

19 November 2020



Denial of Education Robs Hundreds of Students' Future

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Over 200 students in Idlib and hundreds of others in northern rural Aleppo were prevented from sitting final exams in government areas

Background:

On 17 June 2020, Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) issued a decision preventing male and female students from leaving Idlib to regime-held areas in Hama to sit for their final exams, scheduled on 21 June 2020. That decision impacted more than 200 students, some of whom turned to labor work, while others became isolated and depressed.

Reportedly, when students tried to leave Idlib to take their exams in the village of al-Trenbah near the city of Saraqib, HTS members started shooting in the air and beating them with hands and sticks.

Further, two students confirmed being detained for hours by HTS during which they were beaten with sticks and plastic hoses and had their heads shaved in a humiliating way, while others said that they had their exam cards confiscated for expressing objection to HTS' decision.

Not only HTS, the Directorate of Education of the Syrian Interim Government – operates under the National Coalition for Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces – also prevented over 1.000 primary and secondary students from accessing regime-held areas to sit their final exams through the Turkish-backed Syrian National Army's (SNA) checkpoints in northern and western rural Aleppo, which led some students to take clandestine and circuitous routes to reach government areas.

In the same vein, the Interim Government's Directorate of Education in Aleppo passed other arbitrary decisions, as in July 2020 it issued a circular calling for the dismissal of male and female workers who sent their sons to sit their exams in regime-held areas in 2020. Accordingly, more than 50 teachers and workers in the educational sector were fired for violating the circular under two decisions issued successively by the Directorate of Education in Aleppo in August and July 2020.

In a statement issued on 19 June 2020, the United Nations said:

"Up to 23.000 students, mostly from the northeast but also from the northwest, are expected to travel across conflict lines to government areas to sit the exams scheduled to begin in two days, on 21 June. They will join some 250.000 students across the country sitting these examinations... In at least two incidents, members of non-state armed groups have denied dozens of students' safe transit through checkpoints in Idlib and Aleppo governorates while on their way to examination centers".¹

¹ "UN calls on all parties to the conflict in Syria to facilitate safe passage for students to sit their final examinations", UN, 19 June 2020, <https://news.un.org/ar/story/2020/06/1056892> (Last visited: 30 October 2020).

For its part, the Ministry of Education of the Syrian Interim Government, justified preventing its students from going to regime-held areas as being for their own safety citing that they would be arrested, threatened, blackmailed or terrorized by the Syrian Army.²

In the present report, we will cite 12 statements; ten from students who were denied sitting their final exams, a teacher who was dismissed for violating the Education Directorate circular of July 2020 and a driver of one of the buses carrying the students from Idlib. The interviews were conducted online and in person between September and late October 2020.

1. Dozens of students denied sitting exams in government areas

On 15 June 2019, the Salvation Government's Education Directorate in Idlib issued a decision that banned the transit of students and teachers to education facilities in regime-held areas. The decision stipulated the dismissal of any teacher in Idlib's Education Directorate who had sent one of his children to examinations centers in Hama, which is under the control of the Syrian government, and also the dismissal of any teacher whose wife/husband teaches in regime-held areas.

² "The Syrian opposition attacks the UN statement on Syrian students' exams", Syria TV website, 21 June 2020, <https://www.syria.tv/%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B9%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%B6%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%AA%D9%87%D8%A7%D8%AC%D9%85-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D9%85%D9%85%D9%8A-%D8%AD%D9%88%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%85%D8%AA%D8%AD%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%B7%D9%84%D8%A8%D8%A9-%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A7> (last visit: 30 October 2020).

