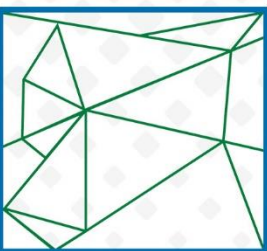


Ukraine: Wagner Group Begins Relocating Syrian Fighters from Libya to Russia



سوريون
من أجل
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Syrians
For Truth
& Justice



21 March 2022

Ukraine: Wagner Group Begins Relocating Syrian Fighters from Libya to Russia

*Testimonies from mercenaries obtained by STJ match flight logs
of aircraft that left Benghazi to Damascus International Airport,
on the eventual route from Syria to Russia*

Syrians for Truth and Justice (STJ) obtained verified information from several highly reliable sources, which confirm that a Syrian security company that works as a local proxy for the Russian Wagner Group is transporting Syrian fighters from Libya, particularly Benghazi city, to Syria, so they can then be transferred to Russia. The fighters are bound for Ukraine, where they will partake in combat beside Russian forces as mercenaries.

Through a different set of testimonies, STJ learned that there have been orders for preparing a new batch of fighters who are currently in Libya to deploy them to Russia and then Ukraine.

Additionally, STJ monitored a marked increase in the registration of the names of fighters who are willing to fight in Ukraine as mercenaries across several Syrian provinces, notably in areas under the current control of the Syrian government. However, STJ did not track any flights that might have transported fighters who registered in Syria to Russia up to 16 March 2022, when this report was composed.

Notably, in a previous [report](#), STJ confirmed the beginning of the registration of Syrian fighters who applied to fight on the side of the Russian or Ukrainian armies.

Mercenaries Flown from Libya to Russia Aboard Civilian Aircraft

On 15 March 2022, STJ interviewed the first source, who was a commissioned guard stationed in Benghazi city, in Libya, at the time of the interview. The fighter served as a guard at an oil facility near the city, where members of the Russian Wagner Group are also deployed. The source opted for anonymity for security reasons and recounted:

“On Friday, 11 March, the Russian officer in charge of our guard group and an interpreter showed up. He told us that we will be transferred from this point to another place, without specifying the destination. He asked us to prepare and pack our bags. On Saturday, 12 March, the Russian officer and the interpreter showed up again. The interpreter called out 25 names from the group. They took them with their bags. Nearly two hours later, I texted my friend who left with this batch. He told me that he was in the Benghazi airport, with approximately 150 other fighters. I asked him whether their mission was protecting the airport. He said that the Russian officer told them that they will be transported to Russia. We lost contact since the evening that day . . . my friend had a Libyan SIM card and when I called him his phone signaled that it was out of service. He must have boarded the airplane and left Libya.”

The source added:

“I and the rest of the group are still waiting for our transfer. They asked us to cease our regular guard duties on Monday and to wait for our relocation.”

The source narrated that he and his friend had signed a six-month facility guard contract with the Syrian Company al-Sayyad/ISIS Hunters (Daesh Hunters). Under the contract, they were deployed to Libya and placed under the charge of Russian officers. The source added that at the end of the contract, they both returned to Syria and stayed there for 45 days before they signed a second contract and traveled back to Libya. They served in Libya for three months before his friend was transported to Russia.

STJ lost contact with the source, who had a Libyan SIM card, at noon on 16 March 2022, Libyan time. The source told STJ that he was transported to the Benghazi airport to be flown to Syria and later to Russia as the interpreter told him, quoting Russian officers. The source was not informed of the exact departure time from Benghazi, nor for how many hours or days they would have to wait in Syria before they are taken to Russia.

Following the interview with the source, a forensic digital expert with STJ used flight tracking apps and detected a flight that left Benghazi city on Sunday, 13 March 2022, headed for the capital Damascus, a few hours after the source indicated that his friend's flight time was arriving. Based on this information, STJ believes that this flight is likely one of the flights that transported Syrian fighters from Benghazi to Damascus, Syria, in preparation for transferring them from Syria to Russia, then to Ukraine to fight in Ukraine and in the separatist regions.

