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Afrin: 116 Persons Arrested and Disappeared in September 2020, despite UN Commission of Inquiry on Syria's Demands for Halting Violations

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The arrests were chiefly carried out by the Military Police Service, the Sham Legion, Ahrar al-Sharqiya, al-Jabha al-Shamiya, al-Waqqas Brigade, Northern Democratic Brigade, Sultan Murad Division, 113th Division, and 114th Division

In September 2020, arbitrary arrests/detentions and enforced disappearances spiked dramatically in the Syrian Kurdish-majority region of Afrin, slamming the demands of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, aka UN Commission of Inquiry on Syria, to cease violations. In mid-September, the commission laid down several recommendations, including the immediate cessation of all forms of incommunicado detention and release of all persons arbitrarily detained, calling Turkey to exert more efforts to ensure public order and safety in the areas under its control to prevent such violations by the Syrian National Army (SNA). These recommendations were made on the heels of the commission's latest report, in which it documented that members of the SNA have committed hostage taking, cruel treatment, torture and rape in Afrin and surrounding areas.¹

In this report, Syrians for Truth and Justice (STJ), through its network of field researchers that operate across Afrin region, documents the arrest/detention and disappearance of no fewer than **116 persons**, including 5 woman and a teenage girl, in September 2020. The reported figures indicate a marked increase compared to the arrests documented in earlier months, as 40 in June,² and 101 in July and August 2020.³

Furthermore, STJ managed to document **the release of 56 persons, detained in September, including two women**. In exchange for their release, the detainees and/or their families paid fines/bails of varying sums, either in Turkish Lira (TL) or in Syrian Pound (SYP), STJ's field researcher reported, adding that the **fate of 60 persons, a teenage girl and four women included**, was still unknown at the end of the reporting time, on 15 October 2020.

Carried out in seven districts, the arrests were perpetrated by the SNA-affiliated Military Police Service, along with other armed groups— namely, Sham Legion/Failaq al-Sham, Ahrar al-Sharqiya/ Free Men of the East, al-Jabha al-Shamiya/Levant Front, al-Waqqas Brigade, Northern Democratic Brigade, Sultan Murad Division, 113th Division, and 114th Division.

It is noteworthy that the reported arrests were basically documented by STJ's field researchers, who are based in the target districts, in addition to local sources, family members or relatives of the detainees, as well as inside sources affiliated with the opposition armed groups, who reported or commented on a number of arrest incidents.

¹ "UN Commission of Inquiry on Syria: No clean hands – behind the frontlines and the headlines, armed actors continue to subject civilians to horrific and increasingly targeted abuse", OHCHR, 15 September 2020, <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/Pages/NewsDetail.aspx?NewsID=26237&LangID=E> (last visit: 23 October 2020), paras. 52-58.

² "Afrin: 40 People including two Women Arrested in June 2020", STJ, 15 July 2020, <https://stj-sy.org/en/afrin-40-people-including-two-women-arrested-in-june-2020/> (last visit: 23 October 2020).

³ "Afrin: 101 Persons, including six Women and two Children, Arrested in July and August 2020", STJ, 7 September 2020, <https://stj-sy.org/en/afrin-101-persons-including-six-women-and-two-children-arrested-in-july-and-august-2020/> (last visit: 23 October 2020).

It is also important to mention that a commander of the Military Police has [in a former testimony](#) reported to STJ that Turkey ordered opposition armed groups, positioned in Afrin, “not to harass or arrest civilians”, as it tasked the Military Police with carrying out arrests/detentions. However, against the Turkish government’s instructions, several armed groups appear to continue perpetrating arbitrary arrests, while detaining dozens of persons without disclosing their whereabouts or bringing them before the courts operating in the region.

