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A Remarkable Increase In Killings and Abductions of Civilians Due to Insecurity- Idlib province

A Special Report Sheds Light on Several Incidents took Place in Idlib and its
Countryside during June and May 2018

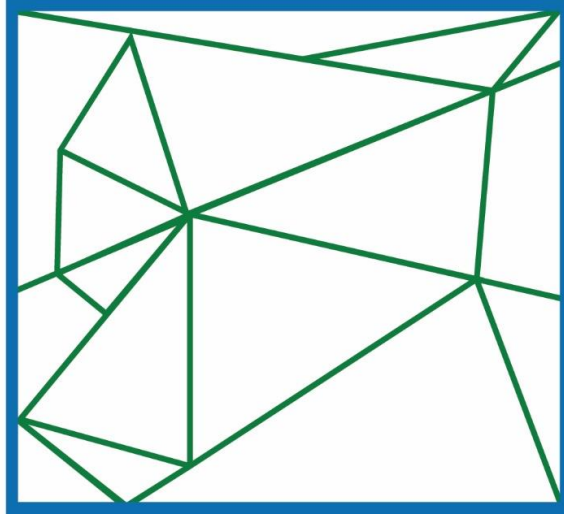
About Syrians for Truth and Justice

[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.

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Introduction

During June and May 2018, [Idlib](#) province saw a remarkable increase of killings and abductions of civilians, as well as explosions that claimed lives of many of them. Insecurity and the proliferation of weapons contributed in increasing such incidents in addition to the absence of inspection operations on the entrances of cities and towns of Idlib province.

Idlib province currently witnesses remarkable instability regarding the security situation, making civilians feel fear and insecure so that they called streets of the province "death roads" due to the increase of killings and kidnappings occurring there, and moving and travelling at night became almost non-existent, the field researcher of STJ said. He pointed that during only June and May, 2018, 32 civilians have been killed, including 6 children and two women, after the bombing of improvised explosive devices (IED) and booby-traps, the shootings, and kidnappings. Dozens of military personnel were killed in Idlib province as well.

In May 2018, Idlib province had seen two blasts that killed many civilians. May 26, 2018, at least 4 persons were killed and up to fifty injured including children and women due to an explosion that shook al-Thelatheen Street; a car bomb had been parked near residential areas in the street. STJ had prepared a report concerning the topic entitled "[Two Women and Two Kids Killed and Up to 50 Injured in a Car Bomb-Idlib City- the Blast- the Second in the Same Month- Occurred on May 26, 2018 Near the Residential Areas in al-Thelatheen Street.](#)"

Another blast had hit Idlib city on May 12, 2018 when at least 14 persons were killed and more than 30 injured because of an explosion of a car bomb in the center of Idlib city in front of the Palace of Justice that ministries of the Salvation Government affiliated to Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) took as headquarter; STJ had published a report concerning the incident titled "[A Car Bomb Kills 14 and Injures Up To 30 in Idlib City-the Explosion Occurred in front of the Palace of Justice of the Salvation Government and Caused the Central Hospital to Be Out of Service](#)".



Armed opposition-held areas in Idlib province, north of Syria, were not the only areas inflicted with killings and insecurity, Daraa province, south of Syria, had also seen such incidents in April 2018. STJ had prepared a report on the incident entitled "[Ongoing of Murder Incidents in Daraa as a Result of Insecurity- A Special Report Highlighting Several Murders in Daraa Province and Its Countryside During April 2018](#)".

First: Spread of Killings and Explosions in Idlib City

Since HTS¹ has taken over most parts of Idlib province in July 2017, checkpoints started to withdrew from cities and villages of Idlib province since HTS prevented the rest of the factions to install checkpoints on the entrances of the towns and villages. Consequently, killings and abductions against civilians as well as militants spread, notably following the renew of [military confrontations between Syrian Liberation Front² \(SLF\) and Hayat Tahrir al-Sham \(HTS\)](#) despite the parts had agreed on a ceasefire on April 24, 2018.

