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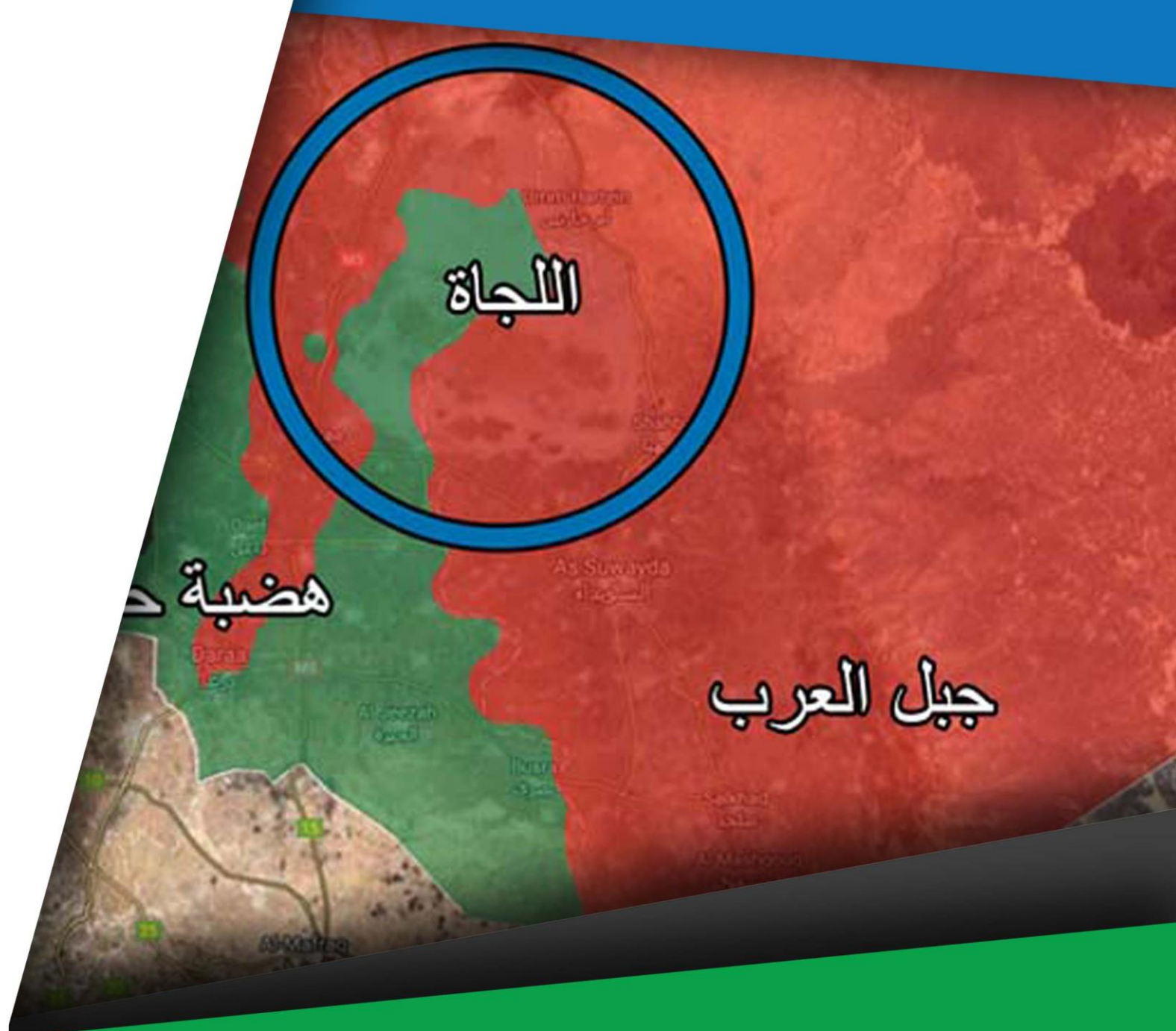For Truth
& Justice

June 2018

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جبل العرب

Return of Kidnappings and Mutual-Kidnappings Between Daraa and as-Sweida to the Front

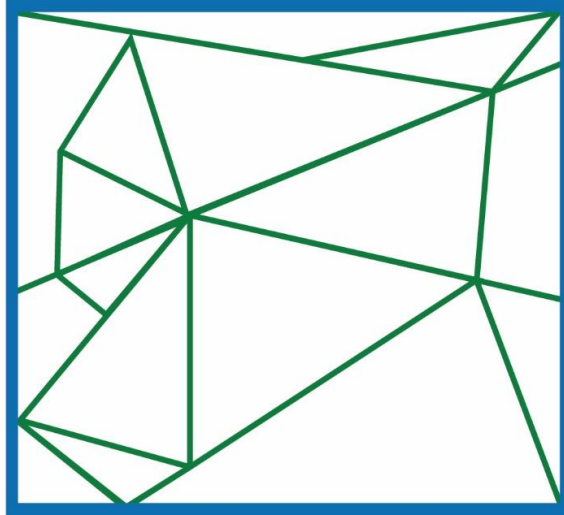## Up To 30 kidnappings Recorded during May and Early June 2018

