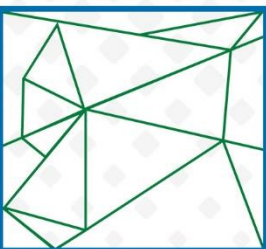


Afrin: Ahrar al-Sharqiya Tortures a Civilian to Death



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Members of Ahrar al-Sharqiya struck Rezan Khalil on the head, causing him a brain hemorrhage which killed him, after he asked for the faction's release of his nephew, Azad Khalil

On 3 February 2022, [Tajammu Ahrar al-Sharqiya/Gathering of Free Men of the East](#), which operates under the Syrian National Army (SNA), issued a statement denying responsibility for the death of Rezan Khalil, a civilian from the village of Jaqla Foqani/Çeqelê Cûmê of the Shaykh al-Hadid/Şiyê district. Ahrar al-Sharqiya claimed that it could not be behind the killing of Rezan since it has no presence in the area of his residence. Ahrar al-Sharqiya also stated that its members visited Rezan's family (locally known as Y'ayou family) with members of the Grievance Redress Committee and extended their condolences.

The following day, Ahrar al-Sharqiya released another statement (see annexes) under the title "Thanks and Gratitude", in which it commended the efforts of the Military Police of Afrin in uncovering the truth of the circumstances surrounded Rezan's death. In its statement, Ahrar al-Sharqiya also vowed to stand against what it termed "the phenomenon of spreading lies" that aims to undermine the social cohesion among the Syrian people.

Syrians for Truth and Justice (STJ) carried out its own investigation into the death of Rezan Muhammed Khalil. We interviewed two members of Ahrar al-Sharqiya, two members of the Military Police of Afrin, a local medical worker, as well as other local sources in Afrin.

Our inquiries revealed that Ahrar al-Sharqiya's statements on Rezan's death were false. We verified that Rezan died from torture in a detention center managed by Ahrar al-Sharqiya in Afrin. He had been struck on the head with a hard object, causing a cerebral hemorrhage which killed him in late January 2022.

Incident Details

Sources confirmed that in the first week of January 2022 members of Ahrar al-Sharqiya arrested Azad Ismat Khalil on charges of affiliation to the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). Azad hails from Jaqla Foqani village of Shaykh al-Hadid and resides in Afrin city where he was arrested near Zakaria Habash School in Az Zaydiyah district. Nearly twenty days after Azad's arrest, his uncle Rezan Khalil Muhammed went to the Ahrar al-Sharqiya headquarters, located in Velat Street in the city center of Afrin, to negotiate his nephew's release. However, members of the Ahrar al-Sharqiya detained Rezan for five days, during which he underwent beating and torture which killed him.

In its statement of 3 February 2022, Ahrar al-Sharqiya denied having a presence in Shaykh al-Hadid town (the birthplace of Rezan and Azad), which is controlled by the Suleiman Shah Brigade (also known as al-Amshat), in an attempt to mislead the public. However, the incident occurred in Afrin city, where Ahrar al-Sharqiya has a presence, not in Shaykh al-Hadid.

On 24 January 2022, Rezan was taken to Afrin Military Hospital; however, his critical condition necessitated his transfer to a hospital in Reyhanlı, Turkey. Despite the transfer, Rezan died of a severe cerebral hemorrhage he sustained in late 2022. His body was then returned to Syria.

A source in the Military Police told STJ:

"Ahrar al-Sharqiya arrested young Azad on charges of belonging to the PKK. Then, his uncle, Rezan, went to negotiate his release with the faction, who asked for 1500 USD to do that. However, Rezan refused to pay such a large amount and thus quarreled with the members of the faction, who then detained him. Rezan underwent severe beating in detention with the result that he had to be hospitalized."