Oday al-Hasan, who hails from Idlib city³, told STJ that in both June and May 2018, Killings, abductions and explosions increased in Idlib province in general and in Idlib city- center of the province- in particular. He added,

"we started to feel continuous danger; we can no longer move at night nor go from one place to another due to the absence of security on the roads that have become almost like death roads. We are now cautious from IEDs that detonate continuously on the highways. Besides the situation in Idlib city is not good because kidnappings, assassinations and explosions operations occur too often in the city and its adjacent villages. On June 9, 2018, masked men kidnapped Mahmoud al-Mutlaq, a gynecologist at the al-Mutlaq Hospital near Idlib city and a

¹ On January 28, 2017, several jihadist factions in north Syria announced the merger under the name H"ayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), and the factions that declared the dissolution and the merger under the new name are Fateh al-Sham Front- formerly al-Nusra Front, Nour al-Din al-Zenki Movement, Liwaa al-Haqq, Ansar al-Din Front and Jaish al-Sunnah. However, against the backdrop of the recent outbreak of confrontations between Ahrar al-Sham al-Islamiyya Movement and HTS in north of Syria on July 15, 2017, Nour al-Din al-Zenki Movement announced its separation from HTS on July 20, 2017.

² On February 18, 2018, the formation of the Syrian Liberation Front was announced through the merger of several factions of the Syrian armed opposition; the most important of these are Nour al-Din al-Zenki Movement and Ahrar al-Sham al-Islamiyya Movement. Syrian Liberation Front is present in several areas in Aleppo and Idlib countryside.

³ HTS controls Idlib city.

week later contacted his family to order a ransom of \$120, 000 for his release. That was what actually happened on June 15, 2018.

June 1, 2018, on the road that links Idlib city and Ma'arat Mesreen, unidentified masked men directly shot two civilians identified as Mohammed Ziyad and Abdullah al-Hasan, who were killed at the spot. Moreover, in May 2018, two explosions occurred in Idlib city; one a result of a car bomb in al-Thelatheen Street where 4 persons were killed and 50 others injured. The second blast hit the central prison affiliated to HTS near the Palace of Justice killing dozens.

On May 20, 2018, a jewelry shop in Idlib city was robbed along with the car of the shop owner. All these incidents prove that the security situation in Idlib is not stable."



An image shows some of the torture signs inflicted on the doctor Mohammed al-Mutlaq by unidentified masked men before being released on June 15, 2018.

Photo credit: Activists from Idlib.



Second: A Media Man and an Element of Free Police Killed in a Motorbike Explosion in Saraqib City

May 3, 2018, an explosion took place near Saraqib city⁴, 16 km from Idlib city, killing a media person and an element of the Free Police⁵ and injuring another. In this regard, Awad Zakaria, Chief of the Free Police in Saraqib said,

"At around 7:30 pm on May 3, 2018, there was a report to the elements of the Free Police who shifted in a center in Saraqib that there was a motorbike parked near Shabour neighborhood south of Saraqib, therefore, a patrol headed to the site and checked the area surrounding the motorbike completely. However, once an element came closer to the motorbike, it exploded. Seemingly, the police elements were being watched at the time. The explosion killed my son who was a media person in the Free Police Center identified as Abdelmone'im Awad Zakaria, 1991, who was married with one daughter. In addition, two elements were injured, one of them seriously and so dispatched to hospital for cure."

Ahmad Hlal, an element of the Free Police who was injured testified to STJ saying that the explosion was prompt and sudden and caused him injuries in the abdomen, indicating that another element died the day after the blast because of wounds he had affected with; his name was Mohammed al-Eleiwei, 1981, married with four kids.

⁴ Jabhat Thwar Saraqib controls Saraqib.