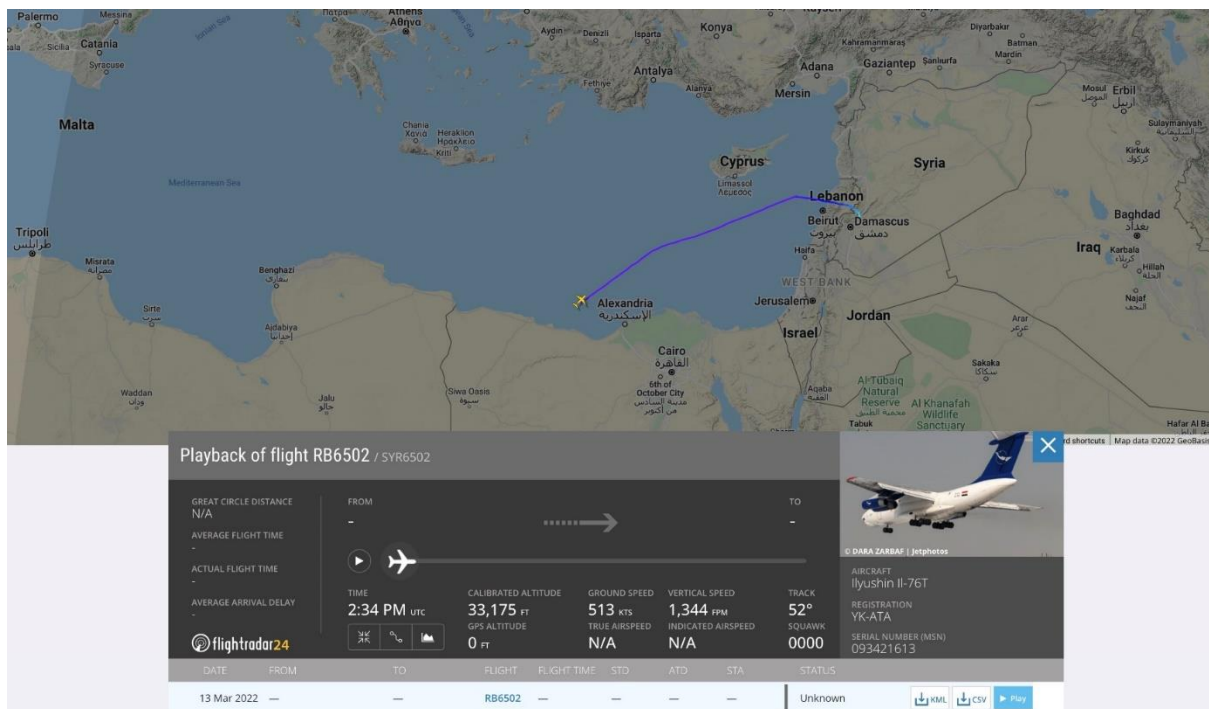


Image (1) – Syrian Airlines Flight RB6502, which STJ believes carried Syrian fighters from Libya. The aircraft was an iLyushin iL-76T - intended for transporting equipment and personnel. (The use of these cargo planes to transport people inside Syria has been documented repeatedly). Note that [Flight Radar 24](#) picked up this flight about an hour after it took off from Benghazi. (The itinerary of this flight/corridor has been compared with other flights on the days prior to and subsequent days and found to be on the same route). Credit: Flight Radar 24.

STJ's forensic digital expert also monitored another flight, this time by the Syrian airlines Cham Wings, that left Benghazi airport on 14 March 2022 (5:37 a.m. local Libyan time) which may have been among the first flights transferring Syrian fighters from Libya to Syria, en route to Russia.