1. Arrests Carried out at Different Intervals in September

From inside sources, affiliated to armed groups, STJ obtained information that indicates the arrest of six persons in September 2020, perpetrated mainly by SNA armed groups. However, the detention facilities, and/or the number of people from Afrin who got arrested outside the region, were not exactly identified. One detainee was released, but the fate of the other five continues to be unknown, STJ’s field researcher reported, adding that no contact could be established with any of the disappeared detainees’ families. The reported arrests were carried out thus:

- On 3 September, **Ahmad Ali Omar** and **Muhammad Hassan** were arrested by an armed group operating under the command of Abu Juma’a al-Farouk, an affiliate of the 2nd Battalion of the SNA’s 1st Legion. The reasons for the arrest were unknown.
- On 5 September, **Jabal Hassan Dairo** was also arrested by the armed group operating under the command of Abu Juma’a al-Farouk.
- On 9 September, **Issam al-Bakrow** was arrested by members of the Military Police in Termanin town, near Azaz. Al-Bakrow was arrested for reasons related to the corruption charges laid against the head of the local council in Jindires district.
- On 20 September, **Rashid Hussain Baker**, 42, disappeared. Baker is a merchant from the Qrmitlq village, in Shaykh al-Hadid district, a local source reported, adding that he went missing after passing a checkpoint of the Suleiman Shah Brigade/al-Amshat while on his way back from Azaz city.
- On 29 September, **Ahmad Omar Krinbeh** was arrested by members of the Military Police for insulting the Police’s personnel. He was released on the same day.

2. Arrests in Afrin District

In the district of Afrin, seven persons were arrested in September. The fate of all the detainees is still unknown. The arrests took place thus:

- On 1 September, the Military Police arrested **Basel Muhammad**, 30, who is a resident of the al-Ashrafieh neighborhood. He was still detained at the time of reporting.

- On 17 September, a patrol of the Military Police arrested **Hussain Sheihko**. He was still detained at the time of reporting.
- On 19 September, members of Ahrar al-Sharqiya arrested the brothers **Idris Hajji**, 33, and **Nabi Hajji**, 34, on the charge of dealing with the Autonomous Administration and performing the mandatory duty of self-defense, when the latter was in control of the area. The fate of the two detainees is still unknown.
- On 20 September, **Jankeen Osman** was arrested at a Civil Police checkpoint, set up at the entrance to Afrin city. Osman was transferred to one of the Military Police's centers in the city, as he was charged for dealing with the Autonomous Administration. Commenting on the arrest, a source close to the detainee said that he was arrested for "not paying due taxes," imposed by the armed groups on the area's indigenous population.
- On 21 September, members of the Military Police arrested **Muhammad Hajji Hussain** at the center of Afrin city on the charge of dealing with the Autonomous Administration in the past a few years.
- On 21 September, **Zainap**, the wife of Khalil Attar, was arrested by members of the al-Jabha al-Shamiya/Levant Front. She was arrested in the al-Ashrafieh neighborhood, Afrin city.

3. Arrests in Jindires District

In the district of Jindires, the Military Police arrested 22 persons, including three women. While 10 detainees, one women included, were released, the fate of the remaining others continues to be unknown. The arrests took place thus:

- On 3 September, a patrol of the Military Police arrested a number of people in the center of Jindires district. They are all linked to the head of the district's local council, **Subhi Rizq**, who himself was arrested on 9 September. On this note, a source informed of the bill of indictment said that Rizq was arrested on several charges, including dealing with the Autonomous Administration, receiving funds from it, and being involved in planning some of the blasts that shock the area, in addition to corruption and embezzlement.
- On 9 September, **Dilkash Hamou**, the owner of a money exchange office, and his brother **Jameel Hamou**, were arrested on the charge of transferring money to the Haftaro for Money Transfer Company, also implicated in the corruption charges laid against of the head of the Jindires local council.
- On the same day, the media officer of the Jindires local council was arrested, with a number of his relatives. The officer is from Junaid family, and his arrested relatives are **Mustafa Rizqi**, **Muhammad Rizqi**, **Hannan**, the wife of Muhammad Rizqi, and **Muhammad Hannou**, owner of an Internet Café. They were all released a few hours later.
- On the same day, the brothers **Rushdi** and **Shadi Khoursheed**, the owners of a money exchange office, were arrested on charges related to the corruption case. They were released two days later.
- On the same day, **Muhammad Baker** was arrested on the charge of performing guard services on behalf of the Autonomous Administration when it was in control of the area. He was still detained at the time of reporting.

- On the same day, **Khadija Siri**, a pharmacist, was arrested on the charge of dealing with the Autonomous Administration by members of the Military Police, which for its part, denied the arrest and stated that the woman was a victim of ransom kidnapping. Her fate continues to be unknown.
- On 17 September, members of the Military Police arrested **Muhammad Bazo**, officer of the Healthcare Department at the Jindires local council, also for reasons related to the above-mentioned corruption case. Bazo was still detained at the time of reporting.
- On 17 September, a resident of the Yalanqo village reported that a patrol of the Military Police arrested and deposited **Murad Hajji Rashid Agha** in the Jindires Prison, charging him and his family for dealing with the Autonomous Administration. Furthermore, the patrol confiscated several vehicles he had, a motorbike, a car and a tractor. Agha was released on 26 September after paying a fine, but he was not given the vehicles back.