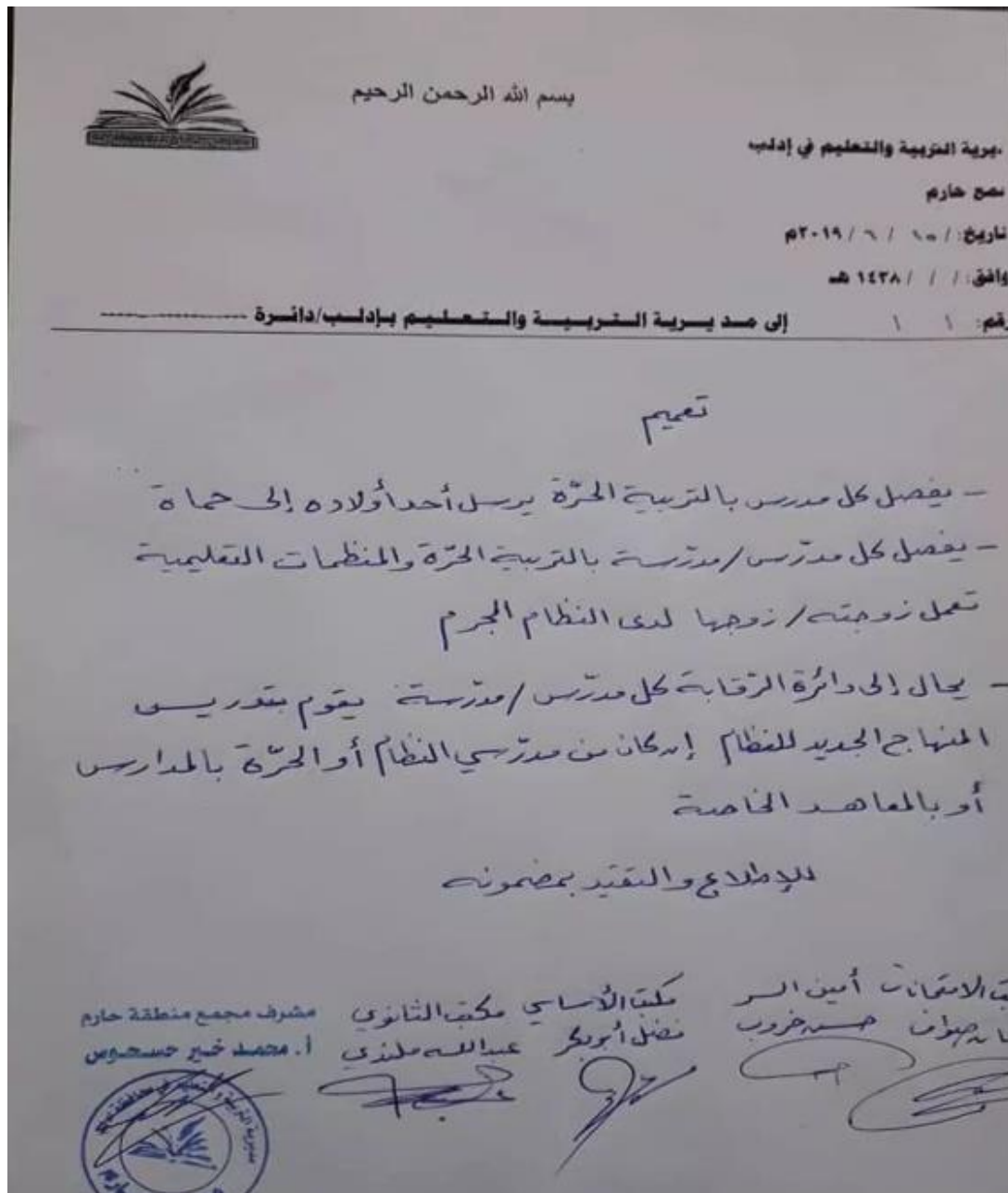


Image 1- the Salvation Government's Education Directorate circular of 15 June 2019.

Credit: local activists.

Accordingly, on 17 June 2020, through the checkpoints it set in the village of al-Trenbah, HTS prevented dozens of primary and secondary male and female students from accessing government areas to sit their final exams scheduled on 21 June 2020.

Adel al-Hadidi, Minister of Education in the Salvation Government stated to the News Agency of Sham, affiliated to HTS, on 18 June 2020 that the Salvation Government will not recognize the certificates issued by the Ministry of Education of the Syrian government and thus their holders will not be able to continue their studies in the liberated areas:

“We will take deterrent measures against those who risk their sons’ lives and honor by sending them to the areas of that regime who lack humanity and integrity of education, and who will treat them as hostages; he will arrest some and use others to improve his bad image”,³ he added.

Prior to HTS’ circular, the Syrian government announced on 14 June 2020, the opening of Saraqib crossing for preparatory and secondary students to sit their final exams in areas under its control.

The Syrian Ministry of Education said in a statement published on its official Facebook page, “we expect 2.100 students from the province of Idlib to enter through the Saraqib crossing, to sit examinations.” That was followed by a statement from head of the Idlib’s Directorate of Education, Eng. Abdel Hamid al-Mi’maar in which he said that the students will be transported by the Syrian Arab Red Crescent through the crossing to fully equipped hostels in Hama.⁴



Image 2- the Syrian government’s Ministry of Education statement of 14 June 2020. Credit: The Ministry of Education’s Facebook official page.

