

Statement

Hay'at Tahrir al Sham Terrorizes and Blackmails the Community by Taking Hostages

The Hostage Saeed Naqresh is a Prominent Case

SNHR

SYRIAN NETWORK FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

الشبكة السورية لحقوق الإنسان

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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.

It seems that the extremist Islamic groups, after emptying the areas under their control of journalists, doctors, or any similar cases that would be considered specific abduction targets and asking for a ransom, usually cash, have turned their attention to targeting and abducting members of the local Syrian community and asking for substantial ransom sums since they managed to take over wide areas of Idlib governorate in July 2017. While Hay'at Tahrir al Sham doesn't often declare responsibility for such incidents, these abductions take place in areas held by them, not to mention that they have never conducted any serious operations to track and hold the abductors accountable.

Detaining a civilian or a fighter and threatening to kill or hurt them unless a specific act is completed or avoided constitutes an act of taking a hostage. This criminal act's impact is not limited to the detained individual or even his family, but extends to create a sense of terror and panic within the entire community. The international humanitarian act was very explicit and strict in declaring taking hostages a war crime, as well as Security Council Resolution 1566, adopted in October 2004, Common Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions, and the statute of the Nuremberg Trials and the International Criminal Court (as per Articles 8-2-a-iii and 8-2-c-iii of the Statute of the International Criminal Court).

On Tuesday, April 24, 2018, around 01:30, about 16 gunmen we suspect that they are associated with Hay'at Tahrir al Sham (al Nusra Front) stormed a house in Sarmada city, northern suburbs of Idlib governorate. The gunmen took Saeed Naqresh to an undisclosed location. Captain Saeed Naqresh is from al Dmair city, Damascus suburbs governorate, he defected from Syrian regime forces in 2012 and is considered a prominent leadership figure with an armed opposition faction who used to operate in Darayya city, Damascus suburbs where he led Lewa Shuhada al Islam before chairing the political office for the same faction after they had to leave Darayya city to Idlib city in August 2016. He was involved in a number of rounds of the Astana talks.



In the course of its investigations, SNHR spoke to some of the local residents who witnessed the detention operations. They've told us that the cars that the gunmen used to take captain Saeed left from Sarmada city and passed through a number of inspection points for Hay'at Tahrir al Sham, who is in full control of the city. This raised the possibility of Hay'at Tahrir al Sham being responsible and fully aware of the abduction or at least had coordinated with the abductors and secured their protection, which implies their involvement in the abduction.

On May 26 and May 27, two videos surfaced on the web in which captain Saeed Naresh appears handcuffed and broken down with signs of physical torture. Captain Saeed spoke in one of the two videos about his involvement in Astana talks, adding that he was involved on the request of the leader of Lewa Shuhada al Islam, an armed opposition faction from Darayya city. He also says that western countries asked him to fight al Nusra Front. In the second video, he says that Lewa Shuhada al Islam had seized large sums of money.

SNHR contacted some of the people close to this family. They told us that unknowns had contacted his family, after the two videos were posted online, and demanded a ransom of \$155,000 to release him alive.

Hay'at Tahrir al Sham's policy, in such cases, is to deny abduction, disappearing people, and taking hostages. However, we've spoken to a large number of people who were released in the past two years and they told us they were kept in Hay'at Tahrir al Sham prisons, despite their denial.

Consequentially, Hay'at Tahrir al Sham has blatantly violated the international humanitarian law and Common Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions. Also, "taking hostages" during armed conflicts constitutes a war crime according to the Statute of the International Criminal Court. As such, SNHR demands that Hay'at Tahrir al Sham immediately releases all detainees and abductees, and treats them in a humane manner without degrading their human dignity.





@snhr



Info@sn4hr.org

www.sn4hr.org

