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## Syria: At Least 13 Kidnappings Recorded Recently in Afrin

## **Syria: At Least 13 Kidnappings Recorded Recently in Afrin**

*This report documents all kidnappings between early 2019 until July  
22, same year*

Ransom kidnappings by “unknown” persons continue to occur in Syria’ Afrin, the Kurdish-majority city which is controlled jointly by the Turkish Army and the Syrian opposition’s National Army. STJ has documented 13 kidnapping cases since the beginning of 2019 until July 22 of the same year. Only four of those kidnapped were released while two found dead and the other seven, including a child, are still unaccounted for.

STJ field researchers in Afrin confirmed that the kidnappings were for ransom and that some cases occurred in broad daylight near checkpoints of the National Army. Relatives of several of those who survived kidnap, refused to reveal details about the detention conditions, the kidnappers’ identities or the parties they belong to, or even about the amounts of ransoms, for fear of being harassed or kidnapped again.

## I. Hostages survived on payment of ransoms

Relatives of kidnap victims who survived, talked to STJ field researchers, but refused to mention the detention conditions or any information about the kidnappers. The kidnappings’ victims are:

- 1- Ali Battal, 38, was kidnapped on June 9, 2019 and released on July 14, 2019 after paying a ransom of \$15,000. A relative of the kidnapper talked to STJ saying:

**“Ali Battal hails from al-Basouta village, which is controlled by The Hamza Division, and he is married with three children. On the 9<sup>th</sup> of June, Ali was on the way to his shop in al-Hal market in Afrin by motorcycle with his brother, when a white car with masked armed men inside got in their way near al-Qasatel factory (also known as al-Alawi factory) on the road to the village of Tarnada. They wanted Ali personally. They took him, along with the mobile phones they had and the motorbike and told his brother to go back home. The following day, the kidnappers called Ali’s family and asked for a ransom of \$100.000, threatening to kill him if they leaked any photos or information about the incident. After negotiations, Ali was released in exchange for \$15.000 on July 14, 2019.”**

The witness affirmed that the kidnapping took place just one kilometer away from a Civilian Police checkpoint. And that Ali with his brother passed three checkpoints before the kidnapping happened; the first was for the Hamza Division at the al-Basouta turn-off, while the second was for the Military police on the Tarnada road at Hasan Abdul Majeed point and the third was for the Civilian Police in the village of Tarnada at the shrine near the turn-off to the village of Kerzayhel.

- 2- The 14-year-child Ahmed Khalil bin Munir. He was kidnapped on February 23, 2019 and released on March 23, 2019. A relative of Ahmed talk to STJ regarding the incident saying:

**“The child Ahmed was kidnapped from in front of his house in the village of Mereskê, which is controlled by the Levant Front/*al-Jabha al-Shamia*. The kidnappers switched off the main circuit breaker of the child’s house to drive him out and caught him. On March 23, they set him free and dropped him at the turn-off to the village of Qatmah from where he walked back home alone.”**

STJ field researcher reported that the child’s family summarily refused to provide any information related to the incident, such as the kidnappers’ identities, the circumstances of detention or the paid ransom. Given the fact of their good financial situation, other members of the child’s family had, reportedly, been blackmailed or arrested by the Levant front on alleged charges, and then released after paying fines.

- 3- Mohammed al-Tari, 66, from the village of Birîmce, kidnapped on January 27, 2019 from his house, which is located on the road to Tarnada in Afrin, and he was released after a week in return for a ransom.
- 4- Aref Mohammed, 50, from the village of Ka’na Korka, in Afrin was kidnapped on January 27, 2019 and released after 10 days in exchange for ransom.

STJ field researchers confirmed that relatives of the two recently mentioned victims, refused to share any details about their kidnapping incidents.