³ “The Ministry of Education of the Salvation Government: We will not recognize certificates issued by the criminal regime’s Ministry of Education”, Ibaa Network, 18 June 2020, <https://ebaa.news/news/news-details/2020/06/68940/> (last visited: 28 October 2020).

⁴ For more info please see:

https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=816068305467355&id=573693363038185

2. HTS arrests students and confiscates their exam cards

On 17 June 2020, at 10:00 am., 25 buses gathered in the village of al-Trenbah coming from Idlib to transport over 200 students to the government areas, but HTS militias, however, intercepted them and prevented from crossing.

That was confirmed by Mohammad D., 19, a secondary student from Idlib, who was one of those who were denied accessing regime-held areas to sit final exams, he recounted to STJ that an HTS checkpoint on Latakia-Aleppo highway 3 kms away from the village of al-Trenbah intercepted the buses carrying the students and told the drivers to go back to Idlib.

Mohammad added that the checkpoint members who were about 20, insulted the students after the latter got off the buses and begged them to pass.

Nevertheless, some students tried to cross the checkpoint and take off on foot but masked men followed them and hit them on their faces and bodies.

Sa'eed M., one of the drivers of the buses carried the students recounted to STJ that after they set off from Idlib towards the al-Trenbah village they passed on three new-set checkpoints of HTS – they were not existed before 17 June 2020 – where the students were thoroughly searched. He added:

“HTS members on every checkpoint we passed insulted the students and called them traitors because they were heading to government areas. It was 11:15 am when we reached the last checkpoint separating us from regime-held areas, HTS members told us to return to Idlib citing we did not have an official authorization to cross. Some students got off the buses and tried to discuss the matter with the checkpoint members, but, however, the latter started firing in the air, insulting the students and beating them with fists and wooden sticks and then arrested some of them with four drivers. That forced us to go back.”

Omar T., 19, a secondary student, confirmed to STJ that checkpoint members detained some students for several hours, and then released them after an official shaved the heads of four of them – to be further humiliated – and confiscated their exam cards.

On the same day members of the police station of the town of Muhambal, to the west of Idlib, arrested two students after they returned from Idlib, from where they tried to cross regime-held areas, and shaved their heads. One of the students called Rami D., 19, talked to STJ saying:

“Two members of the Muhambal’s police station, which is affiliated to HTS, arrested me and my colleague when we returned from Idlib after we denied the cross to government areas to sit our final exams of the high school. Upon our arrest we were beaten with wooden sticks and plastic hoses, and they also shaved our heads, which caused us to feel humiliated and insulted among the townspeople. All we were guilty of is trying to sit the exam which conclude our years of school education.”

On 19 June 2020, a media activist published to the internet a photo of students having their heads shaved by HTS after trying to access to government areas to sit their exams.



Image 3- students with shaved heads after being denied access to regime-held areas. Credit: media activists.

Amer E., 18, is another secondary student denied the cross to government areas on 17 June 2020, he recounted:

“Me wanted to sit exams in government areas does not mean I support a party or another; I see that the education process should not be part of the conflict. I just wanted to get an internationally recognized high school certificate which allows me seek admission in universities in Syria or abroad, as certificates issued by the Syrian opposition institutions are not recognized abroad.”

3. Disastrous consequences on Idlib students

Being prevented from sitting their exams, students of Idlib suffered great psychological distress which led some of them to isolation while others sought day labor work to assist their parents.

Ali M., 19, from the town of Mork, north of Hama, is one of the victims of HTS' decision. Despite war conditions which forced him with his family to constant displacement which ended them up in al-Karama camp, Ali insisted to continue his study moving from school to another in Hama and Idlib. Ali's father recounted to STJ:

"Despite our frequent displacement since 2013, Ali insisted to keep learning and thus he moved from one school to another in Mork, Kafr Zita, al-Bara and al-Karama camp. He studied hard and eagerly waited for the exams as he hoped to attend the mechanical engineering department at university. On 17 June 2020, the day on which the students supposed to travel to Hama to sit final exams; I drove him on my motorcycle to the city of Idlib, where he got on one of the buses waiting to transport the students; he was so happy that his hard study will not go in vain."