In the same regard, a medical staff in Afrin Military Hospital testified to STJ:

"On 24 January, Rezan was transferred by ambulance from Afrin Military Hospital to Turkey through the Hamam border crossing. He was diagnosed with a cerebral hemorrhage. Nobody knows the exact date of Rezan's death nor when his body was returned to Syria. Nevertheless, he certainly died in Turkey because he was alive when he entered it."

A local of Jaqla Foqani village confirmed to STJ that Rezan died on 31 January 2022 in a Turkish hospital and his body was returned to Syria's Afrin afterwards. The local's testimony matches that of the medical staff in terms of Rezan's place of death.

Ahrar al-Sharqiya and the Military Police's Involvement in Rezan's Death

STJ talked to two sources in Ahrar al-Sharqiya, one of whom confirmed that the faction assigned one of its Sharia advisors/ religious leaders to investigate Rezan's death and see whether the security office of the faction was responsible for the incident. The source said:

"We confirmed that the young man, Azad Ismat Khalil, was initially arrested under a malicious report and during interrogation he confessed to belonging to the PKK. However, after a thorough search of his mobile phone no tangible evidence was found proving his confession, which suggest that he made it under pressure."

The same source added:

“As for Rezan Muhammed Khalil, Azad’s uncle, we confirmed that he came to the faction’s headquarters to demand his nephew’s release. Then, members of the faction asked him for 5,000,000 Syrian Pounds (SP) to meet his demand. That angered Rezan, which provoked him into a dispute with the faction’s members, ended with his detention and beating by the latter.”

A second source from the faction testified that some Ahrar al-Sharqiya commanders tried to take advantage of Rezan’s death to tarnish the image of the faction’s security office in Afrin, which would instigate the faction’s leader, Abu Hatem Shaqra, to take action against it. However, Abu Hatem hastened to close the case of Rezan’s death and to conceal it with the help of members of the Military Police of Afrin with whom he has good links.

The Military Police and the Afrin Military Hospital did not publish any document or statement on Rezan’s death incident, not even a death certificate or a forensic report.

Mustafa Sheikh, a media activist and a member of the [Human Rights Organisation -Afrin](#) provided STJ with an exclusive statement in which he cited a different scenario of Rezan’s death:

“On 1 February 2022, I had a talk with a relative of Rezan who told me that it all started when Ahrar al-Sharqiya arrested Azad and his uncle, Rezan, went to the faction to ask about his nephew’s fate. Then, members of the faction asked Rezan a large sum in exchange for Azad’s release. Thus, Rezan contacted his relatives in Europe to help him secure the amount. Rezan managed to collect a sum of 2000 USD and gave it to a lawyer whom he hired to help expedite the release of Azad. Note, the faction asked Rezan for an amount other than that he gave to the lawyer.”

Mustafa added:

“Ahrar al-Sharqiya accused Rezan of getting the money from al-Shahbaa area held by the People’s Protection Units (YPJ)/ the Democratic Union Party and arrested him accordingly. During his detention, Rezan was beaten on his head. The brutal torture he was subjected to left bruises under his right armpit. Following that, Rezan collapsed and thus members of the faction took him home by their military vehicle. The next morning, after less than 24 hours, Rezan was transferred to the Military Hospital and from there to a hospital in Turkey where he passed.”

The activist Mustafa Sheikho provided STJ with photos of Rezan while being prepared to burial. Mustafa noted that the Ahrar al-Sharqiya faction threatened Rezan’s family and relatives with arrest if they published any information related to his death.

The U.S. Department of the Treasury’s Office [sanctioned](#) the Syrian armed group Ahrar al-Sharqiya and two of its leaders for committing crimes against civilians, especially Kurds, including unlawful killings, abductions, torture, and seizures of private property.

Ahrar al-Sharqiya is affiliated with the First Corps, headed by Brigadier General Adnan al-Ahmed (First Deputy Chief of Staff), who is under the command of the Minister of Defense in the Syrian Interim Government and Chief of Staff, Brigadier General Hassan Hamadeh.

Abdurrahman Mustafa is the head of the Syrian Interim Government, operates under the National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces (SOC).

