



## The Most Notable Hay'at Tahrir al Sham Violations Since the Establishment of Jabhat al Nusra to Date

Hay'at Tahrir al Sham Continues to Commit Multiple Types of Human Rights Violations, Mainly in Its Detention Centers

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The Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR), founded in June 2011, is a non-governmental, independent group that is considered a primary source for the OHCHR on all death toll-related analyses in Syria.

**SNHR**  
SYRIAN NETWORK FOR HUMAN RIGHTS  
الشبكة السورية لحقوق الإنسان

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## I. Brief Background Summary on Hay'at Tahrir al Sham

Hay'at Tahrir al Sham (HTS) passed through a series of stages in its development before reaching its current form. The core of the group's foundation can be traced back to Jabhat al Nusra (al Nusra Front), which was first created in January 2012.<sup>1</sup> While Jabhat al Nusra's leader, Abu Muhammad al Joulani,<sup>2</sup> did not declare his allegiance to or the group's affiliation with al Qaeda, the group was formed with al Qaeda's blessing. In April 2013, al Joulani announced that the group would no longer have any connection with the supposed Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), with Jabhat al Nusra pledging its allegiance to al Qaeda.<sup>3</sup> Jabhat al Nusra continued in that form until July 28, 2016, when al Joulani announced his disengagement from al Qaeda, changing his group's name to Jabhat Fateh al Sham.<sup>4</sup> On January 28, 2017, the launch of a splinter group, HTS,<sup>5</sup> was announced, with the new group working in an alliance with Jabhat Fateh al Sham and a number of other extremist Islamist organizations,<sup>6</sup> such as Jaish al Muhajireen wal-Ansar. While some armed opposition factions, local and foreign clerics and Sharia officials<sup>7</sup> joined this alliance, many of those involved gradually left it, although Jabhat al Nusra personnel and members of other extremist Islamist groups and extremist individuals continue to be the mainstay of HTS.

We believe that all these alliances and different designations aim to change the international community's view of Jabhat al Nusra by distancing it from al Qaeda, as well as integrating local factions and personnel in an effort to escape designation as a terrorist group. This was evident in Abu Muhammad al Joulani's interview with the US journalist Martin Smith<sup>8</sup> as the United States of America classified Jabhat al Nusra as such days after its foundation,<sup>9</sup> with the UN Security Council including it on the sanctioned list of entities and individuals affiliated with al Qaeda<sup>10</sup> on May 30, 2013.

<sup>1</sup> Al Jazeera, "Jabhat al Nusra: Front of the Supporters of the People of Syria/the Levant." <https://www.aljazeera.net/news/reportsandinterviews/2012/5/8/%D8%AC%D8%A8%D9%87%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%86%D8%B5%D8%B1%D8%A9-%D9%84%D8%A3%D9%87%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B4%D8%A7%D9%85>

<sup>2</sup> Syria TV, "Stages in the Life of Abu Muhammad al Joulani," Hossam Jazmati <https://www.syria.tv/120891>

<sup>3</sup> Reuters, "The Syrian Jabhat al Nusra Pledges Allegiance to al Qaeda Leader al Zawahiri," <https://www.reuters.com/article/oegtp-syria-crisis-my5-idARACAE9B23BW20130410>

<sup>4</sup> Al Jazeera, "Jabhat al Nusra Separates from al Qaeda and Changes Its Name," [shorturl.at/sxD37](http://shorturl.at/sxD37)

<sup>5</sup> BBC, "'Tahrir al Sham' Is the Latest Version of al Qaeda in Syria," <https://www.bbc.com/arabic/middleeast-38949469>

<sup>6</sup> In classifying extremist or terrorist organizations, we mainly rely on the description of these organizations included in [the reports of the International Commission of Inquiry](#), as well as on the basis of the relevant Security Council resolutions: [No. 2170\(2014\)](#), [No. 2249\(2015\)](#), [No. 2258\(2015\)](#).

<sup>7</sup> Sheikh Abdul Razzaq al Mahdi, Sheikh Abu al Harith al Masry, Abu Yousef al Hamawi, Sheikh Abu al Taher al Hamawi, Sheikh Abdullah al Mhaisni, Sheikh Musleh al Olayani, Abu Jaber al Sheikh, and Abu Yousef al Muhajir.

<sup>8</sup> PBS, Frontline, "The Jihadist," Martin Smith, <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/interview/abu-mohammad-al-jolani/>

<sup>9</sup> The New York Times, "U.S. Places Militant Syrian Rebel Group on List of Terrorist Organizations," <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/11/world/middleeast/us-designates-syrian-al-nusra-front-as-terrorist-group.html>

<sup>10</sup> Al Jazeera, "The United Nations Blacklists the Syrian Jabhat al Nusra," <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2013/5/31/un-blacklists-syrias-al-nusra-front>

HTS has not only changed its designation, but also tried to use various strategies to prove its eligibility for the removal of the 'terrorist' classification. Perhaps the best known of these attempts took place in June 2020<sup>11</sup> when HTS confronted the 'Fa Ithboto' ('So Stand') group, which consisted of five factions classified as extremist Islamist: The 'Hurras al Din' or Guardians of Religion Organization, Ansar al Din Group, Tansiqiyat al Jihad, Liwa al Muqatileen al Ansar, and the Ansar al Islam Group. For HTS, this provided a timely opportunity to show its estrangement from and hostility to the more extremist groups, demonstrating that rather than ally with them, it preferred to fight against them, with the group issuing media statements to this effect and targeting the other groups' leaders. Although this move probably falls more accurately into the category of territorial competition over which extremist Islamist groups could control the largest possible area of land and attract the most followers, it also shows the disparity between the international community's treatment of different terrorist groups. Despite HTS presenting itself as a local faction and confronting other globalized jihadist factions, the international community continues to classify only HTS among these groups as a terrorist threat<sup>12</sup> while withholding the same classification from other locally based extremist organizations, including dozens of Iranian-affiliated factions also responsible for terrorist acts in Syria and Iraq, which have not been classified as terrorist or included on any international watch lists.<sup>13</sup>

Although the group's claims to be making a genuine and serious endeavor to distance itself from the al Qaeda terrorist organization and from the practices of terrorist organizations generally could be considered a step in the right direction, any such moderation cannot be achieved through media declarations and statements issued via Western or local media, but must instead be proven by demonstrating respect for the basic principles of international human rights law, as well as international humanitarian law. Without such practical steps, all statements and claims remain empty verbiage and ink on paper.

This report seeks to show the patterns of violations committed by HTS during the battles in connection with the internal armed conflict in Syria, which constitute violations of international humanitarian law,<sup>14</sup> to describe the violations the group has perpetrated in areas under its control, which also constitute violations of international human rights law;<sup>15</sup> and to highlight the extent and severity of those violations, whose practice and continuing nature undermine HTS' self-serving PR narrative depicting itself as a moderate group playing an important political role in order to preserve its survival. To that end, HTS must address the legacy of the past, acknowledge the violations, hold the perpetrators accountable, compensate the victims, respect basic human rights, and follow other recommendations contained in this report based on the documented violations.

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<sup>11</sup> Omran Center for Strategic Studies, "HTS and the Reshaping of the Jihadi Space: Internal Arrangements and External Messages," Sasha al Alou, [shorturl.at/vK459](https://shorturl.at/vK459)

<sup>12</sup> Harmoon Center for Contemporary Studies, "Extremist and Salafist Movements in Syria After 2011 and the Transformations of Hay'at Tahrir al Sham," Saleh al Hamawi (translated by Fares Jasem), [shorturl.at/gyzW1](https://shorturl.at/gyzW1)

<sup>13</sup> Harmoon Center For Contemporary Studies, "Extremist and Salafist Movements in Syria After 2011 and the Transformations of Hay'at Tahrir al Sham," Saleh al Hamawi (translated by Fares Jasem), [shorturl.at/dghHR](https://shorturl.at/dghHR)

<sup>14</sup> Washington Institute for Near East Policy, "Washington's Militia Problem in Syria Is an Iran Problem," <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/washingtons-militia-problem-syria-iran-problem>

<sup>15</sup> ICRC, International Humanitarian Law, Rule 139, [https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/customary-ihl/eng/docs/v1\\_rul\\_rule139](https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/customary-ihl/eng/docs/v1_rul_rule139)

<sup>16</sup> Idrak for Studies and Consultations, Ahmad Abazid, "Al Joulani's Last Plan: The War in Search of Politics," [https://www.ohchr.org/EN/UDHR/Documents/UDHR\\_Translations/eng.pdf](https://www.ohchr.org/EN/UDHR/Documents/UDHR_Translations/eng.pdf)

## II. The Report's Methodology

This report relies mainly on the Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) team's continuous daily monitoring and documentation of violations committed by Jabhat al Nusra, which became HTS, as past violations cannot be considered separately from the present ones (Abu Muhammad al Joulani still represents its senior leader). SNHR archives all the incidents that we document, constantly following up on and updating these records as required whenever new information emerges, with all the statistics included here being registered according to each detainee's name, date, place and conditions of detention, the party responsible for the arrest and enforced disappearance, the latest observations and documents, and other details. SNHR's Information Technology department has built a dedicated program within the database for each party to the conflict, providing information on detainees' original governorate, gender, marital and academic status, and age group, with all data being entered automatically. The statistics included in this report cover the period from the beginning of 2012 until the end of 2021.

Using the SNHR database, we can distribute the death toll, cases of arrests, enforced disappearances, torture and other violations according to the governorate in which each incident took place, and the governorate which the victim comes from. In this report, we distribute the cases of arrests/enforced disappearances according to the governorate from which the detainee/forcibly disappeared person originates, rather than the place where the arrest took place, in order to show the extent of the loss and violence suffered by the people of that governorate compared to other governorates given that HTS targeted those forcibly displaced to Idlib governorate along with residents of the areas it controlled previously or still controls. We note that there has been a significant change in the areas that have been brought under Jabhat al Nusra/Jabhat Fateh al Sham/HTS control since 2012 up to the current date. Therefore, the record of the violations cited here includes the entire period and designations, in which we use the current name, HTS. Through our database, we can analyze and distribute the data according to the time period for each designation, for each area and other factors, noting that most of the violations have been concentrated in those areas of Idlib and Aleppo governorates that were subject to HTS control, especially since these areas were under HTS control for longer periods of time compared to areas in other governorates, such as Deir Ez-Zour, Hama or Damascus Suburbs. As with all other information maintained in the SNHR database, this data is retained securely, and we store several backup copies in different locations. The methodology adopted by SNHR can be seen at this [link](#).

The report's methodology is also based on interviews we conducted with witnesses and survivors of HTS detention centers, who come from different governorates and were activists or individuals working in related fields; interviews with families of victims who are still detained/forcibly disappeared; interviews with local activists and civilians who were detained and summoned to the judiciary and trial by HTS; and interviews with lawyers, judicial workers, and former members of opposition factions. These interviews were held either inside or outside Syria through multiple means, including in-person visits or by phone

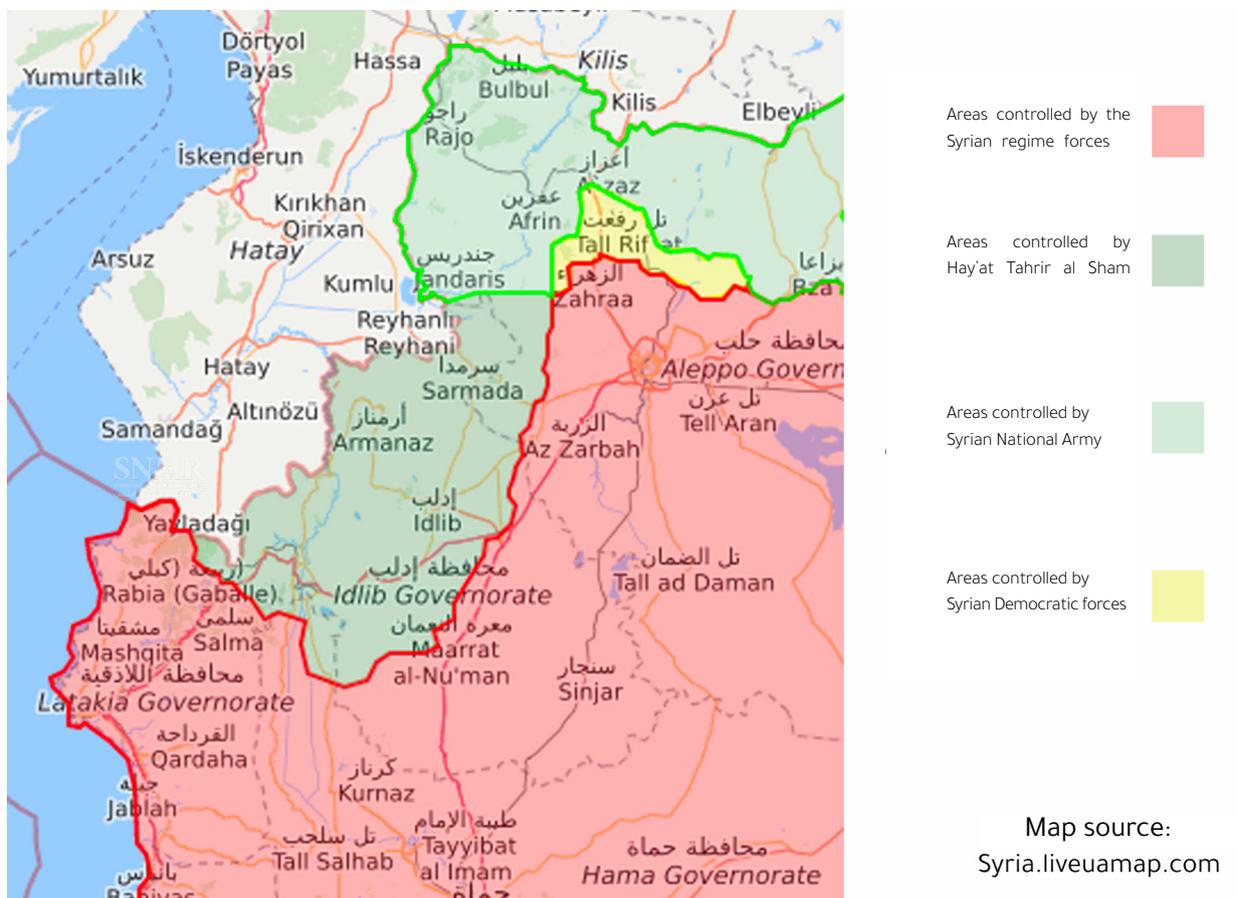
via various communication programs such as Messenger, Skype, and WhatsApp, taking into account the security conditions of our team as well as of the individuals who graciously agreed to be interviewed. In total, we spoke with around 85 people in order to complete this report, although the report itself contains only 22 of the accounts provided in order to limit it to a manageable length and due to the similarities between some of the accounts.

We obtained all the accounts included in the report directly rather than from open sources. In some cases, we have used aliases rather than the interviewees' names, and also concealed or changed some of the information that could help in identifying witnesses, to protect witnesses' confidentiality and to prevent security services from harassing or persecuting them. The interviewees received no financial compensation nor any promises in exchange for participating in interviews. We explained the purpose of the report beforehand to all the interviewees we spoke with and obtained their consent to use the information they provided to serve the purposes of the report and the documentation processes. All of this is in accordance with our internal protocols, with which we have ensured compliance with for years, and we always strive to develop these to keep pace with the best levels of psychological care for victims.

This report focuses on the documentation of violations, especially atrocious ones, such as extrajudicial killing, arbitrary detention, enforced disappearance, and torture, as well as suppression of freedom of opinion and expression, and discrimination against women, but does not include other types of violations such as administrative corruption, allocating positions on the basis of loyalty or kinship, looting resources and wealth, and the lack of financial transparency. In addition, given the exceptional difficulties and the magnitude of the violations, the cases mentioned in this report represent the barest minimum of the violations which we have been able to document.

### III. Rights and Freedoms in Areas Under HTS Control

The areas under the control of HTS have expanded and changed dramatically since its establishment up to the present day, with 2014 being the starting point of its independent control over its own lands,<sup>16</sup> which later expanded to include areas in the northern suburbs of Hama, the western suburbs of Aleppo, and various areas in Idlib governorate, expanding at the expense of the Armed Opposition factions. By the beginning of 2019, HTS had tightened its military and administrative control over large areas of northwest Syria.<sup>17</sup> The following map shows the areas under HTS control in the governorates of Idlib and Aleppo as of the end of 2021:



<sup>17</sup> Human Rights Watch, "Syria: Arrests, Torture by Armed Group: Move to Solidify Control, Silence Critics," <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/01/28/syria-arrests-torture-armed-group>

This report is concerned with the HTS' lack of respect for international humanitarian law during battles with an adversary in connection with the internal armed conflict, as well as more broadly on the basic rights and freedoms of individuals in areas under HTS control. In this context, the term 'control' does not refer only to military hegemony or management of economic resources or to a political role, but most importantly to the respect shown for the human rights of the population in the areas under the group's control since this respect, rather than superior military power and dominance, is the source of the controlling forces' internal legitimacy.

We have documented [hundreds of cases of persecution and detention](#) over criticism of or opposition to HTS practices or policies, no matter how minor or limited this criticism was, [such as publishing a post or tweet on social media networks such as Facebook and Twitter](#), or participating in a demonstration, with HTS even persecuting victims' families or relatives for communicating with us or with other human rights groups to report violations against their families. As a result, many of these complainants or would-be complainants now refrain from communicating with us for fear of threats and intimidation, as detainees are subjected to humiliating security investigations and torture and some have been forcibly disappeared,<sup>18</sup> with the periods of detention and the extent of torture varying according to the accusation. Through such practices, HTS has been able to extend its dominance over the population in areas under its control and to put an end to most protests against the group, and even to enlist individuals in the community to work with HTS for fear of being subjected to its repressive practices in retaliation for any refusal to do so. In some cases, HTS has moved towards using even more horrific practices, through assassinating, killing or exiling its opponents,<sup>19</sup> as well as persecuting and threatening families simply for inquiring about the fate of their relatives. All of these policies are similar to the methods used by other repressive dictatorial powers, such as the Syrian regime.

This report shows that these practices are implemented through HTS' security apparatus and the general security apparatus that emerged from the group in June 2020.<sup>20</sup> To carry out its various operations, HTS has established many detention centers, both publicly known and secret facilities. Despite the claims of the senior Sharia official with HTS' security division, Ahmad Abdul Mu'ti,<sup>21</sup> that the security body acts only according to an arrest warrant or a subpoena from the public prosecutor, both the party that issues the warrant and the public prosecutor are affiliated with HTS rather than being independent from the group, making these steps nothing more than empty formalities for the sake of appearance. In addition, the courts to which accused individuals are referred, and the judges trying them, are not independent of HTS' authority, which undermines the supposed legitimacy of the whole process and devalues the Sharia official's claims.

<sup>18</sup> Human Rights Watch, "Syria: Arrests, Torture by Armed Group," <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/01/28/syria-arrests-torture-armed-group>

<sup>19</sup> SNHR, "Hay'at Tahrir al Sham Was Most Likely Behind the Assassination of Raed Fares and Hamoud Jnein in Kafranbel City," <https://sn4hr.org/blog/2018/11/29/52887/>

<sup>20</sup> Syria TV, "General Security Service: Al Joulani's Trump Card and an Intelligence Agency that Aspires beyond Idlib," <https://www.syria.tv/117433>

<sup>21</sup> Syria TV, "General Security Service"... Al Joulani's trump card and an intelligence agency that aspires beyond Idlib, <https://www.syria.tv/117433>

<sup>22</sup> Omran Center for Strategic Studies, "The Local Governance of Hay'at Tahrir al Sham and Its Perspective for Local Councils," Ayman al Dasouqi,

This report confirms that HTS continues to detain hundreds of forcibly disappeared persons, with SNHR documenting the appearance of many of these detainees in 'confession' videos filmed in HTS detention centers, supposedly confessing to their dealings with the US-led coalition to eliminate ISIS or to plotting against HTS. All the individuals who appeared in these videos were disappeared again. Many families of those forcibly disappeared in HTS detention centers have been subjected to fraud by networks connected to HTS, which have blackmailed them financially in exchange for the release of the disappeared or for obtaining information about their loved ones' fate. In many cases, [HTS has carried out extrajudicial executions](#) without informing most of the victims' families of their loved ones' fate or handing over their bodies in order to avoid further public hostility towards the group. In addition to subjecting the families to more grief and constant worry about their missing loved ones, all these actions serve a primary goal of terrorizing, intimidating and controlling society, ensuring that no dissenting voices dare to speak out or call for democratic elections, an independent judiciary, freedom of opinion and expression, a transparent economy, an end to nepotism, corruption and the looting of wealth and resources, and other fundamental human rights<sup>22</sup> for fear of the dire consequences of doing so.

## IV. HTS' Judicial System and Hesba Apparatus

As both the judicial system and the Hesba apparatus (religious police) of HTS deal with hundreds of detainees and other cases, it is necessary to know the structure of each and the extent of its independence from HTS' authority.

### A. The Judicial System

The Salvation Government, which is affiliated with HTS, established the Ministry of Justice, with the judiciary consisting of six main departments, three of which are affiliated with the Ministry of Justice while the other three are unaffiliated:

- a. Those affiliated with the Ministry of Justice: The civil or general judiciary, and the administrative judiciary, are affiliated with the Ministry of Justice, and the military judiciary is affiliated with the Ministry of Justice but is formally subordinate to it.
- b. Those unaffiliated with the Ministry of Justice: The security judiciary, the judiciary of organizations and associations, and the internal judiciary.

The judicial system is made up of many judicial bodies, which are almost entirely separate from each other with no coordination among them, making it very difficult to create an organizational chart showing the structure for all these departments, especially since HTS and the Salvation Government make periodic changes in this complex organizational form. It should be noted that the judiciary does not base its decisions on specific and known judicial rulings and regulations, and relies mainly on ministerial circulars and instructions, which are considered to be the legal code regulating the work of the courts. With no formal law governing the procedures regulating the work of the courts, the Code of Procedure is the closest to

such legislation, while courts work on degrees of litigation, as sentences are issued in two degrees, with a few of them in three degrees. Meanwhile, the judiciary includes only a few judges and lawyers who are wholly insufficient for the huge amount of work which is supposed to be done. The judiciary also depends on students of religious sciences or law students in many administrative and judicial positions, with these students being either affiliated with or blindly loyal to HTS, leading to an overall lack of independence and efficiency in HTS' judiciary. Below are some of the details that our team was able to obtain with difficulty.