Commenting on the incident, a source affiliated with the Military Police stated that Murad Rashid Agha was kidnapped by unidentified persons and his fate is still unknown.

- On 19 September, a resident of the Kora village reported that a patrol of the Military Police arrested a woman and two men on the charge of dealing with the Autonomous Administration. They are **Rashid Khoursheed**, 32, **Daydar Khoursheed**, 34, and **Aufa Sido**, a resident of al-Mahmoudiyah neighborhood, Afrin city. Sido was arrested while on a visit to her son. The fate of the three detainees is still unknown.

Commenting on the arrest of Aufa Sido, a source affiliated with the Military police said that she was kidnapped by unidentified persons and the police has no further information on the incident.

- On 30 September, a patrol of the Military Police arrested two men in the center of Jindires district. They are **Hussain Za'azou**, 33, from the al-Hamam village, administratively affiliated to Jindires district, and **Ziyad Mahroum**, 39, from Hājj Iskandar village and the owner of household utensils and electronic devices store in the city of Jidires. Both men were arrested on the charge of dealing with the Autonomous Administration and are still detained by the Military Police.
- STJ also verified an arrest incident in Celemê village on 27 August, which was not added to the August arrest lists. In this regard, a local of the village reported that the Civil Police arrested **Muhammad Hassan Zouri**, **Ali Hassan Zouri**, **Kanjo Subhi Kanjo** and **Fahed Ali**. They were all transferred to the police center in Jindires district and were released in September after they paid a fine of 1000 to 2000 TL each.

4. Arrests in Shaykh al-Hadid District

In the district of Shaykh al-Hadid, six persons were arrested, while four were released, the fate of the other two continues to be unknown. The arrests were carried out by Ahrar al-Sharqiya, al-Waqqas Brigade, and the Military Police.

- On 1 September, members of the Ahrar al-Sharqiya arrested **Qazikli Jameel Hamou**, 23, a resident of Jindires city, in Hêkiçê village, his birthplace. He was arrested on the charge of performing the duty of self-defense when the Autonomous Administration was in control of the area. His fate is still unknown.
- On 9 September, members of the al-Waqqas Brigade arrested **Muhammad Sabri**, **Fawzi Sabri**, and **Hassan Sabri** in Hêkiçê village on the charge of dealing with the Autonomous Administration. They were released after paying a fine.
- On 21 September, members of the al-Waqqas Brigade arrested **Abdulrahman Nizameddin Sheikh Mustafa**, 23, on the charge of performing the duty of self-defense. He was released on 27 September after paying a fine of 150.000 SYP.
- On 20 September, the Military Police arrested **Mustafa Baker Klouteh**, 53, in the Shkouta village, a resident of the village reported, adding that he was arrested on the charge of dealing with the Autonomous Administration. Klouteh was transferred to the police center in Afrin city, where he is still detained.
- On 22 September, members of the al-Waqqas Brigade arrested **Ammar Hassan Adham** and **Khamiss bin Hamdan al-Saloum** in the Hêkiçê village, Shaykh al-Hadid district.
- On 24 September, both **Muhammad Rashid Jameel Habash**, 18, and **Muhammad Jameel Habash** disappeared in the center of Shaykh al-Hadid district. They were kidnapped by unidentified persons, a local source said, adding that no further information was reported on the incident.

5. Arrests in Raju District

In the district of Raju, 11 persons, including a teenage girl, were arrested. Five were released, while the fate of the teenage girl and the other five continues to be unknown. The arrests were carried out by the military and the civil police, as well as the Ahrar al-Sharqiya. The arrests were carried out thus:

- On 1 September, a patrol of the Military Police arrested **Nazmi Rashid Akash**, born in the Musakou village, from his home in Afrin city, on the charge of dealing with the Autonomous Administration. At the time of reporting, Akash was still detained.
- On 2 September, STJ's field researcher reported that a patrol of the Civil Police arrested **Mustafa Rashid Zalfou** in the Be'dino village and transferred him to the Police center in Raju district. Zalfou's fate is still unknown. Commenting on the arrest incident, a source affiliated with the Military Police stated that the man was

kidnapped on 8 September—that is, six days after he was arrested. It appears that the detainee was kidnapped after he was released.

