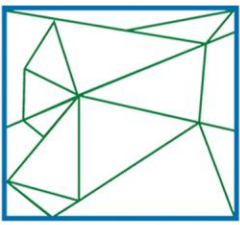


سوريون
من أجل
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Syrians
For Truth
& Justice



January 2018



Opposition Faction Arrests and Humiliates a Media Activist in Daraa

Fighters of Shabab Asuna Forces Arrests and Humiliates Mohammed Haithem al-Ghazawi, the Media Man



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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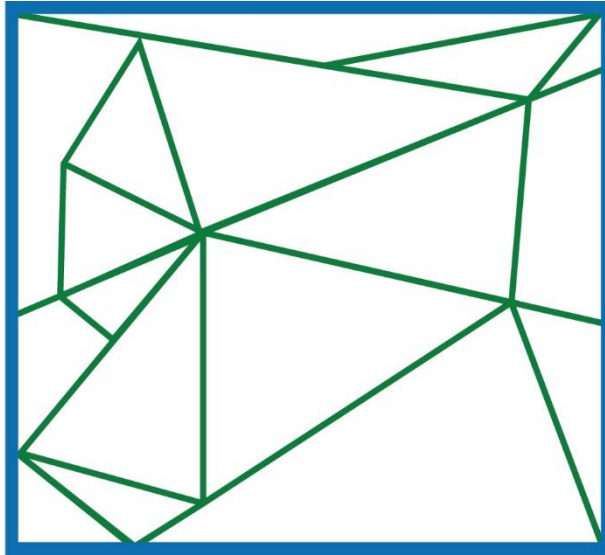




Image of Mohammed Haithem al-Ghazawi, a journalist in ALaan TV south of Syria prior to his arrest by fighters of Shabab Asuna Forces in Daraa on December 11, 2017.

Photo credit: [the Facebook Page of the journalist Mohammed al-Ghazawi, or known as Mohammed al-Horane.](#)



Preface:

The media man Mohammed al-Ghazawi has worked on documenting violations committed by the Syrian regular army against civilians since the beginning of the Syrian armed conflict in 2011 without considering that he might be subjected to arrest by one of the armed opposition factions in Daraa province and specifically in [Busra al-Sham](#) due to criticism to Shabab Asuna Forces¹. On December 11, 2017, fighters belonged to Shaba Asuna Forces arrested and threatened to kill Mohammed after compelling him to undress and do actions contrary to morality. They then forced him to talk in front of the camera and claim that he was promoting for drugs and that he was dealing with the Syrian regular army in Daraa.

Concerning what happened, the survivor Mohammed al-Ghazawi, or Mohammed al-Horane, talked to [Syrians for Truth and Justice/STJ](#) in December 2017 and said:

“When I was in Busra al-Sham to cover an event special to the Community Policing², I was driven to [Busra al-Sham Citadel](#), which seem to have a detention facility run by Shaba Asuna Forces. I was humiliated and was forced to undress while I could hear screams of other detainees in the next room because of torture they had already underwent.”

First: a Glimpse of the life of the Journalist Mohammed Haithem al-Ghazawi

Mohammed Haithem al-Ghazawi was born in ash-Sheikh Meskin city located in Daraa countryside in 1989. He has a Degree of Business Administration from Damascus University. Mohammed started work as a media activist since the peaceful demonstration that swept Syrian towns and cities in 2011. Then he worked as a field reporter in the Syrian Media Center and documented several violations committed by the Syrian regular army in Daraa province. In 2013, he worked as a field reporter and a journalist for ALaan TV and called himself Mohammed al-Horane fearful of security pursuit in Syrian regular-held areas.

¹ Formed on August 21, 2016 under the leadership of "Ahmed al-Odeh", as a result of the merger of 21 armed opposition military factions in Daraa, and Busra al-Sham is considered its major headquarter.

² It was created in May 2016 in Busra al-sham, with the support of the British company 'Adam Smith International', which runs the Ajax program, as more than 60 officers and defectors of the Syrian government Police service underwent four sessions on safety and social justice. Two other centers were established in Giza and Umm al-Maythen towns. Protection and security of civilians are the tasks of the Community Policing as well as the resolution of cases submitted in cooperation with a number of judges and jurists, while the criminal and complex cases are transformed to the Court House in Horan.



Second: Criticism is the Reason for Arrest

On December 11, 2017, the journalist Mohammed al-Ghazawi was arrested on the backdrop of his criticism to Shabab Asuna Forces that controls [Kharaba](#) village located in the west countryside of as-Suwayda, where the majority of its residents are Christians. Mohammed criticized the faction through a [report](#) he had prepared on December 30, 2016, in which it had a section talked how a Christian battalion affiliated to the Shabab Asuna Forces assaulted Kharaba villagers and infringed their freedom in previous occasions. Shaba Asuna Forces considered this report an offending thing against them. In this regard, Mohammed al-Ghazawi talked to STJ:

“Like any activist and journalist working on the Syrian revolution who carries on his shoulder the mission of reporting violations that took place on the ground by all parties to the conflict, I criticized a Christian battalion affiliated to Shabab Asuna Forces. In turn, they accused me of abusing them and distorting their reputation, besides they accused me of copying a secret report and sending it to the United Nations although this never happened. At the time, reaction of Shabab Asuna was represented in just verbal quarrel between me and them on the social media without any direct accusation of kidnapping or arrest. However, a commander identified as Abo Sadam sent me several verbal massages by one of my media colleagues, the message said that Mohammed abused us and so he would be punished and prevented from entering Kharaba village or even any area held by Shaba Asuna Forces.”

