



March 2019



## ***Idlib: Abductions Culminate in early 2019***

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## Summary

Abductions are still ongoing in the province of Idlib, which is mostly controlled by Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), due to rampant insecurity and absence of checkpoints at the entrances and exits of Idlib's cities and towns. At least 23 civilians, medical personnel, and humanitarian workers were kidnapped during January and February 2019, mostly for ransom, according to STJ field researcher.

The phenomenon has created fear and insecurity among Idlib's people who condemned the armed groups' inability to control the security situation.

STJ already documented the abduction of at least 25 people in **Idlib and Hama** in late 2018.<sup>1</sup>

STJ also documented the kidnapping of civilians by unknown gunmen in Idlib between December 2, 2018, and January 8, 2019. Two of the abductees were killed, whereas one child and a media activist were released, and three others are still missing.<sup>2</sup>

### 1. Kidnapping medical personnel for ransom

Hamdo Matar, 37-year-old, married with one kid, was abducted from his own pharmacy in the HTS-held town of Ma'ar Debsa by a masked group on February 3, 2019 at around 5:30pm and released on 16<sup>th</sup> February after paying a ransom.

His brother recalled to STJ:

**"I was working 200 meters away from my brother's pharmacy when some people told me that it was open, but my brother was not in. I go myself there to search for him, but he was nowhere. We realized that he was been abducted and circulated the news, but we couldn't identify the perpetrators even after his release. My brother is a well-reputed and kindhearted man. He has a four-year-old kid and he is rich."**



The pharmacist Hamdo Matar. Photo credit: his family.

<sup>1</sup> "Kidnappings and Killings in Hama and Idlib Surge, People Concern", October 17, 2018, <https://stj-sy.com/en/view/881>

<sup>2</sup> "Kidnappers Kill Two out of Seven Civilians Abducted Lately in Idlib Province", January 15, 2019, <https://www.stj-sy.com/en/view/1143>.

The witness added that other pharmacists were kidnapped earlier in Idlib; namely Abderrazaq al-Ismael and Ahmad Haj Youssef, who were abducted in late 2018. The later was kidnapped at gunpoint by a masked group and released after paying a ransom. Later, he displaced to Turkey.

The victim considered that kidnappings prevailed in Idlib due to chaos and insecurity in areas got out of the Syrian government's hand.

In a similar incident, Obeid Mahmoud al-Obeid, the 39-year-old dentist was kidnapped from his clinic located in a makeshift camp for the internally displaced persons in the HTS-held town of Deir Hassan, northern Idlib. His fate has yet to be disclosed. The dentist has displaced from Aqerbat town in east Hama. He is married with two kids.

One of his relatives recalled to STJ:

**"Unknown gunmen abducted the doctor from his clinic at noon and took him to an anonymous place. Although we reported the incident to the free police in Deir Hassan, he is still unaccounted for, and the perpetrators haven't been identified".**

Two days earlier, unknown men kidnapped Hussein al-Deiri, the 32-year-old pharmacist from his own pharmacy located in the HTS-held town of Jobas in east Idlib. A source from his family narrates to STJ:

**"At around 6:20pm, my cousin went to the pharmacy and was surprised that al-Deiri was not there though his pharmacy was still open. Then, his family reported to the police. The next day, the kidnappers corresponded his family and sent them a video clip showing Hussein asking for help, saying literally 'a gang kidnapped me, help'. In the video clip, the kidnappers threatened to kill Hussein if the family failed to pay \$200,000 as a ransom. Negotiations started between the kidnappers and the family until the amount of the ransom was reduced to \$50,000. Seventeen days later, al-Deiri was set free. Al-Deiri said the kidnappers exposed him to psychological and physical torture and kept him in a place he could not identify because he was blindfolded. The kidnappers served him only one meal a day and they poured cold water over him".**

The witness added that in a previous attempt to abduct Hasan al-Deiri from his pharmacy, the kidnappers killed his brother Tarrad al-Deiri, 38 years old, who was there, and fled, and they haven't been identified yet.



Hussein al-Deiri, the pharmacist who was kidnapped on January 22, 2019. Photo credit: his family

In a statement released on January 22, 2019, the Syndicate of Pharmacists in Idlib denounced the abduction of Hussein al-Deiri and condemned the 'cowardly criminal acts' against medical and humanitarian personnel in general. It also called the parties responsible for the protection of civilians to intensify their efforts to uncover the criminals and held them accountable, warning that such incidents meant to prompt the educated to immigrate and leave the liberated areas in ignorance.