- On 7 September, a source affiliated with the Military Police stated that members of the Sham Legion/Failaq al-Sham arrested **Rashid Fawzi Tobal** in the Bilêko village, who was not handed over to the Military Police. Commenting on this, a resident of the village reported that the detainee was released 10 days later after he paid a sum of money.
- On 7 September, members of the Ahrar al-Sharqiya arrested **Ali Jamil Muhammad Rashkilo** in the village of Hajj Khalil. His fate is still unknown.
- On 9 September, a patrol of the Free Police arrested **Akid Sheikho** and **Jalal Muhammad Sheikho** in the Qasim village on the charge of performing the duty of self-defense when the Autonomous Administration was in control of the area. They were transferred to the Police center in Raju district to be brought before the court.
- On 10 September, members of the Ahrar al-Sharqiya, along with a patrol of the Civil Police arrested **Maraym Afdik Sheikho**, 17, on the charge of dealing with the Autonomous Administration. The teenage girl was detained by the armed group till 5 October 2020, a source affiliated with the Military Police stated.
- On 6 September, a patrol of the Military Police arrested **Msalam Baker Mousa**, 78, **Sheihkmous Mustafa Khalil**, 50, **Raiber Ibrahim Khalil Dawood**, 31, and **Mahmoud Khalil**, 25, in the Koso village on the charge of receiving aid from the Autonomous Administration. They were all released, however, at intervals.
- On 16 September, members of Sultan Murad Division arrested **Murad Abdulrahman Rashid** in the Qasim village. On the same day, **Murad Khalil Murad**, born in the Yalanqoze village, Jindires district, was kidnapped.

Commenting on the incident, a local source said that the kidnapping was perpetrated by unidentified persons and no further information was reported on the matter.

6. Arrests in Maabatli/Mabeta District

In the district of Maabatli, 41 persons were arrested, mainly by the Military Police, Northern Democratic Brigade, and the al-Jabha al-Shamiya/Levant Front. Having paid fines, 32 persons, including a woman, were released. The fate of the other nine, including a woman, is still unknown. The arrests were carried out thus:

- On 21 September, the Military Police arrested **Aref Qazikli Hamou**, **Nashaat Khalil Hannan**, **As'ad Ibrahim Murad**, **Muhammad Ibrahim Murad** and **Muhammad Khalil Hannan** in the Brîmce village on the charge of “not paying due taxes”. They were all released on the same day, after paying a fine of 800 TL each, an official of the Military Police reported.
- On 15 September, the Military Police, an inside source reported, arrested **Khalil Muhammad Osman**, **Walid Mustafa Mousa**, **Faek Sabri Mousa**, **Muhammad Hannan Mousa** and **Mustafa Muhammad Sido** on the charges of “unlawful

possession of weapons and for carrying out unlicensed night guard services". They were offered a settlement, whereby they could pay a fine of 500 TL or serve three months in prison. Ultimately, the five detainees were released, however, at intervals.

- On 6 September, the Military Police arrested seven local council employees in Maabatli district on the charges of dealing with the Autonomous Administration and receiving funds from it. The detainees are **Rashid Murad Qasim**, 43, **Toulin Rashid**, **Midya Ibrahim Khanjar**, 22, **Muhammad Mannan**, 40, **Jalal Hussain Qrouky**, 55, **Farhad Shafi' Bilal**, 50, and **Mustafa Hameed Mamesh**. They were all transferred to the detention center of the Military Police.

Midya Ibrahim and Mustafa Hameed Mamesh were released after they paid a 1000 TL each, a source affiliated with the Military Police said, adding that the other five detainees are still held by the Military Police.