Ali's father added:

"After a while on the same day Ali returned home with his eyes full of tears, and told us that HTS did not allow them to travel to Hama and confiscated their exam cards. Since then, Ali isolated himself in a no more than 3 m² canvas tent, away from the life that blackened in his eyes. I am seriously thinking to take him to a psychologist, hoping to help him come out of isolation, which would harm his body and threaten his life. We, Ali's family, friends and relatives did everything to get him back to social life, but to no avail."

Rasha A., 19, one of the secondary students prevented from sitting the final exams in Hama said to STJ:

"When we came near the village of al-Trenbah, a checkpoint of the HTS stopped the buses and ordered male students to return home and tore the exam cards of those who complained, while allowed buses carrying female students to cross. Members of the checkpoint said to us "you will join the apostates and soon return bodies in fatigues". However, the bus carrying us proceeded to the zone separating government areas from that of the armed opposition, where a military vehicle came carrying five HTS members who start to insult us and then forced the driver to return."

Rasha added:

"I returned home with tears of sadness and heartbreak. My parents tried to persuade me to sit the exam at the Interim Government schools to relieve the depression hit me and got me to isolated in my room in which I spent nearly a year and a half preparing for exams, but alas, my efforts wasted."

The secondary student Khalid H., 20, who had displaced from Ariha town to the city of Harem in rural Idlib, was severely impacted and his family by HTS' decision, as he looked forward to attend university hoping to get a decent job to support his poor family:

"I always wanted to get a university degree in order to be able to help my family live in dignity. Alongside my study in the secondary school I used to help my father in doing construction work for a little pay. However, when I became in the 3rd secondary grade my father asked me to devote my full time to studying and despite his low income, he secured me all school supplies. I spent the school year studying so hard with my eyes on attending the university, but HTS' decision to prevent us from sitting exams in government schools denied me my right to make a future.", he said.

Khalid added that on 17 June 2020, HTS detained him for four hours and confiscated his exam card:

"After I was released, I got back to the house we are residing in Harem and decided to return to the work with my father, so that my school years were gone in vain and my will to support my family turned to a mere dream, which I may not be able to achieve my whole life, or maybe I should wait until things in my country to go back to the way they were before war."

HTS' decision also badly affected Sami D., 20, from the town of al-Dana in north Idlib, who moaned losing his dream to become highly educated and being imprisoned home.

It is worth mentioning that the Salvation Government issued a decision preventing students graduating from Syrian public universities after 2015 from applying for teacher-recruitment competitions in Idlib, controlled by HTS.

Mohammad J., from Hama, a graduator of 2017 from the al-Ba'ath University, was one of the affected from the decision, he said in this regard:

"I had to leave Hama in 2018, after the security forces raided my family's house and arrested one of my brothers. Then, I decided to go to Idlib, and as soon as I arrived, I started looking for a job suitable for the certificate I obtained from the Geography Department in al-Ba'ath University. I went to Idlib's directorate of education to apply for a teacher, but despite my excellent graduation rating, an employee there told me that the preference in recruitment is for students residing in the areas controlled by the Syrian opposition and who had graduated from the University of Idlib while its affiliation to the Salvation Government, in addition to those who hold certificates issued before 2015 from government universities. The employee accused me of favoritism for the Syrian government, and told me to return to its areas."

4. Hundreds of students in rural Idlib denied sitting exams and over 50 teachers fired by the Interim Government

The Education Directorate of the Syrian Interim Government in Aleppo (affiliated to the National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces) also prevented primary and secondary school students in northern and western rural Aleppo, from going to

government areas to sit their final exams. Informed sources from the administration staffs of the Aoun Al-Dadat crossing – between the areas of the armed opposition and those of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) - and of Abu al-Zendain crossing – between the areas of the armed opposition and those of the Syrian government – confirmed that more than 1.000 male and female students from northern and western rural Aleppo were denied access to regime-held areas, between early 2020 and late June 2020, to sit their final exams. That led many of them to deal with smugglers to take them through illegal routes for 100 to 1.000 USD each.

Mohammad A., 19, was one of northern rural Idlib' students who were not allowed to cross to government areas, he detailed:

"In March 2020, about two and a half months before the start of the exam, I decided to go to government areas in anticipation of any possible incident which could prevent me from that later. I took a bus from the city of Azaz towards the city of al-Bab which is about 80 kilometers away. There were four other buses carrying students and their parents following us in a line. The driver of our bus said that the crossings would be opened for the students wanted to sit for exams in the city of Aleppo. However, when we arrived to Abu al-Zendain crossing the buses stopped at the first checkpoint where a masked armed man got on the bus and told the driver to show him his ID."

