

Idlib: Attacks on Teachers and Humanitarian Workers Become More Frequent

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Summary

Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) arrested several educational staff members and humanitarian workers across Idlib province during October and November 2018.

On the grounds of staging a demonstration on November 21, 2018, in Saraqib city to reject the replacement of the state's curriculum by another imposed by HTS in a girls' high school, HTS forces held several teachers and student's parents who were in the demonstration for 24 hours and suspended the school for three consecutive days. The school, that contained 139 schoolgirls, was reopened after the new curriculum was imposed. As a result, parents preferred not to send their daughters to school.

On November 15, 2018, HTS released Ali al-Dandal, a university teacher at Ibla Private University after two months in captivity. The teacher was detained for breaching Islamic sharia decency and playing music in a graduation party within the university in early September 2018.

On November 23, 2018, the principal Samer Bqaa was also held for 24 hours but was released after paying approximately \$10,000 as a fine.

On November 12, 2018, HTS held the 16-year-old Munir Qintar, a student in Ein Laruz town in Idlib, for breaking up a dispute between two students, the family of one of them has links with HTS. The boy Munir was held for few days and was set free on November 19, 2018, according to testimonies obtained by STJ.

HTS practices affected humanitarian organizations as well. On November 19, 2018, HTS fighters held Abderrazaq Awad, the head of Violet Organization for Relief and Development for embezzlement allegation but discharged him on December 1, 2018 proven not guilty. On the other side, STJ's field researcher was likely that Awad was arrested for suspending the organization's work in the border camps since they became under the auspices of the Salvation Government of HTS.

On November 21, 2018, masked gunmen raided the head office of the Polish Humanitarian Action (Polska Akcja Humanitarna) based in Hizano town in Idlib and stole \$50,000, according to eyewitnesses. The amount stolen was allocated to pay employees' salaries. The eyewitnesses confirmed that HTS opened no investigation and the perpetrators are still unknown until December 5, 2018, the date of writing this report.

According to STJ's field researcher, the fate of many teachers who were arrested by HTS still unknown, including Jassas al-Atrash from Saraqib, who was arrested in early November 2018. Besides, The student Mohammed Tamam al-Lodami from Trmanin village in Idlib was arrested on December 4, 2018 without revealing the reason.

HTS's intervention in the educational sector has increased dramatically a few months ago. This caused public outrage in Idlib.

Previously, on October 12, 2018, HTS held Saddam Mohammed, the director of Ataa Organization for Humanitarian Relief for anonymous reasons.

In another similar incident, HTS's armed militaries raided the hospital of Odai al-Hussein in Saraqib, in August 2018, and assaulted the medical staff. This incident was one of the most significant ones which were documented by STJ in an attempt to highlight the violations against medical personnel in Idlib.¹

1. HTS held teachers and guardians in Saraqib

On November 21, 2018, HTS held several teachers and students in Saraqib for staging a protest denouncing a curriculum imposed by HTS instead of that of the state. The new curriculum was proclaimed by HTS as "free educational curriculum". HTS closed down a high school for girls in Saraqib for three consecutive days following imposing the new curriculum. Consequently, many parents refused to send their daughters to the school that contained 139 girls.

The teachers and parents held are:

1. Khalid Darwish, a retired sport teacher.
2. Ahmad Abdulkarim al-Hussein, a teacher.
3. Abdulhakim al-Telawi, a resident from Saraqib.
4. Anas Barish, a lawyer.
5. Manar Dandal, an engineer.

Those aforementioned people were held for 24 hours and were released after giving vows not to demonstrate or protest against HTS again.

One of the teacher recounts,

"We protested to voice our views and reopen the high school. Khalid al-Hamed, an HTS militant, dispersed the protest after threats of arrests. We were held in the Islamic police station in Saraqib, which was an educational institute before. We stayed for 24 hours and were set free after we pledged not to go to the streets again against HTS. Frankly, the educational situation has worsened since HTS imposed its own curriculum. There is nothing we can do to change it as HTS controls the entire city. Recently, it has started to intervene in the civil life as well. The local council in the city did not say a word concerning the issue."

¹ Idlib: Ongoing Attacks on Medical Workers, STJ, April 16, 2018 <https://www.stj-sy.com/en/view/758>.

2. Closing Ibla Private University and holding its dean and a teacher

On November 15, 2018, HTS released Ali al-Dandal, a teacher at Ibla Private University. The teacher was held for more than two months over accusations of violating Islamic sharia decency. He was arrested in September 2018 because of a video shows him playing music in a graduation party in the university, which in turn caused the university to be closed down from November 23 to December 4, 2018 because males and females were mixed, and music played in it. The dean of the university Samer Bqaa was also held on November 23, 2018 for 24 hours **and** released after paying a fine of some \$10,000.