## II. Kidnapped persons whose fate is still unknown

STJ field researchers reported that six people from different villages were kidnapped by unidentified gunmen in Afrin and its surroundings, and their whereabouts are still unknown. While their relatives refused to make it out in any detail. The persons kidnapped are:

- 1- Khalil Mohammed Kojar,40, from the village of Hamam, was kidnapped on January 29, 2019, from in front of his house near Abu Imad bakery in midtown Afrin.
- 2- Ibrahim Kalil Abdu,42, from the village of Ba’dinli, was kidnapped on May 6, 2019 from Afrin, where he lives. The kidnappers asked his family for \$200.00 as a ransom and after negotiations the reclaimed amount reduced to \$40.000. But the contact with the kidnappers had lost before the agreed deadline of the exchange; about a month before preparing this report. However, the fate of Ibrahim still unknown. A friend of Ibrahim spoke to STJ about the kidnapping incident saying:

**“At about 6.00pm Ibrahim was cultivating his land in Ba’dinli with his cousin, when two white cars came and took him. His cousin tried to pursue them with the tractor he was riding but he couldn’t”.** STJ field researcher noted that the Ba’dinli village is jointly controlled by the 112th Brigade and the Ahfad al-Rasul Brigades.

Mohammed Hasan Mohammed, from the village of Ouak, was kidnapped on May 11, 2019 at the turn-off of the Farkh Jirmah village in Sharran district.

- 3- Sheikho Qunbor Abu Harbi, from the village of Sheikh Mohammadly, was kidnapped on June 15, 2019 in Afrin while on his way to buy some stuff for his work.
- 4- The Dr. Kamal Ja'far was kidnapped from his home in Afrin on July 22, 2019. The kidnappers contacted his wife, who lives in Germany, and demanded a ransom of 6,000 euros.



Dr. Kamal Ja'far. Photo credit: Local social media pages dedicated to report violations in Afrin.

- 5- Doran Omar Abroush,32, from the village of al-Basouta, was reportedly kidnapped but STJ does not have further confirmed details about the incident.

### III. Two found dead among three persons kidnapped, while the remaining is unaccounted for

On May 13, 2019, two men and a child were kidnapped by unknown persons while they were traveling from the town of Jindires to the city of A'zaz to buy a car. On June 23, 2019, the bodies of the two men were found bearing signs of torture and burning in one of the orchards near the village of Qastal Jendu. The fate of the child is unknown amid information about his death, but without any clear evidence. A relative of the victims spoke to STJ about the incident:

**“On May 13, 2019 Rasheed Khalil, 42, was sitting with his son, Mohammed,10, at the door of his grocery shop in the town of Jindires, when Sharaf al-Deen Sedo came and asked Rasheed to escort him to the city of A’zaz, because he wanted to buy a new car from there with the 15 million Syrian pounds he had. Indeed, they went there, and shortly after they left Sharaf al-Deen’s wife came to the house of Rasheed’s family and told them that unknown kidnappers called her and demanded the amount of \$100.000 to release her husband, otherwise threatened to kill him and hang his head in the main roundabout of Afrin.”**

On May 22, 2019, the body of Rashid Khalil was found near the village of Qastal Jendu, while the body of Sharaf al-Deen was found handcuffed and burned in a grove near the same village on June 23, 2019. Their deaths date back to May 22, 2019, one week after the kidnapping, according to the Coroner's Office in A'zaz.

The witness went on to say:

**“After finding the body of Rasheed Khalil, his family continue to contact with the kidnappers to negotiate the release of Sharaf al-Deen and the child Mohammed. The Lions of the East Army/Jaish al-Sharqia interfered in negotiations and got \$10.000 from Sharaf al-Deen family to lure the kidnappers, as it claimed. The Lions of the East Army alleged killing the kidnappers, but it didn’t disclose their identities or the fate of the victims. Besides, it didn’t return the money to the victim’s family.”**

As for the child Mohammed Rasheed Khalil, his mother went to Afrin governor (Wali) and to the centers of the military and civil police, but obtained no accurate information, as the civil police suggested the child to be killed but his body has yet to be found.



A screenshot of the messages sent by the kidnapers to the family of Sharaf al-Deen, demanding a ransom of \$100,000 in exchange for their release, and justifying the kidnapping by alleging that the victims support the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and possess a military pickup.

Photo credit: the victim's family.



The kidnapped child Mohammed Rasheed Khalil



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## 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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