- On 11 September, members of the Military Police arrested three persons on the charge of dealing with the Autonomous Administration. The detainees are **Ibrahim Khanjar**, **Issmat Khouja** and **Ahmad Meshko**. They were all released a few hours later after paying fines.
- On 13 September, the Military Police arrested four other local council employees. They are **Izat Hameed Muhammad**, a local of Kamiran village and the deputy director of the Directorate of Education in the district, **Shukri Hassan Humoutto**, an employee at the Directorate of Transportation, **Imad Hussain Khanjar** and **Ibrahim Sidki**, an employee at the district's municipality. Only Izat Hameed Muhammad was released. The fate of the other three detainees, however, is still unknown.
- On 15 September, members of the Military Police arrested **Ahmad Kousa**, **Muhammad Sido**, **Abdo Abass**, **Najemeddin Battal**, **Aref Kaku**, **As'ad Khalil**, **Issmat Na'sou** and **Muhammad Basheer Ibrahim** in the Braimjeh village, Maabatli district, on the charges of "unlawful possession of weapons and for carrying out unlicensed night guard services". They were offered a settlement, whereby they could pay a fine of 500 TL or serve three months in prison.
- On 21 September, a patrol of the Military Police arrested **Muhammad Hajji Hassan**, 35, on the charge of working for the Autonomous Administration. Hassan was deposited at the Maabatli Central Prison where he is still detained.
- On 25 and 26 September, unknown persons kidnapped **Muhammad Hameed Zaino**, 70, and his sons **Kamal**, 40, **Walid**, 35, and **Abdo**, 34, in the Shiteka village, Maabatli district. The kidnappers released the captives after a ransom of 1.600.000 SYP was paid for the entire family.
- On 27 September, al-Jabha al-Shamiya/Levant Front arrested four persons in Maabatli district's center on charges of carrying out guard services for the Autonomous Administration while it was in control of the area. They are **Farhan Qalandar**, **Shukri Jojo**, **Hanan Baker**, and **Ali Kelo**. They were released two days later, after paying varying sums of money. Commenting on the incident, a source of the Military Police reported that the four were actually kidnapped, and the police obtained no further information in their regard.

- On 30 September, a patrol of the Military Police embarked on a large-scale arrest drive, capturing persons for allegedly performing the night guard service, which the Autonomous Administration mandated when it was in control of the area. The arrested persons are **Luqman Azab Sha'abo**, 50, **Subhi Ali Mamesh**, 60, **Walat Muhammad Oskilo**, 61, **Aref Rashid Qarbouz**, 75, **Muhammad Rashid Qarbouz**, 80, **Sidki Mustafa Hambasho**, 51, **Muhammad Ali Yousef**, 54, **Ali Hassan Yousef**, 57, and **Adnan Muhammad Ali**, 60.

According to a source affiliated with the Military Police, they were arrested on the charge of "unlawful possession of weapons" and released after they paid a bail of 600 TL each.

- On 16 September, members of the Northern Democratic Brigade arrested **Adham Hamou**, **Basil Abdulrahman Mustafa**, and **Muhammad Rasoul Mustafa** in Kobke village on the charges of dealing with the Autonomous Administration and performing night guard services. They were deposited at a private detention facility, run exclusively by the armed group, and were not brought before the court. However, they were released after paying a fine of 300 TL each.

7. Arrests in Sharran District

In the district of Sharran, STJ documented two arrests in September, carried out by the military and the civil police. None of the detainees was released so far.

- In early September, a patrol of the Military Police arrested **Muhammad Nabi**, 31, in the Dayr Şawwān village, on the charge of performing the duty of self-defense when the Autonomous Administration was in control of the area. He was transferred to the police center in Sharran district to be brought before the court.
- On 20 September, **Jamil Osman** was arrested in the Kafr Janneh village at a checkpoint of the Civil Police, set up at the entrance to Afrin city, on the side of Azaz, on the charge of performing the duty of self-defense when the Autonomous Administration was in control of the area. He was transferred to the Maratah Central Prison, where he is still detained.

8. Arrests in Bulbul District

In the district of Bulbul, the Civil Police arrested and transferred three persons to the police center in the district. Their fate is still unknown. The Sham Legion/Failaq al-Sham took part in the arrests, a source affiliated with the Military Police reported to STJ, adding that the detainees were not handed over to the Military Police.

- On 21 September, a patrol of the Civil Police arrested **Muhammad Mustafa Sheikh Hassan** in Dodo village on the charge of dealing with the Autonomous Administration, and headed next to the Qaza Midono village, where it arrested **Sha'ban Hameed Sheikho**, and then moved to the Gewenda village, where it arrested the third person, **Muhammad Sheikho Hassan**.

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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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✉ editor@stj-sy.org