#### First: Civil/ Ordinary Judiciary "Transactions"

The civil judiciary is concerned with personal and civil status cases, misdemeanors and felonies perpetrated by civilians. The hierarchy of the civil judiciary is as follows:

**Minister of Justice:** The justice minister is considered to be the head of all judges within the Salvation Government, not just in the Ministry, and is considered the preeminent senior judge in all areas under HTS control, with the right to intervene in various cases.

**Courts:** There are five courts, which are located in major cities and towns, namely: Idlib City Court, Sarmada Court, Ariha Court, Salqin Court, and Darat Ezza Court. Each court is run administratively by a court president, who intervenes in judgments and sessions, has more power than the competent judge, has the power to dismiss judges and court employees, and has the power to appoint replacements for them. The court president receives his orders directly from the Minister of Justice. Each court includes a detention center, with the court allowing litigants and defendants to appoint lawyers, who follow up on their clients' cases before the general judiciary.

The courts have jurisdiction according to the cases they try. These courts are:

- The Court of First Instance, which is called the Financial Transactions Court, specializes in all financial and real estate disputes
- The Personal Status Court specializes in cases of separation, divorce, and khul' between spouses, requests for marital alimony, child support, custody, and the extraction of inheritance documents, guardianship and wardship
- The Penal Court considers cases of traffic accidents, theft, insults, cursing, abuse, fraud, and all misdemeanor offences
- The Criminal Court, which was previously located in Idlib city, then transferred to Sarmada city, considers cases of premeditated murder, unintentional killing, mohareb and every criminal offense
- The Civil Status Court is concerned with cases of changing parentage, amending civil data, and other issues.

In general, each court has a judge, usually a sheikh/clergyman, as well as legal advisors and a scribe. All the courts rely on Islamic law, some Syrian laws, and circulars issued by the Ministry of Justice, and issue their rulings in accordance with these, with the rulings being subject to appeal by the Court of Cassation located in Idlib city.

The court does not decide cases free of charge, but imposes high fees even on the households of convicted prisoners. Judicial rulings are decided according to the defendant's influence, connections and financial ability as the court issues rulings of parole by Tazir and justifies this by noting that prisons and courts are repeatedly bombed. Exile with Tazir of \$1,000 for each month of imprisonment is considered one of the sentences most commonly issued by the court, particularly when the convicted person is well known as an affluent merchant or otherwise wealthy individual. In general, most of the sentences imposed by the court consist of imprisonment, a fine and/or flogging, with the term of imprisonment varying according to the charges. As there is no clear legal definition of each crime and the penalty for it, the judge decides on the sentence and term of imprisonment as he sees fit.

A subpoena issued by the Idlib Court of the Salvation Government's Ministry of Justice for the arrest of Muhammad Mahmoud al Zain on the pretext of his committing blasphemy

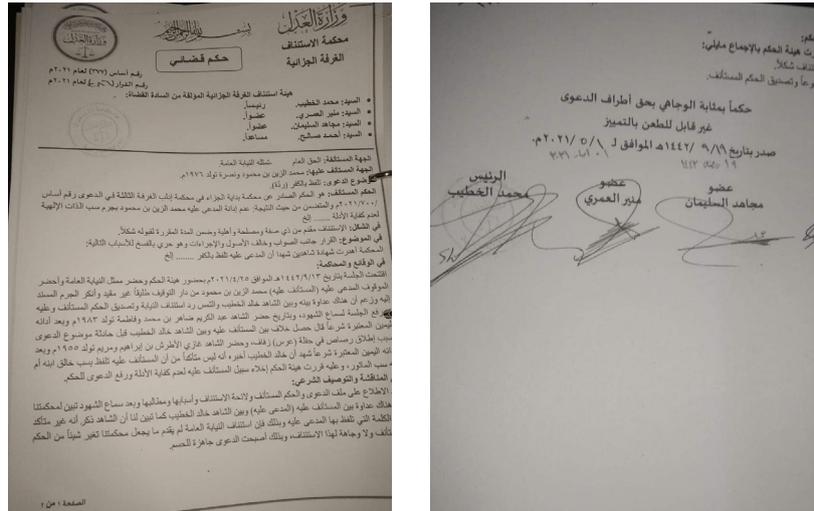
A 'summary of judgment' document issued by the Salqin Court of the Salvation Government's Ministry of Justice, affiliated with HTS, in February 2019. The document shows the crime committed and the resulting sentence, including 300 lashes.



**The Public Prosecution:** This represents the public right and conducts in the Public Prosecutor's Office all preliminary investigations of the reports referred to it by police stations and posts, which it refers to the competent court. If the case is a civil one, it shall be referred to the Ordinary Judiciary "Transactions" or the Criminal Judiciary, with the Public Prosecutor having a First Deputy and a Second Deputy. Despite the existence of a public prosecution apparatus, whose area of competence is to initiate cases, investigate, bring charges and refer cases to the competent court, and follow up on their progress before the courts until a ruling is issued or decided upon, the Public Prosecution's performance is very weak compared to the court judges' domination over the Public Prosecution's work. We believe that HTS developed this body as a formality, with the aim of summoning activists, especially media workers, and interrogating them.

**The Courts of Appeal and Cassation:** There is one Court of Appeal in Idlib city and one Court of Cassation/Appeal, also called the Appeal Committee. The Court of Appeal consists of a chamber/body tasked with considering decisions issued by the Transactions Court, a chamber/body of appeal for the Personal Status Court, whose decision is irrevocable, and a chamber/body of appeal for the Criminal Court, which considers Penal Court cases.

A judicial ruling issued by the Appeals Board of the Criminal Court rejecting the appeal of a ruling on the claim of committing blasphemy



**Judgment Execution Department:** This is the authority vested with the powers to implement irrevocable judgments, which also grants judgment holders the right to exercise a free hand over the money of the losing party in the lawsuit in order to enable them to receive their judgment rights.

**The Court of Cassation:** This considers some judgments that can be appealed by cassation.

**The Supreme Judicial Council:** This specializes mainly in approving criminal judgments.

Second: Administrative Judiciary 'Administrative Court'

The administrative court or administrative judiciary consists of one court located in Idlib city. There is great ambiguity in its work, and, in general, it specializes in the disputes between the Salvation Government's ministries or cases in which one of the parties is an administrative body. It does not have its own prison, and it is usually run by a sheikh or students from the Faculty of Islamic Law. Like the other ordinary courts, the administrative court does not have clear rules and principles in the exercise of its jurisdiction.

Third: Military Judiciary:

The military judiciary specializes in military issues such as battles and skirmishes, and overlaps with the security judiciary in pursuing members of the Armed Opposition factions. It is formally affiliated with the Ministry of Justice, though its work is carried out without referring to the Ministry. We have documented the presence of two military courts, one in Idlib and a second military court (a 'military penal court' and a 'military transaction court') in Sarmada town, north of Idlib governorate, in addition to a military prosecutor service.

#### Fourth: Security Judiciary

The security judiciary is considered the most influential and authoritarian of HTS' judiciary bodies, and is subject to the authority of the security apparatus (like the Syrian regime's Counter-Terrorism Court, which is controlled by the security services). It does not fall under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Justice and operates completely independently from the rest of the judicial bodies. The security judiciary has a security prosecutor and security judges, and does not include recognizable courts, but rather security centers, each of which contains a detention center, in addition to secret detention centers. Its work is distributed across many categories, including a category specifically for the Syrian regime, which specializes in pursuing regime agents; another covering organized crime, which includes kidnappings for ransom; a coalition category specialized in pursuing persons dealing with the US-led coalition forces, both civilian and military personnel; and an ISIS category which specifically deals with pursuing ISIS affiliates.

The security judge is considered to have the highest authority among HTS judges as the investigators present cases to him, on which he issues rulings. Those arrested on the basis of security cases do not have the right to appoint a lawyer, and their families are deprived of any right to visit them, with only some detainees' families able to discover the fate of their family members after sentences are issued against them. Many families of individuals forcibly disappeared by HTS told us that they were able to find out the sentences issued against their family members through a phone number [published](#) by the General Security Apparatus through its official Telegram channel, which is dedicated to receiving complaints.

The security judiciary has established a special committee that issues sentences against detainees in connection with cases related to the US-led coalition or ISIS. The committee carries out its work within a special detention center to which detainees are transferred in order to attend sentencing hearings - similar to the Syrian regime's 'al Midan Court' (the military field court). The judicial committee usually consists of the Minister of Justice or his deputy, as well as the Minister of Endowments and other security officials, who also work as judges, such as Abu Azzam al Jazrawi, nicknamed the 'blood judge' by detainees for the many execution sentences he has issued. It also consists of a public prosecutor named Abu Azzam al Turkmani, and the 'Amir' or leader of the group's investigators, Zaid al Hamawi.

Security centers are spread throughout all areas controlled by HTS, with the total number of these facilities estimated at 112. The Security Judiciary's administrative hierarchy consists of sector management, then central security, then subsidiary security centers. These centers carry out raids, arrests, and prosecutions, with all of their headquarters containing detention facilities, while the judiciary also operates secret detention centers.

#### Fifth: Judiciary of Organizations

This judiciary, a body independent of the Ministry of Justice, which is ostensibly affiliated with the Ministry of Local Development, specializes in persecuting and monitoring directors and workers of civil society organizations, with its operations sometimes overlapping with those of the security judiciary, depending on the case being investigated or prosecuted. Its main center is located near the Bab al Hawa crossing in the office of the Ministry of Development, known as 'al Ma'mal al Azraq' or the Blue Laboratory, which is supervised by a Tunisian person.

This body conducts continuous investigations into the activities of civil society organizations in general, particularly those involved in relief operations and their management staff. This body does not have prisons, detention centers, or judges. It is personally run by the Head of the Organizations Affairs Office, who receives reports from subordinate officials working for him, investigates them personally, and issues sentences that may require the suspension of an organization's work or the acquisition/seizure of the organization's property. Individuals sentenced to imprisonment by the Judiciary of Organizations serve their sentences or receive their punishment in civil prisons or security detention centers according to the decision of the Head of the Organizations Affairs Office.

#### Sixth: Internal Judiciary

This is a special body that is not affiliated with any ministry, which specializes in resolving internal conflict issues within HTS. It is directly run by HTS leader Abu Muhammad al Joulani, who is responsible for appointing the head of this entity. The latter takes the position of a caseworker and is often a member of the Shura Council, with this body also having secret prisons.

#### **B. Al Hesba Apparatus focuses on exerting control over citizens' private lives:**

HTS has maintained al Hesba Apparatus despite establishing the aforementioned judiciary and several courts and police services. Al Hesba Apparatus is considered a new security branch similar to the judiciary and the security apparatus, with all playing a restrictive security role, even if they give themselves the official-sounding name of 'judiciary' or 'hesba.' The role of al Hesba Apparatus has changed and developed in tandem with the change and development in HTS' ideology, and operates according to the powers granted to it by HTS. Although we have recorded periods of extensive activity by al Hesba Apparatus, which has persecuted and detained many people, its role has also seen phases of decline, during which we witnessed few or no arrests or persecutions by its personnel, with security aspects in HTS-held areas playing a role in activating or reducing this apparatus' role.

The current al Hesba Apparatus, known as 'Al Falah,' was established at the beginning of May 2020, prior to which it was known as 'Sawaid al Khair.' HTS usually changes the name of the apparatus as a way of mollifying public anger, especially when violations by its personnel and clashes with members of the public escalate, in an effort to convey a message to the people that it has dissolved this apparatus while

in fact it has simply changed the names. HTS also denies its dependence on this body, like most of the apparatuses it establishes. The main al Falah Center is located in Idlib city and is supported by the city's security forces to carry out arrests or to end quarrels between its personnel and residents, and has committees spread throughout many areas. SNHR has monitored the deployment of a number of vehicles belonging to al Hesba Apparatus in the markets and places of public gatherings in Idlib city, with the objective of imposing restrictions on the population and exerting more control over citizens' private lives. For example, it prevents women from sitting with men in restaurants, offices or universities, prevents the playing of music, and bans certain forms of men's shaving, and other blatantly intrusive practices inhibiting personal freedoms. We have also documented its personnel preventing or stopping many activities related to art and painting exhibitions and prosecuting those in charge, as it is dedicated to forcibly imposing the worldview of HTS' extremist ideology on Syrian society, with violators of these extremist laws facing fines. Al Hesba Apparatus does not have its own detention center, but rather detains civilians in Idlib Central Prison or Idlib Court Prison, known as the 'Criminal Court.'

## V. Record of the Most Notable Violations by HTS Since Its Establishment According to the SNHR Database

In this report, we provide statistics for the most notable violations carried out by HTS since its establishment until December 2021. Although the group has changed its name, or even its affiliation, it cannot escape its responsibility for the violations previously committed by Jabhat al Nusra, with Abu Muhammad al Joulani (Ahmad al Shar') still responsible for the group since its establishment up to the current date despite changing his title from 'Al Fateh' to 'Leader.' The statistics listed here are only those which our team was able to document as we indicated in our methodology, and therefore reflect only the bare minimum of the group's actual crimes. Nevertheless, they succeed to some degree in showing the vast extent of these violations and the percentage of the violations perpetrated by HTS compared to those by the other parties to the conflict, such as the Syrian regime, Russia, the Syrian Democratic Forces, ISIS, and the Armed Opposition/Syrian National Army.

### A. Extrajudicial killing

We documented the deaths of at least 505 civilians, including 71 children and 77 women, at the hands of Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham, since the beginning of 2012 until December 2021. They are distributed by killing type as follows:

- **Unlawful combat attacks:**<sup>23</sup> 371, including 69 children and 67 women.
- **Torture and neglect of health care:** 28 individuals, including two children.
- **Execution following summary and arbitrary trial proceedings:**<sup>24</sup> 106, including 10 women.

<sup>23</sup> Those killed during unlawful combat attacks, unlawful bombings and clashes, and killings that accompanied HTS military attacks. This death toll does not include the death toll from explosions and mines.

<sup>24</sup> Executions in HTS detention centers, in squares, public places, homes, and during attacks on towns.

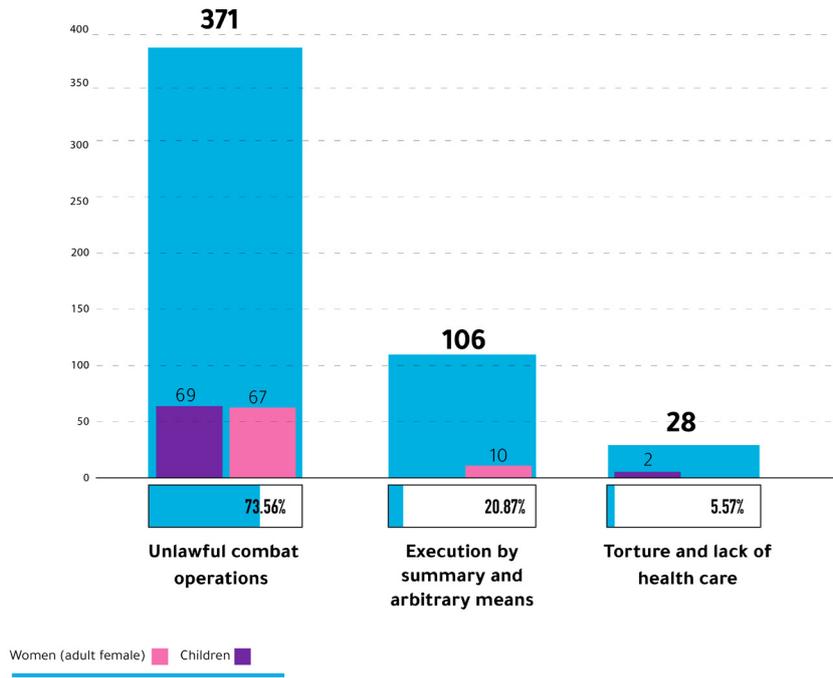
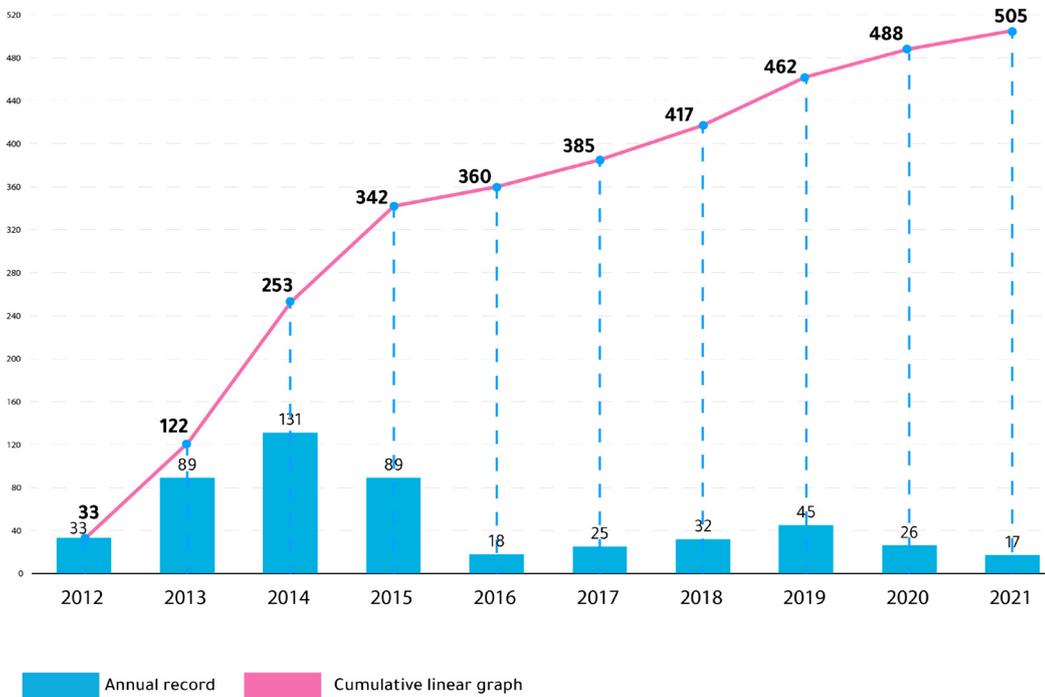
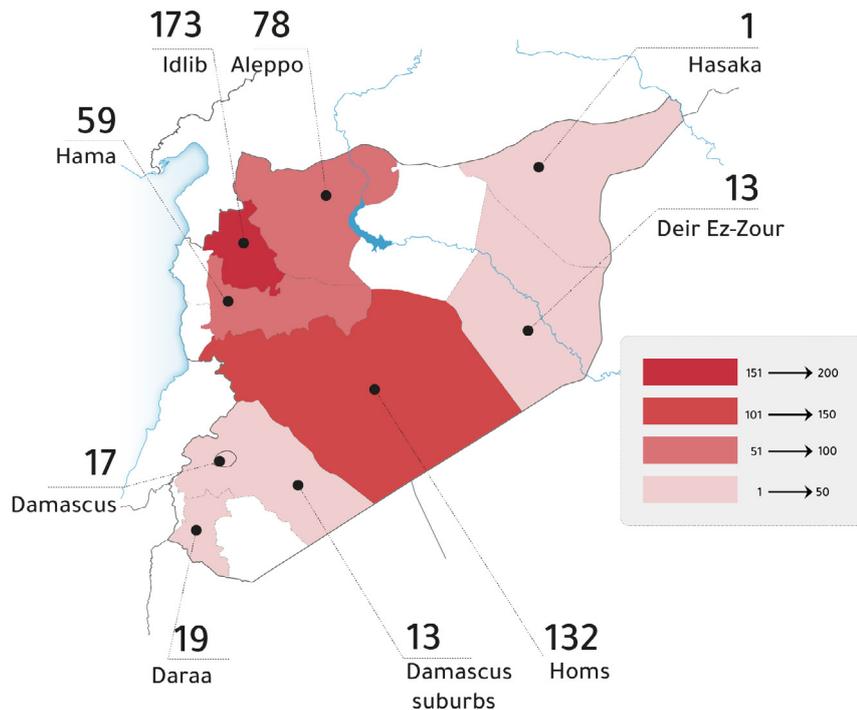


Chart showing the distribution of the death toll of extrajudicial killings by HTS by year since the announcement of the establishment of Jabhat al Nusra in Syria in January 2012, and the cumulative linear graph of that record:



The previous chart shows that 2014 was the worst year to date in terms of the death toll from extrajudicial killings, followed by 2013 and 2015 in equal proportion, then 2019.

Map showing the distribution of the death toll of extrajudicial killings by HTS according to the Syrian governorates from which victims originate:



**The previous map shows that Idlib governorate leads the rest of the governorates in terms of the death toll from extrajudicial killings, accounting for approximately 35% of the total, followed by Homs, Aleppo and Hama.**

The most notable victims of extrajudicial killings by HTS

[Waddah Abdul Karim Ghannoum](#) and Omar Taha al Ghannoum, both from Idlib city, were shot dead by HTS personnel while they were in a house near the city on November 8, 2020.

[Saleh al Mar'i](#), from Ma'aret al Na'san village in the northern suburbs of Idlib governorate, was killed by gunfire by HTS members when they fired on protesters demonstrating against the opening of a commercial crossing by HTS linking areas under its control and areas controlled by Syrian regime forces in Ma'aret al Na'san village, on April 30, 2020. Additionally, a car affiliated with the group ran over protesters to disperse them, injuring five civilians. We note that HTS suspended the decision to open the commercial crossing on the same day.

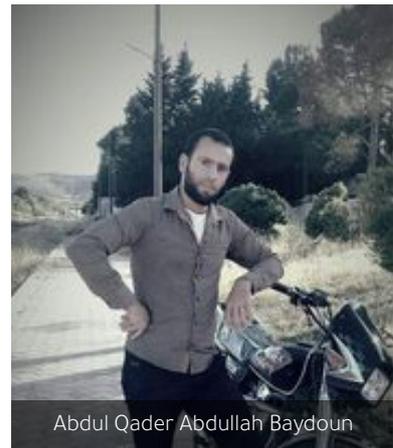
[Muhammad Haj Zakkar](#), a driver of an ambulance for the Qatar Red Crescent, from al Atareb city in the western suburbs of Aleppo governorate, died on March 14, 2020, due to wounds sustained on March 10, 2020, when HTS members opened fire against him during a raid on his brother's house in al Atareb city; the reason for the raid is unknown.

Hussein Muhammad al Alloush, a 16-year-old child from Ebleen village in the southern suburbs of Idlib governorate, who was living in Sarmada city in the northern suburbs of the governorate, was arrested by HTS personnel on Wednesday, January 20, 2021, in Sarmada city, and taken to an HTS detention center, where he was tortured to death. On Wednesday, February 3, 2021, his body was handed over to his family bearing signs of torture.



