health: "The Government punishes us by eliminating our livelihood"

Only 8 of the 23 health al-Qunaitra contained in 2011, remain functioning after the armed groups came into power in 2013. Accordingly, the Health Directorate of the Syrian government issued decisions to fire the staff in these facilities in late August 2018.

Suleiman, 39, a nurse dismissed under the recent decisions, said:

"Me with other 5 nurses and a workman, were suspended from duty and summoned for questioning at the Political Branch. They asked me about the work I was given during the armed groups' control period, also about the funding source of the organization I worked for, which I have no idea about. A while later, we went to the Health Directorate to be informed that we were all sacked, and that we would be returned only by a presidential decree. The government punishes us by eliminating our livelihoods. I think it should consider the hard circumstances imposed on us during the last period. I'm the sole breadwinner for my eight-member family plus my mom, dad and brothers and I remained unemployed for three years, until my friend informed me about a vacancy in the medical center and I decided to apply to settle my debts. I've never carried a weapon or fight against the government, since that goes against the Humanitarian nature of my profession. So why should I be fired from my job!"

VII. The Government's view

The Syrian government stated that the recent dismissals were conducted for security purposes. A civil servant at the Real Estate Directorate briefed STJ:

"Dismissals and security studies are normal procedures followed by any government went through war. Those who found not guilty of terrorist activities would be reinstated. The government just wanted to know the sources of funding for those organization and whether they have played a role in destroying the country or not."



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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