Al-Danda's brother recounted to STJ,

"\$3000 was paid as a fine so that my brother was out from the central prison in Idlib where he remained for two months and 15 days. The lawyer challenged the sentence that provided for four months imprisonment and a fine of \$5000. The prison, as my brother told me, contained eight cells, each contained 70 or 100 prisoners, with insufficient number of cots. The inmates were detained for different charges. Some for dealing with drugs, linking with the regime forces, and apostasy, among other. The inmates were from the towns and cities of Homs, Hama, Daraa, Damascus, and Lattakia and only few from Idlib. The majority of the inmates have not yet appeared to the court although they were detained for long periods."

The detainee's brother said the detention circumstances were not too bad. Food was provided regularly. There was a canteen where the inmates bought stuffs. Inmates whom charged of criminal allegations like murder and drug dealing were tortured, while the others not.

"My brother told me that the second floor of the prison was designated for HTS prisoners. There were at least 1,000 prisoners in the whole prison. 107 Prison is another jail near the military security in Idlib. Rumors said detention circumstances there were too bad, as detainees were exposed to various techniques of torture before they appear to the court to hear their sentences. Concerning my brother, he was released only after he spent half the period of the imprisonment sentence in the prison. Now he lives with his family and starts life all over again."

According to STJ's field researcher, though Ibla is the only private university in the armed opposition-controlled areas, it is still closed by HTS till this today. The university has several departments, including the Architectural Engineering, English department, and Arabic Department, and approximately 700 students attend it.

3. He no longer wants to attend school fearful of HTS fighters

In Ein Laruz town² in Idlib, armed militants from HTS raided the house of the 16-year-old student Munir Qintar on November 12, 2018, and detained him for the involvement in a fight between two students in the town's school, one of them belongs to a family loyal to HTS. The guy was sent to an anonymous place, but two days later the family learnt that he was held in al-Raei prison in al-Zawiya Mount. After that, he was sent to a jail in Kafr Nabl and the family brought witness to the court in an attempt to prove his innocence. However, HTS refused the testimony of the eyewitnesses because they were relatives of the boy, from Qintar family, who proclaimed themselves as opponents to HTS. His family was denied seeing him as well, according to the victim's brother who testified to STJ.

"My family tried hard to be able to see my brother but to no avail. On November 19, 2018, Ahmad Hakim, an HTS former commander visited us and told my family that he would pull some strings and try release my brother, in order to boast and assure to the people that HTS group does not harass people. He kept his promise and went to Kafr Nabl and set my brother free without a court decision. However, my brother Munir never wished to go to school again because he was frightened of HTS agents. Munir told his family that during the period when he was captivated, he saw some women and children held in the prisons of Marayan and Kafr Nabl. Munir now suffers a tough psychological state and he is now afraid of everything. We tried our best to make him forget the hard experience he went through but in vain."



The student Munir Qintar. Photo credit: his family

² HTS controlled Ein Laruz until December 4, 2018, the date of writing this report.

4. \$50,000 stolen from the Polish Humanitarian Action in Hizano town

On November 28, 2018, armed gunmen broke into the Polish Humanitarian Action (Polska Akcja Humanitarna) in Hizano³ town in Idlib, tied up the security guards and beat them. After that, they entered the office and stole \$50,000, as one of the employees illustrated bellow:

"The money was stolen on the same day the organization's office received it. The amount was allocated for the employees' salaries and part of it was for workers in humanitarian projects. The organization works on sanitation projects, including digging for water and sewage projects. HTS bears full responsibility for this incident since it is the only military authority in control of the town and its surrounding. Nonetheless, it opened no investigation in order to recognize the perpetrators. The organization is trying hard to convince the donor Polish administration to await before taking any actions and stop the organization's work, as if happened would negatively affect the residents in Idlib because the organization used to offer services and health projects and help the disaster areas that desperately need water."

5. HTS arrests head of the Violet Organization's relief office

On November 19, 2018, HTS agents arrested Abderrazaq Awad, for the involvement in an alleged embezzlement case filed against Violet organization a year ago by the relief office of the Salvation Government in Idlib city⁴

A relative of the director said,

"It's obvious that Abderrazaq was arrested for suspending the organization's work in border camps after they became under the authority of the Salvation Government, as the organization does not want to work with this government. This is not the first time HTS arrests members of the organization's staff; earlier, two drivers were arrested in March 2018 for allowing mixing between females and males. Arrests against staffs of humanitarian organizations continues across Idlib, despite the dire living circumstances there."