Child Hussein Muhammad al Alloush

Abdul Qader Abdullah Baydoun was a notification courier at Kherbetal Jouz Court, from Bdama town in the western suburbs of Idlib governorate, who was later transferred to HTS' Jisr al Shoghour Court, then appointed as a jailer there. He was arrested by HTS personnel on Thursday, August 20, 2020, inside the Jisr al Shoghour city court on charges of cooperating with US-led coalition forces. On Saturday, July 17, 2021, HTS informed his family of his death. Our data from numerous sources confirms that he was in good health at the time of his arrest, indicating that he probably died due to torture in an HTS detention center. SNHR confirms that HTS failed to hand over his body to his family.



Abdul Qader Abdullah Baydoun

Ahmad Hussein Sattouf, from Tal Hadya village, south of Aleppo governorate, was arrested by HTS personnel in the village in February 2021 on charges of affiliation with Syrian regime forces. On Wednesday, September 15, 2021, HTS personnel informed his family of his death without handing over his body. Our data from numerous sources confirms that he was in good health at the time of his arrest, indicating that he probably died due to torture in an HTS detention center.



Ahmad Hussein Sattouf

Muhammad Aqeb Hammam Tannou, from Darat Ezza city in the western suburbs of Aleppo governorate, was 19 years old when he was detained by HTS members in October 2019 upon his return from Turkey through Bab al Hawa crossing in the northern suburbs of Idlib governorate. On Monday, April 20, 2020, his family received information stating that HTS had carried out a death sentence against him, executing him by firing squad inside one of its detention centers on charges of disbelief, subsequently notifying his family that they could collect his body from the Idlib city National Hospital.



Photo of Muhammad Aqeb Hammam Tannou before his arrest



Photo shows the body of the victim, Muhammad Aqeb Hammam Tannou

Mudar al Ali, a college student at the Department of Administrative Sciences, from Ma'ar Zita village in the southern suburbs of Idlib governorate, was arrested by HTS members on Tuesday, November 19, 2019, in a raid on his home in the village. On Thursday, June 18, 2020, his family received information stating that HTS had carried out a death sentence against him, executing him by firing squad inside one of its detention centers on April 15, 2020. His body has not been handed over to his family.



Mudar al Ali

Muhannad Abdul Majid al Kayyal, from Taybat al Imam city in the northern suburbs of Hama, was arrested by HTS members on Sunday, April 12, 2020, in Idlib city. On Sunday, August 8, 2021, his family learned of his death in one of HTS' detention centers after the implementation of the retribution sentence against him on charges of former affiliation with Jund al Aqsa faction. We were unable to determine the date on which the sentence was carried out. His body has not been handed over to his family.

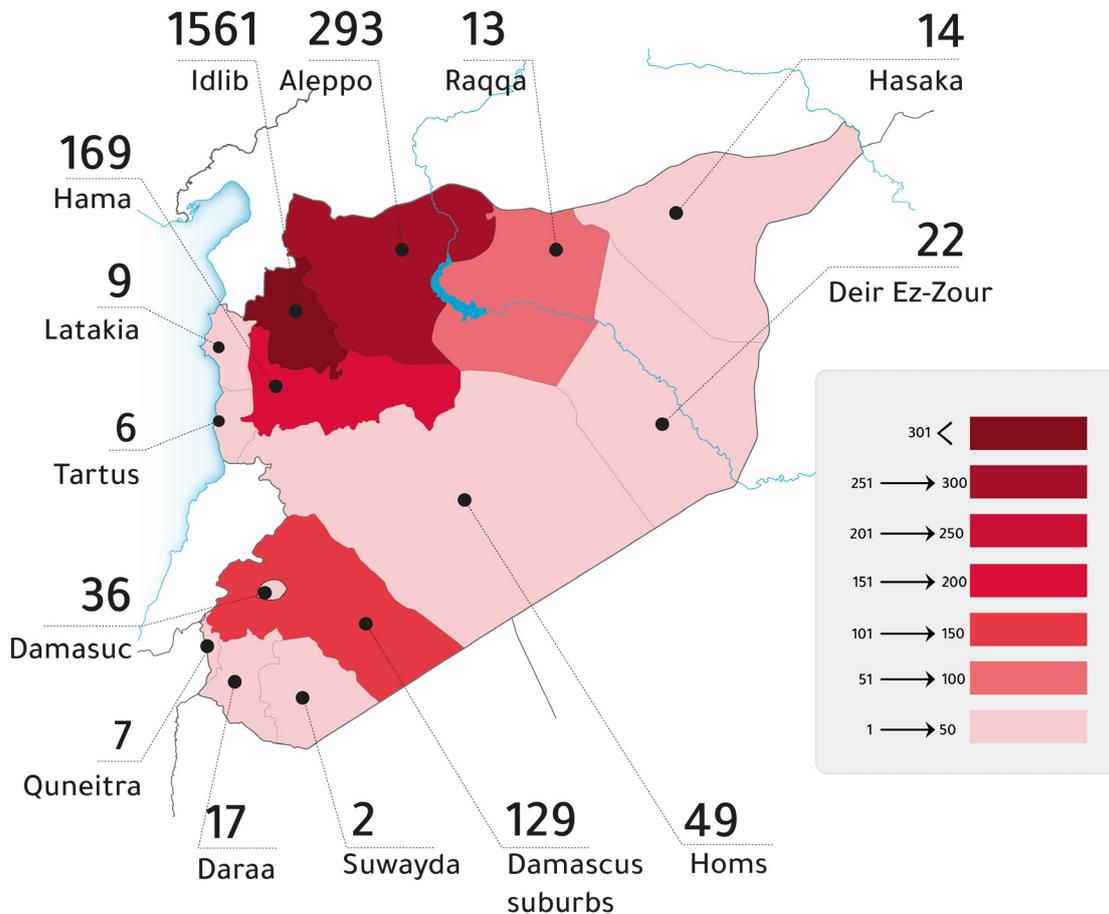


Muhannad Abdul Majid al Kayyal

### B. Arbitrary Detention/Enforced Disappearance

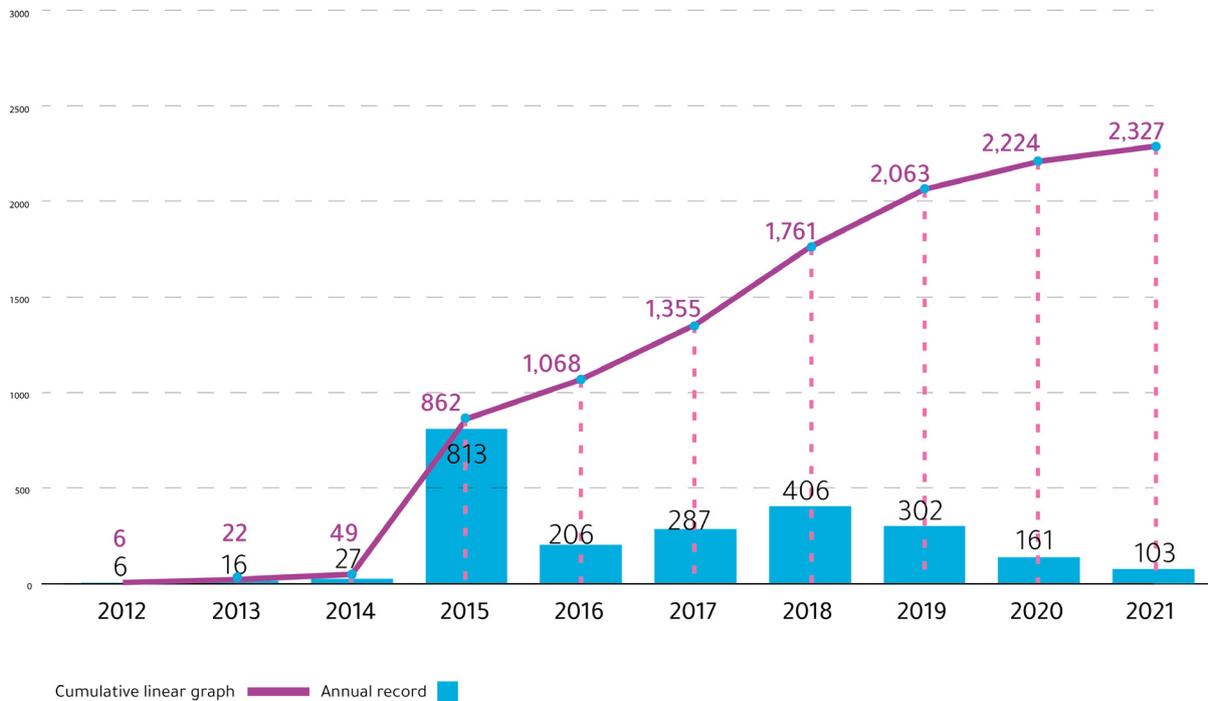
According to our database, at least 2,327 individuals, including 43 children and 44 women (adult female), detained by HTS since the announcement of the establishment of HTS in early 2012 are still being held by the group as of December 2021. At least 2,103 of these individuals, including 19 children and 28 women, have been forcibly disappeared.

Map showing the distribution of the record of detainees/forcibly disappeared persons held by HTS according to the Syrian governorates from which they originate:



The previous map shows that, in terms of the numbers of victims of arbitrary detention and forced disappearance, Idlib governorate is ahead of all other governorates, accounting for 67% of the total, followed by Aleppo, Hama, then Damascus Suburbs.

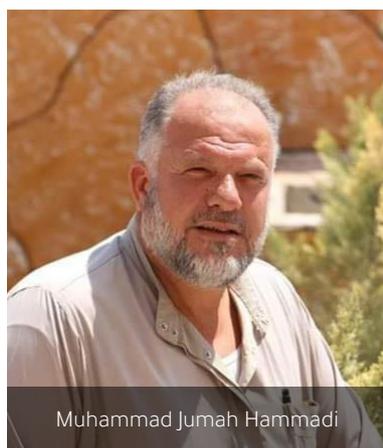
Chart showing the distribution of the record of detention/enforced disappearance by HTS by year since the announcement of the establishment of Jabhat al Nusra in Syria in January 2012, and the cumulative linear graph of that record:



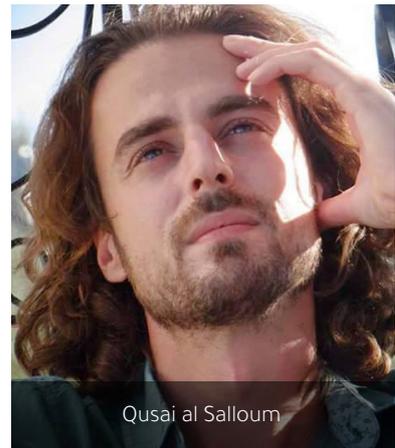
The previous chart shows that 2015 was the worst year in terms of the record of detention/enforced disappearance, followed by 2018, 2019, then 2017.

The most notable persons forcibly disappeared by Hay'at Tahrir al Sham:

Jumah Omar Hammadi, born in 1989, a media activist nicknamed Jumah al Omari, from Kafr Hamra village in the western suburbs of Aleppo governorate, was a law student whose studies had been suspended in 2011. He was detained by gunmen affiliated with HTS on Monday, October 29, 2018, along with his uncle Muhammad Jumah Hammadi, while they were in Termanein village in the northern suburbs of Idlib governorate. Their fate remains unknown to the SNHR, as well as to their families.



Qusai al Salloum, a media activist and member of the Jisr al Shoghour Coordination, from Jisr al Shoghour city in the northern suburbs of Idlib, is married with two children, both girls. He was arrested by gunmen affiliated with HTS on Thursday, June 25, 2015, in al Jdaida village in the southern suburbs of Idlib. His fate remains unknown.



Muhammad Alam al Din al Sabbagh, a university student at the Faculty of Commerce and Economics and a media activist with the Euphrates Humanitarian Association, from Darat Ezza city in the western suburbs of Aleppo governorate, was arrested by HTS personnel on Wednesday, April 7, 2021, near Termanin village in the northern suburbs of Idlib governorate over allegations of dealing with the Syrian Democratic Forces, and was taken to an undisclosed location.



Muhammad Maher Karman, a political advisor to the Aleppo Revolutionary Council, from al Kallasa neighborhood in Aleppo city, was arrested by HTS personnel on Sunday, November 8, 2015, from his place of residence in the neighborhood, and was taken to an undisclosed location.

Ibrahim Abdul Aziz al Dghaim, the Head of Student Affairs at the College of Education in Ma'aret al Numan, from Jarjanaz town east of Idlib governorate, was arrested by HTS personnel on Wednesday, April 11, 2018, in front of the Ma'aret al Numan city hospital in the south of Idlib governorate, and taken to an undisclosed location. HTS denied Ibrahim's kidnapping when asked by his family, but former HTS detainees confirmed that they had seen him in one of HTS' detention centers in 2019.



## VI. Approximately 273 Summonses/Threats against Activists, a Stage Prior to Arbitrary Detention/Enforced Disappearance and Torture

HTS follows a calculated policy of persecution based on first summoning opposition activists, protesters, and critics of the Salvation Government's policies for questioning in order to curtail their activities by persuasion or intimidation, with this stage being viewed as both a warning and a threat. By pursuing this policy rather than immediately detaining critics, HTS avoids sudden detentions, providing itself with a superficial appearance of being reasonable in front of society and even the activists' families, enabling the group to adopt a position of "we warned him, but he didn't listen" and attempting to shift some of the blame for the inevitable subsequent arrest to activists themselves, rather than HTS being held accountable for its own actions and its own deceptive carrot-and-stick policy of punishment for dissent.

This policy of issuing initial 'warnings' has been used mainly with prominent activists and social figures. By contrast, with ordinary civilians whose arrest is unlikely to provoke any public outcry or reaction, HTS simply arrests them directly, without resorting to this preliminary stage, which includes asking activists to pledge not to repeat what they had done, to apologize, and to ask for mercy. Summoned persons often acquiesce and pay a fine, which may be accompanied by a few days' imprisonment and suspension from practicing their profession, all in exchange for not being detained or forcibly disappeared for years.

This strategy has proven effective in intimidating many prominent figures and activists and forcing them to flee, resulting in HTS-controlled areas being emptied of a huge number of leading activists involved in many fields, including media, medical, political, and economic affairs.

Media activists have been specifically targeted in the form of lawsuits filed by HTS' Media Relations Office, in coordination with the Press Affairs Office of its affiliated Salvation Government. In the event that the media activist fails to comply with this summons, the security division responsible for the area where the activist lives is used to compel them to attend the court hearing.

SNHR has documented at least 273 cases of summons/threats issued by HTS between 2017 and December 2021. We have found that there is coordination between the various security apparatuses and the civil and judicial institutions established by HTS (which it denies being linked to) in organizing and issuing these summons/threats.

Photos showing examples of summonses issued by HTS through its affiliated bodies to civilians and activists over expressing their opinion:

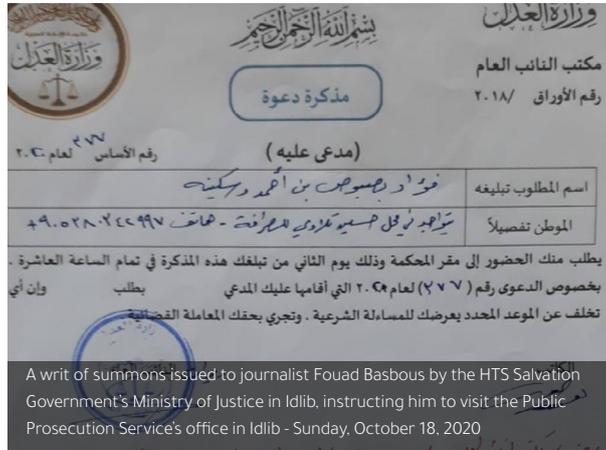
Notification document by HTS to Amjad al Mustafa "al Saeed"



Journalist Fouad Basbous and media activist Meqdam Basbous, two brothers, were arrested by the Salvation Government's Public Prosecution Service, which is affiliated with HTS, on Saturday, October 24, 2020, after being summoned to the Public Prosecution Service's office in Idlib city in connection with Fouad's criticism of the Salvation Government and HTS. We documented that Fouad was released on November 9, 2020, and Meqdam was released on November 14, 2020.



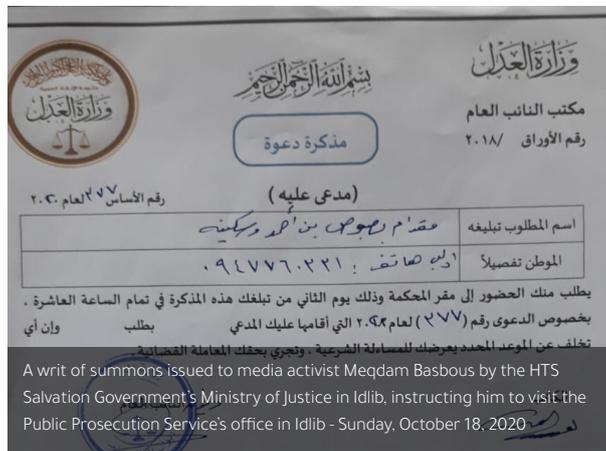
Journalist Fouad Basbous



A writ of summons issued to journalist Fouad Basbous by the HTS Salvation Government's Ministry of Justice in Idlib, instructing him to visit the Public Prosecution Service's office in Idlib - Sunday, October 18, 2020



Media activist Meqdam Basbous



A writ of summons issued to media activist Meqdam Basbous by the HTS Salvation Government's Ministry of Justice in Idlib, instructing him to visit the Public Prosecution Service's office in Idlib - Sunday, October 18, 2020

Yasin al Idlibi, a media activist and cameraman for Orient News Channel, from Ariha city in the southern suburbs of Idlib governorate, was arrested by the Salvation Government, which is affiliated with HTS, on Sunday, October 4, 2020, after HTS summoned him to the Public Prosecution building in Idlib city in connection with his criticism of an employee of the Salvation Government's Civil Registry on his personal Facebook account. We documented that he was released the next day.

SNHR contacted the activist Yasin al Idlibi<sup>25</sup>, who told us: **"I had received a message via WhatsApp from a person with the Salvation Government's logo on his profile, instructing me to visit the Public Prosecutor's office in Idlib in connection with a lawsuit filed against me. When I went with a colleague, I was presented to the Deputy Public Prosecutor, who asked me to clarify the background of the post in which I criticized an employee of the Salvation Government; he heard from me my story and the reason for my post in which I criticized the behavior of the employee when I reviewed him a while ago to extract a marriage transaction, with the employee refusing to complete the transaction and his mistreatment of me, so I wrote what happened with me on my Facebook page."**

**"After that, they brought me to the Public Prosecutor's office, who showed me my post as well as a photo of one of my comments, and he asked me if I was the one who published it, and I said 'Yes'; then he confirmed the same statement and said, "So you acknowledge that you published it!" and I confirmed saying, 'The post is on my page.' Then, he told me, 'You confessed! So don't say we wronged you.' Then I asked him to ask me why I wrote it, but he shouted at me and threatened me twice or three times to beat me. Then, he wrote on a piece of paper, and I don't know what he wrote, and he kept yelling at me. Finally, he asked me if I would eventually apologize, and I answered him in the affirmative. He continued writing: 'He apologized and asked for mercy,' and he asked me to put my fingerprint on it, then he instructed the guards to take me to the cell and detain me until the next day, and then I was released."**

Alaa al Fawaz, a media activist and a reporter for a TV channel, from Ariha city in the southern suburbs of Idlib governorate, was detained by the Public Prosecution Service of the Salvation Government, which is affiliated with HTS, on Monday, October 5, 2020, after he visited the Public Prosecution building in Idlib city to inquire about a media colleague who was detained after being summoned to the Public Prosecution building earlier. We documented that he and his colleague were released on the same day.

SNHR contacted Alaa al Fawaz,<sup>26</sup> who told us:

**"At 9 a.m., I went to the building to follow up on the case of one of my media colleagues, adhering to all the procedures duly followed in this building, from the main door to the office of the Public Prosecutor. I sat in the information room and then went up to the Public Prosecutor's office, according to what the employee there directed me to do. I entered the office and met the Public Prosecutor and told him that my colleague's case had taken a bad turn and I had to talk to him about it. After I was allowed to speak, I told him that my colleague wrote a post on Facebook and asked why he was arrested for 24 hours. He replied by asking me if I agreed with my colleague's**

<sup>25</sup> We contacted him via phone on October 6, 2020.

<sup>26</sup> We contacted him via phone on October 19, 2020.

opinion that he posted, and he said that my colleague had insulted them, and accordingly he would face imprisonment, flogging and a fine as well. My response was that I certainly did not agree with him, but he did not deserve all this over a post. Then, the Public Prosecutor ordered the guards to arrest me and take me to the detention room.”

Alaa described what he went through: “The guards twisted my arms behind my back and pushed me towards the door, and in the meantime I kept silent. The Public Prosecutor did not ask me who I was or whether my colleague was my relative. I handed him my watch, my belt and my wallet, and the guards took me to the prison. About an hour later, the jailer came in and asked me to put a piece of cloth over my eyes. Then they took me by car to the 107th Building in Idlib city, where they put me in the collective prison. When I entered, I saw my colleague, so I greeted him. As soon as the jailer heard that, he took me out and kept me in a solitary cell. About an hour-and-a-half later, I was released.”

Alaa told us that a friend of his was waiting for him outside the Public Prosecution building, and he had Alaa's phone in his possession, and when Alaa was late, his friend inquired about him again, but the officials there denied that Alaa was inside the building: “They confiscated my mobile phone from my friend by force, and after my release, I received it from the Public Prosecutor's [office].”

Thaer al Abeid, a media activist and reporter for a local agency, from al Dana city north of Idlib governorate, was forced by the Directorate of Press Affairs of the Salvation Government, which is affiliated with HTS, on May 20, 2021, to sign a pledge not to write news reports and press materials against HTS on his personal account on Facebook.

SNHR spoke with Thaer al Abeid,<sup>27</sup> who told us: “I received a notification via WhatsApp from a person called ‘Khattab,’ an official in the Media Relations Office of Hay'at Tahrir al Sham, asking me to visit them at their headquarters in Idlib city, on the pretext that I was being harassed during my media work, and they were communicating with me to solve these problems, but I refused to visit them. After I received several requests to visit them, which carried veiled threats, Khattab revealed the real purpose of the request to visit them, and the topic he wanted to talk to me about, which was the HTS' annoyance about some reports and press news condemning HTS' acts and violations against civilians and activists in areas of Idlib.”