Mohammad added:

"After nearly four hours of waiting, the checkpoint members started yelling at the drivers ordering them to take us back home with threats to arrest us all otherwise. And when the bus driver tried to ask them why they started insulting us and calling us 'shabiha'; that forced us to return home. Three of my colleagues managed later to reach Hama city through a smuggler, after paying a sum of about 700 USD each. After what happened, I decided to leave the school and turned to work in a food store so I could meet my needs and help my family."

On 4 July 2020, the Education Directorate of the Syrian Interim Government in Aleppo, issued a decision to dismiss its workers who had sent one of his sons or daughters to sit for the 2020 exams in the areas controlled by the Syrian government.

In a statement published on its official Facebook page, the Directorate said, "Anyone who teaches or allows teaching the Syrian regime's curricula, including teachers and directors of institutes and educational institutions, is dismissed, with appropriate legal measures to be taken against him⁵".

It also stated that it will not recognize the certificates issued from the Syrian government educational institutions in Aleppo and that it will not assign anyone who sends one of his sons or daughters to sit the exams for the 2020 in the areas controlled by the Syrian

⁵ For more info please see:

<https://www.facebook.com/edualeppo/photos/a.701703503210537/3086218828092314>

government, and decided to dismiss its workers whom husbands/wives work in government institutions.

This is not the first time that the Directorate of Education in Aleppo issued such a circular, as it had previously issued similar ones in 2019 and 2018.

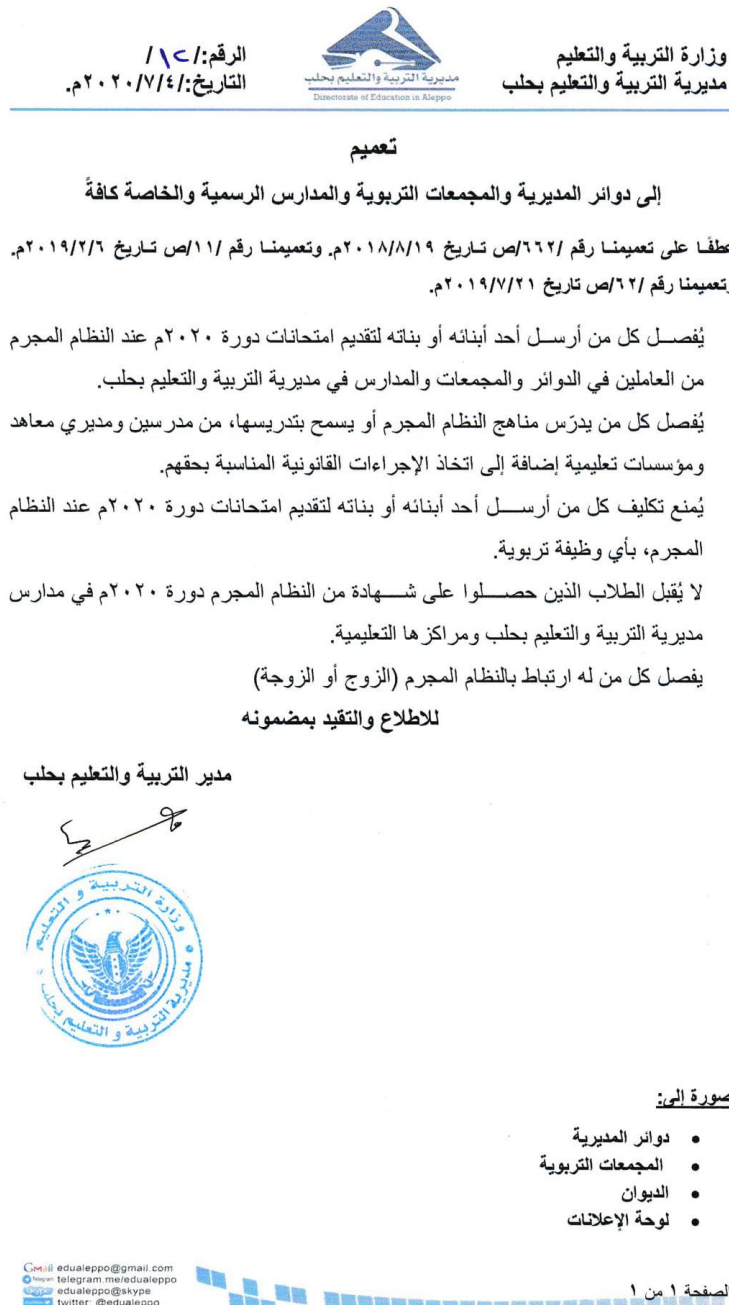


Image 4- the circular issued by the Education Directorate of the Syrian Interim Government in Aleppo.

