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## Another Wave of Summary Executions by HTS in Idlib

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*The executions took place between December 2019 and late April 2020 on charges of “adultery” and “cursing God”*

## Introduction

The Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham's (HTS) security force carried out summary executions against 10 people, including a woman, in various parts of Idlib province, for charges of adultery, cursing god, working for the Syrian government, murder and robbery; that was between December 2019 and late April 2020. The executions were carried out secretly, under decisions made by HTS' courts, according to witnesses and well-informed sources.

This isn't the first time, as in September 2019 STJ documented three executions carried out by HTS in Idlib, on charges of spying for the Syrian government, involvement in the bombings of Jisr al-Shughur city and adultery.<sup>1</sup>

A sharia court of HTS in the city of Ma'arat al-Nu'man, in northern rural Hama, southern Idlib, implemented four executions by firing squad, and it rendered similar default judgments against two people accused of intentional homicide, between August and December 2018.<sup>2</sup>

According to STJ field researcher, HTS has several detention centers and prisons throughout Idlib and northern rural Aleppo, notably al-Iqab Prison in Jabal Al-Zawiya/Zawiya Mountain, Idlib Central Prison, Harem Central Prison and the prison in Rif Al-Mohandeseen area in western Aleppo. The researcher also reported that HTS arrested activists and civilians on various charges including in connection with revolutionary activity and working for the armed opposition or for politicians or military officials of the Syrian government. However, other charges such as theft, are within the Salvation Government jurisdiction.

## 1. Six executions in Idlib since early 2020

HTS carried out six executions between early 2020 and April of the same year, on charges of working for the Syrian government, cursing God, murder and robbery, as reported by STJ field researcher.

### A. A former member of Syria's People's Council faced a firing squad

On 1 April 2020, HTS executed the former member of the Syrian parliament Rifat Mahmoud al-Daqqqa who was born in 1952 in the town of Al Janoudiyah, western Idlib, where he returned after his tenure.

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<sup>1</sup> "Syria: HTS Executes Three Men in Idlib", STJ, 21 September 2019, (last visit: 28 January 2020) <https://stj-sy.org/en/syria-hts-executes-three-men-in-idlib/>.

<sup>2</sup> "Six Persons Placed on Death Row as Sharia Courts Preside over Two Murder Cases in Idlib and Hama", STJ, 19 February 2019, (last visit: 28 January 2020), <https://stj-sy.org/en/1188/>.

On 14 May 2019, HTS arrested Rifat Mahmoud al-Daqqqa, on the charge of intelligence cooperation with the Syrian government. HTS claimed that Rifat mistakenly sent a voice message to a WhatsApp news group named “Al Janoudiyah room”<sup>3</sup>-which includes members from HTS- talking about the powerful military fortifications constructed by the opposition groups in the Kabina village, and demanding to prevent the entry of food and water to the village to secure its fall to the Syrian government forces.

Following the spread of this record, HTS’ security forces circulated Rifat’s face and ID card,<sup>4</sup> and he was arrested upon attempting to flee towards Turkey.



Image 1: Rifat al-Daqqqa before his execution. Credit: Ebaa News Agency affiliated with HTS.

Sons and relatives of al-Daqqqa, tried to visit him in Harem Central Prison more than once but they weren’t allowed, as reported by a relative of al-Daqqqa, who added that a judge in Harem court told him that it was no use trying or hiring mediators to free al-Daqqqa, as he would definitely face execution, which is the fate of every traitor.

However, the same relative contacted a security personnel in HTS to check on Rifat’s status and conditions in Harem prison and he was told that Rifat had been held in an isolation cell for six months and investigated extensively throughout the first three months. Then he was transferred to the court, which sentenced him to death. On 1 April 2020, a security personnel of HTS sent a video on a WhatsApp group of the latter showed Rifat Mahmoud al-Daqqqa sitting on the ground among HTS security personnel while being prepared for murder.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> For more info please check: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-6w3wMW5aL0>

<sup>4</sup> For more info please read: “In the context of Hama’s battles, HTS strikes the strongest blow against al-Assad’s intelligence and arrests a spy from the revolutionaries”, Al-Durar Al-Shamia Network, 14 May 2020, (last visit: 29 April 2020), <https://eldorar.com/node/135293>

<sup>5</sup> See this video: [https://stepagency-sy.net/nfiles/2020/04/video09f58a2a-97ae-4c02-9271-c3d56a5f8f16video.mp4?\\_id=1](https://stepagency-sy.net/nfiles/2020/04/video09f58a2a-97ae-4c02-9271-c3d56a5f8f16video.mp4?_id=1)





Image 2: (on the left) a screenshot from the aforementioned [video](#) shows Rifat Mahmoud al-Daqqqa sitting on the ground while being prepared for kill by HTS security personnel.

Image 3: (on the right) a screenshot from the same [video](#) shows Rifat Mahmoud al-Daqqqa following his execution.

