

Statement



Four Years Have Passed Since Activist Raed al-Fares Was Killed: As the Party Responsible for His and Hamoud Jneed's Assassination, Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham Must be Held Accountable

Wednesday, November 23, 2022, marks the fourth anniversary of the assassination of the activist and prominent Syrian revolutionary figure Raed al-Fares who was assassinated at the hands of masked gunmen in an area under the control of Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), who shot at the car he and his colleague Hamoud Jneed were travelling in on Friday November 23, 2018. This was not the first attempt on Raed's life; in fact, he himself had told us that he survived an assassination attempt in 2014, not to mention many assaults and arrests by HTS.

Born in 1972 in the city of Kafranbel in the southern suburbs of Idlib governorate,



Raed, along with other activists, created and wrote anti-regime slogans on the walls in the early stages of the popular uprising. Raed also helped organize the first demonstration in his home city of Kafranbel, which was held after the Friday Prayer on April 1, 2011, making him a wanted man by the Syrian regime's security agencies from the very first days of the uprising, with his house raided on multiple times.

Raed was among those who pioneered the idea of writing the date and the name of the city where the demonstration was taking place on every banner in the demonstration. Arguably more than anything, he was known for the protest banners' iconic artwork and incisive slogans. Indeed, Raed and the artist Ahmad Jalal pioneered the caricatures of Kafranbel that became a trademark of the city's demonstrations. The wonderful creativity, dedication and commitment sown into these caricatures made the Syrian people avidly await every Friday to see each new caricature. Soon enough, these caricatures became a revolutionary custom and symbol, not only for Kafranbel, but for the entire Syrian popular uprising for freedom.



In 2012, Raed founded Radio Fresh which was the first radio station to broadcast in areas that broke free of the regime's control. He later launched a website for the radio channel. Subsequently, he co-founded the Union of the Revolutionary Bureaus (URB), an umbrella group housing many media and service enterprises, including Radio Fresh, al-Mantara Magazine, Maraya Center for Women, Children's Office, Women's Office, Labor Office, and Aish Campaign, among others.

Naturally, Raed al-Fares's activism, the mark he left on many civil and awareness projects, his calls for freedom and democracy, and his repeated condemnations of tyranny and of the violations and practices of extremist groups, made him a target for all those opposing freedom. He was arrested and threatened on numerous occasions.



Raed al-Fares refused to flee his hometown and leave it up for grabs for extremist groups. He faced worsening pressure and threats before the final attack that claimed his life, especially after HTS arrested the lawyer Yaser al-Salim¹ on Sunday, September 21, 2018. Despite all of these dangers, Raed decided to stay even if doing so would ultimately cost him his life.



¹ A lawyer who had chaired the 'Lawyers for Justice' organization founded by Raed in 2014. After his arrest, another lawyer assumed the managing duties. Yasser was still in detention on November 23, 2018, the day of Raed's assassination.



The details of the attack

[On November 28, 2018, the Syrian Network for Human Rights \(SNHR\) released a report holding HTS responsible for the death of Raed and Hamoud.](#) According to the investigations we conducted, on Friday, November 23, 2018, at around 12:00 Damascus time/10:00 GMT, while people were performing the Friday Prayer, [a van](#) tracked Raed's car as he drove through Kafranbel, with two passengers, fellow activists Hmoud Jneed and Ali Dandoush. As soon as the car stopped, masked gunmen opened fire on its occupants, [killing both Raed al-Fares and Hamoud Jneed.](#) The gunmen fled the scene immediately after the attack, which had clearly been planned to coincide with the Friday Prayers when most people would be in mosques and the streets would be fairly empty, making it easy for the gunmen to move through the city, carry out their terrorist attack, and escape without being seen or identified. Some residents, however, confirmed that the gunmen's van first headed east and then towards the middle of the city, before disappearing out of sight. It should be noted that HTS at the time erected checkpoints at the city's northern and western exits from the city, with no checkpoints at the eastern and southern exits.



Raed al-Fares's and Hamoud Jneed's funeral following their assassination by unidentified gunmen in Kafranbel city in Idlib - November 23, 2018

HTS had almost complete control of the city at the time of this heinous crime, and as such it bore responsibility for protecting its residents. Furthermore, the group never condemned, investigated, or indeed paid any attention at all to the terrorist assassination that shocked the city which had just lost one of its most significant and well-loved activists. Our investigations showed that it was HTS fighters who committed this heinous violation. It is imperative that we keep the memory of this harrowing crime alive and continue to demand that its perpetrators be held accountable. Crimes like Raed's murder prove that the local communities under HTS's control invariably suffer worst from the group's violation. We cannot accuse such communities of extremism and of accepting a group like HTS, since they are victims of a military takeover by a murderous terrorist group that rules with an iron first.