Credit: The Education Directorate in Aleppo's Facebook official page.

This was followed by two decisions by the Directorate of Education in Aleppo, whereby more than 50 male and female teachers were dismissed for violating the previous circular. The first decision issued on 27 July 2020, which stipulated the dismissal of more than 30 male and female teachers for going to areas of the Syrian government or sending their wives or one of their sons to sit exams in the areas of the Syrian government⁶.



وزارة التربية والتعليم
مديرية التربية والتعليم بحلب

قرار ١٢٨١

مدير التربية والتعليم بحلب.

- بناءً على أحكام النظام الأساسي للموظفين رقم ١/ تاريخ ٢٠١٥/٤/١٧ م.
- وعلى القرار الوزاري رقم (٣٨ / ق.و) تاريخ ٢٠٢٠/٥/٣١ م.
- وعلى اقتراح دائرة الرقابة.
- وعلى مقتضيات المصلحة العامة.

يقرر ما يلي:

مادة ١- يفصل المسادة التالية أسماءهم من العمل لدينا بشكل نهائي ولا يكلفون مطلقاً بأي وظيفة مستقبلاً وذلك لارتباطهم أو ارتباط زوجاتهم بالنظام ولمخالفتهم للتعميم رقم ١٢/تاريخ ٢٠٢٠/٧/٤ م وفقاً لما يلي:

الاسم والشهرة	المدرسة	المخالفة
عمر محمد عثمان	ثانوية بنين الشيخ علي	المغادرة إلى مناطق النظام
شذى يوسف الأحمد	ثانوية بنات الشيخ علي	المغادرة إلى مناطق النظام
ثلجة عبداللطيف	ثانوية بنات كفر نوران	المغادرة إلى مناطق النظام
نواة محمد فهم نواف	كفر نوران الشرقية	المغادرة إلى مناطق النظام
نور مصطفى الحسين	أورم الصغرى	المغادرة إلى مناطق النظام
ابتهام عبداللطيف قدور	ابتدائية كفر تعال فوج ١	المغادرة إلى مناطق النظام
صفاء عبداللطيف قدور	ابتدائية كفر تعال فوج ١	المغادرة إلى مناطق النظام
علي إسماعيل دقاق	ابتدائية كفر تعال فوج ٢	المغادرة إلى مناطق النظام
أسماء عبدالواحد حاج حمود	ابتدائية كفر تعال فوج ٢	المغادرة إلى مناطق النظام
حيدر محمد قدور	عرادة حلقة ١	المغادرة إلى مناطق النظام
عائشة حسين قدور	أورم الشمالية	المغادرة إلى مناطق النظام
فهيمة تيسير شحرور	ثانوية بنات خان العسل	المغادرة إلى مناطق النظام
هبة بشير يلزجي	زهرة المدائن	المغادرة إلى مناطق النظام
دعاء زريق	ابتدائية كفر حلب	المغادرة إلى مناطق النظام
ديانا صلاح قره حسين	المعتصم بالله	المغادرة إلى مناطق النظام
سميرة عبدالرحيم	ابتدائية كفر حلب	المغادرة إلى مناطق النظام
منى خالد عبدالرحيم	مركز غصن الزيتون الأبرمو	المغادرة إلى مناطق النظام
وردة محمد تيسير طه	القصر	المغادرة إلى مناطق النظام
مصطفى أحمد قدور	كفر تعال فوج ١	المغادرة إلى مناطق النظام
صباح ديب	مدرسة خليل النجار	المغادرة إلى مناطق النظام
نسرین حاج شعبان	مدرسة خليل النجار	المغادرة إلى مناطق النظام

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الصفحة ١ من ٢

Image 5.