نقابة صيادلة ادلب  
الرقم / 1

التاريخ ٢٠١٩/١/٢٢

**بيان**

**بخصوص خطف الزميل الصيدلاني حسين ديربي**

بتاريخ ٢٠١٩/١/٢٠ أقدمت عصابة مجرمة على خطف الزميل  
الصيدلاني حسين ديربي من صيدليته في قرية جوباس وهو على رأس  
عمله وأثناء تأديته لواجبه الإنساني والنقابي

وبدأت عصابة الإجرام بمساومة أهله لدفع مبلغ طائل من المال لإطلاق  
سراحه

إننا في نقابة صيادلة ادلب إذ ندين هذا العمل الإجرامي الجبان فإننا نطالب  
وبشكل فوري إطلاق سراح الزميل حسين ديربي ليعود لأهله وأطفاله  
ومرضاه سالما وبأسرع وقت ممكن

ونناشد أصحاب العقول من الخاطفين ونقول لهم بأننا نجزم بأن يكون كل  
أطفالهم وكل ذويهم قد استفادوا من خيرة كوادرنا الطبية من صيادلة  
وأطباء في المحرر وذلك بتخفيف معاناتهم من أمراض شتى

فهل يكون جزاء الإحسان إلا الإحسان

وندعو الجهات المنوط بها حماية المدنيين لتكثيف جهودها ومتابعة عملها  
وفي كشف المجرمين ومحاسبتهم وإفشال مخططات المفسدين وعملاء  
النظام في استهداف الكوادر الطبية خصوصا وعامة أهلنا في المحرر  
عموما التي تهدف إلى دفع الكوادر إلى الهجرة وإخلاء المحرر من  
الكفاءات

نقابة صيادلة ادلب  
٢٠١٩/١/٢٢



The release by the Syndicate of Pharmacists on January 22, 2019. Photo credit: [the Syndicate of Pharmacists in Idlib](http://www.stj-sy.org).

## 2. A child kidnapped in Idlib, HTS is the suspect

On January 8, 2018, masked gunmen kidnapped the 15-year-old child Mohammed Samir Bazzarah while he was heading to his father's poultry located in the HTS-held town of Kurin in Idlib. However, the child escaped the following day. He narrated to STJ the course of events:<sup>33</sup>

**"I was on my way to my father's poultry north of Kurin in the afternoon. A car intercepted me, and five masked men got off quickly. They handcuffed and blindfolded me, then took me to an unknown place. I was frightened they would kill me, but they dumped me in a farm with another person who was abducted earlier. The next day, I untied myself and managed to flee. My family was surprised that I could flee while they were still searching for me. I told the concerned parties about everything I encountered, and they stormed the kidnappers' headquarter, which was a villa in Faylun village near Idlib city. Two of the kidnappers arrested turned to be HTS fighters and they were from Uzbekistan. The rest kidnappers escaped.**

**In addition, Anwar al-Bakkor, who was abducted from Harem city was found in the same place."**

In another testimony, a relative of the boy said that when HTS knew the kidnappers were of its agents, it tried to blur the issue, as it hastened to send its security forces to Kurin to hold the kidnappers in order to investigate them, as it claims, in the midst of growing tensions in the region.



The child Mohammed Samir Bazzarah following his escape. Photo credit: the child's family

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<sup>33</sup> The boy was interviewed in the presence of his father.

### 3. The abduction of a media man in rural Idlib

On January 3, 2019, an unknown group kidnapped the media man Abdlghani al-Aryan, born in 1991, while on his way home with his brother, in the HTS-held city of Selqin, and was released the next day.

Al-Aryan is a freelance cameraman and a reporter for several media outlets. He said to STJ:

**"I was driving home along with my brother when a vehicle intercepted us. Masked gunmen got off, beat me on the head and placed me in their vehicle. They also beat my brother so that he would not chase us. Then, they took me to a place which I could not identify. They dumped me in a small room after they handcuffed and blindfolded me. Few hours later, one of the kidnappers began to film me on his mobile saying, 'beat him'. They beat me for 15 minutes while he was filming. I got injuries in the shoulders. I was kept in the room until the next day. They served me no food or water. At midnight, they placed me in a Pick Up vehicle and drove me to an unknown place. They removed the band from my eyes and ordered me to walk and not to look back or they would shoot me. As soon as I walked, they shot in the air, and I started to run far away. When I reached a headquarter run by HTS, the elements there transferred me to Salqeen hospital and then to my house. I reported to the free police center in Salqeen but the perpetrators have not been identified yet."**



The media man Abdlghani al-Aryan following his release by the kidnappers on January 4, 2019.

Photo credit: the media Abdlghani al-Aryan

## 4. Suqour al-Sham accused of kidnapping a civilian in Idlib

A 30-year-old man was kidnapped in Idlib on January 6<sup>th</sup> and released after 17 days. However, his family pointed fingers at Suqour al-Sham<sup>4</sup> armed group.