Thaer added: “On May 8, 2021, the Director of Press Affairs in the Salvation Government affiliated with the HTS, called ‘Abu Moayad’, talked to me and asked me to visit them the next day in the Press Affairs building located in the center of Idlib city, claiming that there was a problem related to me and it was necessary for me to attend to solve it, but I refused to attend. He informed me again on May 10, 2021, that the Media Relations Office of Hay'at Tahrir al Sham had filed a lawsuit against me and that I had to attend to resolve this issue before transferring it to the Ministry of Interior. Once again, I refused to attend. So, the director of the Harem area in Idlib suburbs, known as ‘Abu Islam al Raqqawi,’ summoned me to his office in Harem city, through my brother, and threatened to carry

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<sup>28</sup> Via phone on September 6, 2021

out a raid and arrest [me] if I refused to visit him. I was left with no other choice but to submit to their demands. The next day, I went to Abu Islam's office, and he told me about their annoyance at my refusal to go to their headquarters in Idlib city and meet the so-called 'Khattab,' and told me that I should stop writing things against them, and that the matter would only be ended by my sitting down with 'Khattab' in Idlib city. On May 11, I went to the headquarters of the Directorate of Press Affairs of the Salvation Government accompanied by 'Abu Islam al Raqqaw' to meet Khattab, but Khattab did not attend the session and sent on his behalf the Director of Press Affairs of the Salvation Government along with several other people. The conversation revolved around the journalistic materials and reports that I write, and they described them as fake and [said they] didn't carry any criteria of credibility, and aimed to discredit Hay'at Tahrir al Sham. They told me that there was a lawsuit filed against me by Khattab and that I should sit down with him on a new date that they would set later to convince him to drop the lawsuit against me."

"Two days later, I was informed by a call from the phone number of the Directorate of Press Affairs of the Salvation Government about the date of a new session in the building of the Directorate on May 20, 2021, at noon, in order to meet this so-called 'Kattab'. Indeed, I went on schedule to the office of the Directorate of Press Affairs, and the same conversation took place between me and them about the materials I wrote, and the result was that the lawsuit would be waived in return for my signature on a pledge not to write again against HTS, and to apologize for the mistakes I made, as they put it. I fingerprinted and signed a paper in which I apologized for the materials I had written about their practices and mistakes, in addition to my pledge not to repeat them again, and I left the Directorate and no one has spoken to me since then." Thaeer added: "I was sure that my fate would be arrest if I refused to sign."

## VII. Documenting at Least 46 Permanent and 116 Temporary Detention Centers Affiliated with HTS

To accommodate the huge number of current and prospective detainees, HTS has established numerous detention centers in many areas under its control. It is extremely difficult to find out the names and locations of all these detention centers since HTS ensures their location is kept secret and prevents anyone from talking about them. Through extensive efforts lasting for several months, the SNHR team managed to identify at least 46 permanent detention centers affiliated with HTS located in Idlib governorate, the western suburbs of Aleppo governorate, and Latakia suburbs in northwest Syria.

We estimate that these detention centers hold approximately 2,327 detainees either imprisoned or forcibly disappeared by HTS. Our database shows that dozens of individuals have spent long periods of up to five years in detention, with the vast majority of them categorized as forcibly disappeared, and almost all also subjected to some form of torture, as further detailed later in this report.

In addition to the 46 permanent detention centers, there are at least 116 temporary detention centers, in which the investigations and interrogations that we described previously took place.

HTS has relocated or changed the locations of many of its detention centers, either due to bombardment by Syrian regime forces and the regime's Russian allies, or because the Russian-Syrian alliance took control of the area where the detention center was located. Most of the survivors we met told us that they had been transferred between at least two detention centers, with some telling us about being transferred between three to five detention centers, according to the decisions of the senior officials at the group's security center. Detainees were often transferred by tying them together and placing them in vans or vegetable transport vehicles, with their eyes covered by blindfolds on which their names were written.

HTS generally prevents family members or lawyers from visiting detainees, and many survivors told us that they had not received any visits for the entire duration of their detention. Some other detainees, meanwhile, reported receiving visits, but noted that these were very few and far between, with an average of one visit every six months.

HTS has also established what is known as the 'Follow-up Committee,' which is a committee tasked with visiting HTS detention centers and checking on the cases and conditions of detainees there. This committee has two sections: administrative follow-up and case follow-up, whereby a Sharia judge or leader follows up on cases with investigators in detention centers before touring the dormitories, which is often a formality rather than an actual inspection. Most of the survivors who witnessed the Follow-up Committee's visit to their detention center told us that the committee refused to listen to their complaints or requests, with most of the committee members responding to these by ridiculing and mocking the detainees.

HTS has established a special system that applies to all those who work in supervisory or other roles in its detention centers, whereby all of them wear veils or masks during their work in order to protect their identities. Detainees are also blindfolded during interrogation or torture sessions to prevent them from seeing the interrogators and the torturers carrying out the interrogation or torture. It should be noted that most detention centers are equipped with surveillance camera systems to monitor detainees, with those seen violating the group's orders being punished by beatings and solitary confinement.

The interrogators in detention centers are allocated to cases according to the charges against the detainee in question, with an average number of three to five interrogators in each detention center, each of whom specializes in specific cases (e.g., one interrogator who specializes in cases related to the US-led coalition and informants, another investigator specializing in ISIS cases, etc). Each detention center has a judge and a public prosecutor, who adjudicate in cases within the center without the presence of a lawyer on behalf of the accused. This is similar to the case of the Syrian regime's Counter-Terrorism Court, which we previously covered in detail.

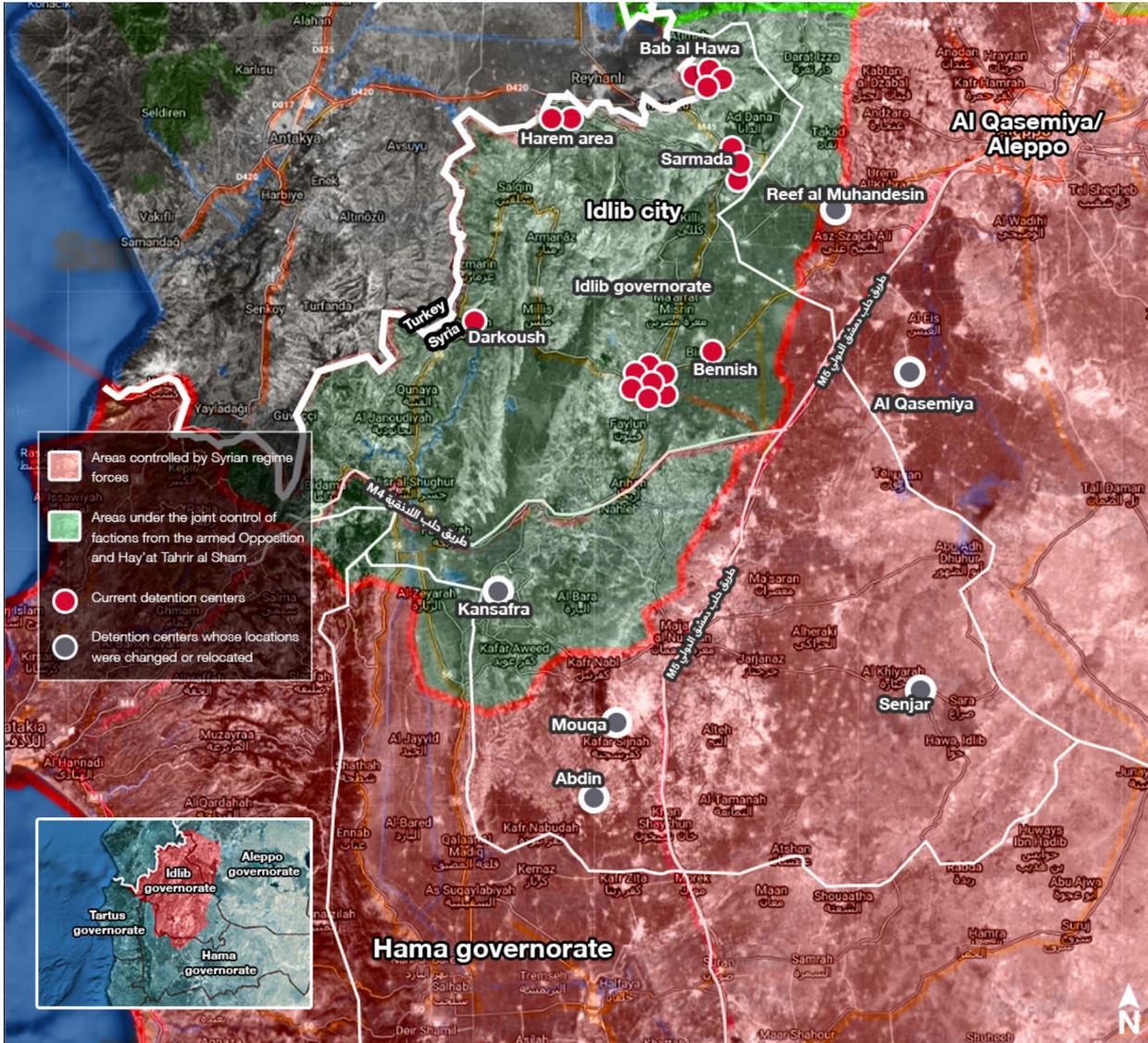
In the final stage, after detainees have been sentenced and the torture and interrogation have ended, they undergo a Sharia course within the detention center, which includes attending religious lessons delivered by a Sharia official, who is often of foreign nationality. HTS films the confessions of many of its detainees, especially those sentenced to death, through its Ebaa News Agency and stores these recordings, broadcasting them later in order to insult and humiliate victims in front of their community, and to intimidate community members from sympathizing with victims.

We note that HTS has dedicated no separate detention facilities for juveniles/minors or women. Rather, minors are held in dormitories/cells with adults and are not tried in courts or by judges specializing in juvenile prosecution. As for women, separate dormitories have been allocated for them within male detention centers. In the event that women are arrested with their children, the child is placed with the mother if he or she is under the age of 5 to 7 years; boys older than this age are taken from their mothers and imprisoned with the adult male detainees.

According to the investigations carried out by SNHR, among the worst detention centers which continue to witness torture and disappearances and have a bad reputation among survivors and families of the forcibly disappeared are Shaheen Prison in Idlib city and Harem Prison in the western suburbs of Idlib. As for the worst among the detention centers that were transferred or relocated, there are two particularly infamous centers: the 700<sup>th</sup> Prison in the western suburbs of Aleppo and al Uqab Prison in the southern suburbs of Idlib. The following is a list of the most notable HTS detention centers that we were able to identify:

Detention center's name	Location	Status	Center's nature
Central Security	Idlib	In operation	Permanent
Grain Silo Center	Binnesh	In operation	Permanent
Magharet al Hersh Center	Idlib	In operation	Permanent
Branch 107	Idlib	In operation	Temporary; it is dedicated mainly to issuing summonses and conducting investigations
The 700th Center	Previously in the western suburbs of Aleppo; it was transferred or relocated after the advance of Syrian regime forces in the area in early 2020	Unknown; we believe it has been merged with another detention center	Permanent
Ma'saret Sarmada	Sarmada area	In operation	This is often considered a temporary center or a transit center from which detainees are transferred to other detention centers designated for them
Al Ma'sara al Jadida	Sarmada area	In operation	Permanent
Shaheen Prison	Idlib city	In operation	Permanent
Idlib Central Prison	Idlib city	In operation	Permanent
Harem Prison	Harem area	In operation	Permanent
Al Seyasiah (Political) Center	Idlib	In operation	Temporary; it is mainly dedicated to conducting security studies
Al Uqab Prison	Previously in the southern suburbs of Idlib; it was transferred or relocated towards Bab al Hawa area	In operation	Permanent
Al Qasmiya Prison	Al Qasmiya, Aleppo suburbs; it was transferred to another area as a result of being bombed by Russian warplanes in early 2020	Unknown	Permanent
Abdin Prison	Southern suburbs of Idlib	It was closed in conjunction with the regime forces taking control of the area in mid-2019	Permanent
Al Mal'ab al Baladi	Idlib	It was closed due to bombardment in 2019	Permanent
Senjar Silo Prison	Senjar area in the eastern suburbs of Idlib governorate; it was transferred or relocated after the regime took control of the area in 2015	Unknown; we believe it was transferred to another area or merged with another detention center	Permanent
Mouqa Prison	Southern suburbs of Idlib	It was closed after an attack by the extremist organization Jund al Aqsa in early 2017	Permanent
Kafr Daryan Prison	Sarmada area	In operation	Temporary; in which detainees meet with a secret judicial committee to decide their cases and issue sentences
Al Mahgara Prison	Bab al Hawa area	In operation	Permanent prison; we believe that it is the same former al Uqab Prison
Branch 116	Bab al Hawa/Sarmada area	In operation	Temporary
Branch 77	Bab al Hawa/Sarmada area	In operation	Temporary
Bab al Hawa Prison	Bab al Hawa area	In operation	Permanent
Darkoush Prison	Darkoush	In operation	Permanent

Map showing the distribution of the most notable HTS detention centers in the areas it controlled since the establishment of Jabhat al Nusra in Syria in January 2012 until December 2021:



### **1- The Main Security Center, the 'Central Security':**

This two-story facility, located in Idlib city, is considered the main headquarters of HTS' security force, and is known as the 'Central Security.' The first or ground floor is designated for detention, while the second floor contains offices affiliated with HTS' Spoils Committee.

This center was mainly used to detain members of Armed Opposition factions and media activists, who were charged with belonging to ISIS or targeting members of HTS with assassination, with the female partners and children of ISIS members also detained there. Many death sentences against detainees transferred from other prisons, especially from al Uqab Prison, have been carried out there.

At the end of 2019, after the center came under bombardment, HTS transferred the detainees to another nearby building, namely the building of the Salvation Government's Presidency (formerly Monitoring and Inspection), where the lower floors were designated for detention and were equipped with solitary and collective cells as well as sanitary facilities for the detainees.

SNHR contacted media activist Khaled Arman,<sup>28</sup> originally from the suburbs of Homs governorate, who is a graduate of the College of Sharia at the University of Damascus. Khaled has been subjected to forced displacement by Syrian regime forces several times in both the northern suburbs of Homs and the southern suburbs of Hama, eventually settling in Ariha city in the suburbs of Idlib governorate. Khaled was arrested/detained by members affiliated with HTS in his home on Friday, June 14, 2019, and taken to a detention center at the group's Central Security headquarters in Idlib city.

Khaled said: **"A patrol of six masked members raided my house, pointed pistols and rifles at me, then handcuffed me from the back, searched me and confiscated my mobile phone before they began searching the house. My wife, who has diabetes, was so scared. I told them to stop shouting and vandalizing the house because my wife is sick but they did not care, with one of them hitting me on the head with the butt of a pistol and insulting me."** Khaled told us that HTS' members did not respect his wife's privacy and her chronic disease, and added that they searched his wife's personal clothes, and whenever he asked them to respect her privacy, he was beaten again.

Khaled was then taken in a van to the Central Security headquarters in Idlib city and left his wife alone in their home with no breadwinner or relatives there. He added: **"In the van, they beat and insulted me. However, all my thoughts were about how my wife would remain alone when we are displaced and we have no one in Ariha, and my relatives and hers are in other very distant areas. About 15 minutes later, they dragged me from the car towards a building where I went down to a small stairway towards the basement, and at a window there a man asked me about my name. They took my things like the belt from my pants and my prescription glasses, and they forced me to put my fingerprint on many papers that I didn't know what they were because I was blindfolded. After that, one of the HTS personnel told me that these papers were my execution papers. Then they took me to a cell and took the blindfold off my eyes, but I could not see anything because I could not see without**

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<sup>28</sup> Via phone on July 8, 2020.

glasses, so I begged the jailer to return them to me, because I could not see without them, so he gave them to me. When I put them, I was shocked by the horror of what I saw in front of me: 27 people, young and old, crammed into a dark, narrow room with a toilet in one corner. They told me to sit and asked me to tell them about the situation outside, then told me that I was in a former government building in Idlib city.”

We learned from Khaled that he faced charges of belonging to ISIS from his time working with Abdul Basit al Sarout in the northern suburbs of Homs, with most of the people who were with him in the cell, who came from various Syrian governorates, also accused of belonging to ISIS or of collaborating with the Syrian regime or the US-led coalition forces. On the day after Khaled was incarcerated in the Central Security headquarters, HTS personnel took a photo of his face using a mobile phone. He later learned that this was done with the aim of collecting information about him and conducting a security study by a group of HTS security personnel. After nine days, they began interrogating him. He recalled: **“They took me to the interrogation room while I was blindfolded, and I sat in a chair, with the investigator beginning by reading a file. I was startled to hear the charges against me, including: killing an HTS member, being a security official in the ISIS organization, distributing financial guarantees to the widows of ISIS members in Idlib, and fighting with Abdul Basit al Sarout against HTS. As soon as he finished speaking, I told him that all these claims are pure slander, and all the charges are fabricated against me, and I have no relationship with ISIS. The interrogator slapped me on the face and insulted me, ordered that my hair be shaved, and they brought me back to the cell, where detainees told me that if I confessed, I would sentence myself to death.”**

The following day, Khaled was again taken for interrogation, and again denied the charges against him, which led to him being subjected to torture and solitary confinement for 37 consecutive days: **“On the second day of the investigation, the interrogator subjected me to the ghost (al shabeh) with the Blanco position<sup>29</sup> and hit me with a water hose of the kind used for sanitary plumbing, on all parts of my body until blood came out of my back and feet, and I fainted. After waking up, I found myself in a very small solitary cell, and near me was a toilet pit, which smelled foul. I stayed there for a week, before I was called back for investigation. I crawled towards the toilet due to my severe pain. I was summoned for more interrogation again a week later, and the investigator asked me: ‘Have you thought of confessing, Khaled?’ and I told him that I had nothing to confess to, so he severely beat me on the face and insulted me, to the extent that I couldn’t open my eyes because of the severe beatings. After that, he put battery clamps on my lips and ears, and plugged them in for a few seconds; I screamed due to the severity of the pain and I felt that I was near death at the time. Then they took me back to the solitary cell, where I stayed for a whole month, during which I could hear the sounds of torture and the moaning of the tortured people in the coffin.”**

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<sup>29</sup> A metal reel used to suspend the detainee during the shabeh to be lifted off the ground, similar to the tools used to suspend carcasses in slaughterhouses.

Khaled said that he also heard the voices of women and children, who he said were the wives and children of ISIS members arrested by HTS to force their husbands to surrender themselves. The jailers used to take the children from time to time into the corridor so that they might stop crying. After one month of solitary confinement, the personnel transferred Khaled to a collective cell with about 30 other people, where he recalled that most of the food provided to them was bulgur, rice and boiled potatoes. Khaled told us that he suffered severe allergic reactions several times due to the lack of hygiene, lack of exposure to the sun, and the use of dirty blankets, adding that he did not receive any treatment or medication. Khaled also said that during his detention, he saw people being taken for execution. He stated: **“One day, two men entered our cell, one from Sarmin town, about 45 years old, and the other from Eqerbat town in Hama eastern suburbs, and they’d been in al Uqab Prison before being taken to the Central Security with four others who were distributed to the other dormitories. They knew that they were brought here to implement the death sentence against them. Their charges varied between belonging to ISIS and killing members of HTS. The next day, they actually were executed. One of them told me that he saw a white fabric in al Uqab Prison intended to cover the executed prisoners. Then they’d inform the wives of those executed that they had been executed and that the wives were obliged to wait for the stipulated waiting period.”**

On November 19, 2019, Khaled was transferred to another prison located on the road between Sarmada and Kafr Daryan towns in the northern suburbs of Idlib governorate, which was a building that had previously been captured by HTS from Jaish al Islam and turned it into a security branch dedicated to prisoners from ISIS and the US-led coalition. On December 10, 2019, Khaled was presented to a judicial committee headed by Ibrahim Shasho, the Minister of Endowments in the Salvation Government, and also including Mazhar al Wais and Abu Azzam al Jazrawi, with the latter nicknamed the ‘blood judge’ for the many execution sentences he had issued. Other committee members were HTS’ Public Prosecutor, Abu Azzam al Turkmani, and the ‘Amir’ or leader of the group’s investigators, Zaid al Hamawi, whom Khaled heard boasting about the killing of eight ISIS members while torturing them. Khaled remained in this prison until the committee issued a decision to release him on April 11, 2020, the same date he was released.

## **2- Grain Silo Center**

Located near Binnesh city in the eastern suburbs of Idlib governorate, this is a military headquarters for Hay’at Tahrir al Sham, where the group also established a secret prison, mostly holding members of opposition factions, ISIS cells and members of other extremist organizations.

## **3- Magharet al Hersh Center**

The Margharet al Hersh Center, located in Hersh al Basel area, west of Idlib city, was previously a military headquarters for the Ahrar al Sham movement, a former Armed Opposition faction. It is a large cave dug below ground level, consisting of two sections, one is a military headquarters and the other is for detainees.

#### **4- Civil Police Center or Branch 107**

Located near the Health Directorate in Idlib city; this is an unfinished building, which was built during the Syrian regime's presence in the city, that Hay'at Tahrir al Sham has turned into a temporary detention center which is also for sending summonses to people instructing them to visit HTS, with those summoned then being taken to another detention center.

#### **5- The 700<sup>th</sup> Center**

Located near al Zerba area in the suburbs of al Muhandesin in the western suburbs of Aleppo, on the Aleppo-Latakia international highway, this heavily guarded facility is a large former factory building, which has been turned into a detention center, where the dormitories and the prison yard are monitored by surveillance cameras. This is considered one of HTS' most notable detention centers in which death sentences are carried out in large numbers. HTS prevents the detainees' families from entering it to visit them and instead has allocated an amusement arcade located on the international highway close to the center for visits. Detainees who have visits by their families are transferred there at the time of the visit and then returned to the center.

The center building consists of a ground floor, a basement and a courtyard surrounded by a high wall. Based on the accounts we obtained, we were able to draw a rough diagram of the distribution of the building from the inside, which we think is likely as follows:

The ground floor: This contains a guard room, a preliminary investigation room, an interrogation room, a torture room, and a judge's room.

Basement: This is the section designated for detention, to which detainees are taken through a 1.2 meter-wide entrance. It consists of a kitchen in addition to detention rooms, which are distributed as follows:

A- Solitary cells: 25 cells, each of which has an area of 0.8\*3 meters and includes a bathroom, with the exception of two cells designated for women, bearing the name 'M1' and 'M2,' with the area of these two cells being 3\*2 meters.

B- Collective cells: There are three such cells, each of which has an area of 6\*3 meters and includes a bathroom; they are called: Collective D, Collective R, and Collective B.

C- Dormitories: Dormitory A has an area of 12\*12 meters and includes two bathrooms, with a large number of detainees, up to 100 individuals, being held in it. Dormitory B has an area of 6\*12 meters, with about 40 individuals being held there.