⁶ For more info please see: <https://www.facebook.com/700807896633431/posts/3151796194867910/>

المغادرة إلى مناطق النظام	مدرسة خليل النجار	لينا حمود
المغادرة إلى مناطق النظام	ثانوية بنين كفر نوران	أحمد خلاصي
المغادرة إلى مناطق النظام	كفر نوران الغربية	علي عمر رحال
المغادرة إلى مناطق النظام	ميزناز	أحمد محمد رفعت
المغادرة إلى مناطق النظام	مجمع عندان	إيمان محمد أسعد غراب
المغادرة إلى مناطق النظام	مجمع عندان	سهام عبدالرزاق رضوان
المغادرة إلى مناطق النظام	مجمع عندان	علي حسن موصلي
المغادرة إلى مناطق النظام	مجمع عندان	عمر محمد نشار
المغادرة إلى مناطق النظام	مجمع عندان	مها محمد منير حسنتو
المغادرة إلى مناطق النظام	مجمع عندان	ندى عنان أبرص
المغادرة إلى مناطق النظام	مجمع عندان	ياسر محمد علي العبدو
المغادرة إلى مناطق النظام	مجمع عندان	عبدالناصر محمود العبدو
المغادرة إلى مناطق النظام	مجمع عندان	جورية عبدالخالق
المغادرة إلى مناطق النظام	مدرسة الجينة الغربية	عبدالرحيم أمين
المغادرة إلى مناطق النظام	مدرسة الجينة الشرقية	بيان خليل
المغادرة إلى مناطق النظام	مدرسة الجينة الشرقية	رداد محمد

مادة ٢- يبلغ هذا القرار من يلزم لتنفيذه.

حلب في ٢٧/٧/٢٠٢٠م

مدير التربية والتعليم بحلب



صورة إلى:

- دوائر المديرية.
- المجمعات التربوية.
- أصحاب العلاقة.
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الصفحة ٢ من ٢

Images 5&6- The decision issued by the Directorate of Education in Aleppo in July 2020.

Credit: The Directorate of Education in Aleppo's official Facebook page.

The second decision was issued on 31 August 2020, whereby at least 20 teachers and workers within the educational sector were dismissed for violating the previous circular.⁷

⁷ For more info please see: <https://www.facebook.com/edualeppo/posts/3251251581589037>



وزارة التربية والتعليم مديرية التربية والتعليم بحلب

قرار ٨٥٦/

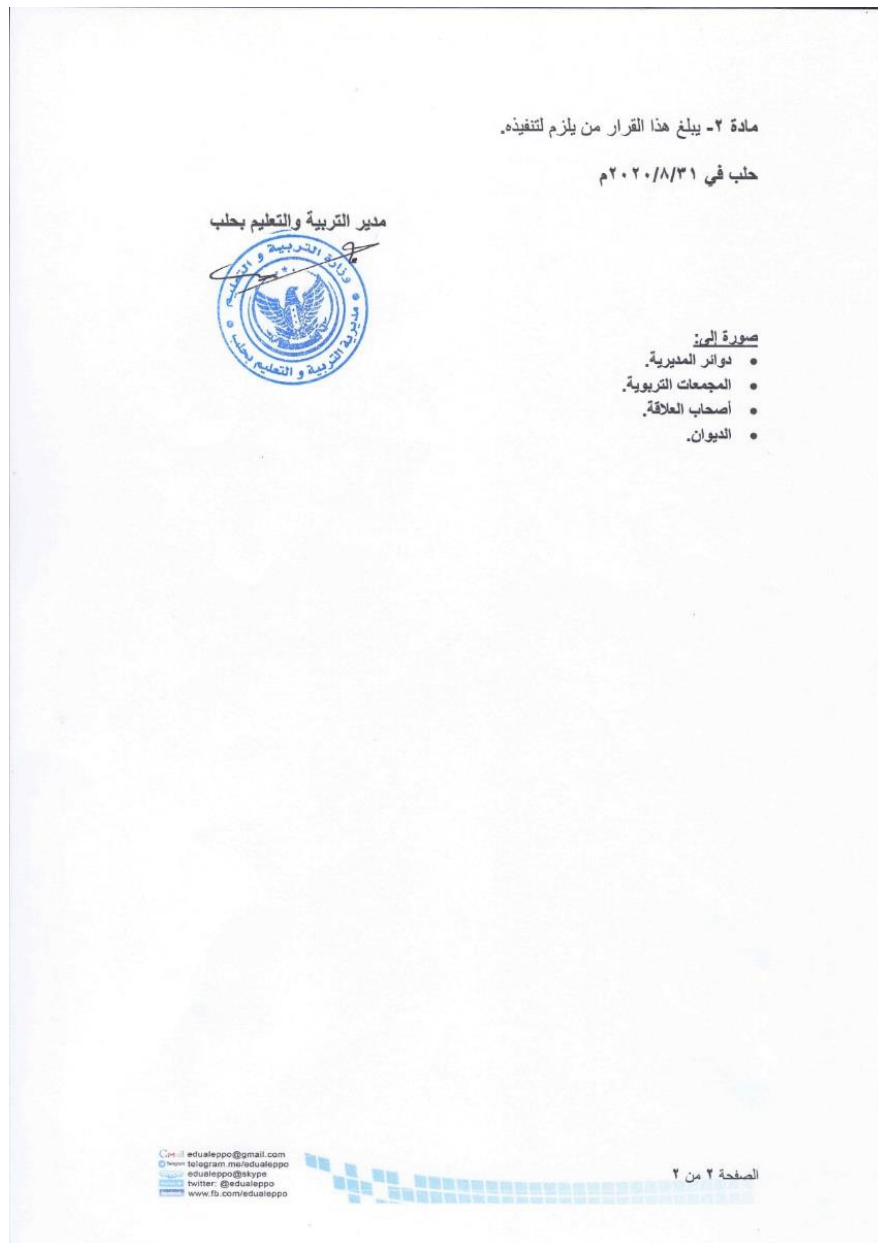
مدير التربية والتعليم بحلب.