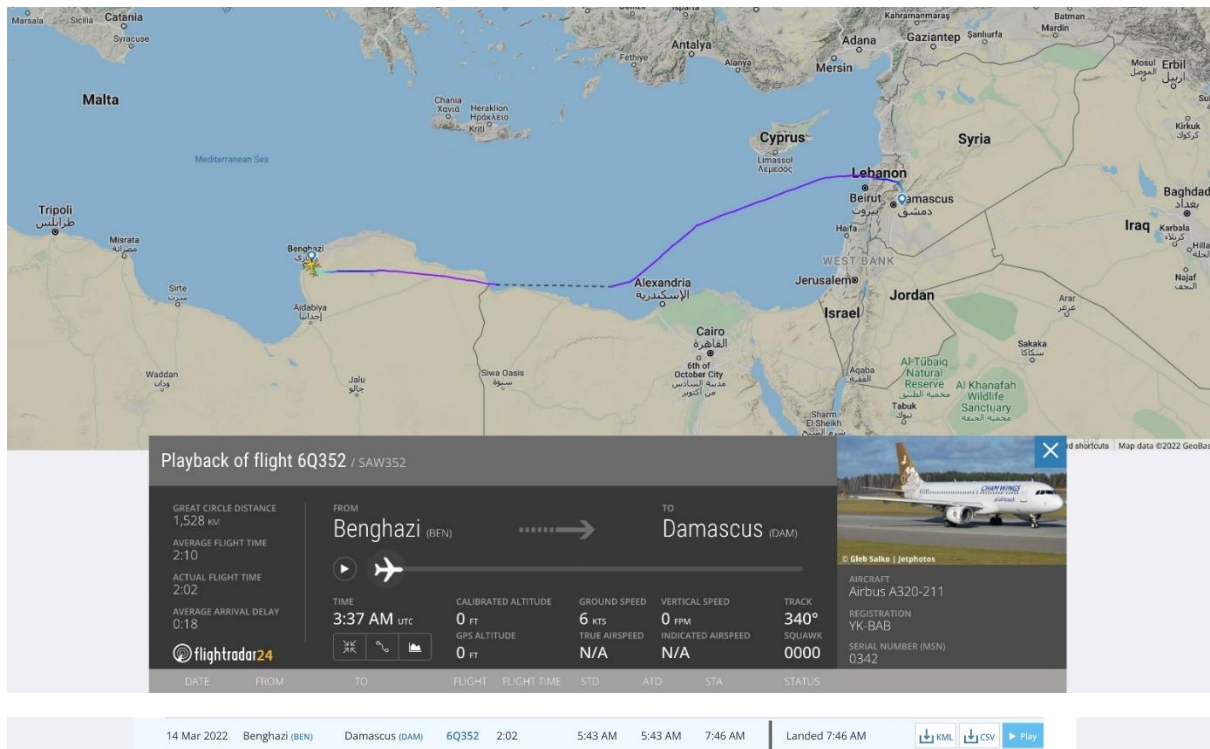


Image (2) – Syrian airlines Cham Wings flight No. 6Q352 (Airplane type A320), heading from Benghazi to Damascus. The flight can carry up to 220 passengers. STJ believes, based on collected testimonies, that the flight may have carried Syrian fighters. Credit: Flight Radar 24.

STJ also monitored flights leaving from Syria to Russia. Our forensic digital expert located a flight, capable of carrying 180 people, taking off from the Hmeimim Air Base in Syria, which is under control of Russian forces in the governate of Latakia, on 15 March 2022. The dates match up with when sources claim Russian forces began transferring Syrian fighters from Libya to Syria, as a first step towards transferring them to Russia and then Ukraine.

