

Detention center location in Adra

موقع مركز احتجاز عدرا

They Detained Us Out of our Will in a “Center for the Displaced”

“Account of the Survivor Salma Muhammad and her Child about an Air Intelligence Detention Facility in Syria-Adra”



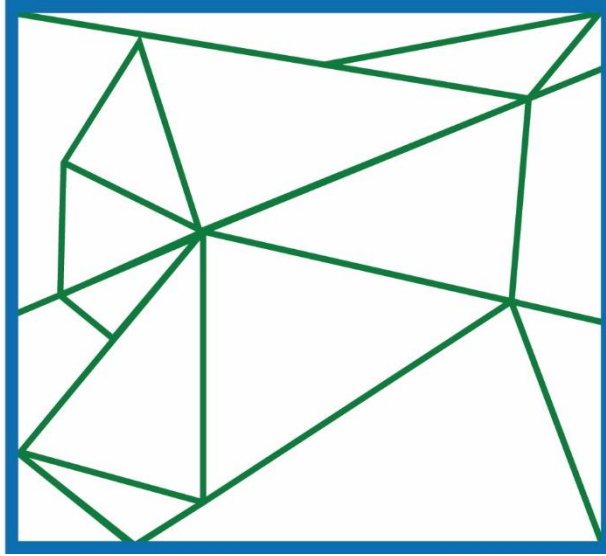
About Syrians for Truth and Justice/STJ

[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.

سوريون
من أجل
الحقيقة
والعدالة

Syrians
For Truth
& Justice





Preface

Salma Muhammad was detained with her 13-year-old child for more than two months in a center that Syrian regular forces claimed it is a center for displaced persons in the area of [Adra](#), located in Damascus countryside. That was after her attempts to move from the armed opposition controlled areas in [Aleppo](#) province to Syrian regular forces-control areas in [Damascus](#) for visiting a relative. On July 8, 2017, the Syrian regular forces arrested Salma along with dozens of civilians who were heading to the capital Damascus for various reasons some of them to receive treatment; they were all denied from their freedom. Anyway, they were taken to one of the centers, that the Syrian regular forces had transferred from a "truck driving school" to a custody, with hundreds of arrested civilians whom were subjected to various forms of physical and psychological torture in order to give them any information concerning persons belonging to the armed opposition. Salma Mohammed¹ confirmed this to [Syrians for Truth and Justice/STJ](#) in November 2017, as she commenced her speech by saying:

"The majority of the detainees were women, children, the elderly and the chronic patients, and I still remember a group of women who were detained with us and transferred to the Air Intelligence Branch in Damascus on the pretext that their husbands fought alongside the Syrian armed opposition factions. The women had been detained on the way to Lebanon because their husbands were working there. I also remember a woman detained with her child, and she desperately needed surgery in one eye, and another was detained along with her five children while she was visiting her detained husband."

¹ It is remarkable to say that name of the witness is an alias due to security purposes.



Satellite images shows the location of the center where the survivor, Salma Muhammad, was detained in the area of Adra, Damascus countryside.



First: A Glimpse of the Survivor Salma Muhammad's Life

Salma Mohammed, born in Idlib province in 1970, is a housewife and a mother of five children, had moved to live with her family in [Atarib](#) city in Aleppo years ago. However, on July 8, 2017, she decided to go along with her 13-year-old child to Syrian regular forces control areas in Damascus in order to visit a relative there. she boarded by a public transport bus accompanied by her child, they both passed the regular forces Syrian-control areas in Hama and Homs provinces with no problems, till they arrived Adra district, which is two hours from the capital Damascus, and in this regard Salma spoke to STJ saying:

"As soon as we arrived Adra area, a military checkpoint run by the regime stopped us, attacked the bus driver and forced him to take the bus to what they claimed to be a center for the displaced, which was about one kilometer away from the checkpoint that stopped us. There were other eight buses that transported scores of civilians the majority were chronic patients, elderly and children, who went from Aleppo to Damascus to receive treatment. We got to the center, which was buildings that seemed to have been previously a truck driving school, but the regime forces had transformed it to a detention center for civilians travelling to Damascus, and claimed to be a shelter for the displaced persons fleeing areas under armed opposition control. Later we find that the checkpoint that stopped us is affiliated to the Air Intelligence Branch in Damascus, and is known as the "Baghdad Bridge/ Jesir Baghdad checkpoint" and that Brigadier Habib Hasan was in charge of both the checkpoint and the center that we were held in."