Abdul Rahman al Sheikh, from Darat Ezza city in the western suburbs of Aleppo governorate, worked in monitoring and evaluation with a number of local and international organizations. On October 5, 2019, he was detained by gunmen affiliated with HTS in a raid on his house and taken to the 700th Prison before he was released on December 25, 2019.

The SNHR met with Abdul Rahman,<sup>30</sup> who told us: **"I was taken in a van with four masked men with my eyes blindfolded, with the road trip by car lasting for about two hours. They put me in a prison, and upon my arrival they took information about me and I was photographed, then they put me in a collective room, where I asked those in it where I was, and I learned from them that we were in the suburbs of Aleppo, in the area of the al Muhandesin suburbs, the 700<sup>th</sup> Prison."**<sup>31</sup>

Abdul Rahman said that he woke up the next day to the jailer shouting his name: **"The jailer blindfolded my eyes and took me to a solitary cell, which I estimated was about 20 meters away from the dormitory I was in. It was a room measuring two and a half meters, and there was a toilet inside. There was also a person I got to know who was a former HTS Emir, who had been subjected to terrible torture using the 'tire' on charges of defecting from HTS and concealing the weapon of the battalion he was leading; he was beaten in the 'tire' every day 40 times."** Abdul Rahman stayed for about 45 days in solitary confinement, during which he was interrogated and tortured several times. During his stay in solitary confinement, he heard voices outside and learned from the prisoner who was with him in the cell that those were people from the follow-up committee whose mission was to visit prisons, but they did not care about his case.

He said: **"In solitary, we used to go out only once a week to take a shower with cold water. We had food twice a day, in the morning and in the evening, and it was awful, but it was necessary to eat it in order to survive. Each person had two rounds of bread daily, with the food being distributed by some forced-labor prisoner. On the 15th day of my stay in solitary, the follow-up committee came and opened the door's window of the solitary cell and asked about our names, and I told them that I had not yet been investigated and I did not know what my charge was. They asked me how many days I spent alone and I answered them that it was 15 days; his answer was that this was a short period of time and next time they would look into my case. Three days later, they took out the prisoner who was with me and I remained alone, and it was one of the hardest days of my life. After nearly two weeks of being alone, and specifically on Friday night, they brought a person to the solitary cell, from the suburbs of Aleppo, who was arrested at the Bab al Hawa crossing during his return from Turkey, and he was released four days later. After a few days, they also brought an Iraqi person, who was traveling from Turkey towards Europe and was arrested by the Turkish Coast Guard at sea and claimed that he was Syrian, so he was deported to Syria through Bab al Hawa,**

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<sup>30</sup> In Aleppo suburbs on February 10, 2021.

<sup>31</sup> Abdul Rahman described to us some of what he saw: "There were five people over 50 years old in the room, and the charges against the detainees in this room varied, either because of fights with HTS members or people coming from the Syrian regime areas or members of the factions, and elements affiliated with ISIS organization. I noticed signs of injuries on a number of detainees, and we had an 8-year-old child there from among those displaced to al Atareb area, who was accused of taking photos. I stayed in the dormitory for three days, then they took me for interrogation with my eyes blindfolded." Abdul Rahman added: "I stayed in the interrogation room for several minutes without anyone talking to me. I could hear movement inside the room, which I estimated came from a person who was moving things in a simple way without speaking, and I could hear the sounds of beating and screaming coming from everywhere. I was trembling in fear. Then, the interrogator began to ask me about the deposits that I handed over to the prison upon my arrival, and he enumerated them, then he asked me about thefts in the organization for which I worked, and I told him that I was an ordinary employee and did not know anything, then he asked the personnel to take me back to the dormitory."

where he was arrested and was accused of having taken a pledge of allegiance to ISIS. Then they transferred him to another place that I don't know about. About a month-and-a-half after I'd been put in solitary, the interrogation began with me, and it was five consecutive times. Each time, the interrogation lasted about two hours, and it was detailed about my life, work, and my relationships, and about a brother of mine who lives in the Syrian regime areas."

Abdul Rahman continued, describing the details of the interrogation: "In the interrogation room, there was an interrogator and an HTS member, both masked, and I was threatened with death and the arrest of my family, and I was beaten from time to time with a stick on various parts of my body. In the fourth session of the interrogation, they accused me of working for the Syrian regime. After that, I fingerprinted on the file, which was the last stage. Two days later, the interrogator called me and told me that I would be brought before the judge, and when I was presented to him, he was masked, and he told me that there were personal goals behind my arrest, then he signed my release, but I was sent back to the solitary."

Abdul Rahman told us that despite the signing of his release, he remained in detention for about two more weeks, and an additional investigation was conducted into him by the Organizations Department of the Salvation Government, with the area around the prison also coming under regular bombardment, which Abdul Rahman could hear. Abdul Rahman told us that he decided after he was released to move to live in Souran city in the northern suburbs of Aleppo, away from HTS."

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## **6- Ma'saret Sarmada and al Ma'sara al Jadida Centers**

Ma'saret Sarmada and al Ma'sara al Jadida are two detention centers linked to each other. Ma'saret Sarmada Center specializes in collecting information and conducting security investigations into detainees, in cases in which initial investigations are underway, before detainees are transferred from there to al Ma'sara al Jadida Prison, also located in the Sarmada area. Ma'saret Sarmada Detention Center consists of four dormitories and six solitary cells at basement level. Al Ma'sara al Jadida Prison, meanwhile, consists of cells equipped with ventilation fans, with each cell measuring about 2\*3 meters, where individuals serving sentences of a few months duration or others due to be transferred to other detention centers are usually detained.

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<sup>32</sup> "I went back to the solitary cell, and I was supposed to be released the next day, but I was not; the releases were usually done after the noon prayer and I waited for this time every day without result. One day, after the afternoon, my name was called for to the interrogation room; there were two people there and I was blindfolded. They told me that they were from the Organizations Department of the Salvation Government, and they interrogated me. The questions were about the organizations I worked for, the organizations I cooperated with, and the figures that run them. My answers were general, and I remained until after the evening prayer time in the room subject to interrogation. At the end of the interrogation, they told me that I would be released the next day. The next day after the noon prayer, my name was called, and after procedures for hours and signatures on folders, two masked men came and put a cloth over my eyes and put me in a car. During our exit, they asked me who I was, from where and what my case was, then we arrived at a place near Darat Ezza, where I was released with a number of other detainees; my brother was waiting for me, and my family was aware of my release on this day and in this place."

We spoke with activist Muhammad al Ahmad<sup>33</sup> from Mashoun town in the southern suburbs of Idlib governorate. Muhammad worked with many humanitarian organizations and trained dozens of activists in the fields of humanitarian work, as well as working with many local and foreign media agencies. At the end of 2014, Jabhat al Nusra permanently prohibited him from practicing his media work in Idlib, although he continued his humanitarian work with international organizations. Muhammad was subjected to threats of death and kidnapping, and Jabhat al Nusra/HTS detained a number of his family members in an effort to pressure him into giving up his work, mainly when he worked within the Free Police project with the Integration Global organization, which he continued until the beginning of 2019. On September 9, 2019, HTS personnel detained him after shooting and wounding him, subsequently releasing him two months later on November 16, 2019.

Recalling the circumstances of his arrest, Muhammad said: **I was intercepted by a white Santa Fe car, from which four masked and armed men got out, pointing their guns at my car and asking me to get out of it. When I refused, they fired at the car. So I reversed but they kept shooting, then I got out of the car and ran towards the agricultural land; they then chased after me and shot at me. After I'd been running for 10 minutes, I was hit by two bullets; the first entered from my back and settled in the intestines and the second entered my left foot. When they reached me directly, they beat me horribly with the butts of their rifles and kicked me with their feet, and they cursed and insulted me and asked me where my phone was until I lost consciousness."**

Muhammad said that he was taken to the Jisr al Shoghour field hospital, and he told us the details of his health situation and what he was subjected to<sup>34</sup> before he was transferred to Ma'saret Sarmada Prison on the ninth day of his detention. Regarding what he was subsequently subjected to in Ma'saret Sarmada Prison itself, Muhammad said: **"They put a blindfold on me to cover my eyes and handcuffed me, then I was transferred to a security prison called Ma'saret Sarmada, where I was placed in a solitary cell for six days. In this prison, even dogs could not bear to live there, and the solitary cell was a very small room, 2 meters long and about 70 or 80 cm wide, in addition to the presence of a toilet inside the cell itself, with the cell door being made of reinforced iron and having a small window in order to pass food through it. On the first day in the solitary cell, I had bleeding from my feet and stomach, and I asked for bandages, and they told me that they did not have medical equipment.**

<sup>33</sup> We contacted him via phone on July 6, 2020.

<sup>34</sup> Muhammad told us that when he woke up after leaving the operating room, he saw his mother, his wife and some of his other relatives around him, discovering that they'd searched for him after they learned of his arrest and injury; 15 minutes after coming out of surgery, Hay'at Tahrir al Sham personnel then transferred him from that hospital to another hospital to prevent his relatives from reaching him. After that, he was transferred between two other hospitals and a detention center, during which he was suffering from worsening ill health. He recalled: "When I woke up in Jisr al Shoghour Hospital, I could hear the screams of the HTS personnel inside the hospital and I was unable to move or speak at that time. A quarter of an hour later, I was taken from the hospital and put in an ambulance and then transferred to the National Hospital in Idlib city where I stayed for one day, and I was under heavy guard in both hospitals, while I was admitted under an alias; then, I was transferred from the National Hospital to al Seyasih Prison in Idlib, because they knew that my family knew my location in the hospital. In al Seyasih Prison, I was placed in a collective cell; later, I began to feel pain and vomit a lot, then one of the individuals inside the dormitory called the jailer and asked him to transfer me to the hospital due to the seriousness of my health condition. About an hour later, I was transferred to Bab al Hawa Hospital under heavy guard, where I stayed for eight days, during which I underwent three operations on my foot, with my health being monitored, since a section of my intestine had been removed during the surgery in Jisr al Shoghour." "During those eight days, I was guarded within the room, and I was prevented from talking to anyone inside it, in addition to being prevented from leaving it. On the sixth day, my family was able to reach me after several attempts and continuous searching, and when my wife and mother entered the room, they were prevented from approaching me. One of the most difficult situations I faced was when my wife requested that my 7-month-old son be brought in for me to hug him, but they prevented him from entering or approaching me. Then, on the ninth day, the doctor allowed me to leave the hospital, provided that there was good medical care outside the hospital."

I was living in a difficult and traumatic situation, especially when I thought about the method of arresting me and trying to kill me, and I could not sleep and I used to smell the foul smell of the solitary cell. The next day, a masked member came and asked for my name and the reason for my being in prison. I told him, 'I hope you will answer this question.' He laughed sarcastically and said to me: 'You all say that you don't know, then it turns out that you are agents and culprits.' Then he shut the door."<sup>35</sup>

On the sixth day of Muhammad's incarceration in Ma'saret Sarmada Prison, he was transferred with a number of other prisoners to al Ma'sara al Jadida Prison, where he stayed for one day, then he was transferred to the 700<sup>th</sup> Prison, where he remained for a month in poor conditions until he was released following mediation by the dignitaries of his village on November 16, 2019.

### **7- Shaheen Prison in Idlib Central Prison**

Shaheen Prison, which is one of HTS' major detention centers, is a security prison located on Arab Saeed Road in the western outskirts of Idlib city, where HTS detains activists, civilians, ISIS members and those accused of communicating with the US-led coalition. The prison is situated in a building on the western side of Idlib Central Prison, which is run by the Salvation Government, and specializes in various criminal cases.

HTS runs Shaheen Prison, whose construction consists of five floors, namely a basement-level floor, and four upper floors:

**Ground floor:** This houses a large 'reception' room to receive detainees, as well as administrative offices and detention rooms, which are divided into:

A- Solitary cells: There are 15 cells, each with an area of about 0.8\*3 meters, of which 0.8\*1 meter is a place designated as a toilet; two to three individuals are usually placed in each solitary cell.

B- Dormitories: There are four dormitories, all of which have no ventilation apparatus, and bear the names 'Dormitory 0,' 'D1,' 'D2,' and 'D3,' with new detainees being placed in 'Dormitory 0' before they are assigned to other dormitories. Dormitory 0 is also sometimes used to assemble those sentenced to death, who are gathered together there the day before the sentence is carried out.

<sup>35</sup> Muhammad continues: "A short while later, I was given breakfast, which consisted of two rounds of bread, an egg and two boiled potatoes. I asked the jailer to open the small window because the smell started to suffocate me and I couldn't breathe. I told him again that I was bleeding, so he agreed to open it on the condition that I did not stand in front of the window. About an hour later, my eyes were blindfolded and I was pulled out to the upper floor where I was placed against a wall where the cloth was removed from my eyes and they gave me a board with a number written on it that I don't remember, and then they took several photos of me from several angles, and then my eyes were covered again and I was seated on a chair, with the interrogation beginning with me. The interrogator told me that there were many claims against me that must be verified, then they took me back to the solitary cell. The interrogation continued with me for days every day; a quarter of an hour after breakfast, I was taken out, and I was asked to talk about my life and write that on white paper. Whenever they read what I wrote, the interrogator would tell me there were things that I did not write yet. He asked me about my salary from the organization and why I was paid in dollars. Then he said that all organizations work for external intelligence and we work with them, knowingly or unknowingly."

As for the remaining three dormitories, each of these consists of two rooms, each measuring around 6\*6 meters. Usually, each room of Dormitory D1 contains between 40 to 65 prisoners and detainees, while between 10 and 15 individuals are placed in each of the two rooms of Dormitory D2; this dormitory is designated for the detention of HTS personnel. As for Dormitory D3, usually between 40 and 65 prisoners and detainees are held in each of its two rooms.

**First floor:** This consists of:

**One: detention rooms, divided into:**

- Cells: There are eight cells, each with an estimated area of 3\*3 meters, located next to the following dormitories, which are known as "Quartets." Usually, each cell holds between 3 to 10 detainees, with the cells named as 'N1,' 'N2,' 'N3,' 'N4,' 'N5,' 'N6,' 'N7,' and 'N8.'
- Dormitories: There are six dormitories, each containing one room that includes a bathroom, which are named: 'D4,' 'D5,' 'D6,' 'D7,' 'C5,' and 'Dormitory 4.' The area of each dormitory measures approximately 1.2\*6 meters, with the number of detainees in each dormitory usually ranging between 70 to 100, with the exception of Dormitory 4, which has an area of about 2.5\*0.9 meters, in which the number of detainees ranges between 100 to 175 prisoners on average.

**Two: administrative offices for interrogation, the public prosecutor and the judge, divided into:**

- Two rooms are dedicated to cases related to the Syrian regime, namely the interrogation room and the torture room, both run by Abu Ali al Lubnani, a 45-year-old from Rankous town in Damascus Suburbs governorate, formerly known as a boxer, who is assisted by a young man named Amjad. According to the accounts we have obtained, Abu Ali al Lubnani owes allegiance to Abu Malek al Talli, one of HTS' leaders. Abu Ali al Lubnani is described as being around 170 to 175 cm tall, with a distinctive hoarse raspy voice, while his assistant, Amjad, is about 165 cm tall, with a frail build.
- Two interrogation rooms are dedicated to ISIS-related cases, both run by Zaid al Hamawi, from the northern suburbs of Hama, who is assisted by six other personnel, one of whom is called Abu al Nour. The survivors of the detention centers described Zaid al Hamawi as around 200 cm tall, with a distinctive raspy voice.
- Two other interrogation rooms are dedicated to cases related to the US-led coalition, both run by Musa, a 50-year-old who previously worked for 18 years as an investigator for the Syrian regime in Aleppo city. Musa is assisted in running the two interrogation rooms by five people, including two of his sons, one of whom is Abu Bakr, currently 15 years old, and the other aged 20, as well as a Tunisian man. According to accounts we have obtained, Musa, who is estimated to be around 180 cm tall, is also assisted by a man from Manbej city in the eastern suburbs of Aleppo, whose height is estimated at 150 cm, and another person named Mahmoud, whose height is estimated at 175 cm.
- The room of the Public Prosecutor, a Tunisian national nicknamed Abu Malek al Tunisi, whose real name is Bilal. Abul Malik al Tunisi, aged 35, whose height is estimated at around 190 cm, was previously the Emir of a jihadist group in Tunisia. He also has an assistant.

- The room of the judge, 38-year-old Abu Azzam al Jazrawi, a black Saudi citizen from al Qassim in Saudi Arabia, whose height is estimated at 170 cm. Abu Azzam al Jazrawi is assisted by a 'scribe,' 40-year-old Abu Musab al Iraqi, whose height is estimated at 170-175 cm.

**The second and third floors:** Both destroyed since 2015 when al Fateh Army took control of Idlib city. **The basement:** HTS imposes maximum security conditions on the basement, with only certain HTS members allowed to enter it. We believe that it is possible that the basement contains detainees held by HTS who have been forcibly disappeared and whose fate is unknown.

### **8- Idlib Central Prison 'Al Gharbi Prison'**

This is the Idlib Central Prison serving Idlib governorate, which was established by the Syrian regime, and is considered one of the HTS' largest prisons. It is run by the Salvation Government, with most of the detainees held there being those accused of criminal cases. We have also monitored the detention of many civil society activists there.

SNHR spoke with Samer al Muhammad<sup>36</sup> from Jozef village in the southern suburbs of Idlib, who was detained on March 13, 2018, by HTS personnel, while he was passing through one of HTS' checkpoints on al Hersh Road near Kafranbel city and taken to al Uqab Prison before being transferred to Idlib Central Prison. He was charged with protesting against HTS and was released on May 16, 2018.

Samer remained in al Uqab Prison for nine days after his arrest and told us the details of what happened to him<sup>37</sup> before he was transferred with six other fellow detainees from al Uqab Prison to Idlib Central Prison. Recalling what took place following the transfer, Samer said: **"When I entered the dormitory, they removed the blindfold from my eyes and the prisoners told me that I was in Idlib Central Prison. Then, I learned that I was in Dormitory D6 on the fourth floor - before it was destroyed by bombing. We were 61 individuals in a room that could hardly accommodate 40 individuals, and the food was two loaves a day, and every five people shared a can of baked beans, while on some days, they did not give us any food. I remember that I stayed three days without food, and they cut off the water for six days. Although I am a civilian, they treated everyone with the same bad treatment - a civilian, an ISIS member or a criminal, they were all treated the same. I remained in this situation for 39 days, during which time I heard about the torture that the detainees were subjected to, such as the 'coffin', the 'ghost' (shabeh) and others."**

Samer was released after being brought before a judge in the Idlib city court, who ordered his release. Samer added: **"They confiscated my mobile phone and my motorbike, and when I asked the judge for them, he told me to go to the al Hesba, which in turn denied having my phone or motorbike."**

<sup>36</sup> We contacted him via phone on April 2, 2020.

<sup>37</sup> Samer says: "I was returning from Kafranbel towards my village, when personnel at al Hersh checkpoint stopped me and spoke via the walkie-talkie with a person called 'Nidaa al Islam' and gave him a name. Then [Nidaa al Islam] asked him to arrest me. A van then came with four masked men who blindfolded my eyes; then they took me to al Uqab Prison. After that, they put me in a room that I think is above ground level. The investigator asked me about the demonstrations against HTS in which I took part and about my opinion of the Ahrar al Sham and Suqour al Sham factions, and I told him that I had nothing to do with the factions and that I was a civilian. Then he called for a member called 'Ten,' because they called themselves by numbers for fear of revealing their identities, and asked him to take me to the cell. So I entered through a small door and went down three steps, then I walked for a long distance, then I entered another small door, and I walked another distance, before he put me in a solitary cell that accommodates one person and has a toilet, a tap and a blanket; then, he took off my blindfold and left. The cell was so dark that I did not know the night from the day inside it and it was very cold. The next day, they brought me food from a hole in the cell door, consisting of a boiled egg and a round of bread, and I stayed like that without investigation for nine days."

We also spoke with Ahmad al Ahmad,<sup>38</sup> a media activist from Idlib city, who was detained by HTS from his workplace in Idlib city on Thursday, October 11, 2018, over his criticism of the decisions issued by the Salvation Government on his personal Facebook account. He was released later the same day, subsequently being detained again on October 13, 2018, when he visited the Public Prosecution Office in Idlib, and released four days later on October 17, 2018, from Idlib Central Prison.

Ahmad said: **"First, they sent notifications in my name [ordering me] to come to Branch 107, but I did not go, so they sent a patrol to my workplace, arrested me, and put me in a van with six gunmen. When we arrived at the branch, they took me down to an investigation room in the basement. The investigator came and interrogated me, and I could see him; he asked me about the post on my Facebook page, and what did I mean by it, and he brought many charges against me, such as slandering Muslims. Then he called the security official, named Abu Muhammad al Souri, an officer from the regime who'd defected since 2014, from al Rami town, and asked him to put me in the custody room. It was a room with a metal door with some small openings. There were two children with me, aged under 14, who were arrested on charges of theft, in addition to a 65-year-old man, displaced from the suburbs of Ma'aret al Numan, who was arrested for committing blasphemy, and three other detainees who were arrested on various charges."**

Ahmad told us that after being held for several hours in Branch 107, he was released on personal bail posted by a prominent dignitary from Idlib city, on the condition that Ahmad visit the Idlib Public Prosecutor's office at the Ministry of Justice building. When he visited it as instructed, however, HTS officials ordered that he be arrested and detained again, and he was placed in the detention room of the Public Prosecution office before being transferred to Idlib Central Prison. He recalled: **"A patrol took me to al Gharbi Prison. When I arrived, they took my belongings and left me in the corridor for three hours sitting on the ground, and I was blindfolded, while the director of the guard was torturing prisoners at that time, as their voices filled the prison. Then they brought a number of other prisoners and put them next to me and began reading our names to go towards the dormitories. Of course, everyone whose name was read was dragged into the dormitory while being beaten and insulted. When it was my turn, the jailer asked me why I was talking about them and started threatening to torture me. Then they took me to Dormitory No 1, which was known among the prisoners as 'al furn' (the oven) dormitory because it does not contain any ventilation hole in its walls, with its area being 5\*6 square meters, in which were about 70 prisoners, including a large number of them under the age of 18, on various charges such as blasphemy, quarrels and sodomy. We were sleeping on one side, like a sword laid straight on its edge,<sup>39</sup> without a cover or a pillow. I could not sleep on my first day because of the heat and overcrowding. The next day, I was transferred to another dormitory, No 6, which is called among the prisoners 'Meridien' because it is large and has four bathrooms and ventilation holes and it contained about 80 prisoners, and also there were large numbers of minors and elderly people - most of them were accused of blasphemy, and some of them had signs of torture. I stayed in this dormitory for two more days, during which I was insulted by the guards, and every day I heard the sounds of torture. Then the decision to release me came after the mediation of dignitaries from Idlib."**

<sup>38</sup> We contacted him via phone on April 17, 2020.

