



JOINT PUBLIC STATEMENT

Syria: No word on four abducted activists

A year on, no information on Douma Four

The prominent Syrian human rights defenders Razan Zaitouneh, Samira Khalil, Wa'el Hamada and Nazem Hamadi – the Douma Four—remain missing a year after their abduction, 57 organizations said today. The four were abducted in Duma, a city near Damascus under the control of armed opposition groups. They should be released immediately, the groups said.

On 9 December 2013, at about 10:40 pm, a group of armed men stormed into the office of the Violations Documentation Center in Syria (VDC), a Syrian human rights monitoring group, in Duma and abducted Razan Zaitouneh, the head of the center, and her colleagues – Wa'el Hamada, who is also her husband, Samira Khalil and Nazem Hamadi. The four human rights defenders have not been heard of since.

The armed groups exercising de facto control over Duma include the Army of Islam, headed by Zahran Alloush, which is part of the Islamic Front, a coalition of armed groups. The groups should immediately release the four human rights defenders if they are in the groups' custody, or work toward ensuring they are released unharmed and without delay. Countries that support these groups, as well as religious leaders and others who may have influence over them, should also press for the immediate release of the four activists and for an end to abductions of civilians.

Razan Zaitouneh has been one of the key lawyers defending political prisoners in Syria since 2001. Since the beginning of the crisis in 2011, Razan Zaitouneh has played a key role in efforts to defend human rights for all and protect independent groups and activists in Syria. Along with a number of other activists, she established the [VDC](#), which monitors human rights violations and records casualties in Syria, and co-founded the Local Coordination Committees (LCCs), which coordinates the work of local committees in various cities and towns across Syria. She also established the Local Development and Small Projects Support Office (LDSPS), which assists non-governmental organizations in besieged Eastern Ghouta.

As a result, both by the Syrian authorities and armed opposition groups threatened her. She had been receiving threats for several months before her abduction. She described some of these threats in an article she [wrote](#) in the online news outlet Now Lebanon. She had also informed human rights activ-

ists outside Syria in September 2013 that she was being threatened by local armed groups in Duma were threatening her. In April 2014, Razan Zaitouneh's family issued a [statement](#) holding Zahran Al-loush responsible for her and her colleagues' wellbeing, given the large presence his group maintains in the area.

Samira Khalil, has been a longtime political activist in Syria. The Syrian government had detained her between 1987 and 1991 for her activism. She later worked in a publishing house before shifting her efforts to working with the families of detainees and writing about detention in Syria. Before her abduction, she was working to help women in Duma support themselves by initiating small income generating projects.

Wael Hamada was also an activist before the uprising in Syria. When peaceful protests first broke out in the country in 2011, the government detained and later released Hamada.. He is an active member and co-founder of the Local Coordination Committees and the VDC. Before his abduction Wa'el Hamada was working to provide desperately needed humanitarian assistance to the residents of besieged Eastern Ghouta.

Nazim Hammadi, a lawyer and poet, was one of the most prominent volunteer defenders of political prisoners before and after the uprising in Syria. He contributed to founding the Local Coordination Committees and also worked to provide humanitarian assistance to residents of Eastern Ghouta.

Razan Zaitouneh and her colleagues appear to have been abducted and arbitrarily deprived of their liberty as punishment for their legitimate activities as human rights defenders. Such actions are prohibited by international humanitarian law and are contrary to international human rights standards. The armed groups in control of the area and the governments who support them should do everything in their power to facilitate the release of Razan Zaitouneh, Wa'el Hamada, Samira Khalil and Nazem Hamadi.

Signatories:

- 1 - Alhaqanya Organization for Law firm and Law, Egypt.
- 2 - Alkarama Foundation.
- 3 - Amnesty International.
- 4 - Arab Network for Human Rights Information, ANHRI.
- 5 - Assyrian Human Rights Network.
- 6 - Badael for sustainable peace in Syria.
- 7 - Caabu – The Council for Arab-British Understanding.
- 8 - Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS).
- 9 - The SKeyes Center for Media and Cultural Freedom.
- 10 - Women's Studies Center – Palestine.
- 11 - CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation.
- 12 - Damascus Center for Human Rights Studies.
- 13 - Egyptian Center for Economic and Social Rights (ECESR).
- 14 - Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights.
- 15 - Euro Mediterranean Human Rights Network, EMHRN.
- 16 - European Women Initiative.
- 17 - Every Casualty, UK.
- 18 - Femmes pour la Démocratie.
- 19 - Fraternity Center for Democracy and Civil Society.
- 20 - Freedom House, USA.
- 21 - Front Line Defender.
- 22 - Gulf Center for Human Rights Studies, GCHRS.
- 23 - HIVOS - Humanist Institute for Cooperation with Developing Countries.
- 24 - HRDAG - Human Rights Data Analysis Group.
- 25 - Human Rights Watch, HRW.
- 26 - Humanrights.ch / MERS- Swiss.
- 27 - Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR).
- 28 - International Media Support (IMS)
- 29 - International Service for Human Rights – ISHR.
- 30 - Kesh Malak Organization, Aleppo Syria.
- 31 - Kurdish Organization for Human Rights in Syria (DAD).
- 32 - Lawyers for Lawyers, Netherland.
- 33 - Lebanese Center for Human Rights (CLDH).
- 34 - Local Development and Small Projects Support office (LDSPS).
- 35 - Maan Organization for Supporting Women Issues.
- 36 - No Peace without Justice, NPWJ.
- 37 - Nuestra Aparente Rendición Association.
- 38 - Pax Christi International.
- 39 - PAX for peace, Netherland.
- 40 - RAW in WAR (Reach All Women in War).
- 41 - Swedish network for democracy and HR.
- 42 – The Syria Campaign.
- 43 - Syria Justice and Accountability Center (SJAC).
- 44 - Syrian Association for Citizenship.
- 45 - Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression (SCM).

46 - Syrian Center for Studies and Legal Researches.

47 - Syria Network for Human Rights - SNHR

48 - Syrian Liberals lawyers Association.

49 - Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, UK.

50 - Syrians for Citizenship State.

51 - Syrian Women's Network

52 - The Day after Association (TDA).

53 - The International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH).

54 - The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation, Sweden.

55 - The World Organization against Torture (OMCT).

56 - Center for Civil Society and Democracy in Syria
CCSDS

57 - Violations Documentation Center in Syria (VDC).



Violations Documentation Center in Syria

For any questions and comments:

editor@vdc-sy.org

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<http://www.vdc-sy.info/index.php/ar/reports>