Satellite image shows the location of the "Baghdad Bridge" checkpoint, in Adra Damascus countryside, which arrested Salma accompanied by dozens of civilians, while travelling to Damascus city.

Second: Details and Features of the Detention Center

Salma added that the center had large yards, one of them was surrounded on the four sides by three-story buildings, and each floor contained rooms, as each family was placed in one single room. Salma indicated that the place contained cellars for torture, where the detainees were interrogated; some persons are also transferred from this center to the Air Intelligence Branch in Damascus city. Concerning what happened with her and her child on the first day of detention, Salma said:

"On the first day of detention, the regime forces confiscated our identity cards and mobile phones, and each family was detained in one room, then regime agents commenced



interrogating some detainees in a basement equipped with torture tools, as I learned later through some detainees. They investigated me in order to give them any information or names of persons belonging to the armed opposition, but despite pressure and threats, I told them I have no relations with any political or military side. Anyway, the next day, new civilians, on two other buses, were detained, and the day later, the regime forces also held five buses, so the total number of withheld buses were (16), with about 50 people on each one."

Third: The First Days of Detention

During the first days of detention, all detainees were interrogated and some of them were transferred to the Air Intelligence Branch in Damascus city in order to pressure them and torture them to confess that they belonged to the Syrian armed opposition. Salam added that some of the detainees had been able to leave the center in the early days of detention, as they are relatives to those who are close to the Syrian regular forces, while the rest who did not have any connections remained in detention and were subjected to blackmail by brokers whom asked for money for their release. Concerning that, Salma said:

"The number of detainees was very large, particularly since there were persons detained in the center for more than a year, and that forced some of us to sleep in the corridors. And on hot July nights we used to sleep on the ground because of the hot, but winter suffering was too much greater, as some women who had been detained for a long time, told me that the center does not have any heating means except some blankets, and the windows of the buildings were mostly broken, the matter that increased the severity of the cold winter."



Fourth: The Course of Interrogation with the 13-Year-Old Ahmed

During this period, Ahmed², 13, was detained with his mother in Adra, his young age did save him from beating and threatening him during the interrogation by agents of Syrian regular forces, and in this regard, Ahmad spoke to STJ:

"In the first days of detention, the interrogator repeatedly slapped me on my face, and asked me to give him any information or names of persons belonging to the ranks of the armed opposition. After the interrogation was completed, I was placed in a room like a solo, as there was another detainee, the agents prevented me of sitting down, they ordered me to stay standing long until I felt exhausted and dizzy, and I stayed trapped in the solitary several hours, until they returned me to the room where I was held with my mother. I still remember a young detainee who was with us; he was a university student denied access to his exams and he was not allowed to do exams despite his attempts to beg them."

Fifth: Views from the Detention Center

Salam recounted some people whom were held with her in Adra area located in Damascus countryside, including a woman from Deir ez-Zur province who came to Damascus with her husband and her children. However, she and her children were detained but her husband was transferred to the Air Intelligence Branch because the Syrian regime agents found foreign currency, dollar, with him. In this connection, Salma said:

"I still remember a group of women whom were detained with us and transferred to the Air Intelligence Branch in Damascus, arguing that their husbands were involved in the fighting in military factions belonged to the Syrian armed opposition, they had been detained while they went to Lebanon because their husbands worked there. There was a young woman detained

² Alias also for security purposes.