*Ukraine: Wagner Group Relocating Syrian Fighters
from Libya to Russia*

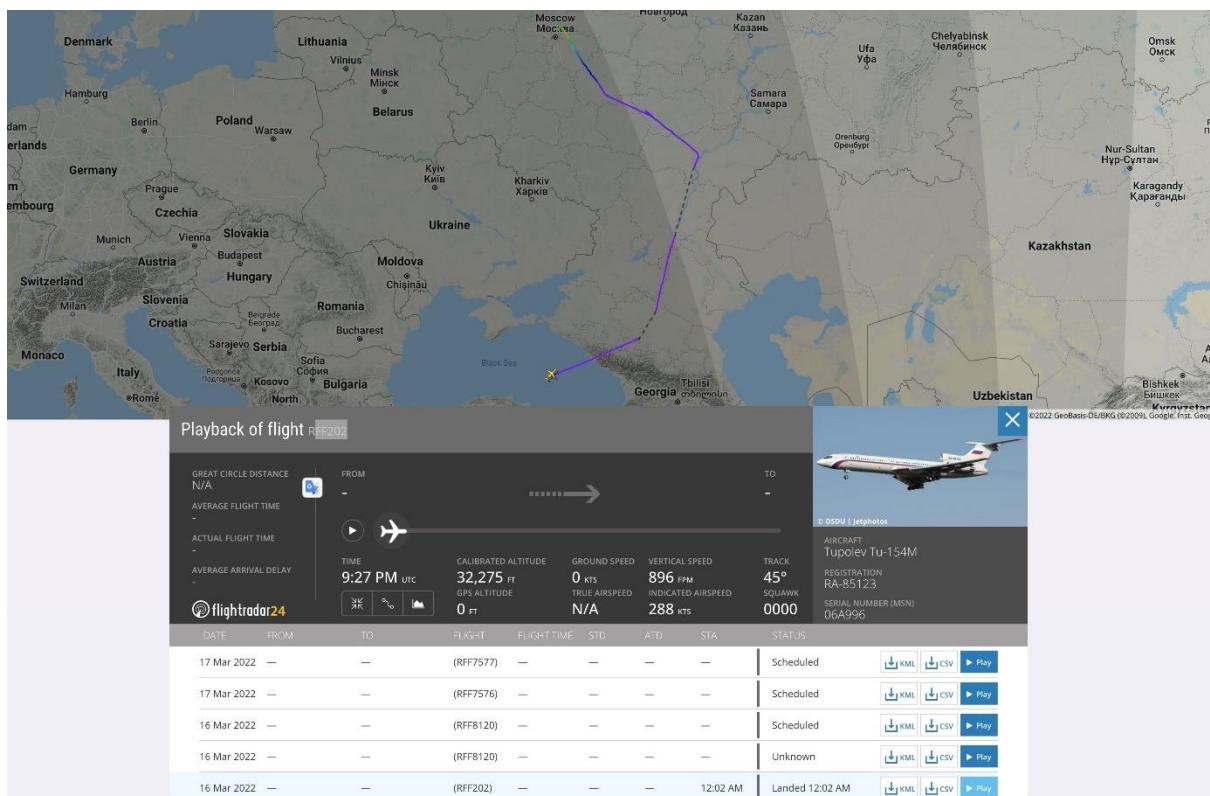
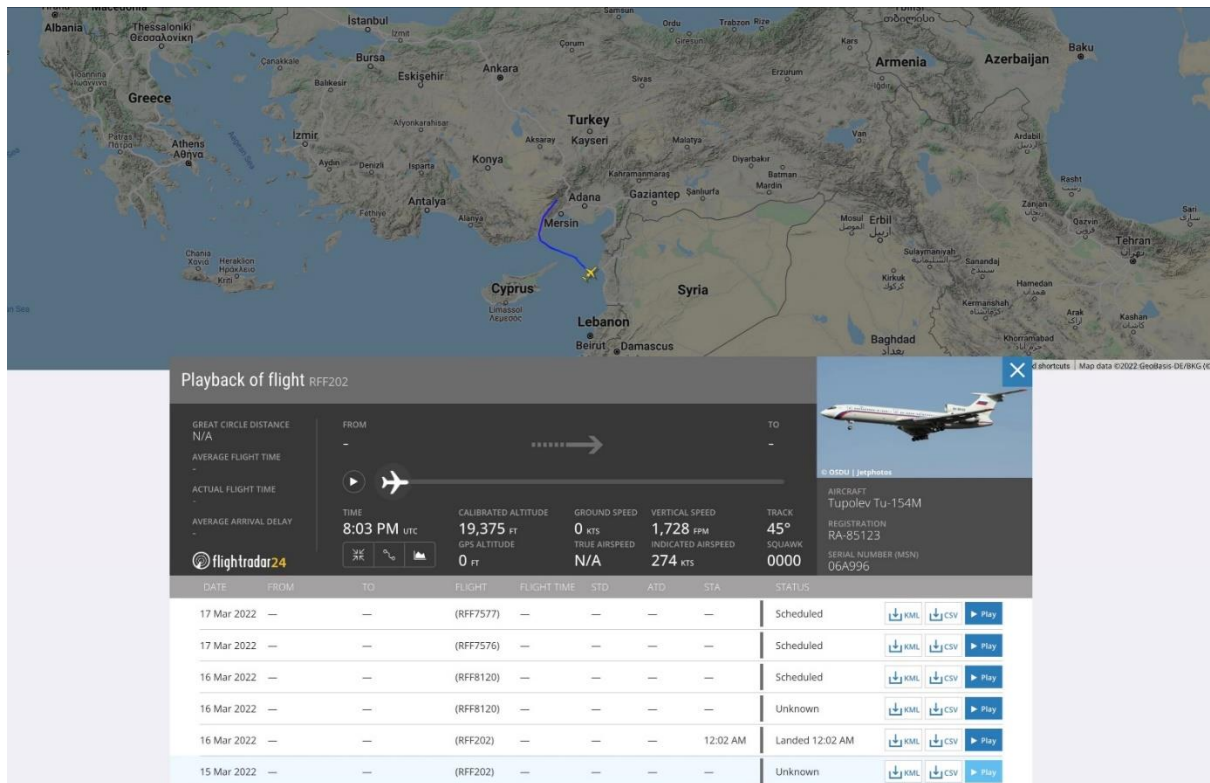