<sup>39</sup> Al Msayafeh: A common method of sleeping for detainees imprisoned in large numbers within a narrow space, whereby each detainee sleeps top-to-toe in the opposite direction to the next.

### 9- Harem Prison:

This is considered one of the main large prisons, located in Harem area in the northwestern suburbs of Idlib governorate, where detainees have been detained on various pretexts, with investigators of foreign nationalities working there and supervising the investigations and torture. Torture is often carried out on the ground floor, with the prison also containing underground dormitories.

The SNHR spoke with media activist Abdul Razzaq al Eisa<sup>40</sup> who was detained by HTS personnel on September 9, 2019, during a raid on his home over his criticism on social media of HTS practices and taken to Harem Prison, then to another secret prison on the Syrian-Turkish border in Kherbet al Jouz area before being released on September 30, 2019.

Abdul Razzaq told us about his experience<sup>41</sup> and the conditions of his detention in Harem Prison.<sup>48</sup> He said: **“After searching, photographing and taking my fingerprints, they took me to one of the prison solitary cells, in which was another prisoner. The situation in the prison was very bad. The solitary cell was two meters long and one meter wide, in addition to the presence of the toilet in it. Its atmosphere was hot and bad, with a foul smell which only reminded me of prison stories and accounts of Seydnaya Prison. The next day, one of their investigators called me and interrogated me about some of the media reports I had filmed. He started insulting and humiliating me and threatening me with death, then they sent me back to the solitary cell. The next day, I was summoned again and they had logged into all of my social media accounts. There was a new interrogator of Lebanese nationality, who interrogated me about my work and told me that my accounts alone would lead to death. After long hours of interrogation, I was put back to the solitary cell again and I learned after that that they checked all my conversations without regard to my privacy.”** He added: **“I remained in solitary confinement throughout the period of my arrest, with my health condition worsening, and I started crying because of my stomach pain (as I suffer from a disease in the stomach nerve). After I started screaming and asking for the prison director and crying from pain, they took me to the investigator’s room and the Lebanese investigator returned to record my statement again and checked if there was any change in it, as well as to take guarantees from me in order to get me out of prison. The next day, the investigator came with a paper containing a pledge of several things, which I signed, then the Lebanese investigator released me from prison.”** Abdul Razzaq told us that to this day he is still harassed and threatened whenever he publishes anything related to HTS.

We also spoke with Mr. Mustafa al Gharbiya,<sup>43</sup> a civilian from Salqin city, who was detained by HTS personnel on July 17, 2017, to force one of his relatives affiliated with Ahrar al Sham Movement to surrender himself, and released a few weeks later on August 30, 2017.

<sup>40</sup> We contacted him via phone on April 30, 2020

<sup>41</sup> “I was threatened and intimidated on many occasions by HTS because of my constant criticism of them. Two days before my arrest, I received information from acquaintances of mine in HTS that they wanted to arrest me. On the morning of the arrest, they raided and stormed my house without taking into account the presence of my wife. They put weapons at my head and took out a card in their hands [an official arrest warrant from the HTS] and told me that, ‘We are HTS, don’t be afraid.’ Here, I started yelling at them and insulting them, so they dragged me out of the house, closed the door, and asked me to tell my wife to put on the veil so that they could enter and search the house. Indeed, this happened and they entered and took the mobile, laptop, camera and all my media equipment that they found. Then they put me in a Santa Fe car and blindfolded me. In the car, the person who arrested me spoke to the official and told him, ‘Al Eisa is with us in the car, where do we take him?’ He answered him: ‘Directly to Harem.’”

<sup>42</sup> Abdul Razzaq said: “During my transfer to Harem Prison, the personnel in the car asked me for the password to my phone and laptop. I refused, so they beat and threatened me, but I refused until I reached the gate of Harem Prison, where they threatened me that something would happen that I did not like if I did not give them the passwords for devices and accounts. When I entered the main prison gate, I heard a detainee screaming loud during his torture, and here fear entered my heart greatly, so I gave them the passwords.”

<sup>43</sup> We contacted him via phone on July 12, 2020.

Mustafa said: "Masked personnel affiliated with Hay'at Tahrir al Sham's security body raided my house in Salqin city by force of arms, accusing me of belonging to the movement. Then I learned that they wanted one of my relatives in the movement to turn himself in. The masked personnel of Hay'at Tahrir al Sham took me to their security center in Harem city, and during that time I faced several beatings by the personnel until they reached the center. Then they took me blindfolded to a ground floor room of about 10 meters, then they ghosted me [hanged by the wrists from the ceiling without feet touching the ground]. I stayed like this for about 48 hours, after which they transferred me to a small room which is close to the ghost (shabeh) room, called the 'Investigation Office.'"

Mustafa was forced to confess under torture during his interrogation that he had attacked HTS: "An interrogator named Abu Hamza al Deiri interrogated me and asked me several questions in conjunction with the blows that were inflicted on me by two personnel, then accused me of attacking HTS during the fighting between it and the [Ahrar al Sham] movement and threatened to put me in a dormitory housing ISIS in order to 'eat my flesh' as he put it. I was tortured by the personnel for two hours until I confessed to all the accusations against me."

Mustafa was again tortured and deprived of food, even after confessing: "After completing the investigation, they dragged me back to the al shabeh room and put me in the 'coffin,' which is an iron closet, and locked me in it. I stayed there for about four hours without enough oxygen, and standing exhausted my body until I lost consciousness, and I was woken up by a member kicking my stomach while I was outside the closet/coffin."

Mustafa told us that he continued to be tortured for a whole week so he would confess to the whereabouts of the Ahrar al Sham Movement members and the locations of their weapons: "I kept being tortured and insulted, and told them that I was wronged, but they were merciless. On one occasion when they brought me back to the al shabeh room, I asked them for food, but they beat me and told me that I would be left without food until I gave them all the information I had, and I remained without food. Two days later, they dragged me to the interrogator's room and told me that I would go [be allowed] out under their protection if I cooperated with them. I swore to him that I was in my house and did not leave it at the time of the fighting, and that I did not even go to the headquarters of the movement. He cursed me, calling me 'heretic,' and asked the personnel to beat me with a stick again. Then he asked one of them called Abu Ref'at to put me in a tire; Abu Ref'at dragged me to a square whose area I don't know, but I caught a glimpse of the light in it, then put me in a tire and said: 'After the tire, you'll be taken to the 'coffin.' Indeed, after the tire, they put me in the 'coffin,' but this time it was in the yard, and it was very hot because of the sun, where I stayed in it for hours. I woke up and was thrown in the al shabeh room with two rounds of bread and a potato next to me. On the same day, I was taken to a dark solitary cell. A day later, I asked one of the personnel for some water because I was so thirsty, so he stretched a hose and sprayed water in my nose until I suffocated and ordered me to bend like a dog to drink, then closed the cell."

Mustafa told us that he stayed in the solitary cell for 10 days, then was transferred to an underground collective dormitory<sup>44</sup> where members of the opposition factions and others from ISIS were held. He also learned that there was a dormitory for women and children and a dormitory for prisoners of war. Mustafa was released about a month after his arrest as part of an exchange deal between the Ahrar al Sham Movement and HTS, and after negotiations that took place between the two organizations.

### **10- Darkoush Prison**

This prison, which is located in the Darkoush area in the western suburbs of Idlib governorate along the Syrian-Turkish border, is considered one of HTS' secret prisons. It is mainly dedicated to detaining displaced persons in Idlib governorate, people deported from Turkey, or foreign detainees. The prison investigations are supervised by investigator Eyad Odai, nicknamed Osama al Deiri.

### **11- Al Seyasiah (Political) Center**

This was a security center for the former Jaish al Fateh<sup>45</sup> (Army of Conquest), and after the termination of Jaish al Fateh, it became the organizational center for raids by HTS' security body. It contained a large prison on the ground floor, which was subsequently turned into a center for security studies.

### **12- Kafr Daryan Center**

This center, located on the road between the towns of Kafr Daryan and Sarmada in the northern suburbs of Idlib, was originally a military headquarters for Jaish al Islam. It is considered one of the centers to which detainees are secretly transferred before sentences are issued against them by a secret security judicial committee, mainly dealing with individuals accused of having dealings with the US-led coalition. The accounts of many witnesses contained in this report included details of them being presented to this committee.

### **13- Al Uqab Prison in the southern suburbs of Idlib governorate**

- One of HTS' largest and most infamous detention centers, this is located in an agricultural district within the al Bara-Kansafra-Balyoun triangle, which is known as the Wadi Martahoun area. The prison is located in rocky archaeological caves dug underground, while nearby former poultry houses are used as administrative offices and command headquarters. Al Uqab Prison consists of an administrative section called 'Section 20,' which houses administrative offices, including two rooms used for investigation, a room for the prison director, a room for the prison Emir, a room called 'an executive,' and a monitoring room, in addition to a solitary section known as 'Section 10,' which contains 32 detention rooms. According to the accounts of detention survivors whom we spoke to, the detention rooms are divided into:
  - Solitary cells: There are 24 such cells, each with an area of about 2\*1 meters, with a door separating the cell and a bathroom with an estimated area of 1\*1 meter. Usually, two to three individuals are placed in each solitary cell.

<sup>44</sup> He said: "I stayed in the collective dormitory for 19 days, and the food was not enough for us. The length of one dormitory was nine meters and its width was four meters. Next to it were nine dormitories full of detainees, including two dormitories for prisoners of the Alawite sect (ten women with their children, and about 50 men) who were captured in Ishtabraq town after the liberation of Jisr al Shoghour city, in addition to dormitories for members of the regime and the shabiha, and a dormitory for military leaders from Ahrar al Sham, Jaish al Islam and the Free Army."

<sup>45</sup> A gathering of factions of the Armed Opposition with the Jabhat al Nusra (al Nusra Front) organization

- Quartet: There are two such rooms that are called 'quartets, with four individuals usually being placed in each of these rooms.
- Collective cells: There are six such cells, named '30,' '40,' '50,' '60,' '70,' and '80,' in which usually between 25 and 45 detainees are held.

The cells, whether they are solitary, quartet or collective, have ventilation vents located in the doors facing the corridors, with a vacuum to circulate the air inside each cell. There is also a ventilation yard next to the cave called a 'Tashmisa,'<sup>46</sup> with an area of approximately 4\*7 meters, surrounded by high walls topped with metal bars that form the yard ceiling. The ventilation yard contains two washing machines for washing and drying clothes, and ropes to spread the laundry, and is also used for cutting detainees' hair or shaving their heads for those who wish to do so. Detainees in collective cells are allowed to go out to the yard once a week from morning until sunset, while detainees in quartets are allowed only half of this period per week.

With regard to the command headquarters around the prison, no one is allowed to enter or approach this area, with HTS designating several checkpoints belonging to al Uqab Prison, most notably al Ma'sara checkpoint west of Kafranbel city on the road to Kansafra town and al Hersh checkpoint between al Bara town and Kafr city, whose task is to arrest individuals who receive notifications that they must visit al Uqab Prison. When summoned persons arrive at one of the checkpoints, the checkpoint personnel blindfold their eyes and transfer them to the prison, all with the aim of concealing the prison's location. This policy has been followed by HTS with all the detainees whom it has taken to al Uqab Prison.

Al Uqab Prison also has a follow-up committee whose mission is to follow up on any complaints about the prison or to follow up on questions from the detainees' families about their family members. This committee is headquartered in al Hesba building between Ihsem town and Deir Senbul village, in a civilian home in the Deir Luza area, where the al Hesba is based. Detainees' families visit the follow-up committee, which answers their questions, to prevent them from travelling to the prison since HTS prevents all the detainees in al Uqab Prison from receiving visits from their families.

HTS transferred detainees from al Uqab Prison during the military campaign launched by the regime forces and their allies on the Jabal al Zaweya area in the southern suburbs of Idlib governorate in January 2020 when they attempted to move towards the Bab al Hawa area in the northern suburbs of Idlib.

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<sup>52</sup> A ventilated courtyard known among the detainees as 'Tashmisa'

### **The most prominent security officials involved in arbitrary detention, torture and enforced disappearance in al Uqab Prison:**

**Saleh Dani**, nicknamed Abu al Saif al Dimashqi, from Kansafra town in the southern suburbs of Idlib governorate, a security official who heads a security group affiliated with HTS, has led raids and detention operations against many civil society activists, civilians, and former members of the opposition factions, and headed al Uqab Prison. Saleh Dani has a bad reputation among the detainees.

**Muhammad Qurmuz**, nicknamed Abu Yousef Helfaya, a member of the HTS Shura Council, from Helfaya city in the suburbs of Hama governorate, worked as a construction worker before the start of the popular uprising and held the position of a senior security official in al Uqab Prison. He is a former security official of Hama and Emir of Hama district, who headed the administration of the area of Ma'aret al Numan, Kafranbel, and the southern suburbs of Idlib. He is considered one of HTS' senior officials and has great influence in al Uqab Prison.

**Osama al Deiri**, from Deir Ez-Zour governorate, is known as Anas al Sheikh, an alias under which he gives statements to HTS' Ebaa News Agency. He also has a bad reputation among detainees.

**Sami al Hamoud**, nicknamed Abu Khaled Mazout, from al Owayna village in the suburbs of Hama governorate, also works within the security wing of the Salvation Government's Ministry of Interior.

**Abu Khadijah al Sourani**, from Souran city in the suburbs of Hama governorate, took over HTS security at the crossings for a limited period.

**Abu Azzam al Jazrawi**, a Saudi national, the security officials' judge in al Uqab, is mainly responsible for the security issues of al Uqab, such as the cases of ISIS and others.

Finally, **Abu al Abbas Jozef**.

SNHR spoke with human rights activist Omar al Eis<sup>47</sup> from Kafranbel city, who was detained by masked members affiliated with HTS on September 21, 2018, in his home in the city, and was taken to al Uqab Prison on charges of expressing secular anti-Sharia thought. Omar was kept in one of the prison solitary cells for a continuous period of 126 days, sometimes punctuated by one or more additional detainees being put in the cell with him before being transferred again. Omar spent the last days of his detention in a collective cell in al Uqab Prison. He told us what he witnessed: **"The sounds of torture were heard throughout the duration of my detention in al Uqab Prison, except for Friday, due to the lack of investigators in prison [on that day]. They transported some of the detainees on food carts, and I saw their feet rotting due to the severity of the beating while some of them suffered fractures."**

About a month after Omar was incarcerated in a solitary cell, he was summoned for questioning over conversations found on his mobile phone, after which he was presented before a judge in a Sharia hearing where he was charged with 'apostasy.' Eighty days later, his family managed to visit him at the follow-up office outside al Uqab Prison for an hour after several people and dignitaries mediated with HTS on their behalf, and he was released on March 20, 2019.

<sup>47</sup> An alias; we contacted him via phone on April 7, 2020.

SNHR also spoke with media activist Walid al Fares<sup>48</sup> from al Habeit village in the southern suburbs of Idlib, who was arrested on July 15, 2018, by HTS personnel from his home and taken to al Uqab Prison on charges of harboring and smuggling personnel affiliated with Armed Opposition factions.

Walid said: **"They raided my house and vandalized its contents during their inspection. Then they took me, blindfolded, by car to al Uqab Prison, and I was beaten and verbally abused all the way. When I arrived, they took me out of the car, stopped me at the door and asked me to turn facing the wall, then they put me in a cell with another person who was accused of being a member of Jamal Ma'rouf. It was a solitary cell and had a toilet pit. I asked the man in the cell: 'Where am I?' and he answered me in a low voice: 'In al Uqab.' The cell smelled so foul and was so narrow that one couldn't stretch his feet fully, and I reached a point where I couldn't breathe, so I banged on the door and started shouting so that they might take me out to another place. A member opened the door and kicked me in my chest and said to me: 'Die, pig!'"**

Walid told us that he was summoned for investigation three days after his arrest, with the interrogator asking him about his weapon and accusing him of facilitating the escape of elements belonging to factions of the Armed Opposition, describing them as traitors. Walid said: **"After the flood of accusations leveled against me by the investigator, Abu Khadija, he logged into my cell phone and turned on audio recordings in it that were conversations with my friends wanted by HTS, then he kicked me and threatened me with death and ordered me to be returned to the solitary cell, where I remained for days without investigation. I could hear the voices of those who were subject to al shabeh 'ghost' [a form of torture], especially the man who was with me in the same cell, who had been arrested and detained in solitary confinement for three months and was subjected to the ghost every day. During Ramadan, they executed him. They always called out the names of those who they wanted to execute at 5 a.m. at dawn, and my cell was close to the interrogation room. I used to hear names such as Abu Yousef al Hamawi, Abu Khaled Mazout, Abu Khadijah al Sourani, and Abu Yousef al Mughir."** After that, Walid was interrogated twice every week and was subjected to the 'ghost' and severe beatings during these sessions. Forty days after his arrest, Hay'at Tahrir al Sham released him, Walid said, adding: **"When I was released, the members threw me out of their car on the road to Kansafra village in Idlib suburbs, and I was unable to stand then due to the severity of the torture I'd experienced. Some passersby helped me to get home."**

SNHR also spoke with media activist Jalal Fadil<sup>49</sup> from Ihsem town in the southern suburbs of Idlib governorate, who studied journalism at Damascus University's Faculty of Media. Through one of his relatives, HTS sent him a notification document ordering him to visit them on November 17, 2019, at al Bayyada checkpoint at 12 noon, accusing him of slandering HTS because of his posts on Facebook criticizing the group. Prior to visiting them, Jalal deleted all his Facebook posts critical of HTS, because of the fear he experienced after receiving the notification document. Jalal said: **"When I arrived at the checkpoint, I told the member my name, then the commander of the checkpoint sent my name and made calls."**

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<sup>48</sup> We contacted him via phone on June 22, 2020.

<sup>49</sup> We contacted him via phone on June 30, 2020.

I waited until 12 o'clock at the checkpoint. Then a silver van came with three masked gunmen in it, who asked where the notified person was. Then one of them took a piece of cloth and covered my eyes and took me to al Uqab Prison. I was able to see through the blindfold by 50% as we reached Ebleen town, where they continued on their way to Balyoun town, and then they headed towards Kansafra town, but when they'd hardly passed Balyoun town and its wooded area, they turned towards the east and went down a dirt road. At that time, I did not know where I was because I hadn't been to this area and road before. After that, the car ran along steep roads within the terrain of Wadi Tahramoun. Then the car stopped, and they put me down quickly and dragged me towards a closed iron door, on which they knocked, then I entered from a corridor 1 meter wide and more than 20 meters long, then I turned left, then I entered another door, where there was another door on the right which I entered; there was also a small space surrounded by many cells and doors. Then, a member came and tightened the cloth over my eyes until I lost my ability to see completely. I stayed standing next to a room I expected was an office and I could hear someone else's voice begging them to pardon him. Then, someone from the office asked me for my name and personal information and then fingerprinted me on papers I didn't recognize, and then they took off my blindfold. I saw interrogators wearing the same clothes and wearing masks on their faces, while the office was a cave dug in the rock. Then he asked me to write my name on a board and to hold it, then he photographed me with his mobile phone camera, then they re-blindfolded my eyes and took me to the cell."

Two days after Jalal was put into the solitary cell, he was summoned for interrogation again, and as he sat in the investigation office, he heard the voices of a woman and of an interrogator shouting at her. The interrogator addressed him in a coastal dialect, mocking his Facebook posts. Jalal said: "The interrogator spoke to me in a coastal dialect that made me feel scared. He addressed another person called Abu Hussein and said to him: 'You see, Abu Hussein! He doesn't love us.' The person replied to him: 'It's okay. Put him in prison for two months,' then called a person called 'Ten' and asked him to put me in the solitary cell so that I could 'learn how to love them!' The food was Mujadara or bulgur, two potatoes and four rounds of bread for the whole day. A few days later, I was able to talk to a person from the neighboring cell, from Deir Senbul village, and he told me with a laugh that they accused him of being a regime agent, and others were accused of slandering HTS."

Some days after Jalal's presence in the solitary confinement, he was summoned for interrogation again and was subjected to torture and severe beatings for every post he published. Jalal said: "They made me lie on the ground, while the interrogator grabbed a stick and started reading my posts and hitting me hard on the back. Then he asked me for detailed information about my life since childhood until today. He knew that I'd been working in Qatar. He told me: 'You came back here to spy on us for Qatar,' and he hit me on the back and head for an hour while cursing and charging me, and then asked 'Ten' to take me back to the cell."

Two days later, HTS took Jalal to a Sharia hearing, which is presided over by a judge who sentences the accused, with the judge listing all the charges against him and sentencing him to imprisonment for an additional 15 days with flogging. While he was serving his sentence, one of the security officials interrogated him to collect information on other media workers. Jalal said: **"When I finished my sentence, a member came and told me: 'You will be released today' and asked me to collect my belongings and not to wear anything on my feet because they would flog me as a Tazir. Then he took me to a long corridor and asked me to sit on my knees and started hitting me on my back and my feet as he was saying to me: 'Ask God for forgiveness for your sin.' After that, they took me out and put me in a van with my eyes closed with three other detainees. They took us for a long car ride and then threw us out on the Balyoun Road and asked us not to remove the cloth from our eyes until the car drove away."**

#### **14- Al Qasmiya Prison and Court in the western suburbs of Aleppo governorate**

Al Qasmiya Prison and Court, which is located in al Qasmiya village in the western suburbs of Aleppo governorate, is a huge, four-story building which was previously a textile factory. It contains several halls on the ground floor, which are divided into halls for women, others for men, halls dedicated to criminal crimes, and others designated for those accused of military cases, as well as halls containing prisoners from Syrian regime forces and ISIS. Each of these halls can accommodate approximately 300 individuals. The second, third, and fourth floors of al Qasmiya Prison, meanwhile, housed the offices of al Qasmiya Court, which was previously affiliated with the Nour al Din al Zenki Movement faction, an armed opposition faction, before these were taken over by Hay'at Tahrir al Sham on January 5, 2019, following a battle between HTS and al Zenki Movement. HTS turned the building into a prison and an affiliated court. Al Qasmiya Court and Prison is considered one of the main courts, especially in HTS-controlled areas in the northern and western suburbs of Aleppo. Among the most prominent security officials who took over the tasks of managing the prison and the court are Abu Muslim, and another man from Hayyan town in the western suburbs of Aleppo governorate.

The prison and court are guarded by a security detachment at the entrance to the building, in addition to the presence of a security checkpoint 300 meters from the prison. The prison was bombed by the Russian-Syrian alliance several times, the last of which was during the military campaign against the north and west of Aleppo governorate in 2020, during which the prison sustained extensive damage. HTS relocated the prison to another site after it was bombed and a number of prisoners escaped from it, while it is currently under the control of Syrian regime forces.