⁵ The Free Police apparatus in Idlib is an independent governmental organization that is not affiliated to any external or internal entity and consists of a command centre along with several branches, the most important is the Media Branch and Training Branch. 32 centers follow the Free Police and are distributed throughout Idlib province. Functions of the Free Police are based on serving the citizens in Idlib and maintaining their security, lives and property by pursuing and detecting crimes, returning thefts to their owners and bringing the perpetrators to the courts on the ground within the sector of each center. The Free Police composes of elements and officers who defected from the Syrian regular. The Free Police has been established since 2016



In image of the media Abdelmone'im Awad Zakriya who passed away in a motorbike explosion in Saraqib on May 3, 2018. Photo credit: Activists from Saraqib.



An image shows a part of the dismantle process of an IED that was put under a car within the city on May 22, 2018.

Photo credit: Activists from Saraqib.



Third: Cases of Kidnappings for Large Sums of Money

Insecurity increases throughout Idlib, it has been revealed clearly through abductions. Civilians are being kidnapped by anonymous persons and are not released except after paying large sums of money and sometimes are being kidnapped then killed, such as Abdullah Mohammed Shawqi ad-Dele'e, who was a teacher at the Free Idlib University; unidentified party kidnapped him in ad-Dana city⁶ on April 12, 2018. One of his relatives said to STJ,

"Abdullah, 40, was from ad-Dana near the Syrian-Turkish border, and a father of five children. On April 12, 2018, at 3:00 he was kidnapped on his way to bring his children back from school, and 48 hours after his kidnaping, the gang contacted his family and ordered \$500, 000 as a ransom, but after conducting negotiations, \$50, 000 was agreed on for his release. On May 13, 2018, the money agreed on was transferred to Hama province as the kidnapers demanded and the family of Abdullah would get him from Darkush city in the west countryside of Idlib. However, that was not what really happened. Ten days later, the Civil Defense teams found Abdullah after being shot in the head but he was still alive, so they transported him to hospital. Unfortunately, he died on the way to the hospital and his body was delivered to his family later."



An image of the victim Abdullah Mohammed Shawqi ad-Dele'e prior being killed by a gang in ad-Dana in April 2018. Photo credit: family of the victim

⁶ HTS controls ad-Dana city.



Image of the victim Abdullah Mohammed Shawqi ad-Dele'e following his murder by a gang in ad-Dana in April 2018.

Photo credit: family of the victim.

In a similar occasion, on May 6, 2018, unidentified part kidnapped Mohammed Amin al-Akta' in Salqin city⁷. Mohammed worked in an exchange currency shop. Unidentified masked men kidnapped him in front of his house located in the city and took him to anonymous place. One of his relatives spoke to STJ saying,

"Mohammed was taken to an unknown place and we knew nothing about him only after seven days when one of the kidnappers contacted his family and asked for \$100, 000 as a ransom for his release. Negotiations went on for 20 days until it was agreed to hand over the

⁷ HTS controls Salqin.



required amount of money to the kidnappers. Actually, Mohammed's family went to Sahl al-Rouj area and gave the money required to the kidnappers and managed to take back Mohammed. Their status is similar to that of many civilians who lose their families due to insecurity in Idlib province in general. No one assist to end the recurrence of such incidents."

Fourth: A Dispute Between Two Families Causes the Death of A Person in Kafr Nabl

On April 30, 2018, a quarrel broke out between both families of al-Hasani and al-Hussein in Kafr Nabl⁸, and the dispute caused the death of Mahmoud Al Hasani, who worked in a warplane observatory in the city. During the quarrel, he was shot and one of the bullets settled in his head, killing him at the spot. In this regard, a relative of the victim, spoke to STJ, saying:

"Mahmoud, born in 1982, was a modest young man who devoted himself to helping the locals through his work at the observatory of warplanes. Late April 2018, a dispute arose between his family and al-Hussein Family, it was a two-years old dispute but was renewed again. During the quarrel, Mahmoud was beaten and shot directly. The perpetrator has yet to be defined nor punished for that."



Image shows the victim Mahmoud al-Hasani prior his murder in a quarrel in Kafr Nabl on April 30, 2018.

Photo credit: [Kafr Nabl News](#).

⁸ Kafr Nabl is controlled by several factions of the Syrian armed opposition, most notably Jaysh al-Izza.