Media outlets circulated another video shows the execution of Rifat Mahmoud al-Daqqqa.<sup>6</sup>



Image 4: a satellite image of the execution site.

<sup>6</sup> For more info please check: [https://stepagency-sy.net/nfiles/2020/04/video2639967f-becb-45c2-9c31-79634b966552video.mp4?\\_2](https://stepagency-sy.net/nfiles/2020/04/video2639967f-becb-45c2-9c31-79634b966552video.mp4?_2)

The activist Nawar al-Idlbi reported that the execution took place near his newly built house at the Al Janoudiyah turn-off from the Jisr al-Shughur side. He also said that the execution was carried out secretly early in the morning.

A relative of Rifat confirmed that even Rifat's family didn't know about his execution before receiving a call from the civil defense telling them to come and pick up his body.

The same relative added that Rifat's body had ten bullets in the head and the back and two in the right leg, and that HTS warned Rifat's family to abstain from conducting public burial or mourning services.

#### **B. Four men executed in Muhambal town, western Idlib:**

The above-mentioned incident was followed by a similar one on 11 April 2020 in the city of Harem, where HTS carried out four executions against a former member of its Dawa (Call) Office, one of its fighters and two members of the Turkish-backed Sham Legion/*Faylaq al-Sham*, on charges of murder and robbery.

According to a media activist in Idlib, on the morning of the same day HTS' security force drove Moafak al-Hussein, Akram al-Jalout, Hayyan al-Jalout, Khaled al-Omar and Mohammad al-Omar, by a vehicle with an iron cage from [Harem Prison](#) to [Jisr al-Shughur prison](#), where they were put in one room and listened to their execution judgments.

The activist added that at 12:00 pm on the same day, the accused were taken by a 4-wheel-drive vehicle escorted by a convoy of five cars carrying ten heavily armed militias each, from Jisr al-Shughur to the town of Muhambal in western Idlib, where the execution took place at the turn-off to the [Josef](#) village, he detailed:

**"When they arrived, the militias scattered out and blocked the road between the Enip village in Muhambal and Josef village in Ariha district by their vehicles. People from the village and nearby villages, including me, crowded to see five blindfolded and handcuffed men squatting on the ground and surrounded by masked militias holding military handguns and rifles. Shortly after, a man in a military uniform got off one of HTS' vehicles holding a paper; he stood among the accused and started reading: "HTS' court in Harem city issued death by firing squad sentences against Moafak al-Hussein, Akram al-Jalout, Hayyan al-Jalout, Khaled al-Omar and Mohammad al-Omar for committing robberies and looting which led to killings and casualties, including that of the teller Anas Moujel al-Askar and the injury of his brother Mus'ab. Given the refusal of the victims' families to pardon the offender and to receive blood money, their execution was decided."**

The activist added that when the statement was over, masked men in military uniforms headed to the backs of the accused to execute the sentence, but before they initiated one of the accused asked to talk to the man who declared the statement and after whispering in the latter's ear, that accused was dragged to one of HTS' vehicles, while the remained four were killed with ten bullets each at 12:45 pm.

The activist added that HTS militias formed a security cordon around the bodies after they carried out the executions and after half an hour, they put the bodies on top of each other in a 4-wheel-drive vehicle and headed to the north. Meanwhile, Mus'ab Moujel al-Askar reported on WhatsApp news groups that his brother's murder was avenged by executing the murderers; Moafak al-Hussein, Akram al-Jalout, Khaled al-Omar and Mohammad al-Omar, except for Hayyan al-Jalout who would be executed at a later date.



Image 5: a satellite image of the four men's execution site.

STJ field researcher in western rural Idlib reported that on 12 May 2019, the military checkpoints in Al-Ghab area in western Hama and Jisr al-Shughur in western Idlib, circulated on Walkie-talkies news saying that people in a van committed a murder in Muhambal and fled and they must be found. The crime mentioned was perpetrated against a man used to work in currency exchange and gold trade called Anas Moujel al-Askar; he hails from the village of Halban in Ma'arat al-Nu'man. What happened was that masked armed men stopped Anas who was driving with his brother on the road to the village of Josef which led to a fire exchange caused the death of Anas and a serious injury of Mus'ab, his brother, as well as the kill of one of the masked men and the injury of two others.

The masked armed men robbed a sum of money from the teller's car and then headed towards the Al-Zeyarah town, which was then bombed by the Syrian government, and threw the body of their dead fellow there. Then they went to the hospital in Jisr al-Shughur, threw their injured fellows on its entrance and fled. According to the dead's relatives who were met by STJ, HTS had extended the detention period to two years, during which



dignitaries and elders from the village were sent to the dead's family to ask them to pardon the killers and accept the blood money, but the teller's family, however, categorically rejected all the reconciliation attempts.