#### **15- Ma'aret al Numan Prison and Court:**

HTS established a civil court in Ma'aret al Numan city, in which the group allocated cells for criminal cases. The city is currently under the control of the Syrian regime.

**16- Senjar Silo Prison in the western suburbs of Idlib governorate**

This is a grain silo facility in Senjar town, which contains warehouses and hangars that cover large areas, some of which are located in underground basements. The Senjar Silo Prison was previously considered one of HTS' most important security headquarters and was supervised by al Badiya Sector. Hamid al Jasem, from al Farja al Shamaliya village near Sinjar, who began working with HTS after it took over control of Sinjar in 2015, was considered one of the group's most prominent security officials and assumed control of supervising the Badiya Sector and the Senjar Silo Prison. The area is currently under the control of Syrian regime forces.

**17- Al Mal'ab al Baladi Prison in Idlib city**

This prison, which is located west of Idlib city, was a former HTS security headquarters. HTS turned the rooms below into a detention center, closing it at the beginning of 2019 because it had been bombed several times.

**18- Mouqa Prison and Court in the southern suburbs of Idlib governorate**

Mouqa Prison and Court is located north of Khan Sheikhoun city in the southern suburbs of Idlib governorate, in the Wadi al Fateh area between Mouqa and Khan Sheikhoun (south of Mouqa and north of Khan Sheikhoun). This area is an agricultural district known for the presence of a network of underground caves, which HTS turned into a prison and court. In early 2017, this prison was attacked by the Jund al Aqsa organization, another extremist Islamist group. HTS continued fortifying and expanding the prison until Syrian regime forces took control of Khan Sheikhoun city.

Among the most prominent security officials responsible for managing Mouqa Prison and Court were Abu Nusaiba al Tunisi, who was in charge of the court, Khaled al Bakour, who is currently in the security wing in Idlib city, known as the 107 center, and Abu Hussein Sajna, director of Khan Sheikhoun police station, who was affiliated with Mouqa Court and later affiliated with the Salvation Government.

**19- Abdin Prison in the southern suburbs of Idlib governorate**

This prison, located in a wooded agricultural area in Abdin town in the southern suburbs of Idlib governorate, was previously under the control of Ahrar al Sham Islamic Movement, an armed opposition faction. HTS took control of the prison and turned several underground caves there into a military headquarters and prison, in which HTS detained members belonging to the Ahrar al Sham Movement and Jund al Aqsa. It is currently under the control of Syrian regime forces.

**20- Bab al Hawa Prison in the northern suburbs of Idlib governorate**

This prison is located within the Bab al Hawa border crossing with Turkey, and it is mainly dedicated to detaining people deported from Turkey, as well as detainees facing security-related charges such as belonging to ISIS or being agents for the US-led coalition, the Syrian regime and others.

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<sup>56</sup> We contacted him via phone on June 30, 2020.

## VIII. Documenting at Least 22 Torture Methods Still Practiced by HTS in Its Detention Centers

HTS uses multiple torture methods within the aforementioned detention centers. Through our interviews with dozens of detention/torture survivors over the years, we were able to identify the most notable methods of torture used by the group, which are similar to a great extent to the torture methods practiced by the Syrian regime in its detention centers. We note that this similarity extends even to the strategy of extracting 'confessions' through torture, then trying detainees on the basis of these clearly coerced statements.

Many detainees told us that they had been tortured by HTS members even before they were taken for interrogation, or were given the option of admitting the charges against them or being tortured until they admitted them. All these similarities with the regime, however, did not prevent HTS from inventing its own distinctive torture methods. In this paragraph, we will not repeat the 72 torture methods used by the Syrian regime, as we talked about them in detail in a [previous report](#). Rather, we will present the 22 most notable torture methods that characterized HTS. A detainee may often be subjected to more than one method of torture during his or her detention. We have divided these methods into three main categories.

### One: 13 physical torture methods

### Two: Eight psychological torture methods

### Three: Forced labor

#### One: Physical torture methods:

##### 1- Coffin:

This is a metal box, affixed to a wall, similar to a closet in appearance, measuring around 170\*50 cm, into which the prisoner is squeezed with the hands fixed to the top before the door is closed on the detainee. In some cases, the prisoner's chest is then further crushed using a metal compressor fitted to the inside of the door, consisting of a convex metal plate that is tightened using a spiral screw controlled from outside the door, with the detainee remaining inside this cramped space for several hours or days. HTS has used the 'coffin' in the group's Shaheen, Harem and al Uqab detention centers. In many cases, HTS deliberately places the 'coffin' in locations exposed to the elements to subject the detainees inside to weather extremes, further increasing the pain and suffering inflicted by the torture, as the 'coffin' is either unbearably

hot or freezing cold as a result of being exposed to the summer sun or winter cold. According to the testimonies obtained by SNHR from survivors, HTS abolished this form of torture in 2018 after the death of a number of detainees while being held in these 'coffins,' especially in Shaheen Prison. We believe, however, that it was abolished in Shaheen Prison only, with SNHR unable to verify its abolition in all HTS detention centers.



## 2- The vertical shabeh position:

The detainee's arms are tied to a metal cylinder fixed to a ceiling or high weight-bearing fixture lifting his or her body so that it swings above the ground, placing the full weight on the shoulder joints, after which the jailer deliberately pulls the detainee's body downward in order to inflict the greatest possible amount of pain and injury, with detainees often left in this agonizingly painful position for many hours or days. This method is similar to al shabeh method used by Syrian regime forces in their detention centers, with torture sessions involving al shabeh often accompanied by beating or flogging detainees while they are suspended in this way or throwing scalding hot or freezing cold water at their bodies to increase their suffering.



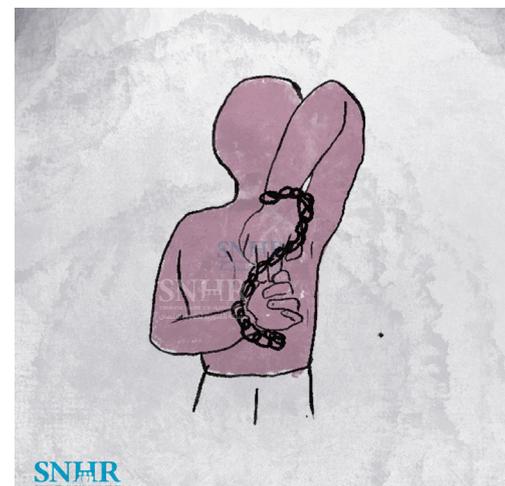
## 3- Salt:

During torture, the jailer fills the detainee's mouth with approximately 100 g of table salt, then forces the detainee to close his/her mouth tightly for 15 minutes, before forcing the detainee to open his/her mouth and filling it with water. This practice causes blisters and ulcers in the detainee's mouth as well as suffocation while swallowing large amounts of salt and water.



## 4- The Scorpion:

The HTS member responsible for torture first ties the detainee's left arm behind his/her back from the left side, and also ties the right arm behind the detainee's back, but from above the right shoulder, before pulling the two arms towards each other and handcuffing them at the wrists. The detainee is left for an hour or more in this position, causing the victim excruciating pain. Survivors whom the SNHR has talked with called this torture position the 'Scorpion.'



### 5- Electrocuting "especially on weak parts of the body":

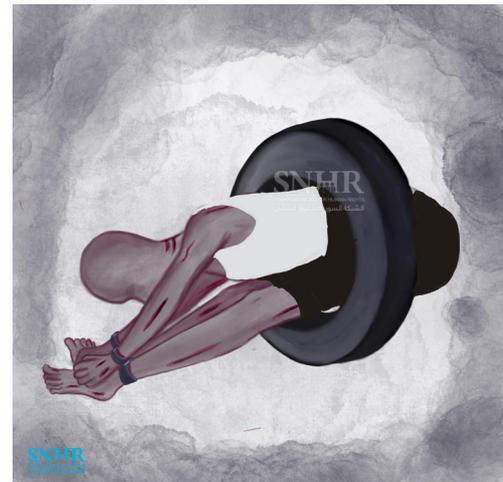
HTS employs similar tools and techniques to those used by the Syrian regime in torturing detainees, including electrocution, with use of this method focusing on specific, sensitive parts of the detainee's body.

Battery clips like those used with a car, which are connected to an electrical control device, such as a car battery, are attached to sensitive and vulnerable parts of the detainee's body (such as lips, nose, ears, genitals or fingertips), with the current then run through the prisoner's body. This practice is not only excruciatingly painful, but also has catastrophic physical effects, including the melting and burning of the electrified organ. These effects and the agonizing pain demonstrate why this method is one of the most terrifying of all the torture techniques used on detainees. Survivors whom the SNHR has talked with recalled having seen fellow detainees who lost their earlobes and noses due to being subjected to torture with battery clips.



### 6- The Tire:

The detainee is stuffed into a car tire with the legs bent inside the tire, and with a wooden stick shoved between the detainee's knees, which are inserted in the tire. After this, the detainee is turned and beaten hard on the feet and the rest of his/her body using rods, electrical cable doubled over in such a way that its weight, strength and durability are increased, or thick plastic tubing.



### 7- Starvation:

The detainee is deprived of part or all of his/her usual food ration. According to survivors of detention, whoever was subjected to this punishment would receive only one round of bread and one piece of vegetable per day.



### 8- Beating:

The imprisoned individual/detainee is restrained and subjected to continuous and severe beatings on all parts of his/her body. Beating is practiced on a continuous basis as part of all the aforementioned torture methods and positions used. It is inflicted with a club, rod, electrical cables, fists or booted feet.



### 9- Conditions of detention and human stacking:

First of all, it should be noted that all the detention centers we mentioned (except for Idlib Central Prison in Idlib city) are buildings intended for other uses, such as factories, military buildings, etc. They are not designed to be detention centers, and in their entirety, they lack safety and ventilation conditions and lighting, but what is worse is the severe overcrowding in these centers. According to what many survivors told us, they were held in narrow cells with an average size of a cell used to house around 50-65 detainees being 6\*6 meters. The detainees' clothes are often worn during torture, which contributes to the spread of diseases,

epidemics and infections, especially respiratory and skin diseases, due to lack of oxygen and scarcity of exposure to sunlight. These extremely harsh conditions are a strategy followed by HTS with the aim of torturing detainees, deliberately intensifying their suffering by allowing various diseases to spread, and then withholding medical treatment. It is also believed that these sordid conditions may be due to HTS' financial inability and unwillingness to provide the basic humanitarian requirements for detention conditions, with HTS not attaching importance to spending resources on detainees or on improvements to its detention centers.



We were able to observe four basic forms within the context of neglect of health care and conditions of detention:

**10- Neglect or denial of access to medicine and treatment:**

Detainees in need of medical treatment are partially or totally denied access to such treatment and to medication, with guards often ignoring detainees' distress and appeals for treatment. In cases where a detainee does receive medication, this is often a generic painkiller or other medicine wholly inadequate and unsuitable for treating the illness or condition suffered by the detainee. The only medications that detainees may receive are almost completely limited to analgesics such as Cetamol or Panadol, which are given to them by a nurse or doctor who visits the detention center at various times, when summoned by the administration of the detention center. In the majority of testimonies obtained by SNHR from survivors, they rarely witnessed the transfer of any fellow detainees to hospital for treatment, with the exception of those who sustained gunshot wounds during their arrest; these cases were taken for surgery then transferred to the detention center before completing their recovery, and in some cases immediately after leaving the operating room. Those who have undergone surgery are also subjected to interrogation and torture immediately after being transferred to the detention center.

**11- Depriving the detainee of bathing, use of a toilet and basic hygiene facilities:**

The number of toilets is not commensurate with the number of detainees in HTS prisons and detention centers, and we have documented numerous cases in which detainees in solitary cells or secret 'maximum security' prisons are often allowed to use the toilet only twice a day, and rarely have the opportunity to shower or wash despite repeatedly asking to do so. According to testimonies obtained by SNHR from survivors, detainees requesting shower facilities invoked their need to take a shower to prepare for prayer in order to ensure their request would be granted faster by guards. Even when showers or washing facilities are available, however, only scalding hot or freezing cold water is offered, according to the prevalent weather, with soap and other essential hygiene items being always unavailable. Detainees are often deprived of showers or washing facilities for months on end, causing skin diseases, lice and scabies to be widespread among detainees, as well as leading to foul, fetid odors in the cells.

**12- Depriving detainees of pillows, blankets and clothes:**

HTS personnel refuse to provide detainees in their detention centers with an adequate quantity of pillows and blankets. Detainees are often forced to share the use of one pillow and blanket, which are usually filthy, threadbare, soiled with blood or other bodily matter, and lousy with parasites. In addition, detainees are denied adequate clothing and often reduced to wearing only their underwear because their clothes are worn or ripped during torture or forcibly removed during inspections. All these practices expose detainees to severe cold in the winter when temperatures fall to freezing.

**13- Sleep deprivation:**

The detainee is deprived of sleep for a variety of reasons. Either sleep deprivation is practiced as a method of torture and during long interrogation sessions, or he cannot sleep due to trauma and 'human stacking' in the prison cells, with the massive overcrowding denying detainees the ability to all lie down or even to all sit simultaneously, forcing them to take turns in sleeping and thereby allowing each only a few hours of sleep. This is in addition to the physical pain and psychological trauma resulting from torture and to the constant pervasive sense of fear which affects detainees throughout the period of their detention, leaving many suffering from chronic insomnia.

**Two: Psychological torture methods:****1- Enforced disappearance:**

'Disappearing' the detainees, preventing them from communicating with their family members or a lawyer, and disappearing them from the outside world make them feel that they are now alone in the face of torture and detention, leading them to collapse psychologically and physically, with this being a deliberate policy.

**2- Solitary confinement:**

The detainee is kept in a solitary cell, which is a small, cramped and narrow cell holding only one person, and is detained there for the entire duration of interrogation, which may last for many days and even months. During that period, the detainee is prevented from going outside to be exposed to sunlight and from communicating with anyone, with all his/her requests, including those for essential items such as medicine and others, being rejected. According to the accounts we obtained, the longest period of solitary confinement in an HTS prison that the witnesses we interviewed knew of was that of a detainee who remained in a solitary cell continuously for 18 months.

**3- Simulation of death:**

In these cases, HTS personnel inform the detainee that they are taking him/her for execution. In some cases, they fire bullets towards him/her with the intention not of injuring him/her but of psychologically terrorizing him/her, carrying out 'fake executions' in order to further traumatize detainees. At other times, after supposedly taking a detainee for execution, they bring him/her back and tell him/her the execution has been postponed.

**4- Impairing the detainee's mental and intellectual capabilities through drugs:**

The detainee is drugged with strong medication and prescription drugs that affect his/her mental faculties and intellectual state. Survivors of detention told us that HTS used these types of medicine in efforts to force the detainee to confess and provide information while in a state of semi-consciousness, with these drugs causing some detainees to lose their power of speech or causing severe vomiting and involuntary urination in a number of cases. Survivors with whom we talked could not determine what kind of drugs they were forced to take.

**5- Instigating mutual hostility and tension inside the same cell:**

HTS attempts to instigate hostilities between prisoners by deliberately assembling people of different, mutually hostile orientations in one collective cell, such as placing those accused of dealing with the Syrian regime or prisoners from among regime forces in cells with anti-regime activists, or putting ISIS members with detainees from members of Armed Opposition factions. Survivors we met told us that they were always in a state of tension and anxiety over being incarcerated along with their opponents, with one of the detainees witnessing a number of fellow prisoners being beaten by ISIS members due to the charges brought against them.

**6- Spying on detainees:**

HTS places its own covert operatives or agents among detainees in the collective cells, posing as fellow prisoners, who work for the group by monitoring the detainees and reporting the conversations and news reports exchanged between them to HTS investigators, leading detainees to live in constant fear and anxiety and to refrain from speaking with or expressing themselves to one another.

**7- Hearing the sounds of torture:**

Usually, detainees are tortured in rooms adjacent to cells holding other prisoners, with the trauma of hearing the sounds of torture and beatings of fellow detainees and their cries of distress leading to psychological collapse among a number of prisoners.

**8- Placing execution victims' funeral shrouds before other detainees' eyes:**

Most of the survivors told us that they had seen the white shrouds used by HTS to wrap the bodies of the people it had executed, with these items intentionally placed either in the corridors of the detention center or in the exercise yards in order to intimidate other detainees and make them fear for their own lives.

**Three: Forced labor:**

HTS personnel force detainees to carry out manual excavation and forced labor, and in most cases to dig the graves used to bury the people executed by the group on various charges. According to the accounts we have obtained, HTS practices this method mainly with prisoners from among Syrian regime troops from the Alawite community as well as detainees who are sentenced to death.

## IX. Testimonies of the Families of Victims Forcibly Disappeared, Tortured and Executed by HTS

Muhammad Abdul Sattar al Abeid, from Saraqeb city in the northern, was arrested by Hay'at Tahrir al Sham on Sunday, December 20, 2015, after being lured from his home in al Shamali neighborhood of Saraqeb city, and taken to one of HTS detention centers in Salqin city in the western suburbs of Idlib governorate. His family was able to visit him for the last time on Tuesday, May 17, 2016. On Friday, May 20, 2016, HTS members executed him in the city square of Salqin city and handed over his body to his family.

SNHR contacted Mr. Hashem Bakkour,<sup>50</sup> Muhammad's cousin, who told us: "At 3 a.m., one of Muhammad's friends knocked on his door in al Shamali neighborhood near Umayyah Primary School, which was a headquarter of Hay'at Tahrir al Sham. After he stood with him outside the house, four individuals kidnapped him, blindfolded his eyes, raided his house and stole its contents, in addition to stealing 20,000 Syrian pounds and 1,400 US dollars in cash, along with his mobile phone, and a pickup car with a value estimated at 12,000 US dollars. At that time, Muhammad's father and sister were out of the house. Muhammad's fate remained unknown for a week, before it was discovered that he was being held at the Grain Silo headquarters, affiliated with Hay'at Tahrir al Sham, in Shabour neighborhood, south of Saraqeb city, before he was transferred to a prison in Salqin city. In February 2016, his father was able to visit him through an intermediary. When Muhammad's father met his son, Muhammad told him that he recognized those who had kidnapped him through their voices, and that they were related to him under the pretext of friendship and greed for money and the car because Muhammad's family is one of the richest in the city. He was tortured and severely beaten by these individuals after they suspected that he recognized their identities, and was threatened with death. He was also able to identify the interrogator who was investigating him, who is one of the sheikhs who issue fatwas in the courts. Muhammad explained to his father that he was charged with having conversations on his phone insulting the Companions and the Messenger. After suffering, Muhammad's father was able to reach the interrogator and explain to him that the charges against Muhammad were false, and that he had confessed to them under severe torture, and if it was true and these conversations were found, he had spoken them under the influence of drinking alcohol. The interrogator informed him that he would interrogate Muhammad again for the sake of investigation, and then he would serve a six-month prison term, be flogged and released. The last visit by Muhammad's family was on May 17, 2016, inside the prison, and they were promised that Muhammad would be released two days later. However, on Friday May 20, 2016, the people of Saraqeb city were shocked that Hay'at Tahrir al Sham executed Muhammad in Salqin Square and handed over his body to his family."

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<sup>50</sup> We contacted him via phone on July 13, 2021.

“After the burial of his body, the people went out in a demonstration against HTS against the background of Muhammad’s killing. It turned out later that HTS brought witnesses who falsely testified that Muhammad was not alcoholic and had insulted the Companions while he was conscious, framing the charge against him, then killing him for fear that he would come out from prison and reveal the identity of Hay’at Tahrir al Sham agents in Saraqeb city.”

Hashem added that until this moment, the car, money and belongings of Muhammad have not been handed over to his father, despite all the attempts made by intermediaries and despite exposing them on social media.

Obaidah Ahmad Dello, a fighter with a faction of the Armed Opposition, from Ihsem town in the southern suburbs of Idlib governorate, born in 1995, was arrested by HTS personnel on Saturday, February 28, 2015, near al Meghraqa School, south of Ihsem town, and taken to an undisclosed location., was arrested by Hay’at Tahrir al Sham personnel on Saturday, February 28, 2015, near al Meghraqa School, south of Ihsem town, and taken to an undisclosed location.



Obaidah Ahmad Dello

The SNHR contacted Mr. Abdul Rahman Dello,<sup>51</sup> Obaidah Dello’s brother, who told us:

“Obaidah was affiliated with a military faction called the Syrian Martyrs’ Battalions and Brigades. At 6 a.m., on Saturday, February 28, 2015, when Obaidah was with his colleague at one of the points in Ihsem town to carry out a military mission, personnel from al Nusra Front (currently Hay’at Tahrir al Sham) saw them from a distance. His colleague ran away, but my brother Obaidah could not escape due to an earlier injury to his body, so HTS personnel arrested him on charges that he was trying to shoot at them, and he was taken to one of HTS’ military points on the road between Ihsem town and Deir Loza village in Idlib suburbs, and then to al Uqab prison in Kansafra town in the suburbs of Idlib governorate. In May 2015, he was transferred from al Uqab prison to an undisclosed location. Since that date, we have not obtained any information about him or his place of detention, and every time we tried to ask about him in the HTS prisons, they tell us that he has died, but we have not received his body or a death certificate. We have asked a number of HTS leaders about him and they told us that his crime is not punishable by death.”

Abdul Rahman added that he has been warned by people affiliated with HTS against repeating his questions about his brother.

<sup>51</sup> We contacted him via phone on July 13, 2021

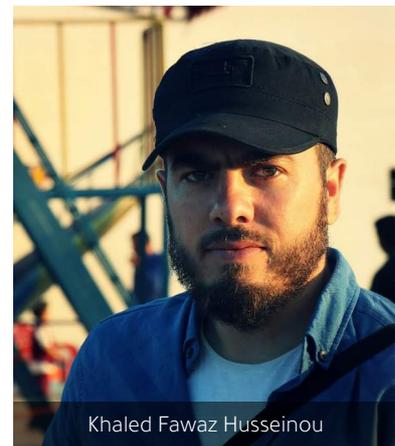
Yousef Muhammad Malek al Rahhal, born in 1983, a married father of five who was a leader in the ranks of the Ahrar al Sham Movement, an Armed Opposition faction, from Ma'ar Shamarin village in the suburbs of Idlib governorate, was arrested by Hay'at Tahrir al Sham personnel on Tuesday, January 22, 2019, following a raid on his house in Ma'ar Shamarin village, and taken to an undisclosed location.