About Syrians for Truth and Justice-STJ

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.
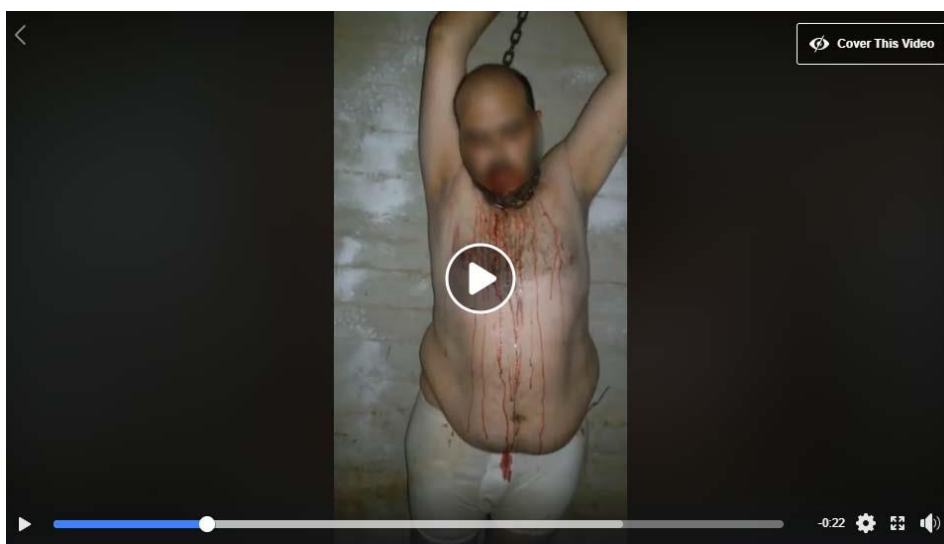
Return of Kidnappings and Mutual-Kidnappings Between Daraa and

as-Sweida to the Front

Up To 30 kidnappings Recorded during May and Early June 2018

Kidnappings and mutual-kidnappings among population of both provinces Daraa and as-Sweida returned to the front once again, according to STJ's researchers who reported that some of these incidents were to get ransom and others were as reaction to previous abductions and robberies from that party or another. The researchers also reported that kidnappers started to use the social media to lure the victims. Only in May 2018, about 27 kidnapping cases recorded in as-Sweida province and more than 10 cases in Daraa province.

In addition, the field researcher of STJ confirmed the kidnapping of both young men Salim and Mufeed al-Zo'ebi from Mesefra town by a gang in as-Sweida early May 2018. they were both lured to a place near the National Hospital in as-Sweida in order to retrieve Salim's stolen car, and they were kidnapped by a joint kidnap gang from Daraa and as-Sweida with the cooperation of a Bedouin mediator from al-Lajat area. Video clips were posted showing Salim being tortured and the kidnappers demanded a ransom of SYP 25 million, but after negotiation, it was reduced to 19 million. Both were released after paying the ransom but without getting the stolen car back.

An image taken from the video footage posted by Facebook page of Swaida Plus 1, in which it showed the abductee Salim al-Zoe'bi- Abu Nayf- with signs of ill-treatment.

In another occasion, a relative of Basil Jamal al-Mesri, a kidnapped young man who was released on 5 June, narrated to STJ that on May 20, 2018, unidentified persons kidnapped his brother-in-law Basil Jamal al-Mesri from Tafas city, who owns a currency exchange shop. Basil along with someone identified as Kamal al-Shaarani, from ad-Dour village in the west countryside of as-Sweida; it turned out that he was involved in the abduction, entered as-Sweida to buy ice. A video clip of the young man, Basil, was published with traces of torture while he was appealing his family to release him. The kidnappers demanded a ransom of SYP 50 million but was reduced to 10 million and then he was released after paying the ransom. The source added that Basil failed to identify his kidnappers or his whereabouts because he was blindfolded.

Image taken from the video footage shows the young man, Basil Jamal al-Mesri, during his detention by the kidnappers.

In a counter-abduction incident, on June 3, 2018, two persons from as-Sweida identified as brothers R-Y Olbeh, kidnapped two other persons along with their chicken-laden vehicle on Damascus-Sweida Highway; brothers Olbeh had carried out several kidnapping operations against people from Daraa since the beginning of May to get ransom, in response of kidnapping their brother "Alaa", whom they claimed was kidnapped in Daraa, according to Suwayda 24.

In another incident, unidentified persons kidnapped the young man Tamam al-A'war, who hails from al-Harisa village in as-Sweida, and on May 28, 2018, the Facebook page of Swaida Plus 1 published a video clip of him showing that he was being beaten by a masked man. STJ was unable to know circumstances of the incident nor the history of the kidnapping.

Earlier, the Qetesh Family from as-Sweida province confessed that it had kidnapped two persons from Daraa as a reaction of stealing their own bus and car in Daraa; the family demanded the return of the stolen vehicles in exchange for the release of the abductees, as local news agencies published.

In both provinces, the kidnappers use the social media such as "Facebook" and "WhatsApp" Application to lure their victims through the advertisement of the need for professional workers or engineers to work on real estate projects. News agencies quoted local sources that they had documented about 20 incidents of kidnapping through this way. Victims are lured also from Damascus, the capital city, like what happened to Idris Abu Shihab, an electrical extension worker, who was lured to Shahba city, located in al-Suwayda, through an advertisement on Facebook, then an unidentified gang kidnapped him and contacted his family and demanded a ransom for his release, as Suwayda 24 network quoted from local sources.

Suwayda 24 network documented the abduction of 25 civilians and two elements from the Syrian regular forces in as-Sweida during May 2018, including 18 cases that were recorded against unknown gangs.

STJ had issued an extensive and a lengthy report on the incidents of kidnapping and mutual-kidnappings between as-Sweida and Daraa provinces; the report entitled "Abduction as Mechanism to Disintegrate the Community Fabric"- A Special Report Highlighting Abduction and Counter-Abduction between Daraa Province and as-Sweida Province, and their Impact on Social Cohesion between Both Provinces.