with her old father who had Alzheimer disease, not to mention another woman who was detained with her baby, and she desperately needed surgery in one eye. There was another woman detained along with her five children while she was visiting her imprisoned husband, there was also a woman with neurological disease, she used to get unconscious for days without anyone to give help. I also remember a detained man, 40, who requested the officer in charge to transfer him to a hospital to receive treatment because he had hepatitis, but the officer in charge accused him of lying and pretending. However, whenever we asked the officer in charge about the reason of our detention, he told us that we were not in detention, but we should wait the permission from the leadership to get out of here, and since then we lived a harsh daily life, suffering from lack of food and material exploitation as well. "

Sixth: One Meal a Day

Salma added that Syrian regime agents served them one meal a day; it was some rice and soup, while in the evening, many of the detainees were forced to buy food at double price, from the restaurant supervised by the Syrian regular forces within the detention center, and Salma went on saying:

"The Syrian Red Crescent oversaw the distribution of food to the detained civilians, they were distributing food baskets to us weekly, but they were not enough, and on holidays such as Friday, for example, there was no lunch, we had to buy food from the center's restaurant, but the detainees who can't buy food stayed without any food until the next afternoon. The Red Crescent volunteers also visited the detention center about once every two weeks, with a view to providing some first-aid painkillers for the ill detainees, but they didn't give ear the pleas of detainees and their confirmed statements that they were not displaced but had been detained against their will. "

Salma noted that Syrian Red Crescent elements had stopped providing free bread and food parcels to detainees for the last week from my detention with my child, the matter that increased the suffering of detainees, especially those who did not have money to buy food.

Sixth: Cruel Practices against Detainees



During the period of detaining Salma Muhammad and her child in Adra, both witnessed many inhumane practices carried out by Syrian regime forces against other detained civilians, most notably the beatings and torture they were subjected to during the interrogation period, as well as lack of food and starvation, and lack of medical care as well. Anyway, Syrian regular forces did not allow any Red Crescent members to transfer crisis medical cases to a hospital only after obtaining the approval of the custodial supervisors, who always neglected those cases, and accused patients of being liars, and in this regard, Salma talked to STJ, saying:

"I learned from some detained young men that a young man had committed suicide inside the detention center, as a result of torture and psychological pressure he was exposed to, as he jumped from the top of a three-story building. I also witnessed the Syrian regular forces exploitation of many of the young detainees, who were forced to dig trenches near the detention center, let alone forcing some young men to work at a poultry farm owned by Brigadier Habib al-Hasan, where they worked day and night in collecting and transporting the chicken's wastes. As for young children, they were not provided any health care, vaccines or milk, not to mention the school-age children who had been deprived of their education as a result of the prolonged detention that sometimes reached a year."

Salma added that all the detainees were trying to leave the detention center by any means. The main way was resorting to brokers and paying a lot of money for them for their release. Salma stated that a month after her detention with her child, Habib Hasan, the Brigadier, who was in charge of the detention center, released about 50 detainees, alleging that they are chronic patients and must be treated. Nevertheless, the truth was that they had paid large sums of money in exchange for their release, concerning that Salma said:

"Syrian regular agents did not agree to transfer the sick detainees to the hospital for treatment unless one of them was about to death. Moreover, many of the detainees were trying to communicate with lawyers in order to release them, the lawyers said that they could



not take any action as the detainees were not in a security branch but were housed in shelters for displaced persons, and the regime forces claimed that they came to these centers with their full will. "

Seventh: September Month of Freedom:

After a detention lasted approximately two months and a half, specifically on September 21, 2017, Salma and her child were released after paying amount of (1000) \$ as a bribe to an officer in the Syrian regular forces. She finally breathed freedom with her child while hundreds of civilians are still forcibly in that center and in this regard, Salma just said:

"I still remember how the regime agents said that they were going to release us if they could fully control Deir ez-Zur, so many of the detainees, especially those who didn't have money to pay bribes, slept and dreamt of the hope that the regime forces would succeed in it, and still many of them are waiting till this moment."