A source from the family who asked anonymity for security purposes recalled to STJ:

**"In the afternoon, my brother was repairing his car in the center of HTS-held city of Marat al-Nu'man. Suddenly, two vehicles stopped; one in front of him and the other behind him. Then, armed men got off and dragged him away at gunpoint. It was 4:00pm when we learned of his abduction. No one recognized the kidnappers because they were masked men. Some eyewitnesses identified the type of cars. Actually, we searched for them for two days and it turned out that the two cars belonged to Suqour al-Sham. We asked the group to set my brother free, but they denied for two days. After practicing pressure on the group, they said my brother has been held by them for three days in Maarrat al-Nu'man and that they have transferred him to al-Zawiya Mount. After dignitaries from the town intervened, my brother was released on January 18, 2019."**

## 5. A relief worker kidnapped and killed

Humanitarian and relief workers were not spare either a result of insecurity, as described by many locals interviewed by STJ's field researcher.

In one case, Hamdo al-Omar, who was born in 1976 in al-Habit town in south Idlib, was kidnapped by unknown people. One of the victim's relatives testified:

**"Al-Omar worked with several aid and humanitarian organizations prior to his abduction. He worked for WATAN, Syria Relief, and People in Need. He is a friendly reputable guy. He is married with six children. In the afternoon of 10<sup>th</sup> December, al-Omar said he would deliver aids to a poor family in the HTS-held town of Ebyan in Idlib. But he mentioned nothing about the family's name or place of residence. He only said he would be away for half an hour, but he never came back. 18 days later, the head of an organization in which al-Omar worked, received a call from the captors demanding \$500,000 in exchange for al-Omar's release. The kidnappers sent a voice message in which the kidnapped explained about his kidnapping. The captors also sent his family a video clip showing the victim being exposed to excruciating torture.<sup>5</sup> Negotiations began with the kidnappers for eight days until the amount of the ransom was reduced to \$50,000. The amount was sent to a currency exchange shop in another area, as demanded by the kidnappers. We awaited a call from the kidnappers so that they would release al-Omar, but that**

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<sup>4</sup> A group included in the National Liberation Front. It actives in al-Zawiya Mount, Ma'arat al-Nu'man, and many areas in east and north Aleppo.

<sup>5</sup> STJ refrains from publishing the video as it contains fierce photos and also to respect the feelings of the victim's family.



did not happen. On January 5, 2019. The civil defense and the free police found a man's body with documents east of Atarib city. He was shot in the head. We went to the hospital of Atarib to identify his body, but we couldn't see him because of crossfire among armed groups. The body was sent to Ebyan town and then to Maarrat Mesreen. They killed him and took \$35,000. The free police in Atarib was informed of his murder, but they came to no conclusion."



The victim Hamdo al-Omar prior to his abduction and murder. Photo credit: his family



The victim Hamdo al-Omar following his abduction and murder. Photo credit: his family

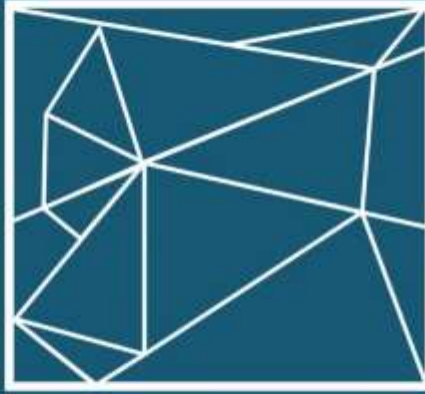
## 6. He was released for a ransom estimated \$1000

Munir al-Ahmad, who was born in Damascus city in 1987, was kidnapped on his way to visit a friend. On November 10, 2018, unknown armed men kidnapped him for ransom and then released him on December 1, 2018. The victim recalls to STJ:

**"I was on my way to Ma'arat al-Nu'man when someone riding a motorcycle passed. He asked me about my destination. I thought he would give me a lift in exchange for money. and because I was late, I asked him to drive me to the junction of Shamarin town. We were just one kilometer away from the junction when a van intercepted us with three gunmen. They threatened me with the guns and called me 'hey you, IS militant'. They seized my cell phone and my possessions and then put me in the van and drove me to an anonymous place. They accused me of dealing with drugs when they found antidepressants in my pocket. After that, they began to hint to money, and I told them that my family cannot afford too much. Few days later, the kidnappers contacted my brother and asked him to pay \$10,000. But the amount was reduced to \$5,000. However, my brother explained to them that my family is not wealthy and that he could only collect \$1000, and so they agreed. The money was sent to them and they released me and fled away. I reported to the concerned parties in Ma'arat al-Nu'man, but they could not find the perpetrators,"**

The media activist Mohammed Bal'as, on the other hand, explained to STJ that the most key reasons of the prevalence of abduction in Idlib is the absence of a judicial authority to prosecute the criminals. Adding that some kidnappers take protection from armed groups in case they were investigated. Some kidnappers were arrested in early 2018 but others are still at large amidst the prevalence of insecurity throughout Idlib.

سوريون  
من أجل  
الحقيقة  
والعدالة  
Syrians  
For Truth  
& Justice



## 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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