Image (3) and Image (4) – Images showing Russian flight number RFF 202 which took off from Hmeimim Air Base in Syria towards Russia. The flight appears to disappear from the radar over the Turkish coast before reappearing near the coast of the Black Sea.

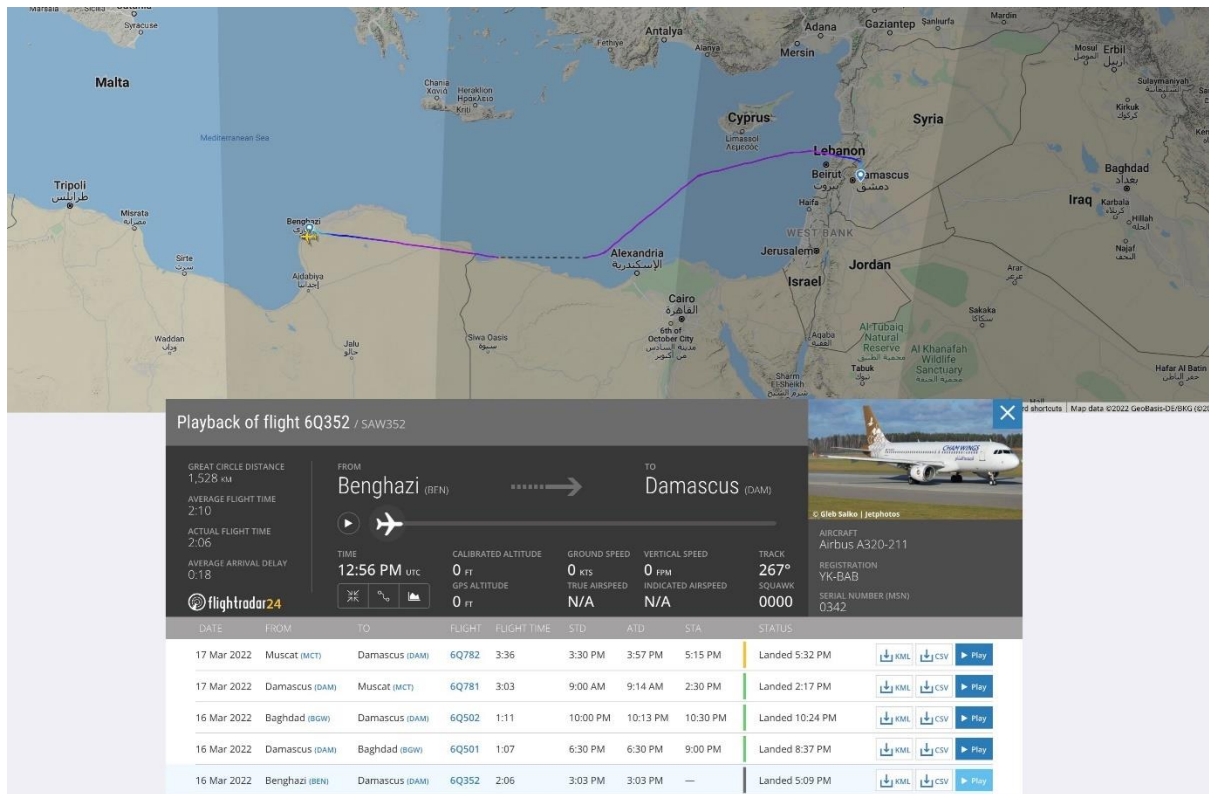


Image (5) – The timing of this flight (14:56 Libya Local Time, or 12:56 UTC), corresponds to the testimony of the first source with whom STJ spoke. On 16 March 2022, the source indicated that he had been transferred to Benghazi airport in preparation for his transfer to Syria and then to Russia. Communication with the source ended only about an hour before the flight's departure.