Annexes



Image (1)- Rezan Khalil being prepared for burial. Credit: Mustafa Sheikho.



Images (2) & (3): On the right, Rezan Khalil while being washed. On the left, Rezan Khalil in a hospital in Reyhanli. Credit: STJ.



الجمهورية العربية السورية

الجيش الوطني السوري

الفيلق الأول

الفرقة 15 أحرار الشرقية



تداولت بعض وسائل الإعلام، ووسائل التواصل الاجتماعي، خبراً يزعم بمقتل المدني ريزان خليل محمد على يد عناصر من فرقة أحرار الشرقية قرب ناحية الشيخ حديد بريف عفرين شمال حلب

وقام مكتب العلاقات العامة في فرقة أحرار الشرقية مع لجنة رد المظالم في غرفة القيادة الموحدة-عزم بتقديم واجب العزاء للمتوفي ريزان خليل محمد وزيارة بيته وأهله والوقوف عند اسباب الوفاة مدعوماً بتقرير المستشفى في مدينة عفرين ليؤكد ذويه أن ريزان وافته المنية نتيجة جلطة دماغية مفاجئة ولم يتعرض له أحد مطلقاً كما أن لا وجود لفصيل أحرار الشرقية بالمنطقة التي يقطن بها المتوفي.

إننا نذكر في هذا الصدد التحريض العنصري المستمر الموجه ضد المكون العربي والكردي من قبل ميليشيات pkk قسد القائم على تلفيق أكاذيب وافتراءات بحق فصيل أحرار الشرقية ولصق التهم جزافاً عليه نتيجة عدم تحملهم فكرة التآلف الإجتماعي بين المكونين في منطقة عفرين على وجه الخصوص.

ونؤكد إن ادعائهم غير صحيح وهي محاولة بآسة أفشلت كل مخططاتهم الإجرامية واحبطت عملياتهم وغدرهم وخيانتهم بحق الشعب السوري بكافة مكوناته

القيادة العامة

حرر في: 2022/2/3

FirstLegion

Image (4) - The first statement issued by Ahrar al-Sharqiya on Rezan Khalil's death.



الجمهورية العربية السورية
الجيش الوطني السوري
الغيلق الأول
الفرقة 15 أحرار الشرقية

شكر وامتنان

تتوجه القيادة العامة في فرقة أحرار الشرقية بالشكر والامتنان إلى قيادة الشرطة العسكرية وأفرعها في استجابتهم السريعة في كشف حقيقة وفاة المدني **ريزان خليل محمد** بعد سلسلة اتهامات باطلة ضد فرقة أحرار الشرقية ونؤكد استمرارنا بالوقوف إلى جانبهم في التصدي لهذه الظاهرة الخطيرة من أكاذيب ومعلومات تحض على الكراهية والتي تقف خلفها ميليشيا قسد بهدف النيل من التماسك الاجتماعي لمكونات الشعب السوري

القيادة العامة

حرر في: 2022/2/4

FirstLegion

Image (5)- The second statement issued by Ahrar al-Sharqiya on Rezan Khalil's death.



About Us:

Syrians for Truth and Justice (STJ) is a nonprofit, nongovernmental organization monitoring human rights violations in Syria. Founded in 2015, STJ has been based in France since 2019.

STJ is an impartial and independent Syrian human rights organization operating across Syria. Our network of field researchers monitor and report human rights violations occurring on the ground in Syria, while our international team of human rights experts, lawyers, and journalists gather evidence, examine emerging patterns of violations, and analyze how violations break domestic Syrian and international law.

We are committed to documenting violations of human rights committed by all parties in the Syrian conflict and elevating the voices of all Syrians victimized by human rights violations, regardless of their ethnicity, religion, political affiliation, class, and/or gender. Our commitment to human rights monitoring is founded on the idea that professional human rights documentation meeting international standards is the first step to uncovering the truth and achieving justice in Syria.



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