SNHR contacted Dr. Khaled al Rahhal,<sup>52</sup> Yousef's brother, who told us:

**"On January 22, 2019, a military force affiliated with Hay'at Tahrir al Sham stormed my brother Yousef's house, arrested him, and took him to an unknown place. Through people affiliated with Hay'at Tahrir al Sham, and after paying huge sums of money, we were able to trace his place of detention, as he was transferred between several prisons, including al Uqab prison and Idlib City Central Prison, the last of which was Harem City Prison in the western suburbs of Idlib, and we [found out] that the accusation against him was carrying out kidnappings and killings in the areas of northern Syria to take ransom from the victims' families. We visited him several times, the last of which was in Harem City Prison in March 2021. During the visit, we saw the signs of torture on his body, which caused damage to the nerves in his right foot and broke two fingers. He told us that the interrogators extracted confessions from him under torture, then they recorded a video in which he confessed to his role in kidnapping a number of people, with this video published at the end of March 2021, and included a person claiming that he was kidnapped by Yousef Rahhal on May 18, 2019. On this same date, Yousef was detained by Hay'at Tahrir al Sham."** Dr. Khaled added that his brother had been sentenced to death, but until this moment his brother's fate, whether he is alive or executed, remains unknown, as they could not visit him.

Khaled Fawaz Husseinou, born in 1995, from Kafr Nbouda town in the suburbs of Hama governorate, is a media activist who works as an administrator in the Anatolia Camp for Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in the north of Idlib governorate, where he also lives. He was arrested by HTS personnel on Monday, April 5, 2021, while he was near a petrol station on the road leading to Kafr Lousin village in the northern suburbs of Idlib governorate and taken to an undisclosed location.



<sup>52</sup> We contacted him via phone on July 29, 2021.

SNHR spoke with Khaled's aunt, Ms. Heyam al Khaled, on August 17, 2021, by phone. She told us: "While we were at home in the Anatolian Camp, we were surprised and panicked when a military force of several cars stormed the house, and they asked us about Khaled. Then three personnel searched the house and confiscated Khaled's equipment, including photography equipment, memory cards, flash drives and papers related to his work in the camp. At that time, Khaled was not at home. Then they informed us that he was accused of embezzlement of money and they asked us to tell him to surrender, but we learned after they went that Khaled had been detained by them and that the raid on the house came after the arrest. We were not aware that Khaled had received any security threats. His mother visited several security centers in Idlib city to ask about him, but did not get any information; they even denied detaining him. In July 2021, the Hay'at Tahrir al Sham's General Security Department circulated contact numbers for anyone who has a detainee to ask about him, and, after communicating with them, we received a response that Khaled was fine and that they were holding him in the Sarmada area of Idlib suburbs without obtaining other details." Heyam added that they have not assigned a lawyer to follow up on Khaled's case.

Majed and Khaled al Jaji, two brothers from Ma'aret al Numan city in the south of Idlib governorate, were arrested by HTS personnel in August 2020 in Idlib city. We documented that Majed was released in November 2020, while Khaled's fate remains unknown. We note that Khaled is a former member of the 13<sup>th</sup> Division, an Armed Opposition faction.

SNHR contacted Mr. Muhsen al Jaji<sup>53</sup>, a relative of Khaled al Jaji, who told us:

"I was arrested with one of my friends in Idlib city near Zilal Hospital while I was in a café, where three cars belonging to Hay'at Tahrir al Sham followed us. Then the personnel raided the café and beat and insulted us, and then arrested us. We did not know the reason behind all this and we could not ask about the reason for the frequent beatings we were subjected to. We were taken to the police station in al Dana town in Idlib suburbs, where we live. They searched our mobile phones, and they were asking about my relative, Khaled. When we were in the police station, Khaled came to search for us, so they arrested him immediately and beat him severely, breaking one of his ribs. Then they asked about his mobile phone and he told them that he did not have a phone. The HTS personnel took me to our homes in al Dana city and searched the house without finding anything. Then we were taken to Branch 106 underground near Bab al Hawa crossing in the northern suburbs of Idlib governorate, where we were subjected to severe torture using the 'coffin,' shabeh, and being tied to a bed. Then we were placed in separate solitary cells. All the questions were about my relative Khaled, about his work and his connection to Jaysh al Thuwar [The Army of Revolutionaries] of the Syrian Democratic Forces, with the charge being that he dealt with the US-led coal-

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<sup>53</sup> We contacted him via phone on August 18, 2021.

tion forces. After three days of torture, we were transferred to Branch 77 in a mountainous area near Sarmada city in Idlib suburbs, where we were presented to the investigators and judges, and we were subjected to investigations and we did not know what our case was. The questions were about my relative Khaled, and another person named Hasan who was arrested a while before on charges of dealing with the US-led coalition forces. Four months later, I was transferred from the solitary cell to the collective cell, and there I could clearly hear Khaled's and Hasan's voices while they were torturing them. I received a message from Khaled through one of the detainees in the solitary cells saying that Khaled greeted me and asked me to seek his release after my release and that he was being severely tortured. I was released in November 2020, and after two months my friend was released." Muhsen added: "After I was released, I tried to contact HTS security officials from Ma'aret al Numan and they told me that they would secure a visit to Khaled. In May 2021, the security official secured us and Hasan's family a visit to Khaled [and Hasan] in the police station of Sarmada city in Idlib suburbs, where Hasan's family met him and Khaled informed us that he was not convicted of blood, that he was expected to be released, and that the torture stopped after eight months of detention." Muhsen added that in August 2021, his family received information from one of the HTS personnel that a Qesas (retribution) sentence was issued against Khaled and his friends, including Hasan, and it would be implemented soon, but they have not been able to verify this information up until this moment.

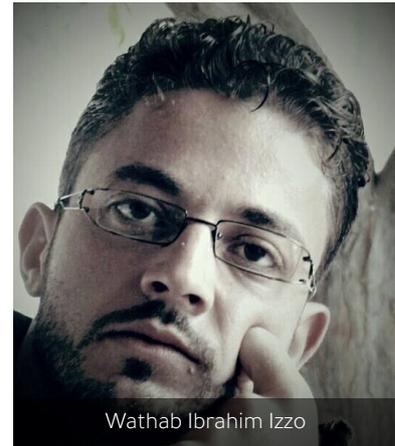
Born in 1990, Wathab Ibrahim Izzo, from Saraqeb city in the northern suburbs of Idlib governorate, was an activist in the popular uprising for democracy working in the relief field. Gunmen affiliated with HTS detained him on Monday, January 5, 2015, as he was passing through one of the group's checkpoints, accompanied by his colleagues, Maad Barish, Mahmoud Anwar Hardan and Wasim al Qayyem (the last being a Lebanese national born in 1983) while they were on their way from Bab al Hawa crossing in the northern suburbs of Idlib governorate to Saraqeb city. Maad Barish and Mahmoud Anwar Hardan were released on Friday, January 30, 2015, while the fate of Wathab Izzo and Wasim al Qayyem remains unknown to SNHR as well as to their families.'

SNHR spoke with Jamil al Izzo,<sup>54</sup> Wathab's relative, who told us: "**Wathab formerly worked in conducting transactions, and with the beginning of the popular uprising in Syria, he had a prominent role in it through his writings on the walls and his activity in the humanitarian relief work. On January 5, 2015, he obtained the approval of the local council in Saraqeb city to bring milk for children due to the infant formula crisis that was happening at the time in Saraqeb. Wathab got into a private car because the council's car was broken down. He went with Maad Barish and Mahmoud Anwar Hardan to Bab al Hawa crossing to bring a young man called Wasim al Qayyem, who came from Lebanon with milk. Upon their return from the crossing, about 100 meters after Taftanaz airbase towards Saraqeb city, a Kia Rio car was parked at an HTS temporary checkpoint, [with its occupants] kidnapping them. On the same day, the driver of the private 'van' car was released. After 25 days, Maad Barish and Mahmoud Hardan were released from the security center in al Zerba town in Idlib suburbs, after they were flogged on charges of keeping bad company, while HTS charged Wathab with secularism.**"

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<sup>54</sup> Via phone on July 18, 2020.

Jamil told us that they had inquired about him in all HTS' headquarters, but had been unable to obtain any information until June 2017, when one of the released detainees came out and told them that Wathab and his friend were being held in al Obari factory located in al Zerba town in the suburbs of Idlib governorate. Jamil added that they inquired about Wathab again, but none of the HTS officials responded to their complaints about his relative's disappearance.



Wathab Ibrahim Izzo

Saed al Sayyed al Ahmad, from Khattamlo town in the eastern suburbs of Homs, born in 1985, is a farmer who lives in Idlib city. On Tuesday, February 12, 2019, HTS personnel arrested him after raiding his home in al Dabbeith neighborhood, west of Idlib city, and took him to an undisclosed location.

SNHR met with Mr. Wael al Sayyed al Ahmad,<sup>55</sup> a relative of the disappeared man Saed, who told us:

**“We were sitting in Saed’s house, when a masked gunman knocked on the door, and he said he was from the security force of the HTS and was on a mission, and called Saed by name. When Saed came, the man arrested him and took him to a car belonging to them, and then other members entered the house and searched it. Then they drove Saed to an undisclosed location. After we searched for them and made contact, we learned that he was detained in the border security.”**

Muhammad told us that HTS prevented family members from visiting Saed, provided no explanation of why he was detained, and gave them no information or details about Saed’s fate, adding that the HTS figures whom the family met said only that Saed had been detained for security reasons.

Muhammad Khaled Mahmoud, from Hama city, born in 1979, an IDP who was living with his family in Kaf-ranbel city in the southern suburbs of Idlib governorate, was arrested by Hay’at Tahrir al Sham personnel on Sunday, May 5, 2019, while he was passing through one of the group’s checkpoints on the Damascus-Aleppo International Road near Ma’aret al Numan city, and taken to an undisclosed location.

SNHR spoke with Ms. Marwa al Sayegh,<sup>56</sup> Muhammad’s relative, who witnessed his arrest. She told us:

**“When Muhammad arrived at the Ma’aret al Numan Checkpoint on the highway, the checkpoint personnel stopped him and asked for his personal ID; he was nicknamed ‘Abu Wael’. Shortly afterwards, I heard Muhammad and the Amir [head] of the checkpoint screaming at each other, then a car came and they put Muhammad in it and went away, followed by another car which they put me into and brought me to my house.”**

Marwa said that Muhammad’s family has asked about him in the HTS court in Ma’aret al Numan city and at the HTS headquarters without any result. She added that she subsequently received unofficial information saying that he’s being held in either al Uqab Prison or in the Central Prison in Idlib city, although she and Muhammad’s family have not yet been able to verify this information.

<sup>55</sup> At his place of residence in Idlib city on August 3, 2019.

<sup>56</sup> On phone on August 3, 2019.

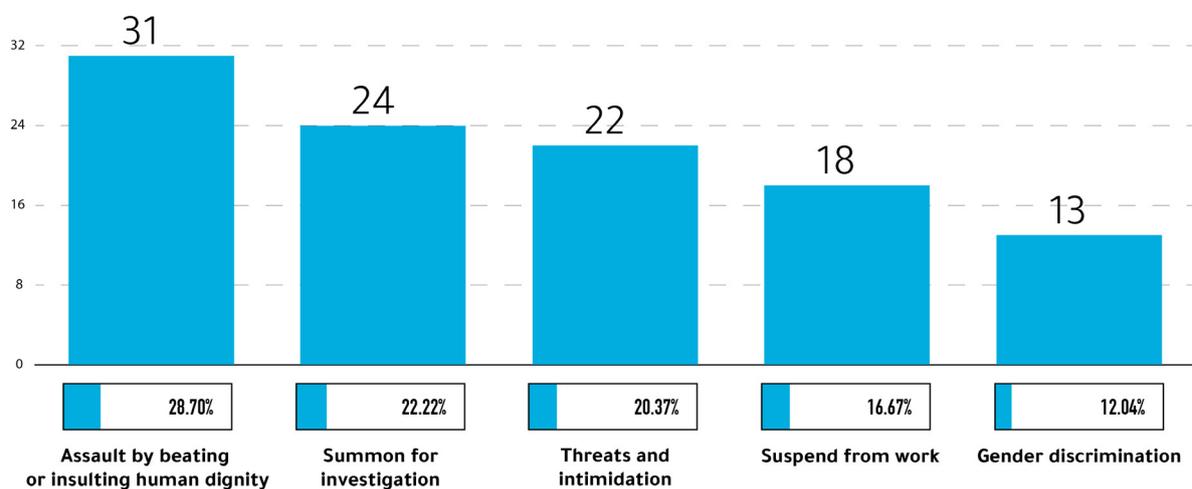
## X. At Least 108 Incidents of Women Being Targeted by HTS due to Their Work and Activities

Syrian women in the areas controlled by HTS suffer from negative discrimination against them in general, with the restriction of freedom of movement and clothing being only one aspect of this repression. The violations against women go far beyond that, and their suffering increases exponentially if they are working or wishing to work in public affairs, or in civil society organizations of whatever kind, whether media, relief-oriented, or political. We have documented many incidents in which women who have been involved in public affairs have been subjected to harassment and intimidation to push them to abandon their work, including:

- Receiving messages threatening to kill, kidnap, or assault them while they were working;
- Attacking their workplaces;
- Harassing or threatening their families;
- Dismissing them from jobs or from local organizations in which they obtained membership;
- Using social media to defame and slander the reputation of women in the local community in a generalized way;
- Filing false charges against them to justify summoning them to appear before the judiciary and detain them;
- Forcing them to sign a pledge after being summoned to the court, vowing to stop their activities and work; and
- Threatening to reveal what they were subjected to during interrogation.

These violations have resulted in women being killed in a number of these cases, with many others subjected to various types of violations, such as being forced to reduce and limit their activities or to give up their jobs and end their activities completely, and often being forced to flee to other areas as a result of threats, leading to further displacement.

We documented at least 108 incidents in which women were targeted because of their work or opposition to HTS practices during the period from the beginning of 2014 until December 2021. These incidents were distributed according to their type as follows:



**Assault by beating or insulting human dignity: 31**

**Summon for investigation: 24**

**Threats and intimidation: 22**

**Suspension from work: 18**

**Gender discrimination: 13**

We have noted that the incidents of targeting women on the basis of gender discrimination were directed mainly against female media activists during their work in covering incidents of violations committed by HTS as they were removed from the area of the incident.

We believe that many of these violations have been perpetrated against women activists in civil society organizations and others due to these women's prominent role in opposing HTS policies. This was clearly embodied in the demonstrations organized by women since the beginning of 2014 to date after the widespread arrests carried out by HTS against members of the armed opposition factions.

On Tuesday, August 17, 2021, HTS assaulted a woman, damaging her teeth, because the woman had attempted to prevent HTS personnel from arresting her son. The incident took place when HTS carried out a campaign of raids and arrests on the Khair al Sham IDP Camp in north of Kelli town in the northern suburbs of Idlib governorate. SNHR documented the arrest of three civilians who were taken to an undisclosed location, with the arrests accompanied by heavy shooting and an assault on a civilian man.



Video shows the woman who was assaulted and beaten by HTS personnel (losing her teeth as a result) on August 17, 2021



Photo shows the civilian man and woman who was assaulted and beaten by HTS personnel (losing her teeth as a result) on August 17, 2021

On Saturday, March 6, 2021, gunmen affiliated with Hay'at Tahrir al Sham assaulted women as they participated in a demonstration in al Sahhara town in the western suburbs of Aleppo governorate, to demand the release of their sons, who are affiliated with Hizb al Tahrir, and who were arrested by Hay'at Tahrir al Sham on March 5, 2021, at one of the checkpoints in al Atareb city in the suburbs of Aleppo governorate.



A statement issued by HTS' Administration of the Sarmada Area about the incident of Khair al Sham camp, offering an apology to the woman

Videos showing a demonstration by women in al Sahhara town in the western suburbs of Aleppo governorate and the assault on the demonstration - March 5, 2021



On Tuesday, March 9, 2021, personnel from HTS' Salvation Government in Idlib city closed the headquarters of the Shine Institute for Strategic Empowerment, located in a villa on the outskirts of Idlib city, after an event organized by the Institute on International Women's Day, in connection with an address delivered by the director of the institute, Rania Kiser, who resides in America, on women's empowerment and their rights. The Salvation Government summoned the director of the Syria branch to investigate and appear before the Public Prosecutor of the Salvation Government. During the investigation, the organization's employee was threatened not to declare the closure decision, and then he was followed to force him to remove the students and staff and take all the keys, after which HTS members said: "[This speech incites the woman to commit immorality and to violate the law of God.](#)" Operating in Syria since 2015, the Shine Institute is a licensed humanitarian organization in the United States of America, which provides educational and relief services and manages community empowerment projects in Idlib suburbs.

Walaa Ismail, a reporter with a local media center, from Aleppo city, is a second-year law student. On March 14, 2020, she was beaten and insulted by Hay'at Tahrir al Sham-affiliated personnel who used obscenities and insulting language against her, while she was providing media coverage of a demonstration near the Bab al Hawa crossing on the Syrian-Turkish border north of Idlib city, which is under the control of Hay'at Tahrir al Sham.



Statement issued by the Executive Director of the Shine Institute Rania Kiser regarding the closure of the institute

SNHR spoke with Walaa,<sup>57</sup> who told us: “The demonstration took place near the Bab al Hawa crossing on the Syrian-Turkish border in protest against the military operations launched by Russia and the regime forces on Idlib, and to demand the opening of the crossings for IDPs fleeing from the hell of bombing. During my media coverage of the demonstration, a number of Hay'at Tahrir al Sham’s personnel attacked me verbally using obscene words, under the pretext that filming is forbidden, and they confiscated my personal phone and my media equipment (a camera and a camera stand) and directed offensive words at me and my husband, which were like: ‘Make your wife virtuous - mixing with males is prohibited.’ After dozens of demonstrators intervened and prevented them from arresting me, the HTS personnel returned my phone and equipment.”

Sidra al Abdou,<sup>58</sup> a media activist from Idlib city, was summoned by the Public Prosecution service of HTS’ Salvation Government on July 17, 2020, in connection with filming a report with a group of women in Idlib city about the representation of women in Salvation Government institutions. Sidra told us: “It was a surprise to me when one of my media colleagues, who has strong ties with the Salvation Government’s Ministry of Justice, told me that I was wanted by the Public Prosecution in Idlib city. When I went there, I was investigated about the content of the report and my filming of women, about the party that I work for, and about my media work in general, then I signed a pledge to delete the videos I’d filmed and not to interfere in the work of the Salvation Government, in addition to being told that I must inform them and obtain approval before I work on any report on the HTS.” Sidra added that she does not know who told the Public Prosecution about her work, and that since then, she has not filmed any reports with women in order to avoid any problems she might face as a result, except for covering humanitarian cases needing relief support.

<sup>57</sup> We contacted her via phone on March 22, 2021.

<sup>58</sup> We contacted her via phone on January 21, 2021

## XI. Legal Conclusions and Recommendations

### **Legal conclusions:**

- HTS is a major military party to the internal armed conflict in Syria, and it must abide by the customary rules of international humanitarian law as it has controlled large areas since its establishment to date, and as a dominant force with a political structure and entity, it must abide by the principles of international human rights law.<sup>59</sup>
- In many bombardment incidents, HTS violated the principles of distinction and proportionality, with some attacks causing material and human losses. Indiscriminate attacks on populated areas constitute a terrible violation of international humanitarian law.<sup>60</sup>
- HTS has committed widespread violations of international human rights law against the people in the areas under its control through kidnappings, arbitrary detentions, enforced disappearances and torture, and through unfair rulings issued by courts that in no way comply with the basic rules of fair trials. This report has shown the group's absolute dominance over the police and judiciary.
- We documented many cases in which HTS killed persons whom its members had forcibly disappeared but failed to notify their families until years later. This confirms to us that this delay is deliberate to increase the suffering of the families of forcibly disappeared persons, as well as humiliate and financially blackmail them.
- Arbitrary detentions, enforced disappearances, torture, harassment of women, and restrictions on freedom of opinion and expression have resulted in many activists and residents being displaced and fleeing to other areas outside HTS' control, or trying to seek asylum. We stress that the areas controlled by HTS are not safe for the return of internally displaced persons or refugees.

### **Recommendations:**

#### **The UN Security Council:**

- Do not delay resolution of the conflict in Syria since this will contribute to strengthening the power of HTS and spreading extremist ideology, leading to the continuation of tyranny and human rights violations.
- Support local communities and organizations that contribute to spreading religious and political awareness based on respect for human rights.
- Take serious steps to end the conflict in Syria, including setting a strict timetable for the political transition process in accordance with Security Council Resolution 2254, as it has been stagnant since the Geneva Communiqué of June 2012 to date.
- The survival of the Syrian regime, which is involved in crimes against humanity, is one of the main causes of the spread of extremist religious ideology and is one of the most important points on which extremist organizations build their narrative, which is based on the massive injustice that has befallen millions of Syrians at the hands of the Syrian regime.

- Allocate resources and create development plans and jobs to try to attract and dissuade those who joined or might otherwise be tempted to join extremist groups through financial incentives, appeals to morality and reasoning, and raising awareness.
- Add extremist Shiite organizations to the lists of designated terrorist organizations, similar to HTS, and make no distinction between them.

**Hay'at Tahrir al Sham:**

- It is not enough for the group to merely verbally announce its disengagement from al Qaeda, especially if the principles of human rights are not respected, victims are not compensated, the perpetrators of all violations are not held accountable, and guarantees are not provided to prevent a repeat of these violations.
- End arbitrary detentions, enforced disappearances, and torture, immediately release all detainees, reveal the fate of the forcibly disappeared, end persecutions, and compensate the victims' families.
- Cease the policy of discrimination against women, especially women working in public affairs.
- Allow freedom of expression and stop persecuting media activists and demonstrators.
- Give the judiciary complete independence.

**International community and influential states:**

- Support vital civil society organizations in areas of northern Syria, which stand as a line of defense against extremist organizations by spreading awareness and providing services.
- Support the formation of a local police apparatus that is strong and coherent to defend the residents against abductions and assaults, which should pave the way to relative stability and security.
- Add the Iranian, Iraqi and other Shiite extremist organizations, which are openly supported by the state of Iran, to the lists of designated terrorist organizations and target and obstruct them in line with extremist Islamist groups.
- Push for an end to the Syrian conflict and put pressure to accelerate the process of political transition towards democracy and stability.

**International Commission of Inquiry (COI):**

- Investigate the incidents included in this report and try to include them in the COI's next report.

**OHCHR and international human rights organizations:**

- Monitor HTS violations, their impact on the lives of the civilians, and the dangers of neglecting the Syrian conflict without a solution for more than 10 years, and submit effective recommendations to the international community in this regard.

## Gratitude and Solidarity

We wish to express our heartfelt solidarity with the victims and their families, and to extend our sincere thanks and appreciation to the families, local activists and lawyers, without whose efforts this report could not have been prepared in this way.



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