STJ reached out to a second source, who is one of the local reconciliation mediators and also one of the brokers who, on behalf of Russia, recruited mercenaries to fight in Libya. The source is currently based in Syria and said that he spoke to one of the fighters in Libya on 15 March. The fighter told the broker that several groups had already been transferred in batches from Libya to Russia over the past few days. The source's information matches with the guard's account and flight logs between the two countries on 13, 14, and 16 March obtained by STJ's forensic digital expert. The second source said:

"The young men I have helped to get a job in Libya contact me frequently. The majority told me that they were concerned they would be transferred to fight in Ukraine, not just because of the battles, but also that they might not be getting any financial compensation from the Russians. The reason they are concerned is that they are getting their salaries from the Haftar government while in Libya, but neither Russian officers there, nor any of the officers in charge of them, have informed them about the financial terms should they be transported to Ukraine."

The third source is another guard, who is also stationed in Benghazi. The source pointed out that there are an estimated 2000 Syrian commissioned guards in Libya, who have been recruited by Russian and Syrian security companies. These guards are deployed to military camps and bases, as well as oil facilities, and are placed under the immediate command of Russian officers from the Wagner Group. The source added that the Wagner affiliated-officers perform military supervision and training and oversee the duties of the recruits. Moreover, the

source stressed that logistics and administrative affairs are under the charge of Russian officers affiliated with the Russian government, not security companies.

Fighter Registrations Spiking in Several Syrian Provinces

Field researchers with STJ detected an increase in fighter registrations in Homs, Daraa, and As-Suwayda provinces, who are applying to join combat in Ukraine. The researchers monitored that the registrations are carried out by individuals affiliated with security services or brokers who maintain tight relations with these services. Most importantly, the researchers noticed a growing appeal among young men to put their names on fighter lists.

Homs Province (Central Syria)

In Homs city, local sources reported to STJ that some of the registrations are being conducted at the facilities of the State Security Branch (The General Intelligence Service). The sources highlighted that most of the applicants are volunteer recruits who already serve within the ranks of groups affiliated with security services. The sources added that the recruiters are promoting the registrations by referring to a 1000 USD monthly salary.

In Homs' northern countryside, different local sources said that the registrations are being carried out in the al-Rastan city by members affiliated with the Military Security Service (The Military Intelligence Division), who are also referring to a 1000 USD monthly salary. As for applicants, the sources said that most of the young men that are registering their names are either fighters who signed reconciliation/settlement agreements with the Syrian government or former volunteer recruits within local militias, in addition to a few civilians.

Daraa Province (Southern Syria)

A field researcher with STJ located several brokers who are active in registering the names of fighters. The researcher traced the connections of these brokers to specific security services, as either affiliated or associates, noting that circulated information is indicating a 1000 USD monthly salary for a seven-month fighting mission in Ukraine.

According to the interviewed sources, many applicants were denied registration for lack of the required fighting experience, while other applicants were asked to register their names in other areas (registration brokers and promoters are afraid of assassinations). Additionally, the sources reported that both members of the Ba'ath Party and individuals affiliated with the Military Security Service (Military Intelligence) are involved in the recruitment operations.

As-Suwayda Province (Southern Syria)

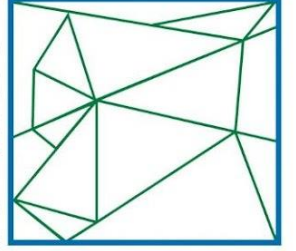
In Shahba city, a field researcher with STJ spoke to a young man who registered his name with a recruitment broker. The broker is a lawyer, M. B., who is mediating the registrations on behalf of the Air Force Intelligence. The source met the broker on 12 March 2022 near the building of the Ba'ath Party in the area and then together headed to the broker's office, in a nearby location. The source narrated:

“The broker asked me several questions regarding my name, political stance, education, mandatory and reserve military service, military operations I participated in, and military

specialty. He also asked whether I wished to go to Ukraine alone, or with a group of my friends.”

The source added:

“The broker said that registration will cost me 200 USD, but I would have to pay only 100 USD if I brought other young men, and that I will be getting 50,000 Syrian Pounds for each person I bring. He told me that the salary is 7000 USD for seven months. That is 1000 USD per month.”



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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