

March 2019



## **Idlib: Hayat Tahrir al-Sham Seizes Public and Private Properties**

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## Summary

Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS)<sup>1</sup>, an armed group, seized, looted and pillaged many public and private properties in the province of Idlib between October 2018 and mid-January 2019.

As soon as HTS captured the town of Jarjanaz on January 10, 2019, it confiscated over 20 houses, belonged to activists and civilians.<sup>2</sup>

On 14<sup>th</sup> January, HTS looted and pillaged equipment and supplies of the Jarjanaz-based **health dispensary**, though it was the only center in the town, provided health care to approximately 30,000 people.

Earlier, on December 4, 2018, HTS seized the **mill in Ma'arat Mesreen** in Idlib and expelled 30 of its workers. Besides, it confiscated \$140,000 and 17m Syrian pounds from people trusted to keep the mill income.

On November 4, 2018, HTS seized the headquarter of the **General Establishment for Cereals** in the city of Idlib as well as its financial incomes, estimated about \$123,168 and 11m Syrian pounds. Moreover, it dismissed 200 workers and employees, depriving them of their only source of survival. On October 16, 2018, HTS seized the **silos of Ra'a** in north Idlib, dismissed the workers and confiscated about 1000 tons of wheat, along with the silos financial incomes that estimated about \$160,000.

According to STJ's field researchers, HTS's practices created outrage amongst the workers who became unemployed due to their dismissal and losing their only source of income. However, they kept silent fearful of arrest by the group. In September and October 2018, HTS seized several public properties in the province of Idlib, including the Saraqib- based grain silos. It also dismantled the train station that links Aleppo to Lattakia and Aleppo to Hama. In October 2018, HTS confiscated more than ten houses in Kafr Zita in north Hama. The houses were owned by people loyal to the Syrian government. It also confiscated the Education center as well as an emergency center used by the civil defense team. HTS provided no explicit reasons for the seizure.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> On January 28, 2017, several jihadist groups announced merger under the name Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS). The groups are: Jabhat Fateh al-Sham, formerly al-Nusra Front, Nour al-Din al-Zenki Movement, Liwa al-Haq (the Truth Brigade), Jabhat Ansar al-Din, Jaysh al-Sunna, and Ansar al-Sham al-Islamiyya Movement. On the backdrop of recent confrontations between HTS and Ahrar al-Sham in north Syria on July 15, 2017, Nour al-Din al-Zenki split from HTS on July 20, 2017.

<sup>2</sup> In early January 2019, armed clashes began between HTS and the National Liberation Front. Several civilians were killed according to an STJ's report entitled "8 Civilians Killed and 17 Others Injured in Clashes between Military Factions in Idlib and Aleppo", <https://stj-sy.com/en/view/1135>  
As a result of the clashes, HTS captured all of Idlib province except the two cities of Ariha and Ma'arat al-Nu'man. HTS also militarily controlled the towns and cities in west Aleppo and north Hama.

<sup>3</sup>Hama: Hayat Tahrir al-Sham Seizes Houses and Public Buildings in Kafr Zita", October 26, 2018, <https://www.stj-sy.com/en/view/895>.

## 1. The seizure of 20 houses in Jarjanaz after controlling it

On January 10, 2019 HTS managed to capture the whole town of Jarjanaz after five days of clashes between it and the National Liberation Front (NLF). After that, it started seizing houses belonged to civilians and activists. An activist from the town who used the pseudonym Ahmad testified to STJ:

**"Jarjanaz is a disaster area. Since October 2018, many of its residents have fled the bombardment launched by the regime forces. Only few remained. On January 10, 2019, HTS captured the town and raided numerous houses belonged to civilians, activists and officials in the civil administration, including my house and my son's. An armed group affiliated with HTS made use of our absence and broke into the two houses and stole the solar panels. They vandalized the furniture and confiscated both houses. Not only that, but they also seized more than 20 houses on the pretext that the owners reside in regime-held areas. They seized public properties, including the local council building, too."**

In a cross-checked testimony Ahmad Hamid, a media activist from Jarjanaz, confirmed to STJ that the moment HTS controlled Jarjanaz, it raided and seized public and private properties. They didn't spare headquarter of the free police, nor some houses owned by civilians, activists, and militaries of the NLF.



One of the houses confiscated by HTS in Jarjanaz town on January 10, 2018. Photo credit: the media activist Ahmad Hamid.

According to STJ's field researcher, Jarjanaz had 30.000 residents and 8000 IDPs, but too few of them still living there, as many fled the bombardment carried out by the Syrian army towards east Idlib, and others fled the clashes between HTS and groups affiliated to the NLF in early January 2019.

## 2. Looting of the health dispensary's equipment in Jarjanaz

On January 14, 2018, HTS agents raided the health dispensary, located near the free police station in Jarjanaz, and looted all of its equipment and logistic materials.

Yousef al-Ahmad, a nurse worked for the dispensary told STJ:

**"HTS took advantage of the displacement of Jarjanaz people and the absence of the health dispensary workers, due to the fierce conflicts between HTS and the NLF, to loot all its contents, knowing that it was the only medical center in the town and used to provide health care for more than 30.000 people. On January 15, 2019, I came to the health dispensary and found no devices or logistic materials inside. Now, civilians, who are still living in the town, have to walk about 35 or 45 kilometers to the closest medical point to get free medical services."**

## 3. The confiscation of \$140,000 and 17m Syrian pounds from a mill

In December 2018, HTS confiscated the mill<sup>4</sup> in Ma'arat Mesreen in south Idlib. The mill used to employ 30 workers and provide flour at low prices to the bakeries in the town.