- بناءً على أحكام النظام الأساسي للموظفين رقم ١١/ تاريخ ٢٠١٥/٤/١٧ م.
- وعلى القرار الوزاري رقم (٣٨ / ق.و) تاريخ ٢٠٢٠/٥/٣١ م.
- وعلى اقتراح دائرة الرقابة.
- وعلى مقتضيات المصلحة العامة.

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الاسم والشهرة	المخالفة
رامز عسكري	مغادرة الزوجة إلى مناطق النظام
ياسر العسكري	مغادرة الزوجة إلى مناطق النظام
هيا عسكري	المغادرة إلى مناطق النظام
مصطفى شريف عبد السلام	مغادرة الزوجة إلى مناطق النظام
مصطفى مأمون مسعود	مغادرة الزوجة إلى مناطق النظام
أمينة محمد مكسور	المغادرة إلى مناطق النظام
ماريا محمد بكري	المغادرة إلى مناطق النظام
صفا أحمد عبدو قدور	المغادرة إلى مناطق النظام
أحمد الحاج شعبان	مغادرة الزوجة إلى مناطق النظام
مريم محمد غيبة	المغادرة إلى مناطق النظام
أحمد الكناص	مغادرة الزوجة إلى مناطق النظام
نور الدين اليوسف	مغادرة الزوجة إلى مناطق النظام
عماد رياض شهاب	مغادرة الزوجة إلى مناطق النظام
سمية اليوسف	المغادرة إلى مناطق النظام
سحر حسين	المغادرة إلى مناطق النظام
أمل حسين	المغادرة إلى مناطق النظام
حمدو أمين حاج حمدو دنيا	المغادرة إلى مناطق النظام
محمد حمدو حاج دنيا	المغادرة إلى مناطق النظام
عمر حمدو حاج دنيا	المغادرة إلى مناطق النظام
سعاد عبد المنعم خلاصي	المغادرة إلى مناطق النظام



Images 7&8- The decision issued by the Directorate of Education in Aleppo in August 2020.

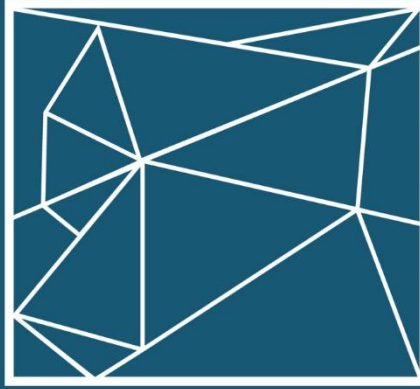
Credit: The Directorate of Education in Aleppo's official Facebook page.

Omar J., 36, married with children, was one of the dismissed teachers, he explained:

"In March 2020, I went with my son to Aleppo and from there to Hama in a difficult journey, so that he could sit for the exam of the preparatory certificate and realize his dream of becoming a teacher like me. For that, the Ministry of Education dismissed me and banned me from applying to any of its vacancies and thus I became unemployed after all the years I spent in teaching. I do not know what to do, that drove me crazy. Family needs large sums of money every month to secure its supplies, and today I am powerless."

سوريون
من أجل
الحقيقة
والعدالة

Syrians
For Truth
& Justice



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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