

October 2021

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## Northeastern Syria: The Revolutionary Youth Attacks Journalists and Protestors

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On 24 September 2021, members of the self-proclaimed Revolutionary Youth (RY)—locally referred to as Tevgera Ciwanên Şoreşger—[attacked](#) a group of protesters that assembled in front of the United Nations’ headquarters in the al-Siyahi neighborhood in the northeastern Syrian city of Qamishli/Qamishlo city. The city is jointly controlled by the Syrian government and the Autonomous Administration.

The protestors took to the street at the request of the Turkey-based Kurdish National Council (KNC)—which operates under the mantle of the Syrian Opposition Coalition (SOC). On 23 September 2021, the KNC called the residents of Qamishli/Qamishlo to hold a protest against what they referred to as “price increases imposed on fuel and bread, as well as royalties forced on citizens,” and also to demand “the release of political prisoners.” The KNC urged their affiliated local councils across northeastern Syria to hold similar protests at the same time.

The RY retaliated before and during the protests. In the hours leading to the protests on 24 September, members of the RY roamed city chanting slogans that accused anyone who wanted to participate in the protests of “treason.”

As dozens of pro-KNC residents and independents from the cities of al-Darbasiyah, Amuda, al-Hasakah, and al-Malikiyah/Dêrik congregated in Qamishli/Qamishlo for the protest, members of the RY escalated the situation and became violent. They used stones and batons to assault protestors and several journalists who accompanied them.

To investigate the protests and the ensuing violence, field researchers with Syrians for Truth and Justice (STJ) reached out to several eyewitnesses who were present during the attacks on protestors in Qamishli/Qamishlo. The eyewitnesses said that the Asayish (Internal Security) forces and the Rescue Forces (Hewarî) of the Autonomous Administration encircled the venue of the protest and blocked major roads leading to the assembly location to prevent potential clashes. However, the forces failed to protect the protestors from the RY’s violence.

## Indiscriminate Assaults

Members of the Revolutionary Youth attacked both protestors and journalists with stones and batons, heedless of the fact that many journalists were only present to cover the protest.

Field researchers with STJ confirmed that several civilian cars were vandalized, while at least two reporters were injured and their possessions damaged in the attacks. Dayana Muhammad, a reporter with Aso-network, was [attacked](#), and her camera and personal cell phone were destroyed. Another reporter, Dara Barakat with KurdsatNews, was also attacked and his car damaged.

Following the attacks, the Union of Free Media (UFM) published a [statement](#) renouncing violence against media personnel. In the statement, the UFM said that “the administration of the RY should necessarily bear the responsibility of the damages and enforce controls to regulate the RY’s actions.”

For their part, media activists described the UFM’s statement as below par and insufficient to protect journalists in the areas controlled by the Autonomous Administration.

Covering the unrest, a field researcher with STJ reached out to one of the reporters who were assaulted, Dayana Muhammad. She told STJ:

“I was doing my job there. I was filming the protest. During the attack on protestors, a young man darted in my direction, pulled the camera from my hand, and hurled it on the ground, breaking it into pieces. Then, he took my cell phone, hit it with a stone and shattered it. He also cursed me in front of the people. . .”

STJ also spoke with Barazan Saleh, who gave a first-hand account of the protest he joined in Qamishli/Qamishlo city and the violence he was subjected to. Barazan recounted:

“I was among the protestors when suddenly someone hit me with a cane on my head from behind. When I tried to defend myself, the attackers smashed cell phone and started throwing stones at me and the other protestors.”

In an attempt to fend off the RY members, several of the protestors found themselves compelled to respond. They started hurling stones at the attackers. To contain the situation, Asayish forces fired shots in the air to disengage the clashing parties.

According to the eyewitnesses that STJ interviewed, the protest—which as a whole only lasted for half an hour—ended after the Rescue Forces arrested an RY member and a number of the KNC’s commanders delivered speeches.

RY hostilities were not limited to protestors in Qamishli/Qamishlo’s. Reportedly, RY members used the same violence against protestors in al-Hasakah city.

Decrying the violence, the KNC’s Secretariat made a [statement](#) accusing the RY of kidnapping protestors Jumard Khalaf from al-Hasakah and Ziyad Muhammad Sharif from Qamishli/Qamishlo. The Secretariat added that both protestors were kidnapped on the evening of the protests and were severely beaten before they were released.

Commenting on the assaults against journalists, the Syrian Kurdish Journalists Network ([SKJN](#)) denounced the attacks — especially as they occurred under the watch of the Asaysih. The SKJN described the violence as a new and alarming development in the context of the abuses of freedom of expression and journalism, particularly because the security forces only deterred a few of the attackers and failed to assume their responsibility, which should have been barring the attackers by force and arresting them when they attacked protestors.

## What Triggered the Unrest?

The protest and popular indignation in northeastern Syria followed a fuel price increase enforced by the Autonomous Administration, which several gas station owners claimed were imposed without publicized official decisions.

The price increase was met by official and partisan refusal. Several of the political parties in the region, including the [Kurdish Democratic Progressive Party](#), called on the authorities of the Autonomous Administration to repeal the fuel price increase, calling the increase “unfair.” The responding parties also demanded that the concerned authorities refrain from imposing royalties and taxes, as well as stop the flow of migration through subsidizing commodities and provide the population with basic services.

For their part, the Autonomous Administration’s General Administration of Petroleum and the Authority of Economy have denied the increase in fuel prices, while gas stations in Qamishli/Qamishlo city are selling fuel for two distinct prices, either 410 or 710 Syrian Pounds per liter.

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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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