Early November 2017, Mohammed received an official invitation from Ahmad al-Oda, the commander of Shabab Asuna Forces, in order to attend a meeting in Busra al-Sham located in Daraa. Without any hesitation, Mohammed met the latter and the dispute was resolved after illustrating many points. Ahmad al-Oda pledged not to harass the journalist Mohammed once more on condition that Mohammed will inform Ahmad al-Oda immediately with any mistakes he might notice or any criticism against Shabab Asuna Forces. Actually, since then, Mohammed al-Ghazawi had not criticized the faction, as he claimed.

Third: a Detention Facility inside Busra Citadel

Mohammed added that on December 10, 2017, he received another invitation from Mahmoud Abo Ghazi, the media director at Shabab Asuna Forces, in order to attend a symposium about the community police scheduled to be held on December 11, 2017. Mohammed was invited just like other media agencies and channels in the south of Syria. He added:



“On December 11, 2017, I was late for the meeting for personal reasons, so I contacted the media director at Shabab Asuna Forces in order to get some videos and images from the symposium and write about it. The latter asked me to go to his office located in Busra Citadel, and at 12:45 pm, I got to the citadel that consists of offices for Shabab Asuna Forces. When I asked one of the guards about the office of the media director, he replied that the director was not at his office and so I recalled the director via my phone and he told me that I had to go to his house located in Busra al-Sham as well. After that, one of the guards came closer and told me that the director was waiting for me inside and then drove me inside the citadel after confiscating my cell phone.”

Fourth: Hours of Detention

Once Mohammed entered the citadel, he could not find the person he supposed to meet, instead he was surprised to see Ahmad Abdullah Tomeh, director of the security apparatus at Shabab Asuna Forces accompanied by nine others. Mohammed could only recognize three of them; they were identified as Yaser Qasem ad-Dous, Salah Abderrahim al-Hifawi and Moustafa Mohammed al-Fadel. In this regard, Mohammed said:

“They received me in a degrading way and addressed me in a very bad language. Director of the security apparatus of Shabab Asuna Forces said that he had been waiting for me for so long to account me for the offence I had committed against Shabab Asuna Forces, and immediately I denied all the accusations and I assured that I did not overpass limits of the freedom of Media. I explained that I had resolved the previous dispute with Ahmad Tomeh, the commander responsible for the faction, but the security director did not care about my answers and transferred me to a room full of iron games (instruments). There, they undressed me of all my clothes and asked me to do movements contrary to morality and decency and they insulted my family; all that was being filmed by a fighter through his phone camera. After that, they tied me and transferred me to a place like a “communicado” that contained iron chains and equipment designated for torture; I stayed there for an hour during which I heard screams of other detainees in the next room whom were subjected to torture. Finally, they took me out and filmed me while carrying drugs such as Tramadol and Hashish and forced me to confess that I was promoting for these drugs inside Busra al-Sham in cooperation with the Syrian regular army in as-Suwayda”.

Mohammed indicated that the elements who released him threatened to publish those videos in case he uttered a word of what he exposed inside Busra Citadel, or even in case he spoke a word against Shabab Asuna Forces. The journalist confirmed that Ahmad Tomeh, director of the security apparatus, threatened to kill him and advised him not to practice journalism again and said the words “we will release you this time to be a lesson for the rest of the media men.”



Fifth: Demand to Account the Responsible Elements

Following the release of the survivor Mohammed al-Ghazawi at 4:30 pm on December 11, 2017, he hurried to Siada town located in Daraa to meet Ramzi ar-Rifa'ei, an administrative officer of Jaysh al-Thawra, and narrated to him the incident happened because Mohammed, the journalist has good relations with Jaysh al-Thawra³. For his side, Ramzi ar-Rifa'ei contacted commanders of Shabab Asuna Forces and denounced what happened to the journalist Mohammed al-Ghazawi. Mohammed added:

"After the commanders of the Revolutionary Army intervened and deplored what happened with me, several civil bodies also intervened, including the Revolutionary Council of Horan⁴, in order to resolve the case. On December 12, 2017, a delegation representing Shabab Asuna Forces came to my home, so I asked them to hold the elements abusers through the law, and to issue an apology statement, which was rejected altogether, but they assured me that they themselves would hold the perpetrators accountable. On December 26, 2017, both factions, Shabab Asuna and Jaysh al-Thawra, agreed sponsored by of the Revolutionary Council of Horan with regard to my case, as verbal apologize was to be made by the leadership of Shabab Asuna Forces, but without any promises to hold the perpetrators accountable or to bring them to justice."

At the end of his speech to STJ, the journalist Mohammed al-Ghazawi just said:

"I do not consider what had happened as a personal issue, but an issue concerned to all journalists and media persons throughout Syria, notably that silence on these matters that happened previously led some to go too far in the abuse. We, the media persons, are considered to be the weakest point because of the many armed military forces and the diversity of their political and ideology orientations. Nonetheless, I assure that no voice is louder than the voice of right."

³ Formed on December 4, 2016, as a result of the merger of four military factions affiliated to the Syrian armed opposition factions in Daraa, they are Jaysh al-Yarmouk, Jaysh al-Motaz, al-Mohajereen walAnsar and Liwa al-Hasan Bin Ali.

⁴ Its first conference was held on October 30, 2017, and it joins 300 civil and military personalities who oppose the Syrian regular forces. It represents all areas of Daraa and aims to build up one political and a military front for Daraa in order to represent it in internal and external conferences.