An employee in the mill said:

**"On November 11, 21018, a committee of the Administration of Supply in the Salvation Government visited the mill to sort its contents, without giving its director any reason. On December 4, 2018, the same committee revisited the mill and ordered the director to hand them over all the flour there. The director asked for money in exchange and said that he needs the consent of the Administration of Supply to do that. But on the same day, an HTS patrol came and ordered to hand the mill over to the Salvation Government. They expelled 30 workers and guarded the mill heavily. Moreover, they confiscated \$140,000 and 17m Syrian pounds of the mill's income that were kept with some people. The funds were taken and deposited in the Sham bank that belongs to the Salvation Government."**

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<sup>4</sup> It affiliates to the Idlib-based General Establishment for Cereal of the Syrian Interim Government and the opposition.

Another employee in the mill confirmed to STJ that the Administration of Supply seized the mill in addition to 55 tons of cereals and about 14,300 kilograms of flour.

On December 4, 2018, fighters of HTS transferred the mill's contents to an unknown destination and expelled all its 30 employees. The mill still under HTS' seizure until the date of writing of this report.

## 4. The confiscation and loot of the Grains Institution building in Idlib

On November 4, 2018, HTS seized the Grains Institution <sup>5</sup> based in the city of Idlib. The director of the department of bakeries told STJ that few days ago the director of the Administration of Supply in the Syrian Interim Government visited the Institution, asking for the delivery of 4,000 sackcloth for free in contrary to the applicable legal methodology. When the director of the General Establishment for Cereal refused to do so, HTS closed down the institution and expelled all its employees.

The director of the department of bakeries illustrated that the Idlib-based General Establishment for Cereal has offered services to the locals by buying grains from the farmers at good prices for four years. It then stored the cereal and grind it in the establishments' mills in both Saraqib and Ma'arat al-Nu'man. After that, it hands out the flour to its bakeries in Jisr al-Shughour, Kafr Takharim, and the public and private bakeries in Idlib areas.

The establishment produced about 15,000 bundles of bread every day and sell it to the locals at good prices.

**"Despite all mediations to solve this problem, the Administration of Supply is still seizing the General Establishment for Cereal. This has a negative impact on the residents' lives. The Administration of Supply summoned all the persons who kept the incomes of the establishment and demanded them to hand over the funds, threatening them with arrest if they refused. As a result, the Amani company owned by Walid al-Rouhi handed over \$14,800, al-Fajer company owned by Yaser Ezzo handed over \$80,000, and al-Qassoum company owned by Qusai Qassoum handed over \$28,368 and 11m Syrian pounds. The total amount was \$123,168 and up to 11m Syrian pounds".**

The director of the department of bakeries said that HTS's seizure of the institution in Idlib has resulted in many consequences. 200 employees lost their jobs, which are their only sources of income, the farmers were deprived of the services the establishment used to offer like buying the cereal at suitable encouraging prices and distributing free sackcloth, the public and private bakeries were also deprived of the domestic flour the establishment used to offer at good prices, and finally the citizens were deprived of the bread made at good

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<sup>5</sup> It affiliates to the Syrian Interim Government/the opposition.

prices in the Kafir bakery in Jisr al-Shughour because HTS seized it on December 4, 2018 and confiscated its contents that worth 3m Syrian pounds and 50 tons of flour.

## 5. Looting \$160,000 and one thousand tons of wheat from the grain silos in Ra'a

HTS confiscated the grain silos in Ra'a<sup>6</sup> town, north Idlib in October 2018. An employee testified to STJ,

**"It all started on October 15, 2018, when Abou al-Mo'taz, an official in HTS arose a dispute to seize the silos. He asked for 5,000 sackcloth from the establishment for the purpose of using them as sand berms, but the director of the institution refused to do unless he gets a formal paper signed by HTS. The next day, an HTS patrol came and expelled all the employees. They also seized the silos of Ra'a which contained about 1000 tons of wheat and 10,000 sackcloth. Negotiations with them did not work out. They asked us to pledge alliance with the group and that the director of the silos had to release a statement announcing that he abandoned the Syrian Interim Government, and that the silos became under the sway of HTS. The patrol looted the financial incomes that were with some people, threatening them with arrest if they refused to do so. The funds were estimated \$160,000."**



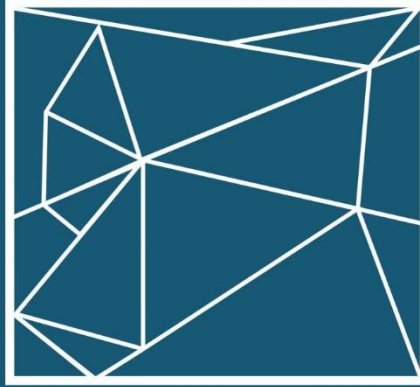
The grain silos in Ra'a, Idlib after HTS seized them in October 2018. Photo credit: STJ

<sup>6</sup> It affiliates to the Idlib-based General Establishment for Cereal, which affiliates to the Syrian Interim Government and the opposition.

سوريون  
من أجل  
الحقيقة  
والعدالة  

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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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✉ [editor@stj-sy.org](mailto:editor@stj-sy.org)