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& Justice



Rural Damascus: Civilians Arrested and Prevented from Returning Home

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Nine civilians at least were arrested upon their return from Syria's north, after they "reconciled" with the Syrian government. The security services have also prevented about 200 persons from returning to their homes in the villages of Wadi Barada

In January and February 2019, Syrian security services have arrested no less than 9 civilians, including women and children, in rural Damascus. A number of these persons were arrested upon returning from Syria's north and conducting legalization of status/reconciliation, in the two areas of eastern Ghouta and Wadi Barada¹ in particular. In addition to this, the involved services have lately issued lists of civilians and militants' names, "politically in agreement with the Syrian government," who are not allowed access to their houses in Wadi Barada "until they refer to the security branch demanding their presence."

The field researchers of Syrians for Truth and Justice/STJ met a number of the arrestees' relatives living in eastern Ghouta and Wadi Barada and other family members based in the areas controlled by the armed opposition groups.

• Arrests in Eastern Ghouta:

STJ's field researcher has monitored three arrests against women and their children, who have been held captive for various reasons, including the return from Syria's north- areas controlled by the opposition armed groups, the husband is prosecuted by one of the security branches and being a relative to a prosecuted person, among others. Two young men were arrested for similar reasons.

1. Miss F. H. (28 years old and single): Accompanied by her father, the young woman, based in the city of Douma, headed to the State Security Bureau to finalize the transactions required to end the seizure imposed on her brother's car, who was displaced to Syria's north, being a former staffer under the Jaysh al-Islam/ al-Islam Army, an affiliate of the Syrian opposition armed groups. This happened late in 2018.

Arriving in the building of the State Security, one of the personnel there told her father to leave her and come back in two hours, for she is to be subjected to investigation. The father was handed over the money and the personal belongings of his daughter and left. Returning on time, other personnel told him that she is to last longer. A week later, through which the father repeatedly asked for his daughter, the personnel informed him that she will never come out, for "many security reports confirm that she worked as a nurse in a former field hospital, in addition to her communication with terrorists and facilitating their work in the Syrian government's control areas."

About two months later, F. H. was transferred to the Damascus Central Prison/Adra. She was yet held there when this report was written.

¹ Wadi Barada district is located to the west of the capital Damascus. However, it is administratively affiliated with rural Damascus province and includes 13 towns and villages.

2. A woman (39 years old) and her three children, all below 14: On January 13, 2019, this mother, along with her children, left the city of Douma heading to a village in Wadi Barada, planning to live with her husband. She was arrested at a checkpoint affiliated with the Air Force Intelligence, in the vicinity of Douma city. The husband was contacted by the branch to surrender himself, in return for the release of his wife and children. Ten days from the arrest, the husband handed himself in and his destiny remained unknown to the day this report was written. However, they let the woman and her children go.
3. A woman (40 years old) and her daughter (15 years old): On January 27, 2019, both the mother and her young daughter were arrested upon returning from Syria's north, where the armed opposition factions are in control. A patrol, under the Military Security Division, raided her house and arrested her along with her daughter, 15 days into their return. A relative of the mother said that the latter returned to Douma to obtain an identity document for her daughter, give her in marriage in the city and head back to Syria's north. Nonetheless, one of the brokers and mediators, who have strong ties with the security services, demanded a sum of 2,5 million Syrian pounds to release the mother and the daughter. The destiny of both was still unknown when this report was written.
4. A young man: On January 22, 2019, the house of the young man, a former worker in the media field, was raided by the Military Security Division, which arrested him. The young man's whereabouts were still unknown to the date this report was made.
5. A young man: Belonging to a well-known family in Douma, the young man's brothers, all former militants of armed opposition groups, left the city while he stayed. Early in 2019, he was summoned by the State Security Bureau in Douma, where he was subjected to investigation for several hours and allowed to return home. Two days later, the State Security raided his house, and his fate remained unknown to the day this report was made.

• Arresting Some and Preventing Others from Returning Home in Wadi Barada:

Several Syrian security services have issued three lists marking no less than 208 names of persons who are "politically in agreement with the Syrian government" and residents of Wadi Barada district, the two villages of Bassemeh and Ein al-Fijeh particularly. At the beginning of the 2013's siege, these people got internally displaced from these villages and headed to live in other areas held by the Syrian government.

In February 2019, the three lists– the first containing 115 names, the second 23 and the third 68 – were released and mainstreamed at the Jdeidat al-Wadi Municipality. In a second step, the Mukhtars, governors of the villages, were also notified and the lists were

generalized there. The lists provide for “disapproving the return of the persons, whose names the lists mention, to their villages until they show up at the security service [departments] demanding their presence.”

STJ had access to the lists and the names they mentioned. Nonetheless, it refrained from publishing any of them to protect the families concerned from prosecution or harassment. STJ’s field researcher has also managed to verify the identity of a few of the mentioned people, finding that some are volunteers at the National Defense Militia, which supports the Syrian regular forces, while others are famous for their loyalty to the Syrian government but “have trouble or are on bad terms” with security personnel and officials in the ranks of the security services.

As the lists indicate, the security services that issued the decision preventing the people’s return are the following: The General Intelligence Directorate of Branch 279, the General Intelligence Directorate of Branch 251, the Political Security Division–Rural Damascus Branch, the Military Intelligence Division–Palestine Branch 235, the General Intelligence Division, the Military Intelligence Division –District 227 Branch, the Criminal Security Directorate, the Drug Enforcement Directorate, the Immigration and Passport Directorate – Travel Documents Branch.

In the same context, security services have arrested several persons, who were displaced to Syria’s north/areas controlled by the Syrian opposition armed groups and who have recently returned after conducting legalization of status/reconciliation, helped by mediators and paying money. Up to six young men were arrested in Wadi Barada, after which they paid money as a “weapon allowance” to seal the legalization/reconciliation. Ten months into the incident, the fate of these young men remains unknown.

In the adjacent town of Madaya, the number of the people who returned from Syria’s north, after conducting similar legalization of status/reconciliation, amounted to 28 persons. All the returnees were arrested at different dates in 2018. The death of three of the arrestees in detention facilities was reported, according to their families, other two were released, their parents said, after paying a large sum of money to an officer as a bribe.



History

Syrians for Truth and Justice was conceived during the participation of its co-founder in the Middle-East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) Leaders for Democracy Fellowship program, who was driven by a will to contribute to Syria's future. Starting as a humble project to tell the stories of Syrians experiencing enforced disappearances and torture, it grew into an established organisation committed to unveiling human rights violations of all sorts.

Convinced that the diversity that has historically defined Syria is a wealth, our team of researchers and volunteers works with dedication at uncovering human rights violations committed in Syria, in order to promote inclusiveness and ensure that all Syrians are represented, and their rights fulfilled.

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