In a statement published on November 23, 2018, Violet Organization denied the Salvation Government's accusation against al-Awad's, and refute any other allegations that could damage the Organization's reputation.

According to STJ's field researcher, al-Awad was released on December 1, 2018, after found not guilty.

³ HTS controls Hizano town until December 4, 2018.

⁴ HTS controls Idlib city.

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Violet Organization - منظمة بنفسج
November 23 at 11:13 PM

بيان توضيحي حول حادثة توقيف مدير برنامج الأمن الغذائي في بنفسج الزميل عبد الرزاق عوض

وكذلك ادعاءات تدقيقها وسائل الإعلام نسيه لسمعة بنفسج ورفيقها .
مع انطلاقه الإستراتيجية الإنسانية للضرورات الواقع والحاجات الملحة للسكان في سوريا عام 2011 , كانت بنفسج سبقة مع مثيلاتها من المنظمات الإنسانية لمد يد العون لأهلها وسدّ الحاجات الأولية بعد حركات النزوح التي استمرت حتى يومنا هذا .
وانطلاقاً من قوله تعالى "وَمَنْ أَحْيَاهَا فَكَأَنَّمَا أُحْيَا أُمَّةً جَمِيعًا" استمرّ عشرات من الشباب التطوعي الطامح للعمل جاهدين لتلبية حاجات المتضررين ملتزمين بقواعد ومبادئ العمل الإنساني , واضحين نصب أعينهم تلبية احتياجاتهم والتخفيف من معاناتهم قدر المستطاع محافظين على كرامتهم وإنسانيتهم , إلى أن استطاعت بنفسج الوصول وخلال شهر أيلول الماضي فقط لأكثر من 300 ألف مستفيد مباشر من جميع برامجها في الشمال السوري , ما أكسبها قبولاً مجتمعيّاً واسعاً وثقةً كبيرةً من جميع شركائها الدوليين والمحليين .
وبناءً عليه , فإن منظمة بنفسج تنفي صحة الإدعاءات الضوالية الموجّهة ضد كوادرها اللذين نذروا أنفسهم لخدمة أهلنا والتي تقدم بها مستفيدون إلى محكمة مدينة ادلب كجبهة قضائية وجهة فصل ذلك لدوافع كيدية وشخصية ,
أدت لتوقيف السيد عبد الرزاق علي ثمة التحقيق منذ صباح الثلاثاء 11/19
وتؤكد بنفسج بأن جميع عملياتنا موثقة ومدققة أصولاً بما في ذلك عمليات الشراء التي نتم وفقاً للسياسات والإجراءات المعتمدة من قبل الشركاء لتوثيق كل الإجراءات والعمليات إضافة إلى التزام بنفسج بسياسات وإجراءات المراقبة والتدقيق الداخلية لكل مشاريعها المنفذة لضمان سير جميع العمليات بحرفية ودقة ونزاهة عالية .
- ومن خلال ما سبق , إن المسؤولية الدينية والأخلاقية والمجتمعية تقع على عاتق كل أصحاب الشأن في حماية العاملين الإنسانيين ومساندتهم لضرورة استمرار تقديم الخدمات الطبية والتعليمية والإغاثية والتنموية وعدم انقطاعها ,
- وتحيب منظمة بنفسج بجميع القوى والمعاليات والجهات المدنية لتسيير أعمالها في سبيل ذلك والحفاظ على

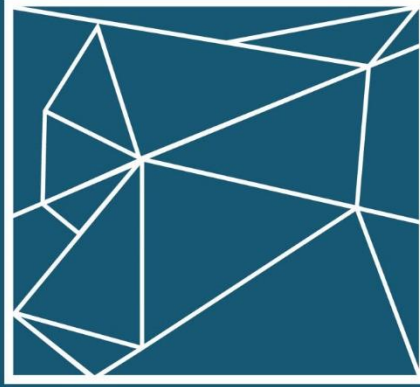
The statement issued by Violet organization on November 23, 2018. Photo credit: [Violet organization](#)

On the backdrop of this incident, Idlib's residents took to the streets on November 20, 2018, rejecting the arrest of al-Awad. The residents raised slogans demanding the release of all prisoners in HTS's detention facilities and spreading safety in the city. In return, HTS fighters shot in the air to disperse the demonstration and imposed a blackout.



An HTS fighter trying to disperse the demonstration in Idlib city on November 20, 2018. Photo credit: [Idlib Media Center](#).

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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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