### C. Executing a guy for cursing God:

STJ field researcher monitored a third similar execution carried out by HTS against the guy Mohammad Aqib Homam Tanu, who was born in Darat Izza town in 2000, on charges of cursing God. A relative of the victim said in a statement to STJ that the latter was arrested by HTS on 26 October 2019 at the Bab al-Hawa Border Crossing while entering Idlib from Turkey to take care of his sick grandfather. Another version by sources aware of the incident relates that the victim returned to Idlib because of being deported from Turkey on the same date, without providing any further details.

The victim's cousin told STJ that Mohammad was executed after several months in detention, noting that HTS didn't disclosed the execution site

He explained:

**"Mohammad stayed in Istanbul and worked in a restaurant there for about five years before he decided to return to Idlib in late 2019. When he reached the Bab al-Hawa Border Crossing, HTS' security personnel arrested him after searching his cell phone and took him to the Court Prison of Sarmada town, where he spent about five months. After that, HTS executed him by two bullets in the head and heart, as confirmed by the forensic report from Idlib National Hospital, where his body was sent and then handed over to his family who buried him in Darat Izza."**



Image 6: (on the right) Mohammad Aqib Tanu before his execution. Credit: the photo was taken from social media and verified by the victim's family.

Image 7: Mohammad Aqib Tanu following his execution. Credit: the photo was taken from social media and verified by the victim's family.



He added that the charge leveled against Mohammad was spying for the Syrian government and that before the execution, Mohammad's father asked HTS for explanations on the arrest but the latter provided no evidence against the victim. In this regard he said:

**"After a while, HTS told Mohammad's father that they found 18 sentences contain cursing God in Mohammad's cell phone and thus he would be executed. One day before the execution, Mohammad's father negotiated with HTS through a mediator the suspend of Mohammad's death sentence in exchange for 2500 US dollars. But HTS, however, carried out the execution the following afternoon and Mohammad's family picked up the body from the forensics department."**

## 2. Executing four people in late 2019:

By the end of 2019, STJ field researcher documented HTS' execution of four people, including a woman, in different areas of Idlib, on various charges, notably adultery. HTS also executed a young man, whom it had been arresting for a year after he was deported from Turkey, without saying why.

### A. Death sentence for a woman and a young man for adultery:

On 2 December 2019, HTS executed a young woman and man from the town of Salqin after being accused of adultery. On this, a relative of the woman told STJ that the latter was married to a guy and living with him in Idlib. However, she was charged after HTS found photos and conversations with another guy in her cell phone.

The witness noted that HTS arrested the woman after she escaped to Afrin, and that although HTS promised her of a lighter sentence (several months in prison), it executed her in Harem. And on 11 December 2019, HTS executed M.M., the guy who was accused of contacting her.

### B. Executing another guy for adultery in rural Idlib:

On 12 December 2019, HTS executed a married man called M.W. from the town of Salqin in rural Idlib, under an adultery charge, which was based on information provided by a collaborator with it. M.W. was arrested from his home in Salqin and executed in Darat Izza in rural Idlib, according to a source from Idlib who asked anonymity for security reasons.

The same source mentioned that M.W. was secretly married to a woman from his town with the knowledge of her family but without her first wife and children being informed. A security patrol of HTS arrested him from the home of his new wife in the presence of her mother and brother. Although he brought two witnesses who confirmed that his second marriage was legal, HTS insisted to imprison him for four months under the public prosecution.

During the months of imprisonment, HTS' security wing contacted sons of M.W. to negotiate his release for 2000 US dollars, but the sons refused, as they thought that he would be released after completing his four months sentence, citing the lack of charges against him. Nevertheless, they were shocked to receive a phone call from their father, telling them that he would be executed for adultery the next day.

### **C. The execution of a guy after being detained by HTS:**

The fourth summary execution carried out by HTS in December 2019, was against a young man who had been held by it for more than a year.

On this, a media activist in Idlib said that the last execution by HTS was against Mohammad Hussein Bakr, from the village of Dumilo in Afrin. About a year ago, Mohammad was arrested by HTS at the Bab al-Hawa Border Crossing after being deported from Turkey.<sup>7</sup> Mohammad's family tried to bail him out but HTS requested large sums which they couldn't afford. On 12 December 2019, Mohammad called his family and told them that he would be executed by HTS, which indeed executed him and sent photos of his body to his family.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Sources told STJ that about a year ago Mohammad was deported from Turkey for not having a temporary protection identity card (Kimlik) from Istanbul and that HTS didn't disclose the charges against him. for more info, please check: "Turkey: Renewed Concern Among Syrian Refugees over a New Wave of Illegal Deportations", STJ, 29 October 2019, (last visit: 29 January 2020) <https://stj-sy.org/en/turkey-renewed-concern-among-syrian-refugees-over-a-new-wave-of-illegal-deportations/>

<sup>8</sup> STJ field researcher couldn't obtain those photos.

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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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